



# COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975



## Warden's Report *with Steve Budden*

As ever, spring has been lovely; even though it is appallingly dry, large parts of the country are on fire and the whole Common is like a tinder box. However, presumably due to all that rain we had in the winter giving us high ground water levels, everything has looked wonderful. Admittedly, the short grass is looking a bit frazzled now and is already slowing down but at least that means we should have cuts left in hand for later in the summer.

Our desperate need for rain is best shown by the state of our ponds. Many of them are now dry and even the deeper, more permanent ones are in an unprecedented state for early spring. Fir Tree Pond for instance is now down to just a few shallow

puddles, each one full of wriggling tadpoles. I imagine the number of mature frogs we produce this year will be small but they can reproduce in such huge numbers that it will have little long term effect.

One area that has been badly affected by the lack of rain is the grass seed we sowed at Edgcumbe Rocks and the other new clearance opposite the Old Sorting Office.

At the end of March, we used an excavator to clear the small roots and debris from these sites and grade and landscape them. We moved soil away from several rock outcrops to expose them again at Edgcumbe; we then seeded both areas as well as the new path at the Bumps and the re-routed path from the Terrace

Walk. Since then, we have had the driest spring on record and no sign of any grass. It may still show if we ever do get some rain but if not, I guess we try again in the autumn.

Grass cutting is well under way now and it will not be long before we will need to start cutting the edge of some of the paths. This is the time of year when we can get on with essential repairs to such things as the surface of Fir Tree car park and our bins and benches. I hope to renovate at least a dozen benches across the Commons and take another couple bins to be re-built. We also have a number of posts and barriers to repair and replace and I have been instructed by the Conservators to install more posts along the edge of Harmony St to protect the Commons there.

As the numbers of cars continues to increase, I imagine this sort of situation is going to arise more often.

Our usual summer problems have started; vandalism and broken glass at the Wellington Rocks and cricket club, ever increasing levels of litter near the Forum and much greater use of the Lower Cricket Pitch for picnics, barbecues and parties. There was an attempt to hold a large illegal party on the Lower Cricket Pitch on the day of the Royal Wedding and apparently there were plans for others during the summer. These sorts of gatherings are pretty much beyond the Conservators to deal with and we rely on help from the Police and the Local Authority.

*Continued on back page >>>*

# birding journal

by Bettina Cassidy

No.10: Wren

Latin name *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Size Tiny

Sound: Loud, hard, rattling chit, chiti, tzerr

The wren is probably our most common Common bird. This may surprise you, as it's not the most conspicuous of birds, preferring to flit restlessly and secretively around in the undergrowth. Before the area in front of Mount Edgcumbe Bar & Restaurant was cleared, the beer garden was the perfect place to while away an afternoon, watching the overgrown scrub below for the wren's furtive movements - the perfect pursuit for the lazy (and thirsty) birdwatcher.

Recently we visited the newly-visible

its image on the old British farthing. The women's branch of the Royal Navy - Women's Royal Naval Service - was known as Wrens. The name couldn't be more apt, considering the bird's endless spirit and energy. And what energy! The male wren is an industrious nest-builder, who will build a number of nests for his wife, so she can choose the one she likes the best. His average of six nests is pretty impressive, but nothing compared to the little Dutch wren who built 40 over a four-year period!

Like many of our birds, the wren may get lumped into the "little brown job" category, but his looks are quite distinctive. No other bird has that wonderfully impudent, cocked-up tail, and his markings, rather than just a dull brown, are rather pretty and intricate. When the sun's shining, I swear his brown feathers take on a russetty hue.

Wren's don't rely on humans for their survival, and I can't say I've ever seen them at a birdfeeder. They probably very wisely take one look at the boorish Great Tits, bullying the smaller birds, and decide to give it up as a bad job. But hopefully the species may evolve to venture into our gardens, as when winters are harsh, the wren population can almost be wiped out, but with their indomitable spirit, they always manage to bounce back. But being friends with humans has worked wonders for tits and robins, and we've got plenty of love (and fat balls) to share with the wrens. So if you change your mind, Mr Wren, you know where to find us! **cg**

Edgcumbe Rocks to admire its geological mysteries. As I strayed away from the path, a very strident and angry chack-chacking rang out from the scrub nearby - I was a little too close to the wren's nest for comfort. What a lot of noise from such a diminutive chap! He's small, but my goodness, he's loud. When he's not in a bad mood, his beautiful song, with its intricate trills and arpeggios which would put Telemann to shame, can be heard from half a mile away if the wind's right.

There are in fact 80 different species of wren worldwide, but none are as small as our British one (at 9cm, only the Goldcrest is smaller), or as well-loved. We Brits love the wren so much we've given it a name - Jenny - and we put



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**cg NEWS!**  
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Dates for your Diary

## Summer Tea Party

The Summer Tea Party will be on June 22nd at 15:00 to 17:00 at Mount Edgcumbe Hotel - Tickets £5 available from address on back page or by phoning 01892 546520.

## Annual Dinner

The Annual Dinner will be on Friday, 14th October at Royal Tunbridge Wells Golf Club.

## Rusthall Parish

Rusthall Parish Council has its first nine councillors! A good mix of people from across the village, young and older who are all looking forward to starting work. We would like to be invited to send a representative to observe at Commons Conservators meetings but at present have no desire to be more involved with the management of Rusthall Common. In due course we will invite Steve to come to a parish council meeting to talk about this with us. The people of Rusthall are all enthusiastic about their common! They are good litter pickers as well.

## Officer & Committee Membership 2010/11

### Officers: (elected annually)

Chairman:	John Barber	Tel: 542962
Vice-Chairman:	John Davie	Tel: 525557
Hon. Treasurer:	Mark Dennison	Tel: 528199
Hon. Secretary:	Glennis Hoggarth	Tel: 517442

### Committee:

Sally Balcon	Tel: 515741
Dr Ian Beavis	Tel: 523007
Ann Hughes	Tel: 527657
Pat Maxwell (Membership Secretary)	Tel: 542858
David Wakefield	Tel: 523983
Hannah Marcheselli	Tel: 532520

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# THE MEN OF TREES

by Christopher Cassidy

With Spring in full swing it's time to start getting out there and enjoying our lovely Commons. We thought we'd take some fresh air over the Common this week to have a look at the latest tree clearances.

a busy roundabout and notice a very forlorn-looking tree. But, this is no ordinary tree, and certainly one that would never be cleared.

Take a knee in the mud and brush aside the fallen leaves and you'll find a small stone plaque which reads: "Whiligh Oak. The gift of Lord Courthope, President Men of the Trees, planted by members of Summer School. 24th July 1954."

What's a Whiligh Oak? Who was Lord Courthope? Who are these mysterious Men of Trees?

Whiligh is an estate in nearby Wadhurst, it was the home of Lord George Courthope. He was a Justice of the Peace and a Member of Parliament for Rye for many years and was created a Baronet in 1925 and a Peer in 1945. His estate was renowned for its splendid oak trees. The timbers from Whiligh were used in the roof of the original building of Westminster Hall in the Palace of Westminster.

The mysterious Men of Trees conjured up pictures of strange men in costumes dancing around over the Common in my mind when I first read the plaque, but they are actually much friendlier and more important than that. Founded in Kenya in 1922 by forestry officer, Richard Baker, they are an international movement that protects and plants trees for habitat restoration, to alleviate poverty and to feed people in poorer countries.

They have been responsible for the planting of nearly 30 trillion trees all over the world. The Summer School was an early local environmental group that was an offshoot of this movement and celebrated a meeting by planting a tree.

Got you in the mood for trees? How about a nice walk to another famous local tree? If you wander across the Commons towards town you'll eventually find Princess Anne's Oak.

Overlooking London Road, right opposite the Bridge Club, this oak tree is said to have been planted around 1700 to commemorate the visits of Princess Anne (later Queen) to Tunbridge Wells between 1684 and



1698. The railings around the trees are Victorian and were restored in 1995 when a plaque was also affixed. It is one of the oldest trees on the Commons.

Go on, take half an hour to get some fresh air this lunchtime and go and explore our Commons, you never know what you'll find. **cg**



If you were to do the same as us and take a lunchtime stroll to the very edge of our lovely Commons, you might happen to find yourself beside

# flora & fauna

by Ian Beavis Rare Plants

Last year the Kent Field Club – the natural history society of Kent – published their New Atlas of the Kent Flora, a monumental achievement by Eric Philp, formerly Keeper of Natural History at Maidstone Museum. Between 1991 and 2005 he personally visited every two kilometre square in Kent, amassing a total of over 250,000 records. It was interesting to see how the special plants of our Commons are faring in the rest of the county, and what are currently the rarest plants we have.

On a national scale, the Commons' most important plant is undoubtedly the Coralroot, a deeper coloured relative of the very common Cuckooflower. In Britain it is found only in the High Weald and the Chilterns. The atlas shows it in fourteen squares in Kent, all but one along the border with Sussex.

Because of its special climate, the High Weald provides a home for many plants that are otherwise found mainly in northern and western Britain. Several of these grow on the Commons, including the impressive Royal Fern, usually found in wetlands but here perched up on the sandstone rocks at Rusthall. There are only three other Kent sites. The Creeping Willow is a miniature heathland relative of the trees whose yellow catkins are so familiar in spring. But, as its name suggests, it grows inconspicuously on the ground. Bilberry, with its pink bell-shaped flowers and black berries, is restricted to a small number of sites in the west of the county: it grows quite prolifically on top of the rocks at Bull's Hollow. And then there is Mat-grass, known on Tunbridge Wells Common since the early 1800s, but now found in only two other places in Kent.

Equally rare in Kent is the Small-leaved Lime, a relative of the familiar and much larger tree which Victorian and later townfolk were fond of planting on the Commons. It grows along Pope's Terrace Walk on Tunbridge Wells Common. Two characteristic heathland plants on Tunbridge Wells Common – the Cross-leaved Heath and the Dwarf Gorse – are currently declining in the county, mapped in the new atlas in eight and eleven squares respectively.

The Star of Bethlehem, whose spring flowers are white with a green stripe on the underside, has been known on Tunbridge Wells Common for many years. The new atlas recognises it as a native plant in Kent, although in the past it has often been classed as an introduction. There are no such doubts about the Juneberry, a small tree introduced

to Britain from North America in the mid-1700s. Occasionally seeds spread by birds germinate in the wild, and Tunbridge Wells Common is one of five sites in Kent where this has happened. Juneberry is particularly striking in the spring when its white blossoms open together with its copper-coloured young leaves. It can be seen near the north-west corner of the Race Course on Tunbridge Wells Common. **cg**



Coralroot

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This can make a speedy solution to these issues difficult to achieve!

I don't know if it is another effect of the dry spring but at the time of writing this article, there has been a huge hatch of Hawthorn flies on the Common. They are very distinctive with their trailing black legs and rather slow flight and there are thousands of them about at the moment. Strangely, I am not seeing them in such numbers anywhere else at the moment. I wonder if Dr Beavis has noticed any other odd invertebrate events. **cg**

## Paws for Thought

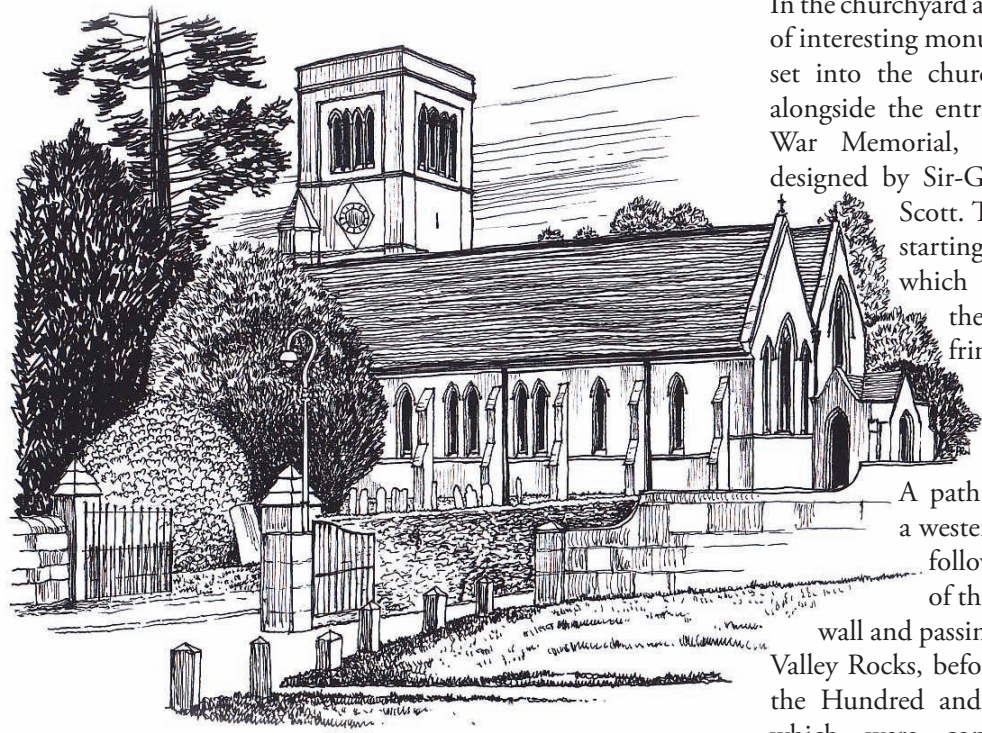
Buying a dog is a long-drawn-out haul. We'd decided a long time ago that we'd like a dog one day, but somehow the time was never quite right. Then a few months ago, we happened to be passing the farm near Tenterden where we got married last year. That's

# NOTEWORTHY BUILDINGS

## Facing The Common

by Philip Whitbourn

### Parish Church of St. Paul, Rusthall



In the churchyard are a number of interesting monuments and, set into the churchyard wall alongside the entrance, is the War Memorial, which was designed by Sir-Giles Gilbert Scott. This is a good starting point from which to explore the southern fringes of Rusthall Common.

A path leads off in a westerly direction, following the line of the churchyard wall and passing the Happy Valley Rocks, before leading to the Hundred and One Steps, which were constructed in 1708 to provide access to the Cold Bath in Happy Valley.

Rusthall has had a separate ecclesiastical parish since 1868 and, in view of the recently approved plans to create a civil parish too, it seemed appropriate to feature the Parish Church of St Paul, Rusthall, in this issue of Common Ground.

work the late Sir Nikolaus Pevsner once remarked that it was "never cheaplooking and never in bad taste", Henry's brother, Nehemiah, was based in Tunbridge Wells High Street, and assisted him in the work.

The church is built of local sandstone in an early gothic style, with lancet windows, and it has a central tower. At first sight, the appearance of the building may seem to be much as it was in Victorian and Edwardian times. However, at around the time of the First World War the church was extended westwards by one bay, and a narthex or porch was added, to the designs of the architect P. A. Robson.

Consecrated by Archbishop Sumner in 1850, St Paul's Church, Rusthall, was originally a daughter church of Speldhurst, from whom it became independent in 1864, before being assigned a large parish of its own, which included extensive areas of the Commons. The architect for the building was Henry Stevens of Derby, of whose

Strangely enough, neither the Happy Valley Rocks, nor the Hundred and One Steps, nor the Parish Church, nor the War Memorial lie within the new civil parish, the southern edge of which is the illogical Ward boundary of Langton Road. Clearly, it would make sense for the whole of Rusthall Common, whether to the north or south of Langton Road, together with Rusthall Parish Church, to be within the new civil parish of Rusthall, and it is to be hoped that this point may be addressed at the earliest practical opportunity. **cg**



where we found Biltong, squirming on the farmer's kitchen floor with his eight sisters. Six long weeks later we picked him up, wrapped him in a beach towel and drove him back to Rusthall.

Until his jabs kicked in, the garden gate was the end of the road for Biltong. The end of his incarceration was like a release from prison, for all of us. These pictures show his first visit to the Upper Cricket Ground. It's the perfect place to take a young pup as he can run off the lead and meet other people and dogs – all part of his 'socialisation' process.

In the space of half an hour, he skipped through the bluebells, scuffled in the bracken, galloped



over the cricket pitch and sprang on a terrier. Since then, he's scampered through Happy Valley (with a refreshment stop at The Beacon) and rooted around Rusthall Common. We've always loved walking on the Commons, but it's even better with our faithful hound trotting along beside us.

**Name:** Biltong  
**Age:** 3 months

**Breed:** Labrador  
**Owner:** Hannah  
**Likes:** Chewing flip flops, pouncing, scrambled eggs  
**Favourite Part of the Commons:** Happy Valley

If your dog would like to be featured in a future issue then please drop us a line at the address at the bottom of this page. **cg**