

Ridge Residents' Association visit to Furzey Island 14/5/2014

It was one of those perfect sun-lit mornings when 25 members of the RRA embarked by launch for Furzey Island from Perenco's base near the cross-channel ferry port in Poole Harbour. The sea was tranquil and the journey down the main channel was made more exciting by sighting the Royalist training ship with main sails gently billowing in the almost imperceptible breeze. Led by Dr Suzie Baverstock, of Perenco, we arrived at the landing stage alongside the slipway on Furzey Island after about 40 minutes.



Strict security procedures meant no smoking, matches, lighters, cameras, mobile phones and even key fobs. However special permission was eventually granted for cameras. Just a few yards from the landing stage was our first sight of the two groups of oil wells on the 31-acre island. This was well site L. Four "nodding donkeys" were pumping away in addition to special submersible electric pumps which were also being used. As part of the environ-



mental regulations the nodding donkeys had been painted Van Dyke brown in an attempt to appear less obtrusive.

These first wells were drilled on the old tennis courts of the mansion house built by the Illiffe family in the early 1930's. The Purbeck stone faced house was undergoing extensive repairs and refurbishment following damage during last winter's gales. Its unique bronze-framed metal windows seemed as good as new after nearly 80 years.



The house built in arts and craft's style had stunning views across the water to Goathorn Point. It was being used by Perenco as an administrative and conference centre. Coffee was served in the main lounge. In the hall was a glass case containing archaeological artifacts from the Stone Age to the late Iron Age—worked flint scrapers, part of an arrowhead and hand axe. There were also a couple of small clay storage pots probably used for wine.. All were discovered during excavation and drilling operations.



After refreshments we were led on a tour of the island past two small cottages. These were once used as servant quarters by the Illife's. Eventually it was sold to Mr Algy Cluff, the oil entrepreneur for a stated £500,000. He in turn passed it on to BP/British Gas. According to Richard Stabbins, an oil executive, Mr Cluff was unaware of the island's potential. It was BP/BG who carried out the first oil explo-

rations in what was to become the biggest on-shore oil field in northern Europe. Did he know this before he sold the island?



Walking along the narrow paths there was an abundance of wildlife in the woods and foreshore. Red squirrels, a rarity in southern England, could be seen along with golden pheasants and more common wildfowl. There were a number of large anthills containing thousands of the virulent inhabitants: one of the reasons we were told to wear proper footwear and trousers. Their bites are particularly unpleasant.



Training Ship Royalist spotted in the main channel.



On the western part of the island was another area where wells had been drilled - more Van Dyke brown paintwork. On the way there was a curious hollow resembling a bomb crater which had a length of large pipe protruding through the edge of the. Apparently used in the early drilling days as an emergency bund in case there was an unexpected oil escape. Oil production from the Wytch field peaked to about 100,000 barrels a day. By drilling deeper and horizontally out into Bournemouth Bay for up to 11.5kms Perenco is able to economically extract much more oil than was originally believed to exist. Geologists suggest there is much more than the previously estimated four million barrels in the Sherwood reservoir.

The visit was a special occasion for us and due largely to the efforts of Debby Wheatley and Hugh Ricks. And a special thanks to Dr Baverstock and Perenco for making it possible on what was an extremely busy day on the island.

Michael Frenchman



Photos: Chris James and Michael Frenchman