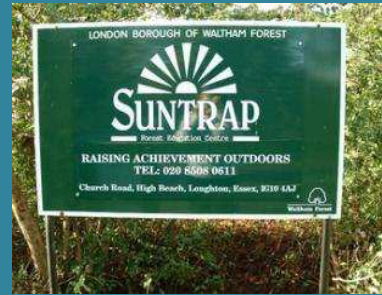


Sun Trap at High Beech



Suntrap was built in 1894 on the site of the former Fairmead House that was a "lunatic asylum"

Children's Sanatorium

It was originally a convalescent home for children and had many patients from east London who were suffering from what was called 'consumption'. This was a widespread common respiratory disease called tuberculosis (TB)



Above Suntrap as a Sanatorium

As there were no antibiotics at that time, the only way to treat TB was with fresh air, rest and a good diet. Many of the children spent their days in their beds which had been wheeled outdoors or were put into summer houses which had huge windows.

Born At Suntrap In WWII

At some point during the Second World War the hospital's patients changed from children to expectant mothers as Suntrap became an annex of Plaistow Maternity Hospital. Mothers were sent from East London to Suntrap to have their babies "in peace". In July 1944, there was one of the heaviest "doodlebug" raids on London and the Nursery was on fire and nurses "dashed about getting babies out of the nursery.

A Home For Families

Following the war in the 1950s the building was roughly converted into five flats to house families in need.

Pioneers In Childhood Environmental Education

Frederick James Speakman

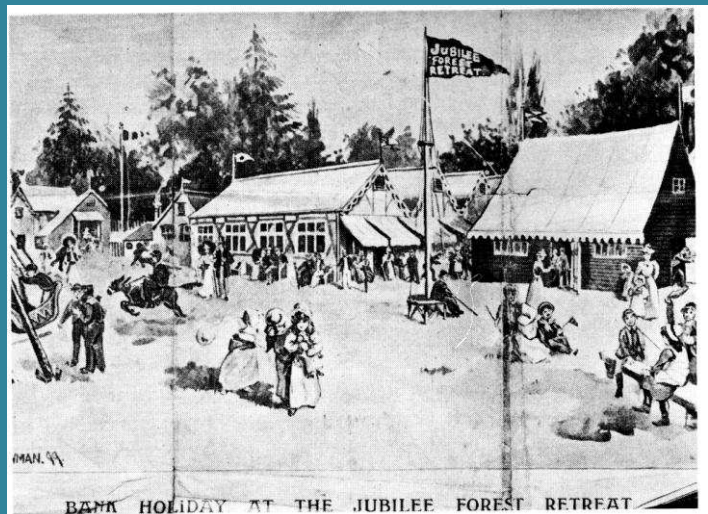


Above: Fred Speakman teaching children

Was born in 1906 and he was the son of a Council employed Assistant Teacher. The family lived in Oatland Rise, Higham Hill and he became a teacher at Woodside School in Wood Street. From an early age he was fascinated by Epping Forest and became a naturalist and a well known popular writer of illustrated guides to Epping Forest and he was one of Britain's best known naturalist-authors in the 1960s.

Right: The Jubilee Retreat. Epping Forest had a Number of Retreats. These were built to cater for the huge numbers of East Londoners who, on Public Holidays would go en masse to the Forest by charabancs and on the train. The Retreats provided food and entertainment and the picture of the Jubilee Retreat is typical of the bigger Retreats.

In the 1950's, with the support of Walthamstow's Education Office, he stated to convert an old cow shed at *Jubilee Retreat* in the Chingford part of Epping Forest into a classroom. This was so that he could take 20 pupils at a time for educational trips into the forest. In 1959, again with the help of Walthamstow' Education Office, he acquired *Roseville*, a now 'listed' property at High Beech, and converted this to a nature study centre that he ran between 1959-79.



By 1961, another teacher was employed to work from Jubilee retreat, and this then allowed a whole class to visit the forest. The first was Ernie Douse (a rural studies teacher) but by 1962 Ernie was replaced by Ken Hoy.

Ken Hoy



He grew up in Woodford in a house with a garden backing on to Epping Forest. He has a lifetime interest in the forest and in 1968 was one of the founders and the first Chairman of the Friends Of Epping Forest (FOEF). He worked for many years at Suntrap educating children about the forest and he is fondly remembered by many of his ex students.

He is the author of several books about the forest and remained as Chairman of FOEF for 40 years until he retired in 2009. The following year he was made a 'Freeman' of the City of London (Who administer the forest on behalf of the people of London) for his work

Left: Ken Hoy with Suntrap students.

Boroughs Merge To Form Waltham Forest

Following the re-organisation of London boroughs in 1965, demand for field trips to the forest was growing as schools in Chingford and Leytonstone wanted the same opportunity for their classes.

During 1966 it was proposed that Waltham Forest Education Committee in conjunction with the Field Studies Council and with the full support of Epping Forest Superintendent, Alfred Qvist should use a "purpose built" new field centre on the Jubilee Retreat site provided by the City of London and plans were drawn up

The Suntrap Field Studies Centre

In late 1966, the Borough of Walthamstow was offered a gift of the old Suntrap Hospital. In June 1967 the London Borough of Walthamstow bought Suntrap and seven acres of land for the princely sum of £500. and converted into an education centre providing opportunities for environmental education and adventurous activities for primary schools.

Ken Hoy became the first Head of Centre and all field study visits from Waltham Forest were now based at the Suntrap site. Following building work to convert the old hospital the first children visited in late October 1967.



The Borough of Walthamstow had become a pioneer in childhood environmental education, sending primary school children, who often lived in working class urban areas, on fortnightly visits to Nature Field Centres in Epping Forest and sending all final year primary classes in the Borough to make eight visits a year to the Centre

The number of staff was gradually increased, so that by the 1970s and through the 1980s, all children in Waltham Forest made 8 visits to the centre during their final year in primary school

In 1970, there was a national furore about Fred Speakman and *Suntrap* when it was claimed that he was breeding the UK's only poisonous snake - the Adder also called a Viper - and he was letting them loose back into the forest. The truth was that Fred rescued sick or hurt animals and, after he had nursed them back to health, restored them to their natural habitat. An unrepentant Fred pointed out that this was a native species and that there wasn't any known case of anybody in the UK ever having died from the bite of the snake.

After retiring he went on to live in Barbados with his second wife Kit and died there in 1982.

There is a super 1968 Pathe clip that shows Fred and children from Henry Maynard Primary School at Suntrap. I have also found some contemporary pictures of the school at Suntrap. You can view it at:

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/epping-forest-aka-nature-class-in-epping-forest/query/geese>

By 1973 all primary pupils in Waltham Forest made 8 day visits to the centre as part of their curriculum entitlement, giving them an opportunity to experience the forest in every season. From 1969 schools were given the option of a camping experience during the summer term. During this time, the London Borough of Waltham Forest funded the

Suntrap budget centrally. The Centre is still owned by Waltham Forest but is now run as a traded service, charging schools directly to ensure it is self- sustaining.

The programme at the centre includes structured courses and activities from Foundation Stage to A level as well as adventurous activities. Since 2007, a successful, extended activities scheme is run in the summer holidays to inspire and motivate 8-12 year olds who are referred by their school.

Facilities At The Centre

The Centre's seven acres of field and garden are managed as mini-habitats with six outdoor classrooms areas. There are a number of ponds (including one fully accessible to wheel chair users) from which freshwater studies can be made. There are mature trees and ancient hedgerows, a wild flower meadow, a small sensory and butterfly garden, containers with a variety of specialised plants, bat and bird boxes (including one with a camera inside) and a weather station. The garden is also home to a small flock of chickens as well as rabbits and guinea pigs.



Above: Children pond-dipping at a raised pond

Team Challenges

There are a number of team challenges in the grounds including a low ropes course, a giant spiders web as well as a number of problem solving games. The centre has an all terrain wheelchair, which can be used even in very muddy conditions in the forest.

A Close Look At The Creatures

The four large classrooms each have a projector and visualiser for looking at live specimens as well as class sets of binocular microscopes and other magnifiers. The Centre has a variety of captive bred vertebrate and invertebrate animals all of which may be handled to enhance animal studies topics.



Right: Henry Maynard Primary School Pupils at 'Sunnytrap' 2014

Camping

The camping field is used throughout the summer and into September; by school groups during the week and youth groups at weekends. It has a purpose build log cabin style camping shelter (open on 2 sides) with a kitchen and a covered dining area with a camp fire pit near by. The cabin has gas cookers, a fridge, freezer and electric water heater.



Above: The campsite

Footfall

During 2008/09 a total of 76 schools visited Suntrap with a total of 326 classes, which represents 432 days of teaching by Suntrap staff.



Left: HenryMaynard School pupils in 2012

Some Satisfied Customers

For over half a century children from Waltham Forest and surrounding areas have gone to Suntrap to learn about nature. This is what some of them say:

<http://survival-supplies.co.uk/about.shtml>

"As a nipper in London in the first half of the 60's I was lucky enough to go to a junior school that sent us on field trips to Epping Forest in Essex. Even luckier still, we made regular monthly visits to the Epping Forest Field Studies Centre at Roseville, High Beach, run by none other than Fred Speakman, one of Britain's best known bushcraft and naturalist authors at that time. Fred taught us natural history and bushcraft with a passion and those days at Roseville Field Centre are some of my happiest memories from that time.



Once a month about a dozen of us would be put on a small coach and arrive a little before ten in the morning, sandwiches and thermos flasks in our satchels. Fred would give us a talk for an hour in a kind of "prefab" classroom and then take us out for a long walk through the forest, pointing out all kinds of things as we went and chatting with the

forest rangers. We had small exercise books which we were encouraged to take notes in as we went - although I seemed to be the only kid doing any writing. When we arrived back at the centre a couple of hours later we would eat our packed lunches and then draw and write about the things we'd seen.



I consider myself very fortunate that Fred took me under his wing and spent a lot of his time talking to me about the habits of foxes, badgers, squirrels, how trees differed, wood lore and how to set up a camp. I have no doubt at all that it was Fred who sparked my life-long interest in wildlife and bushcraft."

<http://www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk/pdfspring03.pdf>

From 1998-9 I wrote up nature notes from fragments jotted down in notebooks during Adult Education walks in Epping Forest, with Ken Hoy as leader. I was voluntarily repeating a task set nearly 40 years ago when I attended the Jubilee Retreat Field Study Centre once a fortnight from Selwyn Girls Junior School, Highams Park. Half the class went to Mr. Speakman at High Beach and the rest of were taught by Ken (with much darker hair!)

How I loved those days traipsing through the forest learning about trees, flowers and fungi. I realise they set a pattern for future enjoyment: walking and observing nature close to home or further afield. We attended the Jubilee Retreat in all weathers; I remember tracking birds and animals in thick snow

Ken would have a roaring fire going before we all arrived; wellington boots were pegged together in pairs at our disposal and a crate of milk was delivered for our consumption. Indoors we gathered round to watch him ring birds and outside we saw deer and heard birds less common these days: bullfinches, greenfinches, goldfinches and long-tailed tits. I know this because I still have my old exercise books, meticulously detailed, and I include a few snippets for your amusement!



It is always useful to keep your eyes open when looking down holes in the ground. Mr. Hoy found the remains of an ox living before Christ. I saw a magpie with Mr. Hoy's binoculars(!) A green finch was trapped and it was found to have a ring. Mr. Hoy put another ring further up its leg. Outside we saw a brambling. This makes it the second time Mr. Hoy has seen one this winter but unfortunately Mr. Speakman has not seen one all! In a bush we saw a bank vole and in the sky we saw a great tit previously caught and ringed by Mr Hoy.

Above Right: a Brambling (Because I didn't know what they looked like!)

When I became a primary teacher I often accompanied classes to Suntrap. Our older daughter, inspired by the Suntrap experience of handling creatures from the wild, later went on to become a veterinary nurse. I remember one Saturday morning in May, in the company of a group of teachers, listening to birdsong at High Beach, enthralled by Ken's knowledge and enthusiasm.

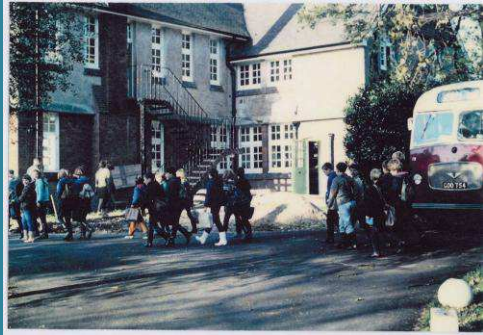
Our lives have overlapped: I taught his grandson, knew his family, live close to where he grew up. One of my neighbours was in his class at Churchfields Junior School and I was able to reintroduce them to each other a few years ago. Through Adult Education classes life came round full-circle and Ken was as inspiring as he had been to our class of eleven year-olds many years ago.

I grew up close to Highams Park Lake and spent much time in the forest as a child. Each day I walk the dog across Mill Plain along the forest paths close to where I grew up. But Ken's walks pushed me further afield to the woods at Loughton, Theydon and the nature reserves of the Lee Valley with their dragonflies, kingfishers and wild orchids. It is all there to be revisited with renewed enthusiasm and joy. There is so much to see in all seasons, all weathers; to share what I learned and to explore further. "The woods are lovely, dark and deep"... I have "miles to go before I sleep."
Penny Freeston

<http://petes-points.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/suntrap-memories.html>

Suntrap memories

I had this idea for starting a series of meaningful memories from my earlier life, things or events that influenced me. I shall start with Suntrap Field Studies Centre, in High Beech, Epping Forest, where I and other pupils from my junior school used to go for nature trips in the 1960s.



When I lived in Walthamstow, East London, until 1968, I attended Stoneydown Park Junior School, and for a couple of years our class and others were fortunate in attending a field studies centre in Epping Forest, called Suntrap. It was later run by the London Borough of Waltham Forest, and at the time I attended Suntrap, the curator there was a man named Ken Hoy, a man with an encyclopedic knowledge of nature and the forest. I don't know if he is still alive, but if he is he would be well into his 80s by now.

I think it was in 1966 or '67 when we first started attending Suntrap. Apart from the opportunity to get away from school for a day, it was a lovely opportunity to experience the great outdoors, to go for walks in the forest, learn about fungi, plants, trees, the local wildlife and look at the stuffed animals and animal skeletons in the field studies centre. We would go by coach to the centre, which was a few miles away, with one or two of our teachers.

We were, I think, the first generation of children to attend Suntrap, as it only opened in the mid-1960s. Suntrap is still going. It has obviously changed quite a lot and is hopefully used now as a way of teaching about the environment and climate change and its effects on wildlife, something that was not on the agenda in the '60s. My love of, and interest in, nature largely began with those trips, although there were other, earlier and later influences, too.

Bill Bayliss

November 2014

Resources

Some resources used in this article:

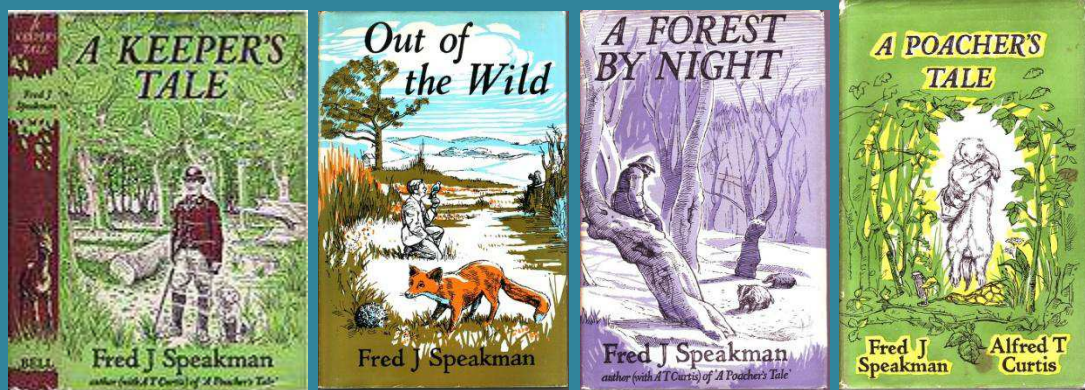
<http://suntrapcentre.weebly.com/history-of->
<http://www.discoveringeppingforest.org.uk/Home/Prov/Suntrap.pdf>
<http://www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk/pdfspring01.pdf>
<http://pathofthepaddle.co.uk/fred-j-speakman-bushcraft-writer-remembered/>
<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/epping-forest-aka-nature-class-in-epping-forest/query/geese>
<http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2009/jul/31/from-the-archive-snakes-epping-forest>
<http://survival-supplies.co.uk/about.shtml>
<http://www.field-studies-council.org/centres/eppingforest.aspx>
<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/visitor-information/Pages/High-Beach-visitor-centre.aspx>
<http://www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk/pdfspring03.pdf>
<http://www.friendsofeppingforest.org.uk/pdfspring01.pdf>
<http://hmpe17.primaryblogger.co.uk/2012/06/>
<http://www.thgirwmit.webspace.virginmedia.com/history.html>

Pictures are from the internet with my special thanks to the *Suntrap Field Studies* site and the *Henry Maynard Primary School's* excellent website where I found several relevant pictures.

Addenda

About the forest.....

Fred Speakman books :



Ken Hoy books:

