

Brian Lambert's (BL) second interview on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2012: summary

Scarfes meadow last ploughed about 25/30 yrs ago, improved grass feed for dairy herd. David Scarfe (DS) kept heifers there until about to calve then walked back to farm through river.

Used as grazing land, pretty wet, natural grasses come back after spraying stopped

Reed taken over in places as it wasn't grazed for a few years and not topped.

C. 8/10 yrs ago BL started his routine of fencing, grazing and fertilizing with only cwt per acre. The meadows were not topped as much by DS. Pretty much the same yrly management.

Ditches not touched. DS dug out ditch to dry out the meadows. Ditch along boundary with The Fen (Old Fen?) dug out many years ago, now almost level.

Management under DS more fertilizer and sprays used to keep weeds down and produce more grass. Hay crop when the cattle couldn't get across deeper water when the sluice was put in (c. 1999/2000).

There were 7 fields where now there are 3. Always grazed. Small fields more wildflowers eg buttercups maybe, as not sprayed then. Hedgerows, not trimmed hedges, and the odd tree, fields separated by a ditch. Along river more trees esp willow on BL side of river, before it was straightened out. River authority used to tidy up fallen trees, not replaced them. More trees before.

Snipe seen in winters, not summer. Woodcock in Garb Fen (Old Fen) and reed bed, not in meadows, in ditches. Kingfisher seen once /twice a week 2/3 pairs. Otters seen twice in last 4 yrs, never before. Deer not on meadows from river side, sometimes amongst cattle. Grass snakes more common in last 7/8 yrs. Lots of frogs in main drainage ditch. Butterflies seen but unknown species. Snipe were more common in past and used to breed there. Kingfishers about same numbers, feed on sticklebacks still in river. Snakes increased.

In past wide range of fish: roach, dace, gudgeon, pike, stickleback and lots of eels, before 1968 when river straightened. Next to nothing now. Polluted by factory in Redgrave but stock built up again after that. Decline with straightening of river. Where the sluice is there is now a fish holding place – only one. Fish need pocket of deeper water another 6 inches so when it floods the fish are not swept away. Cattle drinking places are deeper and you see fish. Ford where cattle crossed the river, the sluice has raised the water level 1.5 to 2 ft and there are more fish there. Only a foot of water in rest of river and no fish holding places. Riffle downstream made of large stones is home to young fish. Eels all gone, not like polluted water. New housing areas with sewage treatment flow into river but since has caused reeds to grow more and faster.

Last flood: River straightened, sluice gates taken out etc but after 2 / 3 days of heavy rain, meadows flood. Most winters not last one (2011/12). Different amounts of flooding. Water gets away quicker now.

Sluice: 3 foot of soil taken off river for some distance to help water return to river. Whilst putting dam/sluice in one Easter weekend the heavy rains flooded the meadows washed away sluice not completed. Flooded through cattle drinking places. Made no difference to flooding. More water upstream of sluice helps otter, kingfishers up there. 1999/2000(?) sluice/dam erected. DS used to

cross his cattle at ford before sluice was put in (c 1997/8). Became too deep for cattle. Then BL took over after 8/9 yrs. Environment Agency used to come through ford to work on the Suffolk side of river up to Blo Norton.

Water levels/table used to be higher. Env Agency/River Auth raised banks by 3 ft with all spoil and dredging placed on bank. River used to be 18 ins below bank, flowed slowly, had few reeds, and lots of water lilies (and water cress in main watercourse). There were good swimming places in river. Straightening changed river, Lt Ouse water board wanted to get water out of the way to stop flooding, to plough up for arable use. There was less need for grazing land. Now want to conserve water and hold water back, changed policies.

More willow trees before than now. Not remember lots of trees, they may have cut down mature willows before estate was sold. Old willows have fallen. Good to have trees on corners / bends in river. BL has had to move fence line in 4/5 times, could stop erosion and provide shade.

Env Agency (?) reduced frequency it cut reeds in last few years, just optional for farmers if they wanted it done. Now only cut if absolutely necessary. Used to be 6 or 12 men scything reeds and shrubs cut and burnt along banks, managed by river authorities. Not got the finances now. Reed cutting not done now. Reeds slow down the river. Old Fen/ Garb Fen was wetter before river was straightened. BL not gone in there. People used to coppice alder, sold as firewood every 15 yrs. Some reed cutting on east side of Garb Fen, left now and used as a shoot. Southern side has post and barbed wire fencing so BL thinks it was grazed not that long ago perhaps by Fen Farm, for a while. Now there are more trees as not coppiced, more shrub wood now. Been a shoot for number of yrs. Twice coppiced in patches Brian recalls. Now not able to afford labour as wood has no value. Not been in Old Fen area knows there is plenty of game, quite a few woodcock. Never went in there. No shooting when cattle were grazing there. Mainly pheasant and maybe partridge shot. LOHP can find out from PC about tenders and length of shooting rights. Foxes live in Old Fen. Never heard of peat extraction no evidence of deep holes, soil only 1 ft/ 1.5 ft not deep peaty with gravel and sand below. Soils out of the river are stone and sand 3 ft down.

Garb Heath ploughed after the WW2. In war gov encouraged farmers to produce more food. Heath not used only bit of shooting. Massive plough all heath veg gone. It paid to farm heath until 1970's. Left since then (south side of A1066), fenced and sheep/cattle graze there now. North of A1066 heathland under different farm made into arable rotation. Irrigation so can grow vegetables/potatoes now. Heath put back to heathland 45 acres in Brian's land. Heathers were on edges. Heather may return. Gorse topped and keeps growing, HLS not want it shrubby.

Summary: Sarah Day 20/4/12

