

**DESIGNATION HISTORY SERIES**

**SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB**

**Ray Woolmore BA(Hons), MRTPI, FRGS  
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## SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB

### Origin

1. The Government first considered the setting up of National Parks and other similar areas in England and Wales when, in 1929, the first Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, established a National Park Committee<sup>1</sup>, chaired by the Rt. Hon. Christopher Addison\* MP, MD. The “Addison” Committee reported to Government in 1931, and surprisingly, the Report showed that no consideration had been given to the fine landscapes of the Shropshire Hills, neither by witnesses to the Committee, nor by the Committee itself. The nearby Midland area of Cannock Chase, arguably spoilt by coal mining, had been put forward as a suggested National Park by several local authorities and societies, but not the dramatic and unspoilt hill country of Shropshire, so evocatively described by A. E. Housman\*\*, the poet, as “blue-remembered hills”.

2. The omission of the Shropshire Hills from Addison’s 1931 Report was redressed in 1945, when John Dower\*\*\*, an architect/planner, commissioned by the Wartime Coalition Government “to study the problems relating to the establishment of National Parks in England and Wales”, included in his Report<sup>2</sup>, the South Shropshire Hills in his Division C list: “Other Amenity Areas NOT suggested as National Parks.” Dower had recognised that certain areas might not be suitable as national parks because of their limited size and lack of “wildness” but that they nonetheless required the special concern of local and central planning authorities to safeguard their landscape beauty – he had suggested that they be designated as “Other Amenity Areas”. A small scale and schematic map in the Report (Map II) suggests that the South Shropshire Hills “Other Amenity Area” stretched south-eastwards from the Welsh border across Shropshire to include the Stiperstones, the Long Mynd, Caer Caradoc, Wenlock Edge, the Clee Hills and the intervening Dales. To the north the Wrekin was excluded, while in the south west, the Clun Forest Hills were included with Radnor Forest, across the Welsh border, as one of Dower’s Division B list: Reserves for possible future National Parks.

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\* When appointed as Chairman of the Committee, Christopher Addison was Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, but by 1930 he had become Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries. He had a distinguished and varied career in medicine and in government, and continued this till his death in 1951, by which time he had become Viscount Addison of Stallingborough (1948).

\*\* A. E. Housman – collection of poems entitled “A Shropshire Lad”, 1896.

\*\*\* John Dower had been the Drafting Secretary of the Standing Committee for National Parks (SCNP) 1938 publication “The Case for National Parks in Great Britain”, which had put forward well-argued proposals for National Parks. The SCNP had been set up by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) and the Council for the Preservation of Rural Wales (CPRW) as a result of the lack of government action, following from the Addison Report.

3. Sir Arthur Hobhouse\*, Chairman of the National Parks Committee established by the Labour Government in July 1945 to follow up Dower's proposals in more detail, also included, in the Committee's Report<sup>3</sup> published in July 1947, the Shropshire Hills, in his list of 52 conservation areas (largely based on Dower's "Other Amenity Areas ..."). Hobhouse had recommended that the Minister of Town and County Planning should designate areas of high landscape quality, scientific interest and recreational value as conservation areas. The 1:1,250,000 scale plan accompanying the Hobhouse Report (Map 1 of this history is an extract from that plan) showed that the Shropshire Hills conservation area was very similar in its extent to Dower's South Shropshire Hills "Other Amenity Area". Hobhouse also put the Clun Forest Hills together with Radnor Forest, as an extensive (474 square miles) cross-border Clun and Radnor Forest conservation area. Unlike Dower he did not identify Clun and Radnor Forest as a possible future National Park, though he did not rule this out entirely, as para 231 of the Hobhouse Report suggested that additions to his list of twelve National Parks might come from some of his conservation areas.

4. Hobhouse's Shropshire Hills conservation area covered 192 square miles (497 square kilometres), including a small area, Corndon Hill, an outlier of the Stiperstones group of hills, in what was then the County of Montgomeryshire, in Wales. In choosing this area the Hobhouse Committee (as was Dower before) were clearly influenced by the beauty and variety of the landform of hill ridges and vales which were so characteristic of its landscape. The varied geology of the area, with the NE-SW orientation of its scarps, whaleback ridges and valleys gave a distinctive pattern to what was otherwise a complex and diverse landscape, of rounded heather moorland hills, rocky outcrops, airy pastoral ridges, woodlands and fertile farmed valleys. This varied geology was also reflected in the varied building styles, from timber-framed to stone buildings; while the border location of the area was reflected in the transition of settlement patterns and mixed English/Welsh place names, as well as in its wealth of archaeological features, including Iron Age forts like Caer Caradoc.

5. The green and smooth rolling uplands of Clun Forest were included in Hobhouse's cross border Clun and Radnor Forest conservation area, and separated from the Shropshire Hills conservation area by the Onny and Kemp valleys and the shapely hills, like Hopesay Hill, between them. Both Dower and Hobhouse clearly regarded the Clun Forest uplands as being of similar landscape character to the rolling, and part-wooded, uplands of Radnor Forest across the Welsh border.

6. As Hobhouse conservation areas, both the Shropshire Hills, and Clun and Radnor Forest, were included in the list of areas, on which, as had been made clear during the passage of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill through Parliament in 1949, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) would be largely (though not entirely) based.

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\* Before being appointed Chairman of the Government's National Parks Committee, Sir Arthur Hobhouse (Kt. 1942) had had a long career as a county councillor in Somerset (he had briefly been the MP for Wells 1923-4), becoming Chairman of the County Council 1940-7. He continued his involvement in local government after chairing the National Parks Committee, becoming Chairman of the County Councils Association (England & Wales) until 1950, and President of that body from 1951 to 1953.

## Designation History

7. **Early Steps.** The first priority of the National Parks Commission (NPC) established under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949 (the 1949 Act), was to designate the National Parks in its programme, adopted from the Hobhouse Report. The first reference to the practical consideration of both the Shropshire Hills and Clun and Radnor Forest as AONBs by the NPC came in a paper<sup>4</sup> (NPC/G/118) on AONBs written by the NPC's first Chairman, Sir Patrick Duff\*, in March 1953, following an earlier paper (NPG/G/110) in which he reviewed the NPC's overall programme for 1953, and highlighted the need for the NPC to prepare a list of possible AONB candidates for future attention. Both areas were omitted from his first seeded list of twelve but appeared in his second list of twelve, "chosen for their beauty". His choice, however, was qualified in both cases, with the Shropshire Hills "Stretton and Wenlock only", and with Clun and Radnor Forests "limited".

8. On 15 March 1954, Committee B\*\* of the NPC, responding to a request to protect the Gower as a National Park or AONB, used the opportunity to take the question of a future programme for AONBs to the meeting, the next day, of the full NPC. Reference was made, in discussion of the Committee's request by the NPC, to Sir Patrick Duff's paper on AONBs (NPC/G/118); and the NPC<sup>5</sup>, led by Lord Strang\*\*\* Sir Patrick Duff's successor as Chairman, requested their officers to prepare a paper on a possible AONB programme. This paper<sup>6</sup>, "Note on AONBs" (NPC/G/178) was prepared almost immediately, and considered by the NPC at their meeting on 13 April 1954. Looking first at the Hobhouse conservation areas, the paper suggested twelve areas as possible "first choices", and these included the Shropshire Hills (Stretton and Wenlock), but not Clun and Radnor Forests. The NPC, in their consideration of the paper, agreed, that the time had come for the Commission to give practical consideration to the designation of some AONBs, and asked<sup>7</sup> their Secretary to prepare a further paper considering the various points influencing the choice of areas for a future programme. This paper<sup>8</sup> "Further Notes on AONBs" (NPC/G/184), prepared by Harold Abrahams\*\*\*\*, the NPC Secretary, argued, inter alia, that the Shropshire Hills area was a

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\* Patrick Duff had had a distinguished and long career as a Senior Civil Servant (including being Personal Secretary to three successive Prime Ministers). Knighted in 1932, he entered the Diplomatic Service in 1941, serving at High Commissioner level in Canada and New Zealand. He became the NPC's first Chairman in 1949.

\*\* The NPC's Committee B was established in February 1953, succeeding the NPC's Southern Committee. Like its predecessor it dealt with the detail of the National Park designation programme in the south of the country, and, later, with AONB designations. It also dealt with other matters affecting "natural beauty", reporting to the NPC on these matters. Both NPC Committees A (which covered designation and other matters in the north of the country, including the Shropshire Hills) and B were wound up in 1961.

\*\*\* Like his predecessor, William Strang had had a long and distinguished career in Government Service, and also had been a diplomat. Knighted in 1943, his last post before retirement in 1953 was Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office. He became Baron Strang in 1954, and was appointed the second Chairman of the National Parks Commission in March of that year.

\*\*\*\* Harold Abrahams, 1924 Olympic Gold Medallist (in the 100 metres track event), Senior Civil Servant and Athletics Correspondent for the Sunday Times, had been appointed the Secretary of the National Parks Commission in 1950, continuing until his retirement in 1963.

specially deserving case for AONB designation, and included it amongst the five AONBs in the first list of areas to be designated. The paper was considered by the NPC at their meeting on 15 June 1954, and with regard to choice of areas for designation, the Commission<sup>9</sup> decided that as a first step they should adopt for preliminary consideration three areas – The Gower, the Surrey Hills and the Lleyn Peninsula. Despite the inclusion of the Shropshire Hills in the NPC Secretary’s earlier list, the NPC had excluded it from its agreed preliminary list; and when, at their meeting<sup>10</sup> on 14 December 1954, the NPC returned again to the AONB programme, to start discussions with the local authorities, the three AONBs chosen in June 1954 remained, with the addition of the Quantocks.

9. The Shropshire Hills soon returned, however, to the NPC’s list of proposed AONBs for designation, being included in L. J. Watson’s (NPC field adviser\*) choice set out in NPC paper<sup>11</sup> NPC/G/260 “AONBs”, which was considered by the NPC at their meeting on 13 September 1955. Once again, following consideration of the paper, the NPC<sup>12</sup> altered their officers’ choice of six areas, but retained the Shropshire Hills (West) in the list which they agreed. Nevertheless, it took the preparation of yet another paper<sup>13</sup>, NPC/G/310, “AONB future programme” reviewing progress on the AONB programme, and its consideration by the NPC in June 1956, before the NPC<sup>14</sup> agreed to proceed (specifically) towards the designation of the Shropshire Hills as an AONB. Significantly, no reference was made to any future position in the programme of the Shropshire section of the Clun and Radnor Forest area which, as a Hobhouse conservation area, had also been identified in previous papers as a potential AONB.

10. **Informal Consultation.** Following their June 1956 decision to proceed with the Shropshire Hills AONB proposal, the NPC opened correspondence\*\* with the Shropshire County Planning Officer, Mr. Bennett, seeking his informal views on the extent of the proposed AONB. The minutes<sup>15</sup> of the meeting of the NPC Committee A, for 27 November 1956, indicated that the Committee had considered tentative suggestions, submitted by Mr. Bennett for the proposed AONB, and that these were for two alternatives, one containing the “Shropshire Hills proper” and the other linking these Hills with the Shropshire part of the Clun and Radnor Forest area. When these proposals were discussed at the meeting<sup>15</sup> of the NPC’s Committee A on 27 November

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\* L. J. Watson, by training a landscape architect and artist, had also been the Hobhouse Committee’s landscape adviser.

\*\* Unfortunately the earliest NPC file relating to the Shropshire Hills AONB proposal, AB/33, was destroyed by later administrative action, so for matters on Informal Consultation, the author has had to rely on references in the relevant NPC minutes. However, Dr. Ian Dormor the Landscape Conservation Officer of the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, has discovered the following reference to Mr. Bennett’s suggested boundaries for the AONB, as Minute 18 of the 10 October 1956 meeting of the Shropshire CC Planning Committee, held by the Shropshire Archives – “The County Planning Officer submitted a map showing suggestions for the boundaries of (a) an AONB comprised of a combination and joining up of the two areas of Shropshire suggested as conservation areas in the National Parks Report, viz, the Shropshire Hills and Clun Forest and (b) an area covering the Shropshire Hills only in case the National Parks Commission preferred to make a separate designation for this area”. The Planning Committee “resolved that the alternative suggestions shown on the map submitted be forwarded to the National Parks Commission for their consideration”. This minute confirms what the author has surmised from the wording of the minutes of the NPC Committee A for 27 November 1956, and the author is indebted to Dr. Dormor for his research on this matter.

1956, Mr. Brunsdon Yapp\* undertook to study the plans submitted by Mr. Bennett, in more detail, and to report back at Committee A's December 1956 meeting. Paper\*\* A/G/365, being Mr. Yapp's recommendations on Shropshire's proposals, was duly considered by NPC Committee A at their December meeting<sup>16</sup>, when they accepted his recommendations as the basis for future study and a visit by an NPC inspecting party. From the wording of the Committee A Minutes it would seem most likely that Mr Yapp's recommendations favoured the option of joining the two areas based on Hobhouse's conservation areas in the County of Shropshire, plus the possible inclusion of the town of Ludlow and the prominent hill of the Wrekin. At the NPC meeting<sup>17</sup> on 19 December 1956, the NPC accepted their Committee A's view, and Commissioners Pauline Dower,\*\*\* Francis Ritchie and Brunsdon Yapp, agreed to form the inspecting party, which would possibly be joined by the NPC Chairman. In the event, the visit did not take place until 21-22 May 1957, when Stuart Mollison, one of the NPC field advisers, joined Pauline Dower and Brunsdon Yapp in the survey party, accompanied by Mr. Bennett. The report of the visiting party was considered by the NPC Committee A at their meeting<sup>18</sup> on 28 May 1957, when the boundary was agreed and the opening of formal consultation on that boundary with the local authorities was authorised. The boundary agreed only differed from the Hobhouse conservation area boundaries in Shropshire in two major respects – firstly, through the linking of two areas by the proposed designation of parts of the Onny and Kemp valleys and the shapely hills in the Hopesay area between them, and – secondly, bringing into the AONB the isolated whaleback hill of the Wrekin, and a short section of the Severn Valley, by means of a narrow peninsula of designated land extending north-east along the Wenlock Edge escarpment and the Dale below. The town of Ludlow was not included, though because of the destruction of the relevant papers by earlier administrative action, the author has not been able to establish the precise reasoning behind this decision.

11. **Formal Consultation.** The preparation of 250 copies of the designation map required for consultation was not completed by the Ordnance Survey till December 1957. A month later Harold Abrahams's formal consultation letter<sup>19</sup> of 13 January 1958, accompanied by the map, was sent to the ten local authorities affected by the proposed designation – Shropshire CC, Bishop's Castle and Wenlock MBCs, Church Stretton and Wellington UDCs, and Atcham, Bridgnorth, Clun, Ludlow and Wellington RDCs. Comments were requested, wherever possible, within a calendar month. Other bodies were consulted through established practice, rather than by statute, and these included – the Nature Conservancy (NC), Crown Estate Commissioners, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food (MAFF), Forestry Commission (FC), CPRE and the National Trust. Copies of the letter<sup>20</sup> and map were also sent, for information, to Mrs Ward, at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG). One of these maps was sent for

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\* Brunsdon Yapp, a geographer from the West Midlands, was appointed a Commissioner in January 1953, and served thirteen years in that role until June 1966.

\*\* This paper, like NPC file AB/33, was destroyed by later administrative action.

\*\*\* Pauline Dower was the widow of John Dower, the author of the 1945 Seminal Report on National Parks (see para 2 above), and was a founder member of the NPC, and one of its longest serving members (along with Francis Ritchie) relinquishing that role in June 1966. As a Commissioner she played a major role in the formulation, through site visits and reports, of the boundaries of several National Parks and AONBs.

the use of the appropriate Provincial Division of MHLG, while a separate letter<sup>21</sup> and map was sent to Branch LG4(c) of MHLG, requesting that Branch to give the NPC details of any proposed alterations to local authority boundaries affecting the proposed designation.

12. At their meeting<sup>22</sup> on 25 March 1958, NPC's Committee A were informed that the comments from all ten local authorities had been received, and that only one<sup>23</sup> of these, for *Wenlock MBC*, had suggested any change to the boundaries put forward in the consultation. *Wenlock MBC had asked for the boundary to be extended (between Buildwas and Iron Bridge in the Severn Valley) to include Benthall Edge, Tick Wood and Wyke* (see map 2 in this history). The Committee referred Wenlock MBC's suggestion to the meeting of the NPC on the next day, 26 March<sup>24</sup>, when the matter was fully discussed. Although the NPC recalled that the original proposal had been extended, at the request of the local authorities, to include the Wrekin area, they also believed that the addition to this area suggested by the MBC was not up to "the required scenic standard". They instructed their officers to inform Wenlock MBC of their views, and to proceed to designation\*.

13. No comments of substance were received from the other bodies consulted; though Herbert Griffin, a Commissioner as well as Secretary of the CPRE, did make an interesting late comment<sup>25</sup>, (in his letter of 2 June 1958) on behalf of a member of the Standing Committee on National Parks (SCNP - an organisation which was linked to CPRE\*\*). This member, Mr. J. H. Hunt, was described by Mr. Griffin as the representative of the Cyclists' Touring Club on SCNP, and as having a good knowledge of Shropshire. He had suggested that a larger part of Corve Dale (the lower Dale) should be included in the AONB, as pleasant hill country, linking Wenlock Edge with Brown Clee. Also he argued for the addition of the lower valleys of the West and East Onny to the AONB, an argument consistent with the inclusion of the upper valleys of these tributary rivers in the proposed AONB, and for the boundary\*\*\* to be drawn on the Welsh border "for the sake of tidiness as well as to link up the hills to north and south". This late comment was not considered by the NPC and was not repeated at the public advertisement stage.

14. **Public Advertisement of the proposed Shropshire Hills AONB (Designation) Order 1958.** In May 1958, in accordance with Section 87(2) of the 1949 Act the NPC advertised<sup>26</sup> its intention to make the Shropshire Hills AONB (Designation) Order. The Order affecting 300 square miles (777 sq. km.) of land in the County of Shropshire was advertised nationally, in the London Gazette, on 13 May 1958, and locally, in the Ludlow Advertiser on 15 May 1958, and in the Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury News on 17 May 1958. Copies of the proposed Order were put on public

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\* The area to be designated was therefore exactly the same in extent as that which had been the subject of formal consultation in January 1958.

\*\* See footnote on John Dower, paragraph 2 above

\*\*\* Although technically not a formal comment, Mr. Hunt's view is interesting, in that it appears to be the only comment which draws attention to the enclave of attractive land in the Bishop's Castle area left between the AONB boundaries and the Welsh border. This land was shown in the V/L notation on the original Shropshire Development Plan.

deposit in the Offices of the ten local authorities affected by the Order, and further copies of the Order and Map were also made available for public inspection at the NPC Offices in London, then at Chester Gate, Regents Park. Representations or objections to the proposed Order and Map were invited to be sent to Harold Abrahams, the NPC Secretary, not later than 21 June 1958.

15. Thirty copies of the Public Advertisement, proposed Order and Map were sent to Branch<sup>27</sup> P4, MHLG, so that MHLG could consult with other interested Government Departments ie the Admiralty, Air Ministry, GPO Telecommunications, War Office, FC, MAFF, Ministry of Supply, Ministry of Works, Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, and other internal Divisions of MHLG.

16. When the NPC's Committee A met<sup>28</sup> on 24 June 1958 they heard from their officers that no representations had been received within the set period following the public advertisement, the previous month, of the NPC's intention to make the Shropshire Hills AONB (Designation) Order. The Committee, accordingly, decided to recommend to the Commission that they approved the making of the Designation Order and the affixing of the Commission's seal thereto. A resolution to this effect was, indeed, adopted by the NPC at their meeting<sup>29</sup> on the following day, 25 June 1958.

17. **Submission of the Shropshire Hills AONB (Designation) Order 1958 to the Minister of Housing and Local Government, July 1958.** The Order was signed by the NPC Chairman, Lord Strang, and the NPC Secretary, Harold Abrahams, and the seal affixed on 29 July 1958, and submitted, with the Map, to MHLG, for the consideration of the Minister, the Rt. Hon. Henry Brooke MP, with a covering letter<sup>30</sup>, dated 31 July 1958, from Harold Abrahams. A copy of the Notice of 12 May 1958, and a copy of Wenlock MBC's observations (the letter from Mr. Sharp, the Wenlock MP Borough Engineer and Surveyor, dated 11 March 1958) on the boundary were also enclosed, while the newspapers in which the public advertisement of the proposal appeared were listed in Harold Abrahams's letter.

18. Prior to formal advice being given to the Minister, the Order, Map, and other documents were considered by officers of P4(c) division of MHLG, headed by Mrs. M. Ward. The Proposed Designation Order and Map had (see para 11 and reference 20) been sent to Mrs. Ward much earlier, for information, in January 1958, and had been, at that time, circulated around, for internal comment, to the relevant Sections of MHLG, and other interested Government Departments and bodies. The proposed AONB and its boundaries (which had not, in fact, changed since the NPC had authorised formal consultation in May 1957) had thus already been the subject of extensive consultation within Government. Mr. D. E. Powell, an officer in P4(c) Division was soon able to provide Mrs. Ward with a manuscript note<sup>31</sup> dated 12 August 1958 and table<sup>31</sup> covering the various comments of the Government Departments and bodies consulted.

19. In his note, as well as referring to the NPC's rejection of Wenlock MBC's suggestion<sup>23</sup> on the addition of Benthall Edge, Tick Wood and Wyke, Mr. Powell mentioned that the only Government Departments to offer any comment were the War Office and Forestry Commission. *The War Office*<sup>32</sup> indicated that the War Department

already held interests in the land to be designated, and they, or the Territorial and Auxiliary Forces Association, could acquire more; and that they reserved all their rights in respect of this land. Additionally they had presumed that if MHLG, NPC or the local planning authorities wished to know any information regarding the land in which the War Department had interests, or wished to enter into access agreements, they would approach the Department or the Associations as appropriate. *The FC* had merely repeated the informal comments<sup>33</sup> it had already given the NPC in March 1958 ie that, apart from existing forests, together with dedicated and approved areas, the potential area for acquisition (for forestry purposes) covered almost the whole of the proposed designation. With regard to these comments by the War Office and the FC, Mr. Powell believed that their nature was such that no further action by MHLG was required. Mr. Powell also mentioned comments from *MHLG internal Divisions*. *Minerals Division* had no objection “providing it (was) accepted that quarrying was a normal feature of an AONB” while *the Provincial (Geographical) Division* had identified a few inconsistencies between the extent of the V/L areas in the Development Plan and the AONB. Mr. Powell suggested that the judgement of NPC should be relied upon.

20. In her minute<sup>34</sup> to Mr. Boden and Mr. Oxenham of 10 November 1958, Mrs. Ward had obviously accepted Mr. Powell’s views, and noted that the only point of doubt related to the representation for additions to the AONB (at Benthall Edge, Tick Wood and Wyke) by Wenlock MBC. She therefore asked for confirmation that none of the additional land proposed was V/L land, and requested the Geographical Branch’s general comments on the Wenlock MBC proposal. She also pointed out that MHLG generally accepted NPC’s opinions on landscape quality (NPC had rejected Wenlock MBC’s suggestion because they did not consider the additional land “up to the required standard”) and that a very strong case would have to be made for acceding, through Ministerial modifications, to Wenlock MBC’s case, adding that a lengthy consultation would be involved. In response to Mrs. Ward’s minute of 10 November 1958, Mr. Oxenham confirmed, in his minute<sup>35</sup> of 24 November 1958 to Mr. Boden and Mrs. Ward, that none of the additional land was V/L land in the Development Plan, though part of the area was an SSSI because of old quarries being of both geological and botanical interest. He added that the land south of the Shrewsbury – Worcester railway line (see Map 2 in this history) had a measure of natural beauty and was highly thought of in the Ironbridge district, but that he would not put its value as high as Lower Corve Dale (see also para 13 above), which the NPC had omitted from the proposed AONB. In his opinion the amenity value of the additional land was “not sufficiently outstanding to warrant modification of the boundary selected by the Commission”. Mr. Boden, (of Division P1) however, in his minute of 25 November 1958 (added in manuscript to Mr. Oxenham’s minute of 24 November 1958), replying to Mrs. Ward, said that he had believed that some of the proposed additional land, particularly Tick Wood could be included within the AONB, but in view of the lengthy and complex consultation procedure involved in making modifications, he would not dissent from the views expressed by Mr. Oxenham in his minute of 24 November 1958.

21. Following the response to her earlier minute by Mr. Oxenham and Mr. Boden, Mrs. Ward rapidly progressed matters, and after her Branch prepared a factual note to inform the Minister, and a draft Press Notice, minuted<sup>36</sup> Mr. E. H. Wiltshire, Assistant

Secretary MHLG, on 28 January 1959, recommending that the Shropshire Hills AONB (Designation) Order be confirmed without modification. Mr. Wiltshire (in his minute<sup>37</sup> to Mr. Street of 13 February 1959) sought the Minister's agreement via his Private Office, and this was given by personal manuscript minute<sup>37</sup> on 20 February 1959.

22. **Confirmation of the Shropshire Hills AONB (Designation Order by the Minister of Housing and Local Government on 11 March 1959.** The Rt. Hon. Henry Brooke MP, Minister of Housing and Local Government, confirmed the Order<sup>38</sup>, without modification on 11 March 1959. Mr. Wiltshire, Assistant Secretary MHLG signed the Order on the Minister's behalf, and the confirmed Order was sent to the NPC Secretary with a covering letter<sup>39</sup> of the same date as the confirmation from Mrs. M. Ward. An MHLG Press Notice<sup>40</sup> "Beauty of the Shropshire Hills to be protected" was issued on 12 March 1959 publicising Henry Brooke's confirmation of 300 square miles (777 square kilometres) of the Shropshire Hills as an AONB. The MHLG press notice\* briefly described the designated area as including "the fine landscape around Church Stretton, with Caer Caradoc, the Long Mynd, the Stiperstones and the long ridge of Wenlock Edge, from which it extends north-east to take in the Wrekin and the Ercall", and "to the south-east the Clee Hills are included, and to the south-west the Clun Forest area on the Welsh border".

23. The boundaries of the AONB (Map 3 in this history) had not, in fact, changed from those agreed by the NPC for the purpose of formal consultation in May 1957 (see para 10), and thus only differed from the two Hobhouse conservation areas in Shropshire (see Map 1 of this history) in two major respects, ie by the linking of the two areas via parts of the Onny and Kemp Valleys, and the Hopesay area hills, and by the addition of the Wrekin.

24. The designation process for the eighth AONB to be confirmed in England and Wales had been comparatively straightforward, taking 32 months to go through the various stages, from the June 1956 decision by the NPC to proceed with informal consultation of the local authorities, to its confirmation by Henry Brooke in March 1959. Early close working with Shropshire CC and its County Planning Officer had facilitated the whole process, as had the later internal views of MHLG officers to rely on the judgement of the NPC on landscape quality, particularly in respect of the additional land near the Wrekin suggested for inclusion in the AONB by Wenlock MBC. Interestingly enough, the fact that no-one, apparently, had raised the possibilities of either, a cross-border AONB linking with Radnor Forest in Wales or bringing into the AONB Corndon Hill, physically part of the Stiperstones group of hills, but in the Welsh County of Montgomeryshire, also contributed to the straightforward and relatively quick progress of the Shropshire Hills AONB Order to confirmation.

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\* A recent, and more comprehensive and detailed, description of the landscape of the Shropshire Hills AONB is contained in "The Shropshire Landscape - A landscape assessment prepared by Land Use Consultants for the Countryside Commission", Countryside Commission 1993 (CCP 407), and is essential reading for any researcher of the AONB.

25. As required by Section 87(8) of the 1949 Act the NPC<sup>41</sup> sent copies of the confirmed Order and Map, to each of the ten local authorities affected so that these documents were available for public inspection at the local authority offices.

26. **AONB Administration.** As far as can be ascertained by the author there were no local authority calls for a Special Advisory Committee for the AONB to be set up, and the planning, and administration of the area were left, in its early days, very much to the County Council and the District Councils. While no AONB warden service was established, the extensive hill properties of the NT throughout the area, and their use by the public, were managed by the Trust's own Estate Manager and Wardens. After local government re-organisation in 1974, planning and countryside management in the AONB became the responsibility of the County Council's Property and Planning Services Department, whose countryside and forestry officer had a general remit for the AONB as did also rights-of-way officers and countryside managers in the Council's Leisure Services Department.

27. In 1988, the South Shropshire Countryside Project<sup>42</sup>, a major management initiative centred on the AONB, was set up as an active partnership between the Countryside Commission (West Midlands Regional Office) and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust together with local communities and land-owners. Funded by the Commission, local authorities, and local sponsors, and eventually administered by the County Council, the Project, with its own Project Officer and advisory group, meeting quarterly, was very much a precursor of the Shropshire Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), established in 1993, with its first Chairman being Councillor Chris Berrington and Judith Moore the first AONB Officer. In 1993 the JAC was made up of representatives from Shropshire CC, Shrewsbury & Atcham, Bridgnorth and South Shropshire District Councils (DC), various government bodies and NGOs, while the practical management of the AONB was achieved through the Shropshire Hills Countryside Unit (the forerunner of the AONB Team), which was based near Church Stretton. The first Shropshire Hills AONB Advisory Plan was completed by Judith Moore, the Countryside Unit, and the JAC in 1996, and provided a framework for the work of the Countryside Unit till January 2003, when the AONB Team was created, the JAC re-formed, and the AONB Office moved to the Old Post Office at Craven Arms.

28. By July 2004 the AONB Team and JAC had completed the new AONB Management Plan required by Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act, 2000, to guide the conservation and enhancement of the AONB landscape, and replace the earlier AONB Advisory Plan. The Management Plan, covering the five year period 2004-9, was adopted by Shropshire CC, Telford and Wrekin Council (Unitary) and the three DCs (Bridgnorth, Shrewsbury & Atcham, and South Shropshire) in the AONB (Map 4 shows current local authority boundaries within the AONB.). The JAC, though still having the formal JAC status, it was renamed the AONB Partnership\* in 2004, then with forty-one members and Sarah Bury, an individual member, its Chairman. The

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\* While the author has derived much of the factual information in paras 27- 28 directly from the Shropshire Hills AONB Team, information has also been taken from "Shropshire Hills AONB Annual Review 2004-5" published by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, 2005, and "Shropshire Hills AONB – Management Plan 2004-2009" published by the Shropshire Hills AONB Office, 2004..

AONB Partnership is, at present, funded by the Countryside Agency, Shropshire CC, Telford & Wrekin Borough (Unitary), and South Shropshire, Shrewsbury & Atcham, and Bridgnorth DCs, while the CC acts as host employer for the AONB Team of nine officers, led by Phil Holden, the AONB Manager, and based in the AONB Office at Craven Arms. Peter Norman, another individual member, has recently become Chair of the Partnership, now (since a biennial review of membership) with thirty-eight members ie five local authority members, three parish council members, five other individual members, eight members from statutory bodies, and seventeen members from non-statutory bodies.

29. **Future Changes to the AONB Boundary.** No work was undertaken on the Shropshire Hills AONB in relation to the Countryside Commission's national AONB boundary review which took place in the 1980s. Unfortunately, two of the four boundary reviews which were undertaken, for the Chilterns and the Cotswolds, proved so costly in terms of use of staff and financial resources, that with the agreement of Government, the planned programme of reviews was discontinued. However, the powers to vary AONB boundaries still remain on the statute book, now under Section 83(7) of the CROW Act, 2000, and would be exercised by the Countryside Agency (which succeeded the Countryside Commission in 1999). The official policy of the Agency (and, indeed, its predecessor) is that where there is consensus or where need is established local variations will be considered. In 2004 the Agency looked again at the criteria which could trigger action for boundary change to be considered, and concluded that it would continue with its current official policy on an ad hoc basis.

30. Thus in the 46 years which have elapsed since the Shropshire Hills AONB Designation Order was confirmed in 1959, the boundaries have remained without change, though with re-measurement of the area by the Countryside Commission in 1991 (along with all the other AONBs and National Parks), using modern techniques, its size "increased" from 777 square kilometres to 804 square kilometres. Whether or not re-examination of the cases for including in the AONB, Benthall Edge, Tick Wood, Wyke and adjacent parts of the Severn Valley, and possibly Lower Corve Dale and the Lower West and East Onny valleys, or any other areas, lead to consideration of proposals for boundary variations to the Shropshire Hills AONB, are questions which can only be decided by the AONB Partnership, the five local authorities, the Countryside Agency (to become part of Natural England in 2006) and, ultimately, by the appropriate Minister in the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

## References

1. The National Park Committee, (Chairman – The Rt. Hon. Christopher Addison MP, MD) “Report of the National Park Committee”, The Treasury, Cmd 3851, HMSO, London, 1931.
2. John Dower, “National Parks in England and Wales”, Cmd 6628, HMSO, London, May 1945.
3. The National Parks Committee (Chairman – Sir Arthur Hobhouse), “Report of the National Parks Committee – England and Wales”, Cmd 7121, HMSO, London, July 1947.
4. Sir Patrick Duff (Chairman NPC), “Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty”, Note by Chairman, NPC/G/118, 2 March 1953. (Folio 13 NPC file AB/51 – TNA file COU1/391.)
5. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 45<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NPC (546(a)) held on 16 March, 1954”.
6. National Parks Commission, Paper NPC/G/178 “Note on AONBs” HMA/LJW/TGM/5.4.54. (Folio 17 NPC file AB/51 – TNA file COU1/391.)
7. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 46<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NPC (565) held on 13 April 1954”.
8. National Parks Commission, Paper NPC/G/184 “Further Note on AONBs” HMA (Harold Abrahams) 8.6.54”. (Folio 20 NPC file AB/51 – TNA file COU1/1/391.)
9. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 48<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NPC (595) held on 15 June 1954”.
10. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 53<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the NPC (681) held on 14 December 1954”.
11. National Parks Commission, Paper NPC/G/260 “AONBs”, J.L. 20/8/55. (Folio 42A NPC file AB/51 – TNA file COU/1/391.)
12. National Parks Commission, “Minutes of 61<sup>st</sup> meeting of the NPC (828) held on 13 September 1955”.
13. National Parks Commission, Paper NPC/G/310 “AONBs – Future Programme”, JRBF 19 June 1956.
14. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 70<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NPC (993)” held on 27 June 1956.

15. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 42<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the NPC Committee A (963) held on 27 November 1956”.
16. National Parks Commission, “Minutes of 43<sup>rd</sup> meeting of NPC Committee A (972) held on 18 December 1956”.
17. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 75<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NPC (1058) held on 19 December 1956”.
18. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 48<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NPC Committee A (1083) held on 28 May 1957”.
19. Letter from Harold Abrahams, NPC Secretary, as sent to the Clerks of the 10 local authorities affected by the proposed AONB, dated 13 January 1958. (Folio 15 NPC file AB/33A – TNA file COU/1/344.)
20. Letter from J. R. B. Ferguson (NPC Secretariat), dated 13 January 1958, to Mrs. M. M. Ward, MHLG, as sent for information with copies of the draft map of the proposed Shropshire Hills AONB. (Un-numbered folio MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)
21. Letter from Mrs. D. P. Knight (NPC Secretariat), dated 13 January 1958, to Mr. L. R. Mustill, MHLG, requesting whether the enclosed draft map of the proposed Shropshire Hills AONB was affected by any proposed change in local authority boundaries. (Folio 28 NPC file AB/33A – TNA file COU/1/344.)
22. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 56<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NPC Committee A (1231) held on 25 March 1958”.
23. Copy of letter from A. M. Sharp, Borough Engineer and Surveyor, Borough (MB) of Wenlock, dated 11 March 1958, giving response to the NPC in formal consultation (Ref. 19 above), and suggesting inclusion of Benthall Edge, Tick Wood and Wyke in the Proposed AONB. (Un-numbered folio MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)
24. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 89<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NPC (1298) held on 26 March 1958.”
25. Letter from Herbert Griffin, CPRE General Secretary, dated 2 June 1958, to Mrs. D. P. Knight, NPC Secretariat, giving the views of Mr. J. H. Hunt, representative of the Cyclists’ Touring Club on SCNP, on including Lower Corve Dale and the West Onny Valley in the proposed AONB. (Folio 81 NPC file AB/33A – TNA file COU/1/344.)
26. National Parks Commission (Extract from the London Gazette 13 May 1958) Advertisement of the Shropshire Hills AONB (Designation) Order, 1958, Harold M. Abrahams NPC Secretary 12 May 1958. (Un-numbered folio MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)

27. Letter from W. Calvert, NPC Secretariat, dated 12 May 1958, to Mr. K. F. Munn, MHLG, sent with 30 copies of the statutory notice (ref. 26 above), proposed Shropshire Hills AONB Order and Map, for circulation to interested Government Departments. (Un-numbered folio MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)
28. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 59<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the NPC Committee A (1282) held on 24 June 1958”.
29. National Parks Commission “Minutes of 92<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the NPC (1364) held on 25 June 1958”.
30. Letter from Harold M. Abrahams, NPC Secretary, dated 31 July 1958, to the Secretary MHLG, as the covering letter to the submission of the Shropshire Hills AONB (Designation) Order, 1958 to the Minister of Housing and Local Government. (Un-numbered folio MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)
31. MHLG manuscript minute (with table) from Mr. D. E. Powell (Branch P4), dated 12 August 1958, to Mrs. M. Ward, summarising comments and concerns of Wenlock MBC, Government Departments and internal Sections of MHLG, on the proposed Shropshire Hills AONB Order. (Un-numbered folio MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)
32. Letter from E. Kenyon, The War Office, dated 17 June 1958, to the Secretary MHLG, giving the comments of the War Department and the Territorial and Auxiliary Forces Association on the proposed Shropshire Hills AONB Order. (Un-numbered folio MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)
33. Letter from B. N. Mills, for Secretary of the FC, dated 3 June 1958, to Mr. K. F. Munn, Section P4 MHLG giving comments on Shropshire Hills AONB Order, and enclosing copy of letter from FC Secretary, dated 14 March 1958, to NPC Secretary, giving informal comments on the same Order. (Un-numbered folios MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)
34. MHLG Minute from Mrs. M. M. Ward (Section P4(c) dated 10 November 1958, to Mr. Boden (Section P1) and Mr. Oxenham (Geographical Division) requesting comments on the Wenlock MBC proposal for additions to the AONB. (Un-numbered folio MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166).
35. MHLG Minute from J. R. Oxenham, MHLG Geographic Division, dated 24 October 1958, to Mr. Boden and Mrs. Ward, stating that he believed that the amenity value of the Wenlock MBC suggested additional land was not sufficiently outstanding, and (added to Mr. Oxenham’s minute in manuscript), minute from Mr. Boden (P1) dated 25 October 1958, to Mrs. Ward, stating that some of the additional land was of natural beauty, but that in view of the lengthy modification procedure, he adhered to Mr. Oxenham’s view. (Un-numbered folios MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166).

36. MHLG manuscript minute from Mrs. M. Ward (P4(c) dated 28 January 1959 to Mr. E. H. Wiltshire (MHLG Assistant Secretary), recommending confirmation of the Shropshire Hills AONB Order without modification, and as an attachment, a typed minute E2 of the same date, from Section P4(c) giving appropriate advice and information for the Minister. (Un-numbered folios MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)

37. MHLG manuscript minute from Mr. E. H. Wiltshire, Assistant Secretary, dated 13 February 1959, to Mr. Street, on the establishment of the Shropshire Hills AONB, and, added, as manuscript minute from Mr. Street, dated 20 February 1959, to Mr. Girling, of the Minister's Private Office, a request to seek the Minister's agreement to confirmation, and, as a manuscript minute signed HB and dated 20 February 1959, from the Rt. Hon. Brooke MP, the Minister, to Mr. Street, stating that he agreed. (Un-numbered folios MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)

38. "National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, Shropshire Hills AONB (Designation) Order 1958", ie Order as confirmed by the Minister of Housing and Local Government and signed on his behalf by Mr. E. H. Wiltshire, Assistant Secretary, on 11 March 1959. A copy of the confirmed Order is kept in the safe deposit in the Records Management Section at the Countryside Agency Offices in Cheltenham.)

39. Letter from Mrs. M. M. Ward (Section P4(c) MHLG), dated 11 March 1959, to the NPC Secretary, saying that the Minister had confirmed the Shropshire Hills AONB (Designation) Order 1958 without modification, and enclosing a copy of the enclosed Order. (Un-numbered folio MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 91/166.)

40. MHLG Press Notice, "Beauty of the Shropshire Hills to be protected" No 9. 12 March 1959. (Un-numbered folio MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)

41. Letter from W. Calvert for NPC Secretary, dated 23 March 1959, to the Secretary MHLG, informing him that the confirmed AONB Order and Map had been sent to the local authorities concerned. (Un-numbered folio MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)

42. Jim Lennon (West Midlands Regional Office of Countryside Commission) Briefing Note for David Woodhall (Commissioner) entitled "Shropshire Hills AONB – Shropshire Hills Advisory Plan 1996-2006 – Launch 28 November 1996", containing much information about the Shropshire Hills Countryside Unit (1988), the JAC (1993) and the Advisory Plan, 22 November 1996. (Un-numbered folio in Countryside Commission file WM/10/3A.)

## **Folios**

All the references above are included as folios in the hardback bound copies of the history (two in the Countryside Agency Resource Centre Library in John Dower House, Cheltenham, one with the Finest Countryside Section of the Countryside Agency, also in John Dower House, and one with the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership at the Old Post Office, Craven Arms). Comb-bound copies, with all folios, have also been produced. The history, without folios, but including the list of references and the four maps has been circulated to interested parties.

## **Maps**

Map 1 – Extract from map, at the scale of 1:1,250,000, contained inside the back cover of the “Hobhouse” Report (ref 3) showing, amongst other areas, the Shropshire Hills and the Clun and Radnor Forest “conservation areas”.

Map 2 – Extract from Shropshire Hills Proposed AONB Map, at scale of 1:63,360, showing not only the proposed boundary of the designation by a dark green line edged internally by a broad light green band, but also the extension, edged by a pecked blue line, at Benthall Edge, Tick Wood, and Wyke, as suggested by Wenlock MBC. (Map contained in first envelope at rear of MHLG file 91808/10/21 – TNA file HLG 92/166.)

Map 3 – “Shropshire Hills AONB”, at scale of 10 miles to 1 inch, contained (ERRATUM Substitute for Map Section incorrectly printed) in Tenth Report of the National Parks Commission For the Year ending September 30, 1959, London, HMSO, 1960.

Map 4 - “Map of the Shropshire Hills AONB”, map contained on page 4 of the Shropshire Hills AONB Annual Review 2004-5, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, The Old Post Office, Craven Arms, 2005.

## Files

The following files have been consulted in the writing of this history.

<b>Title</b>	<b>NPC Number</b>	<b>TNA Number</b>
Shropshire Hills – Formal Consultation with Local Authorities	AB/33A	COU 1/344
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – General	AB/51	COU 1/391
	<b>MHLG Number</b>	
National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 – Proposed Shropshire Hills AONB	91808/10/21	HLG 92/166
	<b>Countryside Commission Number</b>	
Shropshire Hills AONB	WM/10/3A & B	

**Note.** Following a request by the author to the Shropshire Hills AONB Team, Dr. Ian Dormor, the Landscape Conservation Officer in the Team, discovered the information referred to in the footnote to para 10 of the main text of the history in the following document held by the Shropshire Archives (Shrewsbury) ie - SC18/1A1/2 Planning Committee Minute Book (17.6.1947 – 13.3.1957)

Dr. Dormor additionally consulted SC18/2A1/4 Planning (Development) Sub-Committee Minute Book (27.6.1957 – 31.10.1963), also held by the Shropshire Archives.

