



# Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

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*Following on from the last edition of Commons Link and the management planning work we are undertaking for Ludshott Common, this article reproduces an edited version of Ludshott Common's 'Statement of Significance'. The statement is similar to an executive summary and highlights the main factors and themes that need to be considered in the conservation management plan. At the moment we are focusing on Ludshott Common, so outline descriptions of Waggoners Wells, Gentles Copse and the detached sites at Bramshott and Passfield are not included here.*

Ludshott Common is the principle part of a 735 acre block of land lying close to Headley Down and Grayshott. The very poor, acid, free draining sands of the Hythe Beds (part of the Weald's Lower Greensand) on which this property stands, has been the main factor affecting this area's historical ecology and landscape. Until the twentieth century, these impoverished soils and the marginal nature of the landscape dictated pastoral land-use and prevented more intensive agricultural activity.

Well-documented histories that go back to the thirteenth century show that Ludshott, along with Waggoners Wells are survivals of formerly extensive areas of ancient manorial waste and common. In turn these were part of a much broader network of ancient heathland and wood-pasture landscapes spread across north-western Europe, where very old traditions of human usage and pastoralism allowed the development of large stable ecosystems of high biodiversity value. Many local commons fell out of traditional use during the twentieth century, resulting in a large-scale loss and serious degradation of the region's ancient natural and cultural heritage.

Although no longer active, there are still registered 'commoners' and 'rights' at Ludshott. The

majority of rights are held by commoners from the Selborne area, the result of a gift to Selborne Priory in c1230 from the lord of the manor of Ludshott. The rights of estovers (gathering wood and vegetation for fuel and animal bedding) and of grazing for sheep, cattle, ponies, goats, geese and pigs at 'pannage' has a long history, certainly back as far as the Dark Ages and without doubt these practices have prehistoric origins. These customs and activities, over many centuries, underpinned the heathland landscape and its wildlife, much as they still do across the New Forest today.

Around Ludshott, housing development threatened the survival of these ancient landscapes as they were thought of as unproductive and economically backward places during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Sir Robert Hunter, a founder of the NT, having seen many local

commons converted to private property, was involved in preserving Ludshott when he, as Chairman of the Ludshott Common Preservation Committee, helped effect the acquisition of the Common for the National Trust in 1908. The long-term preservation of the Common is secure by virtue of the site being declared 'inalienable' under the National Trust Act, whereby no part of the property can be given up except by permission of Parliament.

Having received this protection, the first three-quarters of the twentieth century have been marked by episodes of scrub and woodland development in the absence of commoners and their grazing animals followed by a number of severe fires. The destruction of the vegetation during the 1940s by mechanised military training is also a significant chapter in Ludshott's recent history. After the wild-fire of 1980, which destroyed nearly 300 acres of heath, scrub and secondary woodland, massive effort, initiated by the Ludshott Committee, has gone into the restoration and maintenance of a substantial area of open heathland.

This conservation management has restored a significant area of dry calluna heathland which is important for many species of bird and insect. Ludshott



now forms an important and relatively large heathland nature reserve and makes a major contribution to the 'Hampshire Weald's' remaining scattered patchwork of habitats. With an eighty to ninety per cent loss of these landscapes over the last two centuries, Ludshott is now amongst the larger blocks of heathland to survive in east Hampshire.

In view of this, Ludshott is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) along with neighbouring Bramshott Common (MOD) and is part of the region-wide Wealden Heath Special Protection Area (SPA). The SPA is recognition that Ludshott's heathland is important for supporting breeding populations of Dartford warblers along with woodlark and nightjar (all annex 1 Birds in the European Birds Directive) as well as other heathland and woodland species. Other notable heathland specialists at Ludshott include the Sand Lizard and Silver-Studded Blue butterfly.

Adding to the historic interest, the eastern part of Ludshott Common is known as Superior Camp, an area that was requisitioned during the last war as an encampment for Canadian troops. With over 100 buildings this was a large and complex site. After hostilities had ceased the site



was acquired by the Ministry of Health and served as an emergency housing estate before it was levelled in the early 1960s. It now assumes a somewhat different character to the rest of the property being an area of willow scrub, relic garden plants and trees, numerous earthworks and building platforms. Probable Bronze Age barrows (heavily damaged by WWII tank training) along with medieval and nineteenth century boundary banks are of archaeological importance.

Today, in addition to its nature conservation value and historic interest, Ludshott Common offers a large block of countryside in what is now a busy and very built up, almost suburban, part of East Hampshire – there are approximately 60,000 people living within a four mile radius. Many people enjoy the open heathland in all its seasonal moods and with its views across to the Hangers and South Downs. Most visitors are local and are generally walking the dog or riding a horse.



## WHAT'S HAPPENING

### Staffing

A big thank you goes to Keith Blackmore who, after four years loyal service, left in July on completion of his contract. He is now working with Hampshire Wildlife Trust and we wish him all the very best for the future. This post is not being renewed, so it means that the full-time wardens team for east Hampshire is down to two. Currently we have two of our former student-volunteers Mandy and Simon working on part-time and short-term contracts.

### Eco-Town

The Regional Planning Advisor, along with the Head Warden have been closely monitoring the Bordon-Whitehill Eco-Town situation. The National Trust has issued the following statement:

"As a nature conservation charity we are legally bound to protect our sites from the environmental and ecological impact of any planned development. As such, we are very concerned about the proposed eco-town at Bordon and we will be urging East Hampshire District Council to demonstrate to Natural England and our partners, through the Habitats Regulations Assessment, that there will be no harmful impact on our sites and those neighbouring areas which are of conservation and landscape importance. We are equally aware that the issues at stake are complex and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the local authority and other organisations in order to find satisfactory solutions."

### Dog mess

For many years 'dog mess' has been a problem that has spoilt many peoples enjoyment of Ludshott Common and recently there has been a significant increase in the number of complaints. We have now installed a 'dog bin' at the main car park at Ludshott Common and will be urging dog walkers to use the bin or 'take it home with them' to keep the area as clean as possible for the health and enjoyment of everyone who visits and to reduce contamination of an important natural environment.

**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 - 'Forever for Everyone'.

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

#### 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.

Our website is <http://www.ntludshott.org.uk/>

# PLANTS OF THE COMMONS

*A series on their flora and fauna*

## Oak (*Quercus species*)

The Oak tree is a familiar and much loved sight in our countryside and we have two native species, the English, Pedunculate or Common oak (*Quercus robur*) and the Sessile or Durmast oak (*Quercus petraea*). Both can be found on our commons though identification can be a bit tricky as they hybridise quite freely. The pure Sessile oak prefers lighter soils and can be found as ancient coppiced trees in Gentles Copse. The technique of coppicing was practiced when quantities of charcoal were needed for iron smelting. The young trees were cut down to ground level at regular intervals, then allowed to make fresh growth, until in turn this was of a sufficient size to coppice. Coppicing is still carried out in other places, mostly on Chestnut, for fencing stakes and with a little for the bar-b-que trade. The trees in Gentles Copse have not been coppiced for many, many years and they probably would not survive the shock if it were attempted. However, the new saplings that are coming on will give the opportunity to begin again this ancient woodland craft.



From ancient times the English oak has been held sacred and regarded as the ‘King’ of trees, as its strong and durable timber was the foremost construction material both for houses and ships. By Tudor times the felling of oak trees had become so widescale that laws had to be passed to protect it. Later the demands of the navy led to extensive planting in royal forests; many of these trees still exist today in places like the New Forest and The Forest of Dean, their branches resembling stag’s heads. This slow-growing, large deciduous tree has branches which rise from a short trunk, forming a massive, wide and domed crown which can grow up to 40m (over 100 feet). The young bark is smooth and shiny, becoming fissured with age, and the leaves are borne alternately and are almost stalkless, with four or five lobes along each side. They appear with the flowers in May, the male flowers hanging in slim catkins, the female being on the tips of the shoots. The resultant seeds are the oval acorns which are often in pairs on long stalks.



*Sessile oaks in Gentles Copse*

The Sessile is the dominant native oak of the less fertile, wetter northern and western upland regions of Britain. Its growth habit is slightly different from the English oak, having a longer trunk and forming a more fan-shaped crown. The word ‘sessile’ means unstalked and refers to the rounded acorns, which are stalkless unlike those of the English oak, but it has longer leaf stalks. Only the female flowers differ in that they are bud-shaped and have no stalk.

The acorns from both species were once an animal foodstuff of great importance with pigs being turned out, in the autumn, to forage in the woodlands. This is the right of ‘pannage’ which still exists, for commoners, today. The use of the bark as a source of tannin for the curing of hides in the making of leather has ceased but oak timber is still highly prized for furniture in which the silvery grain can be displayed to advantage.

### Christmas trees

On Saturday 5 December  
we plan to cut Christmas  
trees to be sold on  
Saturday 12 December  
at Dunelm car park between  
9:30 and 12:30.

### USEFUL CONTACTS

<b>Wardens</b>	
N.T. Warden’s Office	01428 751563
Chris Webb	07768 830662
Jim Avenell	07768 830661
<b>Committee</b>	
Dr Susan Salter Chairman	01428 751409
Sylvia Gamble Hon. Secretary	01420 475501
Janet Crossman Hon. Treasurer	01428 751980
Colin Brash Membership Secretary	01428 713256
David Knighton	01428 608036
Craig Vincer	01428 713532

## **THE NEW WORKBASE**

Preparatory work has been ongoing through the summer for the new Wardens Base at Bramshott. Although we are currently awaiting a planning decision to a change in the building design, we have continued to prepare the site. With the office building being principally a timber construction, Douglas Fir and Larch trees from the National Trust estate at Ludshott and Hindhead have been felled and are being prepared. This keeps the 'timber miles' to a minimum.

Work on the building will be underway during the spring and summer 2010.



*Felling trees for new office building (from left Jim, Graham, Mandy, Keith, Simon. (Jasper up tree)*



*Jim preparing fencing material at the new workbase*



*Moving veteran hazel stools*



*Hazel stools in new positions with NT staff renewing fence line*



*Planting new trees between newly moved hazel stools*



*Existing corrugated barn will become workshop and machinery store*