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COMMON GROUND



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

Issue 14. Winter 1996/97

TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY are we getting anywhere?

The big issue of the last few months has been Transport (as I prefer simply to call it) Strategy. In July Kent County Council in association with the Highways Department of TWBC published a hefty consultation document entitled Transportation Strategy (T.S.) for the Tunbridge Wells and Southborough area.

In November, Highways held an Exhibition at the Town Hall and a series of evening "workshops". The consultation period extends until end of January and the Friends are due to put in their views by then. Our next Committee meeting is 19 January where we hope to formulate an up-to-date view as regards the Commons.

and Castle Roads (residents excepted). Incidentally, Castle Road has the worst record for car vandalism of any road in the Borough.

So far our pressure on the Highways Department, though we have had the support of the Conservators, and, when it existed, of TCM, has borne little fruit. We have succeeded in getting single yellow lines at the top (north- west side) of Castle Road, which is a great improvement. We have got white "advisory" markings at the Racecourse crossing on Major York's Road and at the pedestrian path crossing up Castle Road. And we have been successful in getting some improved access to Tunbridge Wells Common

- and, in the process, hopefully, more elegant railings (to which the Friends have already agreed to contribute).

(ii) Cycleways The T.S. document, not unnaturally in present circumstances, encourages the creation of new cycleways into the town i.e. the so-called Sustrans route which comes, originally, from Crawley and goes towards the south coast. This would use the existing path from Cabbage Stalk Lane to Major York's Road (and would have the added advantage of stopping unauthorised motoring up the path from Cabbage Stalk Lane). Otherwise the T.S. document recommends the creation of cycle lanes on Rusthall Road, Langton Road and your Committee supports all these proposals.

(ii) Park and Ride The T.S. document makes, in our view, sensible recommendations for Park and Ride. We believe the coach parking problem would be solved by using the Park and Ride sites for coach parking. The coaches could set down, and pick up, their passengers at approved points in the town and be called up as necessary. With modern communications this should not be beyond the capacity of coach companies and their drivers.

It will be seen that there is much to chew on in the T.S. document. Copies are unfortunately very hard to come by but if any member wants to read it (and comment) we have 3 copies circulating among the Committee and if you would give me a call (on 527885) I will endeavour to get a copy to you.

Meanwhile all your comments on this vitally important subject will be taken into careful consideration if you write or phone in. As I said above, our considered comments have to be with Highways by the end of January '97. WPS

NOT A PRETTY SIGHT!



Some of the 10 coaches parking in London Road one Spring weekend

Of course, most of the T.S. document does not concern the Commons at all. It addresses the wider, and incredibly difficult, problem of getting traffic into, out of, and through Tunbridge Wells - with the prospect of traffic doubling by the year 2015. We feel it only our business to comment on these issues so far as the Commons are concerned.

Let me, at this stage, remind you what we have been recommending for years (see also Common Ground Issue 9 - and the problem was discussed, and our policies endorsed, at the '95 AGM). We wish to see:

- (a) The prohibition of coach parking on London Road;
- (b) The introduction of double yellow lines in Fir Tree Road alongside the Higher Cricket Ground;
- (c) The extension of double yellow lines on the southern side of Major York's Road up to and including the Racecourse crossing and the establishment of cycle lanes on either side of Major York's Road;
- (d) The banning of parking in Mt. Edgcumbe

from the Town i.e. the new refuge and improved crossing from Castle Street to Highbury (though with regrettably utilitarian railings) and an improved pedestrian crossing from the Pantiles (The Swan Hotel) to the Common. But nothing else!

Indeed our suggestion of enlarging the Fairground Car Park on poor quality grassland to the south of the present site in return for no parking on Mt. Edgcumbe and Castle Roads has been vetoed on legal grounds.

At this juncture I must refer to certain other issues in the T.S. document which concern us:

(i) There is a proposal to spend £90,000 in 1997/98 on the London Road/Vale Road intersection. We have, as yet, seen no plans of what exactly this means but our first reaction is to think that it is a fearful waste of money - £10000 more than is spent on the whole of the Commons in a year. And to achieve what? The speedier flow of traffic into the bottlenecks at Nevill Street and in the other direction, the bottom of Grove Hill Road? The only good we can see coming out of this scheme is improved, and safer, access from Vale Road to the Common

AUTUMN LITTER PICK Enthusiasm maintained despite wet weather

Another litter pick was held on Sunday, November 10th - in light rain. A number of hardy volunteers turned out on Tunbridge Wells Common, rather fewer at Rusthall. The Revell family were notable in both places for their numbers and enthusiasm and special mention must be made of a new recruit. Tony Jackson, who did a significant job in Bull's Hollow.

The Conservators' litter contract is due to change from Cleanaway to Bridgland's who already do the grass mowing. It must be hoped that we will see an improvement in the services.

Our Distributors

Spare a thought for those who bring you your Common Ground and Friends literature come snow, rain, hail, fog or boiling hot summer weather. And anyone who has tried to deliver mail around the old houses of Tunbridge Wells knows the difficulties - big houses that have been carved up into numerous flats, with odd entrances, often in different streets; frightening dogs; and houses without apparently a name or number on them! So, our thanks go out to:

Conrad & Scarlet Payne	- Nevill Park area
Gerry Brown	- London Road, etc.
Ruth Wakefield	- Tunbridge Wells Common
Sybil Muir	- Mt Ephraim, Boyne Park, etc.
Margaret Bardner	- Bishops Down area
Dan Godden	- Rusthall
Maureen Reynolds	- The Village area
David Barton	- Broadwater Down area
Frances Hunter	- Culverden and Royal Chase
Ian Beavis	- Town Centre
Don Welch	- Pembury Road area
Pat Maxell	- Grosvenor Road area
George Soden	- Langton

Between them the Distributors save our budget about £250 p.a. - enough to purchase a new seat every year.

What the Butler's Doing

Members will recall the case against Mr Butler, the proprietor of the Mt. Edgcumbe Hotel, for the erection of an unauthorised signpost on Mt. Ephraim (see Issue No. 10). Although that particular signpost has been removed and a new one erected there has yet been no advertisement consent for the new signswatch this space!

Moreover, what has now happened - as local residents know only too well - is that Mr Butler erected a marquee on Common land at the back of his hotel and this marquee has been made available for parties, music and dancing. The first occasion when the marquee was so used was the night of 19/20 December when the music was so loud that it could be heard as far away as the Kent and Sussex Hospital, the centre of town and the Spa Hotel area.

The immediate residents in Mt. Edgcumbe Cottage and Mt. Ephraim Lodge were kept awake under noise approximately to a Concorde take-off until 2 a.m. on 20 December when, mercifully, the music stopped.

Disco parties are also taking place regularly at the Hotel - without a Public Entertainment Licence!

Your Committee have taken up this unwelcome development on a key position of Tunbridge Wells Common with the Conservators, the Council and the Manor.

POLICING THE COMMONS

Under the new Community Police Unit we now have our own Bobby-on-the-Beat on the south-eastern edge of Tunbridge Wells Common. P.C. Dennis Morden, pictured here receiving an award for gallantry from Chief Inspector Caroline Winter, is a local man who has served for 21 years in Tonbridge, High Brooms and the Sherwood, Showfields and Ramslye estates.

Dennis says "As a family we have enjoyed many a happy hour on the Common climbing on the rocks and forcing the children to go for walks! Also in my running days, I ran many times in the Common Relay.

I have been very impressed by the work done by Steve Budden and his team over the last five years.

It is indeed a worry that incidents against women do occur on the Common as highlighted in Issue 13 of Common Ground and I see nothing but good coming out of the Action suggested in the article.

I would urge women to always report incidents to the Police, however embarrassing it may be.

Whilst the Police response to crimes and incidents against women is not yet perfect I do feel that it has improved greatly in the last few years. Much damage was done by the television programme showing Thames Valley Police treatment of a particular rape victim. If my memory serves me well this was about 10 years ago and I know that crimes against women are treated much more sympathetically and efficiently now. The Police have a 'Special Investigation Unit' based at Tunbridge Wells for this purpose".



Rusthall Common is covered by P.C. Dennis Williams, who is well known in the area, having served there for many years, and living a stone's throw from Toad Rock.

PLEASE REPORT ANY SECURITY PROBLEMS YOU HAVE TO
THE POLICE

Christmas Cards 1996

Last year we sold two designs of Christmas cards - one, a reproduction of a 1786 watercolour by James Lambert depicting the A26 just below St. Helena in quieter times, and the other, a modern photo of the Wellington Rocks in snow, we ordered 2500 of the 18th Century card with 1000 "run-on" notelets (without the Christmas greetings) for the Museum. These 2500 cards were virtually sold out. Members can continue to buy the notelets version with envelopes for 30p each (or 10 for £2.70) at the Museum as long as stocks last.

The Wellington Rocks card, of which we also had 2500 printed, together with 1000 "run-on" with the Christmas message sold rather less well. We have, a number left and have decided to "remainder" them at 20p a copy. Early birds who would like to stock up now with cards ready

for Christmas 1997 should apply to Peter Hoole at Wolfit, Monson Road, Tunbridge Wells, from where the cards are available in packets of 10 with envelopes.

Our profit so far on our 1996 Christmas card venture is approximately £243. All further sales will be profit, which, like all our fund raising, will be devoted to Commons improvements.

New Seats for Old

The Conservators have agreed to the gradual replacement of all the old concrete seats. They will be replaced with the new "Hawthorne" seats which have received universal approval and which have withstood vandalism (except for some hideous examples of spray painting). The Friends have agreed to help fund this programme from time to time as our resources allow.

New Butterflies and Dragonflies on the Commons by Ian Beavis

In an age when human pressures on the natural environment are daily increasing, unspoilt refuges like Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons become ever more important for the survival of wildlife such as butterflies and dragonflies. Up to the end of 1995, twenty-two species of butterflies had been recorded on the two Commons. Although a few out of this number, like the **Clouded Yellow** and **Painted Lady** are only summer visitors, the majority are permanent residents, present in one or other of their life cycle stages all the year round. The present management plan for the Commons aims to produce more diversity of habitat, in particular creating more open areas. This is good news for butterflies, most of which, being sun-loving creatures, avoid dense woodland. Dense woodland also shades out the low plants on which their caterpillars generally feed.

more diversity of habitat

Over the past two or three years, it is already noticeable that the resident butterflies are increasing and turning up in new places, because in the past some have been quite restricted in the areas where they were able to live. Even more encouraging is the fact that new species are appearing. In August 1996, the **Brown Argus** was recorded for the first time, appearing at Mount Edgcumbe Rocks. This butterfly is nowadays a rarity so far as the Wealden area is concerned, having mostly retreated to its strongholds on chalk downland, although in former times it was widespread in meadows and woodland clearings in our area. Since there is nowhere outside it can have come from, the **Brown Argus** must have been living and breeding on the Common since time immemorial, but surviving at such a low density as to go unnoticed.

'At a low density' is a popular phrase amongst entomologists, signifying the fact that a butterfly colony may consist of less than twenty adults alive at any one time, thus making the chances of encountering one of them rather remote. The fact that this butterfly has now passed the threshold of visibility hopefully means that its numbers are increasing. Those interested in trying to spot it next summer (between May and August) should look out for a small dark brown



White Legged Damselfly

butterfly with a row of bright orange spots along the outer margin of each wing. The only species that can be mistaken for it is the female of the **Common Blue**, but this always has at least some blue colouration at the base of its wings. The second new record is of the **White Admiral**, a large butterfly with brilliant white bands on a black background, and a distinctive soaring flight. This species, whose caterpillars feed on honeysuckle, is currently not uncommon in woodland rides and clearings over the Sussex border, in areas such as Broadwater Forest and Hargate Forest. It is not surprising that its first appearance on the Commons should have been at Happy Valley on the southern edge of Rusthall Common, which is linked with the Sussex woodlands by undeveloped countryside. Whether the one example seen was just a stray, or whether the **White Admiral** has come to stay, remains to be seen.

The several ponds of varying sizes to be found on the two Commons provide good breeding sites and hunting grounds for dragonflies. Some have already spread from the old established to the newly, restored ponds. The offspring of dragonflies (known as nymphs) live as predators on other small creatures in ponds and lakes, while the adults feed on insects which they catch in flight. Prior to 1996, the Commons' list of species stood at thirteen, but two more have now been added.

The **White-legged Damselfly**, which appeared at Brighton Lake in June 1996, belongs to a group of dragonflies which are small and delicate, with a fluttering flight quite different from that of their more robust relatives. Unlike other damselfly species, which are red, green, or bright blue and black, the **White-legged** is mainly creamy white in colour. When seen at close quarters, the feathery white legs from which it takes its name are conspicuous.

The other addition to the dragonfly list, the **Ruddy Darter**, is a very attractive species which has been spotted on several recent occasions both at Brighton Lake and at Bracken Cottage Pond. The darters are the medium-sized dragonflies, strong flyers like the largest type, the hawkers, but not so aggressive to one another. Whereas the hawkers hold territories and chase off other dragonflies of similar size, the darters live peaceably together, often in large colonies. They are also the latest to emerge as adults and the last to die off at the end of the year, flying well into November. The **Common Darter**, which is numerous on both Commons, has orange-red males and yellowish females. The females of **Ruddy Darter** are difficult to distinguish but the males are marked out by being much more brightly coloured, with brilliant scarlet bodies.

Charles Tattershall Dodd (1815-78) — Tunbridge Wells Artist



It must be hoped that all Friends went to the Exhibition of **Dodd's Watercolours, Drawings and Paintings** in the Museum from 5 - 18 December last.

Dodd, who taught drawing and painting at Tunbridge School for many years, is the Commons painter par excellence. His big charcoal and chalk drawing of the Wellington Rocks on a stormy winter's evening is a gem, as are his water-colours and pencil drawings of Fir Tree Pond, the Parson's Nose, Toad Rock and the old cottage (now demolished) in Castle Road.

It would be nice if the Museum could produce an edition of Dodd's wonderful paintings and drawings, particularly of the bare Commons as they were in the tranquil 1850's. Those of you who were unable to visit the recent exhibition will be pleased to hear of an opportunity to see some of the pictures at an Exhibition the Museum will be holding 6-30 June 1997.

Willow trees at Patty Moon's Walk, Tunbridge Wells

*Water-colour by C.T. Dodd Snr. c1850
Reproduced by kind permission of
Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery*

RAILINGS EXTENSION



The Railings at the top of the path by St. Helena leading on to Mt. Ephraim, originally provided by the Friends in 1994, have been extended to provide protection against the steep drop on the left.

Mostly Good News! Warden's Report

Although the weather has now stopped work for a week or two, the first half of this winter's work schedule has gone well.

The Marlpit ponds on Rusthall Common have been restored and are currently filling. As many of you will know, the pond has been leaking for the past few years and this combined with low rainfall has caused very difficult conditions for the amphibians and invertebrates living there. Having consulted the Environment Agency and had site meetings with their Conservation Officer we decided to take the opportunity when the pond dried up completely this summer to carry out a total re-build of the existing pond and to excavate the second pond that was originally on this site.

In the same area, a new flight of steps has been constructed on the steep slopes that lead down to the grassland around the ponds. By happy chance the number of steps required turned out to be thirty-nine!

Brighton Lake had attention from the volunteers during the Autumn with excessive weed growth and accumulated rubbish being cleared and bramble and scrub being cut in the area behind the pond.

The row of Lime Trees on Eridge Road that were pollarded last winter have had the epicormic growth removed from their trunks and are now forming good new crowns.

The newly thinned edge of the woodland adjacent to Eridge Road has been cleared of this year's growth and hopefully will be even better for wild flowers next spring. Clearance has also started on the slope behind the cherry trees at Mt. Edgumbe Road.

The volunteers have again proved their worth this winter, as well as the previously mentioned work at Brighton Lake. We had an excellent day at Wellington Rocks when a lot of old, over-mature gorse was coppiced and many birch and sycamore saplings were removed to reverse the decline of the heathland species.

Further work has been carried out at Happy Valley. Holly, fallen timber and stumps have been removed from the top of the rock outcrops finishing the clearance there at least for the time being. Looking now at these wonderful, dramatic outcrops it is hard to remember how little was visible four years ago. Although clearance of trees has now been completed at this site, it will require management during the forthcoming years to control bracken and bramble and to make sure that it is not allowed to return to the same, sorry condition.

As always when writing these reports I have also to deliver some bad news. Once again trees in the Victoria Grove have been vandalised, not as bad as last year's nine in a row, but bad enough. Two trees have been snapped off and will have to be replanted this year. This sort of behaviour is completely incomprehensible to me and I only hope that the perpetrators felt ashamed when they sobered up. Just as annoying, and a lot more visible, has been the spray can attacks on the litter bins. Fortunately, Dave Sissons, our ironwork specialist, has been able to remove the graffiti. I just hope this is not the start of a new trend.

I am starting to sound like 'disgusted' so I shall stop here pausing only to wish you a happy New Year and to thank you all for your continued interest and help with improving the Commons.

The Bicentenary Diversions

In Issue No 11 (Dec '95) we reproduced the poster of 1797 advertising the Diversions which were held on Tunbridge Wells Common on 16 August 1797. We said that we hoped we could repeat these Diversions in August 1997.

The Conservators have now very kindly agreed to this happening on the Lower Cricket Ground on the exact Bicentenary date - Saturday August 16th 1997.

We have set up a small Sub-Committee to run these Diversions and have been joined on it by representatives from the Tourism & Marketing Services of the Council who, with their expertise and advice, are helping us tremendously.

The provisional Programme for the afternoon and evening is as follows:-

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 2 - 3 p.m. | Stool Ball match - Kent -v- Sussex Ladies |
| 2.30 p.m. | Smoking Match starts |
| 3-4 p.m. | Donkey Races (donkey rides continue after) |
| 3.30 p.m. | Jingling Match |
| 4.00 p.m. | First Heat Young Ladies Race* |
| 4.15 p.m. | Second Heat Young Ladies Race |
| 4.30 p.m. | Final Young Ladies Race |
| 4.30 - 5.30 p.m. | Terrier Racing (including Mutt Race) |
| 5.30 - 6.30 p.m. | Wheelbarrow Races (men blindfolded, ladies in barrows) |
| 6.00 p.m. onwards | Tug of War - TW Common -v- Rusthall Common (best of 3 pulls) |
| 6.15 p.m. | Appearance of the Black Horse |
| 6.30 - 9.30 p.m. | Hogpounders' Feast |

* As in 1797 all the young ladies are to be of unsullied character. Events to be held, so far as possible, in contemporary costume.

Round the Lower Cricket Ground we hope to have stalls as well as a refreshment tent.

The Hogpounders' Feast (the ancient rite of the Commons' Freehold Tenants - they are kindly letting us use the title) will take the place this year of our Annual Barbecue.

We naturally hope to make a profit on the whole day for the benefit of the Commons, but in the initial stages we do face pump-priming and cash flow problems. We are approaching the Council, our Corporate members and others for support. If any member knows of any source which might help us - e.g. with prizes or cash - we would be glad to hear from them. Equally we would be glad to hear from any member who has ideas about the programme and who is willing to help on the day.

We will keep members informed about progress.

Diary Dates

Sun 2 FEB	Scrub Clearance, Toad Rock Area 10 a.m.
Sun 2 MAR	Path widening - meet Fir Tree Road Car Park 10 a.m.
Wed 12 MAR	AGM, Town Hall, 7.15 for 8 p.m. Drinks first. Illustrated talk by Steve Budden.
Sat 21 JUNE	Annual Walk conducted by Ian Beavis - TW Common a.m., Rusthall Common p.m.