



# 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 34. Summer 2004

## Diary of Forthcoming Events

### Walks with The Warden, Steve Budden

Wednesday, 26th May,  
2004

Meet at 6.30 pm at Fir Tree  
Road Car Park

Saturday, 12th June,  
2004

Meet at 10.30 am at St  
Paul's Church, Rusthall.

### Tea Party

Wednesday 14th July,  
2004

3 pm at the Beacon Hotel  
Cost £5.00 per head

### Walks with Dr. Ian Beavis

Saturday, 7th August,  
2004

Meet 10.00 am outside  
Thackerays House

## From the Chairman

The most important issue to arise from Kent Wildlife Trust's work on our next 10 year management plan for the commons is undoubtedly the grazing of animals on selected small areas of both commons in order to aid the restoration of heathland and to improve habitat diversity without the need to use machines.

Many of us are excited by the concept of seeing small herds of sheep, goats or cattle appear around a corner of a favourite walk for a few weeks of the year in the Autumn/Winter months.

The Commons Conservators have authorised

further work to be done on a detailed feasibility study including costs. However much we may fancy the idea, it has to be a cost effective management tool for them. I hope that you will all give some thought to this idea and be ready to comment when the detailed plans are available.

I look forward to meeting many of you at our annual Tea Party on July 14th from 3-5pm at the Beacon on Tea Garden Lane. The view from the gardens is wonderful!

**Jennifer Blackburn.**

## ANNUAL TEA PARTY

The Friends of the Common Tea Party will take place on

**Wednesday 14th July,  
2004**

At 3 pm at the Beacon Hotel, Tunbridge Wells Common.

Cost £5.00 per head

Tickets from  
Mrs Sylvia Luckhurst  
Tel: 526121 (Town Hall)

All members and their guests are welcome. Come along and spend an enjoyable afternoon meeting the other members in pleasant surroundings.



Interesting House on Mount Ephraim, overlooking The Common

The Museum's family nature walk on Tunbridge Wells Common on 18 April provided a good opportunity to see two of its most interesting spring flowers. The Coral-root is perhaps the premier rarity of the two Commons. Although it can be found quite frequently in woodlands around Tunbridge Wells, it is a speciality of the Wealden area. The only other part of the country where it grows is the Chilterns. Coral-root is related to the very common Cuckoo-flower or Lady's Smock of open grassland, but the flower is a deeper colour. It reproduces not by seeds but by small purplish brown 'bulbils' which can be seen growing up the flowering stem. The Juneberry is a shrub or small tree which is quite inconspicuous for most of the year, but if spotted at the right time offers a striking display of

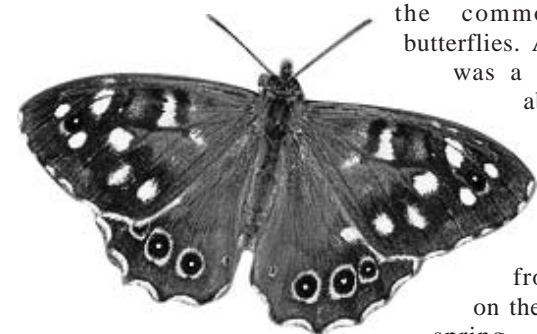
veined White in flight, although when it settles its mottled green camouflage on the underside is distinctive enough. The strategy of females being less conspicuous than males is quite common in butterflies. The logic of this is that males need their bright colours to attract females, whereas females need to avoid predators for as long as possible in order to lay their eggs. Female Orange-tips lay their eggs on Cuckoo-flower or the related white-flowered Garlic Mustard. The eggs are bright orange and stand out clearly on the flower stalks, but the resulting caterpillars are very well concealed.

A few years ago the Small Tortoiseshell, one of the butterflies that spend the winter in the adult state, suffered a dramatic drop in population throughout Britain. It had previously been one of

the commonest garden butterflies. At the time there was a lot of concern about this, but its numbers have now recovered, and plenty have emerged from hibernation on the Commons this spring. It is now the related Peacock which seems to have dropped in numbers, but no doubt that will return to full strength in time.

The Ashy Mining Bee has an unusual colour scheme for a bee – blue black with white fur. In our area at least it tends not to stray far from its nest sites, where the females burrow into sunny slopes. This makes it difficult to find, and though a single male did appear on Tunbridge Wells Common some years ago, none have been seen since. However, this April I came across its nest site near Gibraltar Cottage, and quite a number were in evidence flying low over this warm south-facing slope. As usual, none could be found anywhere else nearby.

Ian Beavis.



white blossom combined with young copper-coloured leaves. Unlike the Coral-root, this is not a British native but a garden escape from North America. However, it has made itself a well-established member of the Common's flora and can be seen in several places.

Those butterflies which hibernate as adults have been active on the Common since March, and those which appear from the chrysalis in spring – notably the Orange-tip and the Speckled Wood – have just begun to appear. The male Orange-tip is quite unmistakable even when glimpsed flying past, as the bright orange areas on its forewings always catch the eye. The female, however, lacks this bright colour and looks much like a Small or Green-

Most members will be aware that two Cricket Clubs, the Linden Park CC and the Rusthall CC, have pitches on the Commons. Both provide an agreeable spectacle and pleasant entertainment for users of the two Commons and I thought it might be helpful to know a little more about their activities so I invited the Club Secretaries to write something for inclusion in Common Ground. The first of these reports from the Linden Park CC appears below. Editor.

The Club continues to run four Saturday League sides and two Sunday sides. Whilst the success rates of the Saturday 1st and 2nd XIs haven't matched previous years' giddy heights, the teams continue to perform well in their respective Kent League divisions. The 3rd XI were promoted in the East Sussex League for the third year running and will now play in Division 6, and the 4th XI ended their season in the top half of their division. It is encouraging to see an increasing number of Colts playing in this team and experiencing senior cricket for the first time.

The two Sunday sides play mainly 'friendly' matches, with the 1st XI also playing in the experimental and non-official Sunday League for the second year against five local teams from Kent and Sussex. They

managed a creditable second place in the 2003 season, beaten only by a very enthusiastic side from Three Bridges.

Mid-week cricket continues to feature strongly and a tour to the Nottingham area is planned for June 2004.

The Junior section continues to grow, filling the gap left by schools that are unable or unwilling to participate in team games. With an increasing number of qualified coaches available, we expect to further increase our numbers and provide competitive games for various age groups in the local Border League.

Fixture cards for the 2004 season are available from Garry Saunders, 20 Albany Hill, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 3RX and you can keep up-to-date with news, results and league tables on the Club's website: [www.lppconline.com](http://www.lppconline.com)

## Tunbridge Wells – 2006

You must all by now have heard that 2006 is a special year for Tunbridge Wells. Four hundred years since the spring was discovered. The Borough Council have called for suggestions from organizations connected with the Town for ways in which we could mark and celebrate this four hundredth anniversary. The Chairman has asked all who belong to the friends for suggestions that we as an organization, or might undertake ourselves. One such suggestion has already been received from Mrs Peta Groom.

Mrs Groom has suggested marking the occasion by erecting four standing stones

ranging from 1 metre in height to 5.3 metres in height to represent the four centuries inscribed with the century and the population of the Town at the end of century the stone represents. She suggests that the stones should be of granite because it would be a more durable material and would catch the light. She also suggests that some sort of water display be incorporated into the design.

Are there any other bright ideas out there? Put your thinking caps on and write and tell us about your ideas.

Editor.

# Warden's Report

The normal spring/summer work of grass cutting is under way and the comparatively dry conditions this spring have enabled us to cut even those areas that are normally too damp to drive the machines on at this time of year. The effect of the dry weather is already showing on our ponds, Cabbage Stalk Lane pond in particular is very low. I was quite concerned last year as our ponds disappeared during the heatwave, not so much for our amphibians, which only require water during their breeding period but more for our invertebrates. In particular the dragonfly and damselfly nymphs which spend several years in the pond prior to emergence as winged adults. It was interesting therefore to talk to Dr. Lee Brady who has been carrying out the pond surveys for our new management plan. His opinion is that the nymphs will probably survive quite long periods of drought by burying themselves in the mud and that the resultant death of any fish, which predate on the nymphs, means that on balance the occasional drying out of the ponds is beneficial.

The new management plan is still the issue dominating the Conservators minds and in particular, as I am sure you are all aware, the question of the possible re-introduction of grazing animals on the Commons. When this was first

suggested by the Kent Wildlife Trust, who are writing the new management plan, there was a certain scepticism from the Conservators as to the practicality of such a scheme. However, after talking to the Trust representatives at the last Conservators meeting, it has been agreed that a feasibility study should be carried out as part of the new plan. There are few details at this stage but there is no intention of grazing the entire Commons. Selected key areas would be fenced for six to eight weeks a year and lightly grazed at very low stocking densities.

Although the discussions as to the practicality of grazing in a modern urban landscape will no doubt rumble on, there can be no question that in an ideal world, grazing would be the best way to manage the open areas of the Common. The lowland heath habitat for which the Common was historically famous was created and maintained by the action of over-grazing on our poor, thin soils. Scrub is kept at bay, nutrient levels are reduced and those plants with high nutrient requirements are starved out. Many of our key insect sites are dominated by ant-hills and of course grazing is the only possible method to clear them without damaging the ant-hills that are themselves important in the ecology of the area.

Steve Budden.



The Chalet on Mount Ephraim

## THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN, (Circa 1905)

*A reprint of the second of three articles on childhood memories of the Common by the late Mrs Mary Cockson-Jones. Mary Cockson-Jones was a founder member and benefactor of the Friends of the Common.*

On the Bank Holidays my father would take me to the fair! Lured by the distinctive crude music of the roundabouts we walked until we came in sight of the crowds enjoying the excitement of the swings, the prancing wooden horses, the shots from the guns aimed at winning a "present" for a "best girl" or a favourite grandchild. All round were sellers of paper steamers and balloons and windmills on sticks. The stall we always visited first was "Jo in the Bottle", and justifyingly held the attention of all who packed the tent, where a small black figure submerged in a bottle of water obeyed every command given him by his master who stood behind the bottle: "go up, Jo," "go down," "Jo, lie down". No means of communication passed between the two, and yet Jo did exactly as he was told – except one thing – Jo must never be told by his master to turn a sommersalt. But the mystery continued to puzzle audiences when they came to see him year after year.

### THE CIRCUS

The other excitement on the Common's fairground of the same calibre, but presented with more sobriety and order, was the circus and all its paraphernalia, which represented the rare and exciting life of those who promoted it. The Common became an exciting spot "housing" wild animals whose unusual voices issued from the closed wagons, and were only seen in the procession which "preceded the actual performance". "Which route around the Common would give us the best view? Would there be an elephant in it? And a clown or two?" You must remember that this was long before the days of radio and television and once gone by the procession had been missed by a latecomer to a vantage point.

### WELLINGTON ROCKS

By the time I was seven or eight I had been introduced to what was the central attraction for all the Common – the mysterious Wellington Rocks. My father told me about their genuine origin, and I became aware of "the dark, backward and abysm of time" when the sea had covered the Common and more land besides; its retreat had left proofs of its capacity for everyone to accept. Little rocks and great rocks, or curious shapes and significant markings, piled attractively on one another, higher and higher, calling for more daring and practice to climb, and what a reward for that last effort – one found oneself on a level with the view of the broad sweep of the Common, flanked by the Queen's Grove and the distant Broadwater Forest.

But between the Queen's Grove and the rocks lay a wide expanse of short tufted grass for running about, cricket, for following the footpath to gorse bush hiding places, and hawthorn trees to be climbed. Here stood Mt. Edgcombe, the only Hotel on the Common, and a few other houses only inhabited by people we never saw, and beyond them the cricket ground, whose railings existed for us to "turn turtle" over paralleled by the cricket ground on the Major York's side of this area.

### MY FIRST PHOTO

Somewhere near to this area my beloved granma ("granny" to all my friends) took us one fine Spring morning to try a new toy she had bought me – a large red paper butterfly. You twisted its antennae, or substitute stamens, and launched it in the air, whereupon it came to life and flutter above our heads, generally coming to earth to be picked up and launched again and again by us all. Who should arrive on the scene but a professional photographer and with granny's permission took our photographs, butterfly and all, as we sat in a row on the pleasant wooden seats so thoughtfully placed about the Common for less energetic or older people. The result was dear and good, but bore no resemblance to our elaborate coloured specimens, and nor did the price of a few pennies per copy! It was simply reproduced on a "negative" but it was permanent, and I have mine to this day.

## FRIENDS OF THE COMMON

Letters from Members

Dear Sir,

In the News Letter just received (Spring 2004) you mention that you would like to receive letters from members. This has prompted me to ask about some areas that have been cleared and dead heather spread over. I am wondering whether this is to try to get heather to grow in these areas. If this is so should not this dead heather be burnt on site to simulate the fires on the heather moors as seen from time to time in Derbyshire. When I moved to Tunbridge Wells, I wanted some heather so I bought some seed, covered it with straw and set it on fire and up came the plants next spring. I believe that heather seed stays dormant for many years until "woken" by fire.

Perhaps we could have an article on this subject in the News Letter.

I enjoy the Commons greatly. Most weeks I walk several times to the Spa from Broadwater Down – you would be surprised by how many ways you can go.

Yours faithfully,

R L Steward. 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2004

### Reply from the Warden, Steve Budden.

*Burning has always been a traditional tool in the management of heathlands. Areas were burnt to control scrub and as a method of releasing some limited nutrients to encourage new heather growth to provide better grazing. Heather seeds survive flash burning well but it is not an essential process in attaining germination. Burning does however have a fairly devastating effect on local populations of reptiles and invertebrates*

Letters (and Articles) from members on the subject of the Common are always welcome. Please address these to the Editor, Common Ground, 70 London Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 1DX or by E.Mail to lawgv7@aol.com.

### Officer & Committee Membership 2003-2004

#### Officers: (elected annually)

<b>Chairman:</b>	Jennifer Blackburn	Tel:546520
<b>Vice-Chairman:</b>	David Wakefield	Tel:523983
<b>Hon. Treasurer:</b>	Mark Denison	Tel:528199
<b>Membership Secretary:</b>	Pat Maxwell	Tel:531968
<b>Hon. Secretary:</b>	Sylvia Luckhurst	Tel:526121 Ex. 3251

#### Committee: (elected for three years)

Jonathan Balcon	Tel: 515741
Dr Ian Beavis	Tel: 523007
Peter Freeman	Tel: 524110
Dan Goddard	Tel: 535042
George Lawson (Editor Common Ground)	Tel: 524019
Conrad Payne	Tel: 513626
Rhys Revel (co-opted member)	Tel: 520475

## Editorial

In our last edition I asked for letters (or E.Mails) from members on any matter concerning the two Commons that may interest them or give cause for concern. So far I have received one letter which I have included in this edition together with comments by the Warden, Steve Budden. Whilst this may be taken as a good sign that members are happy with the way the Common is being managed and used I find it difficult to believe that only one member has anything to say to us!

Apart from letters on matters of concern we are also open to receive articles on matters connected with the Commons, reminiscences of those who have known the Commons longer than most, drawings or pictures of the Commons and their flora and fauna. Any contributions should be sent to the Editor at 70 London Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1DX (E mail: lawgv7@aol.com).

I am please to be able to report that my appeal for volunteers to help on the Committee has been answered by two members who will have attended their first Committee meeting by the time you read this editorial. However, do not think this lets you off the hook! If there is any one else out there who thinks they can help the "Friends" in some way please let us know.

Those of you who walk over the Commons regularly will be aware that we have a constant problem with litter. Whilst there is a regular litter patrol which does much to keep the Common tidy and pleasant for all of us it cannot, for reasons of cost alone, be expected to cope with all the litter left behind by so many thoughtless members of the general public. Some members have developed the habit of always taking a plastic shopping bag with them whenever they venture on to the Commons and collect any litter they see on their route and placing it in one of the bins that are situated around the Commons. If we all did this I sure we could really beat this problem.

GVL

## For Sale

We still have the following items for sale

Christmas Cards	5p each
Notelets	5p each
Mugs	£3 each
Puzzles	£2.50 each
Maps Rusthall Common	£1.50 each
Maps Tun. Wells Common	£1.50 each

Apply to

George Lawson, 01892 524019



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