



# COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

## WARDEN'S REPORT WINTER 2018

*Winter sunshine at Mount Edgcumbe Rocks*

As seems to be becoming the norm these days, we have suffered a string of storms again this year. Although the work that we have carried out on damaged or suspect trees over the years has greatly reduced the amount of damage we suffer during these storms, especially on road edges, there are inevitably a few trees that came down over interior paths or tracks and it is surprising how the cost of this can add up. So far this Winter,

the clean up has cost about two thousand pounds and it is only the end of January.

This is of course the time of year when we are also carrying out our elective tree surgery and clearance and we have a full programme of work ahead on trees that were noted in the latest phase of our roadside survey. We have started this year with the clearance of some ivy covered birch trees next to the A264 at Bishops Down.

This has exposed a lovely large leaved lime tree, one of only two that I am aware of on the Commons. It has also opened a nice, south facing grass area, on which we can hopefully encourage wildflowers in the coming years. The rest of this year's roadside work will focus on the London Road and the section of the A264 between Rusthall Road and Coach Road. This is inevitably going to cause a few delays on the road whilst work is

underway, so apologies in advance.

Some of you will also have noticed a great deal of holly being cut down to about five foot in height all along the edge of Major York's Road.

This is to encourage the holly to break new shoots from the base to form a hedge to block traffic noise in the future.

This is a technique that we have used with good results elsewhere on the Common and it has the added bonus of allowing much more light in, as well as blocking noise. When the hedge is established, we can look at further clearance of holly behind it.

Fir Tree Pond was partially de-silted as planned last Autumn and we are now planning to carry out some substantial clearance nearby. This will be to the immediate south of the pond and again it will be holly that is being cleared. Fir Tree Pond is traditionally used as a very early breeding site for frogs, since the pond is well sheltered from wind and the water warms quickly in any early spring sunshine. In recent years however, the holly has started to shade the pond, so this is the main reason for

the clearance. Added to this, the area to be opened up is very interesting topographically and the removal of the holly will allow a far greater diversity of plants and animals to develop there.

We are also planning to return to the site at Happy Valley where we cleared a great deal of cherry laurel last Winter and continue the task. cherry laurel has taken over large areas of Rusthall Common, where it is a real problem. It does of course provide nectar, berries and nest sites but like holly, it can take over completely and form a mono-culture, blocking light and swamping everything else. The removal of the final section near St Pauls Churchyard will also let a great deal more light into the area, which, as ever, will

help bio-diversity.

The volunteers have been carrying out some great work on our rock outcrops this Winter, clearing invading scrub and where possible, removing the soil that has built up over the years, to prevent it returning. The clearance they did at Wellington Rocks in particular was really splendid; it even won plaudits from my contractors, which takes some doing! We have also had a couple of visits from the Kent High Weald Partnership and their volunteers this year, who did some excellent work clearing scrub and bramble from the heather areas near the Victoria Grove.

As usual, all this work will take place with the time pressure of the approaching nesting season hanging over us.

Already, there is a lot of territorial singing and drumming going on from our resident birds who want to grab the good spots before the summer visitors arrive. Then before we know it, in only about eight weeks time, it will be time to start cutting the grass and the whole cycle of work can begin again.

Steve Budden

CORPORATE SPONSOR



THE SPA HOTEL

WELCOME TO  
The Friends of the Commons

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

at the SPA Hotel

Wednesday 28th March 7pm

We look forward to seeing you



THE SPA HOTEL

Tunbridge Wells  
TN4 8XJ



# NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

It is interesting to note that there was very little damage to the Common in the recent storm. The information boards are now in place and I must say that they have met with approval from the people who I have met on the Common. Work on the crossing at Major York's will be started soon. After all the hard work on the one at St Pauls' Church KCC have now discovered another reason why it is not possible to go ahead with the work because of cost, according to a councillor on the Parish Council. It is the same reason that they gave many years ago.

The lunch was a great success and the Spa Hotel did us proud. We owe a debt of gratitude to our secretary for all her hard work to make it such a success.

The volunteers working parties

are beavering away and their hard work is much appreciated. Advance notice we will be holding a volunteers get together with the Mayor in attendance on the 9th June at the Forum.

Also I am pleased to advise you that our **Annual General Meeting** will be held at The Spa Hotel on **Wednesday 28th March 7pm.**

Clive Evans



**Finally the new pedestrian crossing near the bottom of Major York's Road.**



**Winter sunshine on Wellington Rocks after clearance work**

## THE FRIENDS OFFICERS & COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP 2018

### OFFICERS:

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Clive McAllister	Tel: 01892 532817
Peter Miall	Tel: 01892 517599

# VOLUNTEERI

Dear Friends,

Following the success of our first Annual Friends of the Commons Volunteers' thank you lunch last summer, I am writing to ask you to save the date for our second annual event! This time it will be even better as we are inviting Cally Fiddimore and the volunteers from the Kent High Weald Partnership to join us.

So please

## SAVE THE DATE:

FRIENDS OF THE COMMONS & KENT HIGH WEALD PARTNERSHIP  
VOLUNTEERS BIG THANK YOU LUNCH!

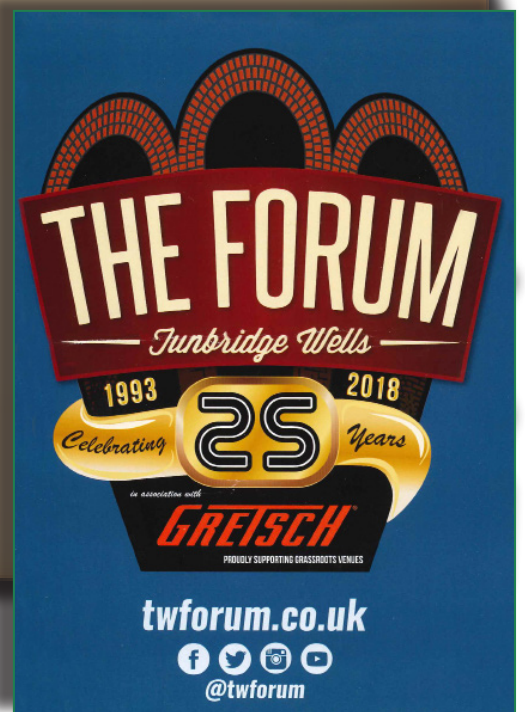
SATURDAY 9TH JUNE 2018,  
NOON TO 2PM AT THE FORUM,  
TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMONS.



Kent  
**HIGH WEALD**  
protect / explore / enjoy

The Mayor will be attending and we shall provide a good complimentary lunch as a token of our appreciation for all your work. I will be in touch soon with more info and rsvp requests.

Best wishes,  
Lynne Lane  
The Friends of Tunbridge Wells and  
Rusthall Commons Committee





# NG MATTERS

Hardy volunteers resting after a satisfying clearance at the Wellington Rocks.



A very big **Thank You**  
to everyone who helped  
during 2017-2018!



KHWP Volunteers

Volunteers gathered around the  
new information board by Toad Rock



# Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall Commons Installation of 10 new Information panels



**New panel installed opposite the SPA Hotel with Targetfollow & Dandara representatives**



**New panel at Toad Rock**



**Crispian, M.D. of HDC Int. & John Barber (ex-chairman) after panel installation**

Ten new information panels were installed on The Commons in the first week of December 2017.

Four panels are located on Rusthall Common:

1. St. Paul's Church
2. The Beacon
3. Toad Rock
4. The Tarry Path (Rusthall Road End)

Six Panels are also located on The Tunbridge Wells Commons:

1. Opposite The SPA Hotel at the entrance to the

Commons

2. Just off Fir Tree car-park by the Upper cricket ground

3. Off the Mount Ephraim Road near St Helena

4. On the bottom corner of the lower cricket ground, facing London Road

5. At the bottom path near Major Yorks Road (facing the Pantiles)

6. Beside the path near the car park at Major Yorks Road

Each panel was designed

for each particular location.

They each have text about the Commons (highlighting the area of the panel), and typically three illustrations: flora, fauna and illustrative features.

All ten panels were jointly funded by DANDARA, TARGET-FOLLOW AND ONE ANONYMOUS INDIVIDUAL DONOR; and the VAT was met by The Friends of The Commons.

We must thank all donors, The Friends Committee (and Design Committee),

including Steve Budden (The Warden), The Kent High Weald Partnership and, finally, Crispian, M.D. of HDC Int. who produced and installed the panels.

We hope the panels remain for many years and provide colour and welcome information for visitors and locals alike.

Chris Gurr  
(Mem Secretary)



# NOTEWORTHY BUILDINGS FACING THE COMMONS

## Somerville, 79 Mount Ephraim

In a book, entitled “Tunbridge Wells — The Gentle Aspect”, that aspired to be the printed evocation of the essence of Tunbridge Wells, the well-respected architectural historian Terence Davis described the Regency house Somerville as “one of the prettiest small villas in the town” and, certainly, the property is a pleasing ornament in the backdrop to our Commons.

Designed in the Grecian taste that was fashionable in the early part of the nineteenth century, Somerville’s classical façade is surmounted by a full-width low-pitched triangular pediment, flanked

by segmental acroteria. The ground floor is raised up above a semi-basement and has an attractive ironwork balcony, enriched with rosettes and anthemion decoration. Above the balcony is a tent-shaped canopy, supported on slender columns and a decorative entablature. The central portion of the canopy projects forward, with another triangular pediment above the entrance. There are further triangular pediments on each side of the building, above round-headed archways, the whole forming a delightful and impressive architectural composition.

Stevens Directory for Tun-

bridge Wells of 1886 tells us that Sir Henry Hunt resided at Somerville at that time. Hunt was a founder member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, and served as a Vice-President from 1868 to 1870. Born in Westminster in 1810, he sprang into public prominence early in life by making an estimate of cost for the Houses of Parliament, following the winning of the architectural competition by the eminent architect Sir Charles Barry. The project was a landmark, not only in architectural history but also in the history of Quantity Surveying, where Hunt played a major role in forging the

profession.

Other projects in which he was involved included the Royal Courts of Justice, the Oxford and Cambridge Club and works for the London Brighton and South Coast, and others of the great railway companies of the day. In 1871 he was made a CBE, and was knighted in 1876. For most of his seventy seven years Hunt enjoyed good health, but this became visibly impaired during the last three or four years of his life, though he remained in possession of his faculties right up to the time of his death in 1889.

Philip Whitbourn





# DISCOVERING ROCK ART



**Egyptian head, Bulls Hollow, Rusthall**



**Kent Mediaeval Graffiti group studying horse's head, Denny Bottom, Rusthall**

People have been making their mark on rocks in the landscape since remote prehistory.

No doubt the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers who used the rock outcrops on the Commons as seasonal camp sites over 6000 years ago would have decorated them with some form of rock art, but the fairly rapid rate of erosion of our soft sandstone has left no obvious survivals. A tumbled block excavated from a similar site at Chiddingstone in the 1960s did reveal signs of prehistoric carving, so it is not impossible that there are such discoveries still to be made on the Commons.

Meanwhile, the abundant carvings of initials, dates and imagery that we see on the rocks today are all much more recent, and most appear to be later than

1800. This does not make them any less interesting. Some readers will already be familiar with the growing interest in what is generally termed "Mediaeval Graffiti", although much of what goes under that name is not literally so old. Enthusiasts conduct surveys, particularly of parish churches, but also of other ancient buildings – and record the previously overlooked informally carved inscriptions that they find. It struck me that graffiti on rock outcrops could be surveyed in a similar fashion, so in March 2017 I guided members of the Kent Mediaeval Graffiti Group around Denny Bottom, Bull's Hollow, Happy Valley and Wellington Rocks to see what we could discover.

Although we found one pre-1800 dated inscription, it was

the visual representations that proved most interesting. The "Egyptian" head by a footpath down into Bull's Hollow – probably an embellishment by one of the Victorian local residents who earned money by guiding tourists around the rocks – was already known, but we spotted a second one in a more secluded spot. The deep-cut flower and animal motifs at Happy Valley near the Cheesewring Rock, one set in a little arched frame like a shrine, must have involved a lot of work in a not very accessible spot. The elephant and horse's head at Denny Bottom, and the dragon and squirrel at Wellington Rocks, would also have taken a good deal of time and some skill to create.

Our best find, however, was a series of apotropaic carvings on rocks only recently exposed

by restoration work at Happy Valley. Two sets of concentric circles were identified by the group as "demon traps", a motif well-known from ancient churches and other buildings. Demons were believed to be attracted to such patterns and would then follow the lines around endlessly, unable to escape. One set was accompanied by an eye motif and a "cross in a box", symbols with a similar magical purpose. These could truly be mediaeval, or at least pre-1600. We can imagine that some of the old freeholders of Rusthall Manor found the rocks spooky when crossing the Common at night, and so decided to take ritual precautions to protect themselves and their neighbours from malevolent supernatural forces.

Ian Beavis



**Framed animal, Cheesewring Rock, Happy Valley, Rusthall**