



COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

WARDEN'S REPORT

December 2018

Lack of availability of contractors has been an issue throughout the period, with our main contractors being somewhat overwhelmed by work. Attempts to find alternatives has had mixed success. In spite of this, most of the work scheduled for the period up to December has been carried out, but some is still underway. The annual cut of our long grass and meadow areas has been completed but the clearance of all our minor paths and tracks is still continuing. It is likely that the final clearances at Happy Valley and Bulls Hollow will not take place until the new year. New steel bollards have been installed on key access points. The main drainage ditch alongside the Racecourse to the North of Major York's has been dug out and the culverts cleared, the cutting of surfaced path edges has commenced now that the leaves are mostly down. New anti-parking posts have been installed alongside the drive to the Edgcumbe Hotel and we have replaced fifty small posts along the edge of Inner London Rd, where there have been numerous issues with builders vehicles parking on the grass, as well as with guests of the hotel parking there whilst loading or unloading their luggage. The roadside tree survey is underway and the trees already identified as in need of remedial works have now been made safe. The remote controlled flail was used to cut the steep bank below Mt Ephraim, and proved to be a cost effective method of clearance on this difficult terrain. It was supposed to have also been used to cut the steep escarpment at Happy Valley but unfortunately the contractor no longer has the machine.

The contractors who were due to carry out the clearances of holly and cherry laurel at Fir Tree pond and Happy Valley are still catching up on other work and therefore have still been unable to come to us. However, they have put us in touch with another contractor with similar equipment, who is actually based more locally. This has proved to be a very useful contact and the delayed clearance works have now been completed to an excellent standard.

Volunteers at Happy Valley, Rusthall

Although the machine being used by the new contractor is much smaller, it has proved ideal for our conditions. It is more manoeuvrable, it's rubber tracks cause less damage to the ground and it cuts just as quickly as the larger machine. As luck would have it, this contractor has also just purchased a remote controlled flail, so the planned clearance of the steep slopes at Happy Valley will still be going ahead in the next few weeks.

As ever, we have had to clear a number of camps from the common. Several old abandoned camps emerged as the leaves started to fall, with over thirty bags of rubbish having to be cleared from the worst of them. The most difficult camp to remove proved to be near the junction of the A26 and the A264, where a huge collection of junk was accumulated by one individual. In spite of us pulling all of it out onto the grass by the traffic lights, he still refused to go and spent about another ten days living there before we finally moved him on with the assistance of the Borough Council.

The Friends volunteer group have carried out their first couple of work parties for this season. Reedmace was removed from Cabbage Stalk Lane pond, willow cleared from the margins in the first work party and invading birch scrub was cleared from the regenerating heather site near Castle Rd the following month. This heather area is doing very well and certainly justifies the efforts made there. The volunteers also cut back birch saplings and bramble on the edge of the site to allow the cutting of the holly near London Rd. The holly

trees were subsequently reduced in height to maintain them as a hedge against road noise. Their next task will be the clearance of gorse from the slopes of Happy Valley at the Beacon end of the site.

We have also had the first of two visits from the Kent High Weald volunteers, funded by the Freehold Tenants. This group did excellent work clearing birch and bramble from the heather site below the Victoria Grove, as well as removing bramble from amongst the ant hills in the adjacent grass.

I am delighted to report the formation of another volunteer group by residents of Apsley St, who will concentrate on their immediate area. They have already cleared some of the rock faces there and hopefully they will be able to keep them clear in future. The labour intensive nature of keeping this site properly maintained without grazing is beyond our current budget, so this work is particularly valuable. If this group remains operational, a cooperative approach could be very valuable. There are a lot of large holly trees on top of the rocks that are starting to block much of the light to the properties in the Bottom. These trees will require control in the near future and I am hoping that if the initial clearance is carried out by us, the residents group would take on the subsequent management. An offer of financial assistance towards the initial clearance has also been made by some of the residents who will benefit most from this work.

Steve Budden



www.friendsofthecommons.co.uk

WORK PARTIES

Are usually held on the first Saturday
Of each month during the winter.

Meet at Fir Tree Road Car Park
At: 10:30am (unless otherwise advised)

All welcome on Saturday 2nd March

Bring drink, gloves
and wear old clothes.

(Tools provided)
work is not arduous and is undertaken with
Steve Budden, The Warden
(or under trained supervision)

NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

JAN 2019 - WITH CLIVE EVANS

Firstly, a be-lated Happy New Year to all our members.

A Traffic Survey has been done recently (we were not informed of the date) for a possibility of a pedestrian crossing near St. Pauls church Rusthall. I will keep you informed of the progress and hopefully the findings of the KCC.

Arrangements have been made along with Kent High Weald Partnership to hold 8 sessions of 'forest schools' on The Commons.

These will be an exciting way of introducing young children to the Commons. Details are included in this issue. And we must thank The Ernest Cook Trust and Targetfollow for their sponsorship, and Tunbridge Wells

Council and KHWP for their generous support. Advance notice must be given regarding an arts play called 'The spirit of the rocks' which is to be put on by John Oram in 2019. An article will appear in our next issue.

And finally, I hope to see many of you at our Annual General Meeting to be held on Tuesday 19th March at:

The Rackliff Centre (former fire station)
26 Lower Green Road,
Rusthall TN4 8TE
At 7:30pm

Clive Evans



Welcome to

THE FRIENDS OF THE COMMONS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At the The Rackliff Centre (former fire station)
26 Lower Green Road,
Rusthall TN4 8TE

Tuesday 19th March
At 7:30pm

One of our members Jane Killick A.K.A Curly Vera.



Curly Vera's Coffee Van, see purple emperor article

The Friends Officers & Committee Membership 2019

Officers:

Chairman:	Clive Evans	Tel: 01892 534040
Treasurer:	Donald Clarke	Tel: 01892 615306
Mem. Secretary:	Chris Gurr	Tel: 01892 542408
Secretary:	Terry Coulthard	Tel: 01892 548785

Committee:

Sally Balcon	Tel: 01892 515741
Dr Ian Beavis	Tel: 01892 523007
David Wakefield	Tel: 01892 523983
Lynne Lane	Tel: 01892 533493
Clive McAllister	Tel: 01892 532817
Peter Miall	Tel: 01892 517599

WILD CHILD!

Connect to the Commons Forest Schools!

I'm very pleased to announce that the Friends has joined forces with The Kent High Weald Partnership outdoor leaning team and together we are offering a series of free Wild Child! Forest Schools events on both Rusthall and Tunbridge Wells Commons. Yes free to all who turn up!

Sharing our commons and woodlands with eager children and their families KHWP have years of experience providing Forest School events for children in Kent. So imagine a woodland hideaway on the Commons, with a magical setting, a big tarpaulin making a shelter, den creations made from fallen branches, fire lighting experiences and cooking marshmallows. Imagine mud play, whittling, hammock play, nature crafts, a trail : that's a typical Forest School. Children love them.

These sessions will encourage children aged 0-12 years to see their natural environment as a sensory playground and within this playground they learn to love nature, they learn confidence, resilience and the ways and means of communicating effectively with others. Many children will surprise themselves with

their own capabilities and they will learn to love and appreciate nature and the local environment. We have organised 4 Forest School sessions on Rusthall Commons and 4 sessions on Tunbridge Wells Commons. Each session lasts for 2 hours and it's just drop in! No booking, just turn up and get playing and making. Find us and join in. Parents or a responsible adult must stay with the children at all times, but there will be hot drinks for the grown up and water for the children. We hope the grown-ups also have a great time and you never know they too might show their appreciation by joining the Friends or getting involved in another way. We hope so. So again, it's all free of charge, yep free and takes place in the school holidays. Please come!

See you there!

Time to thank The Ernest Cook Trust, Targetfollow and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for their generous support.

Lynne Lane

Friends committee member



Kent
HIGH WEALD
protect / explore / enjoy



DATES & WHERE TO FIND US:

Thursday 21st Feb

Follow the signage from Common View,
Rusthall Common 10-noon and 1-3pm

Tuesday 9th April

Follow signage from Fir Tree car park,
T Wells Common (2 sessions as above)

Tuesday 16 April

Follow signage from Common View,
Rusthall Common (2 sessions as above)

Thursday 30th May

follow signage for Fir Tree car park
T Wells Common
(2 sessions as above)



Noteworthy Buildings Facing the Common

PHILIP WHITBOURN

The Royal Kentish Hotel, (Now Kentish Mansions)

Most spectacular of all the Tunbridge Wells' victorian hotels was King Charles church which neighbour the Royal Kentish Hotel, later the Grand Hotel and now Kentish Mansions, in London Road.

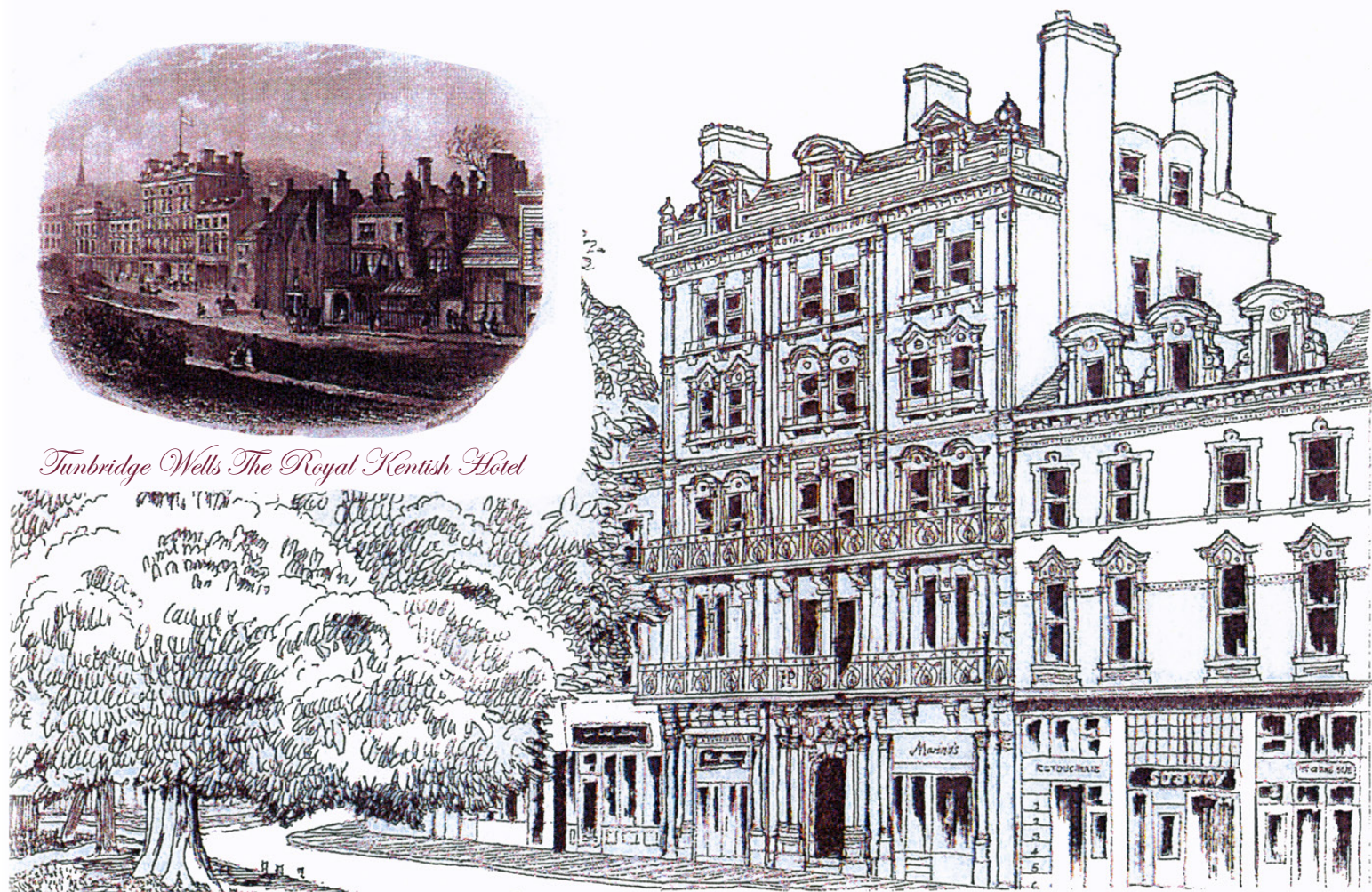
This dates from 1875-8, and, like the Wellington, it was designed by William Barnsley Hughes. His client Francis Peek, one of the richest tea merchants of his day, and his initials can still be seen above the entrance to Kentish Mansions.

Francis Peek's sister, Mary Peek, later Mary Drew, is commemorated on a brass plaque in the chancel of King Charles church. Their first cousin was Sir Henry Peek of Peek frean biscuit fame. Mary's son Julius Drew donated the east window on the King Charles church in memory of his mother.

This might be the last in a short series of articles by Philip Whitbourn, based upon his book "Noteworthy Buildings facing the Commons", and on articles for the Friends of the Commons newsletter. His book is available from Waterstones, price £10.



Tunbridge Wells The Royal Kentish Hotel



The Royal Kentish Hotel, now Kentish Mansions

Welcome to the Emperor!



The Purple Emperor is one of the most famous and charismatic of British butterflies. Among the old collectors of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, it had an almost legendary status on account of its rarity and elusiveness. Purple Emperors were notoriously hard to catch, spending most of their time high up in the trees, feeding at honeydew and sap flows rather than flowers, and making only fleeting and unpredictable descents to ground level. As with many butterflies, the males are territorial and will chase off other males that intrude on their domain.

It is only the male Purple Emperor which has the magnificent purple sheen on its wings that gives this butterfly its name. However, the female is also a large and impressive butterfly, with an overall black and white pattern which resembles a giant version of the more common White Admiral that often shares its woodland habitat. The caterpillars feed on sallows or willows, overwintering on the trees to resume their growth in the spring. They have a distinctive appearance with two horns in front, but are not easily spotted because of their excellent camouflage.

The Weald, with its abundance of ancient woodland, has always been a stronghold for the Purple Emperor, even at times when it was much rarer than it is today. Locally, there are fairly regular sightings on Broadwater Forest and the RSPB Tudeley Woods reserve, and Dene Park Wood at Tonbridge has become a well-known venue for butterfly spotters and photographers hoping for a good view of one. Purple Emperors are strong flyers, and individuals may range far and wide in search of new habitats, sometimes turning up in gardens, golf courses and other unexpected places. This year a male appeared in one of the car parks at Pembury Hospital, and a female was sighted during a mini beast safari I was leading at St John's Recreation Ground and Reynolds Lane meadows.

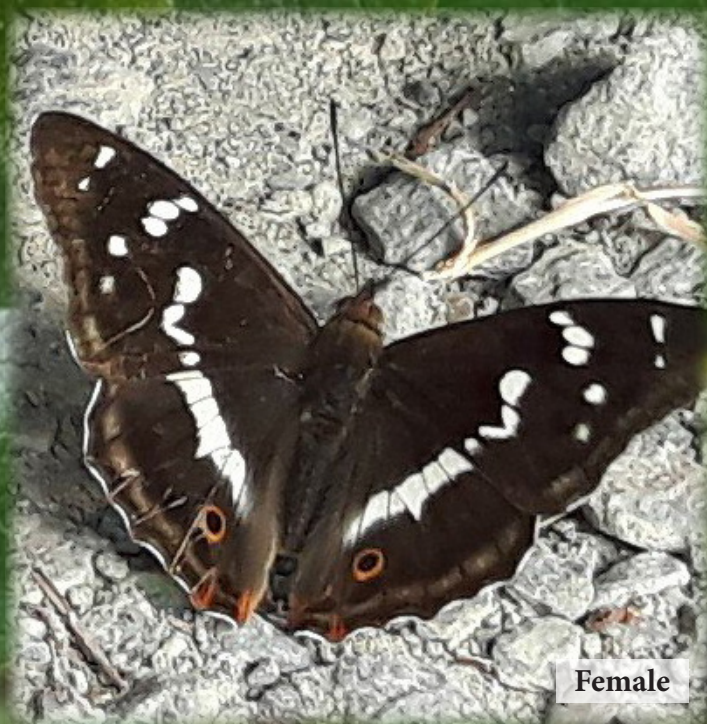
Excitingly, this year also saw two records from Tunbridge Wells Common. On 6 July, Jane Killick who runs the refreshment van near the car park opposite the Lower Cricket Ground photographed a male settled on a car. Purple Emperors are known to have an odd attraction to parked vehicles – whether because of scent, colour or warmth is not clear. Then on 19 July, a resident of Castle Road reported a female flying over the roadside brambles opposite her house.

It is probably significant that there is a willow tree growing very close to where this last sighting occurred. The Common probably does have the right mix of wooded and open areas to support a small colony of Purple Emperors, and the appearance of individuals of both sexes might suggest that this has already happened. Walkers on the Common should look out for these spectacular butterflies in late June and July next year.

Ian Beavis



Male



Female