



# Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

Issue 1 - March 2006

## WELCOME

Welcome to our new look newsletter, which we hope to publish twice yearly to keep you informed about our local commons. These include Ludshott Common, Waggoners Wells, Kingswood Firs, Mt Alvernia Wood, Stony Bottom, Gentles Copse, Stonedene, Passfield Common, Conford Moor and Bramshott Chase.

The local National Trust committee, which administers the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons, would like to hear your views and what issues you would like to hear more about.

So please come and talk to us at the Coffee Morning on 6th May. It will be an excellent opportunity to meet your committee and the local wardens. Bring your friends, and please share this newsletter with them.

Meet us at our  
**Coffee Morning**

On

Saturday May 6<sup>th</sup> 2006

10:00am - 12:00 noon

At Grayshott Village Hall

Wardens Exhibition  
National Trust goods stall  
Raffle

## THE COMMONS OF LUDSHOTT MANOR

By Chris Webb

*Chris is the Area Warden for the North East Hampshire National Trust commons*

Our commons and manorial wastes represent some of the oldest and most ancient landscapes of the district. Common land is often thought of as a type of countryside which is covered with heather, gorse, rough grass and scrubby vegetation. However, strictly speaking, the term 'common' refers to the legal status of the land. All commons are owned by someone or an institution such as the National Trust. In east Hampshire the dozen or so commons lying between Selborne and the Surrey/Sussex border are owned by, in addition to the NT commons, various bodies such as the Ministry of Defence, Hampshire County Council, The Woodland Trust as well as a few individual landowners.

The reason these areas have become common land is because they are subject to 'common rights'. These rights are held by 'commoners' who own particular properties which usually lie around or close to the common. Traditionally, it was the local farms that had rights for grazing livestock on the nearby common land, although many of the older cottages also had rights for a few animals and for collecting wood for fuel. Commoners had



rights to collect a range of other materials such as bracken for bedding down animals during the winter as one example.

Commons and commoners have a very long history that stretches back to the Dark Ages. During this period the ancient forests and heaths of the Weald of Kent, Sussex, Surrey and east Hampshire were still very thinly settled, swine

and cattle grazing being the principle land-use of the region. Most of the commons will have developed from these Saxon swine pastures.

As the population grew, the forest wastes and commons, which were used for grazing and collecting vital materials, were gradually reduced in extent as land was enclosed for farming. This reduction and loss of common land continued until recent times. The acquisition of common land by conservation bodies like the National Trust has helped to preserve some of the few remaining areas of this ancient type of landscape.

Commons could (and can) be used by the owner (who was generally the lord of the manor) for grazing; collecting fuel in the form of wood, heather turf, gorse or

animal dung and for many other vital products which were necessary for everyday life. Crucially, however, whatever the owner of the common did, it couldn't interfere with the commoner's rights or remove the products to which they were entitled. In modern times this kind of restriction seems strange, however for centuries this arrangement was necessary for the wellbeing of the local settlement or manor of which the common was an important part. The 'Commons Registration Act' (1965) ordered that all commons should be registered and common rights should be proven and specified. Today, as a result, the four commons of Ludshott Common, Waggoners Wells, Bramshott Chase, Passfield Common and Conford Moor have registered rights for nearly thirty neighbouring or nearby properties which range from grazing to digging up roots for fuel.

***If you enjoy reading this newsletter, please pass it on!***

### **Become a Friend**

You will receive your own personal copy of the newsletter, and you will be helping valuable conservation work to ensure the survival of our precious landscape and habitat - 'Always for Everyone'.

Becoming a Friend costs only £5.00 for a year. Contact the Membership Secretary, Colin Brash on 01428 713256.

## **LUDSHOTT COMMON**

**This is the first in a series of articles concerning the history of our Open Space Properties**  
By Jane Durham

**A**t the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, residential building threatened the survival of most areas of lowland heath and common. This type of countryside had become redundant for farming as practices changed, traditional methods being overtaken by more intensive agriculture which needed better soils to be successful. It is thanks to the far-sighted founders of the National Trust that the commons at Ludshott and Passfield, and many of our other local areas of open country, still exist.

Many people do not realise that Sir Robert Hunter, one of these founders, lived near Hindhead, and that as a result of his efforts some 750 acres of land around the Punchbowl was given to the National Trust in 1906 by the Hindhead Preservation Committee, of which he was Chairman.

In November 1906 the Ludshott Common Preservation Committee was formed, with the object of raising money and bidding for land at Ludshott that was to be auctioned in the month following. Although the Committee was unsuccessful at the auction, they continued to be active, and over the following 100 years have acquired, in various ways, the common as

we know it today. They made their first acquisition of 17.5 acres in 1907, followed by 542 acres in 1908. This land, together with 39 acres at Bramshott Chase that was given to the Committee by Miss James, was transferred to National Trust ownership later that year, to be managed by the Hants Sub-Committee of the Hindhead Committee.

Various parcels of land were bought or donated in subsequent years, one of the most important being the purchase in 1919 of Waggoners Wells and the house at Summerden, with money raised in memory of Sir Robert Hunter. Two major gifts were the hillsides below Kingswood Firs in 1935 as a bequest from the late Mrs Vertue, and along Kingswood Lane in 1995 from the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution.

To the west of Ludshott, the Committee had always been concerned that the land south of Headley Down was vulnerable to housing development, and in 1983 managed to buy 30 acres of Gentles Copse, to be followed in 1986 by the remaining 35 acres, after a local appeal for funds. The last piece of the jigsaw was put in place in 1999 with the acquisition of the hillside below Stonedene, keeping this area safe for ever.

## **RIDING ON LUDSHOTT COMMON**

**T**his has to be one of the best ways to enjoy the common! When you ride around Ludshott there are few restrictions and few other people to meet. You can imagine that you have gone back in time and are travelling across open country. Accessing the common is easy from every side with no gates or boggy entrances.

During the autumn and winter months the colours change and the views across to Selborne open right up. There is always wildlife to see and the colours of the bracken and trees are truly delightful. As the wind gets up it is exhilarating to ride across the wide path in the centre of the common, a mile in distance, and then drop down towards Waggoners Wells into the shelter of the valley and the trees.

The 'going' is invariably 'good', with the soft, sandy soil that is so well drained. Most horses traverse the common with a spring in their step. Even in the gloomy days of winter the wide light coloured paths make the going easy. In spite of the shortened days a good hour to an hour and a half can be spent following the tracks.

Our wardens take great care of the bridleways and in return expect us to respect the common and take care not to trample off them. If you should have difficulty making your way down any of the tracks do let them know, or me, and I will report it for you.

Sylvia Gamble

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

Our team of Wardens now stands at full strength, Keith Blackmore having been appointed in July on a two-year contract, part of which is paid from Committee funds. Keith had recently finished the Diploma in Countryside Management at Merrist Wood College and the Committee, Chris and Jim are all delighted to have him as a member of the team.

Countryside Stewardship funding enabled a second wardening team to be appointed for 6 months over the winter. Spike and Mitch have concentrated on scrub clearance and habitat management.

The proposal to restore to heathland, areas that had become overgrown with trees and scrub, and to create corridors through which the heathland wildlife can move, met with the approval of the Forestry Commission. This spring, many of you will have seen this felling work in progress, and read the explanation on the notices that the Wardens erected. The volunteers, on February 4<sup>th</sup>, were working

to maintain the heather habitat that lies adjacent to one of these restoration sites. The heathland management using conservation grazing with cattle continues at Hollywater Green, Passfield and at Bramshott Chase. At Passfield, because of Heritage Lottery funding available, through the Hampshire Heathland Project, the fencing around the grazing area will be replaced this year, instead of as scheduled during the next 2 - 3 years.

There is a legal requirement for any landowner to keep the trees on their boundaries in a safe condition. Therefore, the Wardens routinely carry out tree inspections, especially by the sides of the roads which cross the property. This is the first time for hundreds of years that there have been widespread mature trees on the commons, and in Passfield, especially along the B3004, the oak trees are showing signs of stress as large branches are dropping, not just the powdery bits which is normal for oaks. Waterlogging of their roots, the road being busier and utilities' activities

are all contributing factors. Major felling and other timber work will have to be carried out at some stage. This is also the case at Waggoners Wells where the beech trees continue to show signs of decline, but, here, this is due to a form of *Phytophthora* (a fungal disease) which is affecting beech trees throughout the region. It is particularly bad at Waggoners Wells.

It is with disappointment that we have to report that the planning application for the proposed Wardens' workbase, in Standford, has been rejected.

Dog fouling is still an issue at Ludshott but the notices asking dog owners to deal with waste responsibly have been having some effect.

Residents and visitors are asked to contact the emergency services, if they perceive any situation of danger or disruption: someone is lost, fire, vandals, mini-motorcycles, car-theft etc. Dial 999, and then inform the wardens.

## PLANTS OF THE COMMONS

*Beginning a series on their flora and fauna*

### Gorse

The old saying goes, 'When gorse is out of flower, kissing is out of fashion'. This is very true as many of you will have noticed. The reason is that different species have different flowering times and on our commons the Common Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) flowers in the late winter and early spring, and the Dwarf Gorse (*Ulex minor*) flowers in the late summer and autumn. But there is always the odd yellow bud unfurling where and when the conditions are favourable, as well as the scent of coconut which pervades at the peak flowering seasons.

All types of these spiny shrubs, which are members of the Pea family (*Leguminosae*), are indicators of disturbance, so this is why they are found growing so well along the sides of paths. As its name suggests the Dwarf Gorse has a shorter growth habit and never reaches the one and a half to two metres which can be achieved by the Common Gorse. These very important habitat shrubs, which give shelter to the wildlife and provide an important source of nectar throughout the year, are managed so that there are to be found all ages of plants which suit differing animal species. The Dartford Warbler especially is associated with them using the depths of the bushes for nesting and the highest tips as lookout perches.



Common Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*)

### The Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

*are people who may, or may not, be National Trust members, but who have a direct interest in the local National Trust properties and are therefore willing to help maintain the conservation work on these important areas, much of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Areas for birds (SPA), by subscribing annually to support the cost of essential work on the Commons.*

### USEFUL CONTACTS

<i>Wardens</i>	N.T. Warden's Office	01428 751563	
	Chris Webb	01420 511467	Mob. 07768 830662
	Jim Avenell	01483 894784	
<i>Committee</i>	Dr Susan Salter	Chairman	01428 751409
	David Bird	Hon. Secretary	01428 713814
	Janet Crossman	Hon. Treasurer	01428 751980
	Colin Brash	Membership Secretary	01428 713256
	Kathleen Bird		01428 713814
	David Knighton		01428 608036
	Sylvia Gamble		01420 475501
Craig Vincier		01428 713532	

## VOLUNTEERING



*Jim Avenell*

If you walk on the commons you will have noticed the continual work that is carried out to maintain the open nature of these spaces. This is done to preserve this unique habitat on which Dartford warblers, nightjars, sand lizards and many other creatures depend. One of the tasks is to clear birch and young pines, which threaten to turn the commons into forest. Groups of volunteers meet several times a year to cut these saplings.

One of these occasions was on Saturday 4 February, when a dozen volunteers met wardens Jim and Keith to clear brush. It was cold and overcast, but a bit of hard work with loppers or a saw soon had everyone warmed up. A barbeque was lighted, which provided tea and coffee, and very welcome sausages at lunch time.

We managed to clear a good area, leaving the brush in piles for Jim to collect later with the tractor. When the time came to pack up we all felt that we had done a worthwhile job, and had also had the opportunity to meet and chat to like-minded Friends and volunteers.

Would you like to help with nature conservation?  
For more details see notices on the common or contact  
Jim Avenell, the Countryside Warden on 01428 751563



### Diary dates for 2006

**6 May** 10:00 – 12:00 noon Coffee morning at Grayshott Village Hall  
**27 - 29 May** We will have a small exhibition at "Here's Headley 2006" in Headley Village Hall, Arford Road

### Guided walks led by the Area Warden, Chris Webb.

**21 May 2pm.** "The Natural History of Selborne Common" A two and a half hour walk over Selborne Hill, looking at the landscape, history and wildlife of the ancient common land. Meet at the car park behind the Selborne Arms - SU742335. There is a fairly steep climb at the beginning of the walk and it could be muddy.

**10 June 7pm.** Passfield Common & Conford Moor. "Old Commoners and Ancient Landscapes". A two hour walk through heathland, woodland and fen, exploring the history, wildlife and habitats of a landscape shaped by common rights practised over hundreds of years. Meet at Conford Village Hall, Conford near Liphook. SU823330. Wellies may be necessary.

**8 July 8pm.** Ludshott Common. "Heathland at Dusk". A two and half hour walk for glimpses and sounds of heathland wildlife and birds, and in particular the nocturnal nightjar. Meet at Ludshott Common main car park on B3002 between Headley Down and Grayshott. SU853358. Please have stout footwear and a torch.

There will be a £1.00 charge per person on these walks.