



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 42. Autumn 2007

Diary of Forthcoming Events

Annual Dinner

Wednesday, 8th February,
2008

at 7.00 for 7.30 pm
at the Royal Wells Hotel,
Mount Ephraim

Winter Work Parties

Saturday 5th January,
2008

Saturday 2nd February,
2008

Saturday 1st March,
2008

Meet in Fir Tree Car Park
at 10 a.m.



From the Chairman

Dear members, I hope that you have all taken a walk on our lovely Commons - wonderful colours as usual and a proliferation of fungi!

We have cleaned up the two chalybeate spring areas this summer and recently we have funded the repair of a set of steps nearby.

If you know of other small areas in need of attention, please do let me know. The committee's telephone numbers are on the back page.

Please encourage people to join the Friends by using the joining form on our internet site www.friendsofthecommons.org.uk.

We need to increase our membership in these uncertain times with the sale of the title and the commons imminent. We have been involved in discussions with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council as the editorial elsewhere explains. By December we should know the outcome.

Finally I look forward to meeting you all at the Royal Wells in February for our Annual Dinner. Caroline Fitzgerald is the Warden for the RSPB's new reserve called Broadwater Warren which some of you may already have visited just over the border in East Sussex off the Crowborough Road.

The terrain is very similar to our commons so I'm sure it will be an interesting talk.

Jenny Blackburn



Present day sketch of St Helena by Philip Whitbourn

NEW TO BRITAIN

Insects new to the Commons, or new to the Tunbridge Wells area, are found quite frequently. Species new to Britain are much more unusual. In June 2007, local naturalist Keith Palmer found some unfamiliar leaf-mines on small-leaved lime on Tunbridge Wells Common. These were identified, and confirmed by specialists, as belonging to the larvae of a small shiny black sawfly - called *Parna apicalis* - which had not been recorded from Britain before.

Sawflies are a group of insects which, although large in number (there are over four hundred British species), are little known to the general public - except perhaps for gardeners who may encounter 'pest' species like the Rose, Gooseberry or Apple Sawfly. They get their family name from the female's serrated egg-laying organ, which it uses to cut slits in plant tissues in order to conceal its eggs. Sawflies are related to bees and wasps, and they vary greatly in size. Some, like the Birch Sawfly with its fast and buzzing flight, are the size of a large bee, while others are small and inconspicuous. They also show a great variety of colours and patterns. Some have yellow and black stripes and closely resemble solitary wasps; some are patterned in red, orange or green; while others, like our new discovery, are plain glossy black.

Adult sawflies fly by day, and many species can be found on the Commons visiting flowers or sitting openly on sunlit foliage. Some of the banded wasp-like species are predators, catching other insects while they are preoccupied with feeding at flowers. The large flower heads of umbellifers like Hogweed and Cow Parsley are especially popular hunting grounds because of the number and variety of nectar-feeding insects they attract.

The larvae of sawflies are in some cases more conspicuous than the adults. They closely resemble the caterpillars of moths and butterflies, having a series of additional legs or 'claspers' along the length of their body, in addition to the six regular

jointed legs that all insects share. They are all plant feeders, and the majority feed openly on the leaves of various trees and other flowering plants and ferns. As with moth and butterfly caterpillars, the different species all have their own favoured foodplants. Some rely on camouflage to protect them from predators, but others exhibit warning colouration, seeking to persuade predators that they are distasteful. Readers may have seen the green and orange sawfly larvae that feed in large groups on sallow leaves and raise the hind part of their bodies in unison when they are disturbed.

Some sawfly larvae live in galls, those curious swellings that plants produce in response to the eggs that particular insects inject into their tissues. Insects that produce galls specialise in a particular plant species or group of species, and the egg-laying process somehow programmes the plant to produce a distinctive type of gall that provides food and shelter for the insect's young. The most well-known insects of this kind are the gall-wasps that produce oak-apples, robin's pincushions and many other conspicuous types. Galls produced by sawflies are fewer in number, but include the familiar purplish swellings on willow leaves that can be seen, for example, on the trees along Mount Ephraim near St Helena Cottage.

Other sawfly larvae, like the newly discovered species, are leaf-miners. Insects of several different groups have adopted this lifestyle, which involves eating away the juicy inner parts of leaves while leaving the protective outer layers intact. Some insects wander around inside the leaf, leaving a winding transparent trail as they go: a good example, produced by a small moth caterpillar, can regularly be seen on bramble leaves. In the case of our new lime-feeding sawfly, the larva eats away a solid area at the edge of a leaf, leaving a translucent blotch.

Ian Beavis

WARDEN'S REPORT



Warden Steve Budden on a guided walk during Heritage Open Days 2007

Well, it has been quite a Summer with one thing and another. We have had new contractors doing the cutting of the short amenity grass areas this year. It is always worrying when a new outfit comes onto the scene, and this year has been quite a difficult one with the weather ensuring that the grass never stopped growing or even slowing down during August, when we normally manage to extend the time between cuts to three weeks. To add to the problems, last autumn was wet and we were unable to do the late cuts that we normally carry out and so the grass was long when they started. In view of all this, I have to say that I have been pleased with the standard of work that the new contractors have achieved. Obviously, there have been a few teething difficulties but hopefully these have been ironed out and the remaining four years of the contract will run smoothly.

The big flail collector that we introduced last year has again carried out the clearances of our heather regeneration areas and other areas of long grass, and the results are quite pleasing. The machine leaves an excellent finish, although the uneven nature of a lot of our land can stop some of the cuttings being collected properly. I have also been impressed with the speed of the clearance and this has enabled us to clear a greater area than I had anticipated. At the time of writing, the small flail is also working on the Commons and the combination of these two machines working

together is, I think, having quite a noticeable effect.

Sadly of course, not all of my report can be as positive. I am sure that all of you will have been aware of the problems that we have faced at Wellington Rocks this summer, they have been well chronicled in the local press. The rocks, and the area around them, have become a very popular place for youngsters to gather and consume alcohol on Friday and Saturday evenings. I have personally observed upwards of 150 youths there at a time, and as you may imagine, the huge amounts of rubbish left behind and above all the broken bottles have made Wellington Rocks a no-go area for children and dogs at the weekend. We have done our best to keep it clear and mercifully, the problems eased after the middle of the school holidays but it has been a difficult time for all concerned.

I must thank those many people, a number of them Friends who have helped with the clear up. Particular thanks go to members of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, about twenty of whom spent one Saturday morning clearing glass off the rocks and also to Gary Bridgland, whose company have the litter clearance contract who went beyond the call of duty in helping us. Sadly, Doug, who carried out the litter clearance for many years found the recent problems too much for him and had to retire but we now have found a replacement, who is doing sterling work and is gradually getting the problems back under

control. We have also put in an application to the Home Office to have an Alcohol Control Zone put in force on the area and we expect this to be granted. This should help the Police to help us and we are actively working with them to try and be ready should the problems re-occur next summer.

As a final insult (I hope it is final anyway!), Wellington Rocks and Edgcombe Rocks have recently suffered quite bad graffiti attacks which we have cleared as best we can. Wellington Rocks have cleaned up reasonably well, but the attack on Edgcombe was done with dark blue emulsion which has soaked into the rock surface. With this, all we have been able to do is blur and fade the image to reduce its offensiveness, to go any further would involve breaking through the weathered surface layer and exposing the very soft rock underneath. Finally on this subject, we will be carrying out an extensive clearance of scrub and crown-lifting of trees around the rocks this autumn. Our aim is to remove the hiding places and make it easier to police the area in future. This is not going to be cheap because instead of leaving the cuttings on site to form habitat stacks as we normally would, we are going to have to take everything away, otherwise, it will be taken onto the Rocks as fuel for the fires that are being lit on them as part of the gatherings. This, as can be clearly seen on the top of the Rocks, is causing yet further serious damage.

Anyway, after reading all that, you may be forgiven for wondering why on earth anybody would want to buy the Common. I think I will remain silent on that issue for the present. Much heat has already been generated and I suspect that the rest of this issue of Common Ground will be dominated by the subject, and anyway, until we know the price and how it is to be marketed, there is not much to say.

Steve Budden

Noteworthy Buildings Facing the Common

St Helena

The last issue of Common Ground featured a present day view of Belleville, and compared this with William Makepeace Thackeray's sketch of the building in the 1860s. This time, a neighbouring Cottage Orne, St Helena, is illustrated and compared with Charles Tattershall Dodd's picture of the building in the 1840s. The Tunbridge Wells artist Tattershall Dodd made a number of drawings and paintings of the Common at around that time when, of course, animals still grazed there, and there were fewer trees than at present. It has been good to see several of his

pictures at the Art Gallery, along with some by his elder brother, Joseph Josiah Dodd, who illustrated the Common in the 1830s.

As may be seen, St Helena has lost its pretty verandah and, also, the finials from its gable ends. Later additions include a canted bay, a metal balcony railing and cresting on the ridge of the roof. Never-the-less, the building with its decorative barge boards, lancet window and Free Tudor details remains an ornament to the Common.

St Helena has been of special

significance to the Common in another way too. By the early 1880s there were concerns by the Local Board, a forerunner of the present Local Authority, that there was too lax a regime in permitting encroachments. Matters came to a head when the then occupier of St Helena was given permission to "enclose a portion of the rocks and Common with an iron fence". This led to a stormy Freeholders' Annual Meeting in 1883, following which a stricter policy to encroachment was adopted, for which we can all be duly grateful.

Philip Whitbourn

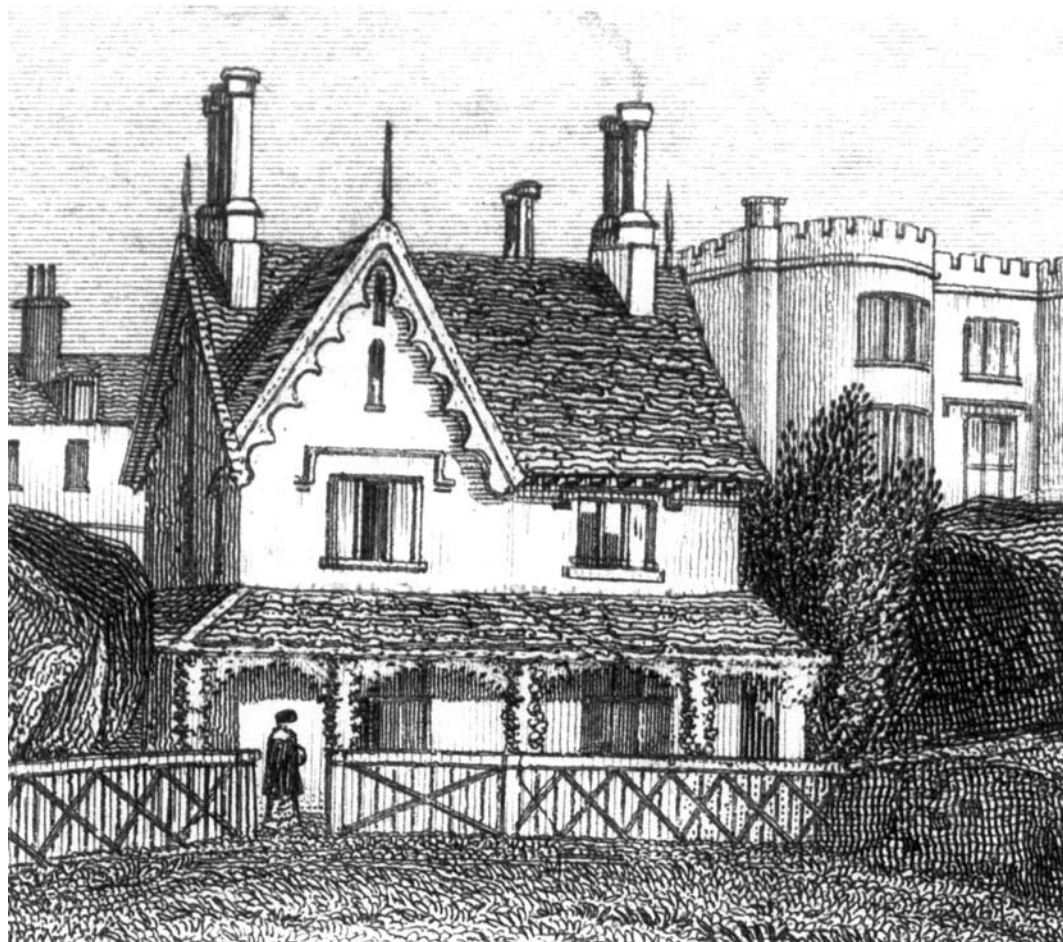


Illustration of St Helena by Charles Tattershall Dodd for Colbran's Tunbridge Wells Guide of 1844

Editorial.

The end of the summer marks the beginning of the winter work parties when the volunteers meet in the Fir Tree car park at 10 am on the first Saturday of each month from October to March. The October meeting got off to a fine start with 10 volunteers supported by 3 dogs and we cleared the foliage from the rock face in an area behind the Fir Tree car park. The November party was disappointingly small in number. It consisted of only three adults, 2 children and two dogs. Whilst we were few in number a substantial area was cleared of small self seeded trees to allow the light to get through to the heather and enable it to flourish. There are still many similar tasks to be undertaken and we really could use a few more volunteers. The work is not heavy, tools and gloves are provided, so what about it? Come along and support us for the December meet.

You will all have already read about the sale of the Common and the Lordship of the Manor. It has been suggested that the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council should buy the Common in order to secure it for the enjoyment of the citizens of Tunbridge Wells. With suitable safeguards this would certainly be the ideal solution and we have been given to understand that the TWBC is in touch with the agents handling the sale. We await developments with interest. Meanwhile a letter or two to the Courier from concerned members might well serve to concentrate a few municipal minds! We will try to keep members informed via the Web Site.

Once again I am appealing for a volunteer to take over from me as Editor of Common Ground. I am sure that there is someone out there who could do the job. Anyone wanting to know what is involved can contact me on 01892 524019 or via lawgv7@aol.com. - GVL



TUNBRIDGE WELLS. - The Common. - LL.

Officer & Committee Membership 2007-2008

Officers: (elected annually)

Chairman:	Jennifer Blackburn	Tel:546520
Vice-Chairman:	David Wakefield	Tel:523983
Hon. Treasurer:	Mark Dennison	Tel:528199

Committee: (elected for three years)

Sally Balcon	Tel: 515741
Dr Ian Beavis	Tel: 523007
John Davie	Tel: 525557
Simon d'Albertanson	Tel: 529256
Pat Maxwell (Membership Secretary)	Tel: 531968
Ann Hughes	Tel: 527657
George Lawson (Editor "Common Ground")	Tel: 524019



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