



Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

 National Trust

Issue 21 - March 2016

East Hampshire Commons - Extent, Decline and Conservation

By Chris Webb

There is little doubt that our portion of east Hampshire is blessed with countryside that is accessible and interesting for its landscape and wildlife. Many of the local sites we visit and walk across have long histories as open land that has served for centuries as a resource for nearby communities. Most was common land where ancient common rights allowed livestock grazing and the collection of wood, gorse, heather, peat and turf for fuel. Gorse and bracken also provided animal bedding. Sand and gravel extraction provided material for road mending and building work. In fact, before the coming of the hardware and DIY store a whole host of materials were collected for a range of domestic and agricultural use by those households with common rights.

People's lives and the economy of villages and farms in east Hampshire were often closely associated with and dependent on these extensive areas of common. Once the agricultural revolution gained momentum through the 18th & 19th centuries much changed as many of the ancient heaths, wood-pastures and downland sheepwalks were cleared, enclosed and converted to

farmland and forestry plantations. Some areas also became new settlements for a rapidly expanding population.

Fortunately, between the county boundary with Surrey and Sussex and the east Hampshire hangers, large areas of infertile sandy soil (Lower Greensand) were not suitable as arable land. This prevented and delayed the process of enclosure which swept away much of the common land across the rest of the county particularly on the fertile chalkland. The enclosure of large areas of local common land did occur a little later because of forestry which didn't need the good quality soils required for agriculture.

Across the district many commons disappeared from the landscape between 1700 and 1900. The list includes 1500 acres of Headley Common with its satellite commons at Standford and Lindford. To the west, on the acidic clay-with-flints that blankets the chalk along the top of the hangers, large areas of common disappeared during the 18th century. Colemore, Priors Dean, Froxfield, East and West Tisted shared a large single parcel of common land known as the Barnet; this was transformed into arable fields and copses in the first decade of the 19th century. The clay commons of Chawton, Farringdon, Newton Valence and Ropley, again forming a large single unit of land, underwent conversion to fields and plantations over a 150 year period before 1850. Because of the acidic nature of the clay that covers the chalk to the west of the hangers, much of the former common land here had a heathland character. Names that survive in the landscape such as Heath Green (Medstead) and Headmore (heather-moor) at Four Marks hint at the presence of a type of vegetation cover that is more familiar on the Lower Greensand soils around Bordon. Heather still grows naturally in woodland near the Barnet at Froxfield.



Watercolour showing Lynchmere Common in the mid 19th century. This is a late summer/early autumn scene typical of many local commons where bracken is being collected and carted. It was used as bedding for livestock that would have been housed in barns and sheds during the winter months.

Smaller commons such as those at Greatham, Liss, Steep and Stroud were also lost – these areas were mainly on the heavy and wet Gault Clay that runs along the western margin of the Lower Greensand. Drainage allowed them to be used for arable or pasture fields.

Because of the changes from common land to agriculture, forestry and settlements the loss of habitat such as heathland has been considerable during the last 200 years. From an approximate area of 12,000 acres of heathland in east Hampshire at the turn of the 19th century, the total now stands at about 2000 acres (this includes the NT's Ludshott and Passfield Commons), representing habitat loss of between 80 and 90 per cent.

Wood-pasture, another semi-natural habitat important for wildlife, has also reduced dramatically. Alice Holt Forest was largely wood-pasture until the late 18th century when it began to be converted to plantation forestry for the supply of timber to the navy. Wolmer Forest still

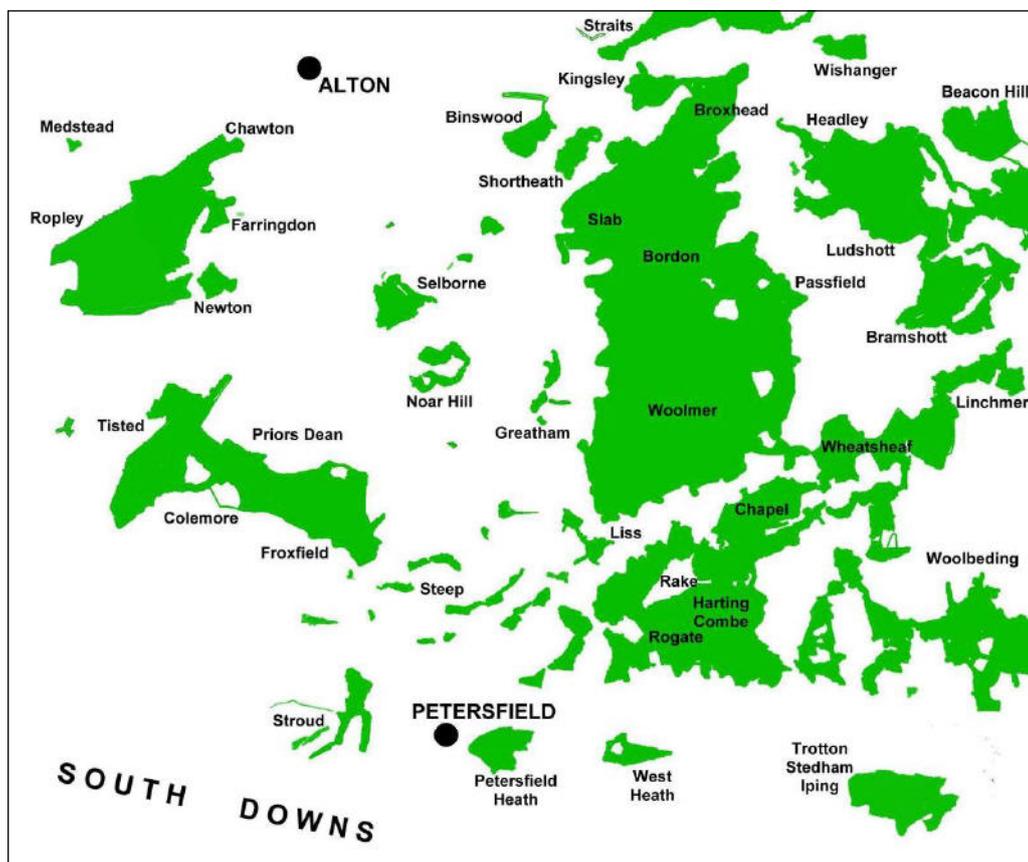
provides our largest extent heathland in the district, but here also, large areas were planted up with conifers during the 19th century. The northern section of Wolmer is now the town of Whitehill and Bordon, with Lindford, Headley Down and Grayshott also being 'new settlements' built on former heathland commons. Four Marks represents a modern settlement on part of a former clay common.



An 1860 painting of cattle in the pond on Selborne Common. Although this common is on the chalk, the acidic clay that caps the hilltop creates conditions suitable for heathland.

Better known today for protecting stately homes, the National Trust's preservation of tracts of ancient landscapes such as common land is very much in the spirit of its original purpose. The acquisition of the heathland common at Ludshott was one of its earliest conservation actions in 1908 which aimed to protect a site that was crucial for wildlife conservation and access. Although large

expanses of ancient habitats such as heathland and pasture-woodland had been stable because common land was protected by traditional unchanging customs and practices, by the beginning of the 20th century these old systems had collapsed and it was necessary for conservation bodies such as the National Trust to step in to preserve what was left.



Map of the East Hampshire district along with neighbouring areas of West Sussex and Surrey showing the extent of common land at the end of the 18th century.

With a few exceptions, the loss and fragmentation of common land habitats has occurred widely at national and international level – it's not just a local issue. The effort that we put into the conservation on our patch with your support is very much against the backdrop of the local changes outlined above, although we see our work as part of a broad movement to prevent the continuing loss of habitats and species on a wider scale across north-western Europe.

What's been Happening

The winter work programme for the wardens has followed its usual course.

On Ludshott, especially, it has been the clearing of scrub, gorse and bracken so that the open heathland is maintained for the specialist bird and reptile species, and the indicator targets set by English Nature are met. This does not just mean tractor and manual clearance but also measuring and mapping the areas with GPS for the annual audit.

The annual tree inspections have continued and some tree pruning and felling has been done, particularly along the roads at Passfield, where also, Scottish and Southern Electricity have been clearing under their power lines.

Events

Annual Sale of Christmas Trees December 2015

As in previous years the Ludshott Commons committee and National Trust wardens held their annual sale of National Trust Christmas trees at Ludshott Common car park on 5th December 2015.

The National Trust wardens assisted by regular volunteers cut about 250 trees a few days before the sale. The wardens rotate the site where they fell the trees each winter, which enables regrowth and in turn allows them to select some prime examples to sell, providing a good choice of size and shape for everyone.

As usual, many families arrived very early to bag their tree. It is amazing how much thought and discussion each family enters into before making their final decision. In fact, in a few cases lack of consensus resulted in two trees being purchased and at three pounds a foot, who could blame them? It is certainly advisable to come assisted by other members of the family, to help you make your selection.

This year, there was also an excellent supply of mistletoe for sale with a choice of loose or ready to hang with ribbons. Both proved very popular and as long as there is a plentiful supply will be on sale again next year.

Unfortunately, 5th December was a very windy day, which proved to be a challenge to everyone throughout the morning. However, the marquee stood firm and there was a plentiful supply of seasonal mulled wine and home-made mince pies handed out to everyone who purchased a tree. It was a very jolly occasion and for many was the commencement of their preparations for Christmas.

Why not join us for the next sale in December. All proceeds from the sale are used by the local National Trust committee to assist the wardens in their work locally for the benefit of the commons.

Quiz Night March 2016

The third National Trust Quiz night took place on Friday 6th March 2016 at Headley Church Centre and this ever popular quiz was a sell out.

It was a fun event and provided an opportunity for the committee to meet local members and enjoy some serious quizzing. The evening consisted of two halves, each consisting of two rounds, and just to keep everyone busy there was the addition of a marathon round which needed to be completed throughout the evening. The quiz master David Knighton, suitably assisted by his wife Anne, set an excellent range of questions ranging from what is the difference between rain and drizzle, to Posh's maiden name.

A ploughman's meal was served in the interval with an ample selection of cheeses, chutneys and fruit. Participants brought their own drinks and nibbles. When everyone had finished eating, the game heads and tails was played with great merriment, followed by the National Trust raffle, with prizes including afternoon tea at Hinton Ampner and Uppark.

A great event enjoyed by everyone, so to avoid disappointment next year, book early.

Why not let us have your e-mail address so that we can let you know when the next one will take place.

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.

DATES for your DIARIES

For further details of any of the events please see:- www.ntludshott.org.uk and Posters on the Commons
Or Contact:- Wardens 01428 751338 selborneandludshott@nationaltrust.org.uk

'Heathland at Dusk' Saturday 2nd July 8.30pm

The annual 1½ - 2 hour **walk** on Ludshott Common for glimpses and sounds of wildlife and birds, hopefully including the nocturnal Nightjar.

Meet at Ludshott Common main (Dunelm) car park on B3002 between Headley Down and Grayshott (map ref SU853358).

Please wear stout footwear and bring a torch. £2.00 per person.

Superior Camp Walk Sunday 13th November 2.30pm

This 2 hour walk, a follow-up to last year's, will concentrate on the post World War II era.

Please wear stout footwear. £2.00 per person.

Christmas Tree Sale Saturday 3th December 2015

Proceeds from all events will be used locally towards the nature conservation of Ludshott Common, and Passfield Common & Conford Moor.

The English Switzerland

Ludshott Common and Waggoners Wells were very much part of the area surrounding Hindhead once known, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as the English Switzerland.

During April the Haslemere Museum is staging a very interesting exhibition entitled 'The Rise and Fall of the English Switzerland'. It describes the period shortly after the arrival of the railway through Haslemere when it was considered that the air at Hindhead and the surrounding area, was as pure and clean as that of the Swiss Alps, and as good a cure for Tuberculosis. The area became very fashionable and attracted a lively, if bohemian, group of writers and artists of the day, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and George Bernard Shaw.

The exhibition concludes by explaining how the area's popularity caused its demise, and the role played by Sir Robert Hunter, co-founder of the National Trust, in securing Hindhead Common and the Devil's Punch Bowl for the nation. Acquisition of Ludshott Common soon followed, and Waggoners Wells was bought by public subscription in 1919 in memory of Sir Robert.

The exhibition runs from 2nd – 23rd April. Entry to the Museum and exhibition is free and the Museum is open Tuesday – Saturday 10.00am – 5.00pm.



REQUEST FOR EMAIL ADDRESSES

Please let us have your details and then we can quickly circulate details of events etc.

Contact us via the website: www.ntludshott.org.uk

THANKS

Grateful thanks to those who responded to our call for volunteers to distribute this newsletter.