



Registered Charity No. 1013975

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'.

Issue 36. Spring 2005

Diary of Forthcoming Events

Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, 16th March,
2005

7.00 pm for 7.30 pm
at
the Town Hall,
Tunbridge Wells

Tea Party

Wednesday, 13th July,
2005

At
The Beacon Hotel

Walks with Dr. Ian Beavis

Saturday, 7th May,
2005

Meet 10.00 am
at Toad Rock,
Rusthall Common

Saturday, 6th August,
2005

Meet 10.00 am
at Thackeray's House,
London Road
Tunbridge Wells

From the Chairman

Today is dull, wet and somewhat gloomy! However, the daffodils are already up along the A264, the speed limit across Rusthall Common and up Major York's Road are to be reduced which is good news. The draft management plan has been received from Kent Wildlife Trust by the Commons Conservators. Those of you who came to our successful Annual Dinner at the Spa Hotel will have enjoyed their presentation and we look forward to the Warden's report at our AGM in March. A copy is available on the website at www.twcommons.org so I urge you to have a look so that we can join in with the discussion.

The last work party before the birds start nesting will be on March 5th at 10am - bramble and sapling removal may be on the agenda - definitely encouraged by the new plan. Hope to see some new faces at Fir Tree Car Park!

The reconstruction of the road-bed along the A264 by St Paul's Church will surely be a painful experience but I hope that everyone will drive carefully down Coach Road and Rusthall Road or through Rusthall when it happens and not complain too much. In the long, it will benefit us all. Whether a pedestrian refuge is also constructed will depend on negotiations with the Manor of Rusthall.

Please may I urge all members who have not yet sent in their subscriptions for 2005, preferably with the standing order form which was sent to you last year, to do so before the AGM so that we can have an accurate idea of our membership figures.

Your support is vital for the future of the Commons. There are many projects in the new plan which we can help to fund - creation of new ponds, a hibernaculum (what's that? I hear you say!), not to mention the fencing for the grazing trial which we hope will be agreed by the Conservators next year.

Jennifer Blackburn.

THREE SAILORS ON THE COMMON

It might seem surprising to find any sailors on the Common, be so far from the sea, until we remember that in olden times, when a sailor decided to come ashore, swallow his hook, retire, he would traditionally pick up an oar, lift it on to his shoulder and stride purposefully inland, only stopping when a yokel asked him what is that? Then he would know that he had reached the promised land, his retirement home.

We have three sailors who had close connections with the Common.

Thomas Hardy (1769-1839), Nelson's Flag Captain at Trafalgar (1805), owned three houses on the North side of Mount Ephraim (then known as Culverden Road), now the Chinese restaurant but formerly an antique shop owned by Mr Graham. Older readers will remember that this shop has a ship's figurehead at first floor level

in front of the shop, Intriguing?

Admiral Sir William Parry (1870-1855) led four expeditions in the 1820s in search of the north west passage, which we now know never existed, three of them in HMS Hecla (see below). He also attempted to reach the North Pole overland from Spitzbergen, reaching the furthest north for that time. He lived at Mount Edgecumbe, now a hotel, and is buried in Holy Trinity Church Yard.

Rear Admiral C D Lucas (1834-1914) was the earliest winner of the Victoria Cross, winning it in 1854 in the Crimean War. A Mate on the Gunboat Hecla (surely not the one mentioned above?), he tossed a Russian Shell overboard, was promptly promoted Lieutenant, awarded the VC and went on to become a Rear Admiral. He lived in Great Culverden (now the Kent and Sussex Hospital),

and is buried in Mereworth Chuchyard.

The facts about Thomas Hardy are not certain, although the library has a card stating what I have written above. Any further information would be gratefully received.

David Wakefield.

THE
ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING, 2005

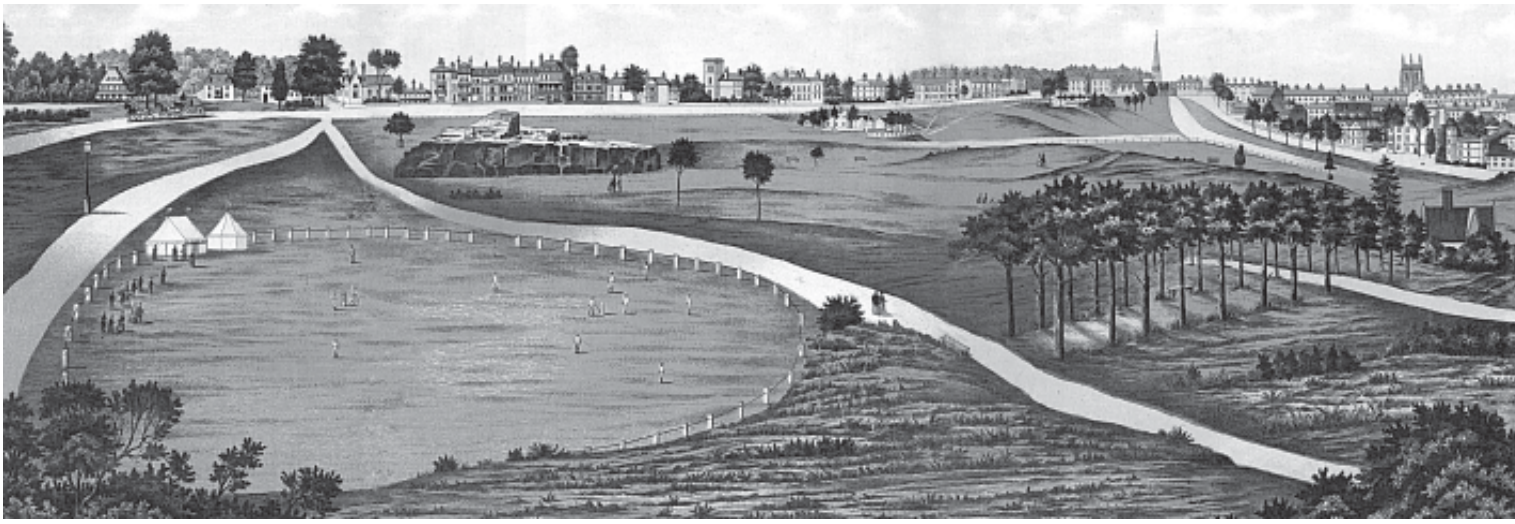
at

The Town Hall
Tunbridge Wells

on

Wednesday, 16th March
at 7.00 pm for 7.30 pm

It is your Society -
Come along and meet your
fellow members over
a glass of wine



ALIEN INVADERS

Readers will probably have seen in the national press accounts of an alien ladybird that seems to be on the verge of successfully colonising Britain. This development has been viewed with alarm because the insect in question has become a significant problem in North America, where it has been established for some twenty-five years. Ironically, the Harlequin Ladybird, a native of the Far East, was introduced – first to the United States and later to continental Europe – as an agent for biological pest control. Like most ladybirds, it feeds on aphids, and so in its original homeland it is beneficial. Unfortunately, in the absence of its natural predators and parasites, the ladybird's population can increase dramatically. When this happens, it becomes a threat to native ladybirds by competing with them for food, and it may also have an impact on other insects such as hoverflies and lacewings by eating their eggs and young. At present it is far too early to say what effect this new arrival will have on the British environment, or indeed whether it will establish itself here in the long term.

The first Harlequin Ladybird to be found in Britain was recorded as recently as September 2004, but in subsequent months it has turned up in several southern and eastern counties, including Kent. What seems to be the first Tunbridge Wells specimen was handed in to the Commons Conservators' office in February 2005, having been discovered close to Tunbridge Wells Common, in a house at Bishops Down. The Harlequin Ladybird is a very variable insect, which may have a pattern of black spots on red, or red spots on black, or may have some of the spots joined up into bands. Nonetheless, it is quite easy to recognise because of its relatively large size (6-8 millimetres) combined with its reddish legs. The only common native ladybird that is as big as this is the Seven-spot Ladybird, and in all of its forms the Harlequin Ladybird looks very different.

If the Harlequin Ladybird does become an established member of the British fauna, it will be only the latest in a long line of non-native insects that have managed to do so. The attractive Rhododen -

dron Leafhopper, bright green with scarlet stripes, has become a familiar British insect wherever its foodplant (which is itself an introduction) grows, including on the Commons. But it was originally a native of North America and only arrived in this country in 1935.

More recently, two additional species of social wasps (those that live in large colonies in nests made of wood pulp) have successfully colonised southern Britain, apparently through natural dispersal from the Continent. It is possible that our changing climate, with milder winters, has enabled these insects to make a permanent home here. When the Median Wasp first arrived in Britain in the 1980s, it attracted a lot of attention in the press and was nicknamed the 'Euro-Wasp'. It was suggested at the time that it might become a major pest, but in fact its establishment has had no obvious impact and it seems to coexist happily with native species. The same has been true of the Saxon Wasp, which appeared at about the same time. As the Median Wasp is somewhat larger than the common native social wasps, it is sometimes taken to be a hornet, now that hornets

have become rarer and many people have never seen one. However, the true hornet, our largest native wasp, is currently staging a comeback in south-east England, and has been seen around Tunbridge Wells for the first time since the 1950s. Once seen, hornets are easily recognised, as their brown and yellow pattern is quite different from the black and yellow of other social wasps.

Ian Beavis.

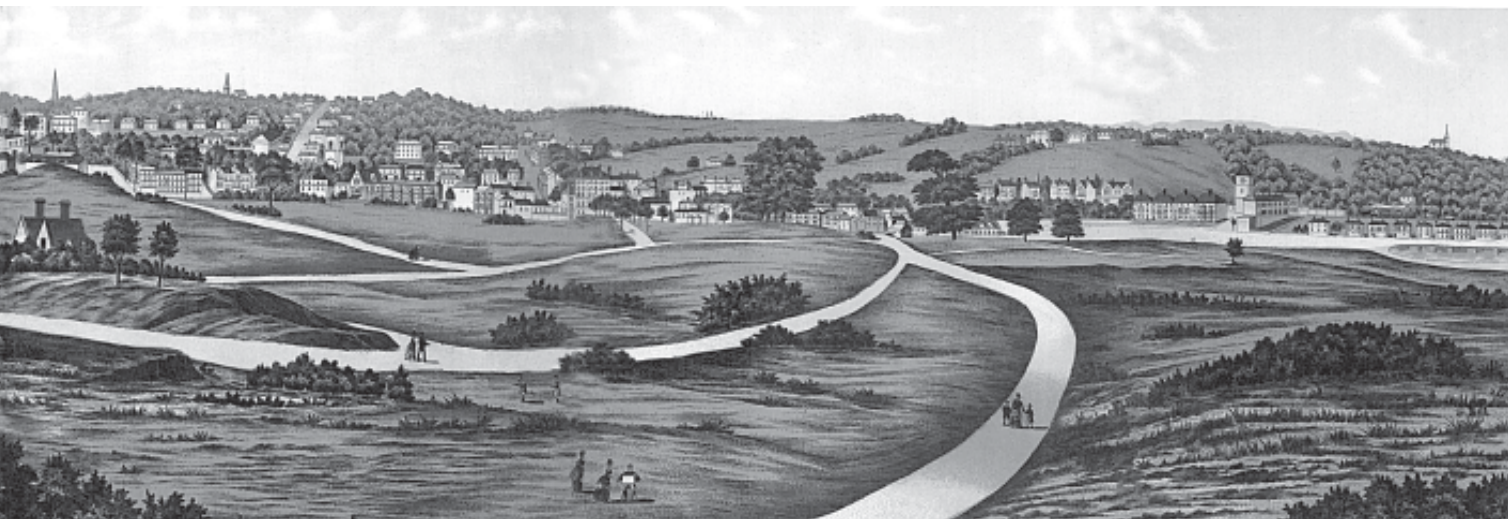
DAFFODILS -

To Plant or not to Plant

In the Autumn Edition of Common Ground it was suggested that daffodils should be planted near the new roundabout. This has not found favour with Richard Still who writes:

This request should be resisted because, first, we would be responsible for buying, and more importantly, maintaining the bulbs, second, it would be a very unfortunate precedent for the Friends to be involved in the introduction of non native plants to the Common and third, They do not look nice! A brief mass of gaudy yellow followed by weeks of ugly leaves drying back.

The daffodils celebrated by Wordsworth were the beautiful native variety growing wild on the banks of Ullswater.



WARDENS REPORT

Work has concentrated on trees again this winter with quite a number of damaged or leaning trees being removed. We have also, with the help of funding from English Nature, carried out a major clearance at Denny Bottom. Scrub, bramble and gorse have been removed from the Toad and all the adjacent rock faces. This stirred up a bit of opposition from a local resident who sent out an anonymous leaflet to all the houses in the area urging them to protest. I am please to report that this resulted in very little response, and of the three calls I received one simply wanted to enquire as to the reason for the clearance, one was opposed to the work initially but after a long discussion understood why we were carrying it out, and one was very much in favour.

The new steps from the Tarry Path to the new pond on Rusthall Common have now been installed and we are currently carrying out clearance near the pond to connect to the large open area near Rusthall Road.

Brighton Lake has had an extensive clearance of weed as has Bracken Cottage Pond and the Marlpit Pond which was also drained to remove the fish that have been predated on the young of the Great Crested Newts over the past few years.

The volunteers have as ever been hard at work over the winter with a lot of effort going into gorse clearance. We lost several of our regular workers

this year with the Weaver family moving away but I am pleased to report that we have a few new members who have brought the numbers back up.

The big news of the winter is, of course, the arrival of the new management plan from the Kent Wildlife Trust. Many of you will have been at the recent dinner and will have listened to Anne Waite and Neal Coombs talking about this. The plan considers the work that we have carried out over the past ten years and gives recommendations for continued improvements. Most of this is fairly uncontroversial, except of course the idea of re-introducing grazing back onto parts of the Commons.

There can be no doubt that grazing would be the best way to manage parts of the Commons. Grazing was one of the key influences in the formation of the Commons as well as the subsequent maintenance over many centuries. However, the world in which we operate today is a very different one and the practicalities of introducing livestock could be very difficult to overcome. The Conservators will be discussing this issue over the next few months and will be seeking the views of users of the Common as well as groups such as the Friends. I am sure that this will be a subject for discussion at next months AGM so I look forward to seeing you all then.

Steve Budden.

Noteworthy Buildings Facing the Common

We are indeed fortunate in Tunbridge Wells to have a wonderful Common that extends right into the heart of the town. However, part of its character depends upon the many buildings that define its edge, and provide a backdrop for its natural features. This new series looks at a few of the noteworthy buildings that face Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons.

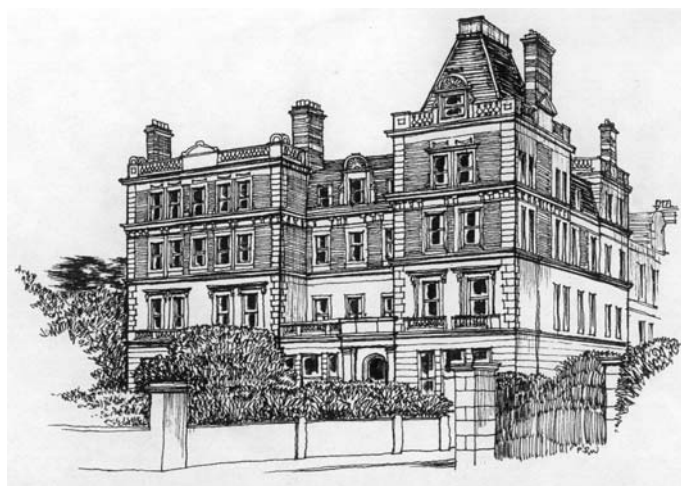
Perhaps most prominent of all these buildings is the chateau-like structure now known as Molyneux Place. This started life as a two-storied mansion called Earl's Court, the residence of local worthy The Hon. F. G. Molyneux. Two further floors were added in 1904 by the Tunbridge Wells Architect Henry Hickman Crank, and for many years the building served as the Earl's Court Hotel. The Hotel was

advertised in the 1930s as a "First-class Hotel situated on the summit of Mt Ephraim, 425 feet above sea level and facing the renovated Tunbridge Wells Common..." The advertisement went on to boast of luxurious furnishings, central heating, a lift to all floors, a fireproof staircase, a garage with private lock-ups, and hot and cold running water in many bedrooms. The Hotel was set in a garden of four acres, with a nine-hole putting course.

Later the building became Reliance House, accommodating Reliance Insurance Offices and the Inland Revenue.

Recently, the wheel has turned full circle and the property has reverted to residential use, but not before a fire raised serious concerns about the building's future.

Dr Philip Whitbourn.



Molyneux Place - formerly Reliance House

Drawn by Philip Whitbourn

Letters to the Editor

SHELTERS ON THE COMMON

From Mr P A Snell

I well remember the Shelters on the Common an in particular the one destroyed by the flying bomb because, on the day of its destruction, I was plying golf at the Spa Golf Course and was, in fact, in the Clubhouse. When I heard the engine cut out I stood in one of the internal doorways (which I had been advised to do should such an incident occur).

After the explosion my immediate thought was to get home to tell my parents that I was safe. I therefore leapt on my bicycle and rushed to 10 Lonsdale Gardens where we lived in a flat over the offices of Snell and Co. to find my parents drinking tea in the garden blissfully unaware that the bomb had fallen anywhere near me!

From a lady member who wishes to remain anonymous.

In response to Bill Buller's letter in Common Ground about the Shelters on the Common, she writes:

In the late forties/early fifties many of the young girls from Rusthall would be escorted home from Assembly Hall dances over the Commons. Much courting was carried out in the thatched shelters on the way. I wonder if there were any Rusthall residents left who remember these activities.

From Mrs Valerie Hawkins.

Re the letter from Mr Bullen in the Autumn edition of the Newsletter concerning Thatched Shelters. The information I have may not be relevant - or someone else may already have informed you of the location of a remaining base.

To locate this, walk up Major Yorks Road towards the Spa.

On the right hand side of the road, opposite the entrance to Nevill Park, turn right onto the earth path of the Common. Walk the few yards to the path on the right hand side. Turn and walk about 10 ft where, on the left, there is a small stunted horse chestnut tree (only about 3 ft high). Stand on the path facing this and walk forward about 5 ft and there is a base of a thatched shelter.

I remember this shelter when I was a child. My mother and I would quite often picnic here on sunny summer days during the days of the 2nd World War. I believe, although I cannot be sure, that this shelter was destroyed by vandals who set fire to it.

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

Editorial

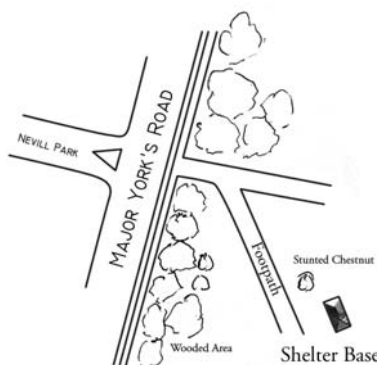
In the last issue of Common Ground I asked for a volunteer to take on the delivery of the Newsletter in the London Road area north of Church Road. I was most gratified by the response. No less than five members offered to take this on. I noted the names of remaining four volunteers and have already filled another vacancy in the delivery team from this waiting list.

Whilst on the subject of volunteers - the February work party was well attended by 9 adults, three children and three dogs. Apart from cutting back secondary growth to open out a foot path they made a good start at clearing unwanted self-seeded growth in the area below the cricket ground. It was a mildly energetic morning in the fresh air which was enjoyed by all. The last work party before the summer season is on the first Saturday in March - 1000 at the Fir Tree car park. Work parties start again on the first Saturday of September.

We are also pleased that members are beginning to take advantage of our invitation to write to us for publication in Common Ground. This edition has several interesting contributions in response to the recent article on the Thatched Shelters.

As Editor I am particularly pleased to receive from Philip Whitbourn the first of a series of articles on interesting buildings that surround the Common.

G.V.L



HISTORICAL PICTORIAL RECORD OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS

We have previously reported that a group of enthusiasts had produced a historical pictorial record of Tunbridge Wells using old post cards, pictures, engraving and old maps lent by a variety of contributors. The record, which was originally published in January 2004 in the form of a CD, also incorporated photographs of most streets in Tunbridge Wells as they are today.

Since January 2004, over 300 additional historical illustrations that have come to hand and these have now been incorporated in a new edition of the CD. The authors of the CD have also taken this opportunity to respond to requests from Rusthall residents to extend the coverage to Rusthall. The new edition now contains over 3000 illustrations together with articles, information and references to Tunbridge Wells.

As with the previous edition all illustrations are related to a map of modern Tunbridge Wells which is used to access them. There is also a comprehensive street index. This is an excellent historical record as well as being a comprehensive contemporary record of the Tunbridge Wells of the early 21st century. The CD's are on sale at a cost of £11.00 each (including postage and packing) and all profits are being donated to a local charity. If any member is interested in obtaining a copy of this CD please contact the Editor of Common Ground on 01892 524019.

Note: The CD is for use in a Personal Computer equipped with Internet Explorer 5 or later.



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