



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 32. Autumn 2003

Diary of Forthcoming Events

Annual Dinner

Friday, 20th February,
2004
Spa Hotel Tunbridge Wells

AGM

Thursday 18th March,
2004
7.00 pm
At the Town Hall
(Council Chamber)

Litter Pick

Saturday, 3rd April,
2004
Meet at 10 am at Fir Tree
Road Car Park or at
Common View Rusthall

Work Parties

Saturday 6th December,
2003
Saturday 3rd January,
2004
Saturday 7th February,
2004
Saturday 6th March,
2004
Meet 10.00 am Fir Tree
Car Park

An Early Decent from the Top

By the time this is printed and read many of you will know that I passed over the Chair to Jennifer Blackburn after the Committee meeting on Sunday, 7th September. For various reasons I found that I was unable to provide enough of my time this year to the affairs of the Society and because of this it seemed only right that I should seek to withdraw.

At the start I had made it clear that I did not see myself holding the Chair

for more than two years. I believe that it is the first time in my life (apart from school) that I have underachieved and, as things were, it appears best to try to get things straight well ahead of the next AGM. I am most grateful to my colleagues on the Committee for their support and understanding and my thanks are especially due to Jennifer for so willingly taking over from me. I wish her every success in taking things forward. She certainly has our interests very much in her mind and

heart and come next March I trust that members will wish to confirm their support.

For the time being I have been co-opted on to the Committee and will be pleased to assist to the best of my ability but only in a minor way please.

Rhys Revell.

From the Acting Chairman

Becoming the Chair of our organization at short notice is an exciting challenge!

I am delighted to help in this way and am hoping to organize and expend the range of walks and events on the common next year. Further details will be included in the Spring edition of Common Ground.

I have already been on a morning's walk with the Warden on a lovely Autumn day when it was looking its best. I urge you to take a short - or a long - walk on one of our two commons to admire the Trees and look for mushrooms. There are many seats now to rest awhile and if there are spots which need one, please let

me or Steve Budden know.

There are challenges ahead with the roundabout development at the top of Major York's Road so the Friends definitely have a role to play and I will do my best to represent the Friends views and to communicate with you all.

Jennifer Blackburn.



Help Wanted

Our Treasurer of the past 6½ years is standing down at the AGM in March 2004 and we need someone from the membership of the Friends of the Common to take his place. You do not need to be an accountant but some experience in book keeping or looking after the accounts of a club or society would be desirable. It is vital that we get someone to take on this important duty.

If any member thinks that they could take on the office of Treasurer please contact either the current Treasurer, **George Lawson (524019)** or the **Acting Chairman, Mrs Jennifer Blackburn (546520)**

*PLANTS ON THE COMMON – LOSSES
AND GAINS by Mary Page*

While browsing through an old Pelton's Guide to Tunbridge Wells published in 1881, I came on a chapter called Botany of the Neighborhood, written by an eminent botanist of the day Anne Pratt. She describes plants which were in various habitats locally including the Common, which was at that time a very different place from now. It was much wetter with ponds and boggy ground, areas of heathland, grazing animals and fewer trees.

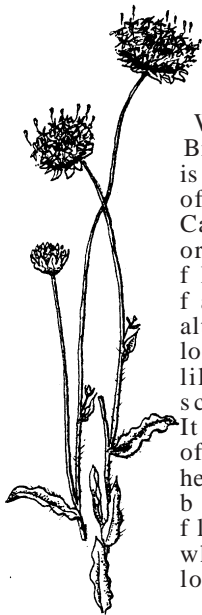
One plant was very plentiful, DODDER *Cuscuti epithimum*, a parasitic plant and a member of the Bindweed family. It has no roots and a very slender, bright red, threadlike stalks which twine anti-clockwise round the stems of the heather and furze bushes and according to Anne Pratt "In some seasons our furze is sadly entangled and injured by the Dodder, its small clusters of creamy little blooms and slender crimson threads strangle many a fine furze shrub.



COMMON DODDER
Cuscutum epithimum

It has long since gone from the Common, the nearest habitat I know is on Ashdown Forest.

SHEEPS BIT *Jasione Montana*. Also a plant mentioned by Anne Pratt is nowadays more commonly



SHEEP'S BIT
Jasione montana

numbering as many as two hundred on a single stalk. It grows about a foot high and is in bloom from May to July. Anne Pratt describes it as "gay balls nodding to the wind among the rocks on the common". Little folk law is known about it. In Cornwall it is said that picking of its flowers is supposed to give you warts. It gets the name Sheep Bit presumably because it grows on ground where sheep graze and they are very fond of it as a fodder plant.

I have called this article Losses and Gains on Tunbridge Wells Common and so far have written about what we have lost. The third is another that Anne Pratt mentions.

LAYD'S BEDSTRAW

Galvium verum, still quite a common plant on chalk but very unusual in this area. We have various Bedstraws in the British Flora, most of them have white flowers but Lady's Bedstraw has bright yellow ones. According to legend the reason for this is as follows.



LADY'S BEDSTRAW

Galium verum was one of the many dried flowers that were spread on the ground, covered with a sheet and used instead of our kind of mattress. The Virgin Mary was said to have laid on bedstraw and

**Highways Major
York's Roundabout**

Little seems to have happened since our last report in the Summer edition of Common Ground. However, it seems that it has been pre-decided that this project will go ahead and it is believed that detailed plans should be available in early December although it is understood that some Councilors are unhappy about the proposal.

As yet the Friends have not been consulted on this but we have agreed to hold a joint meeting of the Committee with the Freehold Tenants before the December meeting of the Joint Transportation Board to review our position.

The Chairman will attend the next meeting of the Conservators of the Common meeting in January and will be in a position to report back in the winter edition of Common Ground.

bracken for the Nativity, the bracken refused to acknowledge the child so it lost its flowers, the bedstraw welcomed him so it flowers were turned from white to gold. One of its country names is Cheese Rennet from a former use of its flowers to curdle milk for making cheese and it is said when animals feed on the plant it reddens their bones. I thought that this was another lost plant from the Common, so was delighted to come across a patch growing on the Common's edge earlier this year and hope it has come to stay.



BUTTON WEED
Cotula coronopifolia

Finally another gain, an addition to the Flora of the Common. This year I made a discovery by one of the ponds, of a completely new plant which I have never seen before. I looked it up in a reference book and the only specimen it resembled was called BUTTONWEED *Cotula coronopifolia* which was classified as very rare and known only on one site in Great Britain, where it was naturalized on marshy ground in the Wirral, Cheshire, so I posted my small specimen to Eric Philp, my friend and mentor to verify. His reply was that it was indeed Buttonweed, a member of the Compositae Family, a yellow green, fleshy annual with rayless, button like flowers on

solid stalks always facing the sun and far from being rare, it is now regularly found for sale among other aquatic plants. Once established it soon spreads and will creep out of ponds and cover the ground. It is now getting out of gardens into the wild, whether carried by birds or dumped when it becomes too aggressive. There are not many Kent records as yet and they are all in the East of the county. My specimen is the first for West Kent.

So our Flora is always changing over the years. We lose some we gain others. Who knows what will happen in the future.

Illustrations by Harold Page.

Warden's Report

Autumn is finally upon us after a very long hot summer that broke all records. Although autumn is here it has not yet brought us mists and certainly not any mellow fruitfulness as those who attended the fungus foray will testify. In spite of this an enjoyable time was had by those who did attend and enough was found on tree stumps to keep our interest. A big thank you to Peter Freeman who organised the day and to Keith Palmer the expert mycologist who was a fount of knowledge. Lets hope that if there is one next year we have more seasonal conditions. The conditions have also badly affected our ponds, which were already very low after a dry spring. Particularly badly hit has been the new pond next to Cabbage Stalk Lane which as I write is almost completely dry. This is a great shame as all through the summer I have been watching dragonflies laying eggs in it, most of which will have been lost. This is of course only a temporary setback and I am sure that they will return next year. Many of our trees, particularly sycamores have been hit hard as well with a number of mature trees having to have been felled. On the bright side, the stress that our trees have been under this year has produced some spectacular, if brief, autumn colour.

All of our annual clearance work on the paths and open areas is now complete, and I have to admit that the Commons are looking pretty good at the moment. It is now becoming possible to see the effect of all the clearances that we have carried out over the past eleven years since the adoption of the Kent Trust's management plan in 1992. The Commons are a much more open place than they were and as some of the original heathland flora returns, so has some of its fauna, particularly the invertebrates. This was recognised some seasons back when the whole Common was given SSSI status to reflect its increasing value to wildlife. The original management plan was intended to run for ten years and it is now eleven years since its adoption. Over the past year the Conservators have been considering commissioning a new

plan from the Kent Trust to carry us forward for the next ten years and this has now been agreed. Work on this project will take place over this winter and it is hoped the new document will be available in draft by next spring. I think it is likely that the emphasis of the new plan will be on maximising the wildlife value of the clearances that we have already carried out as I think we are now somewhere near achieving a balance between woodland and grassland. The new plan will also give detailed recommendations for the management of our ponds as well as advice on meadows. The Friends have kindly agreed to pay a substantial part of the costs involved in this project for which both the Conservators and myself are most grateful.

In the light of the new plan I have been discussing, it has been decided not to undertake any major clearances this winter. Instead we will be concentrating on identifying and dealing with any potentially dangerous trees near our paths and roads. There will still be a full programme of work for our volunteers who will be enlarging heather areas, clearing invading scrub from grassland, cleaning ponds and exposing rock outcrops. I am still planning to put in steps from the Tarry Path to the new pond on Rusthall Common.

One area that will need some attention this winter is the woodland opposite Romanov Lodge. Several new paths were cut through this area two years ago but they have never proved very popular with walkers, instead the area has become more and more used by youths to hold gatherings with resultant litter and fires becoming an increasing problem. The final straw has been the discovery of a number of discarded syringes. In the light of this I think we will have to open the area up further, widen the paths and remove some of the cover that is attracting this unwelcome behavior.

I am pleased to say that this is still an unusual problem and I hope that we will be able to nip it in the bud.

Steve Budden

Fungus Foray

11th October, 2003 by Keith Palmer

The foray commenced from the Fir Tree Road car park at 2.00 pm. It was rather sparsely attended but included a young lady on her way from Faversham to Hastings for an entirely unrelated activity. She had noted our event on a website, we were pleased to have her company.

Perhaps other friends had heard about the dearth of fungi on the Common this Autumn. The dry weather had continued almost unbroken from the hot summer and on the bone-dry hard ground of the Common's freely-draining soil terrestrial fungi were conspicuous by their absence. Those that did put in an appearance included Fly Agaric (*Amantia muscaria*), the archetypal children's storey-book toadstool but never-the-less poisonous, not having a bad year in fact, all things considered; the woolly *Lactarius pubescens* (one of the "milk" caps which exude a white latex from their broken gills; a single Deceiver (*Laccaria laccata*); the Rooting Shank (*Oudemansiella radicata*) with its curious tapering "tap-root"; Fiery Milk-cap (*Lactarius pyrogalus*) in association with Hazel; Brown Roll-rim (*Paxillus involutus*) in association with Birch, the rubber-smelling *Lepiota cristata*, some Honey Fungus (*Armillaria mellea*) and the False Chanterelle (*Hygrophora aurantiaca*) including several specimens near the Spa Hotel.

Apart from these species we had to rely on fungi associated with wood and timber to keep the troops entertained. Sulphur-tuft (*Hypholoma fasciculare*) was common, especially around a pond although one cluster there turned out to be *Pholiota alnicola* on a later, closer inspection. Some Glistening ink-caps (*Corprinus micaceus*) were observed. The very fragile *Psathyrella hydrophila* was common on stumps and fallen boughs and bracket fungi included the

Razor-stop fungus (*Piptoporus betulinus*) on fallen Birch branches, Blushing Bracket (*Daedaleopsis confragosa*), *Ganoderma adspersum*, Hairy Stereum (*Stereum hirsutum*) and Many-zoned Polypore (*Coriolus versicolor*). Finally, also noted on wood chippings on the woodland floor was the Green Wood-cup (*Chlorociboria aeruginascens*), the mycelium of which stains the wood a vivid green-blue colour, formally use in Tunbridge Ware. Therefore a rather agreeable local connection.

At the end of the foray we repaired to Peter Freeman's house to display our finds and to enjoy a refreshing cup of tea.

A Little History



Mayor Alderman Frank William Stone (1841 - 1921)

Alderman Stone served as Mayor of Tunbridge Wells from 1898 to 1900. He was credited with saving the Commons at a time when the Freeholders were accused of permitting too many encroachments such as the enclosure of St Helena Cottage. In 1883 he organized a takeover of the Freeholders by registering (not without resistance) himself and a group of like minded and eligible people. The newcomers secured a majority to elect a new committee to manage the Commons

A Bequest - Mrs Edith Mary Cockson-Jones

We recently received a letter from the Solicitors of the late Mrs Edith Cockson-Jones informing us that she had bequeathed to the Friends of the Common the sum of £5,000. This was quite "out of the blue" as Mrs Cockson-Jones membership had lapsed several years ago. It seems that she was for many years resident in Malta and must have joined the Friends when visiting this country shortly after the Society was formed. She became ill and died about two years after becoming a member which accounts for her lapsed membership.

Little is known about her. Her solicitors believe that she was a teacher and taught at the Girls Grammar School. It is also thought that she founded a drama society when she was residing in Tunbridge Wells.

Whatever her history, she must have had very fond memories of Tunbridge Wells and the Common in particular and I am sure that we are all most grateful for her generosity.

Annual Subscriptions The Annual subscription fell due on the 1st October and those members who do not pay their subscription by Bankers Order will be receiving a reminder letter with this edition of Common Ground. Please try to pay subscriptions as soon as possible - this will save having to go to the expense of sending out further reminders later in the year. We are aware that some members have already sent in their subscription and the Treasurer has tried to ensure that reminders have not been sent to them. If any one has any doubts about whether or not they have paid please feel free to telephone the Treasurer on 01892 524019.

Officer & Committee Membership 2003-2004

Officers: (elected annually)

Chair:	Office vacant
Vice-Chair & Acting Chairman	Jennifer Blackburn Tel:546520
Hon. Treasurer:	Cdr. George Lawson Tel:524019
Hon. Secretary:	Sylvia Luckhurst Tel:526121 Ex. 3251

Committee: (elected for three years)

Dr Ian Beavis	)	Tel: 523007
Mark Dennison	) Elected 21/3/2001	Tel: 528199
Conrad Payne	)	Tel: 513626
Peter Freeman	)	Tel: 524110
Dan Goddard	) Elected 21/3/2001	Tel: 535042
Cllr David Wakefield	)	Tel: 523983
Pat Maxwell	) Elected 26.3.03	Tel: 531968
Jonathan Balcon	)	Tel: 515741

Seconded Member

Rhys Revel Tel 520475

Sub Committee Chairman
Interpretation Panels/signage
Membership
Publicity
Social

Dan Goddard
-
Conrad Payne
-

Note: There is a one vacancy on the Committee

Annual Dinner 2004

Friday 20th February, 2004 -
7.00 pm for 7.45pm
at The Spa Hotel

The 2004 Annual Dinner of the Friends of the Common has been arranged for the 20th February and will take place at the Spa Hotel, Bishops Down Road, Tunbridge Wells at 7pm for 7.45pm.

As usual the Dinner is followed by a talk by a guest speaker. This year the speaker will be Carol Fitzgerald who will speak on Heathland Management, a subject very much in our minds at this time.

The cost of the meal will be the same as last year £24.00 per person (drinks extra). An alternative vegetarian menu will be available and if required should be requested on the booking form.

Booking should be made with the Secretary, Mrs Sylvia Luckhurst at the Town Hall using the booking form enclosed with this edition of Common Ground. Guests are welcome.

The Spa Hotel always does us very well and it is a good way to meet other members and have an enjoyable evening.

Articles and other items for Common Ground

The Editor of Common Ground is always on the look out for articles or other contributions on matters connected with the two Commons. If any member has anything he or she thinks other members may be interested in or which they wish to raise please let us know - ideally by E.Mail to lawgv7@aol.com. Otherwise send your contributions via the Secretary, Mrs Sylvia Luckhurst at the Town Hall.

Historical Pictorial Record of Tunbridge Wells.

A group of enthusiasts have banded together to produce a historical pictorial record of Tunbridge Wells (including parts of Rusthall) using old post cards and pictures lent by a variety of contributors. The record which is to be published in December in the form of a CD will also contain up to date pictures showing the same places as they are now. The whole will be related to a map of the town and brief descriptions and other information will be included. The CD's will be on sale at £10.00 each and all profits will be donated to a local charity.

If any member is interested in obtaining a copy of this CD please contact the Treasurer on 01892 524019.



The
Spa Hotel
A Corporate Member