



Chairman's Report



The things a girl can do - one: hitch a lift

The heavy rains of the winter have at last stopped, and we have the sun back with us.

Whilst the water table on the Commons seems to be falling, and one had hoped that plenty of rain followed by plenty of sunshine would be good for all flora, I see that at least one horse chestnut on the far side of the Common from me is looking very poorly.

Since the last issue of Common Ground, a very important document has been produced by the Council, the Local Plan. Though called a Deposit Copy, I think we can assume this to be the final version. What will be of especial importance to members will be references to the Commons. I have read it through from cover to cover on your behalf (all 213 pages!).

The aim of the Local Plan is to update the earlier plan of 1996, taking it through to 2011. Right from the start it emphasises its objective of protecting the environment, whilst allowing development to take place in housing, industry, tourism, recreation and transport.

All this is of importance to us as citizens, but our main concern must be 'what does the Plan have to say about the Commons?'. The answer, I am sorry to say, is not a lot.

Whilst confirming that Nature Conservation will be taken into account, this to include Woodland and Scrub, Sites of Special Scientific Importance, and protected species and though it mentions Rusthall Common as a nature conservation area, Tunbridge Wells Common is ignored under this heading. I am writing to the authors about this oversight.

Tunbridge Wells Common is mentioned under Open Spaces of Historic Importance, these being areas which will be protected from development. The Plan goes into some detail about housing development and one of these borders onto the Common.

When the Kent and Sussex Hospital moves out, the planners envisage that 220 dwellings will be permitted on that site. Something that we should be keeping an eye on in the coming months.

The only other reference to the Commons comes under Informal Open Spaces, and here the Plan has this to say:

'...area contains a wealth of informal open spaces and woodland ranging in size from places such as Tunbridge Wells Common...to landscaped areas within housing estates.'

'...The Council will...use its influence to ensure that public parks and gardens, common land and woodland...are protected and improved through good management.'

Perhaps we can be comforted by the fact that the planners see the Commons as serving a public need (in leisure, in tourism, and in recreation) and are beautiful in themselves (a veritable 'green belt' within the Town boundaries) and they are to be protected from 'development'.

The Local Plan will be on view at the Royal Victoria Place on the 26, 27 and 28th July.

Your committee have been working hard on the question 'how best can we raise the profile of the Commons?' Up to now that has meant Frolics, but there are problems with Frolics, not least that as we cannot charge for entry, we have great difficulty in running it at a profit. Do you have any ideas about how we can utilise this wonderful facility, for one day a year, involving as many members of the public as possible and making a small profit? If you have, please contact me on TW 523983 with your ideas, or come and speak to me at the Friends' Tea Party at Mount Edgcombe on 21st July.

David Wakefield

Guided Commons Walks

Saturday 28 July 2001

10.30 hrs

from Thackeray's House
Tunbridge Wells Common

Possible further sightings
of Longhorn Moths

Dancing Swarms of Longhorns

One of the highlights of this year's guided walk on Rusthall Common was the sight of a small swarm of longhorn moths over the edge of a marlpit beside a footpath through the Common's central wooded portion. Swarming in this fashion, in mid-air over a fixed point, is a habit more commonly associated with various flies, such as winter gnats which are often the only insects active in our gardens in the colder months of the year. But whatever group of insects is involved, the purpose is the same - to facilitate the meeting of the two sexes. Male longhorn moths gather in swarms to engage in their courtship display, showing off their amazingly long antennae which are about four times as long as the insect and longer than those of any other British moth of whatever size. The antennae being mainly white, reflect the light and are surprisingly conspicuous in the males' slow dancing flight. By assembling in groups, male longhorns make themselves collectively more conspicuous, and therefore more likely to attract the attention of females, which can often be seen settled on nearby foliage while the males'

performance is in progress. Although similar in size and colour to the males, female longhorns can be recognised by the fact that their antennae are of more conventional length.

Longhorns are a small but distinctive family of moths, of which several species have been recorded on the Commons. Degeer's Longhorn, the one seen on the walk, has metallic dark brown wings with a conspicuous creamy white band. Oddly enough, the books describe it as flying at dusk. That is doubtless true, but this was not the only occasion when I have seen it active in daylight. To see the courtship display of this species is a fairly unusual event, but such behaviour is more commonly seen in the case of the Green Longhorn, which flies in bright sunshine. As its name suggests, the latter species is bronzy green in colour, and when seen at close quarters is a very attractive insect. On warm spring days, very substantial numbers of males build up, dancing around trees and bushes. On 1 May 1990 several swarms of up to two hundred males each were observed on Tunbridge Wells Common.

Other members of the family are more secretive and less likely to be spotted. Swammerdam's Longhorn and the similar but smaller Panzer's Longhorn have wings of a uniform shining light golden colour. The Red-headed Longhorn has a close association with cuckoo flower and garlic mustard (well known as the foodplants of the Orange-tip butterfly) and is usually seen settled on their flowers. It has dark metallic wings and a tuft of dark reddish hairs on its head. Other species may yet be recorded on the Commons, including a very small one associated with germander speedwell which has been found elsewhere in the Tunbridge Wells area.



Longhorn moths have a fairly brief adult life in spring and early summer. Most of the year is spent in the caterpillar stage, in which they pass the winter. Unlike the caterpillars of most butterflies and moths, which are reliant on fresh foliage, those of longhorn moths can subsist on dead leaves. Apart from those of the Red-headed Longhorn, which at least start by feeding on their two favoured plants, the caterpillars of the other species described above spend their whole time feeding among leaf litter on the ground of wooded areas. Camouflaged inside a protective case made of leaf fragments, they are well placed to avoid predators. When winter is over, they turn into chrysalis inside their case, from which the adults soon emerge to begin another year's cycle.

Ian Beavis



Friends' Tea Party

21 July 2001
MOUNT EDGCUMBE
ON THE COMMON

Tickets £4.50
from Sylvia Luckhurst
01892 526121

Working Parties

First Sunday from
October to March

10.00am
Fir Tree Road car park

FOR SALE

We still have the following items for sale:

Christmas Cards 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

SUBS RENEWALS

Subs for 2000/2001 are due.

Anybody who has not paid
please remit to the Treasurer.

A Quick Guide to Trees

Oak

The oak is the largest and longest-lived of our native trees and a very familiar object in the landscape. The sturdy massive trunk, the broad rounded outline of its head, its wide-spreading lower limbs, the wavy form of its leaves, and the egg-and-cup-shaped fruit, are characters that cannot be confused with any other tree.

The oak flowers in April or May and the blossoms are of two distinct forms - male and female.

Ash

So commanding, yet at the same time so light and graceful, does a well-grown Ash appear, that it has been called the 'Venus of the Woods'.

The flowers of the Ash are very poor affairs, drooping from the sides of branches in April and May.

Lime

There are three kinds of Lime; Large-leaved, Small-leaved and the Common Lime. The trees grow to a height of eighty or ninety feet, with a girth of about fifteen feet.

The yellowish-white flower has distinct sepals and petals, an abundance of nectar, and a strong, sweet fragrance as of Honeysuckle.

Birch

The Birch is at once the most graceful, the hardiest, and the most ubiquitous of our forest trees. It can grow to about fifty feet with a girth of about two to three feet. The bark can be more enduring than its timber, which may be partly due to its habit of casting off the outer layer in shreds, like fine tissue paper.

The glossy, leathery leaves vary in shape, from triangular form to pointed oval, their edges deeply toothed, and their foot-stalks long and slender.

Beech

A towering massive shaft, clothed in smooth grey bark. A well-grown specimen attains a height of about one hundred feet and a girth of about twenty feet.

The beech flowers in April or May. The 'cupules' of female flowers become a three sided, sharp-edged 'mast', which falls to the ground and is fed upon by herds of pigs.

Horse Chestnut

The grandest of all the flowering trees. The stout cylindrical bole is short, its erect trunk towers to a height of eighty or a hundred feet.

The flowers consist of a bell-shaped calyx with five lobes, supporting four or five separate petals, pure white, but splashed and dotted with crimson and yellow towards the base of the upper ones.

Sycamore

It grows to a height of sixty or seventy feet after only fifty years.

The flowers hang down in a long raceme.



Autumn Litter Pick

The Autumn Litter Pick will take place on

Sunday 14 October

at 10.00 hrs

Two starting points:

- Fir Tree Car Park, Tunbridge Wells Common
- Common View, Rusthall Common (The Old Brahms and Liszt)

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

Perambulations of the Manor of Rusthall

Many records of the beating of the bounds of parishes have survived, but it is unusual to find similar records for Manors. The Manor of Rusthall is exceptional in having among its archives records of Perambulations in 1725, 1883, 1886, and 1919.

In 1883 there were some disagreements among the party - for example near the West Station 'the opinions here differed, Mr Holyer saying the old stream ran nearer to the Railway by ten or twelve yards than the line marked by Mr Walter.' As with Parochial beatings of the bounds, boys took part to cover different stretches. A cottage near Still Green stood on the boundary line and in 1883, over the oven 'the boundary was marked by two lads (Charles Cushman and Thomas Taylor) crawling through...' At Peacock's Bridge near the High Rocks 'stands a post marking the boundary, at which some of the boys were bumped' - so that they should remember the spot for the future. Boundary stones are mentioned at several points, described as being marked BRM - 'Boundary Rusthall Manor'. I have looked for some of those stated to be near the Spa, but so far without success.

The Perambulations contain very specific measurements; in 1886 along Mount Ephraim the boundary went 'crossing the foreground of Boyne House to No 1 Wellington Place, entering these premises at a distance of eight feet from the said Common path, crossing the foregrounds of Wellington Place, and passing within three feet and eastwards of a yew tree, to the angle of Mayo House, which is two feet and six inches distant from the Common path ...'

It was important for the Manor to assert its boundaries, particularly where development was likely to take place. In 1883, Charles Gallard of Southborough was charged £300 for permission to break through the narrow fringe of Manorial Waste, to enable him to open up the Boyne House estate which he had bought for development.

By 1919, it was becoming increasingly difficult to mark the exact boundaries because of new building, particularly at Rusthall where, for example, the boundary went through the houses numbered 77 and 79 Southwood Road. The 1919 event seems to have been a staid affair, in which only officials of the Manor and the Tenants' representatives took part; so far as I am aware it was the last Perambulation to have been held.

Geoffrey Copus