



COMMON GROUND



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

Issue 12, Spring 1996

The Chairman Reports on the A.G.M.

Despite the counter-attractions of Sense & Sensibility at the MGM, and the Hiss and Boo Music Hall Variety Show at the Assembly Hall, let alone World Cup Cricket on Sky, 60 Friends, in addition to most members of the Committee, attended the AGM at the Town Hall on the evening of Wednesday 6th March. We began with a drinks party, making a small profit for the charity, and this now looks like becoming a permanent feature of our annual AGM evening.

The Chairman reported on the year. Membership has increased from 350 to 400 (the 400th member, Rachel Luckhurst, daughter of our most valuable Secretary, Sylvia, having joined that day - see photo inset). Nearly £3000 had been raised for the Conservators in the year, £1500 having been contributed to the Kentner Memorial Fund (which will pay for 10 new seats round the Higher Cricket Ground now installed and 5 more at Rusthall Cricket Ground and Toad Rock), £500 for tools for volunteers and nearly £900 for the railings and plaque round Princess Anne's oak (see separate note on page 2).

400th Friend!



Pictured above is Rachel Luckhurst, daughter of our Secretary Sylvia and a top model, who became our 400th member on 2 March.

Just think! If each of our 400 members was now to enrol just one new friend and so double the membership, what a boost to the resources and aims that could make. Give it a try! The Chairman referred to the good co-operation with the Conservators and with TCM (Town Centre Management). The latter had helped to fund clearances and regeneration along the fringes of TW Common and, with Kent Highways, had helped to initiate the new crossing to the Common at Castle Street and the much improved pedestrian crossing at the bottom of Castle Road.

Certain changes on the Committee took place. Marian May, Peter Hoole and Mark Roelofsen, after 5 years service and for different reasons -

Peter moving away to Hawkhurst and Mark temporarily abroad - felt that the time had come for them to give up. We see them go with great reluctance. All have done an enormous amount for the Friends. We are most grateful to David Barton for taking over the Editorship of Common Ground which Mark has made so readable over the years. Ann Revell, who has lived in Tunbridge Wells all her life and whose family donated the 10 benches on South of France, has been elected to the Committee and Andrew Weaver, still at Skinner's, has been coopted specially to beef-up junior support. He cannot under the Charities Acts become a full member of the Committee - and therefore a Trustee - until he is 18 - two years hence. Meantime we are lucky to have him.

Committee changes

Peter Hoole has very kindly agreed to continue to maintain the membership and distribution lists on his computer and has even more kindly undertaken to do the Christmas card for 1996. A full list of the new Committee is on page 2.

New projects for 1996 include the production of maps of the Commons - one (for each Common) a folding pocket map for walkers; the other (also for each Common) a coloured print a la National Trust suitable for framing and hanging on walls as well as various entry points to the Commons.

Then in August we plan the Bicentenary Diversions referred to in the last issue of Common Ground.

In the autumn we want, with the Conservators' consent, to plant 2 trees - one on Tunbridge Wells Common, one on Rusthall - to commemorate our 5th year in existence - 1st September 1991-96.

Signs of the Times

The saga over the Mt Edgecumbe hotel sign is not yet over. A new sign, slightly smaller, has been erected on the site of the old metal sign and it seems that Mr Butler is intending to change the actual sign for each season. The Council's approval has, we understand, not yet been obtained.

Another sign, which some Friends find unCommon, is the new blue sign for St Paul's Church and the Bretlands Beauty Centre on Rusthall Common. This is much bigger than the old sign and blue instead of green. This again has, we understand, not yet received full Conservatorial or Council approval. Meanwhile our member, John Cullen, is jokingly saying that if others can have these big signs why can't he



have a bigger sign for his Beacon Hotel? Another hideous example of the proliferation of signs is at the junction of Major York's Road and Hungershall Park. Because Major York's Road is 40mph and Hungershall Park and Fir Tree Road 30, there are signs everywhere - amounting to 11 in all at this one cross-roads (see picture inset). Your Committee is working on this in the general context of traffic, speed limits and parking (see Common Ground - Issue No. 9). PS

LITTER PICK

A good litter pick was held on Sunday, April 14th. 20 Friends came to Fir Tree Road for T.W. Common, but only 4 (mostly Committee members) to Rusthall. 2 stalwarts were sent from T.W. to Rusthall. No dead parrots this time but one sad dead badger, a 30' length of piping, an old sofa and the usual collection of bottles, tins, paper, etc. As usual the rubbish by the roadsides was worst. What can we do about this? All suggestions please to the Editor (T.W. 522318).

OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS

CRIPPS HARRIES HALL	THE WELLS SECURITY SERVICES
MAZDA	THOMSON SNELL & PASSMORE
PPP	
THE SPA HOTEL	WOLFIT

All these firms very generously pay £100pa. If any members have any influence with any firm to induce them to become a corporate member please let them exercise it.

Advantages of corporate membership are:

- (a) Support for a vital local interest
- (b) From time to time having the company logo on the front page of an issue of Common Ground
- (c) Receiving copies of Common Ground and the rest of our literature for staff notices, staff participation in work parties etc.
- (d) Staff eligible to attend all our events.

Clearing & Planting - *The Warden's Report*

Winter work has now been completed for the W 95/96 season and at the time of writing this, Spring seems very close with woodpeckers drumming and the snowdrops starting to appear.

Although we have had some snow this winter it has remained basically dry and certainly we have not had enough rain to replenish the water table. Whilst this has been useful in the sense that we have been able to carry out work without causing damage to the paths and tracks, I am sure that we will suffer through lack of water this summer. Many of the plants on the Common are well adapted to dry conditions, even in a normal year

*we have not had enough rain
to replenish the water table*

the sandy soil of the Commons dries out very quickly, but I fear that for many trees this sort of stress on top of that caused by the storm of 87, pollution etc. will be too much. Fortunately there has been just enough rain to bring the ponds back up to their full levels and so there should be enough water to allow our growing numbers of frogs and newts to breed successfully.

More clearance of fallen holly has taken place at Happy Valley this winter and it is now starting to really show the rocks again. Over the past two

years we have cleared the lower slopes of the escarpment to expose the rock faces; this year we removed the holly from the top of the rocks. I hope that one more season's work will see the first phase of the restoration of this dramatic part of the Commons completed.

Further work has been carried out at Apsley Street to again remove holly from the rock faces and allow some light to reach the heather and bilberry still surviving in this area. Volunteers carried out coppicing of a large stand of gorse behind the Toad Rock.

The programme of tree planting along the road verges of the Common has continued. Volunteers planted around 200 young trees to boost the screening of Major Yorks Road at Fir Tree Pond and contractors put in a further 800 to fill in gaps along the rest of Major Yorks Road, as well as behind the petrol station on London Road and on the steep bank to the south of 'Highbury'. These plantings have been of hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, field maple, wild cherry and hornbeam. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers have donated and planted 15 oak trees behind Fir Tree Road car park as well as more hawthorn and blackthorn to provide screening at Onslow Cottages. The lime trees vandalised in the Victoria Grove have been replaced.

Further clearance of bramble and some scrub has taken place at the Marlpit pond site to reclaim more of the old grassland and the steep slope leading from the woodland to the pond has been partially cleared to allow construction of steps this summer.

Clearance has been completed to the north side of the 'Terrace Walk' (above Brighton Lake). Fallen trees have been removed and the windblown stumps ground out to widen the ride and form a scalloped, south facing, woodland edge. This strip will now be managed to control bracken and bramble re-growth and allow a more varied herb-layer to develop.

The 'Friends' have again been generous to the Commons this winter, paying for the restoration of the railings around the 'Princess Anne Oak' next to London Road and with £500 worth of

*The Friends have again been
generous to the Commons*

tools for the volunteers, so next winter why not come along on a volunteer day and make sure your money has been well spent!

S.B.



Princess Anne's Oak

The Friends have restored the railings round Princess Anne's Oak at the bottom of London Road opposite Clarence Road (the contractor was Dave Sissons) and put up a plaque reading:

"According to local tradition this oak was planted around 1700 to commemorate the several visits of Princess (later Queen) Anne to Tunbridge Wells between 1684 and 1698. It is one of the oldest trees on the Common."

Watch out for that Cable

Cable is coming to Tunbridge Welts - probably this autumn. The firm Eurobell (Ltd) of Crawley has power to put cables all over the place, including through and by the Commons. Your Committee have seen some of the devastation carried by cable companies in other towns - trees killed, pavements inadequately restored, water

mains cut through and so on. It is to be hoped that the Council and the Conservators will watch Eurobell like hawks. Your Committee certainly means to. Eurobell have promised us a meeting (now fixed for May 22nd).

YOUR COMMITTEE 1996/97

- Chairman** - Patrick Shovelton
Vice-Chairman - Lt Col. Gerry Brown
Hon. Treasurer - David Wakefield
Hon. Secretary - Sylvia Luckhurst,
C/o TWBC
(Home: 529225) (Office: 526121)
Legal Adviser - Michael Stewart
**Events
Organiser** - Mrs Jane Clark
Co-opted Member (For Juniors)
- Andrew Weaver
Representative of the Freehold Tenants
- Nick Hill
Editor of Common Ground
- David Barton
(Tel: T.W. 522318)
Dr Ian Beavis
Mrs Jennifer Blackburn
Mark Dennison
Peter Freeman
Dan Goddard
Conrad Payne
Mrs Ann Revell

also Peter D Hoole
Membership list by
computer and Xmas
cards.

Attends all meetings if possible: The Warden,
Steve Budden, C/o TWBC (526121)

Zenith of the Victorian & Edwardian Eras

THE HISTORY OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND RUSTHALL COMMONS - Part 5

The present system of managing the Commons, under a body of twelve Conservators, was established by the Tunbridge Wells Improvement Act of 1890, a lengthy piece of legislation which laid down the powers and responsibilities of the new Borough Council established in the previous year. The Act contained a thirteen page section on the Commons, stating that the Conservators

maintain the Commons free from all encroachments

should consist of four persons each appointed by the Manor, the Freeholders, and the Council, and laying upon them the duty to "maintain the Commons free from all encroachments". Accompanying the Act was the first definitive map of the boundaries of the Commons, with the permitted encroachments to date. The Conservators now took over the day to day management of the Commons from the Freeholders' Committee, as well as the power to frame byelaws. The Act also stated explicitly for the first time that "the inhabitants of Tunbridge Wells and the neighbourhood shall have free access". Although the 1890 Act as a whole is no longer in operation, its essential provisions relating to the Commons were re-enacted in the County of Kent Act of 1981.

The Improvement Act gave the local government for the first time some real influence over the Commons, avoiding the frustration felt by the old Local Board over its inability to intervene in

cases such as the enclosure of St Helena (described in Part 4). It also offered the Council the opportunity of complete control, by giving it the right to purchase the freehold and to acquire the rights of the Manor and the Freeholders. There was a clear expectation that the Council would in fact exercise this right, and in subsequent years local campaigners urged them to do so on several occasions. However, this option was never pursued and was not re-enacted in 1981.

In the late Victorian and Edwardian period, the Commons were probably to be seen at their best. They were much frequented by residents and visitors, as can be seen by the numerous postcard views entitled 'Sunday Afternoon on the Common', and depicting crowds sitting on the grassy slopes overlooking London Road. The old problems of digging and quarrying making parts of the Commons unsightly, and of excessive numbers of grazing animals, had now come to an end. As belief in the efficacy of the Pantiles spring declined, so the town's claim to be a health resort began to be focused on the local environment in general, with walks on the breezy Commons being highly recommended to promote recovery from sickness. At the same time, the natural vegetation of the Commons began to be appreciated by the public in general as well as by the dedicated botanist. Pelton's guide, constantly reprinted to the beginning of the new century, contains a classic description: "To our modern taste its natural and wild condition renders it far more attractive than the

artificial parks which it is the fashion to provide for the healthful recreation of the dwellers in large cities. The furze bushes and the brake are the most noticeable ornaments; but the whole expanse abounds with other plants and blossoms - ling and heath, chamomile and thyme, milkwort and wild violets, being among the most abundant. In April and May the golden bloom of the furze, which is unusually profuse in this spot, delights the eye, and its rich perfume scents the breeze".

The practice of large scale tree planting, begun under the management of the Freeholders, was continued by the Conservators. The general view was that additional trees served to enhance the natural beauties of the Commons. In 1895 the Tradesmen's Association, who with their interest

belief in the efficacy of the Pantiles spring declined

in promoting tourism maintained a keen interest in the Commons, organised a scheme whereby individuals and organisations could contribute one or more trees, and over a hundred were planted over the course of a week in November. The new and outgoing mayors, Major Fletcher Lutwidge and Sir David Salomons, ceremonially performed the first plantings beside Major York's Road. What was not realised was that as these trees matured and grazing declined they would begin to seed themselves all over the Commons, beginning a process of uncontrolled transformation of heathland to woodland.

IB

214 NOT OUT! A Short History of Linden Park Cricket Club

Cricket has been played on the Commons for over 200 years. The first recorded game on the Higher Ground took place in 1782 between Groombridge and Tunbridge Wells.

In 1876 a group of gentlemen under the leadership of Lewis Luck formed a club known as Tunbridge Wells Juniors with a ground near the Nevill. The club changed its name a few years later to Linden Park CC on the opening of the nearby Linden Park Estate and moved in 1806 to its present ground.

In early years the Higher ground pitch was infamous for its condition, and in a match between Australia and a United England eleven captained by W G Grace in 1875, Australia was bowled out for 49 runs. It was reported "that fencing is required to keep the cows out".

Australia all out 49!

However, Linden Park CC inherited a ground which has been described as one of the best proportioned and picturesque in England, and over the years many thousands of spectators have watched cricket of a high standard played in an excellent spirit.

The Ground has seen many good sides including the Australians, West Indies, North and South of England, and Kent County - and many famous players including W G Grace, Frank Woolley, Leslie Ames, and the Nawab of Patavai who played for the Club as a young schoolboy. Colin Cowdrey CBE is a Vice-President.

During the first World War very little cricket was played apart from military matches and in 1917 the square was roped off and the ground used for troop training.

After the war normal fixtures were resumed and in 1922 the new pavilion was built replacing numerous tents which had sufficed until then. In 1941 a large bomb landed on the ground badly damaging the pavilion and making a large crater.

Tea-making wives and girlfriends were for a long time dependent on small primus stoves on which they conjured up excellent teas until the advent of a Calor gas boiler, and in 1952 the first

major extension after the war was made to include mains water and proper toilet facilities. Even in those days there was trouble with vandals breaking into the pavilion.

Today, the club whose membership is largely drawn from schoolboys, performs a very valuable function as a nursery for young cricketers. Coaching under the supervision of Russell Wyatt, and Senior Club members is provided for 60-70 boys every evening during the season, and teams (aged 11-13-15) are entered for junior league games). The year before last the club won all three of these competitions.

The club provides an interesting Senior Fixture list and good class club Cricket on Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesdays throughout the season. Affiliated to the club is "The Madhatters" Hockey section formed to promote Sunday Hockey which plays alternate Sundays on the Higher Ground throughout the hockey season.

The club has often found it hard going financially, and so they do today. Insurance is a particular problem. It would greatly benefit from an increase of non-playing members at £5 a head. A possible inducement, if required, is access to a convivial 'low priced' bar in the pavilion for members and their ladies on playing days. Also it would greatly help the club if dog owners would keep their pets from fouling the sacred square and its environs, as at the moment the club has to provide pre-match search parties on each playing day.

"CRICKET WEEK" this year will be from 29 July to 3 August. A number of local Kentish sides will be played ending with "THE NODDY MEN" - a traditionally thirsty team from Bromley.

Editor's Note: Anyone who wants to support the Linden Park Cricket Club please apply to Frank Hollands T.W. 529860]

Friends of the Commons Forthcoming Events

MAY 25th - Annual Guided Walk by Dr Ian Beavis - meet 10am Thackeray's and/or 2pm Toad Rock

JUNE 13th - 27th
- Commons Exhibition, Museum.
14th - 7.15-8.45pm. Private View with drinks and eats

JULY 27th - 6 - 9pm. Barbecue, Ephraim Lodge, The Common (by kind permission of Glyn and John Douché)

End JAN '97- Annual Dinner - Spa Hotel. (date to be fixed) QC, a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary, past President of the MCC and Captain of the R & A

MANAGE TO CONSERVE The aims of the Freehold Tenants

It was about ten years ago that I was asked to represent the Freehold Tenants of the Manor of Rusthall as a Commons Conservator. We had moved into a cottage on the western edge of Tunbridge Wells Common in 1982 and felt a need to become involved. My first visits to the Town Hall for the quarterly Conservators meetings were uneventful; tea and biscuits, attractive watercolour paintings of the Commons around the walls but little substantive business.

However, on the Commons, the cumulative effect of nearly 50 years unchecked growth was beginning to cause concern. This accumulation of brambles, holly, bracken, birch and sycamore was to exacerbate the task of clearing up after the 1987 hurricane. My own experience of that night was waking up to a power cut, no phone and the paths and driveway from our cottage all blocked. Our car was hidden under a fallen oak,

In my opinion the Conservators were not equipped to tackle the challenge of restoring the Commons and could not visualise what needed to be done. The existing workforce struggled to clear the worst affected areas; with limited assistance from contractors. An increasing sense of frustration was evident in many quarters that not enough was being done.

Towards the end of 1988 the Freehold Tenants representatives on the Conservators put forward a paper that proposed external assistance was required and that a number of recommendations be implemented. The first action would be the appointment of a full time Warden; the remainder dealt with issues that could be included in a comprehensive management plan for both Commons. The reception of these proposals was luke-warm; or perhaps frosty would be a better description. However, by chance, one of the planning staff was working on a number of

surveys of Tunbridge Wells Common. When completed they were presented to the Conservators with a recommendation that the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation conduct a survey of both Commons and establish guidelines as to how the Commons could be managed.

Conservators were not equipped to tackle the challenge of restoring the Commons

The KTNC report took a year to produce as it sought to observe the

Commons through all four seasons. The survey was very thorough in its analysis of the Commons vegetation and wildlife. The two Commons were divided into a number of compartments and a number of activities suggested to manage or improve each area. In addition, the report recommended the appointment of a full time Warden. In 1992 Steve Budden was interviewed for the post and was by far the best candidate. Steve's appointment marked the end of one era and the start of another.

The challenge now was to make something of the KTNC report. It gave very little indication as to planning the maintenance and improvement work required. The Conservators created a sub-committee to initiate this process. By now there was considerable adverse comment on the apparent neglect of the Commons. About the same time Patrick Shovelton was busy gaining support for the Friends. Whilst the Friends and Freehold Tenants shared the same sense of

frustration and belief in getting on with the job our two "constituencies" were different. The wastes of the Manor of Rusthall (the qualifying boundary for registration as a Freehold Tenant) extend west from the Inner London Road, include most of Rusthall and extend as far as Langton and Speldhurst; thus excluding virtually all of Tunbridge Wells. The Friends have no such limitation. Our paths have continued to run in parallel. I hope they will continue to do so.

The Friends have supported and funded a number of projects. After an initial injection of £6,000 to kick-start the work on the 1992/93 improvements programme the Freehold Tenants have (with one or two exceptions) withheld further funding until a comprehensive management plan is in place. We are proposing that the concept of compartments on both Commons be retained and used to define the

The report recommended the appointment of a full-time Warden

routine maintenance. (litter clearance and mowing) with longer term aims (clearance, replanting etc) all within the concept of vision of how each compartment may look in five, ten or fifty years. This will be an evolving process with some considerable initial effort required from Steve and others. However, such a plan will facilitate consultation and accountability rests with the Conservators.

The Freehold Tenants will occupy the Chair of Conservators for 1996 and have a clear objective to get this plan off the ground. NH

In 1820 George Mercer was looking for a home for himself, his wife and his daughter Mary Amelia. He was a 'chaise driver', probably working for the Lady of the Manor. Anyway he broached the subject with her, having his eye on a nice little site for building a house on the Common, at the bottom of the Turnpike Road from Tunbridge Wells to Groombridge. She was agreeable but told him he needed the consent of the Freeholders of the Manor of Rusthall.

I very much doubt whether the resulting letter was the work of George himself. The formal style suggests he had assistance. Be that as it may, after the collection of no fewer than thirty-four signatures or marks in lieu, accompanied by seals covered with small squares of papers, the following missive reached the lady's hands dated 23rd November 1820: "To Miss Elizabeth Shorey Lady of the Manor of Rusthall in the County of Kent.

Madam, It having been represented to us the undersigned Freeholders of the above Manor that George Mercer of the Parish of Frantin in the County of Sussex, Chaise Driver, has recently made Application to you for permission to enclose a small piece of waste Ground of trifling value, parcel of the waste of the Manor for the purpose of erecting a Cottage for the Habitation of himself and Family, under the rules and restrictions appertaining to other Cottages and enclosures erected and made on the said waste, and that you have consented to comply with the applicants request provided it is sanctioned by the Freehold Tenants of the Manor, we therefore (so far as we are Concerned) beg leave to inform

YORK COTTAGE



Drawing by Tony May

you that we have no Objection to the application of the said George Mercer, being complied with, being perfectly sensible that the rights of the Freehold Tenants will not be materially injured by the grant being made, and that it will in great measure tend to do away or abridge various privileges now and for a long time past Exercised by Persons who are not tenants of the Manor."

The signatures of the Freehold Tenants are headed by that of Abergavenny which seems to end with half a dozen figure '7s' followed by a 'y'; his 200 odd acres of Nevill Park and

Hungershall Farm, not to mention his title, no doubt justifying the position and the respectful interval separating his from the more of less clumsy signatures of the middle or trading class hoggpounders which follow, featuring many good old Tunbridge Wells names some of which are still with us: Jeffrey, Hollamby, Mercer, Skinner, Beale (William - the coachman?), Monckton, Stapley, Strange (Edward - of the Royal Kentish?), Langridge and Sprange (Jasper - the bookseller and publisher?). In the middle of the signatures is written: "Mrs Shorey gives her Consent to the within mentioned building - Thos. C. Gardner for Mrs Elizth Shorey." Miss Shorey although a spinster was often given the courtesy title 'Mrs'. Thomas Christopher Gardner was her nephew and succeeded her when she died in 1823.

Did George Mercer build York Cottage with his own hands, or with the help of friends or did he employ a builder? My guess is that it was something of a self-build exercise. Anyway, the resulting pleasant white weather-boarded house is seen daily by hundreds of motorists as they swing up Major York's road or turn into the car park - I wonder what the old chaise driver would have thought of that? I am sure he and his little family were pleased. The trouble was that somehow or other he had overextended himself and owed Joseph Delves, the grocer on the Pantiles, £100 'for goods delivered'; and on 13th February 1830 he mortgaged to the grocer at a rate of 5% "All that messuage or tenement situated [on] Tunbridge Wells Common... some years hence erected... with

The Conservators' Finances

The projection for the year 1995/96, the Budget approved for 1996/97 and the effect on the Reserves are as follows:-

EXPENDITURE	PROJECTION FOR 1995/96	BUDGET 96/97
Rates	186	190
Water	40	60
Electricity (1)	37	0
Litter Collection	12,800	13,250
Materials	400	250
Mowing	15,000	15,000
Replacement of Litter Bins	334	2,000
Seat Replacement and Repairs	2,000	2,000
Road/Pathside Trees and Storm Damage	6,500	3,000
Maintenance of Cleared Areas	6,000	6,000
Other Works (2)	3,500	8,500 (2)
Equipment Purchase Repair and Hire	2,370	1,250
Management Plan (3)	10,000	10,000
Admin	28,147 (4)	25,490
Contingency	0	5,000
Total Expenditure	87,314	91,990

INCOME	PROJECTION FOR 1995/96	BUDGET 1996/97
Contributions	5,318	2,950 (5)
Administration Fees	50	150
Interest	2,800	1,500
Miscellaneous Income	20	0
Tunbridge Wells B.C. Precept	80,000	81,000
Total Income	88,188	85,600
Net Expenditure	874	6,390
Reserve Brought Forward	33,075	33,949
Reserve Carried Forward	33,949 (6)	26,559 (7)

- (1) The electricity supply has now been disconnected.
- (2) Other works include in 1996/97 Kentner Memorial seats and preparation of sites - approx. £6000.
- (3) Management Plan budget for 1996/97 provides for path clearance, planting tree screens, clearing around Donkey Walk, heathland restoration, coppicing of hawthorn and removal of sycamore from **Rusthall Common**, final clearance of Happy Valley and further clearance of holly at Denny Bottom.
- (4) Includes purchase of second-hand Landrover.
- (5) Includes Woodland grant of £2,922 from Countryside Commission, payable each year for 5 years.
- (6) Includes £2,150 for the Kentner Memorial Fund (seats).
- (7) It will be noted that the Conservators have taken a decision to run down their reserves slightly.

YORK COTTAGE *continued from page 4*

the approbation of Elizabeth Shorey ... and many of the tenants ... adjoining the Turnpike Road [from] Tunbridge Wells to Groombridge ... situated opposite the Waggon Office belonging to James Bennett Carrier..."

Two years later, on 26th July 1832, George Mercer died intestate leaving as heiress his only child Mary Amelia who was married to a cabinet maker named "John Maynard otherwise Calverley". I suppose John had some connection with the Calverley family (nothing to do with the place names in my opinion! but the thing baffles me. Anyway, Joseph Delves wanted his money

a couple of years later and on 15th April 1834 the Maynards transferred the mortgage to William Scoones the solicitor and increased the mortgage by another £100. A year later, the equity in George Mercer's little creation apparently rising all the time, his daughter and her husband increased their borrowings to £350 and William Scoones passed the mortgage to the widow Jane Pope.

The equity may have risen but not apparently the Maynards' income. Times were hard and by 1841 they owed 'considerable arrears of interest'. The house was conveyed to a gentleman Henry Sears of Maidstone on trust to sell and give back any balance remaining; and on 31st May 1849 it

went under the hammer for £560 - after which the name 'York Cottage', presumably because of Major York, is first documented. Mary Amelia must have been distressed to see her father's efforts come to nought. She could not however say it was all her husband's doing and she knew nothing about it. A law had been passed, acting as Commissioners under which the solicitors John Scoones and John Carnel had in September 1835 'examined Mary Amelia apart from her husband' and issued a 'Deeds of Married Women' certificate. Needless to say the newspapers had for some time been full of the mock horror of married women that their deeds were to come under the eyes of the law!

The Friends' Finances

The audited accounts for the year ended 30 September 1995 are as follows:-

	1995 £	1994 £
INCOME:		
Subscriptions and donations	2,773	1,751
Surplus on events - dinner	26	-
- BBQ	191	-
	<u>2,990</u>	<u>1,751</u>
EXPENSES:		
Newsletter and stationery	61	46
Bank charges	<u>34(1)</u>	<u>27</u>
	(95)	(73)
	<u>£2,895</u>	<u>£1,678</u>
APPROPRIATIONS:		
Capital expenditure and repairs	2,167(2)	2,313
Awards and donations	40	20
	(2,207)	(2,333)
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR	<u>688</u>	<u>(655)</u>
FUNDS AT START OF YEAR/PERIOD	<u>563</u>	<u>1,218</u>
FUNDS AT END OF YEAR/PERIOD	<u><u>£1,251</u></u>	<u><u>£ 563</u></u>

- NOTE: (1) The National Westminster Bank has now kindly agreed not to charge.
- (2) This item includes £1,500 contributed to the Kentner Memorial Fund for new seats round the Higher Cricket Ground, Rusthall Cricket Ground and at Road Rock.

WALKIES!

Walking the dog, or being walked by the dog is a wonderful way to follow the subtle and sometimes dramatic changes to the nature of the Common as the year unfolds. Excepting perhaps when we have prolonged periods of very settled weather there is something different to enjoy on each outing.

Personally, my favourite season is Autumn when the colours of the foliage offer an unbelievable range of greens, reds, browns, oranges, yellows and countless shades and variations in between. Nothing in my experience was more splendid than last year when after the long hot and dry summer, I doubt the display could have been bettered by the Fall in New England.

As late autumn drifts into early winter the carpet of fallen leaves offers a superb vista against the bare trees and a pale blue sky often enhanced by the sun cutting across at shallow angles to create intricate patterns of light and shade.

Recent winters, as I recall, have been relatively mild which can mean quite wet at times and possibly seemingly dull. Not so if you trouble to watch the numerous and various animals scurrying around for food and preparing their winter hideaways.

This winter we have had some snow which on several mornings settled delightfully on the

twigs and branches - however, sunshine and blue skies were lacking to complete the 'winter wonderland' effect.

Snow always brings a marvellous white carpet of stillness and, if you're very lucky, is the best time to see foxes as they steal through the trees and undergrowth.

Naturally, Spring - the great awakening - has its own attractions; for one thing the rain is often wanner We begin to see the fresh yellow/greens of new growth and the colourful splashes of daffodils with, a little later, the bluebells. I often

Mountain Biking

An increasing problem is the invasion of the Commons by mountain bikers. A particularly glaring example recently took place below the Higher Cricket Ground on one of the new paths running down towards Castle Road. Here a group of mountain bikers had made a "Cresta Run", in the process digging deep holes into the pathway. Fortunately Steve Budden has been able to put a stop to this. If Friends see this happening elsewhere they should immediately get in touch with Steve.

wonder where all the fallen leaves get to; I have to sweep mine off the lawn and borders Mother Nature has a clever way of using the winds to ensure Hers end up as a perfect mulch among the ferns and trees.

And then we have the extraordinary range of wild grasses coming into bloom with their delicate fronds swaying in the breezes to create ripples of soft movement across the open spaces.

Summer brings the sounds of cricket - and what magnificent settings we have for the glorious game. The whole area is lush green (except for last year!) and the Linden ground in particular is a natural amphitheatre with its own 'Mound Stand', the Wellington Rocks and the fine oaks and limes all within the panoramic view.

By the way, I almost forgot; I rather think the dog enjoys his walks as much as I do though he seems to be far more interested in the smells than the sights.

Do walk across the Common when you can and especially explore the recently cleared paths through the wooded areas - it's a most rewarding experience. Don't forget it's all yours and there for you to use. **D.B**

P.S. I've made no mention of bird life on the Common simply because in a short article and with such a variety of birds in the area they really deserve a piece devoted to them. . . . any 'twichers' out there we'd be delighted to hear from you. Ed.