



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 37. Summer 2005

Diary of Forthcoming Events

Tea Party

Wednesday, 13th July
2005

3pm – 5pm

at

the Beacon Hotel,
Tea Garden Lane



Tickets (£5.00)
from
Sylvia Luckhurst at the
Town Hall

Walks with Dr. Ian Beavis

Saturday, 6th August
2005

Meet 10.00 am
at Thackeray's House,
London Road
Tunbridge Wells

Annual Dinner

Friday, 10th February,
2006

From the Chairman

Come to our tea party at the Beacon and enjoy the best view over Tunbridge Wells! Details later in this edition. The cakes were so good last year, I'm sure you'll enjoy it again.

The dry weather is rather worrisome, I'm sure that the trees will start to suffer soon not to mention our gardens. Walking the commons is such a pleasure at this time of the year in early Summer - the shades

of green are so various and calming. Do go and see for yourselves - especially if you haven't taken a walk lately.

I am pleased to say that there appear to be no pressing problems at the moment apart from a slow and steady decline in the number of members of the Friends. Please do try to recruit a neighbour or a friend. Anyone may join who has an interest in preserving the integrity of

the commons for ever and helping to raise funds to supplement the work of the Commons Conservators. We currently have just under 300 members - I would like to see this increase to nearer 400! Adult membership is still only £5.00 a year - a bargain.

Jennifer Blackburn.

THE CRISIS OF 2019

The Friends can breathe again. After the hideous shock on Maunday Thursday – the day Governments traditionally slip out unpalatable information – when the Secretary of State for Transport in answer to a question from Reg Rhodes (Con. Tunbridge Wells) – “What steps is the Secretary of State for Transport taking to relieve traffic congestion on the A26 through Tunbridge Wells?” – and the Minister of State, in a written answer, replied “The Government will be putting forward a bill to amend the County of Kent Act, 1981, to enable the Highways Authority to improve the passage of traffic through Tunbridge Wells”.

The Implications of the answer, fortunately picked up by the Friends, though not by the Borough Council, or the Conservators or the Courier, soon became horrendous. On enquiry of the Highways Agency it soon became clear that what was proposed was a four lane diversion from the A26 commencing just after Wyvale Garden Centre and

driving straight across Major York's Road, past the Linden Park Cricket Club, demolishing Gibraltar Cottage and St Helena and debouching at the old junction between the A26 and the A268 where, after the demolition of the Kent and Sussex Hospital, the road has already been turned into four lanes.

Obviously this proposal was anathema to the Friends and all Hell was let loose. A grand Petition was got up with over 5000 signatures, a Protest Meeting was held on the Lower Cricket Ground where Councillor Wakefield, already in his 80's, addressed a crowd of over 4000. Mrs Jennifer Blackburn, Chair of the Friends for the last 14 years, addressed the Conservators in an impassioned speech which even affected the Manor. Mr Patrick Shovelton, founder of the Friends, and now nearing his 100th Birthday, was wheeled

in a Victorian Bath Chair up and down the A26 gesticulating wildly with his crutches and making noises which were presumed to be protestatory.

To our great delight our Opposition was effective and after a nationwide debate - for we reached the columns of the “heavies” - the Secretary of State announced, just before the Summer Recess, that the Government would be coming forward with alternative proposals for the relief of congestion on the A26 through Tunbridge Wells.

At the time of writing we do not know what the Government – and for that matter – the Highways Authority and the Kent County Council – have in mind. But the moral of this crisis is ETERNAL VIGILANCE. The Friends must keep awake and alert.

Anon. August, 2019.

Visit our new Website:

www.friendsofthecommons.org.uk

SPOTTING BUMBLEBEES

Readers may well have heard about the decline of bumblebees, and the efforts that are being made across the country to raise their profile and improve conditions for them. Bumblebees are vitally important for the pollination of wild and cultivated plants, and they are attractive and interesting creatures in their own right. They are active throughout most of the year, from the earliest sunny days in February to the end of autumn. Their furry coats enable them to carry on visiting flowers even in dull and cool weather when most other insects are immobilised. In our recent mild winters, as described in a previous article, some have been seen on the Commons even in December and January. Here they make good of the perpetually flowering gorse bushes.

Bumblebees live in colonies founded in the spring by a queen who has slept through the winter. Queens are the large, often seemingly enormous, bees that we see

in the early weeks of spring as they search for places to make their nests. Once they have found a suitable home, they start to rear large numbers of smaller workers. These are the bumblebees that we see at work through the rest of the year, gathering nectar and pollen from flowers to feed the growing colony. As summer progresses, a new generation of queens is produced along with males. These pair off, and at the end of the year the fertilised queens go into hibernation to start the cycle off again next year.

In the past, bumblebees relied on the wide expanses of flower-rich grassland that traditional farming provided. The widespread 'improvement' of grassland over the last fifty years, creating fields with only one type of grass and hardly any flowers, has been bad news for bumblebees along with many butterflies and other creatures. Places like the Commons where unimproved grassland still survives are therefore

important bumblebee refuges.

All of the six commoner bumblebees can be found on the Commons, and recognising them is generally quite straightforward. The White-tailed and Buff-tailed both have two yellow bands, but in the latter the tail is brown or at least off-white rather than pure white. The Garden Bumblebee also has a pure white tail, but it has three yellow bands. The Early Bumblebee has yellow bands and a light orange tail, while the Red-tailed Bumblebee is all black apart from its deep orange tail. Finally, there is the Common Carder Bee, which is mostly brown with some black hairs but no distinctive pattern.

Less commonly seen, because they lack an extensive population of workers, are the cuckoo bumblebees. As their name suggests, the females lay their eggs in the nests of true bumblebees. There are six British species, each dedicated to one of the

commoner bumblebees described above, although only three have so far been recorded from the Commons. They resemble their hosts quite closely, but they are less furry and have smoky wings.

Finally, there are the rarer bumblebees, some of which are seriously endangered. Of the nine British species in this category, one has been confirmed as an inhabitant of the Commons. The Heathland Bumblebee, most likely to be seen visiting heather, looks like a much smaller version of the Garden Bumblebee but has a round rather than a long face. One very rare bumblebee recently found at Groombridge is worth looking out for. This is the Shrill Carder Bee, which has a very pale orange tail and bands which are a curious greenish-white colour. The colour scheme as a whole gives the impression of a bumblebee in pastel shades, and is very distinctive.

Ian Beavis.

Announcement by our technical department



Until some 5 years ago one looked up the "Who is Who?" directory to find details about an important person. You had to go to the Company Registry to receive details about a business. Associations and Clubs would always have sought to be mentioned from time to time in the local

newspaper or an old Town Guide.

All this changed drastically over the past few years. A presence on the Internet of anyone involved in social and public life is now a must. All those who believe they can do without it are seen as having nothing or little to say. Internet is not hype - it is the most invaluable source of information for people.

When your editor, George Lawson, mentioned on an occasion that it would probably be desirable for the Friends of the Commons to have their own Website, he could not have found a more

enthusiastic supporter than me.

Soon we had a meeting together with the Chairman to discuss the layout and content of the site. It was suggested to create informative community pages, which would reflect the engagement of this energetic and sociable society.

Building the Website for The Friends of the Commons was an enjoyable task. We are now in a position to introduce "The Friends of The Commons" on the Internet: www.thefriendsofthecommons.org.uk.

Instead of writing about what can be accessed by the

international community regarding the Commons of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall, I strongly recommend to view it on your own. If you do not have an own computer or a computer literate friend who could give you a virtual tour, make good use of the facilities at the local library.

One little secret though I allow myself to leak: My wife Katharina has scanned and archived all past Friends of the Commons Newsletters for viewing and downloading. It must be one of the finest collections published on the World Wide Web.

Daniel Bech.

WARDENS REPORT

It seems remarkable as I write this to think that we are only a week from midsummer's day, I guess its downhill all the way now! We are already more than half way through our scheduled cuts on the grass and it is almost time to start cutting our hay-meadows. Although we are desperately short of water in our reservoirs and rivers, there seems to be just enough coming down to keep everything growing at a pace that we are struggling to keep up with.

Our first major cut of paths and rides is now underway and we will then move on to bracken control. We will again be treating areas on both Commons with Asulox, which has proved itself to be a very effective treatment over the last two years. I am also hoping to run some experiments with new types of equipment that will both cut and clear vegetation in one operation. This could make a huge difference to areas such as the new clearance next to Cabbage Stalk Lane if it proves successful and affordable.

A new commemorative bench has been installed in the grass area below Edgcumbe Rocks. I suspect that this will prove to be a very popular site. We have also started work on refurbishing our litter bins with the two worst being replaced and sent off to have new doors fitted and be re-coated. These will then be reinstalled and the next two repaired etc. The problems with these bins have been of our own making; we

thought it would look rather smart to have our name cut into the doors, but all it has done is trap dog wee that has then corroded the metal away. You live and learn!

I seem to have seen a remarkable number of woodpeckers on the Commons this year, both greens and great spots as well as more treecreepers than is usual. There are also more reports and evidence of deer on both Commons at night. Deer numbers are increasing rapidly in our region so I suppose that this is not surprising. We also have some rather unexpected guests on Brighton Lake this spring with a pair of greylag geese breeding successfully there. Many of you will have seen the three chicks which are growing at a prodigious rate and are proving a popular subject for local photographers. August is normally the time when young geese fly, so they should be around for another few weeks.

Finally, you may notice new signs going up across both Commons detailing the bylaws. The last bylaw sign disappeared about ten years ago but the police have recently indicated that they would find it much easier to prosecute any wrongdoers if the bylaws were displayed. It remains to be seen whether any exemplary prosecutions are ever brought, but I guess it can do no harm to have them displayed and it may assist me when I have to tick some youngsters off!

Steve Budden.

Noteworthy Buildings Facing the Common

In this section of the Spring Issue of "Common Ground" there featured the chateau-like structure of Molyneux Place on Mount Ephraim. That building started life as a two storied house called Earl's Court, the residence of the local worthy the Hon. F G Molyneux. Its noble skyline was the result of additions made by the Tunbridge Wells architect Henry Hickman Cronk, who converted the building into a hotel, adding two more stories and surmounting it with a great French Roof.

In 1867 Henry Hickman Cronk provided a further ornament to the Mount Ephraim skyline by designing the mansion "Bredbury" for another Tunbridge Wells worthy, namely Thomas Jones-Gibb. Jones-Gibb was one of the wealthy "merchant princes" of the town, and was notable for his generosity to various local causes. It was said that "no subscription list was ever opened in the town without his name occupied a prominent place"

After Jones-Gibb's death in 1884 his widow re-married his medical attendant, Dr Francis Gray Smart, who became Bredbury's next noteworthy resident. Cambridge educated, Smart was a Justice of the Peace, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society,

and President of the Tunbridge Wells Photographic Society. He was also a fellow of the Linnean Society, and took a keen interest in Bredbury's then extensive and splendid garden.

During the Second World War, Bredbury was requisitioned and served as the Headquarters for the South Eastern Civil Defence Region. Subsequently it housed, at various times, the Ministry of National Insurance, the Ministry of Food, the Department of Health and Social Security and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Recently, a proposal has come forward to convert the mansion back into residential use as five apartments. This, in itself, is welcome enough, although highly unwelcome are related schemes for new angular four storied blocks of flats close by on either side. The Conservation Area Appraisal for Royal Tunbridge Wells states that Bredbury "still retains an Italianate grandeur in its mature garden grounds." Long may it continue to be, especially as the mansion is not only important in the sequence of old buildings along the Mount Ephraim ridge, but it is also a landmark building which provides a focal point in the view up Church Road.

Dr Philip Whitbourn.



Bredbury
77 Mount Ephraim
Drawn by Philip Whitbourn

Letters to the Editor

Letter in reply to the article on daffodils which appeared in the Spring edition of Common Ground.

From Mr Simon d'Albertson

I felt I must reply to Mr Still's piece 'Daffodils - to plant or not to plant', in the Spring edition of Common Ground. The suggestion about planting daffodils may well have originally come from me and I feel that Mr Still may have grasped the wrong end of the stick (or perhaps daffodil in this case).

Perhaps we should start with my original suggestion. It will be noted that there are already daffodils between the footpath and the road on the Spa Hotel side of the stretch of road between the new roundabout and the turning for Bishops Down. My suggestion was that the opportunity be taken to strengthen these and to extend them back into the new land between road and footpath created by the roundabout. This is effectively dead ground for the Common and is separate from it. I did not envisage daffodils being planted anywhere else. However, on further reflection it seems to me that it would be sensible to try to link the daffodils which exist from the Rusthall Cricket Ground onwards towards the Rusthall Road, with those on the stretch discussed above by similar planting in the dead ground in front of the Spa Garage and the grass area between footpath and road further along. I hope what I have said has reassured Mr Still that this is not a suggestion aimed at turning the Common into a municipal Park!

I will turn now to the tone and specific points in Mr Still's article. Let me say that the language of the piece seemed to me to be rather strong - after all we are talking about daffodils and not revolution. Secondly, I am staggered that Mr Still thinks that cost and maintenance are an issue. Firstly, I am sure that the local garden centres could be persuaded to contribute, and secondly, daffodils are relatively inexpensive. Frankly, I find it hard to believe that the costs involved will be at all significant. As far as maintenance goes I would have thought the need to let daffodils die back actually saves money since they are not cut down when the first mowing of grass on the Common takes place.

I am staggered that Mr Still thinks that this suggestion will set a precedent. Interestingly there are many odd clumps of daffodils on various parts of the Common so I do not think the argument about introducing non-native species stands up very well. Daffodils are already on the Common, Mr Still may not like the fact but fact it is.

Let me also inject a balancing view to Mr Still's opinion that daffodils do not look nice - in my view they do, and as I am sure many other people will agree, for me they are something I look forward to every spring as I walk between Rusthall and the station - a sign of better things to come.

So, in summary, the suggestion was about planting daffodils between road and footpaths and not on the Common itself. I hope Mr Still is satisfied with this and will feel able to support a suggestion which is intended to make the approaches to Tunbridge Wells more attractive for both residents and visitors.

Yours, - Simon d'Albertson

Officer & Committee Membership 2004-2005

Officers: (elected annually)

Chairman:	Jennifer Blackburn	Tel: 546520
Vice-Chairman:	David Wakefield	Tel: 523983
Hon. Treasurer:	Mark Denison	Tel: 528199
Membership Secretary:	Pat Maxwell	Tel: 531968
Hon. Secretary:	Sylvia Luckhurst	Tel: 526121 Ex. 3251

Committee: (elected for three years)

Jonathan Balcon	Tel: 515741
Dr Ian Beavis	Tel: 523007
John Davie	Tel: 525557
Peter Freeman	Tel: 524110
Dan Goddard	Tel: 535042
Ann Hughes	Tel: 527657
George Lawson (Editor Common Ground)	Tel: 524019
Conrad Payne	Tel: 513626
Rhys Revel (co-opted member)	Tel: 520475
Simon d'Albertson	Tel: 529256



Editorial

The publication of this edition of Common Ground is timed to remind readers of the Friends Tea Party which takes place on Wednesday, 13th July at the Beacon Hotel. This is always a pleasant occasion and provides an excellent opportunity for members to make contact with each other. Please come along if you can - tickets (price £5) are available from Sylvia Luckhurst at the Town Hall.

One of the problems of a Society such as the Friends is how to maintain the interest of members when all is going well. There is nothing like a good crisis to rally members to a cause, but so often the cause is lost because the watchdog was asleep. The light hearted article entitled "The Crisis of 2019" is therefore very timely - we need to remind ourselves that the Commons are a valuable asset, on which others, road builders in particular, have already cast covetous eyes.

Finally, I am pleased to be able to include in this edition a report from our Technical Department. Yes we do have a Technical Department! It is rather small but what it lacks in size it makes up for in quality. I have been told that setting up a Web Site is easy - any one can do it! From my observations it is apparent that designing and setting up a good web site is a very skilled business. We are very fortunate in having the services of Daniel and Katharina Bech who have done a splendid job of designing and setting up the Friends of the Commons Web Site. (www.friendsofthecommons.org.uk) - Do pay it a visit.

GVL.



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