



Warden's Report *with Steve Budden*

I mentioned in my last report the many projects we have been able to undertake this year because of the extra funding provided by the Freehold Tenants. With the Conservators budget being increasingly taken up by maintenance costs, it has been a real bonus this year. I am therefore delighted to be able to inform you of yet more work that has been funded by the same group.

We have now carried out a major clearance of holly and scrub at Happy Valley to re-expose the Sweeps Cave and have been able to put in a new flight of steps to make access easier. The second phase of this work will be undertaken in the next few weeks to extend the steps fully to the caves and then a new path will be pushed through the scrub to create

a connection to the bottom of the increasingly unusable 101 Steps. As well as creating an alternative route, this path should enable us to extend our bracken control programme onto the slopes of Happy Valley in coming years.

We have also been able to carry out more work in the Brighton Lake area where we planned to widen the two paths that connect the Lake to the Terrace Walk. In the end, one path has simply been widened to allow more light in to encourage the growth of grass to help dry it out, whilst we ended up abandoning the main path from the rear of the Lake and creating a new, much better path next to it. We have blocked the original path, which had really just become a drain.

Those of you who have walked at

Happy Valley recently will have noticed the new path installed to improve access from St Paul's. The Freeholders have agreed to fund a further extension at the other end of this path which will then go right through to the large open area near the 101 Steps.

The most spectacular of the extra projects being funded is the clearance of storm damaged scrub woodland in the area bounded by London Rd, Castle Rd and Edgcumbe Rd. This area has had almost no attention since the storms of twenty years ago and was an almost impenetrable mix of fallen holly and holly and birch scrub. Over recent years it has been home to a number of rough sleepers as well as a site used for drinking dens and other unsavoury activities. We are currently clearing the worst

of the fallen holly, about two acres, leaving a "hedge" of holly on the road edge to thicken up as a barrier against road noise. Over the next couple of winters, we will extend the clearance out to the path running parallel to Castle Rd, giving a total cleared area of about five acres.

The stumps will be ground to allow us to manage the area with our machines and the aim will be to create an area of wood pasture with a mix of open grassy glades and small copses. It is likely that this work will extend over about three years but we have made quite an impact already. We are in a bit of a race against time at present to get the first phase completed before the birds start nesting. Summer is approaching fast and we will soon be thinking about grass cutting again! **cg**

birding journal

by Bettina Cassidy
No.4: Robin

For most of us the robin is a bird synonymous with Christmas, but for me he's the symbol of Spring. This is the time when he's at his most conspicuous; when you can't walk through the common without failing to hear his loud call ringing out above all the other birdsongs. To our human ears it's one of the most beautiful sounds you can hope to hear, but perhaps not so for a bird – in fact he's angrily telling the other blokes to get off his patch! Around this time of year you'll probably see a couple of them embarking in some pretty impressive aerial acrobatics, too, as they fight for the right to romance the local ladies. It's just as well they're so widespread, because they unfortunately do have a high mortality rate. If your cat (the robin's #1 enemy) doesn't catch him, he's very likely to die in combat with a rival.

It's no wonder the robin has officially been our national bird since 1960. His cheeky, bold personality makes him impossible not to love. Even if you don't clock the unmistakable red breast, you can take it for granted that the active little bird playing on the path in front of you, or dancing around the low lying branches beside you, is a robin, as there are few birds who are as unruffled by our presence. Harder to identify is the speckled brown young robin who basically looks like any "LBJ" (little brown job). He has to wait until adulthood to gain his red breast.



Latin name *Erithacus Rubecula*

Size Small, sparrow-sized

Sound: Musical, intricate warble with sharp tik-tik warning call.

It was a wise move on the robin's part to be friendly to man, as it has definitely improved his standard of living over the centuries. Our ancestors were very fond of caging wild songbirds, but the robin managed to escape this fate – "A robin redbreast in a cage/puts all Heaven in a rage"

Although the images of robins on Christmas cards are traceable to the 1860's, their link to theology goes way back and rumour has it that the robin got his red breast by tugging at Christ's thorns. Apparently St Serf of Culross fed a robin who perched on his shoulder whilst he prayed, way back in the 6th century.

If you've been out and about at night and have heard

birdsong, then you're listening to a robin, as they love to sing by streetlights in the wee small hours. Whoever wrote the 1940's hit "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square" wasn't too hot on his ornithology.

Gardeners amongst you may be acquainted with him keeping you company whilst you dig, in the hope that you might turn up a tasty worm for him. When it comes to choosing where to nest, no bird is as inventive as the Robin. They've been known to come indoors and nest in a coat pocket, a pair of wellies, and more extreme, in an unmade bed! I guess that's quite a reasonable excuse for not getting those sheets changed! **cg**

3 Beautiful Things

by Clare Grant

Aerobatics, summer grass and a little mystery.

1. I have watched swifts throw themselves about the thin blue air and made myself dizzy at the thought of it.

2. I love to sit on Wellington Rocks and see the wind turn the stems of long grass so it resembles waves on water.

3. Now it's full leaf time, the Common paths are dark and cool and secretive -- a relief from the bright look-at-me, look-at-me street. **cg**

You can read more of Clare's writings at her websites:
www.threebeautifulthings.co.uk
www.bclaregrant.blogspot.com
www.subbed.blogspot.com



Horseshoe print in the Queen's Grove

TEA PARTY

Don't forget to buy your tea party tickets. Details on back page.

TEA PARTY

NOTEWORTHY BUILDINGS

Facing The Common

*The Yews
5 Lower Green Road, Rusthall*

by Philip Whitbourn

Probably dating from Tudor times, "The Yews" is almost certainly the oldest building that faces Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons. The house was doubtless in existence when Lord North made his famous discovery of the Chalybeate Spring in the early part of the 17th century, when the town of Tunbridge Wells was born.

However, it seems likely that the building would have looked somewhat different in Lord North's time, as a number of alterations have

A thorough analysis of the timber-framed construction could prove particularly rewarding, should an opportunity arise for a detailed investigation of the structure to be made at some future time.

Generally speaking, buildings of this type often start life in the Tudor period as three or four-bay houses, with a central open hall, or living space, with or without a crosspassage, flanked at one end

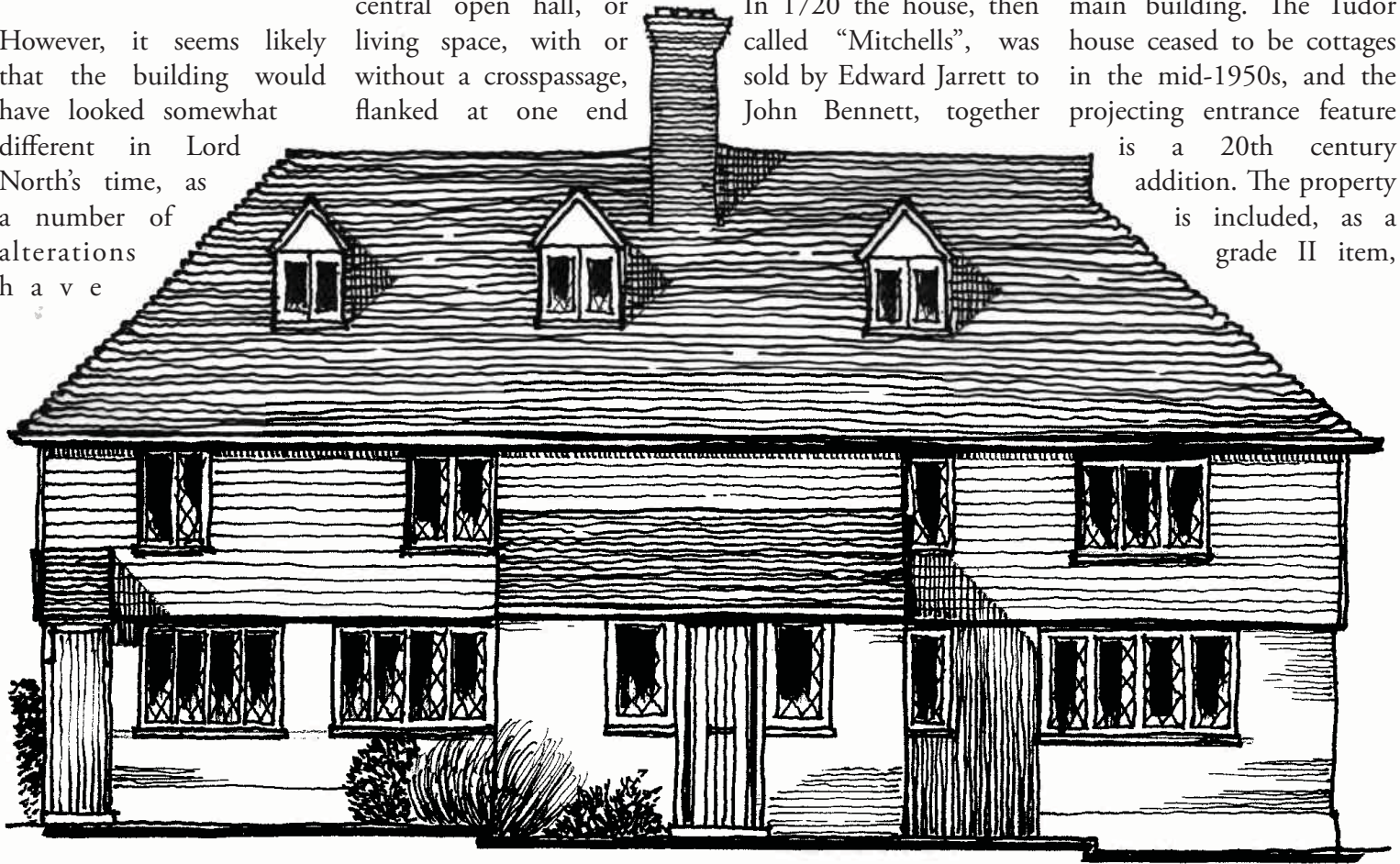
"The Yews", the ground floor wall is of brick, and the first floor wall is tile-hung, so no timber framing is exposed to provide a clue to the building's original form and appearance. The large roof is tiled, and has a gablet at one end, and an axial chimney-stack. Stacks in this position sometimes reflect the site of a former central open hearth.

In 1720 the house, then called "Mitchells", was sold by Edward Jarrett to John Bennett, together

place in the early part of the 19th century, and the census returns suggest that some of the cottages accommodated sizeable families in quite crowded conditions. Also, it seems that one cottage served for a while as a hand-wash laundry, run by Mary Price.

In the mid-19th century a further cottage was added at the southern end of the main building. The Tudor house ceased to be cottages in the mid-1950s, and the projecting entrance feature

is a 20th century addition. The property is included, as a grade II item,



been made over the course of the building's long history. The most drastic of these has been the conversion of the house into three or four cottages, and the various changes that have been made, from time to time, have inevitably obscured the buildings history somewhat.

by a parlour, and at the other end by a service area comprising a buttery and a pantry. Frequently, such buildings were jettied, with the first floor over-sailing a timber-framed ground floor, although ground floor walls were routinely subsequently built up in brick. At "The

with an orchard of five acres. Other familiar local names to be found in documentary sources relating to the property include Anscombe, Bowman, Coppard, Friend, Jeffrey, Nash and Trustram.

Conversion of the house into cottages appears to have taken

in the government's statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest, and it remains one of the most intriguing buildings in the area. **cg**

Editorial

with Christopher Cassidy

Welcome to Common Ground. I hope you enjoyed the great new look of the last edition. We have had a great response from readers to the new design of Common Ground and also to our new website and photo gallery too, which is attracting some lovely pictures. We'd love some more of your photos of the Commons; details on how to send us pictures are on our website.

If you have read this edition and don't wish to keep it, please consider dropping it off to your hairdressers or dentist's surgery to share with others and attract more members. **cg**

From the Chairman

with Jennifer Blackburn

The Chairman is somewhat embarrassed to say that she is still chairman despite her best efforts...

The Committee have decided to spend a good proportion of our funds on clearing another area of the slope between Sweeps Cave and St Paul's Church. There are rock faces buried under the scrub and this work – to be carried out in the Autumn – will complete the clearance started by the Freehold Tenants.

Please do come to the Tea Party in June and enjoy tea and cakes with other members and the Mayor of Tunbridge Wells. With good weather, it will be a very pleasant event!

We are still in need of a treasurer so if any of you have the time and knowledge – please volunteer and then we can co-opt you. Please contact me for an informal chat (546520).

Enjoy the Commons this Summer while they are at their best! Take some digital photographs and submit them to our new website which I also hope that you will look at from time to time and even send in your comments (www.friendsofthecommons.co.uk). **cg**

COMMON GROUND NEWS

Tea Party - Wednesday, June 24th, 3:00-5:00pm.

We are pleased to announce that our annual tea party will again be held at Mount Edgumbe Hotel and Restaurant. Right in the heart of Tunbridge Wells Common – what could be nicer. The party will be on Wednesday, June 24th from 3:00-5:00pm. The Mayor – Cllr. Len Price and his daughter will attend. Please order your tickets - £6.00 per person with cheques made out to "Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons" from:

Mrs. Sylvia Luckhurst, 76A Grove Hill Road, Tunbridge Wells TN1 1SP Phone number: 01892 529225
Please feel free to bring guests – the more the merrier!

The Beginning of The Friends

by Patrick Shovelton

On the night of the hurricane I slept peacefully through all the noise – the wind whistling in the chimneys, the falling trees and the slates whizzing off the roofs so that the postman standing at the crossroads of London Road and Church Road had to dive into his van to save himself from decapitation. Unaware of the total devastation all around I set off at 8.30a.m. for the Royal Ashdown Forest Golf Club at Forest Row for a long-awaited match. I did not reach Langton Green before my progress was halted by a great oak lying across the road. I then tried the Rusthall Road. Same again. I returned home disconsolately.

The Council did a marvellous job in clearing the roads but the situation on the Commons remained dire. This illustrated the poor management of the time. There was no full time Warden - only a part-time former Highways Chief Engineer in charge – and three elderly Council workers whose equipment was sadly below par. For example to cut the grass on Rusthall Common the 3 men solemnly wheeled 3 lawnmowers

from Tunbridge Wells Common to Rusthall and back again.

Critical voices were already being raised about the situation – notably by the Freehold Tenants, that dour and dedicated group of house and cottage owners whose position had been sanctified by the Act of 1763 and repeated in the Tunbridge Wells Improvement Act of 1890 and the County of Kent Act 1981. I tried to join them but found my house – in London Road – was 6 yards outside the Commons boundary and so I was ineligible – my first experience of being beyond the pale.

So, in order to try and get a voice in the management of the Commons, I decided that we locals, who had no effective input, should form the Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons on the pattern of the Friends of Ashdown Forest. Armed with a draft set of objectives

and rules, I set off to see the then Clerk of the Council and Clerk to the Commons Conservators – Jack Girling.

Girling was an impressive man; he had been clerk for many years, of wide experience and a master of procrastination. When I developed my case and said what a help the Friends would be to the Conservators he simply said "Oh, I don't think they'd like that". And I knew it was no good setting up the Friends without the support of the Conservators. So that was that for the time being.

It wasn't until 3 years later – in 1990 – that the atmosphere began to change.

Continued next issue... cg



New Cherry Trees begin to blossom

Officer & Committee Membership 2008-2009

Officers: (elected annually)

Chairman:	Jennifer Blackburn	Tel: 546520
Vice-Chairman:	Simon d'Albertanson	Tel: 529256
Hon. Treasurer:	Mark Dennison	Tel: 528199

Committee:

Sally Balcon	Tel: 515741
Dr Ian Beavis	Tel: 523007
John Davie	Tel: 525557
Ann Hughes	Tel: 527657
Pat Maxwell (Membership Secretary)	Tel: 531968
David Wakefield	Tel: 523983

Corporate Sponsors

THE ROYAL WELLS HOTEL



*The
Spa Hotel*