



# COMMON

# GROUND

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

Issue 18. Autumn 1998

## No Highway across the Common!

Chairman's Report by David Wakefield

It is just possible some members are unaware of what has happened since my last Report in the Spring issue of Common Ground, so please bear with us if this is already stale news to you.

In a nutshell, the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council was completely re-cast following the May local government elections, all twelve Lib Dem councillors seeking re-election lost their seats (including the Leader of the Council) and the incoming majority party, the Conservatives, have decided not to proceed with the plans for taking large parts of the Common for roads.

Two important meetings have been held to confirm this decision. The first was that of the Highways Committee, held in mid-June; the second a meeting in July to consider long term strategy for the Borough generally, but with roads at the forefront of the deliberations. We were represented at both these two meetings.

What has come over very forcibly is the change in atmosphere, the care now being taken to place alternative strategies before the public at an early stage, and the intention to take into account as many factors as possible in reaching a decision on that strategy and not to go at things piecemeal.

At a national level, the Government's own Transport Strategy document, long awaited and often postponed, has at last seen the light of day, and this encourages local authorities to look at various measures for traffic

reduction, with the possibility of a saner future. Certainly, the old policy of 'predict and provide', that is accept that traffic growth is inevitable and bulldoze the landscape to suit, is now, we hope, a thing of the past.

The fight put up by this Society (that is every one of you) had a major effect in stopping the

### *Conservators voice opposition*

vandalism. The letters to the Borough Council, the petition (which gave great publicity to our views) and the public meetings all shaped public opinion and on the crucial day, that of the local government election ensured that public opinion was focused and was heard plainly at the ballot box.

It is encouraging to know how many people, not just members of this Society, care about the Common, and this in what is supposed to be an uncaring age, where the motor car is king.

We understand that various alternatives are being considered by the Highways Committee, including a policy of no parking in London Road and a re-siting of coach parking from London Road to elsewhere in the Town.

We intend to take a full part in the process of reaching decisions on these matters. We do not intend that this one victory should go to our heads, but that we should remain vigilant in the months to come.

**To finish, what we have seen is a very encouraging example of democracy in action.**



*The Chairman presents the signatures on the petition*



*Frolics will be held on the  
Common  
Saturday, 17 July 1999.*

The programme of events was set out in the previous edition of Common Ground and in essence will follow the format of Diversions.

Members might be interested in an update.

We hope to feature, alongside the 18th century stoolball and cricket matches, a rare game Bat & Trap. This is a game which is peculiar to Kent, has been played here since the middle ages, but is relatively unknown to the public. It should be an eye opener. The search for interesting animals, to join the terriers, donkeys and horses already invited, goes on. A local caterer has come forward and offered to do a "Hogpounders Feast".

The Society's annual tea party will form the concluding event, at about 5pm. Put a note in your diaries.

## Autumn Litter Pick

This year the litter pick will be held on 11 October. Start point as usual will be 10am at the Fir Tree car park and the Brokers Arms, for those who want to concentrate on the Rusthall end of the Commons.

This is a most enjoyable event, does the Common and one's stomach muscles a power of good.

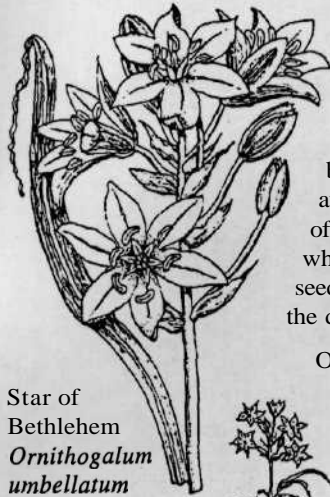
## DINNER 1999

This year's annual dinner will be held at the Spa Hotel on 22 January 1999.

The speaker will be Mr Colin Morgan, Curator of the National Pinetum, Bedgebury. As last year, tickets will be obtainable from Sylvia Luckhurst at the Town Hall, £18.50. Cheques to be made payable to the Spa Hotel.

illustrations by Harold Page

Naturalised plants mean that they have been introduced in gardens from abroad and from there have spread into the wild by various means such as escaping or being thrown away and very often by birds who eat their seeds and help in the dispersal.



Star of Bethlehem  
*Ornithogalum umbellatum*



On Tunbridge Wells Common we have a few of these, such as

the Star of Bethlehem, *Ornithogalum umbellatum*. I have known its whereabouts there since 1959 and it was well established then. I was told it had been known at that spot since before the war. It is a member of the Lily family and some say it is native in East Anglia. Its leaves are fairly inconspicuous blending in with the grass. It is only when in flower that it becomes noticeable with its cluster of white and green starry flowers in May. It is one of the plants whose flowers close early or do not open at all in dull weather. The bulbs are edible and much eaten in the Near East where they are taken dried on pilgrimages to Mecca. In the USA it is described as a nuisance because fresh or dry, this plant is poisonous to animals.

interestingly, it still grows, a bit overgrown with brambles where I originally saw it. The dark green leaves grow close to the ground with flower spikes which carry numerous green-yellow, bell shaped flowers.

A more recent arrival is Evergreen Alkanet, *Pentaglottis sempervirens*,

a native of France and well known in gardens. The name *Alkanet* comes from the Arabic - *alhenna*, a small tree, the source of the red henna dye used by the Egyptians as a cosmetic. Alkanet was probably a medieval substitute as its roots were used to make a red dye.



Green Alkanet  
*Pentaglottis sempervirens*

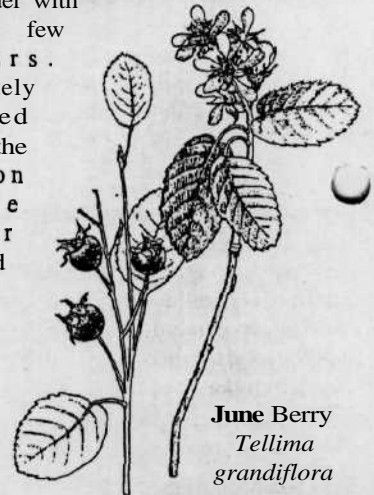
When I started recording plants in this area in 1957 Alkanet was fairly uncommon and my first record of it on the Common was in 1988, but over the years it has become more plentiful in the wild.

An attractive plant with bright blue flowers resembling a large Forget-me-not with hairy leaves and stalks very typical of members of the Borage family to which it belongs.

Lastly a small tree or shrub *Amelanchier* species it has various English names such as Snowy Mespil, Service Berry or June Berry. It was introduced into this country in 1870 from North America and became very popular as an ornamental tree in parks and gardens. It has been naturalised into the wild in some places in South East England, usually bird sown.

On the Common there is an old June Berry which I was first shown in 1961. Ten years later my husband photographed it when it was in its prime and absolutely smothered in blossom. The tree is still there but looking much older with very few flowers.

Fortunately scattered over the Common are a few younger ones and this year, 1998, I saw a very good specimen not far from the



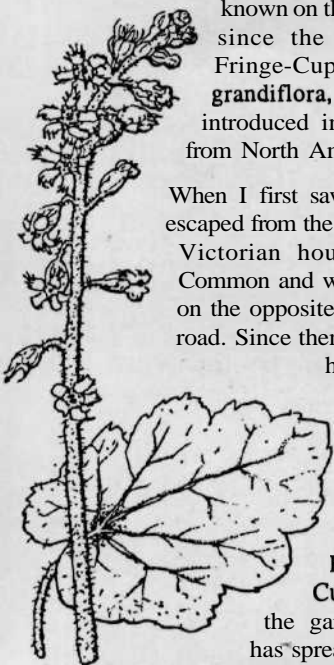
June Berry  
*Tellima grandiflora*

fairground site. It is most easily seen in April when its starlike white flowers make a handsome show before most of the native trees are in full leaf. It is also noticeable in the Autumn when its leaves turn red.

Mary Page

Another plant I have known on the Common since the 1950's is Fringe-Cups, *Tellima grandiflora*, a saxifrage introduced into gardens from North America.

When I first saw it, it had escaped from the garden of a Victorian house on the Common and was growing on the opposite side of the road. Since then, the house has been demolished and a block of flats stands on the site. Fringe-Cups is still in the garden but it has spread on to the



Fringe-cups  
*Tellima grandiflora*

Common on the same side of the road but, more

## Friends' Tea Party July '98

This year's tea party was held at Manor Lodge, Bishops Down, by kind permission of our Vice-Chairman.

What started out as a sunny morning, gradually turned into a very wet afternoon, the heavens opening as the first guests arrived at four o'clock. Nevertheless, a good time was had by all. The Vice-Chairman, with great forethought, had turned his wife's artist's studio/garden chalet into a refuge from the rain and all forty guests were sheltered from the rain.

The Chairman's home-made scones were not a great success, but no written criticisms have been received, nor have there been any reports of food poisoning - as yet! For the rest, the home made cakes and the strawberries and cream all disappeared at great speed.

Our thanks go to Mrs Freeman, whose garden looked superb for the efforts she and her husband put in to make the afternoon a success.



## Christmas Cards and Notelets

Christmas cards are available once again. They show a view of Rusthall Common by our most celebrated local artist, Charles Dodd c 1850.

Price ~ 30p each with envelope

These cards are also available as notelets (i.e. without a Christmas greeting)

Price - 30p each with envelope

Orders to our chairman:

David Wakefield  
68 London Road  
Royal Tunbridge Wells  
TN1 1DT  
tel: 01892 523983

# A Full Working Year

The Warden's Report by S. Budden

In a year that has been dominated by the LA264-A26 issue, the work of maintenance and restoration has gone quietly on. The rain during the first half of the summer kept the grass growing at a prodigious rate, using up our allocation of cuts with some time still to go. In spite of this we have tried to extend the level of maintenance this year with extra cuts to the edges of the Commons and several new areas of long grass being brought into the cutting regime.

Although they were mostly late this year, it has been quite a good season for the wildflowers with the heather in particular flowering profusely. The coral root also had a good year with a new colony appearing near Happy Valley.

A less welcome increase in colour this summer has been the spread of graffiti on litter bins and benches. This is a very difficult problem deal with and we can only hope that those responsible will grow up soon. On a happier note, we have made some progress on another problem, that of dog fouling. No one who uses the Common regularly can have failed to be aware that this has become much worse over recent years as more people are attracted to the site and as restrictions have increased in the town's parks. The Conservators have now managed to 'tag-on' to the Borough Council's clearance contract providing a combination of removal and provision of bag dispensers. The first of these dispensers has been sited at Fir Tree car park for about six weeks now and already a very positive

SEPT 6th	Pond clearance/ heathland maintenance
OCT 4th	Scrub clearance
NOV 1st	Heathland maintenance
DEC 6th	Gorse coppicing
JAN 3rd	Scrub clearance/hawthorn coppicing
FEB 7th	Tree planting
MAR 7th	Tree planting

improvement is discernable. As soon as they are available, further dispensers will be installed at Denny Bottom, Rusthall Cricket Pitch, the Lower Cricket Pitch and at Mt Ephraim. Ultimately the solution to this problem lies in responsible owners and peer pressure, and I would appeal to all Friends to set an example.

We have also tackled some easier, though expensive problems with the complete rebuilding of both footpaths on the Lower Cricket Pitch and the demolition of the old underground workshops near the Upper Cricket Pitch. These workshops have been steadily becoming more dangerous over the past few years so the discovery of three young people living in them this spring was rather worrying. It was on safety grounds therefore that the decision was taken for the demolition of these structures. When they are finally covered with topsoil and seeded it will result

in a big improvement in what has for some time been an unsightly area.

As many of you will have noticed, the Cherry Avenue on Mt Edgcumbe Road has been steadily in decline. Planted in 1937 to mark the coronation of George VI, these trees are reaching the end of their lives and succumbing to fungal infection and die back. Some ad-hoc replanting has been carried out, but not with the original species, 'Chosu hisakura', which are no longer available. The Conservators have now set plans in motion for the complete restoration of the avenue by arranging for Coblands Nurseries to graft bud cuttings of the original trees onto new root-stock. These grafts will be grown-on for 3 to 4 years ready to replace the existing avenue. Our plans were nearly frustrated as when Coblands came to take the cuttings in August, we found that the trees had degenerated to such an extent that the buds were no longer viable. Fortunately, I had to pollard one tree last year for safety reasons and had managed to push out a little new growth, enough for about two dozen grafts. From these, more grafts can be taken next year.

For some time the Conservators have been considering the provision of signage on the Commons to provide visitors with some information. We have decided on an adaptation of the excellent Friends map designed by Ron Burch and incorporating some of Ian Beavis' text as well as information about the management of the Commons and its wildlife. Initially we are planning two signs on Rusthall Common and two or possibly three on Tunbridge Wells.

With autumn now very much upon us, the volunteers will again be in action. The work will be the usual combination of pond clearance, gorse coppicing, scrub clearance and tree planting. The tasks can be as gentle or as strenuous as you wish, according to your desire or ability. So why not come and join us for a morning; you will enjoy Sunday lunch far more afterwards. The volunteers are in action first Sunday each month starting in September. We meet at 10am in Fir Tree car park.

## Christmas Presents

Mugs	These are of bone china with a design taken from an old print of Tunbridge Wells Common showing Mount Edgcumbe and the London Road. The design is in blue on a white background.	£3.95
Tea towels	Made of cotton they feature a lively design of some of the birds, animals and flowers to be found on the Commons. Toad Rock has pride of place in the centre. There is a choice of colours: blue and white or brown and white.	£2.95
Jig-saws	250 pieces. The picture is a busy and colourful scene of the Pantiles in the mid-nineteenth century. It has quite a Christmas atmosphere!	£4.50
Pictorial maps	Designed for us by Ron Burch, these colourful maps, one of Rusthall Common and the other of Tunbridge Wells Common, are most attractive with vignettes of buildings and landmarks. On the back of each is a detailed history by Ian Beavis of all the features illustrated. Framed these maps would make decorative wall pictures. Size: 42cm x 30cm approx.	£1.50 each
<b>BARGAIN CORNER</b> T-shirts	We still have a few of our Diversions T-shirts to sell. They are really very good quality cotton featuring the attractive logo used for Diversions on the Common. This is printed in green on white.  Apply to our Chairman: David Wakefield, 68 London Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1DT tel: 01892 523983	Adult's - was £9.50 now £4.50  Child's - was £4.50 now £2.00

## Subscription Renewal 1998/99

Subscriptions are due for the year, which starts from 1 October.

Would all members not on direct debit (i.e. banker's orders) please despatch their very modest fee:

£5 per individual  
£10 per family

to our new Treasurer: **Comm. George Lawson**, London Road filling in the remittance advice sheet which you will find with this edition of Common Ground.

# Solitary Bees on The Common - by Dr Ian Beavis

Walkers on the Commons in high summer will undoubtedly have seen clusters of small holes in exposed areas of hardened sandy soil, and may well have spotted insects of various sizes and colours, looking more or less like bees, going in and out of them. The more observant may have seen similar burrows in south-facing drainage ditches, root plates or banks with sparse vegetation from early spring onwards. These small tunnels are the nests of solitary bees, an often overlooked but important element of the Commons' fauna. The sandy soil and rock outcrops of the Commons are ideal for these creatures, and many otherwise rare varieties find a refuge here. Seventy-one species have so far been recorded, including eleven on the official national list of scarce and threatened species. These rarities include one that survives in only three other places in Britain.

Solitary bees are so called to distinguish them from their 'social' relatives, the honey bee and bumblebees, which live in communities with a breeding queen and sterile workers. Although solitary species often nest in close proximity, congregating in particularly favoured spots, each female digs its own individual burrow and stocks it with suitable food for its offspring. There are a large number of different species, far outnumbering the variety of social forms. The solitary bees have a significant role in the ecosystem by assisting in pollination, especially in the very early spring when few other insects are active.

The earliest species to appear are the mining bees, which can be active even in late February and are at their peak in March and April. The females dig burrows in bare or sparsely

vegetated ground, which they stock with honey and pollen before laying their eggs. They are especially fond of south facing areas such as Pope's Terrace Walk, the back of Brighton Lake and Happy Valley. Wellington Rocks and the rocks at Denny Bottom are also favoured sites. Laying in a store of food for their offspring entails numerous visits to and from nearby flowers, so the females can often be seen entering their tunnels carrying clumps of brightly coloured pollen in the baskets of

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*haven for spectacular  
rare species*

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hairs on their hind legs. Mining bees are very variable in size and colour, the largest being about the size of a honey bee but more furry, while the smallest are not much bigger than a large ant. The most spectacular, the Tawny Mining Bee, has bright orange fur on its hind body, while the thorax is deep scarlet. Others include the Early Mining Bee, which has a golden tip to its brown body, the Yellow-legged Mining Bee which has a golden pollen basket and pale brown hands fading to white, and Clark's Mining Bee, with black fur behind and red in front.

Female mining bees often make great efforts to conceal their nests from predators, carefully opening and sealing them as they travel to and fro with supplies. However, this does not protect them from the cuckoo bees whose females are highly skilled in detecting other bees' burrows so that they can lay their own eggs inside and save themselves the trouble of gathering their own stores of food. Every species of mining bee has a particular specialist

cuckoo species which is attached to it, roaming around its nesting sites in search of opportunities. The smaller mining bees have associated cuckoos which are red and black in colour, but the larger varieties such as those described above are parasitised by the more conspicuous nomad bees. The nomad bees, which can often be seen in spring exploring the areas where mining bees congregate, have a close resemblance to wasps. One of the commonest, the Red-homed Nomad, has yellow, black and brown bands, and a thorax with three red stripes. The body of the larger Six-banded Nomad, one of the Commons' rarities, is patterned entirely in yellow and black.

A little later in the year, the mining bees are joined by the leaf cutters and carpenter bees which make their nests in rotten wood. The Red Carpenter Bee has light orange fur on its abdomen, while the Blue Carpenter Bee is an unusual deep metallic shade. The females of the Commons' three species of leaf-cutter bees use their powerful jaws to cut semicircular pieces out of leaves. They use these to construct a series of individual cells in their burrows, filling them with honey and pollen for their young. The pieces of leaf are folded into a cylinder, with smaller round fragments serving as a base and lid. Female leaf-cutters have a rather flattened body with a brush of coloured hairs underneath to provide extra pollen-carrying capacity in addition to the baskets on their legs.

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## YOUR COMMONS NEED YOU!

In a Society such as ours membership numbers play an important part. If we wish to influence people, then the greater our numbers, the greater the influence we have. And on a more practical note, the more members the more help we can give in protecting the Commons.

Currently our numbers stand at about 300 persons.

The Committee have discussed ways in which we can increase our numbers. They have come up with the following ideas:

- 1 Common Ground could be seen by more people, if members took the trouble to pass on their copy to a friend or neighbour. Would you like to do so?

- 2 The Chairman should seek to get more publicity for our work through the media. This really means the Courier and he is taking steps to do so.

- 3 We had great support in recent times from members of the public, and that support is manifested in names on our Petition. To contact all the 1750 names on the Petition would call for about 30 hours of clerical labour. Would you be willing to help?

In any event, please bear in mind the need for new members. The person to contact is:

**George Lawson, TW 524019  
70 London Road  
Tunbridge Wells TN1 1DX**

*We welcome any further  
constructive ideas on recruitment.*

## Echo over Common

100 years ago from the Kent & Sussex Courier, August 12, 1898

The usual crowd gathered on the slopes of Tunbridge Wells Common on Sunday evening in anticipating of hearing another battle royal between the flowers of Brigham Young and the representatives of more orthodox and less polygamous religions.

Punctually at 8pm Mr H Collyer, of Commercial Road Chapel, ascended the rain-soaked slopes of Mount Ephraim, but to the disappointment of scores of the Common the orators of aggressive Mormonism were nowhere to be seen. It was a case of Hamlet with the name part left out.

Mr Collyer proceeded to deliver a powerful uninterrupted address on Old and New Testament teaching. His anti-Mormon discourse could be heard as far across the town as London Road, where the benefit of a still night aroused a curious distant echo across the Common.