



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS
AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

Chairman's Report

I write this with one thought uppermost in my mind: the success we have achieved over the fight to save the garden at 63 London Road!

This is the garden which has been tended carefully for many years by our previous Chairman, Patrick Shovelton. There was a house on the site many years ago, but this was demolished when the Homeopathic Hospital was built in the early thirties, almost certainly to improve the view from its large southwest facing windows.

When the Conservation Report was produced a couple of years ago, Philip Whitbourne warned us that it would need to be very carefully written if it was not to be used by developers seeking to use it to justify their claims to build on prime sites in the centre of the Town. How right he was! Almost at once, along comes the Invicta Trust, current owners of the Homeopathic, seeking permission to build a house on the garden, using as a reason that there was a house there before, and that the gap in the building line is unsightly.

The Inspector appointed would have none of this: he has found instead '... That the two gaps, one at each end, add to the attractiveness...framing and emphasising ...', and has dismissed the appeal. Thus, the garden is preserved.

I have dwelt on this matter at some length since there are two points which need to be made. First, the Conservation Area report is a vital, living document, which has been used and must be used in future to preserve our town from unsightly development. Our thanks go to Philip Whitbourne, who did so much to ensure that the document went into sufficient detail to make this outturn possible.

Secondly, and more personally, I am delighted to have played some small part in all of this. For the past four years I have sat on the Borough Council as a Councillor and have seen decision after decision going



against what I perceive to be the best interests of the people of the town. And in almost all cases against the better judgement of the planning committees. The worst instance of all has been Telephone House, but there have been others. Flats built on unsuitable locations in the Frant Road, demolitions at Hawkenbury, the loss of our central cinema, none of which I seemed capable of doing anything about. At last, one small success!

We have had an excellent year. The tea-party was held in lovely weather at the Mount Edgecumbe Hotel, and the dinner was well attended at the Spa. We had an excellent talk on that occasion from Ian Beavis on the flora and fauna of the Commons.

Working parties have re-commenced in the winter months, and you might just be able to catch the last of these (otherwise they start again in October). One gets a tremendous sense of achievement after going on one, since there is so much to show at the end of a couple of hours for one's efforts.

Many thanks to all of you who sent in the survey forms. They make most interesting

reading. It would seem that the majority feel that the Committee is working roughly on the right lines, with some slight reservations about loss-making events such as Frolics.

Accordingly, for the Queen's Jubilee, the Committee have decided that the Friends will mark the occasion by planting trees. This accords well with local tradition, since we have many examples on the Commons of commemorative tree planting to mark Royal anniversaries.

We plan to make a change in the timing of our scheduled walks this year. Besides Ian's daytime walks, Steve will lead two evening walks, details you will find elsewhere in this newsletter. The hope is that a combination of a warm summer evening and the final destination, a convivial pub, will tempt you out.

We are lucky to have three articles in this newsletter which deal with flora and fauna. Besides Ian's usual offering (he deals with the impact on insects of our warming climate), and Steve's report on the groundwork he is undertaking on the Commons, we have a wonderful survey of the mushrooms and toadstools, likely to be found on the Commons from Keith Palmer. There is so much new knowledge here, that I really do think that we should ask him to come and speak to us. Meanwhile, he has set out clearly what he has found to date, but hints that there is more, much more still undiscovered. Why not go out and see if you can find something new, and then confront him with it when he comes to talk to us?

Finally, might I remind you of the AGM? This will be held on 27th March in the Town Hall. It is important to our Society that members participate in its running, at least on this annual occasion, since decisions are taken on your behalf which affect the Society's future. I hope that you can find the time to attend. As an additional bonus, Steve will give a slide show telling us about the work he has done on the Commons this past year.

I look forward to seeing you all there.

David Wakefield

The Shortest Winter

Is it global warming or natural climatic fluctuation? The experts are still not entirely certain on this point, but it is plain enough that here in the High Weald, as elsewhere in Britain, winters have in recent years become much milder than they were through most of the twentieth century. From a naturalist's point of view, winters have also become shorter. Plants have extended their flowering season at the end of the old year and have begun to bloom earlier in the new, and the active periods for insects and other small creatures have extended correspondingly. In 2001, it was widely noticed that even the life cycle of deciduous trees was changing, and that they were waiting much longer than usual to drop their leaves. As a result, the natural world's 'autumn' now spills over into December, while 'spring' begins in February.

At the end of last year, several late-flying insects beat all previous local records for their species. At Brighton Lake the **Common Darter** dragonfly, which always stays active much longer than its relatives, was in evidence as late as 5 December. The ivy blossom in the sheltered hollow beneath Mount Edgcumbe Rocks always attracts a number of autumnal butterflies which then take up residence, appearing there day after day whenever the sun shines. On 1 November, I was surprised to see two very worn male **Speckled Woods** vigorously engaged in a ritual battle for territory. In spring or summer, when the males stake claim to small unlit areas to monopolise passing females, this would be normal behaviour, but at the edge of winter it was very unexpected. For around five minutes the two rivals chased each other or spiralled around together, from almost ground level to high above the trees. I felt quite sorry for these two geriatric butterflies investing so much of their fading energy into what seemed to be a futile exercise,



as so far as I know there were no females left to fight over. However, their optimism was not after all unjustified, as shortly afterwards I saw a female sunning itself on dead leaves near Brighton Lake. Interestingly, it looked very fresh, suggesting that at least one autumn caterpillar had completed its life cycle before the onset of winter, instead of following its normal pattern of hibernating in that stage.

Those resident butterflies that hibernate as adults, like the **Brimstone** and the **Peacock**, tend to hide themselves away in early or mid-autumn, whatever the weather. From their point of view, there is no reason to waste energy flying in a season that will soon be unsuitable for breeding. The **Red Admiral**, however, has a less well-developed hibernating instinct, because until recently it was rarely capable of surviving an English winter. Traditionally, the **Red Admiral** was not regarded as a resident British species, because its numbers were mainly dependent on migration from the Continent and there was little evidence for successful hibernation. Nowadays, mild winters are enabling increasing numbers to bridge the gap from autumn to spring, but they still seem to have difficulty in settling down for their winter sleep. Last year a group of Red Admirals remained active around the ivy at Mount Edgcumbe Rocks until 24 November.

At least one of these **Red Admirals** survived the winter to appear on a gorse bush near Wellington Rocks on 16 February 2002, its formerly scarlet bands now faded to dull orange. Despite the mild sunny conditions on that day, it was the only butterfly to be seen. The old established hibernators like the **Peacock** seem to have an uncanny knack of knowing when mild conditions are firmly established, only coming out in numbers when there is no longer any risk of a reversion to winter. However, a wide variety of other insects were active on 16 February, including ladybirds, hoverflies, shield-bugs, queen bumblebees, and, most

Annual General Meeting Notice

is given that the
Annual General Meeting

of the Friends of
Tunbridge Wells
and Rusthall Commons
(Reg. Charity 1013975)

will be held on

Wednesday, 27 March
2002
at 1930 hrs

in the Council Chamber,
Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge
Wells

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

Working Parties

First Sunday from
October to March
10.00am
Fir Tree Road car park

impressive of all, several hundred Clark's Mining Bees flying over their nest site on the sunny side of the boundary ditch outside the Spa Hotel.

Ian Beavis

WARDEN'S REPORT:

February 2002

We have, thankfully, had a good winter in terms of the amount of work accomplished. It has been quite a relief after last year's appalling conditions. We took advantage of the dry period prior to the New Year to start work on a new pond on Rusthall Common. We have cleared large amounts of holly scrub to expose what we had thought was an old pond, but now that the site is clear, I am beginning to suspect that it may have been an old marl-pit or quarry. This coming summer we will excavate the silt out of the bowl and see what is there. If we are lucky, we will find we have a pond that will hold water, but it may be necessary to import clay to seal the base. The site is adjacent to the 'Tarry Path', next to the colony of Coralroot bittercress.

We have also re-opened an old pond on Tunbridge Wells Common next to Cabbage Stalk Lane. At the moment this pond is very shallow but we will carry out work over the coming summer to excavate a central sump to make sure that it holds some water throughout the year. Amphibians such as frogs and toads that only rely on the pond during the breeding season can cope perfectly well with a site that dries up during the summer through evaporation but creatures such as dragonflies spend several years in the water during their larval stages.

Extensive clearance, again mainly of holly scrub, has been carried out at Happy Valley around the 'Sweeps Cave' and the dramatic views south towards Ashdown Forest have

been opened up. In the same area we have improved access from St Paul's Church with the construction of a new path to avoid the swamp-like conditions that occur in the area most winters.

Most of you will have noticed that the path running from Castle Road to Victoria Grove has also been upgraded. This path too was badly affected each winter, becoming eroded and dangerous by rainwater run-off. It has now been given a tarmac surface thanks to the generosity of the Freehold Tenants group, who have also funded the previously motioned work on the Rusthall pond and the Sweeps Cave. By the time this is published I hope that work will also have taken place to improve the much-used section of path that goes from Castle Road to the Forum.

The volunteers have been busy. They carried out excellent work at the top of Harmony Street to expose some quite dramatic rock outcrops and have planted new trees to provide screening from road noise near the Spa Hotel, as well as undertaking the annual tasks of clearing scrub and coppicing gorse. Edcumbe Rocks have again been cleared of invading bramble and are looking better than they have for some time and the same type of work has been undertaken at the Toad Rock.

We seem to have had to put in a lot of new posts this year, to try to solve the problems with erosion and illegal parking. Some of you may have noticed the new posts outside Thackeray's Restaurant and they have also been installed near the petrol station by the

Forum as well as at Rusthall Elms. We have been using railway sleepers stood upright in the ground. As well as being big enough to make even a lorry think twice about tangling with them, they look surprisingly appropriate for the area.

We have, unfortunately, lost some old trees in this year's storms. A large poplar was lost at Lower Green Road, Rusthall when it was badly damaged and had to be taken down. To make matters worse, the tree in question was screening a particularly ugly gas installation. The Friends have donated a very nice Holm Oak, which has been planted in the area, but of course it is not big enough to screen the installation, nor have we been able to plant it in the same place that the poplar was. The good news is that Transco have indicated that they would be willing to fund the planting of a screen around the site, when they have carried out maintenance work later this year. I have in mind something like the hedge that screens the bottle-banks around the corner at Common View.

We have also had to take down some of the very high profile tress outside the Spa Hotel. Three limes have been severely pollarded on the advice of the Borough Council's Tree Officer and a large beech was so badly damaged that it had to be removed completely. I plan to replace these tress next winter and the three pollarded limes will be coaxed along for as long as possible, and hopefully, by the time they have to be removed, the replacements will have achieved a reasonable size.

Steve Budden

Dates for 2002

Litter Pick

14 April	1000 hrs	Fir Tree Road car park	(for those wishing to cover TW Common)
	1000 hrs	Common View	(for those wishing to cover Rusthall Common)

Walks by Steve Budden

Wednesday 23 May	1830 hrs	An evening walk	Starting at Thackeray's	Finishing at Mount Edcumbe Hotel
Wednesday 5 June		An evening walk	Starting at Common View	Finishing at the Beacon Hotel

Walks and Talks by Ian Beavis

Saturday 18 May	1030 hrs	Meet at Toad Rock	Approximately 2 hour walk covering Rusthall Common
Saturday 27 July		Meet at Thackeray's	Approximately 2 hour walk covering TW Common
Saturday 20 July		TW Museum part of Nat. Arch Day	A talk
Saturday 21 July		Walk on Rusthall Common	'6000 years of Local History'

The Fungi of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons

With careful searching, a ramble over the Commons at the peak of the fungi season in October, following a wet and humid spell of weather, will be bound to produce a wide range of mushrooms and toadstools, and reveal the diversity of forms that these organisms take. I say careful searching, because those which grow on the woodland floor, the majority indeed, can sometimes be remarkably difficult to spot on the newly-fallen carpet of leaves.

The fungi which spring up in the Autumn woods are merely the fruiting bodies (bearing microscopic spores rather than visible seeds) of fungal threads called mycelium, that spread underground, throwing up above the surface in due season the fungi which delight us with their colours, or perhaps repel us by their shapes and smells! Sometimes the fungal threads (also referred to as hyphae) bunch together to form visible branched strands which can creep behind bark as in the case of the Honey Fungus (*Armillaria mellea*), so dreaded by gardeners. Being black in colour the mycelium of Honey Fungus resembles boot laces. It can of course grow (and indeed does) to its heart's content on the Commons.

Most terricolous (ground-loving) fungi possess spore-bearing plates underneath the cap, called gills, that radiate out from the centre like spokes of a bicycle wheel, but one large family called the Boletes have a different arrangement, for the underside of the cap is of a spongy texture covered with minute openings (called pores), the ends of tubes the sides of which carry the spores. Members of this family range from the highly edible Penny Bun (*Boletus edulis*) found on the Commons, to the thankfully rare, Devil's Boletus (*Boletus satanas*), a highly poisonous species.

The Puff-balls (*Lycoperdon spp.*) and

the Earth-ball (*Scleroderma citrinum*), both observed on the Commons this October, have their millions of spores massed within the sphere they form which splits on maturity to reveal the dusty mass which is spread in 'puffs of smoke' by raindrops or, even more effectively, by children and dogs treading on them!

A tall handsome mushroom is the Parasol (*Lepiota procera*), another highly-esteemed edible species, to be found not far from Wellington Rocks. A whole series of generally smallish mushrooms actually exude a milk-like latex when the gills are broken. This 'milk' can be sparse or abundant, mild, hot or bitter tasting, and in some cases be coloured yellow or orange rather than white. *Lactarius subdulcis* and *L. turpis* (the aptly-named Ugly Milk-cap) were both seen.

Russulas can have all sorts of different cap colours - I saw the Blackish-purple (*Russula atropurpurea*), Common Yellow (*R. ochroleuca*) and Blackening, (*R. nigricans*) Russulas, all of which give an indication of their colour. A particularly beautiful fungus is the small Amethyst Deceiver (*Laccaria amethystea*) which has a brilliant deep purple colour after rain. It is common though it can be difficult to locate.

Old timber, logs or rotting trees are also excellent places to find fungi such as the Razor-strop Fungus (*Piptoporus betulinus*) on Birch. This fungus was apparently at one time used to make the straps upon which barbers sharpened their razors, hence its name. Like the Razor-strop, Many-zoned Polypore (*Coriolus versicolor*) is a bracket fungus growing like a narrow shelf from a tree trunk. It is a good

deal smaller but like many species of this kind has spores rather than gills. Blushing Bracket (*Daedaleopsis confragosa*) which can turn pink when handled fresh, was also found on Birch. The Latin scientific name is derived from the Greek myth about Daedalus, who was said to have built a labyrinth or maze in which King Minos of Crete housed his pet monster, the Minotaur, named after the pores of the fungus, which are quite large, of varying shape and labyrinthine in character. The gilled Sulphur-tuft (*Hypholoma fasciculare*) grows in large clusters in such places and often too, from wood buried underground.

Finally, mention should be made of the Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*), the red white-spotted mushroom of the fairy tale books. Hallucinogenic and poisonous, this species grows in association with the Birch, forming what is called a symbiotic or mycorrhizal relationship with the roots of that tree. This also accounts for the apparent association

many other fungal species have with that particular species of tree.

Incidentally, the white spots are actually remnants of the veil or covering which rises from the ground and splits as the toadstool within expands; these remnants can often get washed off in the rain, leaving a plain red spotted cap.

Among other species found on the Commons during my October ramble were the

Brown Roll-rim (*Paxillus involutus*), the Shaggy Ink-cap (*Coprinus comatus*), the Fairy Ring Mushroom (*Marasmius oreades*) and the forbidding Poison Pie (*Hebeloma crustuliniforme*). Only a relatively small area of the two commons was searched and there must be many other species of fungi out there waiting discovery.

Keith Palmer

