



Registered Charity No. 1013975

COMMON GROUND NEWSLETTER

The Society founded for '... the conservation, maintenance, preservation and peaceful enjoyment for the benefit of the public of the Commons by such means as the Society in consultation with the Conservators for the Commons thinks fit'.

Issue 29. Autumn 2002

Diary of Forthcoming Events

Walks with the Warden, Steve Budden

Saturday 10 May 2003

Meet at 11.00 hrs, Fir Tree Road Car Park, covering Tunbridge Wells Common

Saturday 24 May 2003

Meet at 11.00 hrs, St Paul's Church, covering Rusthall Common

Walks with Ian Beavis

Saturday 17 May 2003

Meet at 10.00 hrs, Toad Rock, walk over Rusthall Common

Saturday 9 August 2003

Meet at 10.30 hrs, Thackerays, walk over Tunbridge Wells Common

Work Parties

Meet at Fir Tree Road Car Park

Saturday 5 October 2002

Saturday 2 November 2002

Saturday 7 December 2002

Saturday 4 January 2003

Saturday 1 February 2003

Saturday 1 March 2003

Litter Pick

Saturday 5 April 2003

Meet at 10.00 hrs at either Fir Tree Road Car Park or Common View, Rusthall

Annual Dinner

Friday 31 January 2003

At the Spa Hotel, 19.00 hrs for 19.45 hrs
For Members and their guests. Booking form enclosed.

Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 26 March 2003

At the Town Hall 19.00 hrs.

A View from the Top

It is hoped members will like our new logo. Thanks are due to Douglas Hall ARCA, one of our members, for the design and it seemed appropriate to replace the original heavy looking 'hat' by putting our title around the perimeter instead. The frame used previously has been removed. I wish also to thank Richard Benoy, a comparatively recent member, who came forward in answer to my cry for help by offering his experience with publicity/promotional work and he has been co-opted on to the Committee.

As our financial year end approaches preparations are in hand not only to request existing members to renew membership, but to persuade all those who qualify to sign a Gift Aid declaration so that the Society may claim maximum possible rebates from the Inland Revenue. Gift Aid forms are enclosed (over 200 of them in all) for members who did not respond last time, together with Membership Renewal forms for those members who do not pay by Bankers Order. Our Treasurer looks forward to a good response and, in anticipation of everyone's co-operation, extends his thanks.

A new Membership Form has been printed. It is hoped considerably to increase our membership during our next financial year (2002-2003), whilst at the same time re-establishing a worthwhile Corporate class as well as a new Small Business class. A Membership Secretary is still required to work with our Treasurer and I am disappointed to have failed in this as yet, not least because George Lawson is a very nice chap and so easy to work with.

In Common Ground, issue 28, I addressed what I saw as a need to raise our profile and people's image of our Commons. A most important aspect towards achieving this is to establish regular publicity of good quality, and discussions are taking place with a firm as to how best to achieve this and to handle it at no cost to our funds. It is hoped we should see some tangible results in the local media commencing in October and either Richard Benoy or myself will be interested to hear readers' comments in due course. It is always helpful to the ultimate health of

any organisation to hear from people whatever their views may be. As an experiment the print order of this issue of Common Ground is to be increased with a view to distributing it throughout libraries and other centres. The cost of this exercise will be minimal.

The season's first Work Party (7th September) was made up of eight volunteers and one hopes for better support in the future. Steve Budden can cope with more people - please note his comments in his Warden's Report (page 4). His walks during the Summer were very poorly attended and I cannot understand why because they are always so interesting and informative. Apart from anything else they provide an opportunity to keep up to date with the management, restoration and development of each of the Commons.

A year or so ago we met the threat of a planning application by BT Cellular for a mast and two cabinets sited on the edge of the Common at Mount Ephraim. It was turned down but we need to be very aware of the fact that all mobile phone companies perceive to need to establish perfect reception in every nook and cranny of the area. It appears that preliminary soundings and negotiations are perpetually continuing with local authorities including Tunbridge Wells. We all need to keep alert and watchful to the danger of such threats.

We did finally get some real summer weather and, as Steve Budden reports, it has resulted in unusually lush growth. The dry, hot weather coinciding with school holidays, led to what appears to have become an annual problem of partying youths, drinking, eating and lighting fires and leaving litter and debris of all sorts on both Commons. Much of the behaviour is abhorrent and we will be seeking discussions with the Conservators and the Police, as well as the Council, during the winter months to see what action can be taken. Apart from this seasonal problem youth elements of the town continually cause trouble in the area adjacent to The

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Forum. Discussions between all the parties concerned (Conservators, Council and Police) seem to be advancing and a watching brief will be maintained. Apart from anything else, care must be taken that any remedial action does not remove the problem elements to other areas of the Common.

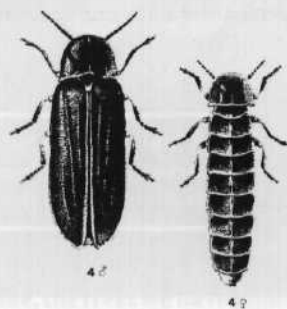
I wish to acknowledge on members behalf the efforts of George Lawson and Dan Goddard. George has been our Treasurer for over four years and during that time has taken over several other ancillary responsibilities. It is only since I took over the Chair that I have realised what a tower of strength he is to the whole of the organisation. Members should be aware that while controlling our funds, he also looks after membership records, distribution lists for Common Ground, stocks of items for sale, our notice boards and notices in the libraries and I am ever hopeful that a volunteer will come forward to assist him to spread the load.

A month or two back we recovered from the

Conservators the £2000 which the Friends contributed in 1998 towards the cost of installing maps/interpretation panels. Resulting from the patient efforts of Don Goddard we will be erecting two panels this year, one at Common View, the other at Fir Tree Car Park. Having experienced how these first panels perform we shall hope to erect more, possibly containing more specific information about different sites.

Finally, I feel it sad that Beating the Retreat on Sunday 15th September was not better supported. It was an impressive event on the Lower Cricket Ground organised by the Royal British Legion and the Royal Air Force Association supported by the Borough Council in celebration of Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee. I was not aware of the event ahead of our producing the last Common Ground and our local press seemed not to deem it worth publicising. Bearing in mind the Council's decision not officially to celebrate this year, readers may be interest to read what happened on the Lower Cricket Ground on 22nd June 1897.

Look Out for Glow-Worms



Everyone has heard of glow-worms. By reputation they are among the most popular of insects, with a special air of romance and mystery about them. But how many people have actually seen one, at least in recent times? In earlier generations, when country folk walked home after their day's work along unlit lanes on a summer's evening, glow-worms shining on grassy banks would have been a familiar sight. But when do town dwellers like most of us ever walk in the countryside at night?

Although nowadays they are unnoticed by most people, glow-worms do still occur in the Tunbridge Wells area, and they are probably much more widespread than the sparse reported sightings would suggest. In recent years, they have been recorded from Broadwater Forest and Hargate Forest on the southern edge of the town, and also from the extensive woodlands between Pembury and Tudeley. In present day circumstances, these are mostly daytime sightings. Glow-worms can occasionally be encountered by day crawling across footpaths or other areas of bare ground, but most people are unlikely to recognise them for what they are.

I have often wondered whether glow-worms live on the Commons, which should be a suitable habitat and which support many much rarer creatures. So I was pleased to hear that on an evening in July a number were seen in the grounds of the Beacon Hotel at Happy Valley. Since this land is contiguous with Rusthall Common, they are more or less certain to be found there too,

and there is a very good chance of them also being on Tunbridge Wells Common.

Despite its name, the glow-worm is in fact a beetle, related to the fireflies of southern Europe. Both sexes and all the early stages are luminous to some extent, but the brightest light is produced by the female. The female is entirely wingless, and with its long segmented body looks nothing like a beetle; in fact it differs very little from the larval stage, but since the nature of the beetle larva has never entered popular consciousness it came to be known as a 'worm'. The male, which is less often seen, is much more of a conventional beetle, with brown wing-cases protecting its hind wings. Glow-worms generate their greenish light by means of a carefully controlled chemical reaction between two substances that are produced in their light-bearing organs, these organs being transparent externally but with a reflective layer on the inside. Light production is extraordinarily efficient, generating virtually no waste heat, an achievement that was beyond the limits of human technology until recent times.

Although the glow-worm's light undoubtedly serves to confuse and deter predators, its main function is to bring the two sexes together. Females sit conspicuously along banks, paths and woodland edges signalling to the males, which are equipped with fully developed wings to travel swiftly in search of them and large eyes to spot the light at a distance. What exactly the adults feed on still seems to be something of a mystery, but the larvae are predators, attaching to slugs and snails, undeterred by the fact that their slow moving prey is often much bigger than they are.

It is pleasing to know that these attractive and fascinating creatures are living happily in the vicinity of the Commons. The adults are active from June onwards into the Autumn, until the weather becomes too cold for them. I would be glad to hear of any sightings from either of the Commons.

EVENTS

The Committee has been reconsidering the Events Programme.

Walks with the Warden have been poorly supported this year. This was very disappointing, especially for Steve Budden who is always so willing to give us his time. Each time one walks with Steve there is something new to be learned. In 2003 we aim to give more publicity to our walks and hopefully new members will have been recruited... who will be interested.

Perhaps it is worth emphasising that these walks are the best way of hearing about the current plans for conservation, restoration schemes and general maintenance of our Commons as distinct from the walks with Ian Beavis which concentrate on the flora and fauna as well as historic details.

The introduction of **new events** is being considered, such as

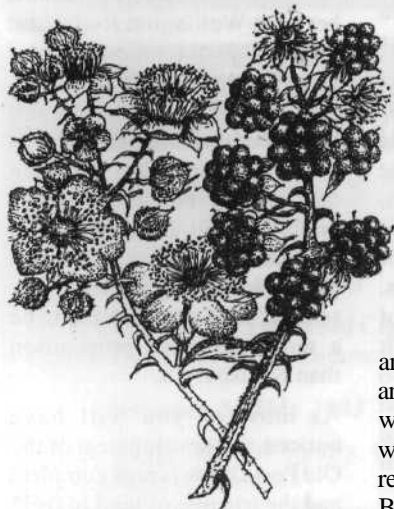
- Treasure Hunts on the Commons
- Special Interest. Lectures/talks
- Visits to other sites

Members' are requested to make their views and suggestions known to the Committee before their next meeting on Sunday 24th November.

Plants on the Common

Keats called Autumn, the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness and some examples of the fruits can be seen on both the Commons.

The best known are the berries of the BLACKBERRY or BRAMBLE - *Rubus fruticosus* agg. I am sure you have all



BLACKBERRY
Rubus Fruticosus agg

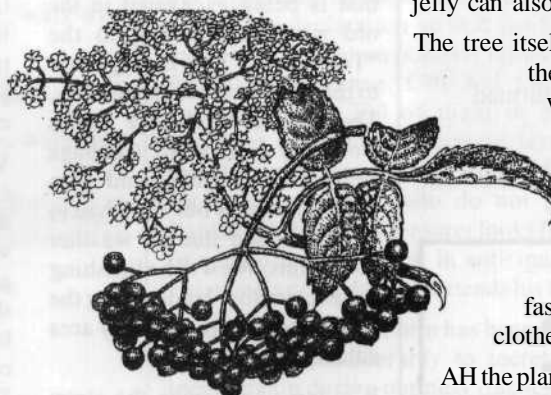
gone blackberrying at some time, in fact men have been doing it for a very long time as the seeds of blackberry were found in the stomach of a Neolithic man excavated in the south east of England in the early 20th Century. And did you know that the fruit has to be picked before Michaelmas or the Devil will spoil them and they lose all their flavour?

There are over three hundred species of Bramble in our flora and according to

experts quite a few can be found on our Commons.

Another edible fruit to be found in September is the ELDERBERRY - *Sambucus nigra*. There are quite a lot of young Elders to be found and occasionally a mature tree is seen. These trees are conspicuous, both in June, when they are white with blossom, and in Autumn when the black juicy fruit is ripe.

Most parts of this plant are useful, the wood was used in toy-making, the leaves when strewn about the barns were said to help keep mice away, the flowers are a recognised ingredient in eye and skin lotions and both they and the ripe fruit make excellent wines. The berries when boiled with sugar are still a country remedy for coughs and colds. But beware, the green parts of the plant, the young bark, the leaves and the unripe fruit contain prussic acid and are very



COMMON ELDER
Sambucus nigra

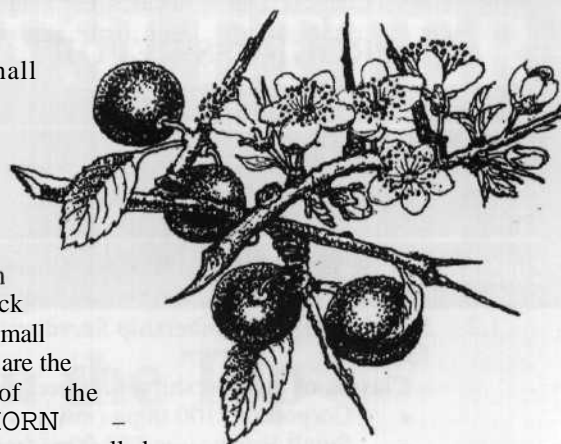
poisonous.

On Rusthall Common in Spring can be seen clouds of white blossom against black branches of small trees. These are the flowers of the BLACKTHORN -

Prunus spinosa, so called because they flower before the leaves as opposed to the Whitethorn or Hawthorn which come later with the leaves in May. The fruits of the Blackthorn are known as Sloes, which are like very small plums and are one of the ancestors of our many varieties of cultivated plums. They start to ripen at the end of summer and at first are covered with a dense, blue bloom, later turning purple to glossy black. They are used mostly for making sloe wine or sloe gin but sloe cheese and jelly can also be made.

The tree itself was also useful, the lower branches were used to make walking sticks, the bark was used to make ink and even its thorns were used as fastenings on the clothes of the poor.

AH the plants so far have had edible fruits but not so the WOODY NIGHTSHADE - *Solanum dulcamara*, a relation of the Deadly Nightshade, but although still poisonous, not quite so lethal. Its pretty purple and yellow flowers can be seen on long, clambering stalks twining through the hedges during the Summer and they are followed in the Autumn by very attractive drooping, egg shaped berries. These start green then turn yellow and finally red. This plant was known in Medieval times as Felonwort, not felon in our modern term of criminal, but meaning abscess or whitlow. The berries were cut

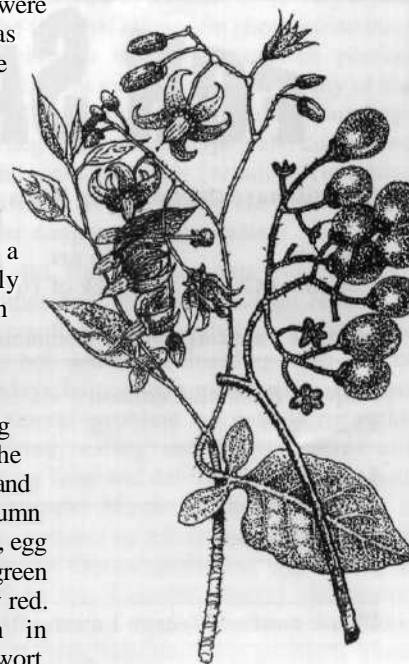


BLACKTHORN
Prunus spinosa

in half and bound over the wound.

Another name for it is Bittersweet because if the berries were tasted, at first they were very bitter but later tasted sweeter. Hence its Latin name *dulcamara dulca* - sweet, *mara* - bitter.

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2002



WOODY NIGHTSHADE
Solanum dulcamara

Reliance House - Update

Nothing official has been received from Rydon; it is probably fair to report that progress following the first has been slower than Rydon Homes had hoped. Some areas of the remaining structure are still unsafe and rebuilding of interior walls will be... than has perhaps been hoped. Minor alterations to the original plans are being discussed with the Planners and when agree we should have the opportunity to examine them. The intention to preserve the original external features of the building remains.

PROGRESS REPORT

Strategy Items

1 Management/Administration

- 1.1 Committee Structure
- two vacancies remain
- one sub-committee formed
- publicity covered
- 1.2 Membership - Membership Secretary still to be found
- Classes of membership redefined namely:
• Corporate £100.00pa (minimum)
• Small Businesses £25.00pa (minimum)
• Individuals £8.00
• Family £10.00
- Gift Aid registered
- New Membership Forms produced
- 1.3 Publicity
- Secretary appointed
- Publicity specialist engaged
- Articles offered to St Paul's and King Charles Church magazines,

2 Projects

- 2.1 Furniture
- repair and reconditioning of seats under way
- 2 new seats reserved - new stock awaited
- 2.2 Interpretation Panels
- design and details of first two finalised and orders placed.
- 2.3 Highways
- no progress yet; sub committee to be formed

FOR SALE

We still have the following items for sale:

Notelets) 25p per
Christmas Cards) pack of 10

Maps of Tunbridge Wells Common £1.50 each

Maps of Rusthall Common
£1.50 each

Mugs £3.50 each

Jigsaw Puzzles £4.50 each

Please contact George Lawson 01892 524019

WARDEN'S REPORT

Once again, the weather this summer has given rise to very lush conditions. So much so that we have struggled to keep up with the routine clearance work on the paths and rides and they are still in need of our final major cut. We will of course get all of the work finished somehow or other and, on the bright side, the trees we have planted over the past few winters have put on superb growth!

The slopes below Mount Ephraim between St Helena and Gibraltar Cottage are due to be cleared again this Autumn. Following that, we will be investigating the possibility of re-exposing the rock outcrops. This will require the removal of much of the soil that has built up over the last hundred or so years. This is likely to be an expensive and awkward operation that will be spread over the next few years.

Work is just starting on the restoration of two ponds; one on each Common. The one on Rusthall Common is a new pond that is being excavated in the old marl-pit adjacent to the "Tarry Path". This is very close to the coralroot-bittercress site. The one on Tunbridge Wells Common is next to Cabbage Stalk Lane. This pond was started last year but work had to be suspended due to weather conditions. We will be finishing the excavation, landscaping the banks and creating a boggy area adjacent to the pond.

It is ten years since the steep slopes between the 101 Steps and the Beacon Hotel were cleared. The scrub is now returning and the views are becoming lost. We will therefore be clearing the slopes again this winter. As well as restoring the views, this work will be of value to the rare solitary bees and wasps that require exposed sandy soil on such sites.

The final section of the path running from Castle Road through Victoria Grove and behind the cricket pavilion will be surfaced this autumn. The surfacing of the previous section

last year, which was funded by the Freehold Tenants Group, has made a huge difference and I am sure that this year's work will be a relief to the many people who regularly use this path.

The volunteers are in action again; the first task for this year was the removal of scrub oak and birch invading the grassland between Wellington Rocks and Victoria Grove. Work parties this year are being held on the first Saturday in the month instead of the first Sunday as in previous years. This is being tried to try and tempt more volunteers out. So far it has not worked. What are you doing on 5 October? Surely hacking back scrub at the Toad Rock has to be a more attractive proposition than Sainsbury's.

As most of you will have noticed, the development of the Old Post Office is now complete and the triangle of land in front of it has been restored. It is looking rather scruffy at the moment as the grass has not yet fully taken and every time we try to mow it the machines start to lift the turf. We will tidy up the area as soon as possible and plan to plant a specimen tree on each triangle this winter.

We will be carrying out clearances of damaged or dangerous trees as usual this winter. The effects of the 1987 and 1991 storms are still making themselves felt with damaged branches that have slowly been rotted, ripping away from trees. Some of you may have noticed the oak just to the north of Castle Road between the two footpaths that recently dropped a major bough across the path. There are, I suspect, still many more similar trees across the Commons. Fortunately, none of the trees identified this year has been as prominent as the trees outside the Spa Hotel that we had to remove last year.