**BUNDOCK Matthew**

**Introduction for the recording and the transcript.**

This recording is part of the oral history project carried out by the Suffolk Horse Society in 2013 with advice from Cambridge Community Heritage, and a generous grant from the Heritage Lotteries Fund.

In the recording you will hear the voice of Mr Matt Bundock describing his memories of the Suffolk Punch heavy horse.

Matt is the current head horseman at Banham Zoo

The recording was made by Juliet Pennell who is a member of the Suffolk Horse Society.

The date of the recording was 18th July 2013 and it was carried out at Banham Zoo.

The duration of the recording is about 12 minutes.

Matthew Bundock

Juliet This is Juliet Pennell interviewing Matt Bundock, Thursday 18th July 2013 for Working Horses, Working Lives, sharing our stories of the Suffolk Punch.

Matthew I am Matthew Bundock, I am the head horseman at Banhams Zoo and I have been here since January 1996, where I started off as just a horseman. I was all by myself then. We had one Suffolk mare, one Shire mare, and two Shire geldings. Since then we have progressed now to 13 Suffolks. We have got one stallion, which is our own stallion, who is home bred. We have got three mares, one foal, a yearling and the rest are made up of geldings of average ages, and different sort of stages of being worked.

Juliet When you joined the zoo was that your first experience of heavy horses or had you had some experience before?

Matthew No not at all. I am the fifth generation in my family now, working with heavy horses. My father was a horseman for Whitbread’s Brewery, and is also a farrier, specialising in heavy horses. Not so much now, it was his 70th birthday yesterday, so he has slowed down on the heavy side a bit now, although he still comes to the shows and such. But I worked on a farm in Essex, at a place called [Coriham Hall?] for the late Jay Young, who was a renowned Percheron and Shire breeder, although there was two Suffolks on the farm, who were owned by a chap called Dennis Hater, who has still got Suffolks in Essex. So yeah... I was sort of brought up with it ever since I could climb the garden gate really, I have sort of been around horses. One of my first recollections was a big Percheron gelding called ‘Samba’ when I was about six/seven years old and... Well my first job was leading him up and down the rows when they were hoeing beans.

Juliet And that’s obviously a job that’s sort of now gone into history really.

Matthew Yes. Sadly there isn’t, farm wise, on a big scale it is not practical or feasible anymore, but on a small scale we used to have about 200 acres in Essex, we used to grow a lot of market garden stuff, so that was peas, beans and spring green, and that sort of thing, and we used all the horses for what we called ‘The top land’ for the market garden stuff, and then we only had a couple of old tractors, which were pretty much relics, which we used on the marshes for doing the cereal crops.

Juliet Wow! In the zoo what do you do? I mean the horses obviously do some work within the zoo and they go out and about beyond the zoo. I mean can you tell me a little bit about what they do within the zoo first of all, and then sort of... and what else outside of the zoo.

Matthew Yes well within the zoo we give dray rides to our visitors, when they come to the zoo. We predominantly do them on Sundays and school holidays, when we are at our sort of peak, so to speak. We usually give dray rides depending on demand for... they are usually around 2 hours, but if we have got a particularly busy day with a lot of visitors through, we will go on for an extra hour or two. But as I say, it just depends on the demand of that. We also do weddings within the zoo. The zoo has got a marriage licence now, so if anybody wanted to get married at the zoo, you can get married in the grounds of the zoo, and we use the horses for carting the bride and the groom, and sometimes the wedding guests around the zoo to the reception. That’s what we do within the zoo more. Out of the zoo we do all sorts of different things, it is very wide and varied. Again lots of weddings, and that sort of thing. We also do lots of shows and promotions. The show side of it is to obviously promote Banham Zoo. When I first started here we sort of stuck really to the agricultural turnout, with er... at that time it was a pair of Shires and then we got a Suffolk gelding called ‘Prince’, and then another Suffolk gelding called ‘Sandy’, so we was then... At one point sort of in about 1998 we were going to the County show, Suffolk show, Norfolk show, Royal show, Yorkshire show, and doing two singles, one Suffolk, one Shire, and the same with the pairs. One pair of Suffolks, one pair of Shires, so keeping very busy in that ring, as well as the in hand job as well. So that sort of has now progressed on with demand and publicity and that, we do the trade turnout, and I am sure people would have seen our shows running out and about the country shows.

Juliet In promoting the zoo of course, it is also wonderful for promoting the Suffolk, because you are taking the Suffolk/

Matthew The Suffolk is always very very well received. We went up to the Bakewell show, for the first time about nine years ago, they hadn’t had a Suffolk Punch at that particular show for about 80 years, and the amount of people who had never seen a Suffolk before, only in a book, and they were very very well received. It is very nice for us as a zoo, and just us personally for people to be so appreciative of seeing the breed come out. That is very rewarding in itself, and it is always a bonus if you do well at the show when you are there.

Juliet And you have been all over the country showing, I mean Bakewell, you have been a lot further north.

Matthew Yes. We have been up to the Royal Highland in 2007, we went up to the Royal Highland in Edinburgh. Also in 2007 we went down south to the Devon County show, so we have been sort of everywhere really. We have been over to Northern Ireland and done the Ulster ploughing match, yes, sort of all over the place.

Juliet You mentioned you have done some work with Shires and Percherons, do you notice differences between the breeds, when you are working them, or when you are showing them?

Matthew Definitely, the Shires are definitely the hoover of the heavy horse world as everybody knows Hoover is a very well known name, and everyone looks at a heavy horse and thinks it is a Shire. Although the Suffolks aren’t a Shire and neither are the Percherons nor the Clydesdale. But that’s peoples’ impression that every heavy horse is a Shire horse. So that’s one of the nice things is that we get to educate people about the differences within the four breeds. Also the Shires are a lot more flashy for the show job, that’s why they are sort of predominantly used in the Breweries, and publicity work, and show work, because they have just got that little bit with the four white legs and a nice dark colour. They are a little bit more impressive, over 18 hands, and they move a lot freerer. The Suffolks are predominantly agricultural horses, sort of designed and built to walk. So going out... It goes out their comfort zone, just a little bit when they are in the trot, although I have got a pair of Suffolk geldings at the moment, I have been showing for the past couple of years in the trade turnout, and we have been holding our own with the Shires and the Clydesdales and the Percherons. So you know, we are getting there slowly, but Suffolks are different, a totally different breed to the other three.

Juliet Yes and in temperament and personality?

Matthew Yeah the Suffolks have a lot more personality, and I would say they are a lot more strong willed than what the Shires and the Clydesdales are. The Percherons and the Suffolks have got more of a sulking gene, shall we say, but once they have got over themselves and you have worked what buttons to press with them, because they are all individuals, they are all good horses. They just take a little bit more longer to work out than what a Shire or a Clydesdale would.

Juliet And obviously at the zoo you also... I mean in addition to all the showing and the trade turnouts, you are also breeding as well.. You are standing a stallion here at the zoo, and you have got mares and foals.

Matthew Yeah. We have got our own stallion, this year, he is a two year old, he was licenced back in February, he is called ‘Bazoo Zoo’, we name our horses with a different letter of the alphabet each year, and two years ago, it was the letter ‘X’, and our prefix is ‘Bazoo’ so we went for ‘Zoo’. This year we’ve had a colt foal... er last year we had a colt foal as well, went it was ‘York’, and this year we have got a colt foal and he is called ‘Zee’ after our new charity, which is the Zoological society of East Anglia, so be is ‘Bazoo Zee’ and ‘Bazoo Zoo’. In a couple of years when they start working as geldings, it is going to be quite a mouthful to get round.

Juliet And how do the horses react to sort of living and working within the zoo, to the zoo animals and what there is out and about in the zoo?

Matthew They all have their own characters, and we are quite lucky, it is only really the ones that we buy in we have any anxiety about, because the others are born to it. Within two weeks of being born they are put in the zoo on exhibition for the public, you know, the public love to see a mare and foal, and we love to show them our mares and foals, and show them the work we are doing. So the foals are generally sort of brought up with that. They will come out to be weaned at about eight/nine months old, then they will stay down the other stables, and probably until they 18 months old, and then they will go back into the zoo and come out at sort of 2 years old, they go in for the summer. Then they will be brought into work regularly and put in the zoo again, so they are always sort of dipped in and out of the zoo, they are getting used to people, pushchairs and kids and umbrellas, all the smells and noises of the zoo. Yeah. But when you have a horse which isn’t known in that environment, especially when we first started, before we started breeding our own stock so much, and that. We would buy horses in and it would be the first few laps round early in the morning before the public got about would be a little bit touch and go. Sort of like suck it and see, just see how they are going to react with driving past tigers and leopards and cheetahs. It is not so much the sight of those, because they are blinkered up and that, and we try and shield them as much as we can from it, it is the smell and the noises of it. You have got gibbons and Simangs and that sort of thing jumping up the wire squawking at them, it is not something a horse gets to see every day, unless you obviously live at Banhams Zoo.

Juliet That’s an amazing part of their education really being within the zoo.

Matthew Absolutely, yeah, and amazing part of my education when I first started here, I had been working horses on the farm, so totally different to me as well. I must admit the first few times I drove around the zoo, because we used to give dray rides from the centre of the zoo then, we are on the outskirts now, we just go past the tigers, and the leopards and the cheetahs and the giraffes and the zebras. But when I first started we used to go, the rides right from the middle of the zoo, so you were right in the thick of it. You had the monkeys and the camels, and the tigers, the llamas, everything, you had to go through the lot, there was no sort of escape route so to speak.

Juliet Well it is wonderful to see... to think of the Suffolks coping with it all and just getting used to it. But, Matt thank you very much for talking about your work with the Suffolks, is there anything else you would like to tell us about working with them, either at the zoo or beforehand, before you came to the zoo. Any early experiences of heavy horses that/

Matthew The only other early experiences, as I say, was when I was at Jim Youngs, when I left school at 15, because I have never been the most academic of people, but always sort of got on with livestock and been practical in the workshop, and sort of make something out of a bit of metal, or repair it. I went on the farm, that was a natural progression for me. I wanted to be a builder before I left school, but then we had a recession, so I couldn’t get an apprenticeship, so the only other thing I knew was working on the farm, so that is what I did. Fortunately for me in 1995 the chap who I worked for, Jim Young, unfortunately he passed away so as they say one door shuts, another one opens, and luckily enough Martin Goymour, the director of Banhams Zoo offered me the job as horseman as Banham. As I say that was 18 years ago, and as I say the rest is history.

Juliet Matt thank you very much indeed for telling us about it.