



Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

Issue 5 - March 2008

100 YEARS OF THE NATIONAL TRUST AT LUDSHOTT COMMON

At the beginning of the 20th century the Ludshott Common Preservation Committee was active in campaigning to preserve our stunning local landscape from developers. Its Chairman was Sir Robert Hunter, one of the three founders of the National Trust, who lived locally. In 1908 the ownership of the Common was passed to the Trust whilst the committee, of volunteer local residents, which became known as the Ludshott Commons Committee, undertook the Common's management with funds coming from donations. The main issues then were not so different from today - to safeguard their natural peace and beauty from fire, from incursion and development, and inappropriate use by vehicles.

In the intervening years the success of the committee inspired generous

On behalf of the National Trust, congratulations on the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Ludshott Commons Committee.

I am sure that this very successful partnership between the Trust and the Committee will continue to thrive for many years to come.

*Jonathan Ingram,
National Trust Area Manager.*

management of its properties, as by then the conservation of these rare and sensitive habitats and the bio-diversity of these special areas of lowland heath needed professional expertise, and so the committee became advisory. In the early years all the management was by the volunteers on the committee, then in the late seventies and early eighties a part-time, then a full-time warden was appointed, until today we have three permanent wardens assisted by regular contract staff and the ever growing band of volunteer helpers.



Sir Robert Hunter

The Committee exists to raise awareness of the work of the Trust and meets regularly with the Wardens and Property Manager to discuss local issues and views. It agrees jointly with the Trust how (and whether) dedicated funds, held by the Trust on behalf of the committee, might be used. The new workbase project is currently using defined purpose funds. Other funds raised from local supporters (the 'Friends'), and from events and walks are used towards improvements beyond the scope of the operational budget. 'Commons Link' is produced and volunteers encouraged to join the conservation work parties.

legacies, donations and responses to specific appeals allowing more acquisitions, notably Passfield Common and Conford Moor in 1948, Gentles Copse in 1986, Mt Alvernia Woods in 1995 and lastly Stonedene Woods in 1999.

In 1992 the National Trust re-organised the



PLANTS OF THE COMMONS

A series on their flora and fauna

SILVER BIRCH (*Betula ssp*)

It is easy to recognise the beautiful birch tree by the easily-peeled, white bark of its trunk, and its long, whip-like twigs, which are purple-brown and borne on upright branches. In winter, these twigs bear minute buds on alternate sides, which open in spring to display dainty oval or diamond-shaped pale green leaves, long-stalked with toothed edges. These leaves turn a warm golden-brown in autumn.

It is one of the hardiest trees in the world, seeds itself freely, grows further north and, with the mountain ash, higher up mountains than any other species. Birch soon establishes itself on bare areas and often spreads onto land no longer grazed, as in the case of our commons. Seedlings are to be found throughout our heath areas and larger specimens with Scots pine in the mixed woodland.

Common birch *Betula pendula* has warty swellings on smooth twigs; the less common Hairy birch *Betula pubescens* is named after its hairy twigs. They both grow on our commons as separate species, but also with hybrids between the two (which can be the most usual forms found), making identification quite difficult. Dwarf birch *B. nana* grows in northern Scotland and is the third species found in the British Isles. Common birch has particularly bright bark, but as each tree matures its bark becomes covered with dark patches, which are diamond-shaped on *B. pendula*.



In winter, male catkins hang from leafless twigs like grey lambs' tails. In spring as the leaves expand, these catkins shed golden pollen, which the wind carries to female catkins, short, scaly green spikes, which open with the leaves on the same tree. After fertilisation these female structures swell and in their turn, droop in lambs'-tail fashion until in about September they break up scattering millions of winged seeds into the wind.

Birch never grows enormously large, 80ft is a good height, nor does it live very long, 60 years being a good age. Most old trees are invaded by wood-rotting fungi which eventually kills them. The white-spotted scarlet caps of the fly agaric often grow under birch trees, feeding on their roots, but although this fungus is poisonous to man this one does not harm the trees.

The timber is uniform pale brown, not very durable outdoors but it is hard and was a very important component of the heathland economy, being used for making tool handles, spoons and cottage furniture. Its twigs also were useful being made into besom brooms.

Volunteering

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.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Wardens

N.T. Warden's Office	01428 751563
Chris Webb	07768 830662
Jim Avenell	07768 830661
Keith Blackmore	07789 926593

Committee

Dr Susan Salter	Chairman	01428 751409
David Bird	Hon. Secretary	01428 713814
Janet Crossman	Hon. Treasurer	01428 751980
Colin Brash	Membership Secretary	01428 713256
David Knighton		01428 608036
Sylvia Gamble		01420 475501
Craig Vincer		01428 713532

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

Become a Friend

You will receive your own personal 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.

WAGGONERS WELLS

Part 5 in a series concerning the history of our Open Space Properties

Along the south-eastern boundary of Ludshott Common lies Waggoners Wells. It consists of three man-made lakes surrounded by semi-natural ancient woodland and was purchased for the Trust in 1919 as a memorial to the late Sir Robert Hunter. The area is within the Ludshott SSSI and receives special emphasis due to the wide range of lichens and fungi on the site. The range of lichens is so extensive that the site has been graded as of county importance for woodland lichens by the British Lichen Society. The area is well known as a local beauty spot and has inspired the novelist Flora Thompson, and the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

The stream, which feeds the three lakes, arises from springs along Stoney Bottom in Grayshott and is a tributary of the southern part of the River Wey. Two of the lakes were made or enlarged c.1623 by John Hooke, then Lord of the manor. He diverted the stream and flooded 'manorial waste' (not wasteland but valuable heathland grazing), which raised complaints from neighbours and tenants. The purpose of the lakes is unknown. They are often referred to as Hammer ponds - used in the iron industry (e.g. Canon Capes, "Rural Life in Hampshire", 1901) but there is no real evidence to support this explanation unless with changing economic times they were built but never used. They may have been created to supply fish or to act as a reserve water supply for the watermeadows and mill at Passfield - very possibly for both reasons. It is certain, however, that "three large fish ponds plentifully stocked with fish" existed when the estate changed hands in 1814.

The tradition of fishing at Waggoners Wells continues, although now for recreation rather than as a valuable food source. (Although just recently it is alleged that, at night, there is some poaching of the magnificent carp from the lake near the ford.) Fishing was even possible during World War II when the lakes were requisitioned

by the Army as a water source for the camps on Ludshott Common. After the War, the middle lake was stocked with trout, with the Fishing Warden living in one half of the house at Summerden, but this was ended in 1988 due to the popularity of the lakes to visitors and the increasing cost of stock fish. Coarse fishing, mostly roach and perch, now takes place on all three lakes, looked after by the Angling Section of the Grayshott Social Club, who have given help in maintaining the fishing platforms.

Ensuring the quality of the water is made difficult, by the oil and grease that runs down Waggoners Wells Road, despite the existence of a large silt trap near the ford, and also the annual leaf fall which causes the lakes to gradually become shallower. Major dredging was last carried out in the early 1980's.

The dams regularly show signs of their age, springing leaks which cause concern. Expert repairs were carried out in 1991 and major refurbishment works were undertaken to the whole area; trees felled by the 1987 and 1990 storms were cleared, the main paths were repaired and resurfaced, and two bays constructed for disabled parking. In 2007, a new bridge, using oak from the Selborne property, was built by the wardens over the outflow from the middle to the downstream lake. Upkeep work continues; including the monitoring of the beech trees, of which, some are showing signs of a *phythopthera* fungal infestation, similar to 'Sudden Oak

Death', which could result in major felling being necessary. Rhododendron has been cited as a carrier for the disease, another reason for the clearance of this non-native invasive shrub. When dogs enjoy swimming they sometimes break down the banks of the lakes necessitating reinforcement of areas of the waterside.

Waggoners Wells is a place of great beauty, which some thought could be further enhanced if swans were sailing on the water. To achieve this, a pair of swans was given to the National Trust by the Vintners Company in 1931, and an island created at the top of the middle lake as a sanctuary where they could nest. Sadly, this proved ineffective as many birds were killed over the years by dogs or foxes. Finally, the cob swan and two cygnets were found dead in 1980, so the pen was given to a bird sanctuary and no more were acquired.

At the downstream end of the circular footpath which goes round the lakes, below Summerden, is the Wishing Well. This has proved a delight for many, from those who throw a coin into the water, (these are collected and the funds used for the well's maintenance) to the youngsters who endeavour to collect extra pocket money from its depths! Alfred, Lord Tennyson was inspired here to pen the verse "Flower in the Crannied Wall". There are plans to erect a plaque with this verse inscribed as part of this year's Centenary Events.

Passfield Issues

There has been local press coverage regarding the proposed footpath and road improvements to the area around Passfield village green. The National Trust has in no way obstructed the progress of these improvements. The delay was caused because the Highways Authority did not fully understand the complications posed by land that is both a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Common Land. Thus, before work could begin three sets of permissions had to be acquired. The land is not only subject to the National Trust Act, in that it cannot be used or sold without appropriate authority, but is also subject to the granting of the necessary permission from Natural England which involves mitigation for the loss of land from a SSSI. In this case a monetary contribution is being made towards scrub clearance at Conford. Further complications arise because the land under discussion is part of the registered Common and so needs consent from DEFRA (Dept. of the Environment for Food and Rural Affairs).

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Over the last few months the priority for the wardening team has been tree inspections and tree safety work across all of the properties in east Hampshire and at Hinton Ampner. Some of you may have seen that a number of large trees have been felled at Waggoners Wells and at Passfield and Conford tree surgery has been carried out on several old oaks. There has been a great deal of less obvious tree work as well in order to keep them in good health and stable.

Our annual programme of cutting and collecting vegetation with our tractor-mounted machinery on the heathland was undertaken during the autumn. This goes some way to mimicking the effects of grazing which was the principle activity for many centuries on Ludshott until livestock ceased to be turned out at the beginning of the twentieth century. Some scrub clearance was carried out during the winter. This went hand-in-hand with Christmas tree cutting, the sale of which raised £650.

We were very pleased to see a dozen volunteers, including two children, at the Wishing Well for the tidy-up task, during

half-term in February. Clearing away the fallen trees and wood has created a nice open area where one of the scenes for the dramatised guided walk can be acted out.

Work on the new leaflet for Ludshott and Passfield has been completed by the designer and the wardens and will be going to the printer in the next few weeks. So, hopefully it will be in the local shops during the summer.

Having received planning approval for the new wardens base at Bramshott, various members of the Trust's regional management team have been working with the wardens on the technical details of the design of the building. Particular attention

is being paid to using locally sourced and environmentally friendly materials and providing the building with heating with low carbon emissions.

During the next few months several of the small 'pull-ins' beside the B3002 at Ludshott will be closed. These cause a great deal of work for the wardens as they are constantly clearing litter which has been thrown out of vehicle windows. After consultation with the highways authority it was agreed that they should be closed off. With the ending of the 'Wildlife Enhancement Agreement' at Ludshott in 2008 which has provided the official permissions and additional funding for our heathland conservation over the last decade, an application for the new 'Higher Level Stewardship Scheme' will be drafted shortly. If the application is successful this will provide the support we need from the government agencies, Natural England and DEFRA, for our heathland and habitat conservation work across Ludshott, Passfield and Conford and form a framework for the management planning for another five years.

From the Wardens

Wardens' Workbase

It is with great delight that we can announce the 'almost' acquisition of the site for the new workbase. Planning Permission was granted in December, the necessary National Trust procedures are in train, and the vendor's solicitors and NT legal department are dealing with the sale and purchase. Work should begin in the autumn.

Guided Walk led by the Area Warden,
Chris Webb.

Saturday July 5th 8.00pm.

'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.

**Bring stout footwear and a torch.
£1.00 per person.**

Centenary Event

"A dramatised walk with
Sir Robert Hunter"

Sunday afternoon, July 27th

Local historian and author, J.O. Smith, as Sir Robert Hunter (one of the founders of the National Trust) will be leading this walk around Waggoners Wells. Come and learn more about the area's history. Look out for details on posters around the common and in the press.

Book the date in your diaries now.

Centenary Photography Competition

To celebrate the centenary of the National Trust at Ludshott we are holding a photographic competition to celebrate the beauty of our commons.

The competition is entitled "The Commons through the Year", and photographs of any of our Commons are welcome. These are Ludshott Common, Waggoners Wells, Kingswood Firs, Mt Alvernia Wood, Stony Bottom, Gentles Copse, Stonedene, Passfield Common, Conford Moor and Bramshott Chase. Possible subject matter may include landscapes, nature, abstract, textures, dog walkers, horses... open your eyes to the world around you and be creative!

There will be 2 sections -

Junior (16 or under on 8/9/2008) Entry is FREE

Adult (Over 16 on 8/9/2008) £1 per photograph entered

The closing date for entries is 8/09/2008.

**For more information and entry forms please phone 01428 713814
or contact a Committee member**