

## Appendix 2 to Proof of Evidence of Simon Fairlie

### MWC Disciplinary Procedure

2 May 2023

These are submissions from all of the people who worked alongside me and frequently Gill, as seasonal assistants on the farm throughout all the summer months between 2016 and 2023.

#### **Raphaëlle Martin, Assistant 2015**

I lived at Monkton Wyld Court from March 2015 to February 2016, and worked as the farm apprentice with Simon and Gill over the summer season. They both rapidly became part of my UK family, they are important people in my life and for me, pillars of what Monkton Wyld Court is and stands for: as they drive and support the sustainable land based aspect of the project, through their presence and engagement in the community life.

I came to Monkton as a community volunteer for two weeks, I rapidly got interested in the Micro Dairy and the way it is run. As the apprentice, I had the opportunity to learn, alongside Gill and Simon, a whole set of land based skills: from grass management, to cheese and butter making, as well as milking cows by hand, learning to use a scythe and other hand tools to make hay.

Simon and Gill were always there for me, really helpful and supportive and communication was always easy (although my English wasn't good as I had just arrived in the UK but they were both patient and always happy to drop a French word or two... or full sentences! I improved massively thanks to their support).

I lived in the UK for another 7 years after my stay at Monkton, and I've always kept in touch with Gill and Simon, visited them at Monkton and joined them at the Scythe Fair. I am grateful to know them both, for all they taught me, for all the knowledge passed on, the hard work and the good fun shared, the days in the meadow with scythes, rakes and pitchforks, the nights full of art, wisdom and warmth in Gill's magical yurt.

This experience is part of who I am today, part of my life. The skills I have started learning then I have been practicing and developing for the last 8 years and I have been sharing my experience and knowledge with people around me.

#### **Pablo Liarte (Camilo)**

**Assistant 2016 - 2017**

#### **Later became a community member**

I have tried to stay away from these email conversations because I don't think they are helpful when it comes to understanding a place like Monkton. But since your last email seems to be something similar to a conclusion of your investigation, I feel I should give my opinion as someone who came to Monkton 7 years ago. I don't want to write an essay about "what I think" so I will be happy to develop on any point over a phone call or a face to face chat.

As a member of the community, I have never felt that Simon was blackmailing me or anyone else. And I don't see his decision of leaving Monkton intended as a threat, at all.

The fact that you think Simon and Gill don't have the right to attend the meetings makes me think that you don't understand how we function as a community/business. In my view, they both have the right without a question. Whether they deserve the space in the meeting is something that they have to prove through work and commitment, and that applies to anyone who lives and works here (tenants, workers, co-op members, long term volunteers...) I am one of those who pushes Simon to come to meetings because I believe he is someone worth listening to.

I strongly disagree with your information about their influence in the community. They have a strong influence over what happens here because they have been here for 13 years. That doesn't mean they dominate, pressure or intimidate us. They are far from perfect and they can be difficult, but what you wrote is just not true in my view.

I disagree with the way Simon and Gill have dealt with these complaints, and also I disagree with how the trustees have created a lot of tension within the community by not giving any information, so I understand how you have come to these conclusions. But I think it's important for you and everyone else to know that, in my opinion, your email wasn't true to the situation here at Monkton. I believe the only way the trustees have to gather all the information is by talking to everyone who actually lives here and has been part of the whole process.

## **Ruth Pullan Assistant 2017**

It has come to my attention that there have been accusations of bullying directed towards Simon Fairlie and Gill Barron. This has come as a shock to me as I have a very different experience over the last six years I have known them both.

I first got to know Gill and Simon when I worked alongside them both in 2017 as a farm apprentice at Monkton Wyld Court. I had first found out about this opportunity after very positive feedback from former apprentices and I was delighted to be able to spend the season working with and learning from both Simon and Gill who I regarded very highly from reading their contributions to the Land magazine and their work in promoting the Austrian Scythe and sustainable farming. I learnt a huge amount from both of them in what I experienced as a very caring and supportive environment. In no way did I feel bullied or coerced into any of the work I was involved in.

Farming is hard work and I was there in particular to help with hay making which involves very early starts as well as dairy work, again involving long days. It was this way of life I wanted to experience and I felt part of a team of people all willing to work together. Simon and Gill were very much an equal part of this, up at the same time if not earlier and still working when we were all in the pub at the end of the day. I felt respected and appreciated for the skills I brought to the role and in no way a victim of a misuse of power. While I was at Monkton I was studying for a certificate in Horticulture as well as organising a hay meadows festival in the Yorkshire Dales and converting my van. On no occasion did I feel under pressure from either of them to do more work than I felt physically and mentally able to do and I was positively encouraged in my endeavours away from the farm work.

After my time with Simon and Gill I went on to volunteer at more farms around the UK before getting a job at Stroud Community Agriculture. I also worked as a cheesemaker for two different businesses in the Cotswolds and I now work for Pasture for Life, an organisation which provides support and certification for farmers raising their livestock purely on pasture based systems. All of these opportunities opened up for me through my experience in 2017 and subsequent visits I have made to Monkton Wyld since then.

Simon and Gill both have strong and determined characters and are alarmingly intelligent and yet for all that I have never felt unable to sit with them both as equals, sharing a bottle of wine and delicious food and putting the world to right. Please do not confuse a strong presence and occasional cantankerousness with a deliberate misuse of power to cause harm and belittle others.

## **Rufus Pilpel, Assistant, 2018**

I first met Simon and Gill in the spring of 2018 when I joined the community as Simon's assistant on the farm. During that season we worked closely together and although the work was often physically demanding, Simon never expected me to do anything he wouldn't do himself or pressurised me to do anything I wasn't totally comfortable with. The same goes for the setting up and running of the scythe fair, a very busy week that was nothing but fun and educational.

As well as working closely with Simon and sometimes with Gill in the gardens, we socialised a lot with others at Monkton, and outside the community.

Although Gill and Simon have strong views about many topics they feel passionate about, in the summer I worked there and in subsequent visits I never experienced any form of bullying or coercion, either to myself or others. Neither did they exhibit any intimidating or dominating behaviour.

It would be naive to suggest there was never any disagreement or tensions in a small close knit community like Monkton but I never saw them unfairly discriminate against other community members or volunteers.

I would hate to see Gill and Simon be asked to leave Monkton as they both add so much to the success of the community and the positive experiences of those fortunate enough to visit.

With great sincerity,

Rufus.

**Julie Rubiella**  
**Volunteer 2018 and Assistant 2019**

I am 29 years old and French. My first stay at Monkton Wyld Court took place in June 2018. I had no idea where I was going and I knew nothing about Simon, apart from the advice of my previous wwoofing hosts: "if you are interested in cheese and cows, go to Simon".

At that time in my life, I was at the beginning of a long questioning about the agricultural world. I grew up in the city and only had a few months of wwoofing experience. However, my curiosity was limitless. From these first weeks, I found in the person of Simon, a catalyst for this curiosity.

It was with him that I milked my first cow by hand, that I was able to find myself alone in the cheese dairy and put into practice what I had previously learned... and of course, understand that he there was still a lot to learn. Despite hay fever, I also mowed my first blades of grass at that time. By writing these words, I become aware of the immense impact that this meeting had in my life. Many of my choices since then are the result of the joy I felt from being in contact with animals, of the good fortune the luck of being able to evolve in a benign situation framework, and of having had the chance to get to grips with the real world of Doing Things.

In June 2019, I came back determined to learn how to make hay by hand with Simon. In the time between my two stays, I continued learning how to make cheese. I can confirm that I felt very welcome, Simon always showed interest in my various experiences in France. I stayed for two months, and the relationship with Simon was very reciprocal. I learned how to use the scythe, I shared ideas about herd management, on various farm models in France, we experimented with cheese recipes together; he taught me his, I showed him mine.

When you arrive as a volunteer in a new place, it is not always easy to find your place. Some hosts can let their fears spill over onto you (fear of getting hurt, fear of messing up the cheese, fear of breaking something, fear of not having the same opinion).

I never felt that in Simon's presence, indeed quite the opposite. Previously, I had never been made to feel so confident of my ability to perform tasks. To know that he felt I was capable of doing, made me capable. In those two months, I've done things I wouldn't have done before (getting up every morning for the cows, experiencing the excitement of waking up at dawn to mow, improving my English so quickly and included in philosophical discussions).

***Translated and excerpted from a longer letter in French. Full French text available***

**Seamus Connolly**  
**Assistant 2020-21 (Lockdown)**

I have known Simon Fairlie since 2016. I have been his next-door neighbour for a time and also been his assistant for about a year, working very closely with him. I have always found him easily approachable and generous to a fault.

Simon is a very strong-willed, principled and outspoken person, which admittedly can work to his disadvantage; as it seems to be doing at the moment. However, it is just that principled and outspoken nature that also makes him a huge asset to Monkton Wyld Court. He is the one person who has continually exemplified the sustainability ethos of the place and I think plays a very important role in keeping it alive in the cooperative's decision making.

By being editor of The Land magazine and getting the name and ethos of Monkton mentioned in his appearances on the BBC Radio 4 Food Program and in The Guardian and by running his scythe business and dairy courses from Monkton, he also draws in much more public interest than Monkton Wyld would otherwise enjoy.

Volunteers willing to engage in the sustainability aspect of the place learn a lot from him, both practically and from conversation outside work hours, as do his apprentices.

On a personal level his argumentative nature can and will get him into conflict on occasion, however I have never witnessed him being unkind or letting it get personal - he just enjoys a rigorous debate and is usually more than willing to accept people's opinions and indeed even adapt his own view should an argument be compelling enough. Further, he has a tendency to be very optimistic about people and seldom takes a personal dislike to anyone.

**Jack Austin, Assistant 2020-2021 (Lockdown)**

I was at Monkton Wyld Court from February 2020 - September 2021, where I started as Simon's farm hand/apprentice from roughly May 2020 for the rest of my stay. I would say I have a degree of social anxiety and was of course slightly apprehensive about living at Monkton. With this in mind Simon and Gills genuine and kind nature helped me confidently feel a part of the community.

Day to day work with Simon was a sheer pleasure and on times where I enjoyed lighter days I would often potter around and enjoy the terraces and flower beds with Gill where we got to know each other as well.

Despite regrettably not visiting Monkton recently, I am still reminded daily of the great deal of knowledge and confidence I gained from working for Simon, through his generosity and patience.

For fear of my piece being several pages long giving examples of both Simon and Gills wonderful relationship with me, it's only fair to say the pair of them are truly salt of the earth.

My writing ability really does not do justice to how highly I think of them, please ask to chat with me to supplement this short message if appropriate.

**Jon Hill**  
**Assistant 2022-3**

I write this letter as a character reference for Simon Fairlie and Gill Barron, due to recent false, damaging claims made against them at Monkton Wyld Court (MWC).

My name is Jon Hill and I worked alongside Simon during the summer season of 2022. I'm also currently at MWC, working back alongside Simon.

There are few places available that I know of, where someone like myself can come and learn first hand, many different facets of working the land. One of these very important opportunities is the farm with Simon at MWC. During my time working with Simon I learned about the whole cycle of keeping diary cattle – from looking out for the first fresh spring grass shoots, to the milking, cheese making, grazing rotation, caring for calves, animal welfare, hay making and all aspects of scything.

It's not just limited to the cows as there's the pigs, arable farming, discussions about land rights and sustainability issues – the countless list goes on.

There have been many seasonal apprentices, like myself, working alongside Simon throughout the years. I know that a fair number of these people have gone on to do great work in sustainable practices. The scythe courses that Simon has been running from MWC for years, have seen possibly hundreds of people trained up as competent scythesfolk. Who else has ever made such an amazing impact here? I believe that nobody has even come close.

I spent more working time with Simon during my stays here at MWC, than with any other member of the community. I worked alongside him when we've had countless volunteers (dozens over the summer), with local people, with other members of the community, on my own and with members of the public – and at no time did I ever witness any unsavoury behaviour from Simon – especially bullying. I wouldn't have returned for this season if I had any indication of poor behaviour.

Simon gives up large portions of his time for the good of sustainability, MWC and to help people. Why on earth has this situation come to such a horrid state? This is a terrible mess and it needs to be cleared up by a full exoneration of these hurtful accusations, and the appropriate, firm action taken against the claimants for causing such serious damage.

I have had a great deal of interaction with Gill during my time here. I have always found her to be warm, informative and caring. I can tell she cares a great deal about MWC and also important issues about sustainability and land rights, which should be at the forefront of what goes on at MWC. She is a terrific asset to MWC, with her knowledge and passion radiating to all that she encounters. I have never witnessed any poor behaviour from Gill – quite the opposite is true.

To have Simon, Gill, The Land Magazine and the Scythe Shop situated here is a sacred asset to MWC. It's an invaluable addition and should be protected in my view, not put under threat by ill-informed accusations.

If this situation isn't rectified promptly by the trustees, I can't see myself remaining here for very long, especially after such disgusting treatment towards Simon and Gill.

I am more than happy to be contacted if required.

Yours faithfully,

Jon Hill