



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'.

Registered Charity No. 1013975

Issue 30. Spring 2003

Diary of Forthcoming Events

AGM

Wednesday 26 March

(see separate notice) and illustrated presentation by the Warden, Steve Budden.

Spring Litter Pick

Saturday 5 April

Meeting at 10.00 hrs at either Fir Tree Car Park or Common View, Rusthall.

Walks

with the Warden, Steve Budden

Saturday 10 May

Meet at 10.30 hrs at Fir Tree Road Car Park.

Saturday 31st May - meet at 10.30 hrs at St Paul's Church.

Walks

with Dr Ian Beavis

Saturday 17 May

Meet at 10.30 hrs at Toad Rock.

Saturday 9th August

Meet at 10.30 hrs at Thackerays House

Tea Party Outing

Sunday 13 July

Finchcocks (see separate panel)

Autumn Litter Pick

Saturday 25 September

Meet 10.00 am at Fir Tree Road Car Park or at Common View, Rusthall.

Work Parties

Saturday 6 September

Saturday 4 October

Saturday 1 November

Saturday 6 December

A View from the Top

Oh dear! A misprint in the separate green 'fixture card' Diary of Events sent out with Common Ground Issue 29 reads '28th March - Annual General Meeting'. The AGM is, of course, Wednesday 26th March. Congratulations to Sylvia, our Secretary, the only one of us to notice! There is a vacancy for a proof reader (an equal opportunity position).

This edition contains the formal notice of our AGM, my Annual Report and the Accounts for the year to end September 2002. I intend the formal business (what I call the boring bits) should not take too long in order to give

time for questions, comments and discussion. After all, it is your opportunity to air your views and for the Committee better to judge where we should be aiming to further our objects.

The responses to the questionnaire circulated with Issue 27 were, as reported in the Summer, both illuminating and helpful despite the diversity of views they contained. It must surely help our health for as many members as can to come face to face with their Committee to expand on this previous exercise. We will then move on to listen to the Warden, Steve Budden, present to use another of his scintillating

illustrated talks about his work, the year's progress and the future objectives he has.

I feel there is a significant number of our members who have never heard Steve make one of his presentations: They have missed a real opportunity, as anyone who attended our recent Annual Dinner will confirm.

This year we have been confined to Committee Rooms 'A' and 'B' in the Town Hall but there should be plenty of room and there should be no problem with the acoustics. I am looking forward to meeting you there.

Rhys Revell

ANNUAL DINNER

Sixty-six members and guests attended this event at the Spa Hotel on Friday 31st January. Judging by the favourable comments made by many of those present an enjoyable time was had by all.

Due to snow and ice a few people could not make it to the event and these included our advertised speaker. True to words of the old song 'There's a silver lining/through the dark cloud shining' the stand in speakers, at short notice, did the gathering proud. Our past Chairman and Founder, Patrick Shovelton, most interestingly talked us through how the Friends came to be established. Admirably setting the scene, touching on the way the problems of maintenance work pre- and sub-

hurricane, somewhat reluctant Conservators and how the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation came to prepare the Management Plan which led to the appointment of a Warden to carry it through. Steve Budden, the Warden, then took over the microphone to take the story beyond 1992. In doing so he chose to emphasize the importance to the Commons of the 'Friends' and the valuable contribution they make in various ways to the benefit of the Commons. After the Chairman briefly rounded off these performances everyone seemed much enthused and two new members were promptly enrolled.

Tea Party Outing

proposed for
Sunday, 13th July
2003

at Finchcocks,
Goudhurst.

1500hrs ~ Welcome talk followed by tea at £6 to include Garden ticket.

House visit and music available for £4 extra.

Numbers are limited. Please contact Sylvia Luckhurst indicating transport requirements.

The last twelve months have been something of a learning curve for me with more to do than I had anticipated. It has been a challenge and I hope it will continue thus otherwise life might be less enjoyable. Regrettably the downside is that achievements have fallen short of ones aims. However, I feel things are starting to come together as I would wish.

On behalf of the Society, I wish to thank all those who have helped us in various ways. They number too many to be named individually and there is always the risk of missing a vital name. There are four in particular who must be named:

Sylvia Luckhurst who, as Secretary, keeps me admirably on the right path.

George Lawson: a tower of strength to me quite apart from being so efficient with our accounts.

Dan Goddard who took on the task of organising the initial Interpretation Panels, just installed, after many frustrating months, and last but not least

Steve Budden who, in his characteristic style, is a never ending fund of knowledge and always full of encouragement about the value of the Friends. He does not always agree with me about clearances but his tact is exemplary.

As to the rest, they all know who they are: such as those who have supported our events, have picked litter, have been 'volunteers', have distributed Common Ground. Finally and importantly to the seven members who have served on the Committee in the last year. I say 'thank you'. Please do not misunderstand the situation — the doors remain open for more assistance.

Members generally seem to agree with me that year on year the condition of our Commons improves noticeably. One has to be impressed by what is achieved under the Warden's guidance and those who walk the Commons should make a point of inspecting the areas of heather restoration, the new pond between Cabbage Stalk Lane and Hungershall Park and the adjacent glade recently

cleared and the new pond on Rusthall Common to the north of the Tarry Path, clearance of rock outcrops at Mount Edgcombe, those overlooking Happy Valley and at Denny Bottom in the Toad Rock area, the latter funded by English Nature. Steve will again have plenty to illustrate and talk to us about immediately after our AGM. Yet again the Commons have been excessively wet at times and growth during 2002 was more than ever involving much extra grass cutting.

Our Fungus Foray, a new event last Autumn, was a success despite the date coinciding with one of the driest periods of the year. It is to be repeated next October. The usual programme of walks was held and will continue in the hope they will become better supported. The Committee are looking to extend such "activities concentrating on specific interests.

I feel an opportunity was lost in 2002 to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee. It was only in July that I was sent a very crumpled programme of the Diamond Jubilee Day event June 22nd 1897 held on the Lower Cricket Ground. Had we known at least a year ahead we could have had a tilt at replicating that event. As was reported in Common Ground the British Legion and RAF Association held an excellent event which, sadly, was not well supported. The Lower Cricket Ground is not over used and it is felt the introduction of short term parking adjacent to it could help ease the pressure which exists round the Fir Tree Road area.

Planning and Transportation matters are constantly kept under observation. Various objections have been registered to planning applications for telephone masts, not actually on the Commons but well within view. One example is the proposal to erect a 22.5m mast with antennae immediately west of the Spa Valley rail bridge over Bridge Road. We have been instrumental in getting the equipment cabinets, which would have obstructed half the old railway bed, resited and persuaded the Council to look seriously how to protect the trees which, when in leaf, will screen the lower half of the mast from view. Concerns remain about parking regulations and speed of traffic on the roads bordering or crossing the Commons and we intend to pursue these matters with more diligence in 2003.

It now seems likely that a new roundabout proposed for the top of Major York's Road will go ahead as soon as funding is available. This will take some ground from the Common but it has been agreed that the upper part of Fir Tree road will revert to the Common. We will try to ensure that pedestrian access interests are catered for in the new design and will look to include a new safe crossing point to the Common from Bishops Down road. We still hope to see a proper crossing installed for pedestrians across Langton road between St Paul's Church and the Tarry Path. Items in the draft Transportation Strategy include the redesign of the Vale Road/London Road junction and a right turn traffic lane on Langton Road to turn

into the Coach Road. The latter seems unnecessary and would involve some road widening.

Membership Forms have been updated and majority of our members have signed Gift Aid declaration to our financial benefit. The decline in membership has been arrested and as our publicity drive finally gets under way it is hoped to see a gradual increase and that we will enlist a sound core of Corporate and Small Business members. All Corporate members will henceforth be acknowledged in our news letters.

The first three Interpretation Panels have been installed. In the light of experience with these the intention is gradually to introduce more panels to draw attention to specific items of interest. English Nature have permission to erect one at Toad Rock. Framed copies of our own panels are being offered to local hotels to assist tourism and will be supplied against receipt of appropriate donations. Some potential amongst Corporate members also exists.

In order to implement the **'Community Networking Project'** the Department of Transports, Local Government and the Regions together with the Heritage Lottery Fund have funded the Urban Parks Forum a not-for-profit organisation to help the management of parks and open spaces. Last Autumn in its publication *Living Places; Cleaner, Safer, Greener* the Government announced that it will launch a scheme to support local groups such as 'Friends'. We have applied to be on the Register. In concert with the Conservators we will be considering what projects and funding we as Friends might apply for.

Year 2006 will be the 400th Anniversary of the discovery by Dudley Lord North of the chalybeate spring new what is now the Pantiles. The Civic Society have already submitted proposals to the Council about what might be done to commemorate this event. One suggestion is a Panoramic Platform to be situated on Mount Ephraim.

Officer & Committee Membership 2002/2003

Officers: (elected annually)

Chair:	Rhys A Revell	Tel: 520475
Vice-Chair:	Jennifer Blackburn	Tel: 546520
Hon. Treasurer:	Cdr. George Lawson	Tel: 524019
Hon. Secretary:	Sylvia Luckhurst	Tel: 526121 ext. 3251

Committee: (elected for three years)

Dr Ian Beavis)	Tel: 523007
Mark Dennison) elected 21/3/2001	Tel: 528199
Conrad Payne)	Tel: 513626
Peter Freeman)	Tel: 524110
Dan Goddard) elected 21/3/2001	Tel: 535042
Cllr David Wakefield)	Tel: 523983
Pat Maxwell & Jonathan Balcon co-opted 2003		

Warden's Report

As another work season draws to a close it is an interesting time to look back. It is now ten years since we started to implement the management plan adopted by the Conservators. It is easy to forget quite how much we have accomplished during that time. I only keep it in mind because I give many illustrated talks to local groups. All the main paths have been pushed back to create glades that promote a greater sense of security for users of the Commons as well as providing a far richer habitat for wildlife. Several new areas of heather have been created across the Commons to help the heathland fauna that still remained. We now have seven ponds that greatly enhance bio-diversity with increasing numbers of dragonflies and damselflies as well as amphibians. Rock outcrops such as Mt. Edgcumbe and Happy Valley have been exposed and have proved to be key areas for our many interesting invertebrates. All of this work has led to both Commons being scheduled as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest, and just as importantly made them a resource used and valued by increasing numbers of people.

Having said all of that, there still remains a huge amount of work to be done and we have been as busy this winter as ever. The slopes of Happy Valley that we first cleared ten years ago have been cleared of regenerating holly and birch restoring the superb views that were becoming lost. With some financial assistance from English Nature, scrub and bramble has been cleared around Toad Rock and other areas at Denny Bottom. Further work has been undertaken to expose rock faces at Mt Edgcumbe and as I write work is underway to reveal the rock outcrop on the triangle at the top of Church Road. The

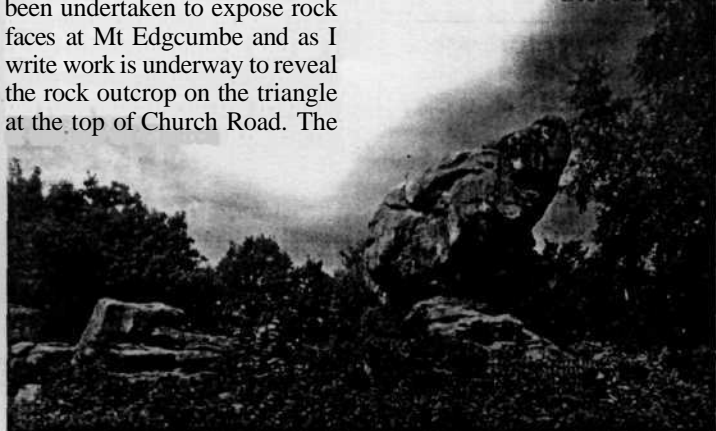
volunteers have done excellent work removing invading scrub from the grassland above Edgcumbe Rocks all the way along to Wellington Rocks.

There has been quite a lot of storm damage this winter with a number of trees being lost, fortunately we did not lose any quite as significant as those lost last year near the Spa Hotel, with the exception of a large oak above one of the seats on the Lower Cricket Pitch. As luck would have it, no one was using the seat at the time!

Our most dramatic work this winter was carried out with funding from the Freehold Tenants. Many of you will have already seen the large clearance carried out between Cabbage Stalk Lane and the path from the fairground to Hungershall Park. This area was dominated by fallen trees and sycamore sapling, most of which had been badly damaged by squirrels. This has all been removed and the stumps have been ground out, where possible the native species have been retained, we are now left with an extensive glade leading up to the new pond at Cabbage Stalk Lane. Already there are signs of the dormant herb layer responding to the increased light and it will be interesting to see what appears this spring. Any seeding or planting deemed necessary will be carried out next winter.

The new pond excavated last year adjacent to the Tarry Path on Rusthall Common is now full and awaiting discovery of our amphibians which will become active over the next few weeks. Steps to improve access from the path and around the pond will be installed when the ground dries out.

Steve Budge



Fungus Foray on Tunbridge Wells Common

Saturday 28 September, 2002

Starting promptly from Peter Freeman's house at 2.00pm, a stalwart band of fungi enthusiasts set out across the Common for an Autumn afternoon's foraging. With careful searching thirty-one fungi species were recorded which in the circumstances was a fair haul considering the predominantly dry conditions of the past several weeks (totals of well over a hundred species are not difficult to obtain in the right weather.) Fungi fruit most readily after rain and later in October 2002 when the Autumnal rains final did arrive there were a great increase in the number of fungi visible in the woods and countryside.

As leader I mostly relied on participants eagerly bringing their collected specimens to me for name confirmation. Five species of the Amanita genus (which includes the most deadly fungus known, *The Death Cap*) were observed include the Death Cap itself but also the less noxious *False Death Cap*, *The Blusher* and the slighter *Tawny Grisette* found in association with Birch trees. The black rhizomorphs of *Honey Fungus*, the species most dreaded by gardeners, resembling boot laces, were found by peeling back bark on a fallen trunk: the fruiting bodies themselves had yet to appear. *The Aniseed Toadstool* was found by one member, its smell and colour are striking and distinctive, making it an easily recognised species though none to common. *The* brightly coloured caps of the *Russulae* were in rather short supply this afternoon but one 'special' was an uncommon type of *Boletus* which grows exclusively on specimens of another fungus the *Earth Ball* (*Scleroderma citrinum*) a quite different beast being spherical in shape, growing by track-sides where people walking

past unwittingly help to spread the spores.

Sulphur-tuft which grows in large clusters was common enough as it usually is but fungi with a similar habit though not so frequent were *Galerina mutabilis* and *Psathyrella hydrophila*. Several bracket fungi were noted growing shelflike from fallen or standing tree boles, *The Birch Polypore* or *Razor-strop Fungus* only on old Birch, the *Blushing Bracket* which indeed flushes a pinkish colour when handled, large chocolate-coloured *Ganoderma* and the smaller *Many-zoned Polypore* and *Bjerkandera adusta*.

Besides a pond a fine example of the *Stinkhorn* was found growing in a damp spot. Having burst from its 'egg' which is first to appear on the surface of the ground, this species features a tip covered with green mucus; this is particularly foul-smelling but it contains the spores of the fungus which get transported away by the flies that are strongly attracted to it by the smell. Normally the flies descend so quickly that we mostly see the fungus with the green mucus already licked away and only the white network that supported it left. However this was a recently-emerged specimen in 'pristine condition.

The blue-staining fungus *Chorosplenium aearuginascens* traditionally used in the creation of Tunbridge Ware was appropriately discovered growing on a few pieces of woody debris. Mention should also be made of the following species seen which help to illustrate the wonderful diversity of English names for these slightly sinister inhabitants of our Autumn woodlands: *Shaggy Ink-Cap*, *Glistening Ink-Cap*, *Brown Roll-Rim*, *The Deceiver* and the *Charcoal Burner*.

Keith Palmer

THE 'VOLUNTEERS'

Our Very Own Work Parties

The switch from Sunday to Saturday mornings for the work parties this winter has been worthwhile and attendance has much improved.

On a couple of days early morning doubts about turning out have been suppressed but in each case the volunteers have found much better conditions outside than it looked from inside! Some singularly bright mornings have been much enjoyed and we have worked up a good appetite and gained in fitness while contributing useful work. The Warden must be pleased - he has invested in some new tools!

At our AGM Steve Budden will no doubt illustrate some of the work carried out this winter and in years past so anyone who feels they might be tempted to join in next winter can learn first hand what is involved. Seeing the results of what one has helped to contribute over the years is really rewarding so it does the heart good in more ways than one.

Notice of 12th Annual General Meeting

to be held at the Town Hall
on Wednesday 26 March 2003 at 1930 hrs.
(Refreshments will be available from 1900 hrs)

AGENDA

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Minutes of 11th AGM held 27 March 2002
- 3 Chairman's Annual Report (printed in Common Ground) to be taken as read.
- 4 Presentation of Annual Accounts to 30 September 2002.
- 5 Election of Committee
 - (a) Officers (retiring annually)
Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary
 - (b) Committee Members (elected to serve three years)
Pat Maxwell and Jonathan Balcon (co-opted members) will be nominated for election.

Any other nominations should be made in writing to the Secretary forty-eight hours ahead of the meeting.

Sylvia Luckhurst

Secretary to the League of Friends
of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Common
C/o Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS

Immediately after the meeting the Warden, Steve Budden, will give an illustrated talk about his work on future aims for the Commons.

The interesting old programme opposite was found in a drawer.



The
Spa Hotel

A Corporate Member

DIAMOND JUBILEE DAY

Great Public Demonstration

ON THE
LOWER CRICKET GROUND,
AT NOON.

PROGRAMME

When all are assembled the Mayor and Mayoress will take up positions on the Platform.
At Noon the Royal Standard will be hoisted in the Centre of the Ground.
Immediately thereafter a Royal Salute of Twenty-one Guns will be fired.
A Short Address will be given by the Rev. J. H. Townsend, D.D.
The Old 100th Hymn will be sung (words over leaf).
A Short Address will be given by His Worship the Mayor.
National Anthem will be sung (words over leaf).
Old English Sports, at 2.30 p.m.
Prize Distribution by the Mayoress, 5.30 p.m.
Dancing on the Green, 7 p.m.
Borough Band Concert "St. Helena," 7 to 9.30 p.m.
Grand Display of Fireworks (the Gift of the Mayor), 9.30 p.m.

ERNEST E. FENWICK,
Secretary.

"GOD SAVE THE QUEEN."

Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, JUNE 22nd, 1897.

HYMNS TO BE SUNG

On the Common by 4000 Children, and the whole of the assembled people, led

BY THE MASSES BANDS,

Under the Conductorship of Mr. M. MARKS, Borough Bandmaster.

THE OLD 100TH HYMN. (2nd Version)

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice:
Him serve with fear, His praise forth tell;
Come ye before Him and rejoice.

The Lord ye know is God indeed;
Without our aid He did us make;
We are His flock, He doth us feed;
And for His sheep He doth us take.

O enter, then, His gates with praise,
Approach with joy His courts unto;
Praise, laud, and bless His name always,
For it is surely so to do.

For why? the Lord our God is good,
His mercy is for ever sure;
His truth as firm as stones firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.
Amen.

NATIONAL ANTHEM.

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen,
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen.

O Lord, our God, arise,
Scatter her enemies,
And make them fall;
Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks,
On Thee our hopes we fix,
God save us all.

The choicest gifts in store,
On her be pleased to pour,
Long may she reign,
May she defend our laws,
And ever give us peace,
To sing with heart and voice,
God save the Queen.

NOTICES

- 1.—A Trumpet Call will be sounded previously to the Hymns and National Anthem when all are to be silent and watch the Conductor attentively.
- 2.—The Keynote will then be sounded, and all are desired to commence with the Conductor's first down beat, which will follow immediately after the sounding of the keynote.
- 3.—A slight pause will be made between each verse.

ERNEST E. FENWICK, Secretary.

BALDWIN, PRINTERS