



# COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

## WARDEN'S REPORT

October 2020



*Emma with the radio-controlled Flailbot*

This strange year continues, as we all adjust to the now infamous new normal. The Commons are returning to more normal levels of footfall now, as children return to school and the weather starts to deteriorate but who knows what the future holds with case numbers increasing again and talk of further lockdowns. The increased numbers of residents who have learned what we have to offer is surely a good thing for the future safety of the Commons, as well as the future membership of the Friends but it has of course brought its own problems too. The most obvious of these issues is the hugely increased level of litter being left, both in the bins and on our paths. We were pretty much overwhelmed during the Spring and early Summer and we are still not back to where we would wish to be. It is clear that our litter disposal arrangements need overhauling and we are

currently looking at the options and what we can afford.

Although as I write this the wet weather seems to be returning, it has been an exceptionally dry Summer. Our ponds largely dried up and the grass has grown a lot less than in many years but in spite of the parched conditions, we are experiencing an absolute bumper crop of acorns. Not only do they seem to be very abundant but they are also very large. A word of warning to those of you walking in our woods at the moment, they are quite painful when they land on your head, especially for those of us who are less hirsute than we were. It was also another good year for our Orchids and we are now seeing a fine showing on our regenerating heather sites.



We are now well into the clearance of our tracks and paths and we have completed the cutting of our meadow areas and the removal of the grass. Sadly, we seem to have lost our long serving contractor Mick Dann, who has done a sterling job of cutting the tracks and verges for almost thirty years. Mick is very much missed but the new contractors, Honnington Farm from Southborough, are doing a good job although it is a big learning curve for them just working out where everything is at the moment! Mick of course knew the Common at least as well as me. We had real problems last year when the exceptionally wet conditions prevented us completing the cut of the tracks, so I am very much hoping for better conditions this year. One way or another, we will do our best to complete everything.

Honnington are also involved in two new pond creation projects that will take place very soon. We have to complete the creation of a second pond at the Marlpit site that was started last Spring and got delayed by bad weather. This is a project being jointly funded by the Friends and the Freehold Tenants Group that will hopefully provide our Great Crested Newts with additional habitat, along with the many frogs which quickly colonised the two small pools created there recently.

The second project is the creation of a group of shallow ponds or scrapes, with an associated wetland area in Bulls Hollow. This project is being funded through a grant from the Sussex Lund organisation, which was successfully applied for by the Friends in cooperation with the Conservators.

A large Beech tree came down in the bottom of the Hollow a few years ago which let in much more light and created an excellent opportunity to add extra interest to the Hollow and at the same time drain water away from the base of the rocks to improve access for visitors. The idea is to create a group of shallow, interconnected pools that will create a mosaic of different habitats. The pools will drain into a dip with a perforated membrane below the soil to create an area of boggy soil for wetland plants. Bulls Hollow is already a dramatic site and this project will enhance it even further; I am very much looking forward to seeing the results as the scrapes mature.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this piece, there have been many odd adjustments to normality that we have had to adapt to this year, one of them being the Britain in Bloom competition being staged virtually. The Commons were again entered into the conservation category, which involved Gemma and I providing words and images to Kasia in the TWBC Parks Department, who then turned them into an

excellent digital entry. She did such a good job that the Commons were this years winners in the category. I am obviously delighted with the result, which is a great tribute to the volunteers who carry out much of the conservation work, as well as the Friends and Freehold Tenants for the funding of so many extra projects and organising community events such as the Wild Child days. Thanks are also very much due to Gemma for her indefatigable enthusiasm, organising not only a hugely successful Facebook page but also a popular lockdown photographic competition; the judges love community involvement.

***Steve Budden***



***Diggers at Rusthall Marl Pits***



***Steve Budden ( and his dog) with local archaeologist Nigel Stapple at Bulls Hollow inspecting on-going work.***

# NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

OCTOBER 2020 - WITH CLIVE EVANS

It was a great shame that we were unable to hold two of our social events this year, but hopefully there will be a light at the end of the tunnel, and next years events will resume.

A first for your Committee was a virtual Zoom meeting earlier in the year, and most recently a social - distanced meeting held in front of The Pavillion of Linden Park Cricket Club which went well with drinks from Curly Vera's coffee van.

Since the last newsletter we have paid for the painting of The Cold Bath railings near the Forum and must thank Carolyn Gray for her article in this issue. We have also paid for refurbishment of six benches, three on both Rusthall and Tunbridge Wells Commons.

Our next project which will start soon is the Wetland Project at Bulls Hollow (Steve Budden describes this in his Wardens notes). This will cost in excess of £7000 and we have been very fortunate to get it fully funded by Sussex Lund. This has

been made possible by the hard work from Gemma Stapeley The Clerk to The Conservators, who is a whiz kid when it comes to completing grant applications. We can thank her personally at our next social gathering.

As you may have read, The Beacon Hotel put in a major planning application which was later withdrawn. According to The Courier they intend to re submit it soon, we will keep a close eye on this.

I hope that many of you will have joined The Commons Website on Facebook, it is very informative.

Finally thank you all for your support during these difficult times, and please remember Membership Subscriptions are due October 1st. Also, we intend to hold a virtual AGM before the end of the year and will inform members of the time and date in due course.

*Clive Evans*



Welcome to

THE FRIENDS OF THE COMMONS

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

From 1st October 2020

Those members who pay by cheque, please fill in the enclosed form.

Thank you Chris Gurr (Mem Sec)

EXTRA CG NEWS

AGM ZOOM MEETING

Wednesday 25th November 11am.

Agenda and details to be found enclosed in this newsletter

## The Friends Officers & Committee Membership 2020

Officers:			Committee:	
Chairman:	Clive Evans	Tel: 01892 518975	Sally Balcon	Tel: 01892 515741
Treasurer:	Donald Clarke	Tel: 01892 615306	Dr Ian Beavis	Tel: 01892 523007
Mem. Secretary:	Chris Gurr	Tel: 01892 542408	David Wakefield	Tel: 01892 523983
Secretary:	Terry Coulthard	Tel: 01892 548785	Lynne Lane	Tel: 01892 533493
			Clive McAllister	Tel: 01892 532817
			Peter Miall	Tel: 01892 517599



# Font Hill

At the base of the hill in front of The Forum (a site known as Font Hill), right by the now busy A26, are two historic sites - a chalybeate spring, and a cold bath. They were actually buried until 1971, when a road widening scheme uncovered them. A 1920s postcard shows a longer, shallowed bank, with different paths to the current ones. 1971 research by Myrtle and Anthony Streeten ("Another Chalybeate Spring and Cold Bath at Tunbridge Wells") found the bath dates from about 1766, and is the one mentioned in the book by Benge Burr as 'about a furlong from the Walks.' It seems likely it was out of use by 1827, when new baths were built on The Pantiles (now in the basement of Boots the chemist). The spring seems to have been accessible for longer, amongst the artefacts found was a coin from 1911, as well as many other finds linked to local apothecaries (all these donated to The Museum, and on display prior to refurbishment of that site). It seems very likely this spring was one of the seven mentioned in the 1766 writings of Benge Burr, and could have been constructed in the late 17th century.

This is a small part of the research I have undertaken for Heritage Open Days 2020, which will be available to view on [twforum.co.uk](http://twforum.co.uk) from September 11th onwards.

By Carolyn Gray



*The Cold Bath - Font Hill*

*Recently painted railings courtesy of The Friends and an anonymous benefactor*



*Can you find Gareth's Tree on The Common?*

## **GARETH'S TREE**

If I come by way of the ancient pond  
where bull rushes and lilies grown in spring  
yellow irises bloom and sticklebacks hide in the sedge,  
if I come that way, the oak  
stands broad backed and tall  
his canopy starting with leaf.

If I come by way of the gravel path  
and meet him face on, his wound  
is unmissable, shocking, beautiful.  
Something calamitous long years ago  
gouged out and cauterised the core of his being  
forcing his straight stem a little to the right.

Sonia Lawrence



Not Gareth's tree, this can be found on Rusthall Common



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

**Targetfollow**

# *Jordan House*

## *68 London Road*

One of the most memorable images of 19th Century Tunbridge Wells is a print of the future Queen Victoria at a very young age, returning from the Common after a morning ride. The picture shown inset, which was printed by W. Day, of London, shows the Princess seated on a donkey led by one footman, while another footman holds a parasol over her. Princess Victoria and her mother; the Duchess of Kent, paid several visits to Tunbridge Wells during the 1820s and 1830s.

The backdrop into that particular insight into the life of the young Princess is Jordan House, which was then called Jordan Place. This late Stuart or early Georgian building is situated at the lower corner of Church Road, a thoroughfare formerly known as Jordan's Lane.

The print shows the premises prominently marked Burrow's Tunbridge Ware Repository, and a signboard claims the place to have been the 'original manufactory of Tunbridge Ware'. Be that as it may, Jordan House was presided over in the early part of the 19th century by Humphrey Burrows, whose grandfather, William Burrows, had taken over the property in around 1740.

The Burrows family was certainly one of the earliest dynasties of specialist Tunbridge Ware makers, and Jordan House seems to have served as a Tunbridge Ware establishment for a century or so of its life. The ground floor facing the Common used to be a double fronted shop, with large display windows on either side of the central entrance. A selection of the Burrows family's work may be seen in the Tunbridge Wells Museum.

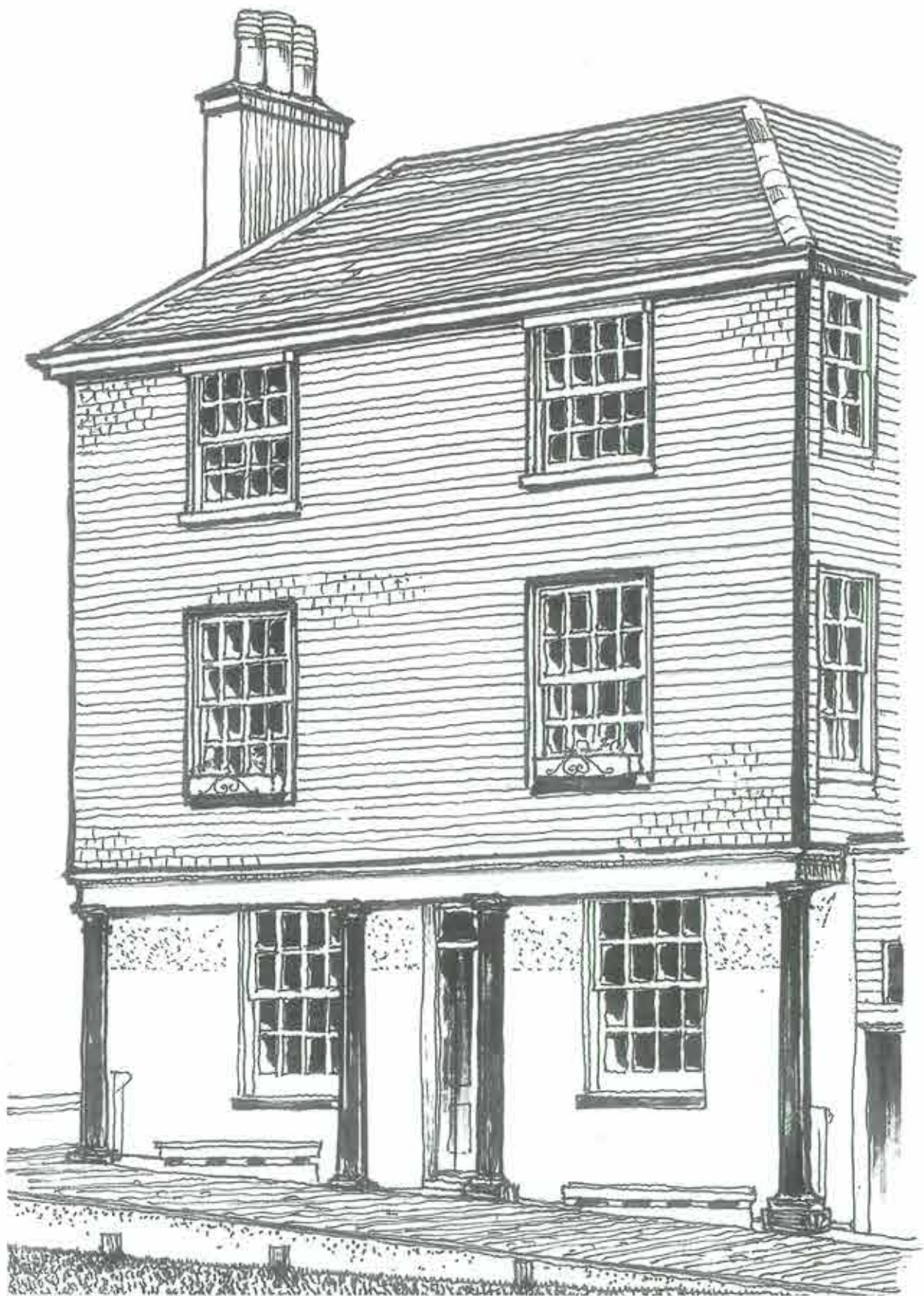
Now residence of David and Ruth Wakefield and daughter Jude in Jordan's Den.

Philip Whitbourn  
2020



*Sketch by W Day of London showing the young Queen Victoria*









*Heather Colletes*

# RISE OF THE IVY BEE

In the last newsletter I wrote about the Early Colletes bee, a new arrival on the Commons this spring. The Colletes bees, sometimes called Plasterer Bees, are a small group of mining bees with nine British species, of which five are found on our Commons. Their special feature is lining their nest burrows with a secretion which sets to form a waterproof transparent lining with a texture like cellophane.

The Early Colletes is the only member of the group which is spring flying, with the others not appearing until late May at the earliest. The other four species on the Commons all look quite similar with dense pale hair bands on the abdomen, but their flight period and the flowers they prefer to visit usually help to identify them. Davies' Colletes (*Colletes daviesanus*) and the Bare-saddled Colletes (*Colletes similis*) feed and forage at various flowers from the composite family such as yarrow, ragwort and ox-eye daisy. Davies' Colletes is a fairly common garden species associated with cultivated versions of its wild foodplants, but its relative tends to avoid manmade habitats. In late summer when the heather is in bloom on Tunbridge Wells Common, the Heather Colletes (*Colletes succinctus*) appears, and it is rare to see it visiting any other plant. Males come out first and patrol the areas of heather as they wait for the females to emerge.

Our fifth species, the Ivy Bee (*Colletes hederæ*), flies last of all and is at peak activity when all other solitary bees are starting to disappear with the approach of autumn. Its emergence is timed to coincide with the flowering of ivy. Ivy is an important resource for late-flying pollinators, but the Ivy Bee is the only one that has evolved an exclusive association with this plant. When fresh, the hair bands are bright sandy yellow, contrasting with the whitish bands of related species.

Ivy Bee is quite a recent arrival in mainland Britain, colonising across the sea from the Channel Islands, establishing itself on the south coast and then spreading inland. The first Tunbridge Wells records were from the edge of Tunbridge Wells Common in 2012. Over the five years, the population has increased tremendously, and the females' habit of nesting in dense aggregations in favoured spots has made it more conspicuous. This year huge numbers of males were swarming around the edge of the sand-pit near Wellington Rocks on Tunbridge Wells Common, waiting for the females to emerge. The first females to come out are sometimes mobbed by males, producing a phenomenon known as a 'mating ball'.

Subsequently equally large numbers of females were flying around the site, burrowing into the sandy ground and bringing in their food store of ivy pollen and nectar. The sandy area around Toad Rock on Rusthall Common also has good numbers of Ivy Bee. Some females stay active as late as November.

*Ian Beavis*



*Ivy Bee Female*



*Ivy Bee Male*



*Ivy Bee Mating*