



COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

WARDEN'S REPORT

April 2022



Steve Budden, our Warden of The Commons for 30 years. Thanks a million Steve.

We are once again experiencing a very dry Spring, with our ponds rapidly evaporating in the bright sunshine and strong North Easterly winds. We are still in peak fire risk season for lowland heath sites, so it is a bit scary to be walking through our woodlands and finding them crispy underfoot. The danger should ease over the coming weeks as new growth comes through. Having said all that though, the Commons look wonderful as the major trees all come into leaf. The horse chestnuts are always the first into leaf and they will be moving into flower in the next few weeks. The chestnuts on Church Rd and in particular near the Forum, are a magnificent sight when they are in full bloom.

We have started grass cutting this week and the combination of long grass, very dry soil and lots of molehills, have made it a difficult start. Hopefully, we will get some meaningful rain soon and another couple of

cuts will get things under control and it will start to look a bit better.

Thanks to the numerous severe storms during the last work period, we are still carrying out work on dangerous and damaged trees across the Commons. From Arwen to Eunice, it has been a particularly destructive year, with trees down blocking many paths. Most of the damage was to Birch trees but a number of semi-mature sycamores were lost, as well as some more ash trees on Rusthall Common. By far the largest and most dramatic loss was the big, triple stemmed oak that came down by Brighton Lake, partially blocking the A26; fortunately, no injury or damage was caused. It was a shame to lose such a major tree and it took quite a while to get it all cleared away. On the up-side, at least we now have a good supply of tree trunks to use when areas of verge need protection.

As most of you are probably aware, I will be retiring at the end of June after thirty years of looking after the Common, so this will be the last time I write for this magazine; at least in the capacity of Warden. My successor, Dan Colborne, has now been appointed and will be starting at the beginning of June to have a month's handover. Dan it seems, will not be the Commons Warden, he will be the Common's Ranger; I am not quite sure of the reason for the change. What it does seem to suggest though, is that I will remain the Warden, rather than just a Warden, which I have to admit is a pleasing conceit to me!

According to the old proverb, it is an ill wind that blows no good and it cannot be denied that the Great Storm of 1987 blew me a great deal of good personally. The effects of the storm lead directly to Patrick Shovelton forming the Friends to act as a pressure group to urge the Conservators to use the storm as the impetus to reconsider the way the Commons were managed. This of course, lead to the commissioning of the Kent Wildlife Trust to fully survey the Commons and draw up the Management Plan that was adopted by the Conservators in 1992, when I was appointed Warden to implement it. The Friends of course have gone on to work closely with the Conservators and are now very much part of the establishment. However, I hope they never lose sight of their origin and are always there to take an independent view and act as an extra layer of security for the Commons future. It is also my most sincere hope that the Friends will eventually succeed in their aim to purchase the Commons for the people of Tunbridge Wells; that surely must be the right thing for the future.

I have loved every minute of the last thirty years; it has been a privilege as well as a pleasure to look after such an important part of the Town. I have met so many lovely people and many of them are now friends, as well as Friends. I have also been incredibly lucky with the colleagues I have worked with, starting with dear Sylvia Luckhurst who some of you will remember, then thirteen very happy years working alongside Julia Woodgate and then the last few years with the wonderful and indefatigable Gemma. I feel easier leaving with her at the helm and I know she will be a great support to Dan, who is going to have his work cut out in his first few years.

I have very mixed feelings about my forthcoming retirement, I have had a wonderful time and will miss so many things about the Commons and the people I meet there but I think is it the right time. The Commons will face many challenges in the coming years, increased usage since Covid, budgetary restraints and as we are currently seeing, climate change to name but a few; a good time for a new pair of eyes, a new vision and younger legs to take over! I hope Dan has as good a time as I have, apparently when he was the Town Ranger in Crowborough, he was known as Chatty Dan, which I think bodes well for him on the Common, I wish him all the best for the future. I will be keeping an eye on things from afar and will no doubt be back to visit occasionally, ideally our visits will be timed to enable us to be at a Strawberry Tea or a Friends Lunch. Thank you for all your support and kindness, I hope to catch up with many of you before I leave at the end of June.



Happy Valley, Rusthall (John Barbers bench), where will Steve's bench be located?

NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

APRIL 2022 - WITH CLIVE EVANS

The Commons are looking pristine due to the hard work of the litter pickers and our contractor who does not miss a trick when it comes to litter or illegal dumping.

The work on the new path to the marlpit, funded by The Friends, will be starting soon.

Thanks to the hard work of Joy and Chris, a new up to date website will be going live soon.

We are also looking into setting up a legacy fund for members who may wish to leave a sum of money for future projects on The Commons.

They say you should always leave the best to last. As you are well aware Steve Budden our wonderful Warden retires at the end of June. His contribution over 30 years has been enormous. You have all been very generous with your contributions for a leaving gift.

Steve would like a bench, in a location of his choice. We will have a chance to say farewell and thank you to Steve at our Summer Tea on Wed 1st June at The Spa Hotel (details in this issue).

I hope to see many of you at the Tea, and also all volunteers at The Thank You event at The Forum on Saturday 11th June (details also in this issue).

Best Wishes
Clive Evans, Chairman



Jane and Ivy with Sarah and Basil on Abe's new bench.

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. joypodbury@talktalk.net

STEVE BUDDEN : 30 YEARS AS WARDEN OF THE COMMONS

The Committee and all the members of The Friends of The Commons wish to thank Steve for his wonderful 30 years of service as Warden.

He became Warden in 1992 after the great storm of 1987 destroyed so many trees and pathways. The land was then owned by Tunbridge Wells Council. It is now owned by Targetfollow, a private property Company, which also owns part of The Pantiles.

We must also thank our many members who very generously donated to Steve's Retirement collection.

Steve is very happy to have a bench placed on The Commons, in a place of his choice, with a dedication to his wonderful service. And with a possible move to the Wye Valley on the cards, excess collection money may well go for new fishing tackle, and towards a holiday for Steve and his partner Penny.

The Commons has certainly flourished under Steve's Wardenship, and he has always been available for assisting work parties and answering questions about The Commons.

Steve and Penny will be coming to our Summer Tea Party at The Spa on Wednesday June 1st 2pm til 5pm. We will be presenting Steve with a gift on the day, so if you would also like to thank him in person please fill out the form enclosed in this issue. Steve will also be coming along to our Volunteers Thank You event at The Forum on Saturday 11th June midday til 2pm (see invitation in this issue).

We will certainly miss you Steve, please attempt to hand over most of your knowledge to the new Ranger Dan in the month of June.
Best wishes for a happy and healthy retirement.

Steve's Gallery with assistant warden Moofy



With the Commons Conservators and Greg Clark MP



Steve with Star



Steve and Nigel Stapple at Bulls Hollow during clearance.



Bulls Hollow looking splendid now.

WildChild! Forest School inspired play sessions on the Commons

This year marks the Friends of the Commons fourth year of WildChild! And our Easter '22 sessions were a huge success

Over the past four years we have welcomed over 2000 children and their families to the commons, many for the first time and it would be fair to say that everyone has loved it.

These sessions are incredibly popular with children and families as they offer a chance for children to have fun, play, learn new skills outdoors and enjoy the wonders of nature at the same time. There's nothing like a real parachute slung up in the trees with a campfire below; marshmallow toasting with lots of different play areas close by.

The marshmallow toasting is carefully supervised but the other activities are gently guided: children move freely between play areas and activities, join in as they choose, "I love it here, no-ones tells me what to do!" In-between activities children explore the commons and come back to try something new: those hammocks have to be put up by someone and the children find a way.

Here are some of the activities on offer:

Fire lighting, den building, nature crafts, Hapa Zome: the ancient art of leaf and flower bashing to create prints! outdoor cooking, whittling, hammock play, mud play, marshmallow toasting

This all comes together with some great team work by the Friends, lots of planning, sending publicity to the borough's schools and few close by, social media and more. The Friends fund raise and commission Kent High Weald Partnership's amazing outdoor learning team of Forest School practitioners who provide the expertise and all the equipment, insurances and trained volunteers.

This year we are particularly grateful to Rusthall Parish Council which made a generous grant of £800 to support the project.

The sessions are free to all.

Lynne Lane and the FoC Committee



WildChild! Forest School Gallery





THE FRIENDS OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND RUSTHALL COMMONS
**INVITE YOU TO THE VOLUNTEERS
BIG THANK YOU LUNCH**

PLEASE JOIN US AT THIS INFORMAL THANK YOU EVENT FOR ALL PAST AND
PRESENT VOLUNTEERS, ALL WELCOME WITH APPRECIATION CERTIFICATES
FOR THE CHILDREN VOLUNTEERS

DATE: SATURDAY 11TH JUNE

TIME: NOON -2PM

**LOCATION: THE FORUM, THE COMMON, LONDON RD,
TUNBRIDGE WELLS, TN4 8YU.**

As a token of our appreciation for your volunteering the FoC is pleased to invite you to this informal lunch event. What to expect: this is an informal event with a complimentary buffet lunch for all volunteers and their guest or parents! The Mayor will attend and present children and young people with their Certificate of Appreciation. On his retirement we will be saying a huge thankyou and making our presentation to Steve Budden our commons Warden of 30 years.

For catering purposes **Please RSVP to Lynne: 01892 533493 or**
cajunbarn@outlook.com or Chris 07759703489 chris.gurr@yahoo.co.uk

On behalf of The Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons



Litter pick volunteers



Rusthall spring site volunteers

COMMON GROUND NEWS

ALLING ALL MEMBERS AND FRIENDS.
JOB VACANCY ON OUR COMMITTEE.

SECRETARY:

THIS POST CONSISTS OF TAKING THE MINUTES AT COMMITTEE MEETINGS, WHICH ARE HELD 4 TIMES A YEAR, AND AT THE AGM.
BOOKING THE COMMITTEE ROOM (usually at The Spa Hotel).
DISTRIBUTING THE MINUTES TO THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS BY EMAIL, (for those on the internet).
DISTRIBUTING AN AGENDA FOR MEETINGS. AND CIRCULATING VARIOUS INFORMATION AS AND WHEN REQUESTED.

PLEASE CONTACT OUR CHAIRMAN CLIVE EVANS IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN THIS ROLE.
CLIVE EVANS EMAIL evans_paddy@hotmail.com or 01892 518975

ALSO, JOY PODBURY HAS BEEN WORKING ON A NEW UP TO DATE AND EASY TO USE WEBSITE FOR The Friends of The Commons, friendsofthecommons.co.uk
this should be up and running in a couple of weeks time.



Litter Picking - Toad Rock

Habitat creation for solitary bees

You may have noticed there is a new sandy 'scrape' on a slope close to the western side of Wellington Rocks. This has been created to provide additional nesting habitat for solitary bees, supplementing the sand pit to the south of the Rocks, and the open ground fringing the Rocks themselves.

As an ancient heathland landscape, the Commons are rich in their diversity of solitary bees, providing a home for many nationally scarce and rare species, along with others that are regionally uncommon. Unlike some insects – such as the rarer bumblebees – solitary bees do not require large areas of suitable habitat to support a viable population. They can persist indefinitely in quite small pockets of habitat if these continue to supply their needs. These needs comprise flowers for feeding and for the females to gather a food store for their offspring (many specialise in just one or a few types of flowers); places for the males and females to gather and pair off (often a sunny woodland edge); and places to dig their nest burrows.

Most of the more important solitary bees on the Commons belong to one or other of the several groups of mining bees, where the females excavate a burrow and stock compartments at the bottom with a mixture of nectar and pollen, on which they lay their eggs. Unlike honeybees and bumblebees, there is no ongoing parental care. Female bees don't want to have to cut through grass roots and other obstacles, so they focus their attention on bare ground. Those open sandy areas on the Commons are ideal and attract a lot of attention from a sequence of bee species between early spring and mid-autumn.

Provided conditions do not change, mining bees remain very faithful to their nest sites. Males, which emerge ahead of the females, often stay to patrol the nest site as they wait for the females to come out. And, after pairing, the females will commonly nest in the same area from which they themselves have emerged. The old sand pit near Wellington Rocks is a particularly popular site, and the bees are completely oblivious to disturbance from children and dogs playing. In fact that disturbance is beneficial, because without it the pit would eventually grass over.

The sand pit is a focal point for the uncommon Large and Small Shaggy Bee, and these will hopefully make use of the new scrape too. They fly from June to August, the Small species emerging first, and they feed and forage from the dandelion-like flowers of Cat's-ear which grows abundantly in the grassland nearby. The dark furry males often sleep curled up in the flowers during dull weather, and this can be a good way of spotting them. The area around Wellington Rocks is the only spot on the Commons where these two species can be seen, and probably the only site in the High Weald apart from Calverley Park.

Ian Beavis





Cats-ear at Wellington Rocks



Ivy /bee mating assembly at sand pit



Large Shaggy Bee female



Sand Pit



Small Shaggy Bee Male