

by MICHAEL BULLOCK (former secretary of Broadland Sun Association and retired Eastern Daily Press journalist)

*Seventy-five years ago, a small group of Norfolk non-conformists rented some secluded land so they could enjoy being naked there. From that small beginning evolved the Broadlands naturist club which in 2010 is celebrating a significant birthday. The Broadland Sun Association is still on that site, only five miles from Norwich, and is a flourishing organisation respected throughout the naturist movement. In three-quarters of a century the world has changed dramatically...but the naturist “uniform” of bare skin remains unaltered.*

SHANGRI-LA, a mythical Himalayan Utopia, entered popular culture in the mid-Thirties through a Hollywood film based on the best-selling James Hilton novel, Lost Horizon, in which it featured. At the same time, Norfolk's pioneer naturist club was born. Perhaps its founders never even considered contemporary trends by adopting Shangri-La as the name of their new club but, nonetheless, subsequent generations of members have regarded the site as their own little paradise on earth.

Instead of an apt but fanciful title, those founders opted for the simple Broadlands, conveying their club's Norfolk roots.

Since 1935 Broadlands has remained its members' beautiful tranquil haven where they can shed their clothes and relax in privacy in the sunshine and fresh air, enjoying a lifestyle of social nudity among those of similar persuasion in 25 acres of Norfolk greenery.

Safe and secluded in their embryo Broadlands, those founders who had boldly defied convention were able to escape from everyday life, without the televisions and mobile phones that today can make everyone instantly aware of the problems beyond the boundaries. But the delights of the club and naturism keep present members insulated from them despite this technology. Once inside the gate, the only worries are trivial. Will it rain or turn chilly? Will the bottled gas run out at barbecue time? Where's the sun cream?

In this 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, Broadland Sun Association's usual serenity will be interrupted by two major August events: its birthday party, when a trad-jazz band and Thirties-themed fancy dress will help to remind members of the pre-war period when the club was born, and the European Naturist Federation annual petanque championship finals that will bring 150 players, families and supporters from the continent and UK.

The knees-up and petanque competition will be the highlights of the 2010 social and sports calendar.

Tucked discreetly away at Stoke Holy Cross, Broadlands boasts excellent facilities for its family-orientated membership of hundreds of people through the age range and from various walks of life.

For its first six decades, it guarded its privacy and shied away from public attention, but as the public perception of naturism became more enlightened, the club has developed a more outgoing stance and has made its presence known, even seeking publicity in the hope that it will encourage others to sample – and, hopefully, embrace – the way of life relished by its members down seven decades.

Broadlands was founded by an Upper Stoke resident and his wife who, with friends, wanted somewhere private where they could have the freedom to be unhindered by clothes in natural surroundings. They rented the present land, Brickle Wood, and worked hard to open up some areas to catch the Norfolk sun. In the intervening 75 years it has developed from simple woodland to a well-appointed site.

Not all has been plain sailing, for its very existence was seriously jeopardised in 1987 when that infamous hurricane felled many trees and crushed numerous members' caravans. However, that loss of trees benefited the club by making once-shady areas open and sunny, to the delight of its members. The remaining trees are all covered by an official council preservation order.

The site is also blessed with a deep spring-fed lake, complete with lily-pads, at one end of the spacious sunbathing green. This lake remains a magnet for anglers and natural water swimmers.

At first, members used bell tents for overnight accommodation. “Then an old hut was provided where members could gather, and on cooler days a large wood fire burned in the centre which I remember with nostalgic fondness,” recalls 66-year-old John Lucas who, with his wife Merrilyn, joined Broadlands in 1973. “An above-ground circular pool was erected next to the cabin which we enjoyed...and shared with a few mosquitos!”

These basic facilities have been upgraded or replaced over the years. There is now a modern wooden clubhouse, with stage and dance floor, TV lounge and a bistro. The club's crowning glory is a superb glass-covered heated swimming pool, the elegant £51,000 conservatory-style structure replacing a plastic bubble and erected to mark the millennium.

The bistro serves everything from coffee and ice-cream to a traditional Sunday roast, and also caters for the influxes when the club hosts big naturist events, some of them

attended by VIP guests including the Lord Mayor of Norwich and the chairman of South Norfolk District Council. Naturists and guests always dress suitably for social functions.

Alongside the sunbathing green are two hard tennis/badminton courts, four-piste petanque (French bowls) terrain and children's play area.

Tennis? Well, naturists play a version called miniten on courts two-thirds the normal size, and instead of a racquet, they put their fist into a “thug” - a plywood “sandwich” in which there is a handle to grip; a normal tennis ball is used.

More than 30 extra petanque pistes – vital when the club hosts major tournaments like the European one in August – and a volleyball court are close by.

At Broadlands, members' static caravans occupy 106 sites, all with mains electricity available; rules dictate that all sites must reflect the rural setting. Also, there is space for three dozen touring caravans, motor-homes and tents, with electric hook-ups if required. The club owns five fully-serviced static caravans for rental by holidaymakers, plus a caravan adapted for disabled use. There are two shower and toilet blocks, sauna, and children's caravan. Wi-fi is available throughout the site.

The summer programme of sports and social events includes a special children's weekend where parents and grandparents ensure the youngsters have a memorable time. The club has two specially appointed children's officers for their protection, and there is a resident warden who took up the post 28 years ago.

According to John Lucas: “Broadlands is a long-term success story. Last year a combination of an open day, our website, coverage in the two national naturist magazines and local press and radio advertising resulted in new members, some of whom have since acquired permanent sites for caravans and are enjoying the relaxed atmosphere of a happy family club.

“Our facilities allow the energetic to participate in several sports, or our members can just stretch out in the sun and chill out” – a modern phrase that conveys the opposite of lazing in the sun!

Broadland Sun Association is a limited company, and profits are used for the benefit of the club and its membership. The chairman is Richard Last.

Anybody interested in discovering more about naturism is invited to telephone 01508 492907. More information can be found on the Broadlands website at [www.broadlandsun.co.uk](http://www.broadlandsun.co.uk) or can be obtained at [info@broadlandsun.co.uk](mailto:info@broadlandsun.co.uk)