



# COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

Photo of Foxgloves abundant in Happy Valley, Rusthall

## WARDEN'S REPORT

June 2018

As I write this, all is lovely on the Commons. The trees are all in full leaf, the chestnuts are still showing their can-dles, the may blossom is reaching a climax and the rowans are starting to flower. Everything is growing wildly, especially the grass, and everywhere is verdant and lush; I guess this the pay-off and our reward for putting up with such a wet, miserable early spring.

We have of course had some very wet winters in the twenty five years that I have been working on the Commons but I do not think I can remember one going on so long, and certainly cannot think of one that has affected our work schedule so severely. In fairness, the situation was exacerbated by the nature of this winters planned works. We were intending to continue

the clearance of cherry laurel at Happy Valley and carry out a fairly major clearance of holly to the south of Fir Tree Pond, which would have involved the use of some very heavy machinery. There were actually a few periods of dry weather when the Commons dried out enough for us to have carried out the work but the machinery was stuck, quite literally in one case, on other less well drained

sites. We finally got to the point where the frogs were starting to return to the pond and birds were starting to look for nest sites and I had to take the decision to delay the work until the autumn. I suppose in the great scheme of things it does not really matter that the work has been postponed for six months but it seemed frustrating at the time.

No. 74

July 2018

*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'.*

As some of you will have noticed, quite a few pieces of deadwood came down within the Victoria Grove this winter. Given the high footfall in this area, we clearly need to take safety seriously and so we decided to carry out a thorough inspection to ascertain what remedial works were required. In order to do this, a large elevating work platform was required, but again the ground was simply too wet to allow it access. Because of the safety implications, we decided we had to carry out this work however late in the season. In fact it was well into April before we could get the equipment on site but luckily the cold held back nesting to some degree, so no real harm was done. The inspection actually revealed that the trees are in surprisingly good condition and beyond the removal of the normal level of deadwood that one would expect in trees of this age, comparatively little was required.

Not all of our work was disrupted. The reduction of holly alongside Major York's designed to create a thicker, more effective barrier against road noise in the future was carried out and the cut trunks are just starting to show the emergence of new buds. Scrub and ivy covered trees were removed next to the A264 at Bishops Down to expose a very nice

old Small leaved lime in the woodland there. The cleared area was then graded and seeded, and is now green-ing up well. We have reinforced the verge at Common View by digging in tree trunks to stop any unauthorised vehicle access. The next phase of our roadside tree survey was completed along Rusthall Rd and London Rd and the required remedial works were all carried out. A large red oak at the junction of Church Rd and London Rd was significantly reduced for safety reasons after a serious fungal infection was discovered, as was a mature lime next to the A26 at St Helena. We also carried out some clearance work around Strange's Avenue, next to the new development at the old petrol station. This whole area has always been a bit of a mess but a scrape of the path surface, the removal of a couple of dead, leaning trees and some scrub, plus the cutting of a lot of bramble has started to make it a bit more presentable.

The volunteers had another busy winter, concentrating mainly on clearing rock outcrops. Some excellent work was undertaken at Wellington Rocks in particular to remove a lot of the soil that has built up on them over the years. This of course is intended to prevent the problems with invading scrub from re-occurring and

follows on from the similar work undertaken at Edgcumbe Rocks last year.

We suffered several storms again this year but fortunately not too much damage was caused. The biggest casualty was a large beech tree in Bulls Hollow that came down complete with its root plate. It is of course sad to lose such a lovely tree but it has transformed the Hollow, flooding it with light. I have often thought that this would be a good spot for a pond, which would help drain water away from the rock faces as well as providing another dimension to the habitat and the loss of this tree makes it a much more realistic option. We have already applied for a grant to help with this objective, so we will see what happens.

Our existing ponds are full of life at this time of year. There was plenty of frog spawn in them earlier and this has of course all now hatched. One of the two small new ponds that we constructed at the Marlpit site a couple of years ago has been remarkably successful and at one point, it contained as much spawn as water. Smooth and Palmate newts have been recorded in many of the ponds and it is very pleasing to report a number of Great Crested Newts found

in the main Marlpit pond. Brighton Lake had good numbers of toads spawning and at one time several great writhing balls of amorous amphibians could be seen. At the moment, the duckling and moorhen chicks are emerging and providing a charming sight.

One other significant event took place over the winter; the installation of our new interpretive panels. I am sure they will be being reported on elsewhere in this issue, so I will simply say that they were worth the wait and are proving very popular with visitors.

**Steve Budden**



# NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Summer is nearly upon us and the common is looking well. The volunteer working parties have now finished until the autumn. They deserve a well-earned rest for all their hard work they have put in under the supervision of Steve Budden.

On the 9th June we had our volunteers lunch at the Forum which was sponsored by Targetfollow to thank them for all the hard work they do throughout the year. It was a great success and we must thank our new Mayor, Councillor Len Horwood and his wife for their attendance. And

I would like to thank Lynne and Steve Lane and their helpers for all their support in

This does not grow on the common but is dropped by individuals.

formed. I look forward to seeing as many of you as



Artwork on the Commons

organising this event. Art Week is in full flow at present and if you look on the green near the forum you will find a display of rubbish picked up on the common during a short period of time.

The crossing near St Pauls Church is on hold. Our local County Councillor and the parish council have agreed to fund a traffic census. I have no date at present but will keep you in-

possible at the strawberry tea on the 18th July at The SPA Hotel  
*Clive Evans*

| The Friends Officers & Committee Membership 2018 |                 |                   |                  |                   |  |
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| Officers:  |                 |                   | Committee:       |                   |  |
| Chairman:  | Clive Evans     | Tel: 01892 534040 | Sally Balcon     | Tel: 01892 515741 |  |
| Treasurer:                                       | David Wakefield | Tel: 01892 523983 | Dr Ian Beavis    | Tel: 01892 523007 |  |
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|  |                 |                   | Clive McAllister | Tel: 01892 532817 |  |
|  |                 |                   | Peter Miall      | Tel: 01892 517599 |  |

# The Friends Volunteers Big *Thank You* Lunch

A huge **thank you** to all the wonderful volunteers who turned out to support our Big Thank You Event on Saturday 9th June at The Forum, Tunbridge Wells Commons. This year our colleagues, the volunteers and staff from Kent High Weald Partnership joined us to celebrate the collaborative work they undertake on the Commons alongside the Friends volunteers. We are grateful to Paul Burnett, asst director Target Follow (the owners of the Commons) for sponsoring the lunch and to Jason Dormon and the volunteers at The Forum for donating

the venue and staff. A special word of thanks to The Mayor

support and good company and to Dr Philip Whitburn for

were presented to the volunteers. The buffet lunch included a selection of sandwiches, six fresh salads, followed by treacle tart, lemon cream sponge, fresh strawberries cream and shortbread. 45 volunteers received their certificates from The Mayor and Mr. Burnett, including two young volunteers Himani and Niamh Nayak age 5 and 3 years. They particularly like using the litter collector and snipping weeds on the rocks. Himani is pictured presenting flowers to The Mayoress beside the Friends banner.

Next year we will be working to encourage more children and families to get involved on the Commons and with The Friends.

*Lynne Lane,  
committee member*



One of our youngest volunteers Himani Nayak presenting flowers to Mayoress Mrs Judy Horwood

Cllr Len Horwood and Mayoress Judy Horwood for their

designing the beautiful Certificates of Appreciation which



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WELCOME TO

## THE FRIENDS OF THE COMMONS SUMMER TEA PARTY

AT THE ORANGERY OF  
THE SPA HOTEL, TN4 8XJ  
TEL: 01892 520331

WEDNESDAY, 18TH JULY 2018  
3PM - 5PM

A selection of cakes, homemade freshly baked  
plain and fruit scones, freshly brewed tea & cof-  
fee, jugs of orange juice



THE SPA HOTEL

Tunbridge Wells, TN4 8XJ

## NOTEWORTHY BUILDINGS FACING THE COMMONS Post Office Square, London Road

The year 2018 is of course one of special significance, marking as it does the centenary of the end of the First World War. By 1918 warfare had moved on from the misery of the trenches, tanks being used extensively and to great effect. When hostilities had ceased,

some of these WW1 tanks were offered to towns for display as a tribute to Allied Victory and, in Tunbridge Wells, a WW1 tank from the Western Front found its final resting place on the Common in front of the old Post Office, as may

be seen from this

contemporary photo-



The green-painted tank had arrived in the town by rail at the old Goods Station, from which it trundled, under its own power, along Camden and York Roads, before turning into London Road and showing its manoeuvrability over the rougher ground of the Common. On reaching the triangle of the Common in front of the old Post Office its engine was formally switched off for the

last time by the Mayor, Sir Robert Gower.

The Vale Road Post Office had been opened in 1896 by an earlier Mayor, Major Charles Fletcher Lutwidge. It was built on the site of Cramp's well-known Riding School, and it replaced earlier post offices that had previously been located on The Pantiles. Although the main ornamental display of the building is un-

derstandably on the entrance frontage to Vale Road, the elevation facing the Common features a prominent chimney breast, flanked by garlands, and the roofline is enlivened by two turrets with cupolas.

After serving as the town's main Post Office for around a century, the Victorian building was adapted for residential, spa and other uses and sympathetically ex-

tended to form the present Post Office Square. This was formally opened in 2002 by Mayor Stanley Ward, and it set the scene for the conservation of this corner of the Common, happily followed more recently by the refurbishment of the former Methodist Church and the former Castle Hotel.

***Philip Whitbourn***



# THE BEAUTY OF *Beetles*

Beetles are not rated very highly among the general public. They are usually seen as ugly black creepy-crawlies and confused with notorious pests such as cockroaches. Even many general naturalists see them as a confusing and inaccessible group with far too many small dull-coloured species that all look exactly the same. But many beetles are remarkably attractive, and some for that reason are scarcely recognised as beetles at all.

Creatures such as ladybirds and glow worms have developed their own independent strands of folk tradition, but they are just as much beetles as those fast-running black varieties that you find under stones in the garden. The Commons provide a home for 17 of the 25 British species of la-

dybirds, including the largest – *the Eyed Ladybird* which is red with black spots encircled by a pale border. Male glow

Hotel have reported seeing evidence of the population that spills over into the hotel grounds from Happy Valley on

dinal, can be found on the Commons, sometimes actively flying on warm sunny days. *Longhorn beetles*, so-called because of their elongated antennae, also fly regularly and are commonly seen visiting bramble or hogweed flowers, while their larvae tunnel through rotting wood. Colourful species include the common Black and Yellow Longhorn, and the scarcer *Four-banded Longhorn* with contrasting orange and black stripes. Jewel Beetles are a mainly tropical group, but a number of the most attractive British species occur on the Commons. I once saw several freshly emerged *Oak Jewel Beetles* – brilliantly metallic blue or green with white markings – swarming around a tree stump near Wellington Rocks.



BLACK-HEADED  
CARDINAL BEETLE

worms look much more like conventional beetles than the females which retain a larval form. Nowadays people rarely walk in unlit places after dark, and so glow worms are rarely seen lighting up. But evening patrons of the Beacon

Rusthall Common.

Many beetles are associated with fallen timber, including the predatory larvae of the brilliant scarlet *cardinal beetles*. Two species, including the rarer black-headed car-

*Continued overleaf...*



SWOLLEN-THIGHED  
FLOWER-BEETLE MALE



FOUR-BANDED  
LONGHORN



EYED LADYBIRD



GREEN TIGER-BEETLE



OAK JEWEL BEETLE

A number of brightly coloured beetles are commonly seen on grassland flowers such as buttercups and Cat's-ear in open parts of the Commons. These include various often orange-coloured soldier beetles, and the bright metallic green Swollen-thighed Flower-beetle – only the males have the curious 'swollen thighs' on their hind legs

which are assumed therefore to play a part in courtship display. Also green in colour, but with some red markings, is the Red-tipped Flower-beetle or Common Malachite.

A few of the predatory ground beetles also have bright metallic colours, but most rarely show themselves in the open. A notable ex-

ception is the Green Tiger-beetle – actually more leopard-spotted than tiger-striped – which is an iconic heathland species found in small numbers in open sandy places on both Commons. Tiger-beetles fly readily in spring sunshine, taking to the air unexpectedly when disturbed by walkers and flying low for a few moments before land-

ing a short distance further on. Their larvae live in burrows in the sand, waiting for unwary smaller creatures to fall in.

*Ian Beavis*