

# COMMON GROUND

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

Issue 7. Spring 1994

### CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

#### A SPLENDID YEAR'S START

I write at the Easter weekend with the trees beginning to break into leaf, the first cut of the grass having taken place by the new contractors, and with the strimming done around the parking prevention posts and other difficult places.

The total effect is, I think, very good.

At the same time more paths have been 'flailed' out through old bracken, bramble and undergrowth - particularly in the area between Major York's Road and leading up to the Higher Cricket Ground; also at Bishops Down.

Over the winter, as the Warden says in his Report on this page, much clearance has been made. For example, those who have not already been there might like to see the opening-up which has been made of the Cheesecake Rock near the bottom of the 101 steps and near the entrance to Rusthall Common from Nevill Court.

Altogether the Commons are looking a very different place from two years ago, let alone six years ago after the hurricane. There is, of course, still a long way to go and the Conservators are now reviewing the Management Plan (originally drafted by the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation) to decide what should be the next priorities for work.

Funding will always be a problem but members may have noted from their Council Tax leaflets that the Council is devoting more money to the Commons this year than last (£79,000 as against £76,700) and the Conservators are prepared to take more money out of their reserves. A detailed review of the Conservators' finances will be found on the back page.

One issue on which I hope we can make more progress is restricting the amount of parking on Commons' roads. Recently the top end of Castle Road has been yellow-lined - single, unfortunately, and not double as we had hoped. But it has already had the effect of improving the look of that part of the Common and the view towards the newly cleared Mt Edgcumbe Rocks has been enhanced.

Another constant eyesore are the coaches parked on London Road by the Dell. Both through the Friends and Town Centre Management we are pressing for another parking place to be found for these coaches. Other places where vistas and the general look of the Commons would be improved by the removal of parking are Major York's Road and Fir Tree Road. Turning to Rusthall, the verges of the Common at Common View have been sadly cut up by heavy lorries, and the only feasible protection here seems to be the insertion of substantial bollards.



Steve Budden refers to one major bit of work to which the Friends have contributed in recent months - namely the clearing up of the area round Toad Rock and the repair and repainting of the railings on which we spent £650. Much favourable comment and press coverage has been received about the look of the area. And by the time this issue of Common Ground is distributed Julia Still, a daughter of two of our members, together with several friends, will have cleared another section of the rocks near Toad Rock in aid of her project to help wildlife and forest conservation in Tanzania. I hope many members will have helped to sponsor her.

So steadily we make progress. We can always do with more members and if each of you could recruit a neighbour or friend that would, of course, double the amount of money we are able to contribute to the Conservators for special projects. A recruitment leaflet is enclosed with this issue of Common Ground and if you could deliver it to a likely new member that would be a great help.

Meanwhile, I heartily endorse Steve's thanks to all those who have helped in so many ways during the winter. Please may the help be forthcoming again this year!

WPS

### CROSSINGS PROPOSED

The best siting of a pedestrian crossing from the Pantiles to the Common is being considered by the Environment Group of Town Centre Management (TCM).

The group is continuing to take a close interest in improving access to the Commons and improving the Commons fringes. High on their list of priorities is to get Kent Highways to put in a pedestrian crossing from Castle Street across to the Common just by Highbury.

Regarding the fringes it is hoped that the area bordering Mt Ephraim can be tidied up, funded jointly by the Conservators and TCM.

### WARDENS REPORT

#### WORTHY WINTER WORK

The winter has been a busy one, although mostly in short bursts of activity between the rains. The volume of rain has been the cause of a few problems such as the very wet and muddy paths but hopefully we can look forward to a drought-free summer.

Probably the most dramatic change on the Commons has been around the Toad Rock. The volunteer party held there cleared the bramble and gorse around the base of the Toad and then Friends' money paid for the restoration of the railings around the Toad itself. The look of the whole area has changed for the better and is now only marred by the habit of some of the local youths smashing bottles against the rocks.

Those of you who walk Rusthall Common cannot have failed to notice the damage to the footpath by St Paul's Church. The damage was caused before Christmas but the weather has been so bad that the ground was too wet to attempt repairs until the end of February. Although some work has been carried out to repair the sides of the path to the Rocks, the path to the top of the 101 steps is still wet. It will, unfortunately, be necessary temporarily to close this path during the spring/summer to allow a good cover of grass to form again. I would ask for everybody's co-operation in this matter, particularly that of horse riders.

Grass cutting has gone out to tender again this year, and the specifications have been changed to improve the standard. Twelve cuts will be carried out on most of the grass (rather than the 10 cuts in last year's contract). Some areas are again being left uncut until the first week in July for the spring flowers to bloom and set seed.

The litter collection has also gone to a new contractor. The specifications for the contract were tightened with clearing of the main trouble

*Continued on page 2*

### A SUMMER WALK

Ian Beavis has very kindly consented to lead another guided walk round the Commons. Members who have been on previous ones will confirm how interesting and enjoyable they are.

This year the walk will start outside Thackeray's House at 10.30 on Saturday July 9th and cover Tunbridge Wells Common before lunch. After a break the walk will resume at 14.00 at Toad Rock to do Rusthall Common. There is no need to pre-book, just turn up.

spots being increased to 3 times per week during the winter and 5 times per week in the summer, including both days of the weekend. However, as many of you will have noticed, this is still not enough around the Forum. Efforts are being made to enlist the help of Kentucky Fried Chicken, Unwins and the Forum to clear up the mess, so hopefully things will improve.

There has been continued clearance work at the Happy Valley to expose some of the rock faces and remove some of the tide of Holly which was blocking all light to the ground. This area looks a little raw after the clearance but it will start to green-up this spring and light regrowth of species such as Hazel and Rowan will be encouraged.

Brighton Lake has also had some attention this winter. Initial clearance has started behind the pond in order to try and throw the emphasis on the rear area, away from the road. At the moment Brighton Lake is not a very nice place to be with heavy vehicles rumbling past only a few yards away. It is hoped that once the area behind the pond is cleared and grassed, some planting can be carried out between the pond and the road.

Discussions are now under way between the Conservators and the Access for the Disabled Committee about the possible construction of a wheelchair route around Tunbridge Wells Common. Such a project would involve the widening of some footpaths and additional hard surfacing. Also provision would need to be made for disabled parking bays in Fir Tree car park and possibly disabled toilet facilities nearby. Whilst it is the desire of the Conservators to improve the Common for all users, there is the danger of the rural nature of the Common being changed. I would welcome the views of the 'Friends' on this issue.

S.B.

Note. The Committee obviously want to help the disabled but do not want to see more tarmac paths, let alone more toilets on the Commons. Does the membership agree?

## AGM REPORT

The third AGM was held at the Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells, on the evening of Wednesday February 16th. 75 Friends (some joining that evening) attended.

The Chairman reported the year's activities and emphasised the good relationship now existing between the Conservators and the Friends, with the Deputy Chairman or himself attending all Conservators' Committee meetings and the Warden, Steve Budden, attending all the Friends' Committee meetings. By this means a good and steady exchange of views takes place.

The Treasurer presented the accounts for the first nine months of 1993, it having been decided to bring the Friends' financial year in line with the date on which annual subscriptions are due (1st October). David Wakefield said the Friends were now contributing some £2000 per year to

Recently assigned Special Scientific Interest Status, Bull's Hollow is the subject of Ian Beavis's historical note.

Bull's Hollow is a corner of the Denny Bottom area of Rusthall Common that is often overlooked, because increasing undergrowth has rendered it invisible from the roads and paths near Toad Rock.

One of the ancient rights of the freehold tenants of the Manor of Rusthall was to quarry stone for building purposes, and for this Bull's Hollow was one of the prime sources. It is probable that much of the sandstone used for local structures like the wall of the Spa Hotel grounds came from here. How the quarry was managed we are not told, but we can deduce that the occupants of the numerous small cottages clustering up to the very edge of the Common in this vicinity earned money by performing the manual work of cutting the sandstone blocks as and when required by individual freeholders.

### Well Watered

One such quarryman is said to have given his name to the Hollow, and a Mrs Bull, presumably his widow, appears in the freeholders' records for 1864, when she is ordered to fill in an illegally dug pond and to uncover a spring used as a watering place for cattle. There is no trace of the spring today, but there is a well which can still be located near the present cottage. The cottage is an adaptation in the 1950s of the original early nineteenth century structure.

By 1890 the quarry had fallen into disuse, becoming overgrown and being used as a rubbish tip. In 1905 the Conservators cleared the area, and it began to be promoted as a beauty spot, appearing on postcards and being illustrated in town guides up to the 1940s. At the time of the clearance, a local journalist commented that the surface of the rocks "presents different colours of a rich and varied character, reminding one very much of the rocks in the neighbourhood of Alum Bay in the Isle of Wight". One was known as the Bleeding Rock, but its whereabouts seems to have been forgotten.

### Target Practice

In March 1918 the Conservators gave permission to the Home Counties Reserve Brigade to establish a rifle range in the quarry, in addition to the one they already had under Mount Edgcombe Rocks on Tunbridge Wells Common. But this was short lived, and the area was returned to public use in April 1919.

When the new sport of sandstone outcrop climbing was pioneered in the late 1920s, Bull's Hollow was an early discovery. It was first publicised in H Courtney-Bryson's 'Rock Climbs Round London' in 1936. By 1947 there were 21 mapped and named climbs at the site, with intriguing names like Conway's Crack, Centurion's Groove and Trident Chimney. Bull's Hollow has remained popular with climbers ever since, and the number of named routes currently stands at 61.

IB



Bull's Hollow Drawing by Tony May

the Conservators' finances. The money had been spent on seats, litter bins, trees in Victoria Grove and, more recently, the repair and repainting of the railings around Toad Rock.

Officers and Committee were elected for 1994/5, the Chairman stressing that the Committee would always be glad to hear of new names who were willing to help. The new Committee is set out on the back page.

The Warden then gave a lecture with slides on the work that had been done on the Commons over the last year together with a preview of some of the work proposed for the immediate future. Questions followed and there was general approval for the work done and in progress. A hearty vote of thanks was passed to Steve Budden.

# Common Aphrodisiac

Mary Page's notes continue with an account of some seasonal flora including an alleged aphrodisiac. Drawings by Harold Page.

## COMMON APHRODISIAC

Spring is the time for new growth and many small plants flower in March and April before the trees come into full leaf. On Tunbridge Wells Common we can see quite a few of them including the frequent LESSER CELANDINE *Ranunculus ficaria*, a member of the Buttercup family. It can be found in all parts of the Common with its clumps of bright yellow



**LESSER CELANDINE**  
*Ranunculus ficaria*

flowers, shining like stars in the grass. This plant was well known to the old herbalists for the treatment of many complaints and disorders. Culpeper, in the seventeenth century recommended it as a remedy for scrofula or kings-evil and used it on his own daughter. He maintained that she was cured in a week with no scars. Magical qualities were also attributed to plants and so as the tuberous roots of the Lesser Celandine were thought to resemble cow's udders, they were hung up in byres to ensure a plentiful supply of cream and butter.

Much less common is LESSER PERIWINKLE *Vinca minor*. It is often found in old gardens and also in one place on the Common. With its dark, shiny leaves and few attractive purple flowers, which are in bloom in March and April, it is not



**LESSER PERIWINKLE**  
*Vinca minor*

boils, toothache and nose bleed. Sir Francis Bacon suggested binding the leaves round the legs to prevent cramp. But the most exotic use was one advised by a French herbalist who said "Periwinkle when it is beat into powder with worms of the earth wrapped round it, and with an erbe called Houselyke, it induceth love between man and wife if taken with their meals"

Near where the Lesser Periwinkle grows another attractive little plant can be found in flower in April. It is the WOOD SORREL *Oxalis acetosella* with its shamrock-like leaves and dainty white veined petals. All its names both English and Latin mean bitter or sour, and its leaves are very bitter indeed. In spite of this they were eaten by country children and known as bread and cheese. It was used as a salad vegetable as early



**WOOD SORREL**  
*Oxalis acetosella*

very easy to find. Its trailing stalks were used by the Romans intertwined in the launch of their victory wreaths. It was used medicinally for

as the fourteenth century and even up to the late seventeenth century. John Evelyn included it in a list of plants suitable for a kitchen garden. One country name that does not mean bitter is Alleluyas because it flowers at Easter and in the days of the monasteries, the monks forbade the chanting of Alleluyas on Easter Day, Alleluyas were sung again and the Wood Sorrel was out.

Later in April and May we can find the pale lilac flowers of the CORAL ROOT *Cardamine bulbifera*, one of the treasures of the Common. It looks a little like Lady's Smock or Milkmaids, another very well known Cardamine, which also grows on the Common. On a closer inspection it will be seen that at the base of the upper stem leaves there are little reddish bulbils. When mature they fall to the ground and make new plants. This is necessary as the plant rarely produces a perfect flower. Although it can be found in quite a few places locally on the Kent and Sussex border, it is very rare in the rest of the British Isles.



**WOOD SORREL**  
*Oxalis acetosella*

As May gives way to June many more flowers will blossom and I hope to describe a few of them another time.

Mary Page

## ROCK SURE

A good deal of correspondence followed the Editor's request in the previous issue for any knowledge on local rock formations.

From Mrs Barbara Lee

In response to your appeal in issue six of Common Ground, may I suggest that you apply to the very helpful and excellent Public Library for their help. An old standard work is 'The Geology of the Weald' published in 1875 by William Jopley, which I found useful in connection with The Harrison Rock formation near Groombridge.

No doubt the Reference Library may suggest more recent works.

From Mr Steve Budden

I do not know of a book about the formation of the Toad Rock complex, but I thought that you might be interested in English Nature's explanatory note. It is a bit technical, but it's all I can come up with in answer to Mrs Akenhead's query.

### Rusthall Common

The site has three main interests. The first and main interest is the spectacular Toad Rock, a classic example of a mushroom shaped, rock pedestal which was produced by wind erosion during the "Ice Age" or Quaternary Period.

The second interest at this site is the intensive cambering present. Cambering is a type of structure best developed where gently dipping

layers of rock overlie thick clays, as is the case at Rusthall. The harder layers of rock tend to become curved over the crest of escarpments and lowered towards valleys. This gentle arching is accompanied by the development of large tensional cracks, known as gulls, parallel to the slope. The hard rock layers are effectively stretched and arched, by gravity, towards the valley bottom. This process is believed to have been facilitated by frozen ground during the cold periods of the "Ice Age".

The final interest at this site is a series of weathering pits (small dish-like hollows) and rock platforms. These are the product of both chemical weathering and erosion of the rock surface.

This locality provides an ideal site for understanding the processes and products of cambering, chemical weathering and wind erosion. It therefore provides a significant resource for education.

The following extract from the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation's Management Plan for the Commons, Dec '91, is more general.

Both Commons lie on the Tunbridge Wells Sands which form part of the Hasting Bed group of sandstones, silts and clays. They are young by geological standards having been formed by sedimentation during the Cretaceous period about 100 million years ago. Rusthall Common is capped by a thin layer of Grinstead Clay.

The Tunbridge Wells Sands are divided into upper and lower beds separated by a bed of Grinstead clay. The lower division is exposed on both Commons, forming the Wellington Rocks on Tunbridge Wells and the rocky area around Toad Rock at Rusthall. Most of these rocks are fairly hard and resistant to weathering, being well cemented sand rock, though softer bands occur amongst them. Thin seams of small white quartz pebbles occur in places.

Occasionally, very thin bands of clay occur; they hold up the downward flow of water percolating through the sandstone and cause it to seep out just above the clay, hastening the erosion of rock at the junction and undercutting the rock above. Such processes have resulted in the formation of Toad Rock at Rusthall.

From Mrs B Akenhead

What a difference it has made to The Toad, having been cleared of its bramble and sycamores by you and your stalwarts last Sunday afternoon. The children do so enjoy climbing over it in the holiday times and it gives me great pleasure watching them.

I do not think anyone used to look for blackberries just there and I should think it will be a much better climb without the brambles. I wonder how many years children have climbed the Toad and even significantly, slightly altered its shape. With all thanks and good wishes.

## THE HEINEKEN EFFECT

The proximity of Supermarkets, fast food joints and Off Licences to the Commons hardly helps keep the level of litter down, so the occasional Litter Pick by members is a welcome addition to the regular contractor's job.

The latest, on March 25th, was pretty well attended and the weather glorious. 14 volunteers spread out all over Tunbridge Wells Common, and six over Rusthall Common. The latter did particularly well clearing up loads of free newspapers which had been dumped. The Warden is talking to the newspapers concerned.

Two valiant volunteers also worked all day clearing up Bull's Hollow.

On Tunbridge Wells a lot of broken glass was cleared from the Wellington Rocks and Fonthill (The Forum), together with the ubiquitous sweet wrappers, KFC cartons, beer cans and bottles.

Steve Budden has expressed his thanks to us, for our help allows him to reach parts of the Commons other people cannot reach.

## CHOOSE YOUR TARGET

The support from the Friends for the Warden's working parties has not been very marked. It may be that some people would like to do jobs on the Commons at times better suited to them and where they have a particular interest.

Steve Budden would always be glad to have such offers (TW 526121). Equally, as regards litter clearance, everyone is encouraged to go out with a bag or bags at any time, perhaps whilst on a general walk, fill it up and leave it by one of the litter bins.

# BUDGETS SPENT & SET

We are pleased to reproduce the Conservators' budget for the year 1994/5 compared to the projected 1993/4 expenditure.

The figures in the accompanying table for 1994/5 are essentially conservative. It will be seen that it makes no provision for contributions from ourselves or the Freehold Tenants, or from grant-aiding bodies such as the Countryside Commission. This is because income from these sources is likely to be spent on specific additional projects. The Conservators have also taken the decision to run down their reserves to approximately £10,000 over the next three years. All this should benefit work on the Commons.

EXPENDITURE	1993/4 (Projected)	1994/5 (Budget)
Rates	166	170
Water	52	60
Electricity	107	100
Litter Collection	13000	12500
Grass Cutting	22121	20000
Materials	400	750
Litter Bins	5312	2000
Seats	6557	1000
Trees and Storm Damage	401	3000
Mntnc of cleared areas	4133	6000
Other works	4167	4000
Eqpt purchase, repair etc	560	650
Man Plan	9500	10000
Admin	20203	20345
Contingency	0	1000
	86679	81575
<b>INCOME</b>		
Contributions (seats)	3318	0
" (Man Plan)	5000	0
Other Contributions	4000	0
Admin fees	100	0
Interest	960	500
Misc. Income	1160	0
TWBC Precept	76700	79000
	91238	79500
Excess of Income over Expenditure	4559	
Reserve brought forward	25931	
Reserve carried forward	30490	

## YOUR COMMITTEE

Following the AGM the committee is now as follows:-

<b>Chairman</b>	Patrick Shovelton, 63 London Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1DT (Tel: 527885)
<b>Vice Chairman</b>	Lt Col Gerry Brown, 60 London Road, Tunbridge Wells (Tel: 534635)
<b>Hon Treasurer</b>	David Wakefield, 68 London Road, Tunbridge Wells (Tel: 523983) Dr Ian Beavis, 104 St James Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 2HH (Tel: 523007) Jennifer Blackburn, 64 Parsonage Road, Rusthall, TN4 8TA (Tel: 546520) Peter Freeman, Manor Lodge, Bishops Down Road, Tunbridge Wells (Tel: 524110) Dan Goddard, 2 Longmeads Road, Rusthall, TN3 OAX (Tel: 535042) Peter D Hoole, Little Grove House, Cumberland Gardens, Tunbridge Wells (Tel: 539977) Marian May, 17 Cumberland Walk, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1UJ (Tel: 525847) Conrad Payne, 1 Nevill Park, Tunbridge Wells, TN4 8NW (Tel: 513626) Mark Roelofsen, 1B Montacute Gardens, Tunbridge Wells TN4 8HG (Tel: 549699)
<b>Representative of the Freehold Tenants</b>	Nick Hill, Bracken Cottage, The Common, Tunbridge Wells, TN4 8NB. (Tel: 520599)
<b>Legal Adviser</b>	Michael Stewart, 2 Rusthall Place, Langton Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN4 8XB. (Tel: 541460)
<b>Secretary</b>	Sylvia Luckhurst, Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS (Tel: 526121)

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with any one of us if you have a point or suggestion to raise.