

GB 2341 BFSS

Countryside Alliance

This catalogue was digitised by The National Archives as part of the National Register of Archives digitisation project

NRA 24454



The National Archives

2 - MAY 1981

Centre for Urban and Regional Studies
University of Birmingham
Institute of Agricultural History
University of Reading



A list of the historical records
of the
British Field Sports Society

Compiled by Philippa Bassett as part
of a research project funded by the
Social Science Research Council

August 1980

CONTENTS

Preface

A brief history of the British Field Sports Society	i
Notes on the historical records	iv
Location and access	v

List of the historical records of the British Field Sports Society

A Publications	1
----------------	---

A brief history of the British Field Sports Society

The British Field Sports Society (henceforth BFSS) was founded in 1930 in an effort to counter the growing number of attacks on all forms of field sports (in the press and elsewhere) which were often inaccurate, but which had considerable effect on public opinion.

According to the first annual report a number of sportsmen, including Lord Bayford (the Society's first chairman) co-operated in producing and circulating a letter to about 20,000 individuals in order to assess support for a proposed society to protect field sports. Some 5000 favourable answers were apparently received and as a result a meeting, chaired by the Duke of Beaufort, was held at Caxton Hall on December 4, 1930 and the BFSS came into being. A management committee was appointed, the original members of which were E E Barclay, The Rt Hon Lord Bayford, F Beadle, The Rt Hon Viscount Ebrington, P F Hancock, Brig Gen R McCalmont, Major Cecil A Pelham, G St C Pilcher, Lt Col H Welch-Thornton, Sir George Thursby, The Rt Hon Lord Tweedmouth and The Rt Hon Lord Vivian. A General Purposes and Finance Committee was also appointed, and over the first two or three years a number of separate Advisory Committees were established for each branch of the sport. These comprised a Hunting Committee (which included members nominated by the Masters of Foxhounds Association and Master of the Otter Hounds Association and the Association of Masters of Harriers and Beagles), a Shooting Committee, a Fisheries Committee and a Coursing Committee. This last committee worked in close co-operation with the National Coursing Committee. All Advisory Committees met periodically to discuss matters affecting the individual sport, and to maintain the high standards of each sport. Each committee was fully represented on the Committee of the Society, and in this way their advice and opinions could readily be obtained.

Today the BFSS is still managed by its Main Committee, which also includes representatives of a wide variety of other sporting bodies (made possible by a change in the constitution in 1935). This Committee in turn is still advised by specialist committees, although their numbers have been increased to include committees for Falconry, Otter Hunting and Stalking. Furthermore in addition to the Finance and General Purposes Committee, there are now a number of other Standing Committees - a Parliamentary Committee, a Public Relations Committee, a Fighting Fund Management Committee and a Triathlon Committee. There is also a Welsh Committee which is represented on a number of the Society's advisory and standing committees. The Scottish Branch of the BFSS (seemingly replacing a separate Scottish Society - the BFSS (Scotland) - founded in 1951 in Edinburgh) has a number of its own committees - for coursing, fishing, hunting, shooting and stalking.

A local administration was also quickly set up. Local correspondents were selected to represent the Society throughout the country, and were based wherever possible on 'countries' or areas covered by the various hunts, which formed convenient organisational units. Other local correspondents, however, were also appointed in large towns and districts not covered by any hunt. The work of these local administrators included enrolling new members, watching the interests of sportsmen locally and advising the Society of disputed attacks on sport in the local press and elsewhere. A small number of local branches of the Society were also formed (probably a maximum of four, the first one being a Taunton Vale branch set up in 1935 or 1936). In more recent years the local organisation of the Society has been extended, and the

country has been divided into a number of regions for which regional secretaries have been appointed to supplement the existing local secretaries.

In 1932 the Field Sports and Game Guild (founded in 1884) was incorporated in the BFSS; its capital was handed over to the Society, and those societies affiliated to the Guild were encouraged to join the BFSS. Those bodies joining included the Wildfowlers Association of Great Britain and Ireland (WAGBI) and the Essex Game Guild; and the interests of the shooting members of the BFSS were therefore greatly strengthened.

The activities of the BFSS can be divided into two basic parts: (1) the countering of anti-sport propaganda, and (2) the development of the interests of field sports; and in this way the Society works to ensure the retention of field sports as an integral part of the activities of the countryside.

Until the Society came into existence, only haphazard efforts had been made to counter the growing attacks on field sports in the press and elsewhere. However, from 1930 when the Society was formed the annual reports of the BFSS are full of details about the organised efforts of the Society to counter the growing criticism. The Society has, for instance, always maintained close contact with those MPs interested in the preservation of field sports, in order that it can be warned in advance of proposed measures. Thus the Society has been able to oppose and introduce amendments to a large number of Bills which have threatened to infringe the sportsman's rights. Furthermore it has successfully opposed every Bill introduced into Parliament which has aimed at the suppression of any form of field sports (of which there have been 27 to date). Although when the Society was originally founded it appears that deer hunting alone was the object of criticism, it immediately became clear in the post-war period that all killing for sport was subject to attack. In February 1949, for instance, a Bill was introduced into Parliament - the Protection of Animals (Hunting and Coursing Prohibition) Bill - which was designed to make illegal all forms of hunting and coursing; and an active campaign was carried out in its support. This was the first major test for the BFS and its cause, and the Society's success firmly established it as the champion of all field sports. It launched its own vigorous campaign: it won the support of the National Farmers' Union, set up Local Field Sport Committees to advise and assist the local secretaries, raised £50,000, circulated posters, pamphlets, etc, secured 1.2 million signatures to a pledge and raised its membership by more than 100,000. In the event the Bill was defeated by a majority of 113 in the House of Commons, and a second bill - the Prohibition of Foxhunting Bill, tabled for discussion later in the year - was also withdrawn. The Government as a result set up a committee of enquiry into cruelty to wild animals; and the BFSS co-ordinated the evidence of the various sporting bodies. The final report, published in 1951, fully vindicated field sports, and the Society published a condensed version of the report for free distribution, entitled 'Field Sports - The Truth'.

Other activities which the BFSS has conducted to meet criticism and counter abolitionist propaganda have included the arrangement of talks and lectures for schools, clubs and meets; and the provision of speakers to put the case for field sports on television and radio. It has also quickly corrected distorted news stories quoted in the press or on the radio or television. Thus the Society has aimed at providing the public with a more balanced view of field sports and how they are conducted, and in this way promotes the sportsman's interests. To this end it has also advertised its work in

the press, displayed posters, etc at Agricultural and Horse Shows and even produced small exhibition stands; it has written and promoted informed articles, features and reports of field sports; it has provided a film and lecture service; and on occasion it has even offered prizes to schoolchildren for essays on the subject of field sports.

The issue of publications has also played a vital part of the Society's advertising of its own work and the promotion of field sports. It has produced a Year Book since 1931 (which contains the annual report and financial statement of the Society, lists of members, lists of officers and committees, details of publications, etc). For a short period the BFSS also published its own magazine, called The Country Sportsman (which amalgamated with Field Sports in 1952). It has produced a wide variety of pamphlets and leaflets defending field sports and advertising its own work. These have included 'The Case for Stag Hunting', 'The Economic Value of Hunting', 'Sport - some attacks and replies thereto by the BFSS', 'Foxhunting - a few facts', and 'The BFSS, What it is, What it is doing', all of which were produced in the 1930s. A series of small-scale hunting and fishing maps were also used in the 1930s.

The Society has also provided a valuable information service for its members. In its earliest years, for instance, it compiled a register of sporting facilities, including such information as lists of hotels providing facilities for fishing, shooting, hunting and other sports. The advice and assistance offered by the Society to its members have been extended to cover a wide variety of subjects ranging from legal help to cartridge tests and reports.

The BFSS has also promoted legislation and other action helpful to sport and to conservation of wildlife in general. As early as 1932, for instance, the Society appointed a committee under Lord Tweedale to consider the existing Game Laws. This committee drafted a Game Laws Amendment and Consolidation Bill which was introduced into Parliament by Lord Bayford on the Society's behalf. The Society also works to reduce the effects of pollution, and as early as 1947 it initiated a survey of major angling rivers in England, Wales and Scotland; and as a result of the published reports the attention of Parliament was drawn to the serious effects of pollution and this in turn led to the passing of the first Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) Act. Subsequently the Anglers' Co-operative Association was formed at the Society's offices. The Society has also given valuable support to the campaign to secure stricter control of materials harmful to wildlife and the countryside. In 1952, for instance, it called a conference - at which the RSPB, the Fauna Preservation Society, the International Council for Bird Preservation and others were represented - to discuss the effects of certain poisonous sprays and insecticides on wildlife. The Society has also conducted investigations into damage by the Heather Beetle on grouse moors, for example, and into game-egg stealing, organised poaching and illegal trapping, and has urged for heavier penalties to be imposed against these infringements of the law. More recently it co-operated in a conference convened by the Fauna Preservation Society in 1965 to discuss the place of mammalian predators in the British countryside. As a result of discussions a Working Party was set up, on which the BFSS was represented, which finally produced a handbook on their conservation and control, entitled Predatory Mammals in Britain. A code of practice for their management.

In summary, therefore, the present objectives of the Society are:

- 1 To ensure the retention of field sports as an integral part of the activities of modern society;

- 2 To show how field sports enrich and conserve the wildlife of our country;
- 3 To keep a watching brief in Parliament on everything likely to affect field sports; to promote legislation where necessary; and to oppose legislation likely to be harmful to the interests of field sports;
- 4 To assist every branch of field sports and the interests of all field sportsmen and to promote field sports through literature, films, the press, television and radio;
- 5 To provide information, advice and assistance to members.

In recent years the Society has attempted to increase support for its activities in the face of mounting opposition from such anti-blood sport bodies as the Hunt Saboteurs Association. It has, for instance, increased its membership by the introduction of an affiliation membership scheme and by offering trade membership to firms involved in the manufacture and supply of sporting goods. It is also hoping to achieve greater support for its parliamentary organisation through closer contact with those bodies having similar interests, many of whom have representation on the BFSS committees. The reorganisation of its local administration - the dividing of the country into regions and the appointment of Regional Secretaries - is furthermore intended to ensure closer links with its membership.

Sources

Publications of the British Field Sports Society, especially the Year Books

Notes on the historical records

Most of the records of the BFSS have been destroyed as a result of vandalising of its offices by anti-blood sportists in 1977.

All that survives of the Society's archive are its publications. These comprise the Year Books issued annually by the BFSS since 1932 (apart from the war years 1939-1946), and a series of bound volumes containing copies of all leaflets, pamphlets, etc issued by the Society since it was founded in 1931.

The Year Book is a particularly valuable source since it contains an often extremely detailed annual report. usually including information as to the activities of its opponents - such as reports of their demonstrations, speeches, etc - as well as providing much information about its own work. The annual report in fact continued to be produced, in an abridged form, during the Second World War, even though the Year Book itself was not published. In addition to the report, however, the Year Book also contains the annual financial statement, lists of officers (including local and later regional secretaries) and of committee members, lists of members, details of publications, etc. In 1978 instead of a Year Book the first number of a journal was produced, which contained many of the features of the old Year Book but also included a number of sporting articles. A second number has since been produced but no further issues are to be published and the Society has decided to revert to the Year Book. The Annual Reports and Accounts for 1978 and 1979 were printed separately.

Other publications produced by the Society - leaflets, booklets, pamphlets, etc - have been bound and are apparently complete. Details of these can be found in the Year Books from which a complete list could be drawn up. They form an interesting source. Many of them are written to counter specific criticisms and attacks on field sports; while others relate to the more general activities and work of the BFSS.

Location and access

The surviving records of the BFSS are retained at its headquarters at 59 Kennington Road, London SE1 7PZ. The Society is prepared to consider enquiries from bona fide researchers favourably; and applications for access to the archive should be made in writing to the Administrative Secretary.

Most records of the BFSS have been lost as a result of vandalising of the Society's offices in 1977. The surviving records of the BFSS consist exclusively of publications

A PUBLICATIONS

I Year Book, 1931/32-1976/77

The Year Books of the Society have been bound in seven volumes. This publication has been produced annually since 1931/32 (apart from the war years 1940/41-1945/46). Each Year Book includes the Annual Report and Balance Sheet, lists of members, committees, officers etc, advertisements, details of publications and other material. Only a photocopy of the first Annual Report (1930/31) survives. Annual Reports continued to be issued during the war years, although in an abridged form, and these have been bound.

In 1978, an Annual Journal vol I was published as a new venture to replace the old Year Book. It included some of the features of the Year Book - such as the lists of the Society's Regional and Local Secretaries; but it did not, for instance, contain the Annual Report and Accounts which were published separately. The journal did, however, contain a number of short articles on field sports. Although a second volume of the journal has since been published, it has been decided not to continue with the venture; and the Year Book will be reintroduced in 1980.

II Other Publications

The BFSS has retained copies of all the publications which it has produced since its formation in 1931. These have been bound in a number of volumes by the Society

They cover a wide range of subjects and include for instance:
4 reports on Pollution affecting Rivers, prepared on behalf of the BFSS by H D Turing, 1947-1949
Report on the BFSS's Investigation into the Food Habits of the Little or Dutch Owl, 1935
The Heather Beetle - Lochmaea suturalis. An enquiry into its biology and control on behalf of the BFSS, by A E Cameron, J W McHardy and A H Bennett, 1944
Predatory Birds of Great Britain. Prepared on behalf of the BFSS by Eric Parker. Illustrations by G C Lodge. Schedules showing the protection afforded to these birds, county by county prepared by Phyllis Barclay-Smith and Edward Barclay-Smith
Prisoners of War Booklets, Nos 1-5, 1943
Young Sportsmen (a series of pamphlets for children), 1950-
Field Sports - the Truth. Containing extracts from the report of the Committee on Cruelty to Wild Animals etc, 1952