



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 41. Spring 2007

Diary of Forthcoming Events

Annual General Meeting

*Wednesday, 18th April,
2007*

at 7.30 pm

in

Committee Rooms A & B
Tunbridge Wells Town Hall

Annual Tea Party

*To be held at
the Beacon Hotel
Tea Garden Lane*

*Friday, 20th July, 2007
From 3 - 5 pm*

(Tickets £7.00 from Mrs
Luckhust, 76A Grove Hill Road,
Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1SP)

Walks with Dr Ian Beavis

*Saturday, 12th May,
2007*

Meet at 10.00 am
at Toad Rock, Rusthall

*Saturday, 1st September,
2007*

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

From the Chairman

Everyone who came to our Annual Dinner at the Spa Hotel enjoyed the meal and the talk which followed. This year we invited Ruth Childs from the Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre near Maidstone to talk about their work. She gave a fascinating glimpse into the world of counting flora and fauna and why it is important in these days of climate change and land development accompanied by lovely photographs! We thank her for her time and hope that she too enjoyed the meal. I would like to thank the Committee members who all

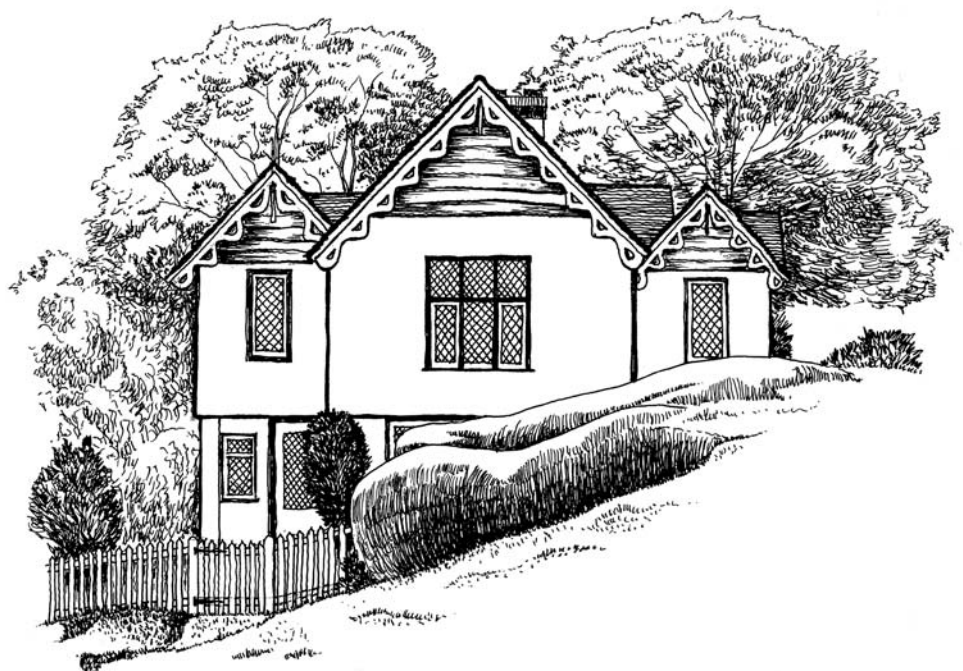
donated a prize for the raffle and to all the members who generously bought tickets.

At this time of year it is usual for me to remind you to ensure that you have renewed for the current year as our Annual General Meeting will be in April and the Membership Secretary, Mrs. Pat Maxwell, likes to give us an up-to-date account of our numbers. I would also urge you all to recruit a friend, a neighbour or someone who you meet on the common. We still need to boost our numbers to reach the 300 mark.

The last work party of the Winter will have taken place by the time this issue reaches you and we hope that you will find the area around Toad Rock much improved. We will be asking Mr. Sissons to repaint the railings round the toad this summer and those around the Queen Anne's tree just above London Road near its junction with Vale Road.

I look forward to seeing some of you at the AGM when our Warden will give his usual illustrated talk.

Jenny Blackburn



Belleville by Philip Whitbourn 2007

ANOTHER MILD WINTER



Nowadays it is becoming commonplace to find remarkably late and early insect activity on the Commons. We have the last of the dragonflies flying on through November and even into early December, and the first mining bees and queen bumblebees emerging in February. But up to now there has always been a fairly clear break between lingering autumn species and the first signs of spring - a more or less 'dead' period in December and January. This winter has been rather different. With only a brief spell of icy weather and snow, there are some species for which 'early' and 'late' have lost their meaning altogether. We now have a select band of 'all year round' insects with more or less continuous activity whenever the sun shines.

I have written before about winter-flying bumblebees, colonies which are not dying off in autumn as they used to, but which have workers gathering pollen all through the winter months. They find the perpetually flowering gorse bushes on the Commons especially useful, as do honeybees, which are also becoming a common sight in winter.

Another creature that has conspicuously changed its habits is the Red Admiral butterfly, easily recognised by its strongly contrasting scarlet and white pattern on a black background. The Red Admiral used to be thought of as a non-resident species in Britain, its population maintained by yearly migration from the

Continent. Migration remains a major source of these butterflies through much of the year, but our winters have now become mild enough for adults to survive the British winter by hibernating, as several related species like the Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell have always done. The hibernation instinct of Red Admirals seems to be fairly weak. They generally stay active a lot later in the autumn than their relatives, which mostly hide away quite promptly at the close of summer. This winter they have regularly been out and about on sunny days, and many readers will have noticed them around the town.

Three species of hoverflies have also adopted a winter-flying lifestyle. Although they have long been known to hibernate as adults, their current level of continuous activity is quite new. Most conspicuous is *Eristalis tenax*, the largest of the drone-flies, a dark, bulky insect which is a very effective mimic of honeybees. This resemblance gives drone-flies protection against predators, but having only two wings and a shorter, broader body they are actually quite easy to distinguish from bees. On the Commons in winter,

they can be seen visiting flowers like gorse or dandelion, often in company with honey-bees, or sunning themselves on foliage, tree-trunks or other surfaces.

The Belted Hoverfly (*Episyrphus balteatus*) is one of the commonest of its family, and like the Red Admiral migrates from the Continent in the warmer months of the year. Its distinctive pattern - mainly orange with several black bands of varying width - is unique among hoverflies and easily recognised (most popular insect guides illustrate it). The generation that survives the winter is darker than those that fly in summer, perhaps an adaptation to absorb more of the sun's warmth. The third

winter hoverfly - *Meliscaeva auricollis* - seems to show similar seasonal variation. It is a more slender-bodied insect, with pairs of orange spots that may join up in the middle. Both species may be spotted hovering over or settled on sunlit gorse and other bushes. Although they may not look particularly wasp-like to us, these medium-sized hoverflies are demonstrating a similar 'warning coloration' to deter predators. While our few British species of social wasps are fairly uniform, the much larger number of solitary species show a great variety of colour and pattern, and it is these that hoverflies are often mimicking.

Ian Beavis

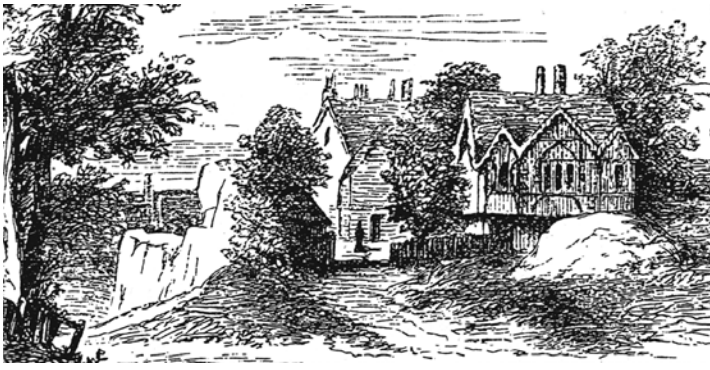
Noteworthy Buildings Facing the Common

"Belleville", The Common

In the last Issue of Common Ground, I illustrated "Thackeray's" 85 London Road. Dating from Stuart times, Thackeray's is one of the oldest houses in Tunbridge Wells, and the novelist, Will Makepiece Thackeray stayed there, with his family, in the summer of 1860. This time I

am following in the steps of the Master, with a sketch of nearby Belleville. Thackeray was no mean artist, and he sometimes illustrated his works with his own sketches. His sketch of Belleville here, can be found at the head of "Tunbridge Toys" in his "Roundabout Papers", published in 1860.





In those days, Belleville looked rather more rustic than it does today. Thackeray's sketch shows half-timbering, perhaps reminiscent of the cottages designed by Willam Wells on his Redleaf Estate at Penshurst. Above the central three light window, two inward-curving timber braces give the effect of a Gothic relieving arch, early 20th century views of the building also show half-timbering. The great novelist was wont, he tells us in his Roundabout Papers, to "stroll over the common and survey the beautiful hills around, twinkling with a thousand bright villas" which had sprung up since his first visit in 1823. Thackeray goes on, "What a delicious air breathes over the heath, blow the cloud shadows across it, and murmurs through the full clad trees! Can the world show a land fairier, richer, more cheerful?"

Belleville is, with Gibraltar Cottage and St Helena, one of

a group of three Cottages Orne that nestled among the outcrops of Sandstone rock at the southern end of The Common. Former residents of this house include the Tunbridge Wells Architect and Councillor Henry Elwig JP.

In 2004 a planning application was made to change the use of Bellville from residential to restaurant use. This was refused and an appeal dismissed. In 2006 a further application was submitted, this time for a "Dinning Club". That, again was refused, following objections from the Commons Conservators and others. Most recently, a query about Bed and Breakfast accomodation suggests that the owner may not have given up all thought of some form of commercial use being made of this prominent dwelling-house and its restricted site on our much-valued Common.

Philip Whitbourn

W e come into a new year seemingly without a winter again. As I write this in mid February, the frogs are back in large numbers in Fir Tree Pond and I would expect them to appear in Cabbage Stalk Lane Pond within the next few days. The roadside daffodils are nearly out and the woodpeckers are making a heck of a racket. In fact the level of birdsong has risen dramatically over the past week. In practical terms, this means that most of our winter work has to be crammed into a much shorter period as it is more difficult to undertake tree work until the leaves are off and it seems to be a briefer interval each year before the birds start nesting again. Fortunately, we have achieved most of our objectives this winter and it is really available finance that has been the limiting factor.

As many of you will have noticed, we have this year started our programme of pushing back trees from the roadside edge. We have been working on the A264 removing a lot of ivy covered hawthorn that was leaning out over the road. This location and Rusthall Road are my first priorities as they have the most concerning trees but we will be carrying out this policy on all the Commons roads over the next ten years or so. There are two main reasons for carrying out this work. Firstly, as you are all aware, liability has increased dramatically over the past ten years and we need to be taking active steps to manage our liability by showing that we are taking all reasonable

measures to reduce risk. Secondly, the new management plan drawn up last year by the Kent Wildlife Trust, calls for us to scallop and grade our woodland edges. In other words, we will extend the woodland edge by creating bays and scallops in the tree line and then manage the re-growth to create a variety of different heights of vegetation to form the graded edge. Woodland edge managed in this way offers far more variety of habitats and therefore is very valuable to our invertebrates and birds.

The volunteers have been in action again this winter clearing back scrub from Brighton Lake, coppicing overgrown gorse in various locations and extending the rather nice glade that they cleared a couple of years ago adjacent to Fir Tree car park. A big thank you as ever to those stalwart few who turn up each time.

After thirteen years of having the same contractor maintaining our grass, it was something of a shock when he lost out in the new tendering process this winter. Our new contractor, Isle Landscapes, will commence the five year contract this spring, and I am sure will do a satisfactory job. However, there are bound to be teething problems for the first few cuts, so please be tolerant. If any of you become aware of any areas that are being missed, please let me know either by calling the office on 554250 or mail me at info@twcommons.org

Steve Budden



Panorama View of London Road, The Common — Album Views of Tunbridge Wells



The Common, London Road — Album Views of Tunbridge Wells

EDITORIAL

One of the problems with running a Society such as the Friends of the Commons is communication. Keeping in touch with members so that they know what is happening is an important part of any Society's work but the present high cost of the postal service makes this an expensive matter. We are fortunate in being able to call on a band of volunteers who deliver the bulk of Common Ground and we try to ensure that any other communications are enclosed with the newsletter thus keeping the cost of postage within reasonable limits. This means that the publication date for the Spring edition of Common Ground is dictated by the date of the Annual General Meeting which is due to take place on 18th April at 7.30 pm. So if it seems a little early for the Spring Edition, you now know why - the AGM has not been very well attended in recent years. This is a pity because it does provide an opportunity for members meet the Committee and find out what is being done on their behalf. So why not make a special effort and come along to the Town Hall in April.

Talking of communication - do keep an eye on the Friends of the Commons Web Site. For those of you who have a computer this is a source of information both about the Commons and future events. The address of the site is www.friendsofthecommons.org.uk

If the work of the Friends of the two Commons is to continue it is essential that we recruit new members and that sufficient members come forward to serve on the Committee and take on the tasks essential to the continuity and smooth running of the Society. Age and infirmity inevitably takes their toll and those who have run and guided the society for so many years have begun to stand down. We need volunteers to take their place. In particular I am looking for someone to take my place as Editor of Common Ground - there must be someone out there who can do it - so what about it?

GVL.

Officer & Committee Membership 2006-2007

Officers: (elected annually)

Chairman:	Jennifer Blackburn	Tel:546520
Vice-Chairman:	David Wakefield	Tel:523983
Hon. Treasurer:	Mark Dennison	Tel:528199
Hon. Secretary:	Sylvia Luckhurst	Tel:529225

Committee: (elected for three years)

Jonathan Balcon	Tel: 515741
Dr Ian Beavis	Tel: 523007
John Davie	Tel: 525557
Simon d'Albertanson	Tel: 529256
Dan Goddard	Tel: 535042
Ann Hughes	Tel: 527657
George Lawson (Editor Common Ground)	Tel: 524019
Pat Maxwell (Membership Secretary)	Tel: 531968



*The
Spa Hotel*

A Corporate Member

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