

TRANSCRIPT OF BROAD TOWN WHITE HORSE RESTORATION GROUP INTERVIEW WITH DEREK GREER

SUBJECT Derek Greer

PLACE Broad Town

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00:00:02,140 --> 00:00:24,860 [Andrew Law]

Okay. My name's Andrew Law. I'm carrying out this recording on Tuesday the 9th of September 2025 and my reference will be Broad Town White Horse Restoration Group number one. I am interviewing Derek Greer and I'll pass the baton to him.

00:00:24,860 --> 00:21:59,480 [Derek Greer]

So, I'm Derek Greer. I've just turned 63 a month ago. I'm originally from Northern Ireland but I came across to England for university in 1981 and I've actually been living in Southern England ever since. Most of the time in Bedfordshire but I moved here in 2018.

How did I become involved in the White Horse? Well, actually it's pretty much, we were looking for somewhere to live in this western part and when we moved into the house one of the main factors for us choosing to buy it was, we looked out the kitchen window and saw a lovely hillside view with a White Horse on it. So, it was one of the factors in actually why we moved here to White Horse. So, I guess I've been involved in it before we actually moved here or as part of moving here. But the activities of the White Horse, that all comes really from after we moved here. Andrew Law, I think, had something in the Broad Town newsletter, probably around about February, March the following year, asking volunteers to come and do liming and scouring activities on the Horse. And I thought, "I can't actually enjoy the Horse without actually contributing to looking after it and its upkeep." so I volunteered and for the next few years just once a year, I continued to volunteer in doing the liming and the scouring.

How did I become more involved in it? Well Bob Clark was leading the group and he, for health reasons, had to step down and so his activities as secretary and administrative, Andrew advertised for someone to take over that. Just so happened that I, at that time, was stepping back from my full-time career and I had a bit of time free so I said, "Well, I'm sure I could give Andrew a hand. It's not that much work." Just once a year, organizing, to buy the lime through Hortons, the farm at the top of the hill who own the land and helping Andrew get everyone up on the Horse for that annual liming. But it didn't quite work out that way. Really if you like, there was a landslip on the hill slope that we all noticed, a bit of a distance from the Horse, several hundred metres along from it in early December 2023. It left a bit of a scar on the hillside southwest of the Horse and we carried on. We carried on looking at working and liming that year in March '24. But September '24, we'd had quite a heavy storm go through and shortly after that, there was quite a landslip below the Horse, almost immediately below it, maybe what, 20, 30 meters away and that began to worry Andrew and me. We wondered, we didn't want that landslip going up the hill or another one destroying the Horse.

So, we saw that in November 2024, there was a conference being organized by Wiltshire Museum in Devizes and it was, I think it was called the White Horse, Badges and Hill Figures and the Hill Figures of Southern

England and that was being held on the 9th of November '24 and Andrew and I went along to that in the audience. We listened to several talks by archaeologists, historians and other experts on chalk hill figures and at the end of that, Andrew stood up and said, "We've got a problem on the Broad Town White Horse. We've got a problem of potential landslip activity; can anyone help us?" And actually, two of the guys who were giving the talks, Garry Gibbons and Mike Allen came up and spoke to us and almost much to our surprise, just a few days later on the 13th of November, they agreed to come up on the Horse and have a look at it. And so we had a visit up to the Horse and inspected it and inspected the hillside and really everything from the project that we're doing to try and look after the Horse came from that. So, we've had a series of meetings, 15th of January, 12th of February, 3rd of March and the 8th of May 2025, were meetings to define a project for what we needed to do. The attendees at that, I think on all of them was Andrew Law, myself, and Gary Gibbons and at various of those meetings we also had Mike Allen, Brian Edwards and Judy Conybeare. Though not attending, I think also aware of what was going on was David Dawson from the Wiltshire Museum and Terry Bratcher from the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre. As result of those meetings, we actually defined a written down project plan to be able to tackle the horse issues. What we decided was to create a baseline and survey of the Broad Town White Horse and this would be the first detailed plan record of the horse and that would actually inform our future management of the horse, its upkeep, and identify any threats and potentially how to handle them. We're also looking in the future, potentially, probably by Mike Allen and Gary, to create a management plan across as many of the white horses as feasible but using the Broad Town as a flagship to start things off. And we also wanted to increase and maintain public awareness of the topic and appreciation of the white horse. So, our project was defined in five different tasks that we wanted to undertake and, in this year, 2025, we've basically been tackling the first three and a little a bit of the last task. So, task one was to create a topographic survey and an accurate hill figure outline on the horse. Task two was to look at the landslip risk assessment and the condition of the hill figure and task three was a historic review of the Broad Town White Horse and its surroundings. Task four is to preserve that data for curation, which we haven't got all the data yet so we haven't started to put that in curation and task five was to look at the wider dissemination, doing talks to the local community, pop-up, arranging things for pop-up exhibition involving the school, the local Broad Town school that is, in the activities. I can talk a little bit about the activities we have undertaken.

So, for the first three activities we needed some funding because we had to involve professional experts to undertake the activities. We couldn't do them ourselves as volunteers and so, activities are particularly led by professional, with us as volunteers supporting those activities and helping, I would say, myself, Andrew, and Gary Gibbons managing the whole project as an overall body going forward.

So, task one, the topographical survey, really the main survey on the GPS and the photogrammetric survey using a drone, they were carried out by Donald Horne and Megan Cameron-Heffer from Oxford Archaeology East. It wasn't done officially by Oxford Archaeology but they were giving their spare time to come and do it, together with equipment. And that activity really started with some strimming on the 25th of June, 2025. Myself, Andrew, and Gary Gibbons were doing that. And then on the 28th of June, the actual survey took place led and performed by Donald and Megan with myself, Andrew, Gary Gibbons, his son Reuben Gibbons and David Walker being present to be able to assist in any activities and also really to go around the outside of the horse and make sure that was visible and all of the stakes which were holding the horse and we had to find after the strimming, were correctly labeled, so that they could be positioned on the survey. We haven't quite yet got the final report from that but it looks to be an exact, a very accurate representation of the horse. And potentially on that, potentially the survey showed some outlines that might look as if they'd occurred from previous horses. It also helped us understand the actual slope in terms of its profile on the whole slope. We were very pleased to be able to get the funding for that from the Bluefield Solar Income Fund which is administered through the

Broad Town Parish Council Subcommittee on the community fund and that was about two and a half thousand pounds to be able to pay for the professional involvement in that. It was probably about double that whenever you added in the cost of the extra volunteers if you took time and effort on that basis.

The second task, looking at assessing the hill slope is still underway at the moment. There has been a very good condition survey carried out, looking in detail at the horse and the fact that there are iron stakes and wire etc around that horse and looking at the condition of those. That condition survey primarily took place on the 1st of July and the 10th of July and that involved Andrew, myself, David Walker, Gary Gibbons and his daughter, Zoe and we were going around really and I guess you could say drawing the stakes and writing down the condition of the stakes and the chalk and looking for any wire etc we could find. And that's all being put together by Gary into a quite extensive condition survey report.

There is an auger survey, which, the first stage of that was carried out the 21st of August. That brought in Dr. Mike Allen as the expert in soil and auger activities. So, Mike led that activity with myself, Andrew and Gary Gibbons taking part in pulling out all of the cores and trying to learn from Mike how to classify what was the lime, what was chalk, what was interesting, potentially previous limey clay from previous horses and infill that might have occurred over the top of previous horse shapes. The results of that, as I speak, are still being put together by Mike in his report and we plan to do a further auguring led by Andrew and myself on a few selected auger sites that Gary has marked out potentially involving Rupert Bastin and Russ Hardy and Tony Curran on the 28th of September 2025. Though it's still in the future a few weeks away.

There is task three on looking at the history of the horse and any changes in shape that can be seen photographically. That that is just starting to happen and an activity on recording the landslips. I should say that in parallel to the talk, the University of Bath master's student, Matt Day and his supervisor Dr. Gerrit Meijer from the University of Bath's Civil Engineering and Archeology Architectural Department have been given some details that we had of the landslips, were interested in it as a master's project and have looked and surveyed landslips across the whole of Wiltshire and across all the chalk slopes. Matt has given us some initial feedback, which seems to suggest that there are more landslips around the Broad Town White Horse than any of the other white horses and has pointed out factors such as the hill slope, the water courses and the springs that occur underneath those slopes and in particular, the junction between the lower chalk formations and clay as being areas which look as if that might have more landslips than any other part of the area. Matt's report is due later in September and Dr. Gerrit promised to send those across to us for our help and consideration. We're very grateful to them for doing that. I should say that tasks two and three also required funding to get professional input and we were very pleased to be able to get support of the North Wessex Downs Trust and the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, each of whom supported one of those tasks.

That was about £4,000 pounds for task two and about £5,000 for task three. So, we're very grateful to them for putting that money forward and supporting the professional involvement in those activities. And again, those numbers I think are about the total amount of the task and it's about half of that was for the professionals. So, if I make that clear, let's say £5,000 in total including in-kind volunteer costs for task three, half of which was for the professionals. So, it's actual real cash required and the same on task two. So, progress to date has been quite positive. We've got a lot done, I think between June and September, we probably won't go on the horse over the winter period, e'll leave that. We'll have to consider, I guess, Andrew, myself and with the help support of Gary, what we might want to do, if anything, next year or do we want to leave the horse as it is and carry on just with the liming? But I really think that it's very helpful to have made contact with the North Wessex Downs because, if something should happen to us, we want to have identified places that we can go for support in order to

recover stuff. We also want to think as to whether University of Bath would likely be interested in anything else. Potential geophysics activities and monitoring the water table level for example, if that's a factor. So that's where we are at the moment. I think we've made quite a lot of progress.

Oh, I should say that we also held a talk within the local community. That was on, I think, the 30th of July. It was an evening talk. We had talks from five people. The lady from North Wessex Downs, who's name I cannot quite remember at the moment. Jemima Selwood of North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust, she gave us a talk putting things into context in her area. We then had a talk from Mike Allen who talked about Uffington White Horse, Cerne Giant and Wilmington Standing Man, to put into context other hill figures of Southern England. And of course, the archeology around them and how you can date them. Gary gave a talk about different white horses and the historical record, some of which you can believe or not believe because everything seems to be hearsay in terms of past history, particularly in the Victorian times and then Andrew gave a talk about the restorations and how the horse is looked after. And then finally, I finished up by giving a few details about the current project and some of the preliminary results. We got over 100 people into the village hall which is one of the best attendances of any event in the last five to 10 years, I believe. So, I think everyone was very happy with that and we're now, I think, preparing to go and do some activities with the school in October to get the young kids there, sort of primary school age, some art and English type projects involved with the white horse.

And I think that's pretty much us up to date at the moment. So, what do I think from the white horse means to me, it's pretty much an icon of Broad Town I'd say. And you can see it from Royal Wootton Bassett as well. I think if you're on the right part of the slope, you can see the horse there as well. So, I'd say for the local area. So, I think that's basically what it is, the white horse and the village go together.

00:21:59,480 --> 00:22:06,219 [Andrew Law]

Derek, thank you very much. That was very, very comprehensive and exactly as I remember it. So, thank you indeed.

00:22:06,219 --> 00:22:08,300 [Derek Grier]

Thank you.