



Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

Issue 7 - March 2009

CENTENARY PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION



A good cross section of photographs from our local commons were received for last year's Centenary Photographic Competition. These were on display at a coffee morning at Grayshott village hall last November. The entries were judged by Phil Peddy ARPS APAGB, and the three winners were:

First: *Ludshott View* by *Sonia Motley* (left) Second: *Ludshott Sunset* by *Robert MacLeod* (top right) Third: *Passfield Common* by *Richard Hoskins* (bottom right)

There were also 8 highly commended photographs. The photographs will be on display at the our regional headquarters, The Vyne, Basingstoke, later this year.

Watch our developing website www.ntludshott.org.uk for details.

Ludshott Common - Looking ahead

By Chris Webb

A regular task that comes around every 3 to 5 years at National Trust countryside properties is the review and updating of management and conservation plans. Ludshott's plan is now due for renewal and this will be a major part of my and my colleagues' work over the coming year. These plans firstly consider what is significant about the property, whether the threats to the conservation of the site have changed and take account of any new opportunities that may improve the way we do our work. Once we have assessed the priorities, the resources that are available and sources of funding, a programme of work is drawn up. These plans are generally required when we apply for grant aid from the various bodies which sometimes help us financially.

This review of Ludshott's plan will be a bit different because we consider that the time is right to take stock and look critically at the past management of the site over the last thirty years. In recent decades, particularly since the severe fire of 1980, intensive mechanical, manual, and occasionally even chemical management work has been undertaken to stop one of our principle habitats - heathland - from declining in both extent and condition. The cost of this work has been considerable and is increasing. Although there is going to be the usual detailed planning for the next few years, this review will also seek to look further into the future in order that we set off on our next century looking at the best ways of doing our conservation work and meeting our long-term objectives.

The research for last year's celebration of the Trust's first century as custodian of this ancient landscape focused our thoughts on how successful we have been bearing in mind the NT's remit to



Spraying in the late 1980s to control the density of the vigorous, extensive and very flammable stands of gorse which Ludshott is famous for.

protect and 'preserve places of historic interest and natural beauty'. This commitment and our responsibilities comes into sharp relief when you consider that only 10 to 20 per cent of the Hampshire Weald's common land survived the nineteenth century onslaught which swept away heathland and ancient woods, converting them to farmland, forestry and housing estates. In the early twentieth century, Sir Robert Hunter and others were busy buying and acquiring as much common land as they could and securing its 'permanent preservation' by putting it into the hands of the National Trust, thereby ensuring the traditional access enjoyed by local communities could continue and it didn't become parcelled-up plots of private land.

Ludshott, along with a few other local commons, now stand out as critical remnants of the district's once very wild and very rural landscape. Alongside the Trust's acquisitions, if the Army had not taken over large areas of former common and ancient royal forest for training this part of East Hampshire could have been very different - probably much more urban in character. Looking at it another way, this part of the district would have been very similar to the New Forest if the former proprietors of common lands had been less vigorous and successful in removing the commoners and their rights so that they could 'improve' the land for private use or sell it off for profit.

Luckily some relatively large areas like Ludshott remain as open land and serve as important 'island' refuges for some increasingly rare species. The NT's objectives to protect these landscapes have been bolstered by recent legislation which places areas like Ludshott in a UK and

European wide network of nature conservation sites which are designated as 'Sites of Special Scientific Interest' and 'Special Protection Areas'. Although this places legal obligations on the Trust to maintain the area in 'Favourable Condition' for wildlife, this very much coincides with the charity's original purposes.

Legal protection on its own does not ensure that the landscape and the ecology survives - that depends on continuing human activity, which has been the key factor in maintaining and managing the vegetation of these areas for thousands of years. Research has shown that the way these heathlands have been used have kept them as relatively stable environments for millennia and it is remarkable that they still exist despite such widespread and major changes in the countryside during recent centuries.



Headley Down in the 1920s. Common land adjoining and similar to Ludshott existed at Headley Down and Grayshott until it was enclosed for housing in 1849.

In our planning process during the next few months it will probably be no surprise to many that methods of preparing these plans have developed and it is considered good practice that consultation is undertaken, particularly because we will have to look at a number of future long-term management options. There are further requirements under recently issued guidelines that major management planning for registered common land should be informed by the 'stakeholders' who have an interest in the site. Therefore over the next few months we will be consulting with individuals and groups about the site and its future.

In order to keep the process manageable we will be asking that those who wish to be consulted register their interest. During the summer, details will be advertised explaining how this can be done. We will be undertaking a number of open days for



Mechanical grazing with a forage harvester which cuts and collects vegetation.

people who use the area and will be contacting organisations and individuals with direct interests, such as registered commoners, neighbours, local authorities and parish councils.

The outcome of the process will hopefully be a clearly understood direction for the future management of the common.

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.

GENTLES COPSE

Part 6 in a series concerning the history of our Open Space Properties

This part of the property lies to the west of Ludshott Common and south of Headley Down. The Committee had always been concerned with its vulnerability to housing development and in 1983 managed to buy 30 acres of the Copse, with funds built up from generous legacies and donations over the years, to be followed, in 1986, by the remaining 35 acres after a local appeal for funds.



Sessile oaks at Gentles Copse

This lovely area of woodland in which to walk and ride has particular ecological importance as the site of an ancient coppice of Sessile oak. Mostly found in the north of England these trees tolerate lighter, more acid, less-fertile soils. However, they are now a fairly rare landscape feature in the south-east of England as their habitat has diminished with building encroachment but also, as here, by the invasive nature of other tree species. The Sessile oak coppice covered approximately 100 acres for many centuries. From the 65 acres of Gentles Copse that was acquired, about 20 acres of coppice remained. These are slowly being restored and expanded. Due to the generosity of a local resident, and in memory of his wife, 600 acorns were collected from beneath their parent trees, by the family in the autumn of 1999, and were grown on for us by the Forestry Commission. In 2002, birch and pine trees were cleared and the 400 saplings that had germinated from the acorns were planted on the hillside to expand the grove of Sessile oaks. In 2006, another generous donation, in memory of another supporter of the Ludshott landscape, was received and is being used to propagate a further batch of acorns which had been collected here, by friends. The saplings from all these acorns ensure the continuity of the genetic stock of this stand of trees.

The ancient boundary banks on the hillside to the south of Pond Road, are evidence of the old farming practices of the commoners of Ludshott. These banks were raised to denote land ownership and to keep cattle out of the coppice. There is also a small area of Chestnut coppice along Gentles Lane, which was obviously deliberately planted at some date, however, no traces of old house foundations have ever been found here. But the remains of old quarries can be seen, on the hillside to the north of Pond Road, where material was dug to create the roadways and early buildings in Headley Down. Today, the paths down the hill include a footpath from Furzehill Road on to Ludshott Common that was dedicated in 2001.

***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.

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
Steve Thames		01428 713096

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Over the past few months the wardening team, assisted by our regular volunteers, have been completing our annual tree safety inspection work across the properties. Much of the identified remedial work can be done by the team but in some cases we require the assistance of specialist local tree surgeons with climbing skills. This was the case at **Waggoner's Wells**, where extended Beech tree limbs over a footpath were removed and a nearby Beech tree showing signs of the onset of disease was climbed and dismantled.

The cutting and collecting of vegetation, using our tractor mounted machinery, was carried out across much of the Heathland we manage. The weather has not been kind, limiting the amount of work we can carry out so our emphasis has been on keeping tracks and pathways passable.

This year we again accepted an invitation to support the Blackmoor Apple Day in October. Our stand focussed on The National Trust's role in, and history of nature conservation in the area and we met many new friends among the record number of visitors the event attracted. Our volunteers provided support throughout the day cutting samples of the wide variety of apples available for visitors to taste.

On Saturday 6th of December we were supported by a good turn out of Volunteers to cut Scots Pine trees as part of our continuing scrub clearance work on **Ludshott Common**. The weather was splendid, a crisp clear day, and a brisk morning's work cleared dozens of invasive trees. Sadly the following Saturday, when we sold the cut trees from Dunelm Car Park, was cold and very wet, although our Volunteers did note that at least it wasn't blowing a gale as it had been the previous year! Notwithstanding the weather the Christmas Tree sale was well supported, raising over £900 which goes directly in support of our local nature conservation work.

The project to build a new **Work Base** to support our nature conservation work is gathering momentum. A design consultant, specialising in 'Green Building', has now been appointed for the **Sir Robert Hunter Wardens Base**. We have been working so far on site preparation, a necessary preliminary to the main work starting. We have re-coppiced and layed an existing hedge on the boundary between the Tunbridge Lane site and the neighbouring property.

We have also re-coppiced the old Hazel stools along the Tunbridge Lane bank ready for them to be dug up and re-planted further into the field. This will improve the sight line for vehicles going into, or out of, the work base as required by the grant of planning permission. The trees are currently dormant so we expect most to survive the move, but we will also carry out additional planting to replace any that might fail. This will maintain the wildlife value of the feature.

The next phase will be the ground works to create access and the installation of services to the site. Once this phase is complete, hopefully over the next few months we will be able to move on to the landscaping of the compound including the planting of a wild-life hedge around the boundary and starting on the 'Green/Eco' build for the Office and Workshop.

We have already received a number of offers of Volunteer Support for the project. If you think that you might be able to help please contact the Warden's Office (01428-751563) or e-mail keith.blackmore@nationaltrust.org.uk.

Please though bear with us as this is quite an involved project and we may find ourselves constrained as to just how many volunteers we can safely deploy for particular tasks.



Selling trees in the wet



Christmas tree cutting is such hard work!

Ludshott Common **Guided Walks**

across the Common led by the wardens. These 2 hour walks will focus on the history, wildlife, conservation and future of this ancient landscape.

Saturday 16th May 10:30 - 12:30
Thursday 21st May 19:00 - 21:00

Heathland at Dusk

Saturday 4th July 8.00pm

A 2½ hour walk for glimpses and sounds of heathland wildlife and birds, and particularly the nocturnal nightjar.

For all three walks meet at Ludshott Common, main (Dunelm) car park on B3002 between Headley Down and Grayshott. Map ref: SU853358
Please have stout footwear and a torch for evening walks.
There will be a **£1.00** charge per person.

(For further information contact the Wardens on 01428 751563)

Selborne Common

Guided Walk

Sunday 31st May

Meet at 2.00pm at the car park behind Selborne Arms Pub
Map ref SU 742335
Led by the warden the 2½ hour walk will begin with a steep climb up the Hanger before crossing the Common.