



COMMON GROUND

Registered Charity No. 1013975

THE RANGER'S REPORT

June 2023

Poppies along London Road

What an amazingly busy spring it has been for the commons! Lots of lush growth and masses of wildflowers to be seen. Worryingly, we are not seeing as many insects as we would hope to see at this time of year. We must all do what we can to help our wildlife and you may have noticed that we are delaying some of our annual cutting of paths and roadside edges to a bit later in the year. This delay in our cutting programme is designed to ensure that we give our pollinators and all biodiversity as much opportunity as possible to find the food and shelter that they all need so desperately these days. We are also now looking at all potentially wildflower rich areas in order to include them as part of our reduced cutting programme into the future.

As readers will know I have been asking for anyone with bird or wildlife knowledge if they would like to help us to gather data for the new 5-year Ecological Management

Plans that we are producing in October. I have been overwhelmed by the response so far and have met some lovely people on this journey. We now have several volunteers surveying Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons. It would be fabulous if we could find a few more birders and butterfly people over at the Rusthall end of things though. So, if you have a bird or butterfly (loving) brain and perhaps a little spare time, then please do get in touch via our info@TWcommons.org email address.

Surveys are now in full swing; we have been listening to lots of bats and birds and also doing much gawping at dragonflies and butterflies! It would also be wonderful if any budding photographers would like to send us any photographs of these species that they see around the commons (just let us know where you saw them). You don't need to be able to identify them, we can do that. Although

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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'.

the iNaturalist App is great for helping people to learn as its in-built 'Elec trickery' can recognise many insects from your photos - it is ridiculously clever!

To end on a serious note: It seems that we are now re-entering the annual silly-season where people seem to think that disposable BBQs or having open fires is a sensible choice on a dry and parched common in the middle of a

town. I can confirm that these choices are very far from wise and would very much appreciate it if everyone could please refrain from being daft this year. We and the fire brigade did get a bit tired and stressed about it last year as we really don't want anyone to get hurt if a fire gets out of control. Please be safe and respectful to each other and our beautiful commons.

Dan Colborne



Ecological surveying of The Commons



Refurbished bench by the wild poppies

NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

JUNE 2023 - WITH CLIVE EVANS

The Friends of the Commons membership fee has not been increased for over 30 years, inevitably inflation since 1992 has greatly reduced our ability to improve the Commons for the public's benefit. Therefore, the committee have agreed, future annual subscription for an individual should be raised to £10 per annum and £20 pa for family membership. I am sure members will agree it remains a very modest fee.

Our Summer Tea Party date is Wednesday, 19th July 2023, 3pm to 4.30pm at the Spa Hotel. Thanks to the generosity of a donor, the cost remains the same as last year, £17 per person. See <https://www.friendstothecommons.org/news.html> for more details. The AGM will follow-on between 4.45pm and 5.45pm. We hope to see you there!

We are funding several projects this year, the first two have already been completed. Clearing a glade area in the Marshall plan area, on Tunbridge Wells Common, and the first phase of the Denny Bottom /Eales Terrace clearance. Both of these areas are well worth a visit. Two other areas are due to be cleared in November. In addition, receipt of welcomed

donations mean we are able to replace four litter bins that have reached the end of their shelf life.

The General Manager of the Commons (note the new title), Gemma Stapeley, has successfully succeeded in obtaining two grants. One from Southern Water of £1500 which will be used for ongoing ecological surveys. The second, a grant of £1025 from the Royal Tunbridge Wells Round Table, which will be used to purchase heavy-duty tools and machinery for use by Dan, the Ranger.

It is with much sadness I have to inform you of the passing of Sally Balcon. She was a long-standing member of our committee who represented us on the Civic Society. Donations were received from a collection at her Memorial service.

And lastly, we must congratulate one of our founder members, Philip Whitbourne for being awarded The Freedom of The Borough, very richly deserved.

Clive Evans.



**Chris Gurr ordered a batch of new Hi-Vis vests for our volunteers.
See how smart they look.**

The Friends Officers & Committee Membership 2023

Officers:

Chairman:	Clive Evans	Tel: 01892 518975
Treasurer:	Donald Clarke	Tel: 01892 615306
Deputy Chairman & Mem. Secretary:	Chris Gurr	Tel: 01892 542408
Secretary:	Tony Pawson	email.akpawson@hotmail.com
Social Secretary:	Terry Coulthard	Tel: 01892 548785

Committee:

Dr Ian Beavis	Tel: 01892 523007
Clive McAllister	Tel: 01892 532817
Peter Miall	Tel: 01892 517599
Joy Podbury	email. joypodbury@talktalk.net

Denny Bottom Rock Clearance

One of the main projects the Friends are financing this year, is the rock clearance at Denny Bottom. An area of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), located on Rusthall Common, home to the prominent Toad Rock. It is a key site for sandstone weathering features, and of high conservation value which needs to be protected.

Contractors cleared hazardous trees; the forward plan is to clear vegetation and expose the rocks over a three-year period. The vegetation will then regrow at different rates and create opportunities for species such as newts, lizards, and butterflies to succeed.

Some of our fantastic volunteers helping to clear the rocks and make a difference!



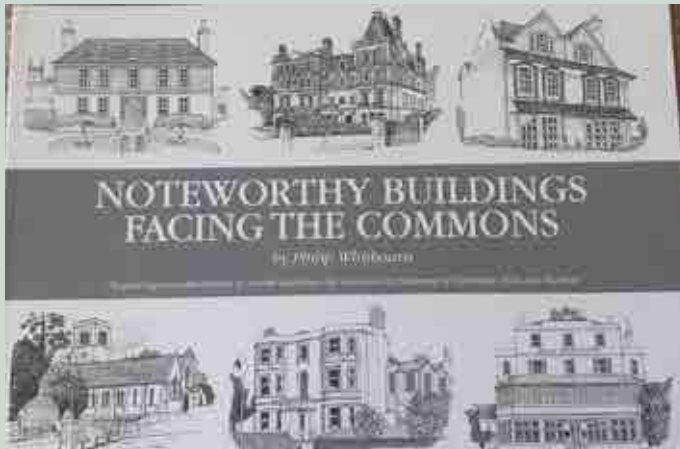
Forest School Play Sessions



For the 5th consecutive year, we have managed to fund four Forest School Play Sessions, which were wonderfully organised by Gemma, the Kent High Weald Project team, with assistance of our volunteers. Over 300 visitors enjoyed this popular two-day event.



A WONDERFUL BOOK



You may have recently read, one of our members, Phillip Whitbourne OBE PhD, FSA, FRIBA, FRTPI received the well-deserved honour of the Freedom of the Borough from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

Members who have joined more recently, may be unaware Phillip produced a fascinating series of articles for past copies of Common Ground, based on the more noteworthy buildings facing Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons,

Twenty-five of the articles including beautiful line drawings were later produced in book form. We have copies available for a modest £10 each. They would make a wonderful gift, so you might also like to consider purchasing a second copy for a family member or friend. All funds received finance commons projects.

You can either make a bank transfer to our NatWest account - sort code: 55-70-13, account number: 01028774 - marking your payment as Book or enclose a cheque payable to "Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons". Contact joypodbury@talktalk.net The Coach House Royal Chase. TN4 8AY.



Litter pickers by Toad Rock

Volunteer opportunities

Tasks include clearance, litter picking, all under the supervision of the Ranger. If you want to lend a hand, just turn up, we are always happy to see you. Tools and hi-vis are supplied. Dates/times may be subject to change so check the website. www.friendstothecommons.org

Saturday 24th June 10.30 meeting at Fir Tree Road car park Tunbridge Wells Common

Saturday 29th July 10am St Paul's Church/Happy Valley on Rusthall Common

Saturday 26th August 10.30 meeting at Fir Tree Road car park. Tunbridge Wells Common

Saturday 30th September 10am meet at St Paul's Church/ Happy Valley, Rusthall Common

Time to update your Membership Details

We are required to check the information we store on our membership database is accurate and up to date. Thank you to those members who have already responded.

If you have been meaning to get round to it, please send the following information to joypodbury@talktalk.net The Coach House, Royal Chase, TN4 8AY. Many thanks

Surname..... First name.....

Email address

Address:

Postcode Tel No.....

Mobile

*Please delete as appropriate” “I confirm that my subscription *continues to / *does not qualify for Gift Aid.”

Archaeology Team News



The team recently gave an informal presentation at Rusthall Library that was well attended by interested locals. The library staff were on hand offering tea and coffee, their support and enthusiasm made the event possible and a second one is planned for Southborough later in the summer.

Many of the items are now on permanent display within Rusthall library. A display cabinet was funded by The Friends of The Common and The Rusthall History Group. Work is expected to continue throughout the summer and new volunteers are always welcome. See the teams full Summer 23 Update on the website www.friendstothecommons.org Contact Nigel at wkdarchaeology@gmail.com

Enjoy walking

NEW! We have recently included a link to 15 Tunbridge Wells Walks see the Maps and Walks page.
www.friendstothecommons.org

Summer Tea Party

Book early for the Summer Tea at the Spa Hotel, TN4 8XL Wednesday 19th July.

Tea 3pm-4.30pm followed by the AGM 4.45pm-5.45pm. Only £17 per person! See the flyer and website for details.



**Steve Budden's refurbished 'Bench with a view' kindly donated
by the members of The Friends of The Commons**

THE MYSTERY OF THE LOCUST BLOWFLY

Everyone knows about the migration of birds, and some will be aware too that many larger insects like butterflies, moths and dragonflies regularly migrate across the Channel. But what about smaller insects? Occasional invasions of ladybirds turning up on our shores sometimes hit the headlines, but there are many other less obvious migrants. Several species of hoverflies fly across from the Continent every year to supplement the resident population.

The Marmalade Hoverfly (*Episyrphus balteatus*) is one of our commonest hoverflies, with a distinctive pattern of broad and narrow bands on its orange abdomen. Although a resident species, occurring all year round, thousands regularly make a one-way journey from France in high summer. The largest British hoverfly, the impressive



The Marmalade Hoverfly, Episyrphus Balteatus



Locust Blowfly, Male

Hornet Hoverfly (*Volucella zonaria*) which gives a very convincing impression of a real hornet, used to be considered a rare migrant to this country but in recent years has established itself as a permanent member of our fauna.

And then there's the Locust Blowfly (*Stomorhina lunata*), which started appearing on British shores in 2001 and is now found fairly regularly in Tunbridge Wells. This well-marked species is easily mistaken for a hoverfly and commonly visits various flowers as hoverflies do. It has dark lengthwise stripes on its bronzy thorax, and the abdomen has yellow spots in the male and grey spots in the female.

Traditionally Locust Blowflies have been thought of as native to warmer climates where locusts are resident. Their larvae feed on locust egg pods which are laid in the soil. When locust swarms migrate, the blowflies follow in their wake. But individual locusts sometimes massively overshoot and end up way beyond their intended destination, even reaching Britain on occasions, and it has generally been assumed that British records of Locust Blowfly are also the result of migration.

But inland locations like Tunbridge Wells do not receive a lot of rarer migrants, because most migrant insects stay close to the coast where they make landfall. In most cases, we only see migrants that arrive in large numbers like the Painted Lady butterfly or the Silver Y moth. So it seems strange that we are seeing the Locust Blowfly so regularly nowadays, often several in the same spot. Locusts are essentially just very large grasshoppers, so it is not impossible that the Locust Blowfly could adapt to breed on the egg pods of our native grasshoppers. Interestingly, some Locust Blowflies seen in Tunbridge Wells last year were very small, and this is exactly what you would expect if their larvae had been feeding on the eggs of a much smaller host than their regular one. It would be hard to prove, but evidence is definitely mounting that Locust Blowfly is becoming a resident British species.



Locust Blowfly, Male

Ian Beavis



Locust Blowfly, Female