



Transport Strategy and The Commons

An open letter from Patrick Shovelton

May I thank you for your article on Transportation Strategy and the Commons in the Autumn edition of Common Ground.

Perhaps, with the work being done on the Commons' verges on the A26 - and on the Fir Tree Road car park - it is timely to review our relationship with the Highways Department.

It has to be said that our great victory in the spring and summer of 1998 which succeeded in stopping the creation of a five-lane carriageway at the Church Road/London Road junction and the accompanying loss of common land beside the A26 and the A264 - as well as the loss of the fine red oak tree at the south-east corner of the crossing — seems to have had some effect on the present works on the A26.

Scrupulous care is being taken to preserve the Commons' borders and the kerbs are being built up to compensate for the raising of the road level. As a result, parking on the Common - or "resting" - will be difficult.

I understand also that in return for using part of Fir Tree road car park as a depot during the works, the contractors are going to re-surface the whole car park. And the old granite blocks used as parking prevention on the A26 can now be transferred to Hungershall Park to protect the verges there.

Of course the contractors, as in all work, have scarred the edges of the Common and, in some cases, got their vehicles stuck on the Common with dire results in this wet winter. But we are assured that at the end of the day they will make good. Furthermore, they must be contracted to re-turf the edges of the Common by the A26. Seeding would be

no good in view of the number of people who daily walk across these edges.

Equally the contractors building the new flats on the old Post Office site at the corner of Vale Road must make good the little triangular bit they have been allowed to set up as their temporary camp.

Other benefits the Commons have received from recent Highways policies are, first, the new refuge in London Road near the Balmoral House and, secondly, the double yellow lines by the racecourse crossing in Major York's Road.

But there is still a long way go. May I take the points one by one.

No Parking on Commons Roads

We and the Freehold Tenants have long argued for no parking on the roads leading across the Commons, and this includes no bus parking.

Speed Limits

Again, we have campaigned for reduction of speeds across the Commons, particularly applicable to Rusthall Common, where the A264 is unrestricted as it crosses the Common.

Cycling Across the Common

Whilst we are not against cycles on parts of the Commons, we do feel that some restriction is called for, if other users' interests are to be respected.

It would be good to know what it being done about these matters.

Patrick Shovelton



Friends' Tea Party

will be held on
8 July 2000

MOUNT EDGCUMBE
HOTEL

Tickets £5
from Sylvia Luckhurst
01892 526121

Bring your own rug or chair

150th Anniversary of St Paul's, Rusthall

15th June
Flower Festival

16th June
Parish History Exhibition

18th June
Family Eucharist 10am

All events will take place
at the Church.

Further details from
Geoffrey Copus
01892 523991

FOR SALE

We still have the following
items for sale

Notelets	0.25p each
Maps of Tunbridge Wells Common	£1.50 each
Maps of Rusthall	
Common	£1.50 each
Mugs	£3.50 each
Jigsaw Puzzles	£4.50 each

from **George Lawson**
01892 524019

The First and The Last

One of the interesting aspects of recording the insect fauna of the Commons is to observe which species are the last to be active at the end of the year and the first to emerge in spring. The generally mild winters of the last few years have meant that 'autumn' has often extended well into December, whilst 'spring' has begun in February, leaving January as the sole 'dead' month dividing the end of the old insect season from the start of the new. Tunbridge Wells Common, in particular, has several sheltered south-facing areas which maintain a warmer microclimate than elsewhere, and it is here that the last and first butterflies and other creatures are likely to be seen. The best of these are the hollow below Mount Edgcumbe Rocks and the area at the back of Brighton Lake.

The latest butterflies to be seen tend not to be the long-lived hibernating species, since these generally hide themselves away quite early in the autumn. It is those which maintain themselves by migration from the Continent, or which leave their eggs, caterpillars or chrysalises to survive the winter, that remain active until they finally succumb to increasingly cold and cloudy conditions. One of the most familiar migrant species in the Tunbridge Wells area is the easily recognised scarlet and black Red Admiral. Although in theory it is capable of hibernating, there is no evidence that it does so on the Commons. In the late autumn of 1996, a group of about three of them took up residence at Mount Edgcumbe Rocks, feeding on sunny days at the abundant ivy bloom which helps make this spot so attractive to late flying insects. They were last seen there on 15 November. Examples of the Speckled Wood often linger on late into the autumn at Mount Edgcumbe Rocks, as does the Small Copper.

As other flowers die off, the ivy blossom at Mount Edgcumbe Rocks becomes increasingly important, and even when it is well past its best insects still congregate here. By December, this is the one spot where on a sunny day insect activity can still be observed.

Even as late as this, the last of the social wasps are to be found here, accompanied by a handful of select species of the hoverflies which impersonate them. Also to be seen in December are the two larger species of dronefly, one at least of which will eventually hibernate. Droneflies are in fact members of the hoverfly family, but being bee mimics they are given a distinct common name.

At the end of the year, Brighton Lake too may produce some late butterfly or hoverfly sightings, but this site is of particular interest for its late-flying dragonflies. The medium-sized Common Darter, with its bright red males and duller brown females, breeds in the lake in considerable numbers. It emerges remarkably late in the summer compared to other species, but compensates by carrying on to the very edge of winter. In this sheltered spot, there are plenty of surviving bluebottles and other flies to provide an ongoing food supply. The latest date so far was 20 November 1995, when about a dozen were hunting over the sunlit lake. There was even a pair engaged in courtship activity and a female laying eggs.

Spring on the Commons generally begins in February with the appearance of the first of the solitary bees. Clark's Mining Bee is usually the first species to be out, often making its appearance at the back of Brighton Lake. The female is easily recognised by its attractive colour scheme, scarlet in front and black behind, although the male is less conspicuous. The females nest in burrows in vertical surfaces such as banks, root plates and the sides of drainage ditches. The early emergence of the solitary bees is rivalled by that of the queen bumblebees which come out of hibernation as early as possible in order to seek out suitable holes in which to found new colonies. The first bumblebee species to be seen are the very large Buff-tailed Bumblebee and the somewhat smaller Early Bumblebee, which has yellow stripes and a light orange tail.

These bees, protected by their furry coats, are hardy creatures which invariably appear on the first available sunny days of February, and they do not seem to be concerned if conditions are windy and the actual temperature quite low. The hibernating butterflies, however, are more choosy about the time of their emergence and will sometimes wait for several weeks until the weather is both sunny and mild. In recent years, the earliest emergence from hibernation took place on 13 February 1995, while the latest was on 4 April 1996. There are four hibernating species which are regularly seen on the Commons, and the general pattern is for them to all appear for the first time on the same day, which is obviously carefully chosen to provide the optimum conditions. The back of Brighton Lake is a good place to see them. Although in theory they could return to their sheltered hibernation sites in hollow trees and dense undergrowth, a premature resumption of activity might entail a potentially fatal waste of energy.

The most unmistakable of the butterflies in question, even at a distance and in flight, is the lemon yellow Brimstone. On the Commons this species rarely settles, whereas the other three can often be seen sunning themselves on bare ground or drinking nectar from early flowers such as dandelions or sallow catkins. If they can be observed in this way, identification presents no problems. The purple-brown Peacock has its unique eye-spots which it uses to confuse and intimidate potential predators. The Small Tortoiseshell is mainly orange with black markings, and has small blue spots set into its dark wing margins. The Comma is orange-brown with black markings and may look superficially similar to the Small Tortoiseshell, but its most obvious distinguishing feature is the irregular outline of its wings. This unusual wing shape, unique among British butterflies, is a form of camouflage, giving it a resemblance of a dead leaf, especially when settled with its wings folded.

Ian Beavis

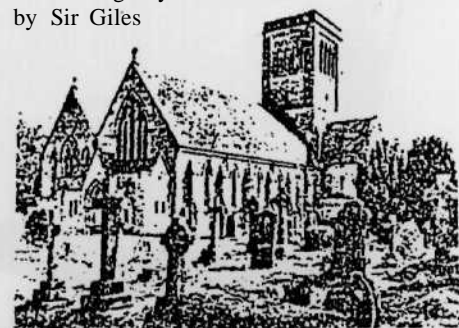


St Paul's Church, Rusthall

St Paul's was consecrated in 1850, and the 150th anniversary is being celebrated in June. Among other events will be a Flower Festival in the Church, and an historical Exhibition in the Church Centre, Rusthall High Street.

St Paul's is a fine building in local sandstone, designed by Henry Isaac Stevens of Derby. There are windows by Burne-Jones and Martin Travers and fittings by Sir Walter Tapper and Cecil Burns; the War Memorial is by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott.

The Exhibition will cover the history of both the Church and the parish, including the Commons. I am sure that members will find much to interest them - here as a taster is a



poster from the Rev Thomas Edwards' papers in Tunbridge Wells Museum, kindly photocopied for me by Dr Ian Beavis.

The Exhibition will be open on Friday 16 June from 10am to 7pm, on Saturday 17 June from 10am to 10pm and on Sunday 18 June from 2pm to 6pm.

Geoffrey Copus

FELLOW BURGESSES.
OUR COMMONS.
VOTE AGAINST
THE
BAD BARGAIN

About to be made by the Town with the Lord of the Manor & Freeholders.

Why, what have they conceded to the Town?
 The right to send 4 Councillors as Conservators to attend their Meetings to be out-voted by their 8 Conservators—a hopeless minority.

It is also hampered by
UNNECESSARY RESTRICTIONS & FINES.

WHY SPEND SUCH A LARGE SUM OF MONEY FOR SUCH A
Paltry Concession ?

**IT IS A BAD BARGAIN—VOTE AGAINST IT
 AND THROW IT OUT.**

THOMAS EDWARDS,
 Salem, Tunbridge Wells,
 A Native and an Old Inhabitant. Dec. 9, 1889.

J. H. CANN, PRINTER, 59, CAMDEN ROAD, TUNBRIDGE WELLS.

Poster produced by Rev. Thomas Edwards, Vicar of *Rusthall* in 1889

Mushrooms

Mycology may be a minority passion, but many of us do look out for edible fungi while walking. Alas, our Commons are not rich in these; the occasional "Parasols" (*Macrolepiota procera*) are to be found, but the *Boletus* species, *Chanterelles* and so on, seem scarce indeed. (If some very early birds amongst members know differently, would they like to inform the rest of us?).

Our riches — thanks partly to storm damage — are in the bracket and crust fungi, on trees and rotting logs. Though inedible, some are very attractive. Of such species, scores are known in Britain so it would be interesting to know how many live on our Commons.

Peter Freeman



GUIDED COMMONS WALKS

The guided walk this year, led by Dr Ian Beavis, will take place on

Saturday 15 July

starting at 10.30 hrs from Thackeray's House on the Common.

The morning walk lasts about two hours.

The afternoon walk will commence at

14.00 hrs from Toad Rock, Rusthall Common and, again, will also take about two hours.

A must for anyone interested in the flora and fauna of the Commons.

Autumn Litter Pick

The autumn litter pick will take place on

Sunday 1 October at 10.00 hrs

There are two starting points:

- for those who want to clean up Tunbridge Wells Common, the Fir Tree car park;
- for those who are interested in Rusthall Common, meet outside the old Brahms and Liszt public house (now gone, but we all know where it was!).

If you are in any doubt as to where to go, then the Warden (01892 526121) will give you directions.

These litter picks are good not only for the Commons, but I find they do my waistline a treat as well.

COMMONS WALK A

TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMON

This walk on the Common begins and ends at the Pantiles but is mainly a circuit of the old disused race course. The soil of the Common, lying over sandstone tends to drain quickly but in a few places can be muddy after rain.

1 Starting at the Pantiles mount the steps between the Swan Hotel and "Tracks and Trimmings" turning right at the top and crossing by zebra crossing to the Common. Take the asphalt path bearing left (there is a wooden finger post incised 'Groombridge and Speldhurst'). After 50 or 60 paces the path is crossed by another asphalt path which you take, turning right.

This path runs roughly parallel to the busy Major York's Road, but before proceeding note York Cottage on the other side of the road, one of the oldest buildings on the Common.

The path runs uphill through woodland - mainly birch, beech and oak. It is not an arduous ascent but there are seats at several points along the way, a reminder of the past popularity of Royal Tunbridge Wells as a place for convalescing to recuperate. The air of the Common has long been considered as invigorating and restorative.

2 The first seat on the left bears a plaque;

THIS SEAT DATING FROM VICTORIAN TIMES WAS DISCOVERED IN THE UNDERGROWTH WHICH FORMERLY COVERED THIS AREA WAS REPAIRED AND RENOVATED BY THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND RUSTHALL COMMONS APRIL 1995

3 60 paces further on there is another seat on the right and the asphalt path is crossed by a broad grassy glade. This is the old 18th century race track. It was laid out at a time when Tunbridge Wells was one of the most fashionable places in the country with 'Society'. One of the things which this society enjoyed hugely was gambling - on the Pantiles, where Beau Nash ran the gaming tables, and at the races held here on the Common. Turn right along the racecourse which curves gently away to the left. As it bears left the course rises slightly. It is wooded on both sides and crossed by a number of paths, but follow the course round to a point where the bend tightens and you come to a double avenue of trees on the left.

4 This is the Royal Victoria Grove, planted in 1835 to commemorate the visits of Princess Victoria and her mother, the Duchess of Kent. Victoria Grove was planned as a double avenue of sycamore, limes and elms. The elms succumbed to disease in 1972 and in 1992 the 3rd row was replanted to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's accession. The Grove is reputedly haunted on summer evenings by the grey figure of a woman in Victorian garb.

Continue past the end of the Victoria Grove passing also a small area of heather scrub on your left, but still bearing gently left until you meet an asphalt path. At this point there is an open area with Victoria Grove on the left, the cricket pitch in front of you and to the right an outcrop of rocks. Take the asphalt path right towards the rocks. These are known today as Wellington Rocks and in the 18th century they must have made a

natural grandstand to the start and finish of the horse races. The tallest of the rocks was nicknamed 'the pulpit' by the Victorians. Other 19th century inhabitants sought 'diamonds' in the sand around the rocks. These were quartz crystals which could be polished up and used for costume jewellery. The rocks with their clefts and crevices have been a magnet for children of countless generations (*Ruskin said they were his childhood Switzerland*).

At this point the race track has been overlaid by the construction in the 19th century of the cricket pitch - in fact, the upper cricket pitch, there being two pitches on the Common. The upper pitch has been, in its day, the scene of important matches and Dr W G Grace played here in 1875 and 1882. Nowadays County Cricket is played at the Nevill Ground about a mile away.

6 Walk up the asphalt path to a point just past Wellington Rocks (*to your right in the trees is a pavilion with public toilets*), and then take the newly surfaced track left round the top edge of the cricket pitch. If a game is in progress there are plenty of benches from which to enjoy the match. Continue across the road (*Fir Tree Road*) to a small car park. On the left you will see a litter bin near a small oak tree. Walk toward this and you will see an unpaved track on your right curving downhill - this is a resumption of the race track. At the end of the glade the track is crossed by another small path, carry straight on toward Major York's Road. Major York built this now busy road across the Common to connect the Pantiles with his house at the top of Bishops Down. His house, much enlarged is now the Spa Hotel.

8 At the road, take the footpath left for a few paces to a break in the grass verge and cross the road to a row of short wooden posts. These posts straddle the width of the course along which we proceed. This straight section is crossed by a private road marked by more posts. Continue across this road along the race course. The woods on each side have been left largely as they were after the hurricane adding to the variety of wildlife habitat on the common.

9 When the race course turns again to the left it is crossed by another road marked by more posts. This is Hungershall Park Road which we cross. Following the track we come to a clearing on the left, skirted in the main by a birch wood, which has been opened up to encourage heather to grow and butterflies to proliferate. Continuing along the race track we come to Major York's Road again. Cross, and complete the circuit of the race course, returning to the Pantiles by the asphalt path on the right which brings you back to the start of the walk.

Approximate length of walk- 1.25 miles
Allow about 45 minutes.

