

APPROVED

# COMMON



Mrs Jennifer Blackburn  
64, Parsonage Rd

# GROUND

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

Issue 16. Autumn 1997

## An ill wind?

Warden's Report by Steve Budden

Ten years ago we all thought that the end of the world had come. However, time is a great healer and Mother Nature has just carried on as no doubt she has in many similar circumstances during our recent history (by recent, I mean since the last ice age).

Our memories of that night have faded, the 'Hurricane' has become 'The Great Storm' and now looking across summer woodland it can be easy to forget the extent of the damage. But it only takes something like the fire we had near Hungershall Park to bring the memories flooding back. In the two to three acres that were burnt, around 200 windblown trees had to be removed and their stumps ground out and that level of damage still exists over much of the Common. Walking along tracks such as the Terrace Walk above Brighton Lake, the woodland on either side appears to be regenerating well but closer inspection reveals that most regrowth is in fact coming from fallen trees and will ultimately fail. Many years of work remain ahead of us to bring our areas of woodland back into proper management. However it is an ill wind that blows no good and the aftermath of 1987 focused many minds on the need for proper care of woodlands and in the case of our Commons it masked a hiatus that led the Conservators into the decision to prepare a co-ordinated plan for the future. Implementation of the plan started in 1992 and I think we can now say that these plans are starting to bear fruit. Many of the first clearances that were carried out, such as adjacent to the Racecourse, behind Fir Tree car park and behind Brighton Lake are forming good **heathland/grassland** communities and the paths that have been widened or re-opened are greening up with welcome returns of wildflowers along their margins. Old views and rock faces are re-appearing and facilities such as seats and bins are being slowly upgraded. The Conservators

and the Friends have accomplished much over the past five years but much more still remains to be done.

Work will continue this winter with the grinding of windblown stumps in the Bishops Down triangle to facilitate flailing of bracken to encourage the regrowth of grassland; we will start scalloping the damaged woodland on the South side of the terrace walk; and more work will be carried out on Bracken Cottage Pond. The drive to Rusthall Elms will be cut back to remove dangerous and damaged trees and the slopes of Happy Valley will be again cleared of bracken

and bramble to allow grasses to re-establish.

As many of you will have noted, large new posts are being installed to block cars from many paths and this work will continue on both Commons. More scrub clearance will take place around Denny Bottom to expose rocks and encourage regeneration of heather and grasses and at Bulls Hollow ring bolts and signs will be installed to try and alleviate erosion problems caused by climbers. All paths and tracks have been given an extensive cut this Autumn and the new All-Ability Trail has been constructed between Fir Tree car park and Victoria Grove.

Other, less welcome work, will also take place over the next few months as Eurobell start to install cables around the Commons. Fortunately, much of the digging will take place in the less **sensitive** parts but I fear that in spite of all the good intentions of Eurobell's management, problems will arise and the subcontractors will need to be monitored closely.

On a happier note, this summer I became involved with the 'Mayor's Trophy', an environmental competition for schools organised in conjunction with TWBC and the Kent High Weald Project. Over 1700 children took part and entries were of a very high standard ranging from recycling to tree planting to community maps. All the judges were most impressed and I am pleased to report that **Skinner's** School got second place in the Conservation Projects category for their work at Edgcombe Rocks on Tunbridge Wells Common.

### Diary Dates

**DEC 7<sup>TH</sup>**

Scrub Clearance - Toad Rock

**JAN 4<sup>TH</sup>**

Scrub Clearance - Highbury

**JAN 30<sup>TH</sup>**

Annual Dinner - Spa Hotel  
7 for 7.45pm

**FEB 1<sup>ST</sup>**

Scrub Clearance - Highbury

**MAR 1<sup>ST</sup>**

Scrub Clearance - Bull's Hollow

**MAR 11<sup>TH</sup>**

A.G.M. (with Warden to speak) 7.15pm for 8pm,  
Town Hall.

**JULY 4<sup>TH</sup>**

Ian Beavis's Annual Walk

(NOTE: Work parties meet at Fir Tree car park at 10am or on site)

## Walks on the Commons

A leaflet detailing walks across both Commons, (which the Friends have been planning for some time), together with accompanying text, is being published by the Borough Council with the help of the Warden and Mrs Ruth Wakefield. Copies may in due course be obtained from the Tourist Information Centre, The Old Fishmarket, The Pantiles.



# AS IT HAPPENED

## —200 years on!

a report on the day's events by Patrick Shovelton

We first of all talked to the Conservators in 1995 about re-enacting Diversions or a 19th Century Commons race meeting. The idea of a horse race quickly went out of the window as the old racecourse was judged by experts to be totally unsafe - quite apart from the crossings and jumps across Major York's Road. So Diversions it was - and they were approved by the Conservators in 1996 and took place on the bicentenary date of 16th August 1997. Much planning ensued. A major breakthrough followed when the Council Leisure Board in February of this year agreed to vote us £3000 in support of the venture. The Freehold Tenants shortly afterwards chipped in with the very kind offer to underwrite us to the tune of a further £2500 - an offer which in the event we gladly did not have to call upon. Other sponsors came later. PPP Healthcare with their major grant which enabled us to order a large marquee and subsidiary tents; Thomson, Snell & Passmore and Wetherspoons with their most generous sponsorship of the firework display. We decided also to mount a big raffle which in the end raised over £2000. Big prizes were provided by British Airways, Maersk Air, The Spa, Russell, Beacon and Swan hotels, Letheby and Christopher (our caterers), Thackeray's Restaurant, Burberrys and many other generous firms and individuals.

The programme closely followed the 1797 Diversions - starting with the Stoolball match between the Kent & Sussex Ladies, dressed in costume, with their ribbons - blue for Kent and pink for Sussex; and we saw some excellent stoolball with magnificent fielding. The suggestion was indeed made from the touchline that some of these ladies might give lessons to members of the England Cricket team.

Simultaneously the smoking match was staged and appropriately won by Councillor Sayer, Chairman of the Conservators, who outlasted all the professionals from Past Pleasures in their 18th Century dress and with their large clay pipes.

The other 18th Century games - the ass races, the jingling matches, the running races, including those for young ladies of unsullied character, together with the sack and wheelbarrow races - all went well. We had been worried before the event that we had no entries. But on the day, as soon as Christopher Hall, our commentator, announced a race our worries were at an end. We had flocks of children rushing forward.

To the 1797 events we added some others. Notable was the arrival of Whitbread's dray and Shire horses. They had to be de-boxed on Mount Ephraim and trotted down Castle Road. As soon as they arrived on the Lower Cricket Ground there were queues of children lining up for rides. Among the Diversions photos on pages 4 and 5 is a good one of Whitbread's dray with the horses and children.

Another "added" event was the Terrier Races sponsored by Peter Hoole of Wolfits and run by George Skilton. These were a great success - the only complaint being that there were so many spectators it was difficult to see! The so-called Mutt Race was won by a bitch far from being a mutt - a liver-spotted Dalmatian named Dodie, well-known to Commons' dog walkers.

Another great attraction was Cancara - The Lloyds Bank Black Stallion. He could not be paraded owing to the press of people but munched gratefully the many carrots supplied to him by adoring children.

Finally came the Tug-of-War. We were much concerned because the Fire Brigade teams did not appear. So we started with childrens' (aided by some parents) tugs. This proved mighty popular and might have gone on for ever had not the Fire Brigade turned up, having been held up (would you believe it!) by a fire. The professionals then took over and Rusthall beat Tunbridge Wells by 2 pulls to 1.

Another 18th Century item was a mini-fair provided by Albert of Worthing. Whether the 1797 organisers had side-shows history does into record. But the carousel, the haunted house, and the Big Wheel certainly attracted the children and gave great pleasure - as did the coconut shy kindly provided by Rusthall Scouts.

Throughout the afternoon music was provided - thought not much of an 18th Century character. The New Orleans Echoes led by Pete Curtis paraded round and the Wadhurst Town Band performed outside the main tent. In the evening, the Hog Pounders' Feast re-enacted, (as far as the Health and Safety Executive would allow!) for the first time for probably over 100 years, was attended by over 200, dining out of doors on a balmy August evening after an exceptionally hot August day - as those dressed in 18th Century costume will never forget.



At the end of the Feast the raffle was drawn - with the results to be seen on page 6. As His Worship the Mayor won the second prize - 2 Club Class air tickets to Copenhagen - there were some cries of "FIX" but I can assure you that the draw was above board with no sleight of hand.

The evening concluded with the Firework Display - 18 minutes of spectacular colour and height, stopping all the traffic and bringing hundreds to watch.

Altogether I think it can fairly be said that the afternoon and evening was a success. It showed how the Common had been used and could be used. We were blessed by grand weather and there was no national tragedy immediately, preceding the day. The events went to time and the populace turned up - over 5,000 according to stallholders - some distributed as many leaflets. A small

# AN HISTORICAL NOTE

by Dr Ian Beavis  
Assistant Curator, Tunbridge Wells Museum

**D**iversions on the Common 1997 was an imaginative re-enactment, including original and modern features, of a holiday event held exactly two hundred years ago. It was based on the contemporary event. Local printer and publisher Jasper Sprange, whose scrapbooks containing samples of his work, provide a fascinating glimpse of life in the young town of Tunbridge Wells at the end of the 18th century. By publishing the standard local guidebook and acting as a one-man tourist information service, Sprange played a leading part in publicising the town's attractions and entertainments.

For centuries before the discovery of the Chalybeate spring in 1606 and the foundations of the town, Tunbridge Wells Common had been part of the wastes of the Manor of Rusthall, the communal grazing lands for a small and scattered population. The dramatic rise of Tunbridge Wells as a spa resort gave the Common a new role. Each summer there was an influx of fashionable visitors, who came as much for a rural holiday as to take the waters. Gradually a permanent community grew up to cater for their needs. In the absence of any formal local government, the arrangements for visitors were organised by an honorary Master of Ceremonies, a position invented for himself by Beau Nash when he came to

take charge of the Wells in 1735. In a newly formed town without the benefit of a traditional village green, and in an age before municipal parks, the Common met a vital need for a public open space. Any outdoor activities such as horse races and cricket matches that could not be accommodated in the restricted space of the Pantiles or Mount Sion would naturally find a venue on the Common.

Life at Tunbridge Wells in the holiday season was designed by Nash to be completely set apart from normal existence. Within this charmed circle, class distinctions were temporarily abolished. Everyone was equal, and people were not expected to stand on their dignity. Regular social rules did not apply, but were superseded by a code laid down by the Master of Ceremonies. Visitors were encouraged not to keep to themselves but to participate in whatever public events were organised for them. In this relaxed atmosphere, visitors could join in all kinds of unlikely activities that they might never dream of engaging in elsewhere. Messrs. Porter and Batchelor could thus be assured of full support for their Diversions enterprise. The 'gentry visitants', as Sprange describes them, would have paid for the prizes and other expenses by public subscription, the



means by which everything that happened at the Wells was financed.

Visitors could also claim that playing silly games on the Common was part of the health-giving regime of a Tunbridge Wells holiday. As Sprange explains in his guidebook, the full benefits of the place were not to be had by drinking the waters alone. The breezes blowing across the open healthy landscape of the Common were highly beneficial and to be enjoyed as much as possible, whether by walking, riding, or sports activities. Furthermore, "in order to give the water fair play, it is proper to banish care and melancholy from the mind and encourage mirth and good humour". For the tourists of 1797, **Diversions** on the Common were a winning combination of a healthy venue and healthy activity.

"By thus drinking the Tunbridge Wells water", Jasper Sprange tells us, "and by entering cheerfully into all the amusing pleasures of the place, many, in time past, have recovered their constitutions, who were in all appearance hastening to their graves; and it is not to be reasonably doubted, but that the same methods will, through the blessing of providence, be attended with equally happy effects, to the latest posterity".

## *As it happened! — contd.*

profit was made which we will pass to the Conservators. Whether Diversions - or something like Diversions will be held again - ? for the Millennium - who knows? Obviously, it was a very great deal of work over many months and much thanks must go to the Council, the Conservators, our many sponsors and the great many individuals who helped on the Diversions Committee and on the day. In particular special thanks must go to Steve Budden and Sylvia Luckhurst without whom the event could never have taken place at all.

W.P.S.

**(NOTE: Some copies of the Programme, containing an historical note by Ian Beavis, copies of the 1797 and 1799 Diversions programmes as well as of the 1997 one are still available at the half price of 50p each. Please apply to David Wakefield at 68 London Road.)**

## Christmas Cards & Notelets

A notice has already been circulated about the availability of this year's Christmas Card - a view of Rusthall Common by Charles Dodd c. 1850 - on sale at 30p each with envelope.

These cards are also available at the same price, together with envelope, as notelets i.e. without the Christmas greeting.

Orders to:  
David Wakefield  
68 London Road.

## Subscription Renewal

**S**ubscriptions were due from September 1st. Would members not on direct debit please despatch their very modest fee (£5 per individual, £10 per family) to David Wakefield, 68 London Road, Tunbridge Wells. Cheques to be made out to the Friends of the Commons, please.

Please also take this opportunity to encourage friends and neighbours to join. The bigger our membership, the greater our influence.

Covenant forms available from David Wakefield for those who wish to covenant.

# Grand Raffle Prize Winners 16.8.97

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>1ST Mrs J Medhurst</b><br/>2 EuroGatwick British Airways Club Class Return Tickets</p> <p><b>2ND His Worship the Mayor</b><br/>2 Maersk Air Business Class Return Tickets to Copenhagen or Billund (Legoland)</p> <p><b>3RD Mrs Stapple</b><br/>Dinner, Bed &amp; Breakfast for 2 in de luxe accommodation with access to Sparkling Health at the Spa Hotel.</p> <p><b>4TH Mrs Brenda Page</b><br/>Dinner, Bed and Breakfast for 2 at the Russell Hotel</p> <p><b>5TH Mr S Lugton</b><br/>Voucher for £60 at Thackeray's Restaurant</p> <p><b>6TH Mr B D Mitchell</b><br/>A day at Fontwell Races for 2</p> <p><b>7TH Mr Brian Mayhew</b><br/>A Burberry's Holdall</p> | <p><b>8TH Mrs Weston</b><br/>A Burberry's Lady's Sweater</p> <p><b>9TH Mr J Douche</b><br/>A Burberry's Man's Sweater</p> <p><b>10TH Mrs P Haynes</b><br/>A Burberry's Scarf</p> <p><b>11TH Mr Read</b><br/>Dinner with wine for 2 at the Swan Hotel</p> <p><b>12TH Mrs Jeffery</b><br/>A meal for 2 at the Beacon Hotel</p> <p><b>13TH Mr N Hill</b><br/>Dinner for 2 at the Russell Hotel</p> <p><b>14TH Mrs Mackie</b><br/>A Plant from Eileen Nott</p> <p><b>15TH Mrs Hardy</b><br/>A Box of Chocolates</p> <p><b>16TH Mrs F Hunter</b><br/>A Tin of Biscuits</p> |
|--|---|

## Jeremy Menuhin



Lord of the Manor of Rusthall

Jeremy inherited his share of the Lordship of the Manor from his aunt, Griselda Kentner, on her death in March 1995.

Jeremy is the elder son of Lord and Lady Menuhin and, like his father, a brilliant musician though in this case a pianist, not a violinist. He made his debut as winner of the Young Artist's Piano Competition in New York in 1984 and since then has played regularly with leading orchestras and given numerous concerts and made countless recordings all over the world. His playing will be familiar to many members through concerts in the Church of King Charles the Martyr.

Jeremy lives in London and travels for his concerts widely. We cannot therefore expect to see him on the Commons often but we are assured that, like his aunt before him, he has the well-being of the Commons close at heart and will resist vigorously any attempts at encroachment and development.

## Flowers of the Common by Mary Page

In this article I am going to describe a few of the trees which grow on both Commons. I've kept the title of flowers of the Commons because trees are flowering plants.

Trees on the Commons are very important features nowadays. It was not always so. Take a look at old postcards from the turn of the century and you will see that trees were much sparser than now. Over the last fifty years they have multiplied immensely. Many have been planted to celebrate events and people and to learn more of these consult Ian Beavis' book, Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons Past and Present.

The best known tree is the OAK *Quercus rubra* with its distinctive leaves and fruit, the acorn. It is one of our oldest trees and also one of our longest living ones, some having been known to live well over five hundred years. The oldest on the Common is, I think, Princess Anne's Oak, said to have been planted around 1700 AD which makes it about three hundred years old.

In many ways the Oak is a wonderful tree and as well as living a long time, it is also host to many small creatures and insects. It has been estimated that at least 500 species of small insects use it including a tiny gall wasp which lays its eggs in oak buds causing swellings which become galls well known to us as marble galls or oak apples.

This tree was very important indeed in early times, in fact right up until the discovery of coal and the birth of the iron industry.

Before then the oak had been at the heart of our tree-based economy. Everything, houses, furniture and ships were all made of oak, the latter known as our "Wooden Walls" by John Evelyn in the 17th Century

**SILVER BIRCH** and "Hearts of Oak are our Ships" by David Garrick in the 18th Century.

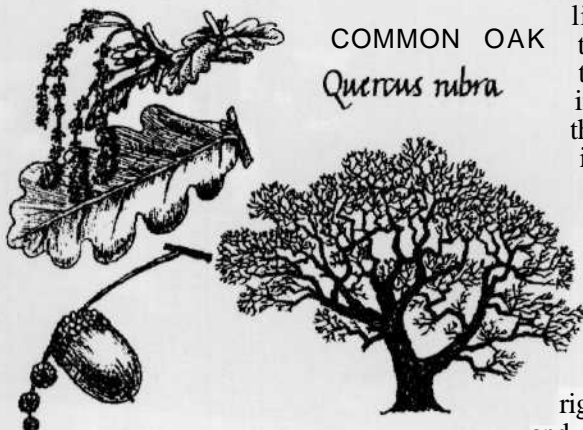


*Betula pendula*.

The next tree, the **SILVER BIRCH**

*Betula pendula*, looks completely different. Compared with the sturdy,

thick trunk of the oak it looks very elegant indeed with the silver bark which gives it its name. As trees go it is not a long living one, only lasting about eighty years but it dates back to the end of the Ice Age when it was one of the first trees to re-colonise Britain after the ice receded and much of the north of the country was covered with birch forests. And so it was used from early times for the making of many articles, furniture and other household goods such as besoms and brooms, farming implements, ploughs,



**COMMON OAK**  
*Quercus rubra*

# Christmas Presents

- Mugs These are of bone china with a design taken from an old print of Tunbridge Wells Common showing Mount Edgcumbe and the London Road. The design is in blue on a white background. £3.95
- Tea towels Made of cotton they feature a lively design of some of the birds, animals and flowers to be found on the Commons. Toad Rock has pride of place in the centre. There is a choice of colours: blue and white or brown and white. £2.95
- Jig-saws 250 pieces. The picture is a busy and colourful scene of the Pantiles in the mid-nineteenth century. It has quite a Christmas atmosphere! £4.50
- Pictorial maps Designed for us by Ron Burch, these colourful maps, one of Rusthall Common and the other of Tunbridge Wells Common, are most attractive with vignettes of buildings and landmarks. On the back of each is a detailed history by Ian Beevis of all the features illustrated. Framed these maps would make decorative wall pictures. £1.50 each
- Size: 42cm x 30cm approx.

## BARGAIN CORNER

- T-shirts We still have a few of our Diversions T-shirts to sell. They are really very good quality cotton featuring the attractive logo used for Diversions on the Common. This is printed in green on white.
- Adult's -  
was £9.50  
now £4.50  
Child's -  
was £4.50  
now £2.00

## Captions to the Photo Page

- A The Terrier Races  
B Conrad Payne, the winner of Men's Fashion, with Peter Freeman and Mark Dennison  
C Rusthall Fire Brigade in the Tug of War  
D Pauline Clements, the winner of Ladies Fashion  
E Whitbread's Shire Horses and Dray with happy children aboard  
F The Smoking Match, with Cllr Arthur Sayer, Chairman of the Conservators, the winner second on the right.  
G The Stoolball March  
H The Mayor and the Lady Mayoress  
I The Treasurer with a treasure  
J The Chairman in full cry  
K The Mayor in the stocks  
L The Wheelbarrow Race  
M The start of a Donkey Race  
N Cancara, Lloyd's Bank Black Horse  
O The Stilt Walker  
P One of the Sack Races  
Q The Stoolball Ladies get another victim

carts, gates, as well as for smoking hams and herrings and tanning leather.

The birch was of course the implement of punishment endured by generations of schoolboys. As one 18th Century writer says of it "Its twigs are used for Besoms and Rods, the one for the cleanly Housewife to sweep down the cobwebs and the other for the magisterial Pedagogue to drive the Colt out of the Man".

In Winter when the tree is bare, bundles of twigs can be seen on the branches. These are clustered galls and are known as Witches Brooms.

The next two trees are smaller. There is a controversy as to whether the HAZEL *Corylosavellan* is a tree or a shrub.



I think of it as a small tree and am very glad to see it in the dreary month of February, its flowers, the catkins or lamb's tails, hanging down, shedding golden pollen to cheer us with the promise of the coming Spring. It is one of our old magical trees, with many superstitions in various parts of the country. In Devon, a double nut was a cure for toothache and in Ireland a nut in the pocket kept rheumatism or lumbago at bay. Its sticks were a protection against snakes and of course it was a hazel twig used in water divining. These were all pagan ideas so the Early Church decided to Christianise them. The Filbert, a variety of hazel nut was called after St. Philbert, a Benedictine monk of the 7th Century whose day was August 22nd when the hazel nuts were ripe.

Lastly, HAWTHORN *Crataegus monogyna*, also known as Whitehorn as it blossoms in May with its leaves to distinguish it from the Blackthorn, a Prunus, which blossoms earlier in April before its leaves are out. Some just call it MAY, because in the days of the old calendar before 1752, Mayday was thirteen days later than now and the blossom was out in time for all the festivities connected with May Day. Hawthorn is another magical tree like the Hazel, and it has been especially



related to the Rites of Spring in Both Pagan and Christian times. Superstitions continued about Hawthorn even after the Christianization with the story of the Glastonbury Thorn and Joseph of Arimathea. In 1667 Pepys writes in his diary that his wife rose early to wash her face in *maydew* to improve her looks and even up into the 1920's my mother regarded Hawthorn as very unlucky and we were not allowed to take it in to the house.

I will end with a humorous little anecdote I found in an old guide to Tunbridge Wells of 1916. The writer describes excessively the beauty of the Hawthorn in flower on the Common and adds the following "These hawthorns afford great pleasure to climbing children. The Common Ranger has been seen to shake nine little boys out of a single tree, chase them away and return to shake out a tenth!"

Drawings by Harold Page

# The History of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons

## Part 8 *Managing the Evolution by Dr Ian Beavis*

By the 1970s, the originally open character of the Commons had been almost entirely transformed. Increasing numbers of self-sown trees, along with a spread of bracken and bramble, had produced a landscape that for the most part appeared to be woodland traversed by narrow footpaths. The Race Course had become a forest ride. Heathland had been virtually extinguished, surviving only in a few dwindling patches, themselves being slowly encroached upon by taller undergrowth. The once ubiquitous gorse bushes flourished only in a few open spots, while elsewhere they were being shaded out by the tree canopy. Acid grassland still survived on the northern and southern fringes of Tunbridge Wells Common, but it was clearly threatened by advancing woodland. Victorian seats hemmed in by vegetation hinted at lost viewpoints. Some rock formations, notably at Mount Edgcumbe and Happy Valley, had been so densely engulfed by foliage that their existence was generally unknown. And the last of the little informal ponds had been reduced to boggy hollows, well on their way to complete disappearance.

This process, so dramatic when set out in print, or when Victorian views of the Commons are compared with their modern equivalents, was rendered less noticeable by its gradual nature. Older residents remembered what the Commons had looked like in earlier times, but over the years became accustomed to its new appearance. While younger folk, and those recently moved into the area,

naturally imagined that this was how the Commons were meant to be. Almost all shared a general perception that "nature looks after itself, failing to realise that in England at least no landscape is entirely natural but must inevitably be a conscious or unconscious collaboration between human activity and natural processes.

The vital stimulus that encouraged many to look at the Commons in a fresh way was the famous Great Storm or 'Hurricane' on the night of 15/16 October 1987. Local people awoke to discover that enormous numbers of trees which had appeared to be permanent features of the landscape had met a premature end. Although not as devastated as some areas, the trees on the Commons had suffered considerable losses. The Commons Conservators now had to consider how the damage could be repaired, and in doing so they were prompted to investigate what the landscape had looked like in times past, using the now well known pictures in the Museum collection that have been exhibited on a number of occasions in recent years. The Conservators decided to commission the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation to do further research on the history of the Commons, to conduct an environmental survey, and on the basis of these to prepare a detailed management plan. With the help of various experts, both local and from farther afield, an extensive report was prepared for consideration by the Conservators and for public consultation, and its recommendations were formally adopted by the Conservators in 1992. At

the same time, public interest in the Commons had considerably increased, resulting in the establishment of the Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons in 1991. Most important of all a full-time Warden was appointed.

Since 1992, considerable progress has been made in implementing the new management plan, which does not aim to put the clock back to 1900, but to achieve a mosaic of diverse habitats, of which woodland will still form a part. A number of areas of scrub had been cleared, of which the north west corner of Tunbridge Wells Common is now a particularly attractive example. The surviving patches of heather are being encouraged to spread, the most striking progress being seen in an area beside the Race Course where the plants had almost been shaded out of existence. Grassland areas too are being expanded, and their characteristic butterflies are already increasing and spreading to new areas, assisted by the wider fringes of the footpaths where grasses and flowers have space to flourish. Fir Tree Pond, Bracken Cottage Pond, and the Marl Pits are coming back to life, providing homes for dragonflies, amphibians and other creatures. And lost rock formations at Mount Edgcumbe, Denny Bottom and Happy Valley have been once more exposed to view. Much more remains to be done, but a fine start has been made towards making the Commons as attractive to locals and visitors, and to their native plants and animals, as they were a century ago.

Your Committee have recently learnt of a £200,000 Highways scheme to "improve" this crossing. The "improvements" would involve taking several hundred square metres of the Common on the east side of London Road, both north and south of the crossing. The scheme basically stems from the decision to put more and more traffic on the main trunk roads (A26 and A264) and from the desire to stop the right turn into Mount Ephraim from London Road. The scheme also involves the stopping-up of Inner London Road at the north end and the creation of a "turning head" taking a further lump out of the Common. A further piece of the Common would have to be taken to improve the turning into Inner London Road at the south end under the new envisaged circumstances, though some land would be given back here.

## The London Road/ Church Road Crossing

We are, of course, very concerned about these proposals to take Common land and have serious doubts about the necessity for "improving" the main crossing. Everyone knows that blockages up and down the A26 and A264 occur at numerous places and are caused for different reasons. In fact the London Road/Church Road crossing is not itself a bottleneck. Representatives of your Committee will be discussing these proposals with the Conservators and with the Highways and Transportation Committee of the Council. It must be hoped that the Conservators with their

statutory duty to maintain and preserve the Commons will view the proposals with the same alarm as we do.

A particularly obnoxious feature of the scheme is that it would result in the severe cutting, if not total destruction, of the fine red oak at the south-east corner of the crossing.

The whole subject is due to be discussed at a meeting of the Highways and Transportation Committee of the Council in the Town Hall at 6.30 p.m. on Tuesday 25th November. All residents are entitled to attend. If you wish to speak you have to notify the Clerk of the Committee (Mrs Newton May on Tunbridge Wells 526121) before 4 pm on Monday 24th November. The Friends will, of course, be represented at this meeting.