



COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

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THE RANGER'S REPORT

September 2023



Artwork by Humor on The Wellington Rocks toilet block, paid for jointly by The Friends and Tunbridge Wells Together

We are now in August, and it's been an amazing year so far for the man who just happens to be lucky enough to have the best job in the World (that's me by the way)! I cannot quite believe that July marked the first anniversary of when I formally took over as Ranger from Steve Budden. As you can imagine, it has been an enormous pair of shoes to fill - bearing in mind that Steve had been caring for and improving the Commons as the Warden for 30 years!

I still have so much to learn and so many people to meet and talk to. I have thoroughly enjoyed discussing the history, social context and all of the challenges of our amazing spaces with you all. I get overwhelmed, emotional, and as many of you have found out; I often also get a little bit over-excited by it all. I have so many ideas, thoughts and emerging project suggestions... many, many of these are being inspired by your love and knowledge of these two precious and valuable oases that we are so very privileged to be the guardians and custodians to.

It would - I think - be remiss of me not to reflect on the fact that so much rapid, alarming and often profoundly depressing damage is happening in the world around us due to (human-accelerated) climate change. Our insatiable greed for new 'stuff', disposable products and lots of flights/cruises is undeniably causing our global temperatures to rise much faster than most of our beautiful and precious wildlife can cope with; the majority of species simply cannot adapt fast enough, and nor can we humans. These are scientifically proven facts, so please don't let anyone on the internet misinform you otherwise.

I truly believe that we can all make a difference. We all owe it to our children to do everything that we can to protect our wildlife and ecosystems in every possible way that we can. My degree in Ecology taught me how critically important our ecosystems are for our survival, that by not living sustainably we are destroying our very own paradise planet. We are not separate from nature; we are a living part of it. Why am I saying this in this article? Well, without the necessary changes taking place, we will see more trees dying from diseases like Ash die-back and our biodiversity continuing to decline. So as your Ranger, I feel compelled to do everything in my power to change this fate. I would not actually be

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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'.

doing my job properly for the Commons if I didn't try my best to protect it from... well, from the impacts of our own behaviors.

So if you want to make a difference, then please at least think carefully about how you live, and especially, how you manage your own gardens. It is possible to have a gorgeous garden that also provides a perfect little world for nature. Then all of your beautiful little garden worlds become a larger interconnected world, which in turn helps the Commons to be even more valuable as so many more species will come and share our spaces with us.

Here are a few snippets of what we have been doing, which I will give updates on in future issues:

- Continuing with our surveys (consultant and volunteer led) for everything flora and fauna related. This is in readiness for the new Ecological Management plans which will be produced in the Autumn. These plans will determine how we best manage our spaces going forward. Many exciting projects for things like new ponds and wildlife corridors, glades and vistas are already emerging from this work.
- We have been working slowly but steadily on refurbishing and repairing benches.
- We have allowed many grass areas to grow longer this year, so that we can see what wildflowers might emerge from the ground (seed bank). This different approach has of course meant that they are perhaps looking a bit messy to some eyes. However, it has been incredibly valuable for both our flora and fauna. For example, this experiment has yielded possibly the finest crop of nationally rare chamomile in Kent, as described by an experienced botanist. This is on the Lower Cricket Pitch and we will be changing the cutting regime to carefully and appropriately accommodate this wildflower (as well as humans) into the future.
- We are now allowing more areas of previously cut short grass to grow longer. This is only in areas where there is a rich wildflower presence and is being monitored carefully.

Finally, I would just like to thank The Friends of the Commons and all the wonderful volunteers who help to keep our Commons as clean and beautiful as they can be. I gave a talk earlier this year to a lovely group of ladies. I asked them if they were members of The Friends and none of them were, simply because they thought it meant that they also had to volunteer for physical tasks. This is not the case at all, you can simply donate or join the Friends. In doing so, you can help us to look after our wildlife and improve the aesthetic beauty of the Commons. The money donated by members of The Friends is much appreciated. With you, our community, we can together do so much more to look after and improve our Commons.

Dan Colborne



Large trunks reused in Tea Garden Lane to help prevent fly tipping

NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

AUGUST 2023 - WITH CLIVE EVANS

At the recent Annual General Meeting, the committee recommended the first increase in the membership fee since the charity was established in 1991. This will allow us to continue our current level of good works, including our wide-ranging projects, and help cover the increase in our printing and administrative costs.

Members attending the meeting, unanimously supported the proposal. Individual membership will cost £10 and £20 for a family. Members paying by Standing Order, which is our preferred option, are requested to contact their bank to amend the subscription, before the next payment is due on the 1st of October 2023.

In July, a pleasant afternoon was spent at the Spa Hotel. Sixty-one members and guests enjoyed an afternoon tea, consisting of tea, scones, and cakes.

The toilet block on Tunbridge Wells Common has regularly been vandalised. We have assisted by part funding a beautiful mural which has enhanced its appearance and is worth a visit.

Invitations to the Friends lunch, on the 19th of November, have been included with this issue, see also the website <https://www.friendstothecommons.org/news.html>. The Friends are being charged £37 per head for a three-course meal, but once again due to the generosity of the donor, members and their guests will receive a reduction of £5 each, will only be charged £32 each.



Photo of four replacement litter bins recently purchased by the Friends



This is one of the bins due to be replaced

The Friends Officers 2023

Officers:

Chairman:	Clive Evans	Tel: 01892 518975	Deputy Chairman & Mem. Secretary:	Chris Gurr	Tel: 01892 542408
Treasurer:	Donald Clarke	Tel: 01892 615306	Secretary:	Tony Pawson	email.akpawson@hotmail.com

Toilet Block Restoration

The toilet block close to Fir Tree carpark, is owned by TWBC. The building has been a constant target for graffiti artists and required regular repainting.



It was agreed the best solution would be to have the block painted by a professional street artist, however, the council did not have the budget.



The Friends of the Commons and Royal Tunbridge Wells Together were approached, and agreed to fully fund the project.



The scheme of trees and native butterflies was designed and painted by talented Hugh of Humor Street Art. It looks amazing, so do remember to take a look next time you visit.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

A rise in member's subscriptions from 1st October 2023 has been agreed at our recent AGM This is the first rise since the formation of The Friends over 30 years ago. A reminder to those members who pay by Standing Order to please advise your bank to amend the subscription amount before October 1st, 2023, thank you.

Single Members £10 Whole Families £20

A rise is also needed so we can continue to do our current level of good works, eg. artwork on the Wellington Rocks toilet block , tools for our Ranger , and our work parties , and producing trail maps for both Commons , to name but a few.

Also the printing and production of the much-loved Common Ground newsletter 3 times a year has rising costs. Members who would be happy to receive it electronically (unless you do so already), please contact.

Chris Gurr (Membership Secretary)
chris.gurr@yahoo.co.uk
07759703489

Thank you for your valued, and continued support.

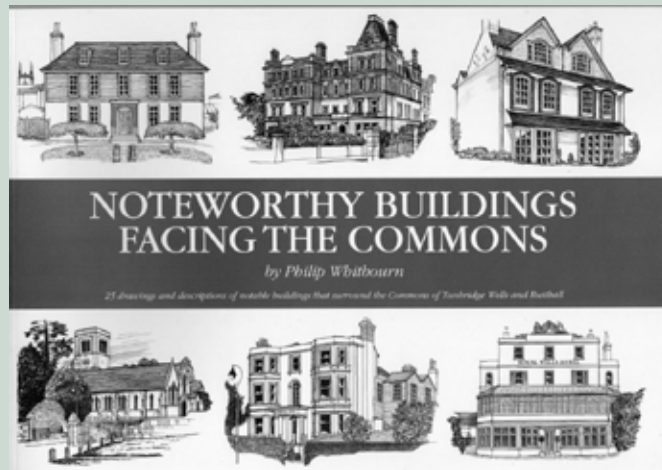
A wonderful book.

Phillip Whitbourne, produced a fascinating series of articles for past copies of Common Ground, based on the more noteworthy buildings facing Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons.

Twenty-five of these beautiful line drawings and interesting articles were later produced in book form. We have copies available for a modest £10. A copy would make a great gift. Funds received finance commons projects.

Contact

joypodbury@talktalk.net The Coach House Royal Chase, Tunbridge Wells TN4 8AY alternatively chris.gurr@yahoo.co.uk 45 Erskine Park Road, Rusthall TN4 8UT



Missing copies of Common Ground.

The committee would like to build a complete library of past copies of Common Ground; however, we are missing the following years 2012 numbers 54, 55, 56 missing, 2015 number 66 missing and 2018 72, 73, 74 missing. If you have any copies, and would be willing to donate them please contact chris.gurr@yahoo.co.uk

Stet

Thanks to member Phil Vernon for sending a copy of his poem. It was written several years ago when ash trees were being felled elsewhere in Tunbridge Wells. The poem was originally published in his collection Poetry After Auschwitz (Sentinel 2020)



Stet

On finding a group of ash trees, felled
to prevent the spread of disease.

Will children know the common ash,
will they infer what thing was here
from softened stumps, in future years
– like finding faded planting tags?

We claim the changes progress brings:
more choices, safer, longer lives –
but mourn the consequent demise
of quiet, starlight, hops, lapwings.

We've lived without the English elm;
we'll live without the ash, you say.
Perhaps. In my mind's eye I fell

each ash from every copse and field:
this leaves no wounds that scars can heal –
it drains the sunlight from the day.

Trial was a huge success!

Email updates are free and would allow us to notify members at short notice, with latest news items, offers and upcoming events.

As a trial earlier this year, a random selection of around fifty members were sent an update on the latest situation with Ash Dieback. We also included a few snippets we thought might be of interest to members. They were asked if they would be happy to receive periodic updates in this format. We received a huge yes please and lots of lovely comments!

At the moment we have around 50% of members email addresses, so If you would like to be included next time round, please send your email address to joypodbury@talktalk.net Thank you.

What an improvement!

In July, an enthusiastic group of volunteers tackled a section of Rusthall Common in need of attention.

The team cleared the narrow, overgrown track. By the end of the morning, it had been transformed into the wide user-friendly path, seen below. It is a huge improvement!

Next, they started to clear an area of tangled brambles, and to everyone's surprise, found a section of rocks that none of us remember seeing before. When the nesting season is over, the Ranger plans to return to expose the rocks.

Others set about clearing the litter. It is the locations where vehicles are parked that are always the most heavily littered. We all agreed, it had been a satisfying morning's work, mission accomplished!!

If you would like to join us, just turn up, we are always pleased to see you.

The up-to-date details can be found on www.friendstothecommons.org



Volunteer opportunities

Monthly volunteer sessions are organised by Dan and Gemma. Tasks include a variety of conservation tasks, including litter picking. If you would like to lend a hand, just turn up, we are always happy to see you. Tools and hi-vis are supplied. Dates/times may be subject to change so check the website. www.friendstothecommons.org

September Saturday 30th 10am meet at St Paul's Church/Happy Valley, Rusthall Common

October Saturday 28th meet at 10.30 at Fir Tree car

December Saturday 2nd 10.30am meeting at Fir Tree car park on Tunbridge Wells Common

January Saturday 6th 10am St Pauls Church, Rusthall/Happy Valley on Rusthall Common

Chamomile

If you've walked across the Lower Cricket Ground in the last couple of months, you will probably have noticed several large and small patches of white daisy-like flowers with narrow thread-like leaves. These late-flowering plants have always been there, but a slight shift in the mowing regime has enabled them to reveal themselves in a way that hasn't been seen in recent years.



The plant is Chamomile, one of the rarest flowering plants on the Commons. There are now only three remaining wild sites for Chamomile in Kent, all of them in the High Weald. The other two are Southborough Common – where they be seen in short turf near the parish church – and the village green at Benenden. Over in East Sussex there are four sites left, one of which is in Frant, and there are about a dozen in West Sussex.



Chamomile on the lower cricket ground

Chamomile can be grown as a garden plant, and it is best known for being used from Elizabethan times to create scented lawns. Some gardening books give it names like Roman or Garden Chamomile, but simple 'Chamomile' is its official wildflower name. The name goes back to the ancient Greek chamaimelon which literally means 'earth-apple' and refers to the strong scent of the foliage. The aromatic quality of the leaves is the easiest way for the non-botanist to distinguish Chamomile from a number of related species, some of which – like Scentless and Scented Mayweed – are very common.

Although never a common plant in Kent and Sussex – the first Kent flora from 1899 describes it as 'rather rare' – Chamomile was once more widespread. But it needs short turf to survive, and its characteristic habitats like commons and village greens were traditionally maintained by grazing. Thomas Forster's pioneering flora of Tunbridge Wells from 1816 describes it is plentiful on both Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons, where the regular grazing of sheep would have provided excellent conditions. Mowing of the Lower Cricket Ground has evidently had the same effect as grazing over the years since the last animals were removed from the Commons, and so this single spot continues to provide a refuge for one of our most special wildflowers.

Ian Beavis



Chamomile on the lower cricket ground