



COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

# WARDEN'S REPORT

June 2021



*Families enjoying the sunshine at The Wellington Rocks*

Although Covid remains a real issue, its impact on the Commons has lessened significantly; as I write this, we are still waiting to see what happens on June 21st, but the gradual re-opening of retail and leisure has reduced footfall and the Common is gratefully returning somewhat towards normality. So many people have discovered the Commons over the past fifteen months and I am sure that lots of them will become more regular users. Hopefully, the upside to this will be increased membership of the Friends and a far greater awareness of how important the Commons are to the whole community.

Covid or no Covid, some problems remain the same and late March saw another incursion onto Rusthall cricket pitch by a large number of travellers. Caravans and cars were driven on to both the outfield and the pitch itself,

causing considerable damage, this was extremely upsetting for the club, who were due to play their first game of the season the following weekend. Mercifully, the travellers were removed fairly quickly thanks to the efforts of the Police and TWBC Officers. Volunteers from the cricket club and the public pitched in to clear the rubbish left by our visitors and in the end, this was a relatively minor incursion compared to some in recent years. It has however made us all realise that we are clearly on the list of potential sites and greater measures are needed to protect the ground in future.

By good fortune, the start of the easing of social restrictions came just after the start of the new litter contract that Gemma and I put a lot of effort into organising (mostly Gemma).

No. 82  
JUNE 2021

*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'.*



This has split the contract into two parts, the litter is now cleared from the bins by Ash from LML Services and is put into big trade bins on each Common, these are emptied a couple of times each week by another Company, Countrystyle Services. After a baptism of fire in the first few weeks, both contractors have really got themselves organised and I cannot think of the last time I came across an overflowing bin, we are both delighted. Gemma's volunteers are keeping on top of the litter on the paths and open areas and the whole system seems to be working well.

The weather has again been bizarre this year, with an incredibly dry April that saw many of our ponds shrinking rapidly in size, it also made it pointless sowing seed around the newly restored Marlpit Ponds, with the ground so dry we would simply have been feeding the birds. Then just as I was off on holiday in May, it all changed and the heavens opened; by the time I returned after two weeks, the grass was growing so wildly that we have been struggling to keep up with cutting it. Happily, the grass seed that we finally sowed at the Marlpits just before I left has successfully germinated and the site is now gradually turning green and looking very good. All four of the new ponds seem to have already been colonised by frogs and newts and as I was there today in the sunshine, there were quite a few Dragonflies and Damselflies in evidence. The dry April allowed us to instal a new flight of wooden steps on the slope behind the new ponds, which should make access much better later in the year when it gets wet again.

With some very welcome extra funding from the Friends, we are currently repainting and restoring thirty benches across both Commons, ten on Rusthall and twenty on Tunbridge Wells, this means that almost all the benches on Rusthall have been treated, whilst we concentrated on the more obscure sites on Tunbridge Wells Common. We have also replaced quite a number of anti-parking posts across both sites and new ditches have been excavated to block vehicle access to some further sensitive sections. I hope to be able to repaint a number of our more disreputable bins before Britain in Bloom judging takes place in July and by then, we will be underway with our major work of the year, cutting and clearing all our paths, glades and meadows.

One of the big changes I have seen during my time as Warden is the attitude towards dog fouling. Back in the early nineteen nineties, it was comparatively unusual for people to pick up after their dogs and walking across the Common was a rather more hazardous experience! Nowadays things are a lot better, although there are inevitably those few who will not take responsibility for their pets. For many years now, the Conservators have supplied dog bags at various locations, although problems with the rolls of bags snapping off inside the dispensers often mean they are unavailable. Most people bring their own bags with them, using ours only in an emergency but to those who rely on our bags, I have a warning. We buy our bags from China and this means that there is up to a four month wait before our pallet of dog bags arrives. We put an order in at the start of this year and were expecting their arrival in April, however by mid-May they had still not materialised. We made a few enquiries and guess what; remember that ship that got stuck in the Suez Canal, apparently our bags are on that ship and are

currently being held hostage by the Egyptian authorities until appropriate reparations are made! In the light of this, I am afraid the message for dog walkers using the Common in the coming months is, please bring your own bags.

*Steve Budden*



*The Marlpit Ponds*



*New Steps at the Marlpit Ponds*



# NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

JUNE 2021 - WITH CLIVE EVANS

We are slowly coming out of lockdown and with this in mind we did intend to arrange outdoor events in September. At time of print these are to be put on hold ,but when events and dates are known I will inform members and the public via the local press and the [twcommons.org](https://www.twcommons.org) website.

In the last newsletter I mentioned the problem of litter on the commons ,and as stated in Steve Budden's wardens's report the new setup is working well,especially with the new storage area on the Coach road in Rusthall. Our volunteers will be having their next litter pick on saturday 3rd July 10.30am start at Fir Tree Car Park. Equipment is provided so please come along for whatever time you can give,and Coffees etc. at Curly Vera's van afterwards. Details will also be on [twcommons.org](https://www.twcommons.org) from Gemma Stapeley.

This wonderful website has now over 1500 members,and we have paid £2000 towards the cost of setting it up,well worth a visit.

Our recruitment drive for new members is going well with over 30 new members so far this year,and many thanks to our new Committee member Joy Podbury for leafleting the new development on the old hospital site where we gained new members.

Another new Committee member we must welcome is Mark Howden who as a lot of Rusthall locals know works tirelessly around the Commons litter picking,and takes along with him youngsters who are on The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

You will notice this is a larger edition due to a range of articles on offer.

*Clive Evans*



*The Friends Committee meeting in the fresh air of The Commons*

## The Friends Officers & Committee Membership 2021

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
			Joy Podbury	email. <a href="mailto:joypodbury@talktalk.net">joypodbury@talktalk.net</a>
			Mark Howden	Tel: 01892 519320

[www.friendsofthecommons.co.uk](http://www.friendsofthecommons.co.uk)



# Common Ground June 2021

## All Abilities Path – Happy Valley, Rusthall Common

*“Having an all abilities path along Happy Valley in Rusthall Common would be fantastic. It is such a picturesque route so the more people that can enjoy it, the better. Too often people with mobility constraints are excluded from the countryside so increasing accessibility is very important. That is why I am a strong supporter of this initiative.”* Greg Clark MP

The Covid epidemic has made life different, and often harder, for all of us. Isn't it wonderful that the Commons have offered so many people the opportunity to be outdoors and get away from the confines of their homes. The many paths across the Commons have been thronged like never before. During this period the Friends have been looking to make one of the most attractive and heavily trodden paths, going between St Paul's Church and the Beacon, suitable for everyone to use in every season. The idea for this came from one of our members, Kate Sander. The path offers magnificent views over Happy Valley to the lakes in the Beacon grounds, towards the western edge of Tunbridge Wells and even Crowborough. These views are complemented by sandstone outcrops and a wide range of flora and fauna. Being in this area gives an uplift to both physical and mental wellbeing. We want this to be available to everyone, including those with wheelchairs or prams. The path is currently predominantly unsurfaced and often uneven and very muddy in wet weather.

The path will be 450 metres in length by 2 metre width and in a robustly surfaced finish, which will be sympathetic to the Commons environment. Tree roots and the sandstone outcrops will not be damaged in the creation of the surface. Its resin bound construction should mean that it will be largely maintenance free. Also we will look to provide extra benches, including possibly a “happy to chat” bench, and maybe more bins, along the route. ‘Happy to Chat’ benches can feature a simple sign which reads ‘Sit here if you don't mind someone stopping to say hello’ and are designed to help combat loneliness and encourage community interaction.

We are seeking £20,000 towards the recently agreed cost of £89,000. The Friends hope to raise the bulk of the money from major funding organisations. Understandably, these organisations, expect community support too. We currently have an application with The National Lottery for £75,000, which is being considered positively. It has gone through some of their initial vetting and currently we understand they are checking whether their criteria allow the grant to be made when the land owner is a commercial enterprise. Rusthall Parish Council has also made an application to KCC for £75,000 as one of its bids for funds that central government is making available to KCC. The criteria for making awards under that scheme are under review. We are hopeful that one of these applications will be successful. Already we have had success with our wider fund raising, most notably with a £5,000 anonymous donation, £1000

from the SMB Charitable Trust and a good number of individual donations, many of them eligible for gift aid. As well as having support from Rusthall Parish Council and Greg Clark, the creation of this path is also backed by TWBC's Health Improvement Team, the Tunbridge Wells & Area Access Group, St Paul's Church and The Beacon.

Notwithstanding this success in fund raising we still have a gap. We completely understand that finances might be very stretched at the moment, yet it would be great if you are able to support our fund raising by contributing by direct payment to:-

Payee: The Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons  
National Westminster Bank, Tunbridge Wells  
Sort Code: 55-70-13  
Account Number: 01028774  
Payment Reference: Path

If you want us to be able to increase your donation by 25% and you are eligible for gift aid please email Chris Gurr at [chris.gurr@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:chris.gurr@yahoo.co.uk), or contact him on 01892 542408.

Very many thanks, and enjoy your time in nature!



***Happy Valley, Rusthall the 101 steps.***





## PROPOSED ROUTE OF THE ALL ABILITIES PATH FROM ST .PAUL'S CHURCH RUSTHALL TO THE BEACON



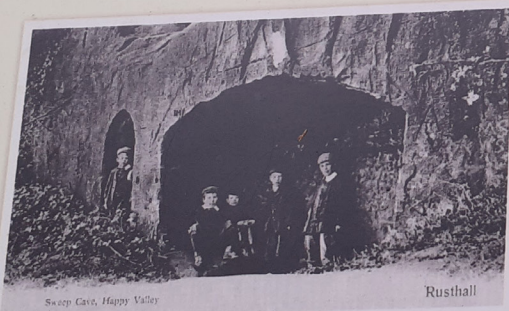
## Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall Commons

### Welcome to the countryside in the town!

Enjoy the Commons whatever you are doing today: walking, exercising, horse-riding, playing, or just absorbing your surroundings. Use the many paths to explore the varied features and areas. This is a natural environment with natural hazards, such as uneven ground, rocks, steps, and ponds.

The Commons are famous for sandstone rocks, laid down as deposits from a vast freshwater lake around 136 million years ago, and sculpted by wind and water erosion during the Ice Age. The hunter-gatherers of the Middle Stone Age began clearing the primeval forest to attract deer. This allowed the Commons to be used as pig pasture in Saxon times and later for leisure activities, when the discovery of iron-rich waters in 1606 led to Tunbridge Wells' development as a spa town.

The heathland created by grazing lasted until the early decades of the 20th century, when, in wartime, troops camped on the Commons. Without grazing, scrub and woodland took over, changing the natural environment. Careful management since the Great Storm of 1987 has restored much of the heathland landscape, which again offers a habitat for a wide range of wildlife and plants.



Sweeps Cave (point 18 on the map): Shelter for seats at the old viewpoint that looked across Happy Valley.



### Rusthall Common



Warm summer evenings on the Commons are a great time to experience the wonder of bats in their natural environment.

Many of the 18 species found in the UK can be found here on the Commons, however the pipistrelle is the most common.

Weighing just 5 grams (same as a 20p piece), a single pipistrelle can eat as many as 3,000 tiny insects in just one night!



Pipistrelle

Nuthatches are somewhat woodpecker-like, but more agile, perching up on their feet with bodies and tails held well clear; they can descend head-first and hang upside down beneath twigs and branches.

The nuthatch is a secretive woodland bird, found on trees or tall bushes.

It has the unique habit of plastering mud around the entrance to its nest hole.



Nuthatch





# DRESSING THE TOAD

## SATURDAY 3rd JULY

Dear All, Please see below details of workshops leading to The Dressing Of The Toad as well as events on the actual day. which have been organised by Karen Gardner. The all day event on Saturday 3rd July will lead to The Dressing. at 5.00 p.m when there will be a band, Hot Foot Specials, who play American, Irish and English folk music as well as Cajun. They will then move to The Toad Rock Retreat and play two forty minute sets.

Free Creative Workshop Weekends leading up to 3rd of July when we Dress the Toad. Come for any or all sessions, as you like., For both Adults and for Children accompanied by an Adult At Toad Rock Retreat's outdoor picnic tables, 12 to 2pm  
Drinks and bar snacks available for purchase inside

June 5th and 6th - Stick Weaving and Dream Catchers  
June 12th and 13th - Poetry Art; Short poems to collaged icons  
June 19th and 20th - Decorative Lei and Anklet Making

You are welcome to attend the workshop or come collect a box of creative inspiration containing supplies to make your objects at home in your own time. Bring or wear your creation on the 3rd of July to decorate the Toad from 11am to 7pm. Offerings will be returned to the makers by previous arrangement.

On the Day of Dressing The Toad - Saturday, 3rd July

A full day of socially distanced creative activities, including the art of storytelling, will be offered for free from 11am to 7pm at the sandy area in front of the Toad Rock. A sign-up form for time slots will be on site for each of the art forms. You can reserve a space before the day to ensure your space or just turn up.

At 2pm and 5pm there will be a circle procession from the sandy area up to the Toad Rock fence to add our creative gifts made in our workshops, at home, or during the day's activities.

Wear a flower lei, jingle bell anklets, or headdress made in our workshops or from one of our free creative gift boxes. Or just come in colourful clothes and see what's happening at the Toad Rock.


Free Creative boxes include materials and guidance to get you started with either Stick Weaving (suitable for ages 8+), Dream Catchers (age 6+), Visual Poetry (10+), or Lei and Anklets (all ages).

### Origin of Dressing The Toad

Philosopher Richard Wollheim coined the term "seeing-into" as the creative act of finding forms within inanimate objects, such as clouds. We do this when we look at our cherished village rock and there we see the toad; his snout, his shoulders and haunch, sitting there majestic in scale. Since the mid-1800's tourists have visited the Toad Rock, coming up from the station in charabancs to see-into the form.

In 2019, to coincide with Jon Oram's "Legends of the Rocks" devised community play, a new event was created to celebrate Toad Rock. Similar to century's old well dressing ceremonies in rural parts of England in which villagers venerate their wells with flowers and blessings in appeals for life, fertility, or health, the community of Rusthall is commemorating its abundance of creativity. Our village is wealthy in artists, poets, performers, musicians, ceramicists, writers, and those who study and appreciate the Arts. The creative gift of seeing-into the rock and finding the Toad is being returned to the Toad annually on the first weekend of July with creative decorations and writings prepared by the community with the help and generosity of professional artists within the community. The form of the offerings will evolve over the years and it is these early years where imagination is most needed. Any who would like to take part by making, assisting or offering creative workshops in any of the art forms are welcome. We hope to see new as well as familiar faces on Saturday the 3rd of July from 11 am to spend the day in front of The Toad Rock and offer a creative gift, flowers, or poem to hang on the Toad's protective fencing. All creative gifts will be returned to their makers by previous arrangement.

For more information, to collect a free creative box, and to reserve a workshop space in advance, contact Karen Gardner at [Karen@Gardnersonline.net](mailto:Karen@Gardnersonline.net)





# DRESSING THE TOAD



Saturday, 3rd July **2021**

## Rusthall Toad Rock

Bring creative offerings to The Toad Rock  
Activities all day • Celebration 5pm • Live Music





# HAPPY HIGHWAYS A COMMUNITY PLAY

Into my heart an air that kills from yon far country blows:  
What are those blue remembered hills,  
What spires, what farms are those?  
That is the land of lost content, I see it shining plain,  
The happy highways where I went and cannot come again.  
AE Houseman

Following on from Claque Theatre and Rusthall Community Arts 2019 play, Legends of The Rocks, The Heroes Journey their project for the 2021 Arts Festival is now fully underway. Over 50 people from the local community performed in Legends of The Rocks, many more helped with research, devising the piece, making costumes and props, and stewarding. Claque Theatre have been producing community plays for over 40 years internationally. A community play means involvement is open to everyone, no-one is turned away. The Arts Council has funded this two-part project, the current part, entitled Paths, started in September 2020 and has so far involved the gathering and sharing ideas on zoom, casting and rehearsals are to come, the second project, the play itself is called Happy Highways, taken from AE Houseman's poem The Shropshire Lad. Happy Highways will be a theatrical walk around Happy Valley. The audience, led by a guide, will travel in small groups on different paths. The story will unravel as they encounter fellow travellers, meet story tellers and singers and witness different scenes. The final scene will take place around a natural amphitheatre when all the groups come together. There is an 'easy' route for people who may not be able to manage steps, slopes or rougher terrain. The performance are from 26th August to 30th August 2021, in the early evening with some weekend afternoon matinees.

The play will have been fully devised by the community and takes as its theme Home. Because of lockdown this has all had to be done on but now we are walking around Happy Valley, whose history and landscape has inspired the ideas for the production. Members of the devising group have undertaken local research. We've heard many stories, one about a man who lived in Rusthall all of his life and died in 1961 aged 90. He wrote poetry and loved the common. One moving poem was written while he was posted in North Africa, during the WW1. He wrote how his memories of Happy Valley kept him going. We heard from a researcher whose son and some friends excavated the cold-water baths back to the tiles (and refilled them) and were surprised about how small they were. We imagined how communal baths would be a place where people shared stories. During WW1 Tunbridge Wells housed many Belgian refugees including the Mayor and Mayoress of a village outside Antwerp. They and their family wrote of excursions to Happy Valley. The couple were so popular with locals that when they died there was a huge funeral procession with people lining the streets to pay their respects. During WWII many Jewish refugee children were accommodated at The Beacon; they would have played around Happy Valley. A geological walk took place in Happy Valley during the 1890's and in 1975 Rusthall Primary School undertook a project called Wonderful Walks.

We are learning more and more about the history of the area and developing our own stories. As we get more freedom to actually explore Happy Valley we are seeing how we can use the natural sounds and compliment them and discovering how the sounds of our voices travel and echo around the rocks. Happy Valley is well deserving of being the star of the show. During the last weekend in April we held our first Land Art Workshop, creating images using nature's materials: fallen wood, feathers, ivy, rocks and leaves. We hope that after May 17th we will be able to offer further outdoor workshops to more people. If you are interested in making Land Art, writing, music making, researching local or family history, drumming we are still needing help in all these devising areas. Creative and devising workshops continue on zoom, every other Wednesday. We generally start with a "provocation" (some stimulus to inspire creative thinking). We then break into small discussion groups, come back and share. You can follow how the play is developing in the blog pages of the Claque website:

<https://www.communityplays.com/blog/category/devising-the-legend>.

## Take Part in the Play

Casting is open to everyone and will start early June followed by rehearsals. It's inclusive so if you want a part, we will give you one. To be safe scenes will be rehearsed in small groups. The final rehearsal stage runs into the summer so we can use the outdoor performance spaces as much as possible. For the performance will also need volunteer stewards and people to generally help out the production team. Everyone is welcome, this is a production for and about your community. If you are interested in taking part in whatever way, please get in touch by contacting us at [rusthallcommunityarts@gmail.com](mailto:rusthallcommunityarts@gmail.com)

**PERFORMANCES OF  
HAPPY HIGHWAYS**  
Rusthall Common Community Play  
Venue: Happy Valley

August Wed 25th- Mon 30th  
Evening Performances 7pm  
Except Sun 29th 3pm





CLAUQUE THEATRE  
in Association with  
RUSTHALL COMMUNITY ARTS



# LEGEND OF THE ROCKS II HAPPY HIGHWAYS Rusthall Common Community Play CASTING

We are looking for performers whatever level of experience or none at all. There's a part for everyone. We are also looking for musicians and singers. This is an opportunity to be part of a play devised by the community in collaboration with Claque Theatre's Director Jon Oram. Jon has directed Community Plays across Britain, in Europe, Canada and USA. Uniquely, *Happy Higways* is a devised theatrical journey through Happy Valley. There are parts large and small to suit everyone's needs and ability.

Performances August 25th - 30th 2021

## CONTACT US AND YOU WILL HAVE A PART

E Mail: [rusthallcommunityarts@gmail.com](mailto:rusthallcommunityarts@gmail.com)

Mobile: 07541 835777

Post: 12 Apsley St, Rusthall TN4 8NU

you can also register on our website

[www.communityplays.com](http://www.communityplays.com)

*"These plays can be a life changing  
experience for players and audience alike"*  
Toronto Globe



LOTTERY FUNDED





# IT'S BEE SEASON AGAIN

Back in the summer I wrote about the rare Early Colletes mining bee that appeared as a new colonist of the sandy ground by Toad Rock on Rusthall Common. In late March this year one of my contacts on Twitter who is interested in bees and who was visiting Tunbridge Wells asked what special species he could look out for. So I sent him to Toad Rock to look for the Colletes. His success in finding it showed that this new arrival has definitely become established in what is a perfect habitat for a species that likes sandy ground and traditionally inhabited coastal dunes.

When I went to the site a few days later I saw about thirty males performing their 'lekking' or courtship display flight over the exact same area of ground where I had seen them last year. Among solitary bees generally, males emerge first – because there is evolutionary pressure for them to be ready and waiting – and fly persistently around the nest site or some focal point nearby until the females come out. By the last day of March some females had appeared and were starting to make their nest burrows in the sandy ground. The nectar and pollen store they lay up for their larvae is mainly taken from willow (pussy willow) catkins.

Most of the widespread solitary bees on the British list have an associated cuckoo bee that sneaks into their nests and lays its own eggs there. Because the population of the host determines that of the cuckoo species – a well-adapted parasite can't afford to wipe out its host – some rarer British bees do not exist in large enough numbers to support such an associate. But when the situation changes, there are associated cuckoo bees on the near Continent – where the host may have always been more numerous – ready to move in. So the Early Colletes has recently been joined in Britain by its special cuckoo associate the red and black Giant Blood Bee (*Sphecodes albilabris*). This hasn't turned up at Rusthall yet, but no doubt it will in due course.

The Banded Mining Bee (*Andrena gravida*) has a similar story. Once nationally rare, this attractive white-banded species with a golden pollen-basket has been spreading over the last few years and now occurs at several sites in Tunbridge Wells, including the Commons. Its special cuckoo bee, the Dusky-horned Nomad (*Nomada bifasciata*), first appeared in Britain on the Kent coast in 2018 and made its Tunbridge Wells debut in April of this year. The *Nomada* group of cuckoo bees have a rather wasp-like appearance, and are patterned in various combinations of black, yellow and red; this one stands out from related species by being particularly brightly coloured with an all-red underside.

*Ian Beavis*





**THE EARLY COLLETES BEE**



**DUSKY HORNED NOMAD BEE**



**THE BANDED MINING BEE (FEMALE)**



**THE BANDED MINING BEE ( MALE)**



Sunnyside Hall 🌿 Rusthall Road TN4 8RA

## The Season at a Glance

Saturday Evenings Doors and Bar open 7:00pm  
Programme starts 7:30pm Main Feature starts 8:00pm

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE - SEE OUR UPDATES AT  
<https://www.rusthallcinema.club>

The Remains of the Day	Sat 3 July
Parasite	Sat 17 July
Death in Venice	Sat 31 July
Monty Python and the Holy Grail	Sat 14 Aug
Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot	Sat 28 Aug
Out of Africa	Sat 11 Sep
Withnail & I	Sat 25 Sep
The History Boys	Sat 9 Oct
The Personal History of David Copperfield	Sat 22 Aug
1917	Sat 6 Nov

**\*\*Licensed bar & film-themed cakes\*\***

Please suggest films for next season

To suggest, vote, and be advised of upcoming films please complete  
<https://www.rusthallcinema.club/contact.html>

Join us at [www.RusthallCinema.club/membership.html](http://www.RusthallCinema.club/membership.html)

Charity registration No. 1171282

# Welcome to Rusthall Community Cinema

Films we all choose, watch,  
then discuss together

Spring/Summer  
Season  
2021

