

COMMON GROUND

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

March 1992

Management Plan - Friends Respond

A few precious copies of the final Draft Plan were circulated 'pass the parcel' style around the Committee, together with a draft response, which was then debated at a Committee meeting before our official response was submitted. A summary of this is published below.

As explained at the AGM the Committee, the whole, approves the Report; however, we feel strongly that it should be published at the earliest opportunity.

The view that publication would 'raise public expectation too high' is not shared by the Friends, who believe that its continued confidentiality will cause concern and suspicion amongst the press and public. We have therefore requested that it be put on deposit in the Rusthall and Tunbridge Wells libraries with a fair and succinct summary.

An Adjunct to Debate

As Peter Freeman said at the AGM, the Friends could greatly assist the Conservators by acting as the conduit for public comment. He suggested the Friends chair talks, presentations and debates, and perhaps conduct opinion research ultimately reporting back findings to the Conservators.

A brief summary of our response:

1. A Phase One action plan be drawn up and costed.
2. A full time Warden be appointed.
3. Heather and acid grassland be maintained and enhanced.
4. Areas of open water be maintained and enhanced.
5. Scrub and secondary woodland be managed e.g. removal of fallen trees, cutting back branches and bramble, destroying invasive weeds such as Japanese Knotweed etc.



6. Recreate aspects of historic interest, e.g. the view across Happy Valley from the 101 steps, and Mt. Edgcombe rocks whilst taking care not to open up the Commons to the motor car and 20th century architectural 'eye-sores'.
7. Creation of new paths, and restoration of lost walks.
8. Safeguard notable species.
9. To improve visitor access, and facilities:
 - i) restore seats
 - ii) introduce 'rustic' litter bins
 - iii) use the Fonthill Centre for Information/Education purposes
 - iv) events, possibly equestrian oriented, be re-introduced
 - v) possibly open up the caves for occasional use
 - vi) greater care be taken over Commemorative Plantings

Grave concern was expressed over any plans there might be to develop parking on the Commons. 'Pay & Display' proposals were deplored, and park-like developments such as picnic tables were not supported.

Chairman's Letter

The big Commons event since the last Newsletter has been the arrival of the 'Final Draft' of the Management Plan prepared by the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation members Anne Waite and Paul Buckley.

Our response to it is the lead item so I do not intend to detail it much more here. Our response, together with others is being considered by a Committee of the Conservators and will be taken at the full Conservators' meeting on March 19th. We are pressing for implementation of Phase One which should include; removal of particularly unsightly fallen trees; restoring the 101 (in fact 105) Steps; recreating the vista over Happy Valley; clearance of rock outcrops e.g. The Toad Rock area, Mt. Edgcombe and behind Gibraltar Cottage.

We are also pressing for publication of the Report together with a short synopsis and a statement of what are considered to be the priorities.

We hope that this will then be deposited in the public libraries and we have offered to host a public debate, reporting back to the Conservators on public feeling.

One very important decision being taken by the Conservators is to appoint a full time Warden. The advertisement for this post will be issued shortly.

Following the Grand Litter Pick on both Commons on Saturday April 11th (national Spring Clean Day), a nine day Environment 'Week' starts on May 16th and we hope that many members will come forward to assist on the various projects we have planned, especially that of making a start on cleaning Mt. Edgcombe rocks and the Japanese Knotweed behind Gibraltar.

Finally, I should mention that a start has been made, with the Conservators, and the Freehold Tennants to repair and restore the Victorian 'Hawthorn' seats and many others.

(cont. page 2.)

Chairman's Letter cont'd...

All in all I think we can fairly say that in 6 months we have come a long way, and thanks to the **Conservators'** agreement to have us along with them we have, I believe, been a positive influence.

WPS. March '92

Litter Pick II - Rusthall Results

Supported by Mr Roles, Headmaster of St. Paul's Junior School, 3 members of staff and some 40 children, various Friends, Rusthall Village Society Chairman Tom Jenkins, and 10 of his members, we made an enthusiastic sweep of the Common stretching out from the Brahms Public House and Common View to the Beacon Hotel, the 101 Steps and the Rusthall/Langton Roads junction.

Nearly 100 bags of rubbish were collected as well as various other items including car seats, old **batteries**, concrete, and Freebie Newspapers! The Cleaner Borough Support Unit assisted with the debris removal, and we were pleased to be joined by Cllr Joyce Hilling (a Commons Conservator) and Cllr Blackwood.



Nearly two bags of litter per head were collected

Diary

Full details to be advised in due course.

March 19th

Conservators quarterly meeting (not open to the public).

April 11th

Litter Pick III, a major Spring Clean. 10 start points across the two Commons.

May 16th-24th

Environment Week. To include:

May 16th

Clearing of Brighton Lake.

May 17th-24th

Cutting and treatment of Japanese Knotweed at Gibraltar.

Commencement of work to clear Edgcombe and Toad Rock area.



Happy Valley - the view in 1875 (Supplied by the Curator TW Museum)

HAPPY VALLEY.

Comparison of Victorian and Edwardian maps with modern ones will reveal that the label 'Happy Valley' has been shifted from what is now the grounds of the Beacon Hotel to the southern edge of Rusthall Common.

It is the older maps which are more accurate, since Rusthall Common contains only the head of the steps. The print shown here from 1875 shows the vista from this spot, now obscured by scrub but described in 1884 as 'as beautiful a view as England affords.'

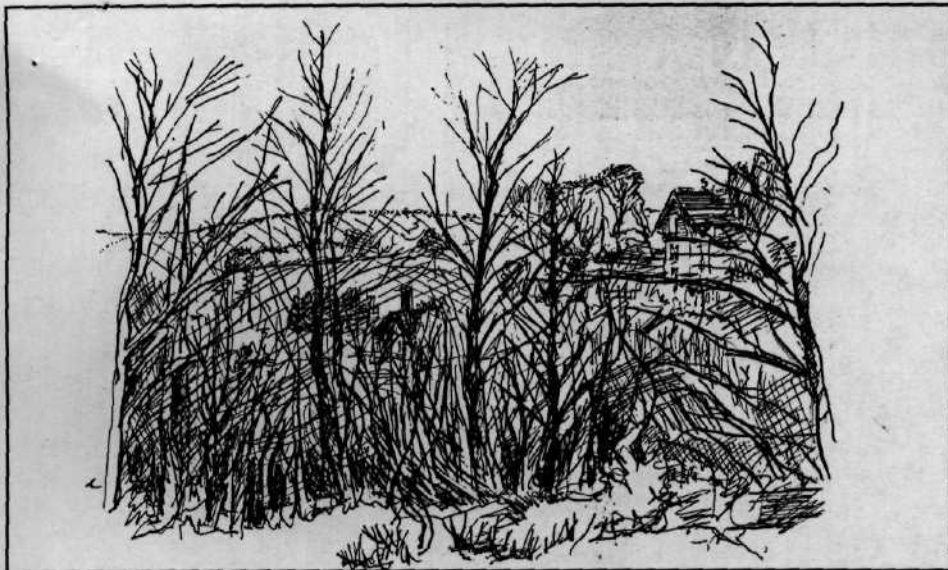
The name 'Happy Valley' seems to have been invented only in the 1870s, but the history of the site goes back to 1708, when a Cold Bath fed by spring water was constructed. The bath was covered by a 'handsome and convenient house' and the surrounding pleasure grounds laid out with fountains and other water features including the three lakes which survive today. The so-called 'Hundred and One Steps' were built at this time to provide the main access to bath and gardens, and the shelters cut in the rock face beside the steps are probably similar date.

FIRST MEMBERS' EVENT

FRIENDS' GUIDED WALK ON THE COMMONS - SATURDAY 30TH MAY

The walk will be led by Ian Beavis of Tunbridge Wells Museum and Mary Page of the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation, who will point out and comment upon the features of historical and natural historical interest. The day will be divided into two parts, a morning session on Tunbridge Wells Common beginning at Thackeray's House, London Road, at 10.30 am, and an afternoon session on Rusthall Common beginning at Toad Rock at 2 pm.

Members intending to stay for the whole day should bring a packed lunch. Since the number that can conveniently take part is limited, members are asked to reserve a place by contacting Ian Beavis at the Museum, Civic Centre, Mount Pleasant (TunbridgeWells526121ext.3171), giving name and address and stating whether they wish to attend one or other or both sessions. Reservations will be confirmed. If there are significantly more requests than places available, the event will be repeated.



The view today. Drawn by Mr T. May

NOT SO HAPPY VALLEY

However, the Cold Bath proved **too** remote to retain its popularity, and **by** 1766 the gardens had gone wild and **the** bath house had collapsed **to** be replaced by a plain unadorned structure. **All** that now survives of its original splendour are a few ornamental tiles preserved at the Beacon Hotel and at the Museum.

But the site was never entirely forgotten. Clifford's early **19th** century guides recommend a visit to the Bath in its 'beautiful romantic **dell**' and indicate

that it was still used by bathers up to about 1830. Colbran's 'New Guide' of 1839 says **that 'the** approach to it, from the Common, descending what was once a flight of steps, but now nearly **covered with turf, is extremely romantic.**' In late Victorian and Edwardian times Happy Valley gained renewed popularity as one of the town's chief beauty spots, described in official town guides as 'a charming place to which neither pen nor picture can do really adequate **justice.**'

Ian Beavis

The Friends are pressing for the historic view over Happy Valley from the top of the '101' steps to be opened up again as part of the Phase One work of the Management Plan.

Membership Update

Membership over the first six months has passed 240 which is a very encouraging figure. However, we need more - not just to allow us to provide funds for seat refurbishment, but to strengthen our voice.

It is up to existing members to spread the word of the Friends; personal pleas to friends, neighbours and fellow walkers are usually highly effective. If you require application forms contact anyone on the committee in particular Margaret Bardner and David Wakefield (T.W. 533325 and 523983 respectively).

At the end of the AGM Chairman Patrick Shovelton welcomed our 200th member, Julian Watson of Langton Green. We hope it will not be too long until we welcome our 300th.



Correspondence

From Mr & Mrs A.S. Toop

I note from Common Ground that suggestions are welcome. The toilets situated between Wellington Rocks and Mount Ephraim need the dead tree removed and undergrowth cut back both in front of and to the sides of the building.

Many females would be too nervous to use the toilets under today's conditions.

May I also suggest at least three sign posts be erected directing people to the toilets. Many people do not even know that they exist.

The Chairman writes:

The matter of the **dead tree** and **undergrowth** has been brought to the attention of the Conservators, thank you. At the same time it has to be said that 'The Wellington loo' is not the most attractive of buildings, and indeed its building might be considered to be in breach of the then statute. Screening is, therefore, desirable, and additional signage is not something the Committee is generally in favour of on the Commons. We do not (repeat not) want a park.

From Jane Clark, Programme Organiser, Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society.

On behalf of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society may I thank **all your** members who contributed to the catering at our joint Christmas meeting. It certainly was a good start to the festive season.

From Lassie, A member's dog. I really must complain! What is the world coming to? What is the Common coming to? More to the point what is a Border Collie to do? Twice recently, when I have taken my Pet for her afternoon amble she has made me wait for a fox to cross my path! I ask you, what should a dog do? If we're not careful our various two-legged pets will have a school crossing patrol on our Common for **incoming foxes.** Advice or bonios welcome.

IMPORTANT Non-member Readers

Membership is open to anyone who is keen to see the Commons restored to their former glories. Your subscription (£5 per individual, £10 per family will help us achieve **that** aim. Apply to David Wakefield, Hon. Treasurer, 68 London Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1DT.

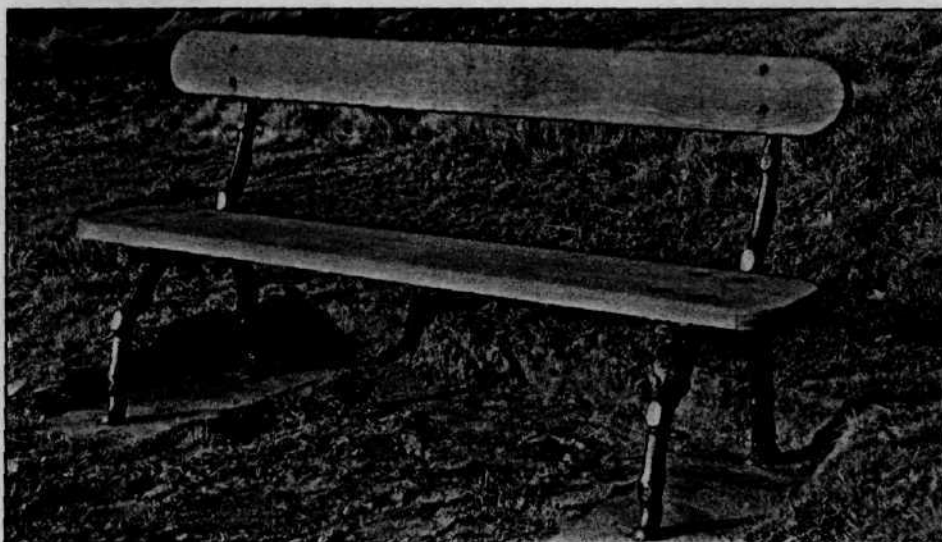
HAWTHORN SEATS SPROUT NEW LIFE

Our first major expenditure has seen the part funding of repairs to benches and Victorian 'Hawthorn' seats in the Wellington Rocks and Upper Cricket ground areas. With member approval at the AGM granted this project will continue.

OPENSOURCE

Your letters and contributions are warmly welcome. Please submit any material to:

Mark Roelofsen
1B Montacute Gardens
Tunbridge Wells
TN4 8HG



One of the original Victorian 'Hawthorn' seats recently refurbished and jointly funded by the friends and the Conservators.

MAJOR AGM QUERY ANSWERED

The Conservators' Finances

Several questions were asked at the AGM of the subject and the Chairman has since had a meeting with the Conservators' Treasurer.

As a result the following can be stated:

1. The Conservators' annual accounts (audited) are available for inspection at certain times of the year. This is determined by the date when the audit takes place - probably July of each year. A notice appears in front of the Town Hall advertising the availability of the accounts for inspection.

The Treasurer will raise with the Conservators the possibility of depositing the audited accounts in the Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall public libraries for inspection in future.

2. Monies unspent in any one financial year are carried forward for spending in the future.

3. We have the authority to reproduce here the Conservators' Budget for 1991/2 (revised) and the Budget for '92/93.

I hope these figures will go a long way towards satisfying the queries raised at the AGM.

WPS.

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS CONSERVATORS

	Revised 91/92 Budget	Budget * 92/93
Maintenance of Common (TWBC)	£37500	£39500
Supplies and Services	£12679	£14420
Tree Replacement & Removal	£ 200	£ 600
Seat replacement	£ 400	£ 800
Equipment - purchase/repair	£ 8000	£ 8000
Parking prevention posts	£ 500	£ 7000
Storm damage work	£ 500	£ 1500
Management Plan provision	£ -	£10000
Salaries and Expenses	£ 2330	£ 2450
Other Expenses	£ 1429	£ 1280
Contingency	£ 500	£ 500
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£64038	£86050
LESS FEE & INTEREST INCOME	£ 1220	
NET EXPENDITURE	£62818	-
USE OF BALANCES	-	£11950
ADD TO BALANCE	£11282	-
PRECEPT ON TWBC	£74100	£74100

* the 1992-3 budget is in the process of being revised upwards as we go to press.

BALANCES AVAILABLE

Revenue Account balances	£29750
Estimated Addition to balances 1991/92	£11282
Estimated balance 31/3/92	£41032
Use of Balances 1992/93 (Provisional)	£11950
Estimated Balance 31/3/93	£29082