

Forest Murmurs Script 30.8.06

Action: Text typed onto notepaper “What do you know about Epping Forest?”

Main voice: So what *do* you know about Epping Forest?

Action: Moving across map of London towards Epping Forest

Interviewee 1: *Well, it's part of London folklore or folk myth that Epping Forest is a place where headless bodies are found.*

Interviewee 2: *Similar negative statement - to be recorded.*

Interviewee 3: *Similar negative statement - to be recorded.*

Interviewee 4: *Similar negative statement - to be recorded.*

Action: Red flashing light moving eastwards along map of the North Circular.

Main voice: I'd been hearing a lot of bad things about Epping Forest; so I decided to go there and have a look for myself, find out what the truth was.

Action: Montage of shots of driving along the North Circular.

Action: Shots of people in the Forest.

Main Voice: So when I got there I had a look around, in fact, I spent a long time looking around and I did see the odd thing that looked a bit dodgy, but on the whole things looked pretty normal; families out for the day, harmless fun. And a lot of people think it's a really nice place. So why does Epping Forest have such a bad reputation?

Titles: FOREST MURMURS

Action: Montage of white vans moving across the screen mixing into pan across map of forest and down into animated historical sequence in the style of 19th Century engravings.

Main Voice: I started looking into the history. I Googled “EPPING FOREST MURDERS”. Turns out that over the years some quite unsavoury characters had passed through there. There was a letter, allegedly sent to the police by Jack the Ripper in 1888. He told them he'd buried bottles of his victim's blood somewhere in the forest. Going back even further than that, Dick Turpin had a cave up there,

where he'd sit and wait for unsuspecting travellers to go past. He was a thoroughly nasty piece of work.

Overheard voice: *Yeah well, he does look a bit mean dunnee.*

Main Voice: Perverts and child killers, bank-robbers and gangland assassins, they all found sanctuary in the Forest at sometime or another and in 1966 Harry Roberts, on the run after shooting dead three policemen, bought camping equipment and hid from the law up there for three months.

But for the 19th Century poet John Clare, Epping Forest was more like a prison. Having lost his mind he was committed to High Beach Mental Asylum where the inmates roamed beneath the trees. One day, dodging his minders' watchful eye, he escaped, walking 80 miles, back to his Northamptonshire home.

So that was then, but what about now?

Action: Back to contemporary shots of people in the forest.

Main Voice: I carried on watching and listening. Sometimes I heard things that made no sense at all.

Action: Animated sequence – stream of consciousness images relating to overheard conversation.

Overheard voice: *All I know was that in the wardrobe there was loads of soldiers' uniforms, like combat with big rubber spy outfits... urrr... Guy Fawkes hat, big wide brimmed hat and a long black coat... cape and a white mask. There's hundreds of us.*

Main Voice: Once or twice I thought I might just be onto something.

Action: C/U of fly walking across a tree trunk.

Overheard voice: *I could end up in the forest or something, know what I mean, so if you come in one day I'm not here, I'm either on holiday in Thailand or buried somewhere in the forest.*

Action: Animated montage of images relating to overheard conversation.

Overheard voices: *Whatcha go down for then? Errr... MURDER! Laughs.*

Action: Animated text superimposed on a blurred tree trunk.

Overheard voice: *...and then you've got Temazepam and Lorazepam, they've stopped making the Jellies, as they call them, because people keep sticking the needles in and get it out and sticking it in their veins, as you do.*

Action: Old men jogging across a road.

Main Voice: But none of it added up to much and on the whole the conversations I heard were pretty dull.

Action: Animated montage of people in the forest.

Overheard voices: *Lovely day today. Oh it is, it is. It's ideal weather. Have a lick of your lolly, let's have a lick of your lolly. Yesterday was so hot, you know, I just wanted to pour some water over m'self, and ermm...*

Action: Pages turning in a diary. Words like "NOTHING", "RIEN", "ZILCH" on each page.

Main Voice: Months had gone by and I was getting nowhere. And the longer I spent up there, the more conspicuous I became. People started to recognise me and I was feeling more and more vulnerable.

Action: Shot of man talking on his mobile phone. He notices he is being watched and challenges the viewer.

Action: Eccentric looking middle-aged trio.

Main Voice: Guilty too, because I was basically spying on people who were doing nothing wrong. In fact if anyone was up to no good, it was *me*.

Action: Closed up tea hut in the rain.

Main Voice: By December I was cold and wet... and starting to lose it. I felt like I was searching for weapons of mass destruction and I half believed that the voices (I was hearing) were talking about me.

Action: Animated montage of images relating to overheard conversation.

Overheard voice: *He used to come up here as a youngster and then he went away for a long while, while he stuffed steroids up his arms and built his body up. Yeah? And its only in the last few years he's started coming back.*

Action: Shots of a gloomy deserted playground.

Main Voice: Clearly I'd been loitering in these woods for too long and I was feeling like something really bad might happen.

Overheard voice: *There is some old legend, apparently, that if you see, like, a white stag in Epping Forest it's a sign that someone's gonna die and your gonna have all sorts of trouble. I don't know if there's anything in it, but anyway...*

Action: Time-lapse shot of lake in the middle of which is an animated stag shaking its head. Name on a gravestone morphs into my own.

Main Voice: Found another bit of information on the internet: Last year the charred remains of an Asian shopkeeper were found floating in a pond.

Action: Graveyard shots mix through to a discarded bin bag sitting in some water. Pan across map into some woods.

Main Voice: And only the other week a bloke was shot in the head in the car park of the Kings Oak.

Action: Montage sequence including a manikin of an ancient woodsman, stuffed animals and reverse time-lapse shot of decomposing squirrel.

Main Voice: And I was afraid of the dark. Not the dark outside, but the darkness inside.

Overheard voice: *...someone's gonna die...*

Action: Bunch of daffodils at the base of an oak tree. A man's shadow on the tree turns from black to white.

Main Voice: And I felt like, if I didn't get out of there soon, I might never get out at all.

Action: Old lady walks over to car holding ice creams.

Overheard voice: *She endeavoured to play games with a member of our staff's husband.*

Action: Zoom into old postcard showing a man and woman standing in front of church. The couple disappear, as if vapourised.

Overheard voice: *Scream*

Action: Owl turns to camera. Followed by text over blurred foliage.

Overheard voice: *She's the victim. She is the victim, and he's reaped his rewards... sorry.*

Main Voice: On shit!

Action: Running through dark woodland.

Overheard voices: *Whatcha go down for then? Errr... MURDER! Laughs.*

MURDER! Laughs.

MURDER! Laughs.

Action: Blackness

Action: Fade up to shot looking up at the forest ceiling from inside a shallow grave. Soil starts falling down from above.

Main Voice: So I never did find out the truth about Epping Forest. But what I did discover was that if you spend too long in the woods pointing a camera at people, you might find yourself in a very dark place indeed.

Action: Animated sequence in which animals deny having witnessed anything going on in the woods. "I saw nothing" etc. Night falls and a white van drives back down the North Circular.

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