



COMMON

GROUND

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS
AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

Issue 26. Winter 2001



Chairman's Report

Summer has given way to Autumn, and what an autumn! Here we are at the end of October with warm sunny day following warm sunny day. However, the large Red Oak, so prominent outside my window in Inner London Road, has got the message: winter must soon be upon us, and has started to drop its lovely red leaves. All over the Commons, the leaves are coming down.

Cricket is my opening theme. We have long been supporters of the two cricket clubs who play on the Commons; Linden Park playing on the Upper Cricket ground and we were delighted to welcome again this year the Primary Schools Cricket Festival on the Lower Cricket ground. They played everyday throughout August.

And if I can stick with the word cricket, might I direct you towards Ian Beavis's article on crickets (the winged variety) in "this newsletter. Ian is doing pioneering work on the small creatures who inhabit our world, and I sense that his collected articles will be turned into a book at some time in the future. If anyone should ask you the question 'Why did God invent bees?', you should answer 'So that Dr Beavis can study them, and entertain his fellow men with his reports*!'

Next year marks the Queen's Jubilee (fifty years on the throne), and the town intends to celebrate the occasion by asking local societies to come up with ideas as to what they would like to do, and to subsidise them where necessary. Some parts of the town already have clearly recognised societies to represent them (I cite the excellent Hawkenbury Allotment Holders as one such). But I sense that here in the middle of the town we lack any such body, except possibly the Friends. We really must take advantage of this opportunity to raise our profile, have some fun and do something good for the centre of the town. The enclosed questionnaire gives you, the members, the chance to come up with some ideas about what we should do. Please fill it in, and let me have it back. I intend to raise this further at our AGM, to be held on 27th March, in the Town Hall.

The Local Plan has now reached the stage where talking must stop, and voting must begin. As I said in the last newsletter, the only matter which directly affects the Friends is the omission of Tunbridge Wells Common from the list of nature conservation areas. This point was also picked up by the Courier, and I was happy to expand further on this matter in their columns.

You will see elsewhere reports on the Friends' tea party. This was held in glorious weather at the Mount Edgecombe Hotel. I decided, instead of a raffle, to hold a quiz, entry £1 (all receipts going to our funds). This gave me the chance to slip in some dubious questions and answers, known only to myself, but I was forced to award the prize to a third party!

Our next social event is the Friends' dinner, to be held at the Spa Hotel on 18th January 2002. This is always a highlight of the Friends' year, and this year we are to have a talk from Ian Beavis on the flora and fauna of the Commons. Tickets can be obtained from Sylvia Luckhurst via the separate form enclosed in Common Ground.

Two immediate threats to the Commons have come up. First, BT have requested permission to erect a 10 metre mast/antennae just outside 63 Mount Ephraim. We have objected, since this would be on the very spot where the Conservation Report says that the finest views of the Town are to be had. The Planning Committee have turned down the application, but I sense that we have not heard the last of this matter.

Secondly, the Invicta Hospital Trust, which owns the Homeopathic Hospital, also owns the garden which runs down to 63 Inner London Road. Patrick Shovelton has looked after this memorial garden for many years. The hospital seeks planning permission to build a house on this garden. We have again objected, since here the Conservation Report regrets earlier in-fills in Inner London Road, citing the loss when Rose Hill was built over. The Planning Committee have also turned down this application, but the hospital have called for an Inspector's report, the date of the hearing at present is not known. We intend to be present.

David Wakefield

Friends' Dinner

18th January 2002

Tickets from Sylvia Luckhurst

See attached form

New in 2001

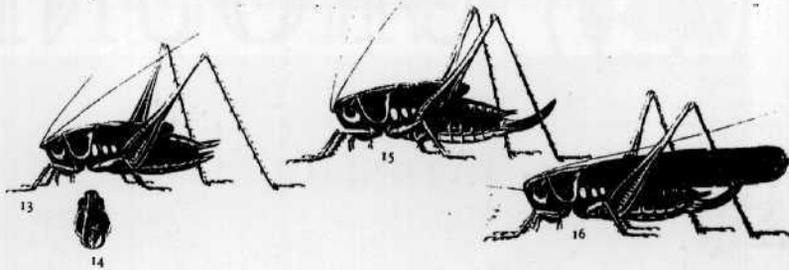


Plate 1: Tetigoniinae

Figs: 6,9-16,xi;7-8,xi

This year's most conspicuous addition to the growing list of insects on the Commons is a genuine new arrival. Roesel's Bush Cricket is a bulky green or brown insect with the characteristic long thread-like antennae that distinguish crickets from grasshoppers. It can be recognised by the yellow markings on the sides of its body, although it may well be heard rather than seen. Fortunately its ability to hide away in long grass is no obstacle to detecting it, as its weird song which 'has been likened to that of an electrical discharge such as is emitted by pylon cables in damp weather' is very distinctive. In fact it sounds like nothing else in the world of nature. Roesel's is a cricket which until recently was reckoned as quite a rarity, being restricted to the Thames marshes and east coast sites. However, since 1985 it has for some unknown reason been able to expand its distribution and it has now reached the Tunbridge Wells area. Two were found on separate occasions in high summer on Tunbridge Wells Common, in the grassland in the vicinity of Wellington Rocks, and we can expect this species to establish itself as a permanent resident. Interestingly enough, another formerly rare cricket, the Long-winged Conehead, underwent a similar expansion of range a few years ago and has now become a well established resident on the Commons.

Demoiselles are among the smaller members of the dragonfly order known as damselflies. They have metallic greenish bodies, and the males are distinguished from all other dragonflies by their heavily marked wings. As a result they can look confusingly like butterflies in flight, especially if they are encountered unexpectedly away from water. Demoiselles prefer to breed in streams rather than still water, so they are unlikely to become permanent residents of the Commons. They may, however, visit occasionally, and the commoner of the two British species, the Banded Demoiselle, was spotted beside Brighton Lake some years ago. As its name suggests, this has a broad dark band across its wings in the male. The rarer species, the Beautiful Demoiselle, has the wings of the male entirely dark indigo blue, appearing almost black in flight. The

Beautiful Demoiselle is something of a speciality of the southern part of Tunbridge Wells, breeding in the River Grom near High Rocks and in the various small woodland streams of the county border. This year a single male appeared around the Marlpit ponds on Rusthall Common, having no doubt travelled from the High Rocks area in Happy Valley.

As regular readers will recall, solitary bees and wasps are an important part of the biodiversity of the Commons, which provide a refuge for many scarce and rare species. The Hairy-footed Flower Bee looks rather like a medium-sized brown (male) or black (female) bumblebee but is much faster and more agile in its flight. It is one of the earliest spring bees and has adapted itself very well to life in local parks and cemeteries, where it feeds and gathers food for its young from a select group of non-native flowers, being very choosy in the types it will visit. Its wild habitat in this area has proved elusive, but this year I discovered that it lives on the Commons, where it uses gorse as its preferred flower. The bushes around Toad Rock seem particularly good places to find it.

Three solitary bees and wasps, added to the Commons list in 2001, are also new records for the Tunbridge Wells area. The Pointed Mining Bee is an elusive insect flying very early in the year and visiting willow catkins, while Enslin's Black Wasp is one of several related species that nest in burrows in dead wood. Both are nationally notable species, as is the Brussels Mimic Wasp which, at the time of the most recently published survey (1991) of scarce and threatened bees and wasps, was known to survive at only about twelve sites in Britain. This last species is the largest of a small group of slender black and red wasps which nest in sandy ground and feed their young on leafhoppers which they hunt among the foliage of trees. The two females so far recorded from the Commons were nesting at the foot of the rocks at Happy Valley.

Ian Beavis

XPWIT

LOOKING BACK

Show a good idea

96m YEARS AGO: From the Kent & Sussex Comer, August 16, 1901: A NOVEL sight was witnessed on the Tunbridge Wells Common, the ground usually occupied by itinerant circuses, on Wednesday evening, when a pony and donkey show, arranged by the local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, took place.

Practically all will agree with us when we say that this society does a most laudable and admirable work in seeking to improve the condition of animals of all kinds, more especially beasts of burden. It was, therefore, an excellent idea to hold a show for ponies and donkeys used for working purposes, and there was a large crowd to see the judging.

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 via the attached form

Warden's Report



This has been a busy summer, and with the good weather extending into November, it looks as though we have reached the era of all the year round grass cutting.

Work on path improvements has taken place in several areas, notably Happy Valley and Common View, the diagonal path leading to the Queen Ann Oak and in Hungershall Park.

Heather re-generation has taken place, using seed from Ashdown Forest, notably in the area between the Spa Hotel and Fir Tree Road.

The pond in Cabbage Stalk Lane has been cleared, and we have cut down scrub surrounding ponds on Rusthall Common to allow in more light.

The volunteers have started work on scrub clearance at the Victoria Grove. Our programme of work through the winter is (first Sunday of the month):

November

Removal of gorse from Hungershall Park

December

Scrub clearance from Denny Bottom

January

Planting of small trees at the Spa

February

Scrub/general clearance Edgecumbe Rocks

We have made a clearance at Sweeps Corner, and storm damage work at Happy Valley. We have also had a clearance of weed from the Brighton Lake.

Seats have been installed on the racecourse, near the cricket pitch and at Happy Valley.

We are still faced with the problem of car parking on the edges of the Common. This is worst at Fir Tree Road and Hungershall Park. The Borough Council have been made aware of the problem, and we have suggested double yellow lines in Fir Tree Road, at the point where it meets Major York's Road, as a minimum.

The trees paid for by the Friends have been installed at the corner of Fir Tree Road and seem to be doing well.

Steve Budden

Ian Beavis leading a walk on the Common

EMPERORS, ADMIRALS AND ORANGE-TIPS

Butterflies and Nature Conservation in the High Weald are explored in an illustrated talk by Museum Officer Ian Beavis

Friday 31 August 2001
7.15 pm

Admission Free



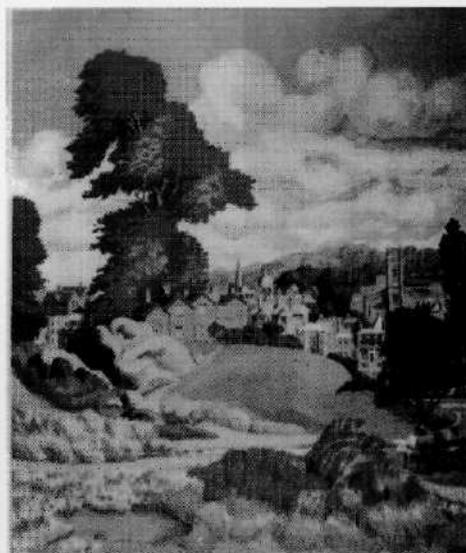
Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery
 Civic Centre, Mount Pleasant, Royal Tunbridge Wells



Tunbridge Wells

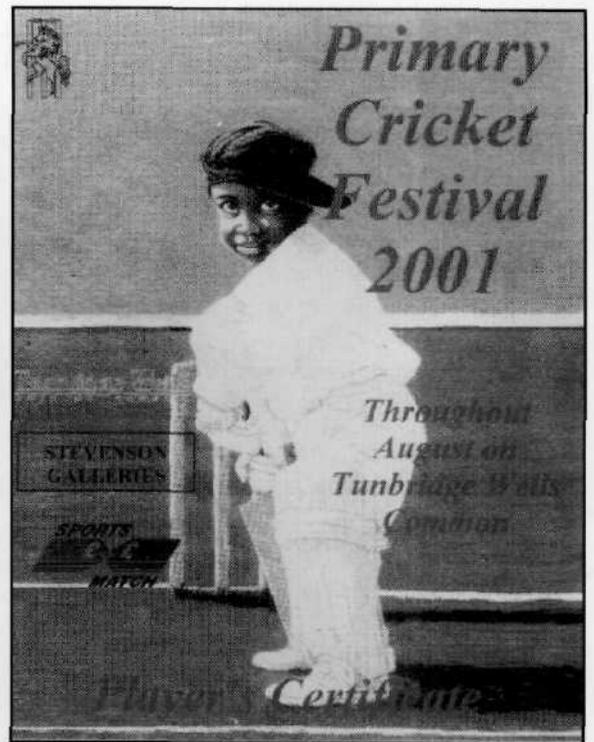


This poster came up for sale at Sotheby's in September. One of a series of Railway Art. Does anyone know how much it fetched?



Royal
Tunbridge Wells
Literature from Information Bureau Tunbridge Wells
SOUTHERN RAILWAY

Primary Schools Cricket on the Common 2001



Friends' Tea Party

