Wild and lonely windswept spaces
Where the whaups and peewits cry,
Cry above the old sea places
‘Neath the deserts of the sky.

BLEAK IT may be in November, but
Buddon Ness is never without its fascination—even when the lovely grass of
Parnassus flowers and the autumn gentians
have faded. The coppices of sea-buckthorn
still hold their haze of orange-hued “whisky
berries”, and first catkins on the willows
and alders proclaim that all the coming
year lies ready.

The two lighthouses and the keeper’s
house have been vandalised, but are still a
part of our historic heritage.

“The High” and “The Low”—they were
not the original “Lights of Tay”, even if
they have stood for 127 years. There were
beacons (coal-fired) at Buddon Ness as
early as 1885.

The beacons were later replaced by a
stone-built tower when George, 3rd Earl of
Panmure, feu’d a portion of ground to the
Seamen’s Fraternity of Dundee, for which
he charged a nominal ground annual of five
shillings.

Two boundary stones marking this
ground are still to be seen, carrying the
letters SF for Seamen’s Fraternity and M
for Maule.

The 17th century tower was superseded
in 1866 by the two lighthouses standing
today, but the lower part of the tower is still
attached to the keeper’s house and was
used for many years as a storeroom.

Lined up, the two lighthouses gave a
leading light into the shipping channel of
the Firth. The fickle nature of the sand-
banks had, however, not been accounted
for. The line of the channel soon changed
and the “lead in” was dangerously faulty.

An extraordinary plan was then decided
upon—to move the Low Lighthouse holus-
bolus to a new position!

And it was done, carefully and calmly, by
engineers from Dundee harbour. The
lighthouse was packed up, set on rollers
well lubricated with tallow, soap and black
lead, and then inched along to its new site.

But sad to tell, it was all in vain. The
sandbanks and the shipping channel
moved again. The lighthouses were taken
out of commission, and their role taken
over by the Abertay lightship.

Then, in more recent times, the lightship
was itself replaced by a buoy.

A long history from beacon to buoy!

COLIN GIBSON
First published in the Courier on
July 16, 1983

NOBODY could call them mountains, for
the highest top is only 90 feet. Yet every
eminence on Barry Links has its tradition-
al name. There is Hog’s Back, the Green
Braes, St Helena, Spion Kop, the Pinnacle,
North Hill, the Lighthouse Bluff.

All this is Army ground, and classed as a
Danger Area. But Buddon Ness has always
had an element of danger. Many a ship has
foundered or been stranded at the Gaa, the
Norse-named entrance to the Firth of Tay,
and the loss of the Broughty Ferry lifeboat
crew is fresh enough in our memories.

Danger, too, has always lain on the land-
ward side. On John Adair’s map of Angus,
dated 1793, he wrote across the Sandy
Downs, “The Sandhills of Barry are per-
fectly barren, and in high winds it is dan-
gerous to be near them.” With a gale
blowing, and every dune belching sand like
a volcano, it is well to heed the warning.

Nevertheless thousands of inhabitants
(in the way of flora and fauna) find life less
perilous in the midst of the shot and shell
of this battle training area than in the
ordinary countryside.

Roe deer, otter, stoat and other mam-
als find shelter in the woods and thickets
of sea-buckthorn, and many butterflies and
moths flourish in territory free from the
use of pesticides.

Wild birds are remarkably tolerant of
whizzing bullets and exploding shells. Nesting
goes on virtually undisturbed by
military manoeuvres. Flowers grow unmo-
usted in their natural habitats, whether
salt-marsh, dunes, woodland or moor.

One of the smallest (and most dedicated)
of Government Departments is the Defence
Ministry’s Conservation Section. Meetings
are held at Buddon Camp from time to time
to discuss any significant change in flora or
fauna, and to tackle any problem.

Buddon Ness has a climate of its own,
with cold winds springing up in the tumult
of tides at the bar of the Tay, and frequent
haar. Because of this, the plant-life (and
bird-life too) have a curious affinity with
hill tops far inland and countries far north.

Three years ago (it was then a closely
guarded secret) two longtailed skuas spent
the summer on the moors, and almost cer-
tainly nested unsuccessfully. But these
birds of the Arctic held their territory,
dive-bombing all intruders. Graceful and
buoyant, they were fascinating to watch.

The Commandant (a keen observer of
wildlife) got some good photographs, and I
myself painted them in flight. I gave this
picture to the Commandant, and it now
hangs in the Officers’ Mess. “Prince
Charles had a good look at it, last time he
was here,” the Commandant told me.

COLIN GIBSON