



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 35. Autumn 2004

Diary of Forthcoming Events

AGM

*Thursday 16th March,
2005*

6.30 pm for 7.00 pm
At the Town Hall
(Committee Rooms A & B)
Refreshments at 6.30
Meeting starts 7.00

Work Parties

*Saturday 9th October,
2004*

*Saturday 6th November,
2004*

*Saturday 5th December,
2004*

*Saturday 8th January,
2005*

*Saturday 5th February,
2005*

*Saturday 1st March,
2005*

Meet 10.00 am
Fir Tree Car Park

Annual Dinner

*Friday 28th January,
2005*

at the Spa Hotel

From the Chairman

One year has already flown by since I became chair of the Friends! I don't feel that I have achieved much but both Commons are looking well in their Autumn colours. Why not take a walk, look but don't pick mushrooms and fungi, conkers, wonderfully coloured fallen leaves and admire the views over towards Ashdown Forest. We are so lucky in Tunbridge Wells.

Our plans for a set of stones in a circle with the date of each century since 1606 are beginning to come together. We have now received a

quotation from Burslem's the Stonemason which will be discussed at the next committee meeting in November. We will present a detailed plan to the Commons Conservators at their January meeting. We have been asked to plant daffodils along the A264 near the new roundabout. Please let me know what you think – 01892 546520. The tidying up around the new areas is continuing with proper paths being installed.

Work parties have started again – please come along! You can do as little or as much as you feel you want to. Safety

issues are paramount so the warden will provide gloves and tools and advice. There are always smaller jobs for us to do rather than the contractors which all helps to keep the commons in good heart.

The steps to the new pond off Tarry Path on Rusthall Common should go in soon so that we will be able to admire our latest pond probably quite full by now given the amount of rain we have had recently. Welly boots, though, may be required!

Enjoy the Commons – Hope to see you at the Annual Dinner

Jennifer Blackburn.

WINTER BUMBLEBEES AND OTHER FINDS

All the books say that bumblebee colonies are founded in the spring and die out at the end of the summer. Only the new generation of queens survives the winter, hibernating in holes which they dig for themselves in sheltered banks. There they stay until the earliest warm days bring them out into the open again to search for nest sites. At least that was the story until recently, when our mild winters started to change things.

Over the last few years, there have been a number of reports from southern England of bumblebee colonies carrying on all through the winter. There was some evidence for this in Tunbridge Wells during the winter of 2002-3, but on the Commons last winter the signs were unmistakable. Some of the gorse bushes near Wellington Rocks were flowering quite prolifically through December and January, and on clear sunny days, even when it was otherwise cold and windy, worker bumblebees could be seen there gathering pollen just as if it was spring or summer. Bumblebees gather pollen not for themselves but for the young back in the nest, so their colonies must have been in full operation all through the winter. The species involved were the White-tailed and Buff-tailed Bumblebees, and on some occasions up to six at a time were in evidence. Apart from the weather, the main obstacle to keeping a bumblebee colony going in the colder months would be shortage of flowers, so the gorse on the Commons, which is always in flower somewhere, will be a major factor in making this new behaviour possible.

Most insects are dependent on plants and their flowers in one way or another. Some are highly specialised and rely exclusively on one particular species. The Speedwell Longhorn Moth, a 2004 addition to the fauna of the Commons, is one example. This small day-flying moth, metallic bronze with white markings and the characteristic long antennae of its family, spends its whole life around patches of Germander Speedwell, a low-growing bright blue flower often seen beside footpaths on the Commons. The caterpillars eat the seed capsules and leaves of the speedwell, while the adults feed at its flowers. Several were seen in late May hovering over their foodplant beside Pope's Terrace Walk on Tunbridge Wells Common.

Several other interesting creatures were recorded as new to the Commons this year. The Museum's mini-beast safari on Tunbridge Wells Common in August turned up an unusual wetland ground-beetle with beautifully sculptured bronze wing-cases. This was found at Fir Tree Pond, along with the Lesser Water-cricket, which is not a cricket at all but a water-bug, a smaller relative of the well-known pond-skaters. A sunny afternoon around the Toad Rock in July produced three additions to the Commons' already long list of solitary bees and wasps. These included the delightfully named Puffed-up Robber Wasp, an uncommon species with a distinctive colour scheme of red, black and white markings. The females hunt leafhoppers and froghoppers, carrying them back to their nest burrows in the sand as food for their young. As with many bees and wasps, the Puffed-up Robber has its own dedicated cuckoo species, the Small Spurred Digger Wasp, which is similar in colour but much smaller. Like all cuckoo bees and wasps, this sneaks into the nest of its host while the female is away and lays its own eggs on the carefully provided food store. The Small Spurred Digger is rarer than its host and ranks as a Nationally Notable species.

Ian Beavis

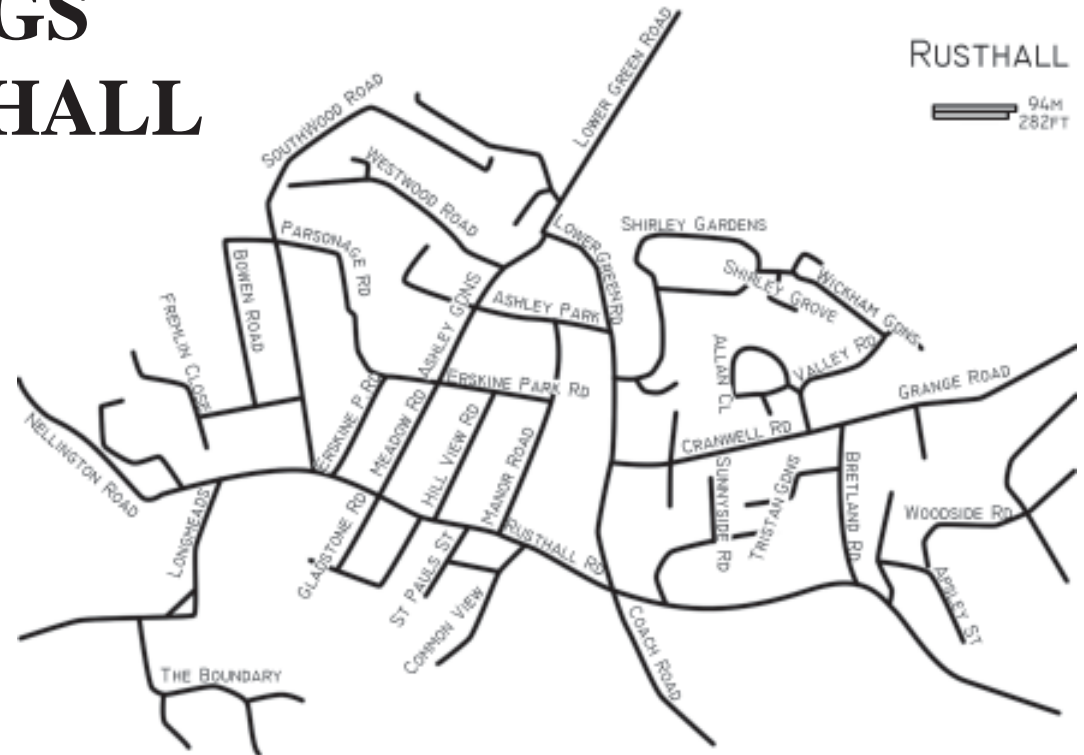
COMMON BUILDINGS AT RUSTHALL

RUSTHALL COMMON was surrounded by about 30 dwellings at the beginning of the Eighteenth Century according to John Bowra's Map of 1738 and this is supported by recent researches of Manorial and Tithe Records. Only a few properties remain, some now incorporated into larger new buildings.

"The Yews" (to the east of St Paul's Church Centre) survives to this day. Originally an open hall design of at least 16th Century origin, it was soon modified and later formed 5 cottages, one used as a Hand Laundry. The Victorian appendage remains a separate dwelling, whilst the original building was converted to a single residence with garage and granny annex in the mid 1950s.

The painting by Charles Tattershall-Dodds (1815-78) which hangs in the town museum, depicts "The Yews" and the buildings of Rusthall Farm. This was farmed by the Jeffery family from the early 1700s. In the mid 1800s, a descendent, Stephan Watson sold off plots of land on which were built the larger villas facing the Common several of which remain. As a result of this a road was built from Lower Green Road to Bretland Road. Near the latter, a new building incorporating an old timber building was erected for renting to the new St Paul's Parish as a Vicarage (1850-75). The Parsonage was renamed "Braeside" by Robert Marnock (the designer of the gardens at Dunorlan and can still be seen behind a yew hedge).

Seventeenth Century land owners, Brett, are associated with "Blacklands", a house not identified on the 1738 map but which is thought to predate "Rusthall Grange". Currently the Rusthall Grange is a complex of modern Housing



Association Flats and it previously belonged to "Streeles Farm" (accessed off Apsley Street). Demolished in the 1970s the Grange had been both Children's Nursery and an Old Peoples Home in the preceding 50 years.

The House of Jeffery Fullaware was located opposite the detached portion of the Common - "Still Green"; whilst the other main "Denny Bottom" land owner, Widow Banes, resided near the site of the Toad Rock Retreat Inn. Virtually across the road, but accessed from "Rusthall Park" is the "Hobblies". This incorporates the building erected c.1589 by Thomas Groombridge of Farningham which passed to the Mercer family. However, Bowra credits J Weller with ownership. This building can still be glimpsed over the wall from Harmony Street.

The 1738 Map shows four dwellings on to-day's Golf Course bordering the Common and others on the south side of the Langton Road, one about the site of "Rusthall Place", previously known as "Stoneleigh".

Leaving aside the "Cold Bath" and the "Beacon" structures,

we move to the land owner D Coyfe in the vicinity of "Rust Hall" (a VAD Hospital in the Great War) and the probable site of "Le Hand and Sceptre" (no evidence of licence) which is mentioned in the Manorial Records. A cluster of six dwellings existed in the early 1700s around to-days "Heathgate" area. Two belonged to the Hollamby Family whose "Great Dornden" lands extended over much of to-days "Dornden" and "Holmwood" estates and beyond.

Five dwellings were identified on the western boundary of the Common; three belonging to the Baker family, including Dorcas (a dipper at the Wells) whose property was later replaced with a Public House at the entrance to the High Street. Originally called "The Morning Star" and then the "Brahms and List", this property is once again a private dwelling.

Across the road was the house of "Wogan", acquired in 1755 by the Parish of Speldhurst and used for 80 years as the Workhouse. It was closed in favour of the enlarged institution at Pembury, and the Rusthall Workhouse building was let as 6 tenements by

Joseph Holmwood who first leased it from Speldhurst Parish and then from D J Robertson after he had purchased it at auction in 1857 for the sum of £390.

This building and surrounding land had been bought by Thomas Fitness before his death in 1898 when the "Erskine Estate" was acquired from William Oliver. He was responsible for the housing and shops to the North of "Workhouse Lane", later renamed the "High Street", and this development involved the demolition of the old Rusthall Workhouse building and the building of the convenience store and the pharmacy.

Note: Further details of the workhouse and the subsequent development of this part of Rusthall with charts of the High Street Shops throughout the 20th Century were the subject of a Rusthall Local History Group exhibition held at St Paul's, Church Centre on Saturday, 9th October. The author of this article, Dennis Penfold is a member of the Rusthall Local History Group which was formed in 1999 to research and record the history of Rusthall.

Warden's Report

As summer draws to a close we are still awaiting the completion of the new management plan being drawn up by the Kent Wildlife Trust. We have been assured that it will be ready in time for the next Conservators meeting in late January; watch this space!

I am sure that by now everybody has used the new roundabout at the top of Major Yorks Road. My impression is that it has helped traffic flow and certainly the closure of Fir Tree Road has had a positive effect on the Wellington Rocks area but the standard of finish on the areas of common bordering the scheme has been lamentable. A great deal of damage was caused to trees bordering Major Yorks Road, the all ability access trail leading from Fir Tree car park has been left with pools of muddy standing water on it. Bishops Down Road has been gated, but the agreed work to return the area behind the gate to Common has not been carried out. I could go on but I am sure you have all seen the mess. Following a lively meeting with representatives from County, some of these problems are being addressed but my suspicion is that this could be a slow process.

Our main cut of the year is now nearing completion. All paths have been cut back to their full width and many overhanging branches have been removed. You may have noticed that some areas such as the triangle of land behind Fir Tree car park and part of the heather restoration site by the racecourse have not yet been cut. This is because following last year's very successful trials, these areas have been treated with Asulox. This herbicide affects only bracken and dock and is widely used by many of the County Wildlife Trusts. In order for it to be as effective as possible it is necessary to allow the bracken to die back naturally after treatment, we will return later in the year and tidy up these areas then.

Sadly, we have had to remove a number of mature trees this year. Three oaks have been felled on the racecourse between Fir Tree Road and Major Yorks Road and one of the original limes from the Victoria Grove has been removed. These trees have no doubt been suffering from a number of stresses for some

years as most urban trees do but I suspect that last years very hot dry summer was the final straw.

Several new benches have gone in over the summer, including one to commemorate the sterling work of former Chairman and still hard working committee member David Wakefield. We are also just about to start a programme of renovation on our litter bins, many of which are suffering badly from the attentions of over territorial dogs! We have recently renewed several drains and culverts on Rusthall Common so hopefully winter walks in the woodland between Common View and Coach Road will be less muddy in future.

We will also attempt to improve drainage in Bulls Hollow this year. after the wonderful work carried out there last winter by local rock climbing groups, it seems the least we can do.

For those of you who don't know Bulls Hollow, and I suspect that will be quite a few, it is well worth a visit. If you are not sure of the location you could always look it up on our brand new web site at:

www.twcommons.org

The site is still very new and we are still inserting images but have a look and you can tell me what you think of when I see you all at next years A.G.M.

Steve Budden

Friends of the Common Annual Dinner

The Friends of the Common Annual Dinner will take place on 28th January, 2005

at the Spa Hotel at
7.00pm for 7.45

The speaker will be Neil Coombes who will talk on the plan for the management of the Common over the next 10 years

The Cost of the Dinner will be £26.00 and a booking form for tickets is enclosed with this edition of Common Ground.

The Common Proves Resistant to Change

A reprint of the last of three articles on childhood memories of the Common by the late Mrs Cockson-Jones. Mary Cockson-Jones was a founder member and benefactor of the Friends of the Common

The upper part of the Common was bounded by two main thoroughfares. The "Mount" as it was briefly called, and at right angles, Major York's Road, where traffic from Rusthall turned to meet the town at the Pantiles. It rather sharply divided the Common and was less popular, but held some interesting places - namely, one or two ponds, one small and much neglected but an attractive spot for children and students of aquatic life such as tadpoles and waterboatmen. The other side of the road harboured the site of the old racecourse for donkeys and humans, bearing marks of its existence by its hard trodden lane kept free for walkers.

Mount Ephraim, on the contrary, was the equivalent of the promenade of a seaside town, and while children were absorbed in rock climbing, the older generation thought of Mount Ephraim and its rural views as a place of rest and quiet, authority having thoughtfully placed at secluded distances from each other, the comfortable wooden seats (with back!) holding room enough for two or three ladies to relax and chat - one eye, perhaps, for their offspring.

Sunday was the day for parading in one's "Sunday" clothes with restless, but well behaved children in tow. Finally for the really old and well-to-do, was the wide, smooth path and the road, along which came the bath chairs in which sat upright old ladies looking as though they owned the whole Common. They were dressed in long, dark skirts, capes, even fur capes, their hands warmly pushed into muffs, or holding sunshades above their stately heads. Rugs covered their legs (as was only proper!). Of course, the thin, bent, old bath-chair men had their backs to them anyhow.

There is one area of the Common that I have not yet spoken of, that is, London Road and for this means the siting of the County School for girls. It was the old and dignified, ivy covered neighbour to Rose Hill School for boys, but bore no relation to it. It faced the island of grass lying between London Road and itself and the lane of old houses flanking the original road down which rode or came in coaches the society who came to "take the waters" in the eighteenth century. In my day (circa 1910) traffic was slow and scanty compared with today, or no one would ever have crossed the main road "to get to the other side" in break or lunch time to play rounders, climb the long suffering hawthorn trees (there were two, one at each end of the Donkey Drive), or set up a temporary wicket for cricket or carry over two heavy wooden stands for stoolball.

All this was "free time" - no severe disciplinary mandates to prevent us rambling - so long as we returned at the ring of the bell, back across the road to school. Indeed school was a relaxed and happy place - one lovely evening in Summer it seemed wrong to sit at desks indoors to read "Julius Caesar". I shepherded my class from the Technical Institute in Monson Road across the road to the sheltered spot and proceeded to organise the readers, placing Mark Anthony on a convenient rock projecting well above my "stage". Suddenly I was surrounded by several excited and alarmed children. They spotted an "audience". An old tramp lay full length fast asleep below the rock, caring nothing for the grand speech being made above his head. "Look miss! Look!" they shrieked in shouted whispers, "Caesar's body! Miss, Caesar's body!".

This was the Common as I knew it before the First World War, a playground of beauty enriched by golden gorse, refreshed by cascades of blossom from the May trees. Wherever we went it always seemed fresh and new, inviting and exciting. Whoever else enjoyed its loneliness it was a children's land. The Town looked upon it as a great asset.

The powers that be saw to it that it remained so.

Mary Cockson-Jones

Memories of a Thatched Shelter on the Common

The picture on this page is of one of the Thatched Shelters that used to be on the Common. My dearly loved wife and I spent many happy hours courting on the seats in one of these shelters in the early 1960's.

Sadly, my wife, Maureen, died early this year after 40 wonderfully happy years of marriage.

I recently decided to look up some of our old haunts. When I went to the Commons Office I found that the sites of these seats were shown on an old map. Jennifer Blackburn kindly offered to help me find the exact site of "our seat" and on a wet and windy Sunday afternoon she and I searched without success to find at least one of these bases. After 40 or more years the area had, of course, totally changed and I wonder if anything of these seats would have survived today's vandals. However I will continue my search.

If any members have any memories of these Thatched Shelters I would be delighted to hear from them.

Bill Bullen.



Ed. Note. One of these Shelters was destroyed by enemy action during the Second World War but its not known when the others were removed.

Officer & Committee Membership 2004-2005

Officers: (elected annually)

- Chairman:** Jennifer Blackburn Tel:546520
- Vice-Chairman:** David Wakefield Tel:523983
- Hon. Treasurer:** Mark Denison Tel:528199
- Membership Secretary:** Pat Maxwell Tel:531968
- Hon. Secretary:** Sylvia Luckhurst Tel:526121
Ex. 3251

Committee: (elected for three years)

- Jonathan Balcon Tel: 515741
- Dr Ian Beavis Tel: 523007
- Peter Freeman Tel: 524110
- Dan Goddard Tel: 535042
- George Lawson (Editor Common Ground) Tel: 524019
- Conrad Payne Tel: 513626
- Rhys Revel (co-opted member) Tel: 520475
- John Davie Tel: 525557
- Ann Hughes Tel: 527657

WORK PARTIES - Winter 2004/2005

You can help the Common in a practical way by coming along to lend a hand with clearing, planting and other light jobs that need doing on the Common. No special skills are required and none of the tasks involve heavy work. Indeed most of the current volunteers are already Senior Citizens! We meet once a month throughout the winter. Dates and times are on the front page of this edition of Common Ground and on posters placed on the notice boards on both Commons. So come and join us for a morning in the fresh air with the satisfaction of having done something to help preserve your Common.

Editorial

Most societies such as the Friends of the Common have their news sheets or similar publications which are an essential means of keeping in the members in touch what the affairs of the society and what their Committee are doing on their behalf. Whilst the feedback that we get tends to suggest that "Common Ground" is doing its job well enough, I think it is fair to say that most members societies such as ours have little idea of the cost in terms of both finance and voluntary labour that goes into the production of each news-letter.

The most difficult task is getting members to contribute letters or articles for publication. We have our stalwart regular contributors such as our Warden, Steve Budden, who keeps us informed about the management and upkeep of the two Commons and Dr Ian Beavis who keeps us in touch with what is happening to the flora and fauna with the change of the seasons but few others venture to give us the benefit of their knowledge or even to air their concerns. I am sure that amongst our members there must be some well informed people who have something to say about the Commons, so what about it? Write us a letter, or if the cost of postage deters you send us an E.Mail (lawgv7@aol.com).

Of course the work of producing the "Common Ground" does not stop with writing articles and other copy. It has to be typeset and prepared for printing - normally an expensive process. The Friend of the Common are fortunate in having a volunteer in the form of Daniel Bech who expertly transforms the written word and art work into a finished master that can be run off by a commercial printer. We are very grateful to Daniel for giving his time and expertise so willingly.

Having collected the newsletters from the Printer we are faced with the task of printing the envelopes from a data base maintained by the Editor and of folding Common Ground and any other notices, for stuffing into the envelopes. This task falls to your Editor and his wife June.

For most societies the cost of postage is a major drain on funds. The cost of sending out Common Ground three times a year would be around £231 and other notices which we distribute with Common Ground, if sent out separately would double this figure. We are saved this expenditure by another group of volunteers who do the "walks". They each deliver Common Ground to up to 35 members! We are very grateful for the efforts of these members, several of whom are no longer in the first flush of youth! In this connection we have a vacancy for the London Road (North) Area Walk. This covers Inner London Road (above Church Road) to Hanover Road. We would like to hear from anyone who can spare an hour of their time some 3 times a year to deliver Common Ground in that area. Please telephone (01892 524019) or E.Mail (lawgv7@aol.com) the Editor.

GVL.



The Spa Hotel
A Corporate Member