



COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

WARDEN'S REPORT

July 2020



*Some normality returns to The Commons. Preparing the wicket at Linden Park C.C.
The first game was played on Saturday 11th July.*

How the world has changed in the six months since the last issue of Common Ground. Covid has changed all our lives and it has had a dramatic impact on the Commons as well.

When lockdown started, the Commons were very quiet, with only two or three cars at Fir Tree Rd car park most days and just the occasional dog walker to be seen. However, when lockdown started to ease, we became inundated with hundreds of people looking for somewhere to

exercise or just get out of the house. The sudden change to hot weather in May made the Common even more attractive, the car park was always full and dozens of picnicking groups appeared on the cricket pitch. There was also a huge surge in cycling, which I know upset quite a number of regular users of the Common. There were so many bikes that I mostly had to give up trying to control it, although I couldn't help myself on the occasions I came across people cycling round and round the cricket pitch!

No. 79
JULY 2020

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'.

The huge majority of people of course behaved very sensibly but the sheer numbers were a real problem, our litter bins were overwhelmed on a daily basis and our contractors deserve thanks for coping as well as they did.

As travel restrictions have continued to loosen, use of the Commons has eased somewhat, but when I was up there today, watching Linden Park's first cricket match of the season, every bench around the ground was occupied and there were numerous groups picnicking or just sitting around the Rocks and in the shade of the Victoria Grove. It was a lovely day and it was nice to see so many people enjoying the Common; the more people who love it, the safer it's future will be, but if this level of use is to be our new normal, it will have quite an impact on our budget. Clearly, more bins will be needed, along with more litter clearance of the paths and this is already one of our biggest expenses. On the up-side, hopefully this increased usage will also lead to many more members for the Friends.

When I last wrote, we were in the middle of clearing holly scrub, poisoning cherry laurel and rebuilding the second Marlpit Pond at Rusthall. The effect of the herbicide on the cherry laurel are very apparent now, with many dead specimens alongside Rusthall Rd and between the Pantiles car park and Hungershall Park. Although this does not look very nice at the moment, it will allow the development of far greater biodiversity in the future, with a mix of native species and habitats, rather than just the monoculture of laurel shading out everything else.

The removal of the last section of holly scrub from the slopes of Happy Valley has opened up the views of the area considerably and seems to have been generally well received by walkers. We did sow our grass seed mix around the clearance here but the blazing heat of May resulted in very poor germination. We will try again in the Autumn both here and at Fir Tree pond, where the same thing happened.

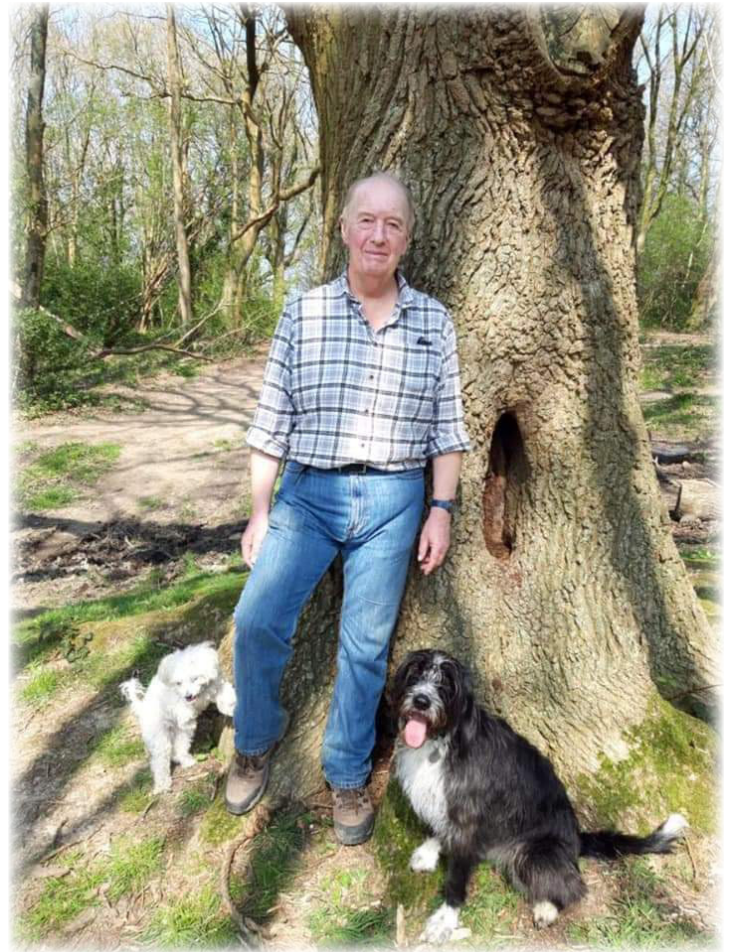
The restoration of the second Marlpit is still pending unfortunately. By the time the site had dried out enough for work to re-commence, it was already well into the breeding season for our amphibians. We hope the diggers will be back in August to complete the project.

Regardless of pandemics, nature has continued it's due course over the last few months and it has been a lovely Spring. Our ponds have suffered from dramatic evaporation in the heat but there has been plenty of moisture remaining in the soil to keep everything green and produce another spectacular crop of orchids. One

thing I have noticed strongly this year, is the delicious scent from the Lime trees around the Commons as they have flowered. It has been particularly strong at the Royal Victoria Grove, especially in the evening. We are fairly blasé about seeing buzzards on the Common these days but it was lovely to see a red kite soaring over the cricket pitch and then gliding off towards Rusthall a couple of weeks ago.

The coming weeks will see the clearance and widening of our paths getting underway and the big, collector flail will be starting to cut and remove some of the long grass. Our meadow areas will be left until Autumn to allow seed to mature before we cut it.

Steve Budden



Steve Budden with his dogs.

NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

JULY 2020 - WITH CLIVE EVANS

I hope I find you all safe and well during this difficult period. The pandemic has led to a vast increase in the number of people using the Commons. The majority of people respect this beautiful area, but unfortunately this is not true of everybody. One example of this is that one of our members answered his doorbell to be asked for some water to put out a fire!

The Linden Park cricket ground has been left pitted with holes, and next winter a quarter of the ground will be fenced off so that the area can be re-seeded.

Another problem has been with cyclists, some of whom race around the Common with no consideration for people walking on the paths. Again this a minority of cyclists, but it needs to be mentioned that cycling is prohibited on the Commons.

Sadly, the Wild Child events have had to be postponed until next year, another victim of the pandemic.

On a more positive note, we have funded the clearance around Harmony Street. Also, many years ago the Friends funded some railings near St Helena, and at Steve's

suggestion these have been repainted and are looking very smart.

I am pleased to report that the second tree that was planted at the top of Bretland Road in memory of Patrick Shovelton is flourishing.

If you are on Facebook you can find a very good group that has been set up by our wonderful Conservator's Clerk, Gemma Stapeley, all about the Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons. It is well worth joining this group.

As you will be aware, the Spa Hotel has been closed and our summer afternoon tea party has had to be cancelled for this year, but we very much hope that the lunch in November will be able to go ahead.

The Committee recently held a 'Zoom' meeting, a first for the Friends, and I am pleased to say that it went very well. Last but not least I would like to extend our best wishes to our Member Joy Podbury who has recently been appointed Mayor of Tunbridge Wells.

Clive Evans



Welcome to

THE FRIENDS OF THE COMMONS

CG NEWS STOP PRESS

Great news that our application from SUSSEX LUND for a grant for £7178.00 has been successful. This will enable the Rusthall Common Wetland Project to go ahead.



'Hell's Grandad's' having a coffee at Curly Vera's

The Friends Officers & Committee Membership 2020

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

EXTRACTS FROM PATRICK SHOVELTON

“The man who made people smile”

By kind permission of Dame Helena Shovelton

Over the years Patrick was integral in many different things. From helping to restart the Jesters after WW2 and get the Fives section going again, to acting as an educational adviser to the RAF Benevolent Fund, to writing some speeches for Mary Donaldson when she was Lord Mayor of London, to advising the House of Lords Committee when it was undertaking a particular maritime investigation. He enjoyed them all but I think what he enjoyed the most as he aged was when he was in charge. The Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Common was an organisation that Patrick created following the hurricane in the South East in 1987. The Commons were devastated. Patrick wanted to do something about it. He tried talking to various people on the Council and on the Commons' Conservators. Little changed. He was particularly incensed by the fact that the Council was using 4 men with a wheelbarrow and a handsaw to start on the clearance. He reckoned it would take over 20 years to gain the clearance that was required. With typical energy and panache he set about calling a public meeting. He asked his godson James Whitting to come and help him deliver the A5 pamphlet that we had written to all the houses that bordered the two Commons. The meeting was called to take place in Monson House. Patrick calculated that there would be too many people for this venue and organized that if needed the Council Chamber could be available. As he planned and organized following appearances on Radio Kent and interviews with the local papers, many people arrived. He then led a cortege of people to the Council Chamber. Everyone thought this was a spontaneous act – as usual with Patrick it was a well thought out ploy to get publicity. The meeting resulted in the foundation of the Friends which is still going strong.

A Management Plan for work was then created. The Conservators bought in to the plan, as did TWBC, and so the clearance began. The first Warden was appointed, Steve Budden, and help provided on the secretarial side through Sylvia Luckhurst. The future looked good and the organisation really made a difference. It was a typical piece of Patrick's skill. His *modus operandi* was as follows – identify a problem, have a good idea of what to do about it, bring everyone in, make it fun and achieve the end result with everyone thinking what a good organisation it was.

*PATRICK SHOVELTON
1912 - 2012*





Dame Helena Shovelton planting a tree in memory of Patrick Shovelton founder of The Friends.



Trees as they are now.



Clive Evans planting a tree in honour of his wife Paddy Evans.





UPDATE OF RUSTHALL ARCHAEOLOGY SITE

RUSTHALL ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT

Our work on Rusthall Common has now got back to a degree of 'normality', following the Coronavirus pandemic. For those of you not aware of the archaeological excavations going on at the eastern end of the common, we have a series of rock cut features that may well be medieval or earlier in date?

Finds include prehistoric flint and pottery to 15th C. Germanic stoneware.

We are now back on-site on Sundays and encourage local community volunteers to join us if they can. We meet from 10:30 onwards and if you have an interest in archaeology you are more than welcome to get involved in any way you can.

Email. wkdarchaeology@gmail.com



Summer solstice in alignment.
Nigel Stapple in trench.



Summer solstice sun



'Shadows' by Rusthall resident Michael Lawrence of The Rusthall spring site at the winter solstice.

ARTICLE BY GEMMA STAPELEY OF THE COMMONS CONSERVATORS



The Commons Conservators launched their own Facebook group in April and have been amazed how quickly it has developed into a fantastic spot to share news, views and information with the Community.

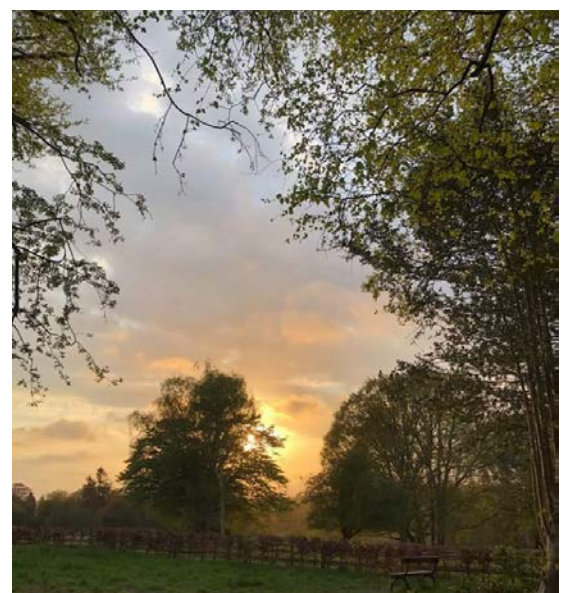
There are regular posts covering a wide range of topics from flora and fauna, geology, history, walks, conservation and nature-based activities, sharing the magic of the Commons and keeping everyone up to date.

Facebook has been the main platform for showcasing the photography competition enteries with judging on the 31st July. We hope to be announcing the winners very soon.

If the group sounds of interest, please do join us at
[Facebook.com/groups/TWRCommons](https://www.facebook.com/groups/TWRCommons)



GEMMA STAPELEY
Assistant Clerk



TUNBRIDGE WELLS – ON – SEA

The Victorians loved to fantasise about Tunbridge Wells as an inland version of the seaside. The pavement along the top of Tunbridge Common was known as the Promenade, and Pelton's guidebook famously declared that 'what the ocean is to a sea-bathing town, the Common is to Tunbridge Wells'. Many postcard views entitled 'Sunday afternoon on the Common' show crowds sitting out on the grassy slopes as if they were on the seashore. Over on Rusthall Common, generations of children have never ceased to enjoy their very own miniature beach in the sandy area in front of Toad Rock.

This link between our Commons and the coast is also a very real phenomenon for a number of species of plants and animals. Plants such as Buck's-horn Plantain and Creeping Willow that grow predominantly in sandy coastal habitats have long been known from similar areas on the Commons. And many bees and wasps that thrive on sand dunes by the sea also appear in those open areas of bare sand around Wellington Rocks and Toad Rock.

One of the most characteristic of these sand-loving bees is the Sandpit Mining Bee (*Andrena barbilabris*) that flies for an extended period through late spring and summer. As commonly happens with mining bees, the males emerge first and begin flying low and persistently in a curious evasive pattern over the open sand. The erratic flight path with abrupt twists and turns is intended to distract predators, while the bees' coat of long light-grey hairs help them blend into the light-coloured sand below. Sometimes large numbers can be seen swarming over the sand together. The purpose of this behaviour is to look for potential mates as the females emerge in turn. Males of most solitary bees and wasps, and also bumblebees, engage in mate-searching patrols or swarms of one form or another, and this activity has come to be known as 'lekking', a term adopted from birding. The females nest in burrows excavated in the deeper more compacted sand, and they have an uncanny ability to find their way home through the loose sand on top despite the absence of any visible indication on the surface.

At the beginning of April this year, I was pleased to find a new arrival. Several males of the nationally rare Early Colletes (*Colletes cunicularius*) were lekking in a similar fashion to the Sandpit Mining Bees in front of Toad Rock. This larger solitary bee used to be restricted to coastal dunes in north-west England and Wales, but in recent years it has started spreading to a few scattered inland sites that have plenty of open sand. It is not yet clear whether these new colonists have come from the other side of Britain or from across the Channel. The latter may be more likely, as in 2011 I recorded the first examples from the Channel Islands, which are often a stepping stone for new insects arriving in mainland Britain.

Ian Beavis



AN EARLY COLLETES BEE



A MALE SANDPIT MINING
BEE



A PAIR