



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 43. Spring 2008

Diary of Forthcoming Events

AGM 2008

Annual General Meeting

*Tunbridge Wells Town Hall
(Committee Rooms A & B)*

*Wednesday 16th April
at
7.00 for 7.30 pm*



From the Chairman

Dear Members, As some of you may know, this will be my last article as chairman as I am standing down after six years. I wish the next chairman every success in taking The Friends of the Commons forward.

Spring is definitely here - frogspawn in the ponds, daffodils aplenty along the A264, birds nesting already! Phenology - the science of monitoring dates when things happen in the natural

world - has the evidence for climate change whatever the cause may be!

A lot of work has taken place around Brighton Lake with more to come - some funded by the Friends and some by the Freehold Tenants, in order to restore the path at the back and remove some of the pond weed. Steve Budden will tell you about recent work in his article too.

The sale of the Lordship, part of the Pantiles and the two

Commons is complete. We await the appointment of the four new Commons Conservators with interest and will be in touch with them in due course.

Thank you for all your support over the past few years, keep recruiting and let us hear from your thoughts as to what happens on the Commons!

Jennifer Blackburn

The Annual Dinner, 2008

The Friends of the Commons Annual Dinner was held on Friday Feb 8th at The Royal Wells hotel. It was held there this year as the Spa Hotel was undergoing refurbishment. About 50 Friends of the Common came and were greeted by the Chairman Mrs Jennifer Blackburn on their arrival. The dinner was enjoyed by

everybody and the hotel staff looked after us well. Mrs Blackburn said that it was early days for the friends to know what plans the new owners of the common had in mind for it. The friends felt sad that the Tunbridge Wells Council had not made a more robust bid for the common when they could have bought it for the Town.

Ms Caroline Fitzgerald,
Warden of Broadwater Warren

RSPB Reserve gave an illustrated talk. The RSPB have only just acquired the Warren and that they have 8 pairs of Nightjars nesting which is very exciting. The Chairman thanked Mrs Anne Hughes for all her hard work in organising the dinner and we all plan to go to the Broad Water Reserve in the summer and see if we can hear the nightjars.

Sally Balcon



Construction of the splendid new Cricket Pavilion on the Upper Cricket ground is now almost complete. Whilst some may think that it does not have the charm of the old building it is a worthy replacement and when finished will sit well in its setting.

SPRINGTIME PIONEERS

At the north-west corner of Tunbridge Wells Common, just outside the Spa Hotel, is a wide boundary ditch. The steep sunny south-facing side is one of the most important nesting sites for mining bees, which feature in the Commons' management plan as one of their key aspects of nature conservation interest. The sandy soils of the Commons are fast draining and provide ideal habitats for creatures which excavate underground burrows and would find themselves in difficulties if these became waterlogged.

The Spa Hotel boundary ditch is an ideal place to observe the earliest flying mining bee, and indeed the first true spring insect, if you discount those - like bumblebees - which hibernate in the adult state and are intermittently active all through the winter. Clark's Mining Bee (*Andrena clarkella*) emerges on the first sunny and mild days of the year. This year they came out on 8 February, eight days earlier than the previous record

in 2002, whereas in 2005 and 2006 they were not seen until mid-March. The males, mid-brown with indistinct paler bands on the abdomen, appear before the females, digging their way out of the previous year's nest burrows. Several hundred may be seen, flying low or walking over the nest site. They also 'swarm' in little groups around nearby tree trunks. There is evolutionary pressure for male mining bees to emerge first so that they can have the maximum opportunity to find a mate when the females do appear.

As is generally the case with mining bees, the female of Clark's Mining Bee looks quite different from the male. It is a bulkier insect, easily recognised by the bright orange fur on its thorax which contrasts with the black hairs covering the rest of its body. After mating with one of the waiting males, the female digs a nest burrow in the side of the ditch, consisting of a straight tunnel branching out into several chambers at the bottom. It then goes off to gather nectar and pollen

from flowers, gradually building up a food store in each of the cells. As there are few flowers about at this time of year, it is particularly reliant on sallow catkins or gorse. Once the female has laid her eggs on the food stores and sealed up the nest, her work is over. Few are seen beyond early April. When the young hatch, they spend the rest of the year feeding underground, finally turning into a chrysalis to await the first fine weather of the new year.

Throughout spring and summer, a succession of different species of mining bees use the Spa Hotel boundary ditch as their nesting site. One of the most attractive is the Tawny Mining Bee (*Andrena fulva*), which is active from mid-March to the end of May. The female has a bright scarlet thorax and orange abdomen. All mining bees have their dedicated 'cuckoo' species which sneak into their nest burrows and lay their own eggs on the food stores within. Clark's Mining Bee is accompanied by the Pale-eyed Nomad (*Nomada*

leucophthalma), a dark, hairless, rather wasp-like insect with yellow bands and some red markings on the abdomen. Females can be seen in March, flying over the nest site in search of occupied burrows or digging into one that they have just discovered.

Nomada signata, the cuckoo bee associated with the Tawny Mining Bee, is one of the Commons' rarest insects. It is not dissimilar to the Pale-eyed Nomad, but is more brightly coloured. Its distinctive features include a broad yellow belt across the base of the abdomen and an irregular yellow mark at the back of the thorax. The official national catalogue of rare flora and fauna has five degrees of rarity, and *Nomada signata* comes in the second highest rank ('Red Data Book 2 - Vulnerable'). The latest national distribution map for this species, published in 2005, shows only seventeen known sites across the whole country.

Ian Beavis

Noteworthy Buildings Facing the Common

No.1 Boyne Park

Although some of the buildings facing Tunbridge Wells Common are included in the government's statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest, the majority are not. This is also true of the Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Conservation Areas generally. So there has not been any formal system in place for identifying those many unlisted buildings that contribute so vitally to the backdrop of our commons, or to the overall character of the town.

In October of last year the Town Forum and the Civic Society started to compile a Local List of Heritage Assets, which would supplement the government's national list. One such building is

No 1 Boyne Park.

This building is situated at the junction of Mount Ephraim with Boyne Park in the North Common section of the Conservation Area.

No 1 Boyne Park was designed in 1899 by the distinguished architect E.J. May, who was Decimus Burton's last Pupil. On completion of his articles, and attendance at the Royal Academy Schools, May entered the office of the highly successful architect Norman Shaw, through whom he became involved in the development of the early "garden suburb" of Bedford Park in West London. This was in the "Queen Anne" style, which May also adopted for his work at Boyne Park in Tunbridge Wells.

Characteristics of the "Queen Anne" style to be seen at no 1 Boyne Park include gables; monumental ornamental chimneys; segmental arches; rubbed brick dressings over and around openings; tall white painted small-paned windows, and the use of red brick. E.J. May along with other leading architects of the day, including Norman Shaw, Halsey Ricardo, Leonard Stokes and Harold Blomfield, served on the Editorial Committee of the influential "Architectural Review" magazine.

May's client for No 1 Boyne Park was H Hays Cooper, whose room overlooking the Common featured the right-hand pair of first floor windows in the sketch. The left-hand pair lit Mrs Hays

Cooper's bedroom. On the ground floor, the right hand bay window was to the Drawing Room, and the left hand bay window was to the Morning Room.

The builder, as for several other houses in Boyne Park, was C.J. Gallard, and the property is now occupied by Messrs Brookes Batchelor, Chartered Patent Agents.

Philip Whitbourn

WARDEN'S REPORT

Following our beautiful autumn, which lasted till early December, the continuous rain of the next two months caused lots of frustrations in carrying out our programme of tree works. However, nature relented at the end of January and we commenced with the clearance around Wellington Rocks. This clearance is intended to assist in the event of a repeat of last summers problems at the Rocks. The removal of much of the scrub and saplings adjacent to the site will, we hope, make it harder for the youngsters to hide away and make it easier police the area. We hope also, that the Alcohol Control Zone will be in place within the next few weeks and this will enable the police to act more effectively. Many of you will have been watching the progress of the new cricket pavilion with interest and it is gratifying to see the speed at which it is progressing, especially since the roof started to go on. It is now starting to reveal itself as quite an imposing structure, which although it only covers the same footprint as the old building, looks a lot larger. Very nice though. The club are currently facing a battle with the planners, who for some strange reason are saying that the

whole building must be painted white. This would be a nightmare to keep looking smart and would seem to be an invitation to all our local graffiti artists. The Conservators are backing the club in its fight to get the exterior of the new pavilion similar to the old one; brown weatherboarding with white window and door frames and a white balcony.

The club are obviously concerned about the risk of vandalism when the construction is completed and as many of you may have heard, they started a campaign to have Fir Tree Rd reopened to traffic in the belief that a flow of traffic along the road will give more protection. Whilst they appreciate the concern of the club, the Conservators are of course, very much opposed to this idea as we think that the closure of the top section of the road is one of the best things we have accomplished and of course, the vandalism takes place very late at night when there is unlikely to be anyone using the road anyway. The situation has progressed somewhat now and the club are exploring the possibility of placing a barrier at the bottom of Fir Tree Rd to exclude vehicle traffic at night altogether. I must admit that although preferable to the re-

opening, I worry that this will make it less likely that the police will patrol the area. It is also unlikely to help with our problems on the Rocks as almost all the youngsters who meet there are under the age for driving and walk up from the town.

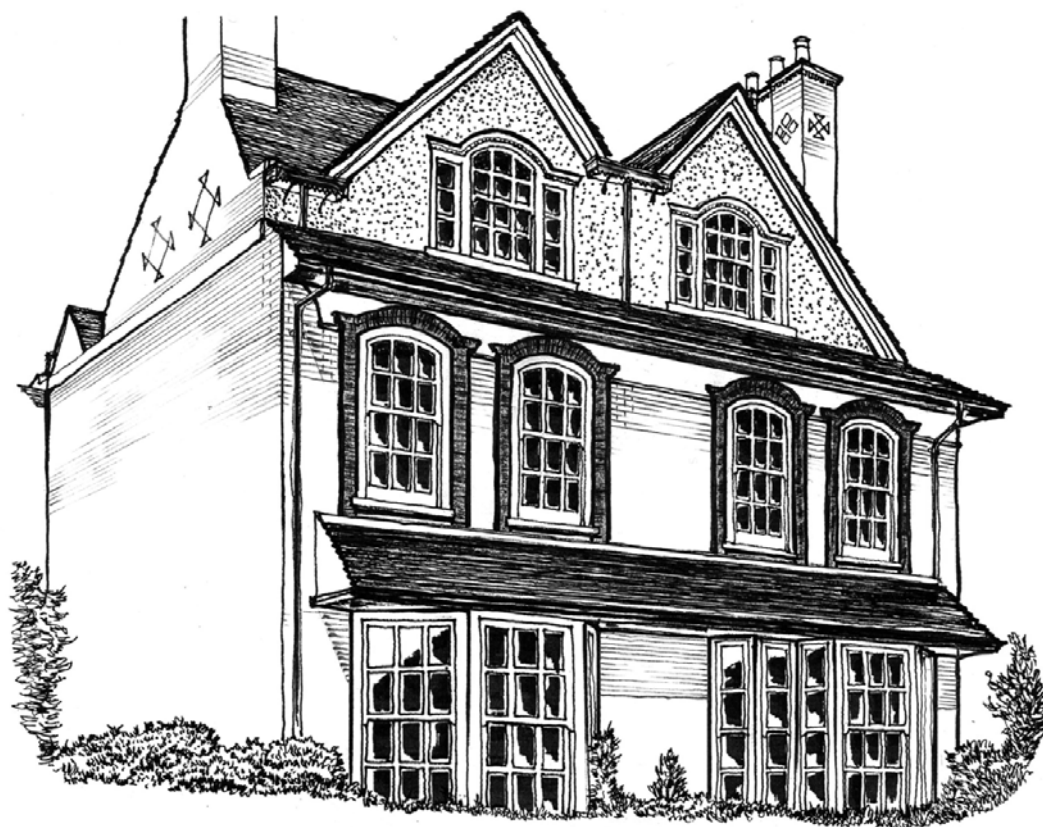
Getting back to the clearances carried out this winter, we also removed a large number of dead Elm trees from the perimeter of Fir Tree car park and adjacent to the closed section of road. We are now waiting to get the stumps ground out so that this area can be maintained with our flail mower and I hope we will quickly see grass covering the ground. This area has seen a lot of change recently with the construction of the bat refuge and the clearance carried out by the volunteers which has now been seeded with heather. We still have further clearance to carry out here to let the light into the new glade but it is starting to come together now and I am very pleased. I can imagine it will be a popular place for a picnic, perhaps we should consider putting a bench there.

Most of you will also be aware of the clearance carried out behind Brighton Lake for which,

irritatingly the Council got the credit in the Courier. We will also be grinding out these stumps as soon as possible to allow easy maintenance in this area. The final major clearance of the winter was the continuation of our programme to push back the roadside trees. This year we went from Tea Garden Lane to St Paul's Church on the A264.

Of course the main news of the winter is the sale of the Commons. Our new owner and Lord of the Manor is Targetfollow (Pantiles) Limited who also purchased the Pantiles, having for some time controlled the Corn Exchange. Early indications are very positive indeed and it appears we have been acquired by a company who wish to re-vitalise the South end of the town and enhance the Commons as part of that process. I am sure that this subject will be covered in the rest of this issue so I will leave my comments there.

Steve Budden



Editorial.

When I first took on the editorship I thought that this edition of Common Ground might more properly be called the Winter edition. This year the signs of spring were with us very early - in our garden we saw the first daffodils burst into flower before Christmas! On the common everything is well advanced and monthly winter working parties have taken full advantage of the mild, and even sunny, weather.

This winter, the favourable weather conditions have made it possible for the volunteers to make very good progress in the clearance of secondary growth in different areas of the common and have opened up those areas to the sunlight. Whilst the 9 or 10 volunteers and their attendant dogs have done commendably well during this season, a few more volunteers would have made it possible to do even better. If you are reasonably able bodied and really want to see the Common continue to improve, do make a note to come along next season, commencing the first Saturday in September (10 am Fir Tree Car Park). Dogs are welcome!

For some years one of our members, Mr P Morey, has delivered Common Ground in the Nevill Park and Hungershall Park areas. He now wishes to give up and we are looking for someone who would be willing to take on this duty (delivering Common Ground to 10 members 3 times a year). Any one who is willing to take this on please contact me on 01892 524019 or by E.Mail lawgv7@aol.com. The Friends of Commons are most grateful to Mr Morey and indeed also to all the those members who deliver to other areas, for having helped in this way.

For some time I have been trying to find a successor as Editor of this newsletter. I find it difficult to believe that there is no one amongst our many members who does not have the time and the inclination to undertake this task and I have concluded that the time has come for me to issue a deadline. This will be the last edition of Common Ground that I will edit and produce but I will undertake to see the new Editor into the job and to help them in any way I can. I would be sorry to see Common Ground close down - I hope that some other member is equally concerned.

George Lawson



LOWER CRICKET GROUND.

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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