



# COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

## WARDEN'S REPORT

January 2022

*Toad Rock after clearance of brambles and litter.*

We have finally come to the end of our annual clearance of all the tracks, paths, glades and meadows across the two Commons, although having said that, there are bound to be a few bits we have missed which will be picked up in the next few weeks. The weather was kind to us with fairly dry conditions right in to the middle of December, so there were no real problems for the machines accessing the site. This meant that we were able to achieve a good standard of finish, so the Commons are currently looking good if I say so myself. As many of you will already know, I will be retiring in June, so this is the last time I will be carrying out this major task, probably the biggest operation of our year, so it is pleasing to be able to finish on a high; I am especially pleased with Happy Valley where so much work has been done over the past few years.

Autumn is also the time when our attention turns to managing our trees and woodland and this year we have been once again been concentrating on Ash trees adjacent to the roads on Rusthall Common. A large number of trees badly affected by Chalera fraxinea, the Ash die-back disease, have been removed or reduced alongside Rusthall Rd, Coach Rd and Langton Rd. Fortunately, there are far fewer Ash trees on Tunbridge Wells Common, so although there will inevitably be more issues with affected trees in the future, we have now hopefully have a few years where we can focus more effort on other necessary tree work.

No. 84  
JANUARY 2022

*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'.*



Our volunteers have been busy again, this year we have been combining our conservation volunteer group and Gemma's litter group in joint tasks. We started with the big Wellington Rocks clean up, removing the scrub and gorse that has been invading the site, as well as a thorough clean-up of the gullies in the rocks and the sandy area around them. The following month we thinned the vegetation in Cabbage Stalk Pond and cut back scrub and hazel to prevent excessive shading of the nearby orchid site. Then in January the two groups went to Denny Bottom to clear gorse, bramble and scrub from in front of the Toad Rock, whilst the litter group cleared rubbish from there and Bulls Hollow. Both Wellington Rocks and The Toad area have been hugely improved by these efforts and a huge thank must go to all involved. Our work parties only last a couple of hours but it is surprising what can be achieved in that time!

Over the next few months, we will be attending to a number of relatively minor but still important tasks such as re-digging the drainage ditches along the Racecourse, removing graffiti from bins and signs, installing signage at Brighton Lake and installing some new commemorative benches. We will also be carrying further work funded by the Friends and the Freehold Tenants group. The two areas at Fir Tree car park and Wellington rocks which were cleared of holly scrub last year will have a lot of the resulting mulch scraped off, along with soil and roots to promote re-growth of the original ecosystem that was there before the scrub took over.

The scrapings will be used to create refuges for reptile, amphibians and small mammals, as well as providing excellent habitat for invertebrates. There are already encouraging signs that dormant seed there remains viable, just needing the sunlight to come back. We will also be clearing the rest of the remains of the old gorse hedge that used to be a feature below the Wellington Rocks. Again, early indications are that this should come back strongly from the old root systems, it would be lovely to have it back again.

More holly will be cleared adjacent to Hungershall Park to widen the new paths and create further links through to the meadow adjacent to the Racecourse and a major clearance of scrub and long grass will be carried out on the section of Tunbridge Wells Common between Mt Ephraim and London Rd to re-expose some of the rock outcrops on the steep slope that runs from Gibraltar Cottage to St Helena.

On Rusthall Common, the Friends will be funding improvements to the path from the new steps at the Marlpits, as well as paying for a gate to be put into the railings around the Toad to allow access to clear vegetation. The Friends have also offered to fund the fabrication of a new steel barrier at Rusthall Cricket Pitch to try and prevent further problems with traveller incursions. This will be installed along with tree trunks that are to be dug in around the perimeter of the pitch, which are being funded by Rusthall Parish Council.

Steve Budden



*Volunteers at Toad Rock.*



# NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

JANUARY 2022 - WITH CLIVE EVANS

A happy and healthy New Year to you all.

Let's hope that 2022 will be a much better year so we can meet up for our usual social gatherings and events – a Wild Child event in April and a Volunteers thank you Party in June to name a couple.

Our membership has grown rapidly over the last year (almost 90 new memberships). Thanks must be given to the hard work of Joy Podbury and Chris Gurr; with great information also on our joint website with the Commons Conservators: [twcommons.org](http://twcommons.org). We now have 530 memberships.

Thanks must also be given to our work parties and litter pickers, their efforts can be seen all over the Commons. Thanks to Gemma Stapeley for her organising skills, alongside our Warden Steve Budden who is retiring in June, our May issue will include a special feature.

We Have been asked to fund 3 main projects for 2022.

1. A new path to the Marlpit ponds.
2. A locked gate to be put in the railings surrounding The Toad Rock so we can clean and clear this area around the rock.
3. A more secure barrier to stop encroachment onto the Rusthall Cricket Club pitch.

Thanks must also be given to Sally Balcon for her help and assistance on our Committee over many years. Sally is stepping down, and we wish her all the very best. And finally, 2021 marked 30 years of The Friends 1991-2021. The late Patrick Shovelton was the guiding light behind it's foundation. Due to Covid any plans for celebrating this event were postponed (eg. the Barn Dance). Hopefully in 2022 we will be able to hold some events to celebrate our 30 years.

Best wishes, Clive Evans.



*Paddy Evan's commemorative new bench at Bulls Hollow.*

## The Friends Officers & Committee Membership 2022

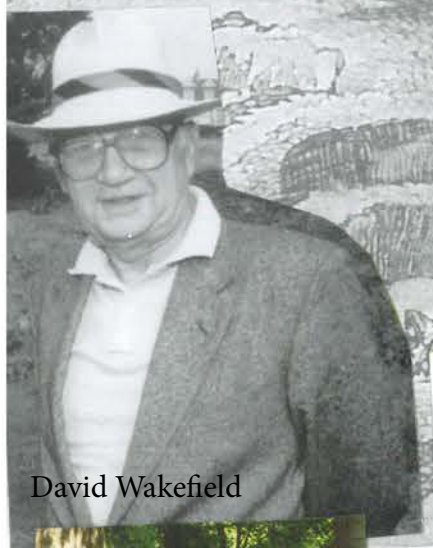
Officers:			Committee:	
Chairman:	Clive Evans	Tel: 01892 518975	Dr Ian Beavis	Tel: 01892 523007
Treasurer:	Donald Clarke	Tel: 01892 615306	Lynne Lane	Tel: 01892 533493
Mem. Secretary:	Chris Gurr	Tel: 01892 542408	Clive McAllister	Tel: 01892 532817
Secretary:	Terry Coulthard	Tel: 01892 548785	Peter Miall	Tel: 01892 517599
			Joy Podbury	email. <a href="mailto:joypodbury@talktalk.net">joypodbury@talktalk.net</a>





# 1991-2021

## 30 YEARS OF THE FRIENDS



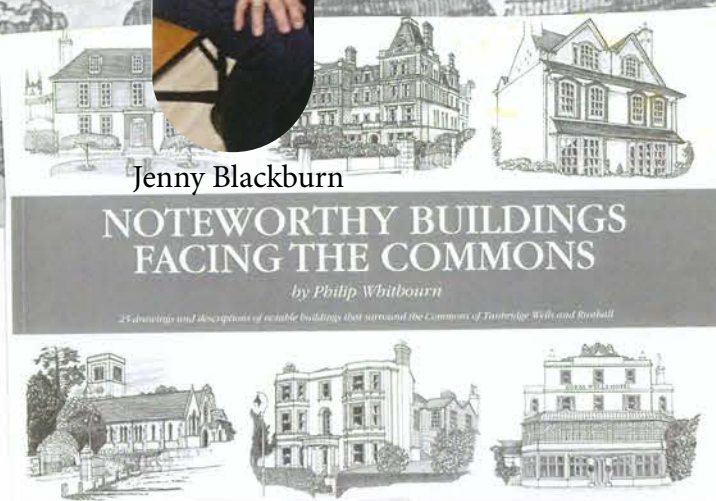
David Wakefield



Jenny Blackburn



John Barber



### DO YOU CARE ABOUT THE COMMON?

If so, come to a Public Meeting to set up The Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons.

**Date:** Friday, 30th August 1991  
**Time:** 8.p.m.  
**Place:** Meeting Room, Monson House,  
 Monson Road

Our object is to help restore the Commons to their former glories.

If you cannot come but would be interested in joining please contact:-

**Patrick Shovelton**



Steve Budden

Patrick Shovelton



# The Friends of Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall Commons



*Something you  
can do now -  
for the future*



Clive Evans



Gemma Stapeley



## DIVERSIONS

*on the*  
**COMMON**

1797-1997





# Wild Child! Free Forest School Play Sessions Are Back

## Easter School Holidays 5th and 6th April 2022

With our team of trained Forest School leaders, Kent High Weald Partnership will be leading our fantastic Wild Child! Forest School sessions again on Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons. This is something the children and adults love and its free!

This will be our third programme of WildChild! sessions and it would be fair to say that The Friends is getting a lot of positive feedback about these sessions. We are famous!

This is your family and friends' chance to join in the fun in a beautiful 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 they have fun!

The Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons is so happy to invite you and yours to come along to any of the 4 half day Forest School Sessions on the beautiful Commons. All free!

No booking: just turn up and yes you are welcome to come to more than one session.

**When: Tuesday 5th April:**

**Where Rusthall Common by the Marlpit pond area, look for signage from Common View**

Session 1 Time 10 to 12 noon

Session 2 Time 1pm to 3pm

Cost: Free for all

Booking: No, just turn up

Suitable for: children accompanied by an adult.

Wear: clothing for play in the woodland setting.

**When: Wednesday 6th April**

**Where: Tunbridge Wells Common. Look for signage from the car park in Fir Tree Road, TN4 8AH**

Session 1 Time: 10am to 12 noon

Session 2 Time: 1pm to 3pm

Cost: Free for all

Booking: no, just turn up

Suitable for: children accompanied by an adult.

Wear: clothing for play in the woodland setting,

Volunteer?



We always need volunteers to help unload the KHWP vans at 8.30/9am for the Rusthall session, help set up the sites, make sure it's free of litter, and load them up again at 3.30pm. We also need help with the drinks table, the marshmallow prep, guiding people to the site as well as help at the play areas assisting the practitioners

Please contact me for more details:  
[Lynne Lane cajunbarn@outlook.com](mailto:Lynne Lane cajunbarn@outlook.com)





# The Volunteers Big Thank You Lunch is back!

.....Save the date: Saturday 11th June, noon to 2pm, The Forum..TW Common.....,

The Friends of Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall Commons committee warmly invites you to join us for our “Volunteers Big Thank You Lunch Event “

at The Forum, Tunbridge Wells Common on Saturday 11th June, Noon to 2 pm

As well as a time to show our appreciation, the volunteers ‘big thank you’ event is an informal get together and a chance to meet one another. It’s an important event in our calendar as we celebrate the work of the children and adults who come out whenever they can to do their bit.

A volunteer is everyone who helps preserve the common in any way and you don’t need to be a member of an organised work party to be a volunteer.

Its informal and very family friendly and the garden area will be open to us.

We will provide a complimentary (free!) buffet lunch with deserts to follow and tea and coffee.

The Forum has a full pay bar which will be open for other beverages.

We are expecting The Mayor to attend to present the certificates of appreciation to all volunteers and The Mayor will make a special presentation for children.

The Friends of the Commons is going from strength to strength due to volunteers, thank you

It will help catering if you could let me know if you think you can come, please contact me on .

Thankyou

Lynne Lane

Foc committee



Young volunteers with cetificates presented to them by the mayor Chris Woodward



Happy Valley



Litter Pick at Wellington rocks area. (Please note Mark Howdens extra long pole for clearing between rocks!)



# All Abilities Path: An Update

Fundraising for the All Abilities Path has seen a couple of significant movements. You may remember that The Friends are seeking to create a 465m long by 2m wide, wheelchair and buggy friendly, usable all year round, path on Rusthall Common. It will go from St Paul's Church, taking in the marvellous views along the top of Happy Valley, through to the Beacon and Tea Garden Lane.

First the bad news. A little while back it looked like we had the creation of the path fully funded through the generosity of many of you and a couple of other charitable bodies and individuals making substantial contributions. In this way we had already raised £18,000. We had every expectation that the National Lottery, from the communications that we had had with it, were going to give us the £75,000 for which we had applied. We thought that we were fully funded to meet the £89,000 cost for the path. But then we heard from the National Lottery again and apparently, giving money to Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons, however, good our cause, now does not fit with the government's "levelling up" agenda. The National Lottery have told us that our bid for money for the path can no longer receive its support.

But there is some good news! Rusthall Parish Council have given the Friends £10,000 towards the cost!! The only caveat is that we must use it to build the path within the next 3 years. We cannot tell you how thrilled and grateful we are for this wonderful support. The Council clearly sees that the path will be used extensively by, and provide significant well-being benefits for, the community that it represents. So now we have £28,000 and some £61,000 to go. We say "some" because the likelihood is that we can expect a price increase on the original £89,000 price. We also want to raise money for an extra bench or two, including a "happy to chat" bench (which can help to combat loneliness and encourage community interaction), and possibly an extra litter bin.

We would very much like to have the funds in place so we can build the path next year once winter is over. Fortunately we hadn't felt the need to approach many organisations for funds: quite simply we didn't think it was going to be necessary. So now we will be contacting businesses, organisations and individuals for support. If you know of any business, body or person who might share the values behind what we are seeking to do with this path, please speak with them or let us know so that we can contact them. If you are able to give personally, that would be great too: please contribute directly as follows:

Payee: The Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons

Sort Code: 55-70-13

Account Number: 01028774

Payment Reference: Path

If you are eligible for gift aid, and so can increase your donation by 25%, please email [chris.gurr@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:chris.gurr@yahoo.co.uk) or contact him on 01892 542408. If you want to help us fund raise please contact [johnspbarber@gmail.com](mailto:johnspbarber@gmail.com) or contact John on 07990 973 041.

Don't the Commons look amazing at the moment! If through creating this path we can get more people to enjoy the special places on them, won't that be something special. Thank you.

Proposed route of all abilities path in Happy Valley, Rusthall







### Happy Valley All-Abilities Footpath

The Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons have an exciting plan to improve the path at Happy Valley to make it suitable for pushchair and wheelchair users and those with all types of mobility difficulties. It will run from St Paul's Church to Tea Garden Lane along the route of the existing path. This will be of enormous benefit to the residents of Rusthall, opening up this picturesque walk to everyone.

Following a presentation to the Full Council in October Rusthall Parish Council have pledged to support the scheme and were pleased to present the Friends with a giant cheque for £10,000 towards the cost.

Pictured are **Cllr Liz Ellicott** (Chair), **Cllr Barry Edwards** (Vice-Chair) and **Cllr Doug Smith** along with representatives of The Friends – **John Barber**, **Terry Coulthard**, **Lynne Lane** and **Kate Sander**.

The Friends are still looking for sponsors and donations to raise the rest of the funds.

**More information about the path can be found at [www.twcommons.org](http://www.twcommons.org) in John Barber's blog post**





# COMMON GROUND NEWSLETTERS

Recently, the Committee discussed how we could make changes to be more environmentally friendly. One of our changes is try and reduce the number of printed newsletters we send out.

## 1. THE ENVIRONMENT.

An electronic newsletter has a much smaller carbon footprint and cuts down the use of paper and printing dyes.

Newsletters which our posted require an envelope and label, which again has an environmental impact.

## 2. THE COST.

About 120 of our newsletters are posted to members (30 sent already via email, and the rest are hand delivered by volunteers). As the price of postage has dramatically increased over the past few years, this cost takes away a large portion of the £5 or £10 annual membership fees.

## 3. THE TIME.

Collating, printing labels, putting newsletters in envelopes and hand delivering are all time-consuming tasks that our volunteers have to complete.

## YOUR CHOICE.

If you are still happy to receive a printed copy of the newsletter you don't need to do anything.

If you wish to receive an electronic copy of our newsletter, simply reply by email and let Chris Gurr, The Membership Secretary, know.

Chris.gurr@yahoo.co.uk (All lower case).

Newsletters are also posted on our joint Website with The Commons Conservators.

Twcommons.org (All lower case).

Please get in touch with me if you have any questions.

Kind regards, Chris Gurr.





# The 2021 insect season – A retrospective

The Commons are always my place to go to spot the first spring insects. The dates can vary by three or four weeks, as insects respond to the actual conditions rather than any fixed internal clock. There are usually two phases, the first out being certain solitary bees – usually Clark's Mining Bee emerging from a nest site in the boundary ditch by the Spa Hotel. In 2021 they came out on 21 February, although the all-time record is 8 February. Following later are hibernating butterflies like the Brimstone, Peacock and Comma. I look for these along the woodland fringe either side of and behind Brighton Lake, where they hibernate in dense undergrowth and spend time fluttering around this sheltered south-facing area in warm sunshine before dispersing. Usually three to five species appear simultaneously, on this occasion quite late – on 29 March (the record is 5 March).

Also in late March the Early Colletes mining bee – a new arrival which I've written about previously – appeared for its second year nesting near Toad Rock and seemed to be flourishing in its new home. By the first week of April, a wide range of spring-flying solitary bees were active. On 4 April, there was a mixed swarm of males of twelve species performing their mate-searching patrol flight along the hedge bounding the Spa Hotel grounds, and drawing the attention of several corresponding females. These included three of our nationally scarce species – Large Gorse, Trimmer's, and Grey-gastered Mining Bee. Through April similar courtship aggregations were in evidence around the gorse bushes near Wellington Road, including the beautiful black and white Ashy Mining Bee and its associated 'cuckoo' species Lathbury's Nomad.

In May males of another scarce bee, Hawksbeard Mining Bee, were active in the Mount Edgumbe area, and in early June the Small Yellow Underwing, a pretty little day-flying moth, rarely seen locally, turned up in the meadow near Rusthall Church. On 13 June it was good to find that the Small Heath, a meadow butterfly nothing like as common as it once was, was maintaining its presence in the grassland in front of Wellington Rocks, while at the nearby heather patch Britain's largest dragonfly, the Golden-ringed, made one of its occasional appearances on the Commons.

There were two new species for the Commons recorded on 9 July – the hoverfly *Chrysotoxum verralii* with an ornate yellow and black pattern; and the Blunthorn Nomad, a cuckoo bee associated with three mining bees in the small genus *Melitta*. Two *Melitta* species occur on the Commons, one foraging from white clover and one from harebells. August saw a stray Silver-washed Fritillary along Mount Ephraim, and in September the latest mining bee to emerge, the Ivy Bee, was back at its now regular nest site in the sand-pit by Wellington Rocks. The season closed with winter-active Buff-tailed Bumblebees and hoverflies in late November.

Ian Beavis



Small Heath Butterfly

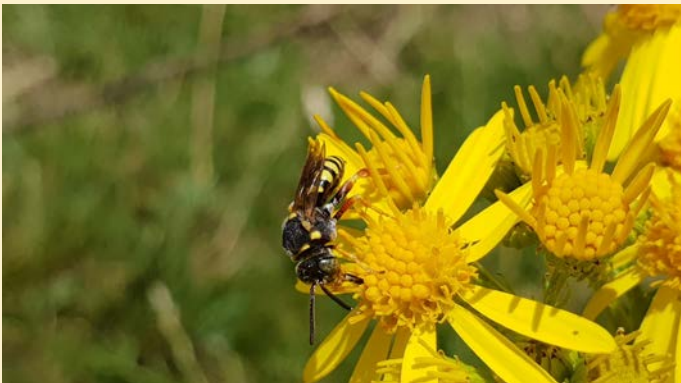




Ashy Mining Bee



Grey-Gastered Mining Bee



Bluthorn Nomad



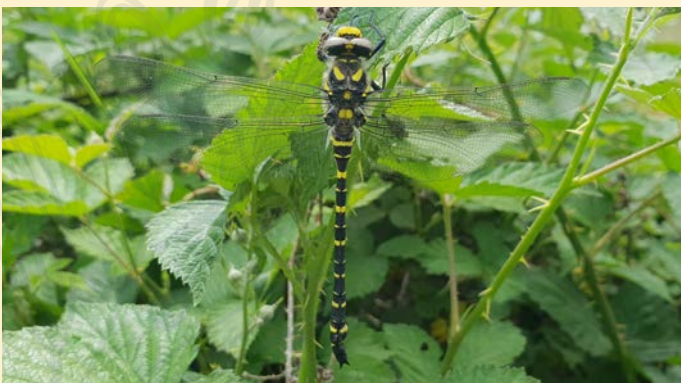
Hawksbeard Mining Bee



Clark's Mining Bee



Peacock Butterfly



Golden-Ringed Dragonfly



Small Yellow Underwing