



## Chairman's Report



Warden, Steve Budden (with Jade)

**T**wo items call for special mention as this year closes. First, we have just received the Conservation Area Appraisal from the Planners, and as this features both the Commons, it is important to our Society. The purpose of these appraisals is to designate those areas which call for special protection in a Town, thus ensuring that development does not take place within them, reducing its visual aspects. As the Commons sections are covered at such length in the Report, I have summarised them elsewhere in this document.

The other matter concerns Frolics 2001. We are going ahead with planning for this, to be held on the Lower Common on Saturday 21st July 2001. The Council have very kindly donated £3000 to get us

started, and this has encouraged us greatly. We still have to raise the same amount again, which will call for an effort from all of us, but it is nice to think that Frolics will return to the Common next year. Because our experience as taught us what is involved, I have set out a few key points later in Common Ground.

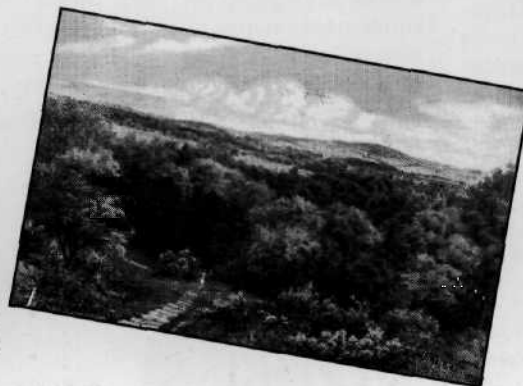
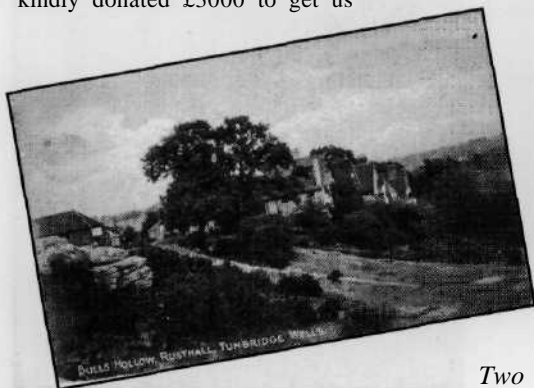
The Dinner is to be at the Spa Hotel. This is turning out to be an enjoyable event in our annual calendar, and is very well supported. We have on this occasion, a talk from Bob Ogle, the author of 'The Great Storm', and as he is an excellent speaker, we can look forward to an entertaining evening.

The Commons continue to improve, under the care of our Warden, Steve Budden. This last year he has had a blitz on bracken. In past years, he has tried cutting it, which is more difficult than I make it sound, since it has to be cut several times and raked up by hand between each cut, before it can be persuaded that it is not wanted. Even then, it has come back. Steve this year is trying out a new method: he is knocking it down with a large machine. It is to be hoped that this rough and ready method will persuade it to go elsewhere.

Two other aspects of work on the Common will be of interest to you. First, there are large areas of heather re-generation just below the Victoria Grove which are doing very well. The second is the repair of storm damage, caused by the great blast of wind we had at the end of October. This is not as great as the damage suffered in the great storm of 1987, but putting it to rights is made more difficult by the wet weather of this Autumn, which is slowing things up.

Your Committee takes a keen interest in ensuring that improvements to the Common should not be held up for want of resources, and we are actively following up several schemes along the lines of tree re-planting. We will report to you in due course.

David Wakefield



Two views of Rusthall Common

### FRIENDS' AGM

will be held on  
**21st March 2001**  
**19.30 hrs**  
COUNCIL CHAMBER,  
TOWN HALL

### Friends' Dinner

will be held on  
**26 January 2001**  
SPA HOTEL  
....

Tickets £22  
from Sylvia Luckhurst  
**01892 526121**  
see separate sheet

### SUBS RENEWALS

**These are now due for 2000/2001**

Please remit to our Treasurer,  
**George Lawson**  
see separate sheet for details

### FOR SALE

**We still have the following items for sale:**

Christmas Cards	0.25p each
Maps of Tunbridge Wells Common	£1.50 each
Maps of Rusthall Common	£1.50 each
Mugs	£3.50 each
Jigsaw Puzzles	£4.50 each

from George Lawson  
**01892 524019**

# Millennial Mini-beasts

Despite some remarkably unseasonal weather during the spring and summer, the year 2000 was a reasonably good one for the Commons' smaller wildlife. Like the previous year, there was a perception among the general public that it was a poor year for butterflies, but this was because of a shortage of familiar garden species like the Small Tortoiseshell rather than the grassland varieties which make up the bulk of the Commons' fauna. The Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and others did appear on the Commons this spring after their hibernation, but they were still in smaller numbers since their unexplained decline in 1999.

On 11 June, I led a meeting of the Kent Field Club, the Society for the county's naturalists, on Tunbridge Wells Common, to which the county dragonfly recorders John and Gill Brook came. They have developed a technique for confirming dragonfly breeding by identifying the shed skins which nymphs leave behind on emergent vegetation when they leave the water for the last time. By this method, it was possible to ascertain that the Downy Emerald, a metallic green dragonfly first recorded at Brighton Lake last year, was in fact breeding there. As well as several more common species, breeding was also confirmed for the Black-tailed Skinner (a medium-sized blue dragonfly with a black tip to its body) and the Four-spotted Chaser (a broad-bodied yellow-brown species with four dark marks on its wings). These two had been seen on the Commons before, but up to then it was not clear if they were permanent residents.

The furry brown beeflies with their swift darting flight are a familiar sight on the Commons in spring. Remarkable examples of mimicry, they achieve protection from predators by their close resemblance to bumblebees. Most human observers probably think they are bees too! Their young live as parasites in the nests of mining bees, and females are often seen hovering around the burrows of their hosts. Although there are several British species, most are rare, and all prior records from the Commons relate to the Common Beefly which has a single broad dark band across its wings. This year, however, one of the rarer beeflies, characterised by having spotted wings, appeared in Happy Valley. It is a nationally notable and declining species, known from only around twenty sites since 1960.

As has been explained in Common Ground before, the sandy soils of the Commons make

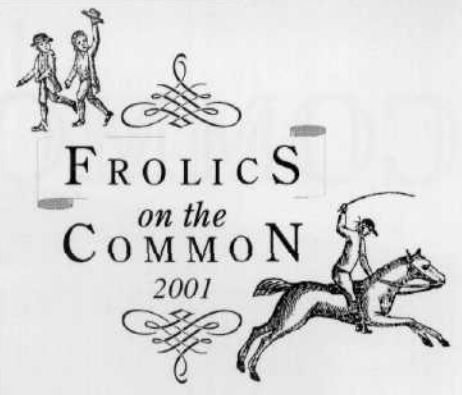
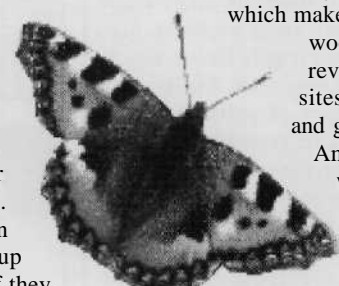
them an important habitat for those fascinating and often colourful insects the solitary bees and wasps. Several species new to the Commons were discovered in 2000. On a hot day (there were a few!) in mid-June, a number of slender black bees were flying wildly over the little sand-pit in the grassland south of Wellington Rocks. These proved to be the males of the Furry Panurgus, a type of mining bee, in search of females, several of which were already busily digging their nest burrows and stocking them with food carried in their pollen baskets of long golden hairs on their hind legs. One of the attractions of this spot was obviously the fact that the sand-pit is surrounded by abundant yellow flowers of the Cat's-ear, which provide food for the adults as well as their offspring. In the following month, the closely related but smaller Spurred Panurgus appeared in the same spot, behaving in a similar fashion.

Another focus of attention near Wellington Rocks was a prostrate but still living birch tree, whose root plate was patronised right through the insect season from spring to early autumn by a wide variety of solitary wasps which make their burrows in soil or decaying wood. A visit on any sunny day would reveal females searching for suitable sites, digging their burrows, or coming and going with food for their offspring. Among those which appeared here was a yellow and black Six-belted Digger Wasp, another nationally notable species.

The Sand Wasp is a large and impressive red and black insect, notable for its extraordinarily long and slender 'wasp waist'. The female hunts for caterpillars, which it paralyzes with its sting and carries off to its nest burrow to feed its young. Although conspicuous enough, it must be few in number on the Commons, as the first examples were not seen until this year, flying low over the sandy ground around Toad Rock in search of their prey.

And finally, in case anyone is wondering about the title of this article, 'mini-beasts' is a term that teachers and other workers with children have started to use in recent years for insects and other small creatures. It sounds rather more enticing than 'invertebrates'!

Ian Beavis



Saturday 21 st July 2001

As we have done two previous Frolics, we are aware of the major tasks which need to be undertaken. The headings of the sub-committee's minutes will give you a flavour of the work

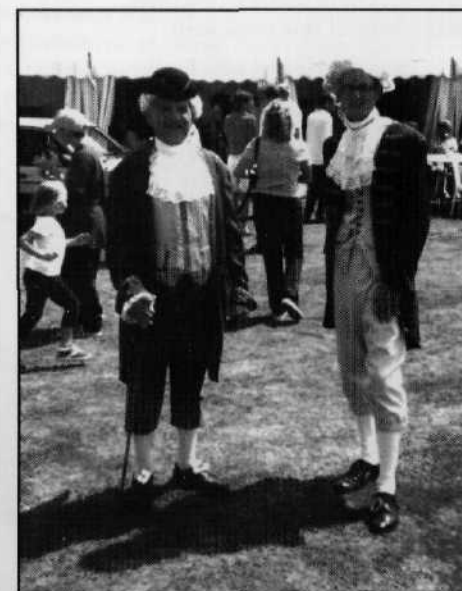
- tentage and toilets
- publicity
- finance
- animals
- childrens' games and races
- historic games
- catering and bar
- funfair

We already have names set against several of these headings, but what we still lack are names for

- raffle (that is getting raffle tickets sold on the days leading up to Frolics)
- sponsorship (raising finance from local businesses)

We badly need help on both these two fronts. Please contact me (TW 523983) if you feel that you can help.

David Wakefield



# Letter from the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society

Chairman,  
Highways Committee  
Town Hall  
Tunbridge Wells TN1 1RS

27 October 2000

Dear Councillor Howell,

## **Fairground adjacent to Major Yorks Road**

The Society was alarmed to read, in a copy.....of the <sup>TWBC</sup> Highways Committee meeting on 11 September 2000, of a proposal for further investigation of the possibility of creating more car parking spaces in the Fairground area of the Common by surfacing it and marking out car spaces. We understand that, in order to do this, the Borough Council is considering buying the Fairground land from the Trustees of the Manor of Rusthall.

We deplore the description in the Agenda of the Fairground as "Major York's Road Carpark" and we wish to remind you that the use of the Fairground as a carpark was only approved, many years ago, by an annually renewable lease, as a temporary measure. The purpose was to alleviate the concerns of the Pantiles traders who feared severe loss of custom during construction of....Union House.....

The reason for the insistence upon such car parking being approved as a temporary measure only, is ..the County of Kent Act 1981. . . . gives ...directions about the uses and activities which may be <sup>permitted</sup> on the Common.

Para 110 states that " the Conservators shall have the power to permit temporary enclosures to be made ...on such occasions as they think fit. ". The use of the Fairground as a carpark by annual renewal lease...was permitted to ensure that it was a temporary arrangement.....

Para 111(1) states that the conservators may make byelaws for various reasons and at (1) "for the prevention of all acts and things tending to the injury and disfigurement of the commons... "

We consider that a surfaced carpark on the Fairground site would be a disfigurement.

We are outraged that such works are now contemplated and urge you to refuse to pursue this proposal.

Yours sincerely,

Tunbridge Wells Civic Society

# GUIDED COMMONS WALKS

**TWO guided walk this year,  
led by Dr Ian Beavis,  
will take place on**

**Saturday 16 June  
2001**

**starting at 10.30 hrs  
on Rusthall Common,  
starting from Toad Rock**

**Saturday 28 July  
2001**

**10.30 hrs  
from Thackeray's House,  
Tunbridge Wells Common  
and, again, will also take  
about two hours.**

*A must for anyone interested  
in the flora and fauna of  
the Commons.*

## Spring Litter Pick

The Spring litter pick  
will take place on

**Sunday 15 April  
at 10.00 hrs**

There are two starting points:

- for those who want to clean up Tunbridge Wells Common, the Fir Tree car park;
- for those who are interested in Rusthall Common, meet outside the old Brahm's and Liszt public house (now gone, but we all know where it was!).

If you are in any doubt as to where to go, then the Warden (01892526121) will give you directions.

These litter picks are good not only for the Commons, but also for the waistline!

# Conservation Area Appraisal

**This document, complete with maps and pictures of the key buildings in the Town, has now appeared. It is of great importance to us, since both the two Commons are given prominence.**

The reasons for its importance are many, not least that it will be quoted by developers in making their case for getting planning permission in the future, and if we have been astute enough to foresee that step, in our getting their refusal.

The report has this to say about Tunbridge Wells Common.

'The relationship of such a broad area of countryside ... the Common, to the dense and historic development of the town centre is one of the most significant contributions to Tunbridge Wells's unique identity. In a town where hills and change of level are the essence of its topography, the Common represents extremes, from its high point at Mount Ephraim of over 130 metres above sea level to 70 metres or so at Eridge Road. This remarkable change of level generates very important vistas and broad views southward and eastward over the town....'

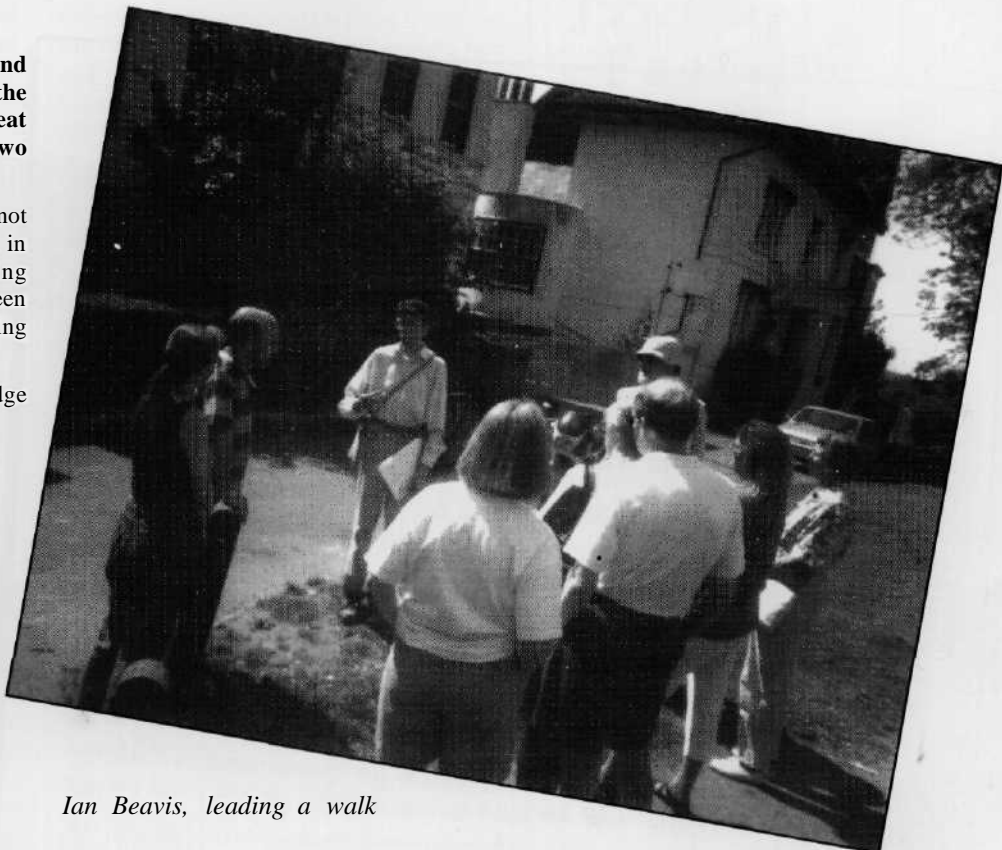
'The Common is criss-crossed by roads and paths that cut through the wooded areas ... the features that make the Common a particularly distinctive area are the individual properties sited within it and its famous rocks ...'

'The open space of the Common is so dominant that there are few opportunities in its immediate area for distinctive urban space ... however, in the north of Mount Ephraim and London Road, where the urban form is relatively strong, there are more significant small spaces ... the greens of the northern common ... the space in front of The George ...the widening of the street with the junction of Culverden Street ...'

'Inter-visibility is a key part of townscape quality ... The Common and Mount Ephraim ensures that there are many impressive views between parts of the conservation area and from the conservation area out into open countryside...'

'The self-evident main attribute of the Common is its vegetation ... rocks are uniquely distinctive focal features ... the greenery of the Common is important to the wider area of Tunbridge Wells...'

I think that I have quoted enough to give you the gist of what the outside planners think of our Common. Perhaps of equal importance is the



*Ian Beavis, leading a walk*

next section of their report, 'Elements that Detract from the area's special character.' Here they feel that

- '... modern traffic intrudes both because of its volume and because of the visual effects of widened roads and other highway engineering structures.'
- 'Gaps have been broken in the townscape immediate surrounding the Common in a number of places ... Mount Ephraim at the Hospital site and Stormont Fords' forecourt and works...and at the rear of Nevill Terrace, now occupied by a builder's yard and a petrol filling station...'

Turning to Rusthall Common, they say

- 'Rusthall Common to the south of the developed area represents a high plateau along the ridge which falls away steeply to the north east to Denny Bottom ...'
- 'Denny Bottom ... has perhaps the most distinctive characters of any residential area in the region...'
- 'Rusthall Common constitutes the bulk of the conservation area at this point ... the most spectacular element of this area is the surprise one experiences as one emerges from the densely wooded part of the Common to the exposed high rocks above Happy Valley...'
- 'The cliff above Happy Valley affords spectacular views out

towards Ashdown Forest and the High Weald ...'

- 'A central element of this is the '101 steps' that link the Cold Baths (local bathing pools) on the valley floor to the Common some 60 metres above.'

I am sorry about the metres rather than feet (you will have to do your own translation), and also the use of the word local in the last sentence, which gives a flavour of currently in use, which they most certainly are not! Perhaps historic bathing pools might have been better!

Again, I find the elements which detract from the historic character of the area as being interesting, since this is an outsider's view of our town.

- 'Rusthall Grange development - modern residential blocks ... No. 35 Harmony Street - an acceptable building which unfortunately is vacant and boarded up ... recycling centre and car park on Common View Road - unattractive spaces and uses in such a sensitive location.'

Altogether, a most satisfying document and one well worth reading. Copies should be available from Tunbridge Wells Council.

**David Wakefield**