

# COMMON GROUND

? No 1

## THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

### Friends Publish Priority Tasks

Eight priority tasks have been identified by the Friends' Committee for urgent attention by the Commons Conservators. Suggested to the Conservators by letter from the Chairman, the Friends are pleased to report that work on most of the tasks is already being undertaken, with completion hopefully by March '92.

### The priority tasks outlined comprise:

1. Clearance of all paths for 10 feet either side.
2. Clearance of nettles, weeds, rubbish etc. on **Rusthall** Common fronting Common View.
3. Clearance of brambles etc. overlooking borders eg. Castle Road.
4. Repair/reinstatement of broken, twisted or missing railings eg. opposite Vale Road Post Office, Mount **Ephraim** and side of Upper Cricket Ground Pavilion.
5. Replacement of unsightly 'gravestones' in London Road by granite kerbstones or tree stumps.
6. Prevention of parking on common verges eg. entrance to Nevill Park.
7. Clearance of ivy, bramble, ferns etc. around cherry trees in Donkey Walk, and replacement of dead trees  
**(all in addition to:-)**
8. MORE FREQUENT CLEARANCE OF LITTER, AND LITTER BINS.

*The positive response from the Conservators has been welcomed by the Chairman, who spoke encouragingly about future prospects and the constructive way the two bodies, together with the Borough Council, have worked in these first few months.*



### LOGO LAUNCHED

With so many voluntary groups in existence these days the Committee felt that it was appropriate to develop a logo for the Friends and to give ourselves a sense of real identity. However, the Committee felt that it was not itself skilled enough to produce one (was it not said that a camel is a horse designed by a Committee?). Consequently 'Mark Roelofsen, who looks after our PR, marketing etc., was asked to seek the help of a professional, but offer nothing but the honour and prestige of doing the job!

We are, therefore, enormously grateful to Richard Potter, a young freelance graphic designer based in Langton Green, for producing an impressive number of high quality 'visuals' for consideration. The one featured above was finally selected. In an uncomplicated and striking way it conveys a feeling of space and peace, and will work well in both colour and monochrome. We hope you'll like it.

Richard can undertake a wide range of graphic work (from logos and corporate identity, to advertisements and brochures). For more information contact Richard on Tun Wells 862637, who says 'I'm pleased to have been associated with the Friends at this early stage of what I'm sure will be a very long, worthy and proud history'.

### Chairman's Letter

Since agreement to set up the Friends at the public meeting on 30th August we have, I think, made considerable progress. At the last count over 160 members had joined, together with 4 corporate members, and from this enthusiastic group the provisional Committee, set up on the 30th August, has enlisted the help of a couple of co-options. The full Committee is listed on the back page. The secretarial duties are being carried out by Sylvia Luckhurst - the secretary to the Conservators, and an enormous help she is. We must all be extremely grateful to her for her dedication to the cause of better In addition our meetings have been greatly assisted by Nick Hill as the representative of the Freehold Tenants, and Michael Stewart who is very kindly acting as our legal adviser, and piloting our application for charitable status through the Charity Commissioners.

**Rep Appointed** - Under the Terms of Reference agreed with the Conservators we are entitled to one representative at the meetings and I have the honour of having been nominated as that. At the September meeting the principal item for discussion was the progress with the Management Plan being prepared by the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation and the Borough Council. *( cont. page 2. )*

### • AGM •

Make a diary note now.

The AGM will be held on  
**Thursday February 6th**  
at 8pm.

It will be held in the  
Council Chamber  
of the Town Hall,  
Tunbridge Wells.

*Friends of Friends are also welcome!*

## Chairmans Letter contd...

It is hoped that this plan, which is expected to contain far-reaching proposals for the restoration of the Commons towards something of their old beauty, will come before the Conservators at their meeting in early 1992, with work commencing next Autumn. Meantime interested bodies have been asked to give the conservators a list of the tasks which they think the existing workforce should concentrate on this winter. We have duly given our views, which feature in our lead story. We would welcome members' views on this list, and any other ideas you may have.

- Another matter which came in for some criticism and questioning at the same meeting was the size of the funds being held by the Conservators - some £30,000 - when the commons are in the state they are. We are assured by the Clerk that the balances were not being held in reserve against carrying out the Management Plan, and would not affect the size of the 'precept' which the Conservators might make to the Borough Council under the County of Kent Act, 1981, sec 115, for funds for 1992/3 and beyond.

- 'Seats'. One of the most obnoxious ways in which the Commons have been allowed to deteriorate is the state of the seats. One of our first tasks is to try to concentrate on the repair and improvement of the seats, and we hope to organise some volunteer work in this connection. Indeed, to demonstrate our feelings on this we have offered the Conservators to replace or repair two seats, from the funds already raised. There will be a plaque indicating they are donated by the Friends.

- Recruitment is a subject permanently on the agenda of your Committee. Clearly the more members we have the more influential we are likely to be. Please apply yourselves to spreading the word of the Friends and recruiting members whenever possible.

- I hope you find 'Common Ground' an enjoyable read, and I know Mark Roelofsen, who is getting it together, would welcome any views and pieces you may wish to submit. His address will be found with others on the back page.

- Thank you for all joining. I trust that over the years we may help to achieve our object of restoring the Commons to their former glories

*Patrick Shovelton*



*Looking towards Mount Edgcombe and Mount Ephraim (supplied by the Curator, TW Museum)*

# SO MUCH TO DO ...

Historically Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons consisted of open heathland with gorse and heather, maintained as such by grazing of sheep and cattle. The earliest image of the former, Jan Kip's bird's-eye view of 1719, shows it virtually free of trees. This essentially open character was retained well into the present century, with few trees other than commemorative plantings.

This is well illustrated by the numerous Victorian and Edwardian prints, postcards and photographs depicting panoramic views across the Commons from various points. Guides published in this period emphasise the beauty of the characteristic heathland vegetation, the gold of the gorse, and the purple of the heather. A series of aerial views from as late as the 1930's show most of Tunbridge Wells Common still open.

Once grazing ceased, round about the time of World War Two, a process of reversion to woodland began, although this has not proceeded at the same speed throughout. The characteristic heathland vegetation, which apart from its aesthetic attractions was an important example of scarce wildlife habitat, became overtaken by tree growth, so that today only a few struggling remnants remain.

Most of the views seen in old illustrations (including the classic view over Happy Valley) have now become invisible, as two

views above show. Former beauty spots such as Fir Tree Pond have become smothered by undergrowth, as have some rock formations at Mount Edgcombe and Denny Bottom. Thus over the past half century many of the beauties of the common which were formerly admired by residents and commended to visitors in local guides have disappeared or been obscured.

*Dr. Ian Beavis*

## AND HOW YOU CAN HELP.

The simple act of joining the Friends demonstrates your interest in the Commons, but as is often the case to be successful, especially in the early days, more is often needed. Friends responded well to our first call upon their valuable time - the litter pick on Saturday Nov 23rd. Over 40 members turned up at various times of the day, at the end of which 48 sacks of litter and discarded items were collected, including concrete posts, cast iron piping, clothes and old signs amongst others.

### Teamwork

As a jointly co-ordinated event between the Friends and the Borough Council's Special Projects Group, both parties are



*And the view today (supplied by Mr M. May)*

pleased with the result, and some useful publicity was achieved.

The Chairman, however, was keen to point out that litter picking is NOT what we are all about. As our priority tasks make clear, we see that role being one that should be more thoroughly undertaken by the Conservators' team and the Council. That is not to say that when a specific need is identified we will not lend our support.

## Volunteers Needed

Any friends interested in working on the Commons are asked to give their names to Peter Hoole, (details on back page), saying what they would like to do and when. This may include helping restore seats, bramble and undergrowth clearance, as well as more demanding work such as fallen tree cutting and removal. If numbers are appropriate then perhaps a team can get together and set about a specific project.

By demonstrating our practical help to the Conservators and Council our profile and influence can only increase.



*Litter Pick*

## Membership Nears 200

Having been launched only 3 months membership is already over 160, and with subscriptions coming in every week we'll soon be near 200. This must reflect not only the strong sense of affection and concern for the Commons in the area (membership extends as wide as Pembury, Capel and Groombridge), but also the constructive way in which we are perceived by the public as they read about us in the press.

## Friends of Friends

As with all products (if we can call ourselves a product) the best form of advertising is word of mouth, so please whenever possible preach, proselytize, and recruit! If every Friend could, before the AGM, recruit another Friend, we'll have over 300 members, and that would be a good start. We also need more Corporate members. If any member is 'in' with (or has) a firm that borders the Commons, please do appeal to them. The chairman can always liaise with them, and explain our objectives and any specific areas of help we may need.

**Our influence, and the regard in which we're held, will grow as our membership does. So whilst the subscriptions help us to enhance the Commons in tangible ways (seating, voluntary work etc) as well as keeping you in touch through Common Ground, the actual number of supporters is crucial, too.**

## CORPORATE MEMBERS

We currently have 4 Corporate members to whom we extend a warm welcome and our thanks;

1. Hammonds Ltd (Estate Agents)
2. MCL Group Ltd (Mazda Cars)
3. The Spa Hotel
4. Wolfit Ltd (Petshop)

## Getting Nettled

Nettled about the Common? Well I was. At least stung by a nettle when passing too close to a clump. Stopped from what I had intended I looked around me. Brought up to believe in nature's essential orderliness, I expected to see an antidote. No docks! And an actively smarting hand. Curiosity undeterred, I reflected that it can bring rewards as well as perils.

I had been drawn to strike into a bank of Autumn's glorious golden bracken. I wanted to have a look at a tree root, one of those magnificent forms, monuments to the Great Storm of 1987. I'm glad we have some remaining. They'll surely last there at least a generation, for others to wonder at, and act as a potent reminder of the other side to the natural elements.

It was not just idle curiosity. On one of those delightful rough areas of the Common, it lay spikily undisturbed. I was intent on looking for traces of insect or other living activity there might be, but I found practically nothing! But with our recent persistent dry summers there's been little to encourage growth, or decay, of any sort on the roots for insects to use as shelter or food.

Of course the nettles - and thistles too for that matter - serve their purpose. Caterpillars of the Red Admiral, Peacock, Painted Lady and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies seen in such great numbers in and around the Common this year must all have depended on them.

Paul Pearce-Kelly, keeper of invertebrates at London Zoo would rhapsodise about any insect habitat. He was recently asked his views on the economic potential of the introduction of insects into our diets. He thought it could be very sensible indeed not just on dietary but also on environmental grounds.

*(cont. overleaf)*



He waxed lyrical about the natural sources of rich protein, but confessed he had yet to eat any maggots himself.

Well, I'm not supporting any introductions of this nature in our diet, yet the Common is home to many varieties of creatures, including insects. They will only live there given enough pockets of relatively undisturbed ground. In turn this will keep birds on the Common, and that helps fill our gardens with them too.

I've yet to come across any docks. But the nettle stings are but a distant memory now. And I look upon them as a sort of honourable wound anyway.

*Stephen Grenville*

## OPEN SPACE

Correspondence, views and articles are all welcome from members. If you would like to submit something to Common Ground, please do so, and with time and space allowing I'll be pleased to include it. You'll find my address in the list of committee members (below). Hopefully the next issue will be out shortly after the AGM.

P.S.

You may be able to help me with the Common Ground, especially if you have access to a DTP. If so this will help reduce copy deadlines and save the Friends money!

*Mark Roelofsen.*

## Your Committee

Below appears the full list of the provisional committee members with executive functions where appropriate. There should be a member living near you who'd be pleased to hear of any views or thoughts you may have.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Chairman -</b>                                     | Patrick Shovelton, 63 London Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1DT (Tel: T/Wells 527885)   |
| <b>Vice Chairman -</b>                                | Lt Col Gerry Brown, 60 London Road, Tunbridge Wells. (Tel: T/Wells 536365)  |
| <b>Hon Treasurer -</b>                                | David Wakefield, 68 London Road, Tunbridge Wells. (Tel: T/Wells 523983)   |
| <b>History -</b>                                      | Dr Ian Beavis, 104 St James Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 2HH.<br>Peter Freeman, Manor Lodge, Bishops Down Road, Tunbridge Wells. (Tel: T/Wells 524110)<br>Stephen Grenville, Flat 1, The Priory, 3A Nevill Park, Tunbridge Wells, TN4 8NW.  |
| <b>Volunteers -</b>                                   | Peter D Hoole, Little Grove House, Cumberland Gardens, Tunbridge Wells. Tel: T/Wells 539977<br>Marian May, 17 Cumberland Walk, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1UJ<br>Derek Page, 38 Common View, Rusthall, Tunbridge Wells, (Tel: T/Wells 528455)<br>Conrad Payne, 1 Nevill Park, Tunbridge Wells TN4 8NW |
| <b>PR and<br/>Common<br/>Ground -</b>                 | Mark Roelofsen, 1B Montacute Gardens, Tunbridge Wells, TN4 8HG. (Tel: Home- T/Wells 549699)   |
| <b>Representative of<br/>the Freehold<br/>Tenants</b> | Nick Hill, Bracken Cottage, The Common, Tunbridge Wells TN4 8NB.  |
| <b>Legal Adviser -</b>                                | Michael Stewart, 2 Rusthall Place, Langton Road, Tunbridge Wells TN4 8XB.<br>(Tel: Home- T/Wells 541460)  |
| <b>Membership<br/>Secretary -</b>                     | Miss Margaret Bardner, 11 Manor Close, TN4 8ZB. (Tel: 533325)   |
| <b>Secretary<br/>(pro-tem)</b>                        | Sylvia Luckhurst, Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS. (Tel: T/Wells 526121)   |