

# COMMON



# GROUND

Issue 28, Summer 2002

Registered Charity No. 1013975

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

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 of the Commons thinks fit".

### A VIEW FROM THE TOP

**A**s the new leader of this organisation I have spent time to reflect on why it was founded, understand its objects, assess its achievements and current health; I hope to guide it forward so as to leave it in better shape when the time comes for me to move on.

It is a matter of general concern that our membership has recently been in decline and there is a common view that the Society has failed to find an arousing objective since the infamous Highways Agency proposals to widen London Road and the related desecration of our precious Common which would also have occurred around other road junctions in the area had the scheme ever gone ahead. The threat of what, not only in members minds, could have been a disaster had the bonus of rallying support to the Friends and a considerable boost to membership. The wane of interest since that time has resulted in a membership decline of over 20 percent and clearly this situation needs rectification. The Society is not matching its Objects if it just sits back and holds only a watching brief over the ground until another disaster threatens. It should also be noted that the original element of Corporate members has virtually disappeared.

The Society came about through the dedication of Patrick Shovelton who had the inspiration to recognise the need for such a pressure group to campaign for good management and the restitution of the Commons after the results of the 1987 hurricane and the further damage caused by the high winds in January 1990. His negotiating prowess with the Conservators gave us our Society and led in no small way

to the appointment of the Warden and the subsequent marked and regular improvement to the state of the Commons. As a result of his tact, carried forward by his successor David Wakefield, the Friends hold the respect and support of the Conservators which is of course essential. It occurs to me that many of our members may not realise that, though the Conservators are responsible for managing the Commons, they have to rely on the funds limited by precept annually from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Thus any assistance provided by the Friends is more than welcome and over the years our efforts have been and remain noticeable on the ground. My hope is that members will wish to see us increase this assistance as far as we can.

As things are I suggest the most obvious priority is to raise the profile of the Friends and to emphasise the importance of our Commons in the minds of all who reside and work in the area while fully utilising our charitable status. Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons are vital to the district and a most important part of our local natural heritage always much praised by visitors. This Society of Friends was formed specifically to ensure proper stewardship of the Commons in perpetuity so we must not risk becoming moribund. It is not in bad shape but needs to regenerate and to reignite members interest and this edition of Common Ground aims particularly at starting this process.

Following my remarks at the AGM a Strategy has been formulated together with an implementation plan for this year. It is not chiselled in stone and it is hoped as many members as possible will assist, not only with comments and suggestions

upon it but by offering of their time and energy to help carry the programme and future management forward. There is a desperate need to fill three vacancies on the Committee and also to recruit volunteers to sub-committees where any skills or experience can best be utilised without making it onerous for those involved. There are worthwhile things to be done but which can only be achieved by sharing out some of the responsibilities and work involved.

**"Work of each for weal of all"** - my old school motto seems apposite!

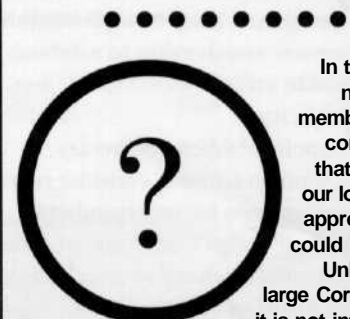
Please reflect upon it with good purpose. I thank you in advance and full of anticipation.

**Rhys Revell**

### NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

This edition of Common Ground concentrates on bring members up to date with what the Society is about and how the Committee sees the way forward. It is hoped members will be willing to respond with their comments and suggestions.

Some forty-one subscribers took time to respond to the questionnaires sent out with edition 27 of Common Ground last November. A response rate of over 12% was encouraging and the analysis, despite the diversity of views expressed, has been both illuminating and helpful. The results will be taken in to account during future Committee deliberations and some suggestions have already been adopted.



In the past a number of members have commented that they feel our logo is not appropriate or could be better.

Unlike many large Corporations it is not intended to spend millions of, indeed anything at all, but those of artistic bent may like to come forward with their ideas for consideration.

**Rhys Revell**

# Can you help?

## • Litter Picking

Over the years it has been the custom to hold Litter Picks on Sundays mornings, one late Autumn, another late Spring. Initially these events were adequately supported but interest has waned and the last two certainly were not. Only four members turned out on 14th April, three at Fir Tree road and one at Common view.

The Conservators employ a man regularly to clear litter but it is not possible for him to cover all the ground.

To employ him more extensively would mean less funds for other essential work contained in the Management Plan. As an experiment Saturday 21st September has been selected in an effort to attract more members to assist in this worthwhile work. It is not particularly energetic and as each sack is made ready for collection it can feel quite rewarding.

Additionally the Warden is open to the idea of our members "adopting" specific areas of the Commons. Two members, John and Marion Goulden, (who as usual faithfully

turned out on 14th April and were appalled at the amount of broken glass they cleared from round Wellington Rocks) have kindly offered to clear that area each month. All one has to do is to let our Secretary, Sylvia Luckhurst, or the Warden know and you will be contacted in due course when things have been coordinated.

## • Graffiti

This intolerable activity is increasingly in evidence on the Commons, especially on litter bins and seats. On the Commons removing litter and graffiti comes under the aegis of the Conservators, not the Borough Council and the Warden will be grateful for all the help we provide in order to obliterate it. Seats will have to be dealt with within the routine maintenance plan which has just been resuscitated with our help. We hope to be able to issue aerosol canisters with paint of the right colour to members who might wish to "adopt" bins in order to keep them clear of the menace. Here again please contact the office (tel: 526121) in order to enlist.

## • Work Parties

A small number of members, termed "the volunteers" by Steve Budden, have in the past turned out up to eight times a year during the winter months. They have ranged in age from mid-teens to the late seventies. The work ranges from pond clearance to opening up traditional rock outcrops, through scrub clearance, coppicing gorse and tree planting. Tools and gloves are provided and Steve is expert at allocating tasks according to the abilities of those present.

A number of other members have said "if only it was not Sundays". A few have suggest mid-week. As a trial the next four Work Parties are scheduled for Saturdays.

## • Membership Forms

Copies of the new forms are enclosed in the hope that all existing members will use them to enrol new members. Forms for membership renewals will be sent out to existing members with the next edition of Common Ground. Kindly note that in order to to save on administration the membership of any new subscribers joining at this time will carry through September 2003.

## STRATEGIC PLAN & IMPLEMENTATION PROPOSALS 2002

{Formulated April/May 2002}

### STRATEGY ITEMS

#### 1. MANAGEMENT/ADMINISTRATION

##### 1.1 Committee structure

- Review within the Rules
- bring committee up to strength and coopt urgently to cover Membership, Publicity. Also Social/Events
- establish sub-committees

##### 1.2 Membership

- appoint Membership Secretary
- develop plan to increase
- redefine classes of membership and recruit accordingly
- seek donations and benefit of Gift Aid
- design and issue new Membership form
- review membership to establish interests, available skills, etc.

##### 1.3 Publicity

- appoint Publicity Secretary
- Common Ground: consider redesign, distribution and cover price for non-members
- acknowledge Corporate, include Societies' Objects, introduce 'letters' section and consider advertising
- activate and utilise media
- offer items to Parish magazines
- develop literature covering our role, past achievements, history of the Commons
- produce leaflets for walks and rambles

- maintain publicity in Libraries, Tourist Information, hotels and guest houses

##### 1.4 Education

- develop contacts with schools

##### 1.5 Merchandise

- establish exact stocks
- extend sales to tourists
- assess future demand

#### 2. PROJECTS

##### 2.1 Furniture

- organise regular maintenance
- establish new requirements and install what possible

##### 2.2 Interpretation Panels: design and install

##### 2.3 Nature Trails

##### 2.4 Waymarked walks

##### 2.5 Gain better pedestrian access to the Commons

##### 2.6 Campaign to reduce traffic speeds on cross common roads

##### 2.7 Reduce car parking on cross common roads and increase short term parking

##### 2.8 Seek re-establishment of

- 101 steps
- more rock outcrops
- more broad vistas

# Wardens Report:

June 2002

**W**ie have, we hope, solved the mystery that has been exercising the local media of late. Namely, what has been causing the large holes that have been appearing in the Common near Brighton Lake. The BBC desperately wanted them to be caused by collapsed smugglers tunnels but the truth was rather more mundane. We had been aware for some time that there was a minor seepage from the dam separating Brighton Lake from the A26 and plans had been made to repair the leak this spring. When we excavated around the wet area in the bank however, we discovered that in fact we had a major leak coming from a collapsed outlet pipe and that a large volume of water was disappearing straight down into the ground.

We put a disclosing dye into the outlet pipe and eventually found traces of the dye appearing inside a nearby inspection chamber that services the main sewer that runs nearby. It would appear that the escaping water has been running along the outside of the sewer pipe washing away the surrounding soil to create an

underground void and that this has caused the ground above to collapse. The damaged pipe has now been repaired and the run-off from the pond is going straight into the storm drains, as it should. It is likely that we will continue to experience some subsidence for a while as the soil continues to settle but hopefully we will be able to simply add topsoil until everything reaches stability.

The wet start to the summer has made it very difficult to keep up with the grass cutting this year; growth can only be described as exuberant. We will be bringing forward our main cut of all the paths to the end of June to try to keep on top of the situation. At the same time our wild-flower areas will be cut and bracken control will be carried out.

The weather has been beneficial to our ponds at least, with all of them staying to high water levels. The new pond adjacent to Cabbage Stalk Lane on Tunbridge Wells Common will have the landscaping around its margins finished this summer and we are planning to create a bog plant site near it to further increase the variety of habitats available. A second new pond is due to be

excavated in August; this one is in an old marl-pit close to the Tarry Path on Rusthall Common.

We will be continuing to upgrade the path network this summer by surfacing the last remaining section of the path running from Castle Road through the Victoria Grove to the Upper Cricket Pitch as well as putting a gravel finish on paths at Apsley Street and The Forum.

The Fun Fair was allowed on to the Lower Cricket Pitch over the Jubilee weekend; the first time it has been allowed on this site since the Coronation. There was some concern expressed by a number of nearby residents prior to the event but I am pleased to say that Mr. Shaw, who runs the fair, made sure noise was kept to an acceptable level. My main concern was the potential for damage to the pitch given the torrential rain that we experienced both before and after the weekend but again I must thank Mr. Shaw for the great efforts he went to protect the site. A spectacular firework display on the Monday attracted good numbers of people and it was pleasing to see the Common providing what turned out to be one of the main Jubilee events in the town. The Lower Cricket Pitch will be in use again when the annual Schools Cricket Festival is staged there in August.

Steve Budden, Warden

## IMPLEMENTATION PROPOSALS 2002

(Formulated April/May 2002)

### STRATEGY ITEMS

|  | All            | PROJECTS  |
|--|----------------|---|
| 1.1 Committee structure                              |                |   |
| 1.2 Membership                                       |                | 2.1 Furniture   |
| - appoint secretary                                  |                | - recondition all hawthorne seats                                 |
| -targets: 400 family/individual                      |                | - install 4 new seats   |
| 7 corporate  |                | - see regular maintenance established                             |
| 5 trader   |                | 2.2 Interpretation Panels   |
| - Gift Aid:  | <b>in hand</b> | - form and design in progress to install first 2 panels this year |
| - new Membership/renewal forms:                      | <b>in hand</b> |   |
| 1.3 Publicity  |                | 2.5-7 Highways matters  |
| - appoint secretary                                  |                | - Fresh negotiations about to commence                            |
| - Common Ground:                                     |                | 2.8 - habitual discussions and negotiations will continue         |
| <b>all items in hand and the rest as time allows</b> |                |   |

## Ongoing Issues!

increasing members participation required in:

- ADMINISTRATION
- CONTROLLING LITTER
- EXPUNGING GRAFFITI
- WORK PARTIES

## Dairy of forthcoming events

### Friends Tea Party

Saturday 6th July

- at the Mount Edgcumbe Hotel (see below)

### Walks with the Warden, Steve Budden

Wednesday 10th July

- meet at 1900 hrs, Fir Tree Road car park

Wednesday 7th July

- meet at 1900 hrs, St. Pauls Church

### Walks with & Talks by Ian Beavis

Saturday 20th July

- at 1030 hrs in the Museum (part of National Archaeology Day)

Sunday 21 July

- meet at 1030 hrs, Toad Rock. Walk on Rusthall Common concentrating on 6000 years of local history

### Fungus Foray with Keith Palmer

Saturday 28th September

- meet at 1400 hrs, Manor Lodge, Bishops Down Road to seek and identify fungi on the Common.

### Litter Pick

Saturday 21st September

- meet at 1000 hrs, either at Fir Tree Road car park or Common View, Rusthall

### Work Parties

Saturday 7th September

- meet at 1000 hrs at Fir Tree Road car park

Saturday 5th October

- meet at 1000 hrs at Fir Tree Road car park

Saturday 2nd November

- meet at 1000 hrs at Fir Tree Road car park

Saturday 7th December

- meet at 1000 hrs at Fir Tree Road car park

### Annual Dinner

Friday 31st January 2003

Preliminary notice, details to follow.

## Reliance House - Post-fire Optimism

**Much concern has been expressed with regard to the future of Reliance House on Mount Ephraim subsequent to the recent conflagration which destroyed the roof and upper floors, the building, and appeared severely to damage the rest of the structure.**

Contrary to some reports in the media Reliance House is not a listed building. Nevertheless it is a particularly sensitive site within the Conservation area and Reliance House is specifically mentioned in the Conservation Area Appraisal of November 2000 as a significant landmark, sitting as it does in one of the most prominent spots along the length of Mount

Ephraim. The building line along Mount Ephraim which, from Bishops Down to London Road, forms the northern edge of Tunbridge Wells Common is seen at its best from parts of the Common and the upper part of London Road. Also Reliance House is one of the larger buildings clearly visible from areas south of the town. There would surely be a public outcry if the grandeur of this building were to be lost as a result of the fire.

For the time being we can afford to feel optimistic. Rydon Homes Ltd. acknowledge the fire has been a serious setback to their plan to convert Reliance House into luxury apartments. Until a detailed report of the damage has been

completed it is not possible to assess how far their original plans may have to be adjusted. However one can be encouraged by what the Managing Director of Rydon has written. "...we are fully committed to restoring the building in keeping with its original design and character and intend to **make** it a highly distinctive feature of Tunbridge Wells once again". They estimate the fire will have delayed their programme by about nine months. One must hope that their present intention can be fulfilled.

Direct contact with Rydon has been established in order that we may be kept fully informed about all aspects of progress on the site so watch this space later in the year.

### OFFICER & COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP 2002/2003

#### Officers (elected annually)

|                        |                    |                       |
|------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Chair:</b>          | Rhys A Revell      | Tel: 520475           |
| <b>Vice-Chair:</b>     | Jennifer Blackburn | Tel: 546520           |
| <b>Hon. treasurer:</b> | Cdr. George Lawson | Tel: 524019           |
| <b>Hon. Secretary:</b> | Sylvia Luckhurst   | Tel: 526121 Ext: 3251 |

#### Committee (elected for three years)

|                       |                     |             |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Dr. Ian Beavis        | )                   | Tel: 523007 |
| Mark Dennison         | } elected 21/3/2001 | Tel: 528199 |
| Conrad Payne          | )                   | Tel: 513626 |
| Peter Freeman         | )                   | Tel: 524110 |
| Dan Goddard           | } elected 27/3/2002 | Tel: 535042 |
| Cllr. David Wakefield | )                   | Tel: 523983 |

#### Sub Committee Chairs

|                        |             |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Interpretation Panels- | Dan Goddard |
| Membership             |             |
| Publicity              | -           |
| Social                 |             |

**NOTE:** there are three vacant chairs on the main Committee.

## Friends' Tea Party

6th July 2002

3.30pm

at the

**MOUNT EDGECUMBE  
HOTEL**

Tickets £5.00

from

Sylvia Luckhurst

Telephone: 526121 Ext. 3251