



COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

WARDEN'S REPORT

September 2021

The Victoria Grove TW Common

As the seasons swing round again, the signs of Autumn are becoming increasingly apparent. Seed heads on our orchids are reaching maturity, the rowan trees are in full berry, our heather areas are in full flower and our beech trees are alive with squirrels gorging on a bumper crop of nuts. It has been a good year for many plants, Common spotted orchids have been abundant and they are spreading out from their main sites. The Coralroot bittercress is doing well on Rusthall Common and the Harebells at the Bumps and Wellington Rocks are now showing nicely, there is also a splendid display of Lesser hawkbit through the grass at the Bumps.

Our ponds have kept their levels well this year and the grassland around them has been teeming with froglets over the last few weeks. It has been pleasing to see that our new ponds at the Marlpits and Bulls Hollow all seem to have been colonised by dragonflies, damselflies and diving

beetles, as well as our amphibians. Unfortunately, we have been experiencing problems at Brighton Lake, with discarded fishing tackle and line posing a serious threat to birds and animals, and quite a few reports of fish being taken from the pond. We have always turned a blind eye to local youngsters fishing there but in recent years there has been a lot more serious fishing of the pond, including people fishing at night. We will be putting up signage at the pond to try and promote more responsible behaviour and will continue to monitor the situation.

The steady occurrence of rain has meant that the grass is still growing and the growth extension on our trees has been exceptional. This has made the annual clearance of our paths and tracks a rather more challenging undertaking than usual. This is of course not helpful to our new contractors, who are still finding their feet in what is only their second year of carrying out this major task. Mick Dann, our previous contractor for this task had been doing it for over thirty years and I am still coming to realise just how valuable his intimate knowledge of the job was.

The first cut of some of the major paths with the collector flail has been carried out and it will return in late September to cut and clear the larger meadow areas. The hedging flail will also need to return in the coming weeks to give the verges and road edges a second cut.

We have been experiencing far greater problems with tree damage than normal this year. The repeated, unusually strong winds whilst the trees are in full leaf has brought down a number of large limbs, as well as smaller trees, particularly birches, across paths on both Commons. If, as seems likely, these types of weather patterns become more common in the coming years and with the greatly increased footfall on our paths, I can see that there is the potential for yet another severe strain on our already overstretched budget.

On the subject of stretched tree budgets, we are also going to have to carry out quite a lot of tree clearance along Rusthall Rd, where Ash dieback is wreaking havoc, especially between Bretland Rd the junction with Langton Rd., as well as along the Tarry Path. As I was walking Rusthall Rd with the contractor who will be carrying out this work, I noticed at several large Sycamore trees that had considerable amounts of deadwood within their crowns, I hope we are not seeing the start of yet another tree issue.

With very much appreciated assistance from the Friends, we have been able to renovate a large number of benches this year and we will be replacing the timber on some more well worn seats in the coming weeks, as well as putting in new benches at Bulls Hollow and Inner London Rd.

We have installed tree trunks at Bracken Cottage on Tunbridge Wells Common where there has been a great deal of erosion by large vehicles and we have put down more at St Paul's Church drive, where cars have increasingly been parking on the Common under the lime trees. We will also be creating a new ditch and bund at the St Paul's entrance to Happy Valley in the coming weeks to prevent any unauthorised vehicular access in the future.

We will be re-digging some of our main drainage ditches this Autumn, which should alleviate some of the problems we have experienced in recent years. I hope we can refurbish the whole drainage system over the next few years.

Our new litter picker is almost halfway through his first years contract and I am delighted that things are still proceeding smoothly and we now have an excellent service.

Gemma's volunteer group are doing a great job in clearing litter from the paths and the Commons are looking better than they have done for some time. I look forward to our conservation volunteers resuming operations in October, there is certainly plenty to be done. We will probably start as we have many times before by clearing scrub from the Wellington Rocks and removing sapling from the grassland between the Rocks and the Victoria Grove.

Steve Budden



Harebells Rusthall Common

NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

SEPTEMBER 2021 - WITH CLIVE EVANS

We are looking forward to welcoming members face to face at our

**AGM AT SUNNYSIDE HALL, RUSTHALL ON
WEDNESDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER
FROM 6.30PM.**

We will be providing wine and soft drinks on entry.

As you can see later in the newsletter we are providing an extensive programme for The Heritage week in early September, and it's great to see Wild Child back.

Much thanks must be given to Lynne Lane and Terry Coulthard whose hard work has made this possible.

We have recently funded the refurbishment of ten benches on The Commons (please see the article on bench dedication and purchase)

Lastly, we much thank David Wakefield for all his sterling work over many years who is stepping down from our Committee. David, has been Chairman and Treasurer, as well as having a year in Mayoral office for Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Clive Evans



Litter pick in Happy Valley ,Rusthall - VOLUNTEERS READY FOR ACTION!

The Friends Officers & Committee Membership 2021

Officers:

Chairman:	Clive Evans	Tel: 01892 518975
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
Lynne Lane	Tel: 01892 533493
Clive McAllister	Tel: 01892 532817
Peter Miall	Tel: 01892 517599
Joy Podbury	email. joypodbury@talktalk.net
Mark Howden	Tel: 01892 519320



HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2021 AND THE FRIENDS

This year the FoC has joined forces with the National Heritage Open Days Project to public and which we hope you, your family and friends will enjoy. All events are based on support, without which this project couldn't have happened. A note of thanks is

GUIDED WALK WITH THE COMMONS WARDEN,

Tunbridge Wells Common On Saturday 11th September

Meet at the car park, Fir Tree Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN4 8AH at 2pm
Maximum number: 25 for this tour.

A Friendly Guided Tour of Tunbridge Wells Common with Steve Budden, Warden of the Commons. Discover the rocks, the racecourse, the avenues, the ponds, hear about the latest discoveries and just maybe you will see a deer. All welcome. Children are welcome with their adults.

Steve has been the full time Warden for the Commons since 1992, when he was employed to implement the first 10-year Management Plan. He is the font of all Commons knowledge and along with his faithful dog Moofy, Steve is usually found walking the paths and tracks of the Commons. He is always happy to answer your questions and queries, especially if there is a compliment in there about the fantastic job he's doing!

There's nothing Steve doesn't know about the Commons, and he's always happy to show people around on his famous guided walks. Join Steve for one (or both) of his friendly guided warden walks, suitable for all ages and for those who can manage the Commons terrain. Wear suitable clothing for walking the Commons.



ARCHAEOLOGY RUSTHALL COMMON

Saturday 11th September

At: 10.30am

Full Archaeology Tour' – Meet at entrance to St Pauls Church, Rusthall

A guided tour of Rusthall Common highlighting a series of archaeological sites going back thousands of years. Many new to the historical record in our part of West Kent.

Guide and information provided by independent researcher Nigel Stapple of WKDArchaeology who has been working the sites on Rusthall Common for several years with his team of volunteers. Duration: 2-3 hours

Suitable for: Adults and young people accompanied by an adult.

Due to the rocky, winding, uneven, hilly and muddy terrain on these sites on the Commons unfortunately this tour is unsuitable for people with mobility needs.

Wear suitable clothing for clambering!



WILD CHILD! FOREST SCHOOL PLAY SESSIONS

Saturday 11th September.

Tunbridge Wells Common. Look for signage from the car park in Fir Tree Road.
Morning session: 10-12 Noon. Afternoon session 1-3pm

With a team of trained Forest School leaders, Kent High Weald Partnership will be leading our fantastic Wild Child! Forest School sessions on Tunbridge Wells Common. This is something children will love.

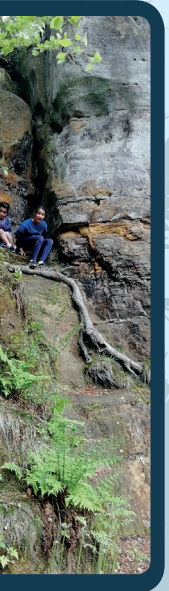
When we did this a couple of years ago and they were brilliant and very popular. Join in the fun in a woodland environment, where we have supervised hundreds of children fire lighting, whittling, finding insects and bugs, creating dens, hammocks, playing with mud kitchens, painting bark, printing leaves, making pendants and not forgetting cooking countless marshmallows! Our practice allows the children to see their environment as a sensory playground and within this playground they learn confidence, resilience and ways and means of communicating effectively with others. Many of them surprise themselves with their own capabilities, and have fun. Suitable for children accompanied by an adult.

Wear clothing for play in the woodland setting.



DS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

to provide a fab programme of 8 events on Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall Commons which are open to the public on the wonderful Commons and all are free of charge. We are grateful to the Friends for your generous support. This is also due to the tour leaders, guides and the FoC behind-the-scenes organisers and volunteers.



ARCHAEOLOGY RUSTHALL COMMON.

Sunday 12th September.

Meet at the sandpit by Toad Rock, Harmony Street 10.30am
'Mini Archaeology Tour' for families with younger children.
Meet at Toad Rock, by the 'sand pit' Harmony Street

A short, guided overview of selected archaeological sites on Rusthall Common. This tour is suitable for families with younger children. Discover sites going back thousands of years, before the 'olden days' and imagine what life was like for the people and animals living here!

Guide and information provided by independent researcher Nigel Stapple of WKDArchaeology who has been working the sites on Rusthall Common with his team of volunteers for several years.

Duration: 1-2 Hours
Suitable for families with younger children.

Due to the rocky, winding, uneven, hilly and muddy terrain this tour is unsuitable for mobility needs.

Guided Walk with the Commons Warden, Rusthall Common

Sunday 12th September

Meet at St Pauls Church, Langton Rd.
Time: 2pm for approximately 90 minutes.
Maximum number: 25 for this tour.

A Friendly Guided Tour of Rusthall Common with Steve Budden, Warden of the Commons. Discover Toad Rock, Bulls Hollow, Happy Valley and the 105 Steps, the ponds, hear about the latest discoveries and just maybe you will see a deer.

All welcome. Children are welcome with their adults. Steve has been the full time Warden for the Commons since 1992, when he was employed to implement the first 10-year Management Plan. He is the font of all Commons knowledge and along with his faithful dog Moofy, Steve is usually found walking the paths and tracks of the Commons.

He is always happy to answer your questions and queries, especially if there is a compliment in there about the fantastic job he's doing! There's nothing Steve doesn't know about the Commons, and he's always happy to show people around on his famous guided walks. Join Steve for one (or both) of his friendly guided warden walks, suitable for all ages and for those who can manage the Commons terrain.

Wear suitable clothing for the weather and walking the Commons.

WILD CHILD! FOREST SCHOOL PLAY SESSIONS

Sunday 12th September

Rusthall Common. Look for the signage from Common View.
Morning Session 10-12 noon and the afternoon session 1-3pm.

With a team of trained Forest School leaders, Kent High Weald Partnership will be leading our fantastic Wild Child! Forest School sessions on Rusthall Common. Join in the fun in a woodland environment, where we have supervised hundreds of children fire lighting, whittling, finding insects and bugs, creating dens, hammocks, playing with mud kitchens, painting bark, printing leaves, making pendants and not forgetting cooking countless marshmallows! Our practice allows the children to see their environment as a sensory playground and within this playground they learn confidence, resilience and ways and means of communicating effectively with others. Many of them surprise themselves with their own capabilities, and have fun.

Booking: not needed
Suitable for children accompanied by an adult.
Wear: clothing for play in the woodland setting.

cg NEWS!

Welcome to

THE FRIENDS AGM

Wednesday 22nd September

From 6.30pm

At Sunnyside Hall, Rusthall.

Rusthall Road, TN4 8RA

Wine and soft drinks on entry

LOCATION, PLEASE SEE MAP BELOW.

SUNNYSIDE HALL, RUSTHALL.



COMMEMORATIVE BENCHES ON TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND RUSTHALL COMMONS

To celebrate a special occasion or milestone, to remember a much-loved family member or friend or simply because you love the Commons, and it would make you smile.

Our benches have distinctive hawthorn branch shaped iron supports with solid-inch oak planks cut from local sources for the seat and back. The style was copied from an old Victorian bench found hidden in the undergrowth after the hurricane of 1987, that hit the Commons.

WE OFFER TWO PRICES FOR OUR BENCHES:

Refurbished benches - £720 + plaque*

Many of our benches are currently unadopted and we are therefore offering the opportunity for an existing bench to be refurbished and rededicated in a favourite spot. We will refurbish the bench two further times during a ten-year agreement.

New benches - £1010 + plaque*

A new bench to be located in a new location on the Commons. We will refurbish the bench two further times during a ten-year agreement.

To discuss a commemorative bench further please contact us at info@twcommons.org



* 2021 prices reviewed annually due to material costs.

RARE SUMMER FLOWERS

The Commons have been known for their scarce and rare flowers since Georgian times, when visitors were encouraged to enhance their holiday experience by studying the natural as well as the built environment of the area. Noted botanist Thomas Furry Forster published the first list of the local flora as an appendix to Jasper Sprange's tourist guide in 1801.

The most well-known floral specialities of the Commons are probably the spring-flowering ones like Coral-root, subject of an annual count. But we have some important summer flowers too. Hiding in plain sight in the open grassland near Wellington Rocks is a small patch of the delicate Harebell, with brilliant sky-blue flowers on a slender stem. Richard Deakin, in his 1871 flora of Tunbridge Wells, says 'This elegant little flower is a general favourite, and the theme of many a poet's song'.

Harebell belongs to a group known to gardeners as Campanulas, which is their generic name derived from the Latin for a 'little bell'. Although many Campanulas can be seen growing wild on old walls in Tunbridge Wells, these are long-established garden escapes (Trailing Bellflower and Adria Bellflower), and Harebell is the only native species in our area.



Harebell (Rusthall Common)



Imperforate St. John's wort

A leading Kent botanist recently discovered Imperforate St John's Wort, which is supposed to be extinct in the county, on Tunbridge Wells Common. St John's Worts are a large group of flowers named after John the Baptist and traditionally gathered around his feast day in June for medicinal and magical purposes. They comprise the genus *Hypericum* and all have fairly similar looking yellow flowers which range in size from the tiny Trailing St John's Wort to the flamboyant garden shrub Rose of Sharon.



Perforate St. John's Wort



Harebell (TW Common)

The commonest species is Perforate St John's Wort which has transparent glands on the leaves. If you hold a leaf up to the light, it looks as if it is perforated by lots of minute holes. There are other species which share this feature, but Imperforate St John's Wort notably does not, although superficially it looks much the same, a relatively tall plant about the same height as ragwort. It also has stems that are square in cross-section (four ridges), whereas those of Perforate have just two ridges. Both features have to match, though, because there is also Square-stalked St John's Wort with square stem and 'perforations'!

Ian Beavis

It has been noted recently that the Commons are now the only place in Kent where Harebell grows off the Chalk which is its prime habitat. As well as the population on Tunbridge Wells Common, Harebell also grows in grassland on Rusthall Common. The plants in Rusthall are notably taller than the ones in Tunbridge Wells, presumably because of the thin sandy soil near Wellington Rocks.