



Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

Issue 12 - October 2011

DUKE OF EDINBURGH AWARD VOLUNTEER DAY

By Simon Chaffe, NT Warden

On Wednesday 20th and Thursday 21st April 2011 three strong, willing young men volunteered their services to assist the Wardens with some hard labour.

The time they gave comprised an element towards their Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Wartime Canadian Camp, which had become exposed.

A passing dog walker was concerned that he had discovered some fly tippers, but was reassured by one of the Wardens that the activity was legitimate! The next task was to lay and compact some tarmac patching into three large potholes on Superior Road.



The final challenge saw the team scrub clearing along the margins of some tracks on the Common, cutting down the Silver Birch *Betula pendula* and Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus* re-generation which was closing over the tracks.

The lads worked hard to achieve their goals, demonstrating a strong work ethic and good team work. Their efforts were much appreciated by the Wardens.

The weather was fine and warm. I think we all remember the summer we had back in April! The lads were set to work shovelling some material from a trailer to be used for filling some potentially hazardous holes around Superior Road, on the edge of Ludshott Common. They used wheelbarrows to ferry the material to fill an open drainage chamber from the



COME AND JOIN US

COFFEE MORNING

**5th November
at Grayshott Village Hall
10.00am - 12 noon**

Meet the Wardens
and see their information stand

Meet the Committee

Exhibition of Competition entries
and prize giving

NT Goods Stall -
buy your Christmas presents

Greetings card stall
(local views)

Raffle

Free Entry
Coffee/tea/squash and biscuit
£1.00

*All proceeds to help support the
management work on Ludshott
Common, Bramshott Chase,
Passfield Common and Conford
Moor.*

RECENT EVENTS

On 1st May, the RSPCA invited us to have a stall at their Gala event, on Headley Village Green. The weather was very windy, so stalls with gazebos had some difficulty in securing them, not just us!

The occasion was well attended, the Wardens' information boards and maps attracting interest, so Chris and Mandy were able to talk to many people, describing the status of the Commons and the management work. Committee members were recruited in to help when it was very busy, and in addition we were pleased to sell some NT Goods, which added to our funds, and we signed up several new Friends.



Stall on Headley Village Green

The annual Ludshott Common 'Nightjar Walk' took place in the evening of 2nd July. We welcomed quite a large group, some regulars, and some new faces. Chris guided the walk, giving short talks at intervals on the way round, describing the



Gathering at Dunelm car park

management of the Common and why it was so important as a wildlife habitat. As dusk was falling the Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* could be heard and this year two were seen in flight. Nightjars are summer migrants and are nocturnal. They are mostly easily seen hawking for food at dusk (hence the later than normal start for a walk on the common!) and dawn. They have long pointed wings and long tails, making their shape

not unlike a kestrel or a cuckoo. Their grey-brown, mottled, streaked and barred plumage provides ideal camouflage in the daytime whilst resting or incubating eggs in the nest, which is a shallow depression on the ground. Flight is almost silent and the first indication that there are nightjars about is the male's churring song.

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) were also sighted. This is also a largely nocturnal bird, but can be seen all the year round as the UK population is mostly resident, although the breeding population has been falling due to the decrease in open habitats. It is a large bulky wading bird from the sandpiper family, with short legs and a very long tapering bill, and also nests on the ground.



Listening to one of Chris' talks

ALL CHANGE

Submitted by Wendy Long, who since talking to Chris, has decided to become one of our Friends

Head Warden Chris Webb is clearly looking forward to moving into purpose-built premises with staff facilities, storage space and the means for more efficient and effective administration. His current office is a cramped former outhouse, complete with original beams and situated in the yard of a grade II listed farmhouse. It's a delightful spot; but the move is necessary. (Chris insists that once he and his team are installed in the new place, hopefully before Christmas, there will be no more problems trying to find the coffee and milk!) Chris is something of a pragmatist and knows quite a bit about the need for change. In 1983 he decided it was time to leave The Forestry Commission and do something more satisfying and challenging as a National Trust warden. For ten years he worked single-handed on the Ludshott, Passfield and Conford, and Selborne Commons before being joined by another warden. The extra man power allowed him to take a part time degree course at Winchester. Later he gained an MA.

1992 brought a significant change when the National Trust centralised the management of all its properties leaving local committees to focus on their advisory and supportive roles which they continue to fulfil. Since the mid 1990s, Chris's role as Head Warden with responsibility for 1,300 acres of National Trust property has evolved into that of leader of a team of four wardens each of which has his or her area of expertise. Chris sees himself very much a part of that team. Nevertheless, he is aware of his overall responsibility and spends much time formulating management plans for various sites and making applications for grants and agreements. Though The National Trust provides a budget for everyday necessities such as vehicles and repairs, Chris has, for the last two years, been putting together applications for a variety of grants from Natural England and The Forestry Commission (both DEFRA agencies).

He is very much in control of both day-to-day decisions and plans for the long-term future. He is acutely aware of the need for conservation, an example being the Ludshott heathland which is managed in perpetuity. It must survive and Chris is determined to make that management more robust and secure for the future. This, hopefully, will include the reinstatement of grazing. Despite his knowledge and vision, Chris has to seek consent for any schemes connected with Sites of Special Scientific Interest for ten years ahead; and he knows that these sites will be inspected regularly by Natural England and The Forestry Commission to ensure that a high standard is maintained.

Although his workload has changed over twenty five years with less emphasis on the practical and more on decision-making, the variety is still wide: Chris might be seen removing fallen trees; undertaking tractor work; drawing maps – often to a deadline - as part of the application process; liaising with farmers or with other agencies similar to The National Trust, especially where adjoining land is concerned; or giving talks in order to engage with the public and to publicise National Trust work. Aspects of summer and winter work differ. Habitat management has to be done outside the bird nesting season so land clearance and tree felling must be

complete by mid February when the birds, notably woodlarks, begin to nest. Summer is the time for cutting firebreaks; organising grazing; hay making; bracken control; guided walks and other activities involving the public.

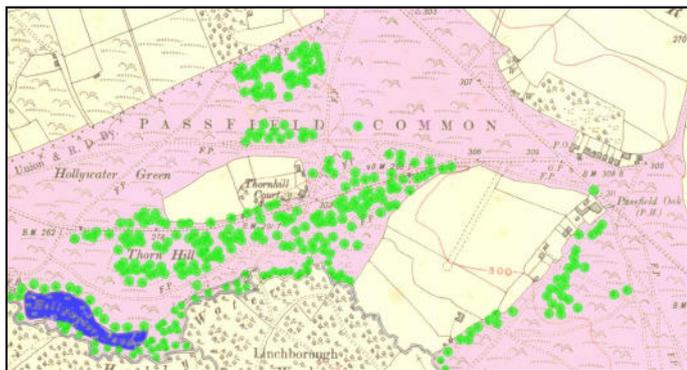
Any outside legislation deliberately brings change. The introduction of European protection for important nature conservation sites has been, in Chris's opinion, a good thing for British designations and not only because it increases funds. "I like to be involved in sites which are considered by Europe to be of special interest. It gives prestige." Chris and his team are keenly aware of current conditions and practices beyond their control. Climate change is now a big consideration when planning for the future as are the effects of pollution. Beech trees, for example, probably won't respond well to global warming; and the surviving areas of heather growing on poor, acid soil can be affected by atmospheric pollution which leads to increasing levels of nutrient. These, in turn, speed up the rates of change on heathland habitats.

Chris obviously loves his work with a team he greatly respects. He believes that their most valuable task is that of protecting our ancient landscapes. He thinks of them as custodians of land which has survived huge changes over the last hundred years. Restoration, an essential part of that custodianship, ensures that the land remains for the future, the same as always, in an ever-changing world.

VETERANS, POLLARDS AND WOOD-PASTURE at Passfield Common and Conford Moor *By Chris Webb, Head Warden*

The 240 acres of common land at Passfield and Conford is part of a larger landscape of wild open heathland and woods that extend out from Woolmer Forest. The forest, along with the numerous commons, provided local people with many of the resources they needed to survive – heathland pasture for grazing their cattle, sheep, ponies, pigs and geese; bracken, gorse and heather for winter animal bedding; peat from the bogs and wood from trees for fuel; along with many other materials. Although now much smaller in area, there is still a rich patchwork of wildlife sites, their survival very much the result of these old traditional practices continuing until just a few decades ago.

Even though, in a broad-brush way, this landscape has been classified as heathland, that's a little simplistic, as historical and ecological evidence shows that there has been for centuries, 'wood pasture' here as well. The scattered trees and woods added diversity and widened the range of resources for the



The 1910 edition of the 6" scale OS map showing the western part of Passfield Common. These maps are well-known for accurately depicting the distribution of woodland and even the location of individual trees. The scattered woodland and trees are highlighted in green while the open heathland and pasture is in pink. Hollywater Pond is shown in blue.

commoners. And although now hemmed in by recently regenerated secondary woodland, patches of ancient woodland and many fantastic old trees or 'veterans' survive from a time when the commoners were still actively managing them. These are the trees that we have been seeking out and recording recently as part of a property-wide and nationwide 'veteran tree survey'.

So far the survey shows that open-grown oak trees in particular were once numerous across the heathland at Passfield. The reason they survived in the landscape is because there was a crop

of acorns for fattening pigs to be had in the autumn, an activity known as 'pannage', and they could also be lopped and 'pollarded' for fuel on a regular basis. This practice involved cutting branches from the crown just out of the reach of browsing livestock. New branchwood springing from dormant buds could then grow on for a decade or two for the next crop of firewood. This cycle of cutting and regrowth was repeated many times, creating a number of large, ecologically important 'pollards' that are still present on the common today. In language that harks back to Saxon and medieval manorial customs the common rights associated with this were known as 'firebote' and 'housebote' and are still referred to as 'estovers'.



An older generation pollard oak on Hollywater Green, now hemmed in by recently regenerated holly scrub, but still very much part of a working wood pasture landscape where a commoner continues to exercise common rights and graze cattle.

At Hollywater Green a dead fallen pollard allowed us to measure and date a tree accurately for comparison with others that are still standing and alive. There appears to be a set of oaks which began life in the mid nineteenth century that were last pollarded around 1900 to 1920 when the trees were about 60 years old.

Some trees are obviously older, possibly between two to three hundred years. The obvious example is the 'Passfield Oak', which, in a photograph from around 1900, appears to be a mature tree, probably already well over a hundred years old. These old trees may have been pollarded several times during their early years. The most recent lopping work seems to date from between the 1950s and the 1970s.

We hope to complete the survey next year with the help of volunteers and we are aiming to make the completed survey available on our website. However, we are already learning a lot more about the history and ecology of the Common which is helping us to plan our future conservation work in an informed way.



The Passfield Oak

WHAT'S HAPPENING

WORKBASE NEWS

The Committee is very pleased to report that, at long last, work is in progress, on site.

An excellent contractor, who started in August, is renovating and re-cladding the originally steel-clad barn, with wood felled at The Vyne (see Commons Link, Issue 11). This will take until November after which the Wardens will move to the site. As a temporary measure, planning permission has been granted for a portacabin which will be used as an office, with welfare facilities, whilst the eco-friendly new building is being grafted on to the rear of the barn.

We are grateful for all the expertise injected into this project from the NT hierarchy, the architects, and many others. Also, the help given by our regular volunteers in many ways not least the hand finishing, with preservative, of all the planking and other timber that is being used. Our warden Jim, with colleagues Mandy and Simon, have been deeply involved, in talking to neighbours, overseeing plans, arranging the utilities, sourcing the timber together with its felling, transport, and organisation of the sawing to the required lengths, to name but a meagre few of the many hurdles they have overcome. Although it will take up to another two years to finally complete the project, involving input from many volunteers as well as contractors, at the moment the excitement felt, of being about to move to purpose built facilities, is palpable.

We are hoping that later on a Friends event can be arranged on site, to recognise that this new working environment for the wardens could not have been achieved without the finance accrued from legacies and donations of our Friends past and present.



'Old' barn



Local contractor's mobile saw bench



Interior of barn showing timber and planks ready for hand finishing

THANK YOU

A very big thank you, following our appeal, to the volunteers who came forward offering to deliver Commons Link at Headley Down, and continuing thanks to our Grayshott deliverers. If any other Friends would like to help in this way please contact Susan Salter, by phone, or email, or via the website.

If you would like to help in conservation management volunteering please contact Jim Avenell at the NT Warden's Office, or email via the website.

FAMILY FUN

Due to unforeseen circumstances in August, it was not possible to organise the Family Fun afternoon. We apologise for this and very much hope that the event will take place next year.

DATES for your DIARIES

November 5th Coffee Morning, Grayshott Village Hall, 10am - 12 noon.
Exhibition of entries to the Junior Art Competition, and to the open Photographic Competition; Meet the Wardens; NT goods; Raffle.

December 10th Christmas Tree Sale. Dunelm car park, 9am - 12 noon.

Further details for these events will be available nearer the time from posters on the Commons and from the website.

USEFUL CONTACTS

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