



The Queensmere Swans do it again!



Swan and cygnets on Queensmere

In 2007, many of you who use the Commons followed avidly the highs and lows of the swans on Queensmere. First the highs as they laid their clutch of six eggs and then the lows as one cygnet failed to hatch, another died from a crow attack soon after hatching and the occasional harassment from dogs. There was outrage when one of the adult swans was killed - possibly by someone who thought it would be good to eat.

So in 2009, members of our staff constructed and secured two floating platforms on Queensmere. To our delight, both the Mute Swans and Coots took the opportunity to build nests on these platforms and, after a short period of incubation, young from both of these species were seen.

The platforms were located well away from the banks so it was initially quite difficult to estimate the number of young in each nest but, by mid-May 2009, eight cygnets were seen swimming on the pond. In order to protect the cygnets further, the Conservators, under their Byelaws, put in place a "dogs on lead" zone around Queensmere. The public responded really well to this and the Conservators pass on their thanks to dog-walkers.

All eight cygnets went from strength to strength and grew to maturity on the pond. In late 2009, four of the young, with strong "encouragement" from the adult pair, took off and left Queensmere. The other four cygnets remained until January 2010 when "dad", presumably with thoughts of mating in his mind, decided enough was enough and refused to let the youngsters back onto the water. Because of concerns about their safety, London Wildcare were contacted and they caught the youngsters and took them off to their centre in Wallington, for future release at Kingston lock.

Wimbledon Common wins London in Bloom Award

In 2009, the London in Bloom Awards included a category for "Best Common" for the first time. With the permission of the Conservators, Merton Council put Wimbledon Common forward for the award. In July 2009, one of the Conservators, Dr Stephen Frank, showed a team of judges around the Common, focusing in particular on Queensmere and the work that had been done to encourage the swans; and also on the Plain and the efforts to encourage the acid grassland, and the Skylarks to return.

Much to the delight of the Conservators, Wimbledon Common was placed first in the category. This Award was sponsored by the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association (MPGA) and, at their October Board meeting, the Conservators were presented with the award by Mrs Joyce Bellamy MBE, the Secretary of the MPGA. On presenting the award, Mrs Bellamy said "London's commons are very special places with wonderful landscapes and abundant wildlife, whilst also providing a wide range of recreational opportunities". The



Conservators being presented with the award for Best Common by Mrs Joyce Bellamy MBE of the MPGA

Conservators and the MPGA have an historical connection in that the MPGA were heavily involved in the design of the Memorial Ring on the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields, which provides the setting for the war memorial commemorating those who lost their lives in the First World War.

Wimbledon & Putney Commons Conservators

ANNUAL OPEN MEETING

Monday 21 June at 8pm

The Cornerstone

Alton Road, Roehampton Lane, Roehampton, SW15 4LG

Presentation of annual accounts and report

There will be a general discussion on any points you wish to raise.

Refreshments will be served after the meeting.

Woodland Management

The woodland of Wimbledon Common, Putney Heath and Putney Lower Common consists of approximately 250 hectares of mainly deciduous trees within a total area of 460 hectares. The management of woodland habitats is therefore a significant part of the Conservators' overall conservation action plan.

The woodlands have developed through a process of natural regeneration on land that was historically a heathland/acid grassland site. In 2007, the woodlands were evaluated by Soil Association Woodmark, which is a Forestry Stewardship Council accredited certification body. As a result, the Conservators were awarded a certificate of registration in August of the same year.

All work carried out on the woodlands now follow Forestry Commission, Natural England and UK Woodland Assurance Standard guidelines. By creating a partnership with these organisations, the Conservators have ensured that all woodland operations undertaken by our staff meet high standards that will ensure long-term benefits to the woodland habitats.

Apart from the rich variety of flora and fauna, one of the great attractions of the Commons for generations of visitors has been that they provide a countryside environment amid a wider urban setting. Whilst conservation and development of bio-diversity remain central to the active management of the woodland, the huge amenity value of these woods remains a key factor in all our management decisions. Health and safety issues must also be addressed and regular inspections of the trees are carried out.

One of the perennial tasks that continues to occupy our staff is the pruning and clearance of holly (*Ilex aquifolium*). If left unchecked this native tree soon envelops many of the paths and tracks throughout the wooded areas of the Commons. In its defence, holly provides an important source of winter food and shelter for birds. Unfortunately it does have the ability to grow freely in the shade of other trees and it is so successful that this hardy species has come to dominate large areas of the woodlands. Work on controlling the growth of holly both by our own staff and groups of volunteers is ongoing. Dense areas of holly have been cleared from the edges of a number of the horse rides to create light and improve sight lines. Where these clearings have been created, access to space and light will allow nearby trees to develop and prosper.

Regular users of the Commons may have noticed that alongside these clearings, we have opened up areas through hazel coppicing. Coppicing is an ancient technique that involves the removal of all vertical growth, which then enables the coppiced wood to produce new growth. Far from being destructive, the coppicing of understorey species such as hazel (*Corylus avellana*) can actually prolong the life of the tree. Coppicing on the Commons is carried out on

a fairly short rotation of around five years, and the cut poles and branches are used for a variety of projects on the Commons.

We have had success in attracting nesting birds with the 'dead hedges' that have been created by weaving larger cut materials into tightly packed structures in the immediate area of the coppice site. Smaller prunings have also been useful in providing cover for the swans and coots on Queensmere's floating platforms.

A further important aspect of caring for the woodlands is the successful management of its deadwood. Dead or decaying wood provides one of the most important habitats within the woodland eco-system and is home to a large number of creatures that depend on it for their existence. Both standing and fallen deadwood has often been seen as something to be removed from



Silver Birch trees

woodland and as a result many woodlands have become seriously impoverished. The Commons have become an outstanding locality for Stag Beetles (*Lucanus cervus*) as a result of the manner in which the wooded areas have been traditionally maintained.

Where standing deadwood is found away from well-used paths and rides, it is ecologically beneficial to leave it where it stands. Nevertheless, we must remain vigilant to the requirements of public health and safety. In cases where branches or even

entire trees provide a serious risk to the public they will be felled and left on site to decay. Where trees die as a result of a recognised infectious disease the wood is always burnt. Before any significant tree operation takes place, all trees are first thoroughly checked by our staff to avoid the risk of harming wildlife.

The important task of managing the woodlands of the Commons is an ongoing project which has no commercial interest and is carried out purely for the enhancement of bio-diversity and the enjoyment of Commons' visitors.

New Gallery opened in the Windmill

The Windmill on Wimbledon Common has housed a museum for over thirty years. It contains models and displays showing the history and development of windmills in this country since they first appeared in the 12th Century. However, a new gallery has recently been completed, showcasing more modern uses of wind power.

Officially opened by the Mayor of Merton on 23 February, the display includes models of wind pumps and wind turbines from the smallest to the largest. All the models, built by the Windmill's Curator, Norman Plastow MBE, are built to a scale of 1:50 but to accommodate the largest of these, it was necessary to remove part of the ceiling!

The display tries to give a balanced view of the advantages and disadvantages of wind power, but it is difficult to ignore the old saying "No-one ever built a windmill if he could build a water mill".

The Windmill Museum is open every Saturday from 2pm to 5pm and every Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday from 11am to 5pm, from April to the end of October. School and group visits can be arranged at other times by appointment.



Wimbledon Common Stables Open Day

Come along to the Annual Stables Open Day on **Sunday 12 September** - from 10.30am at The Ranger's Office, Windmill Road SW19 5NR

**Farm Animals Birds of Prey Tractor Rides
Horse displays and The Wacky Dog Show!**

The 2010 Open Day will also be hosting the annual charity Tug of War organised by the Wimbledon Village Safer Neighbourhood Police team. All proceeds from the Tug of War will be going to Help For Heroes.

If you would like to enter a team, please e-mail wimvillagetugowar@btinternet.com

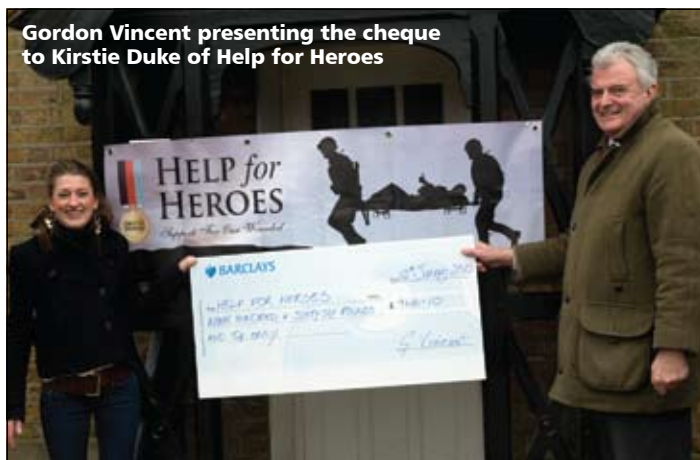


Help for Heroes Donation

Those of you who visited the Stables Open Day in 2009 might have sampled some of the delicious cakes, biscuits and other culinary goodies that were being sold on the Cake Stall to raise funds for Help for Heroes.

The stall was the brainchild of Commons' dog-walker, Ally Tennant. Ally coerced dozens of her friends into helping her to bake for the stall and it proved to be one of the most popular of the day, raising an amazing £750! Added to that, the Clerk & Ranger, Chief Executive, Gordon Vincent, auctioned off two huge Teddy Bears at the staff Summer Party and raised another £215. Gordon presented the cheque to the local Help for Heroes representative, Kirstie Duke.

Ms Duke commented "Every single pound that's been raised here sends a powerful message of support to our wounded service men and women returning from Afghanistan and Iraq, and their families. On behalf of all our men and women at Selly Oak Hospital and Headley Court, Help for Heroes can't thank enough the Conservators, their staff, and those that contributed to the cake stall!"



New Chairman of the Conservators

David Devons, an elected Conservator since 1994, stood down as Chairman in April this year after eight years. During this time, David has guided the Conservators through so many challenges that the role of Chair must have often seemed like a full-time job.

Andrew Simon, Vice-Chairman for the last 3 years, has been appointed in his place. Andrew said on taking over the chair:

"Everyone who loves and uses the Commons owes David an enormous debt of gratitude for his commitment and stewardship over eight very busy and testing years.



Fortunately, he continues as an elected Conservator so that his deep experience remains available to his colleagues."

Andrew, a retired solicitor, has lived in Wimbledon and Putney for over 30 years, and has known the Commons as a walker, runner, and birdwatcher. He has also been a steward at the Windmill Museum for several years. His over-riding aim is to keep the Commons free of party political control, to preserve the flora and wildlife, and at the same time to maintain the balance with the wide range of recreational activities for our own generation and especially for future generations.

Railways on the Commons

Did you know there was once a railway on the Commons? In fact, there have been two! The first, built in 1845, was Prosser's experimental railway, which ran from Thatched Cottage at the south end of Wimbledon Common to the Windmill, with a large turning circle on Putney Heath, the outline of which is still reflected in the layout of some of the footpaths today. A map of the route can be seen in the information centre. The train ran on wooden rails using wheels without flanges and the wheels were kept on the rails by smaller guide wheels running against the inside faces of the rails.

The second was a horse-drawn tramway built in 1864 by the National Rifle Association, which used Wimbledon Common as



The N.R.A. Tramway, 1864

its base for shooting competitions from 1860. The tramway ran from the Pound, near Wimbledon Village, to the Windmill and was a series of open-sided carriages to enable visitors to get to each of the firing points. In 1877, the NRA experimented with a steam engine which, despite proving to be very successful, was taken up and moved when the NRA created their permanent base at Bisley.

The Commons narrowly escaped having a public railway built across Putney Heath. By 1880 the District Line from London had reached Putney Bridge and plans were drawn up, in conjunction with the London and South-Western Railway, to extend the line to Kingston and then on to Guildford. In 1881 an Act was passed allowing the line to be laid across the Thames at Putney, up the hill to Tibbet's Corner and then across the Commons to Kingston. Work began but the District Railway ran into financial difficulties and settled for taking the line to Wimbledon instead.

NEWSBITES

- Because the RPI in September 2009 was a minus figure (-1.4%) there will be a consequent reduction in the Commons' Levy for 2010/11. The charge for a Band D property will be £23.85 per annum, compared with £24.32 last year.
- In response to public concerns over indecent behaviour on Putney Lower Common, woodland has been cleared to create sight lines and, in future, undergrowth will be kept low.
- By the time you read this, the refurbishment of the Windmill car park toilets should be almost complete. The £35,000 upgrade by the Conservators will be a big improvement.
- The Conservators have been fortunate enough to receive a grant from the Drinking Fountain Association, and a matching donation from a local resident, to replace the drinking fountain by the horse trough near the Windmill.
- Please don't forget that it is now a requirement of the Commons Byelaws to pick up after your dogs on the Commons!

Chairman's Report

There has still been no movement at the Putney Hospital site on Putney Lower Common - the dilapidated buildings remain and there is no immediate prospect of demolition or redevelopment. The negotiations between the Wandsworth Primary Care Trust, Wandsworth Council and the Conservators over the Section 106 Agreement and the Land-Transfer document have seemed never ending. The documents were only signed recently, so that formal planning permission could be granted, and the land at the rear of the site could be registered to the Conservators in compensation for the proposed new access road on the Common along the eastern side of the site. It is unlikely that this planning permission will be acted upon, since it is now expected that the Putney GP practices will move to a more central site in Putney and the Putney Hospital site will be sold for redevelopment.

The legality of the Bye-law allowing us to exclude dogs temporarily from certain areas of the Commons - particularly to allow Skylarks to nest on the Plain - has been challenged. After discussing the matter with Defra we hope to limit the wording to deal with the specific problem of dogs discouraging ground-nesting birds, and put the legality of the Bye-law beyond doubt. Last year we reduced the maximum number of dogs allowed to be walked by licensed dog-walkers from six to five, mainly because it appeared that the local

Councils would introduce similar measures. This has not happened and so the maximum number of dogs allowed has reverted to six. As before, any dogs above four must be on a lead.

After protracted discussions with the Charity Commission and, with advice from a local surveyor, a scheme for granting easements was offered to owners of those properties around the Wimbledon Village end of Wimbledon Common who have to cross a verge belonging to the Conservators in order to access the highway. It was a delicate balance to devise a scheme which was the best that could reasonably be obtained for the Conservators - a registered charity - and which was fair and reasonable for the property owners.

The long-envisioned scallop on Beverley Brook by the Scout Field near the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields was finally excavated last autumn to create an alcove in the bank of the brook. With judicious seeding of the bank and possible planting of a reed bed it should provide an attractive view of the brook and a haven for river life.

David Devons
Chairman (2002 to April 2010)

Commons Finances 2009 – 2010

2009-10 has been unique in recent times in providing a context of deflation, which has posed some unfamiliar questions for financial planning, but which the Conservators are confident they have answered effectively. The Commons Levy is linked to the Retail Price Index (RPI) for September the preceding year. In September 2009 the RPI was minus 1.4%. Accordingly, the Conservators reduced the Levy for 2010-11 by 1.4%, which will result in a loss of income for that year of about £13,000. For 2010-11, the Levy for a Band D property will be £23.85 per annum, compared with £24.32 in the previous year.

However it was clear that inflation would return in 2010, particularly in energy and materials costs. To plan for this, the Conservators have saved two vacant posts, enabling a slightly higher proportion of Levy income to be spent on maintenance, equipment and environmental care. Income from other sources has continued to grow, and new licences are under negotiation for the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields, following the decision of Harlequins Rugby Union to vacate. This secures the revenue budget for the year 2010-11.

Capital assets, including those arising from the forced sale of Mill House, have been protected from the worst of recent market uncertainties, although earned interest has, of course, fallen. Despite a difficult context, the Conservators are continuing to avoid using capital to meet routine expenditure. They are confident that the budget for 2010-11 is capable of sustaining the current level of care and conservation of the Commons and providing a sound basis for subsequent years.

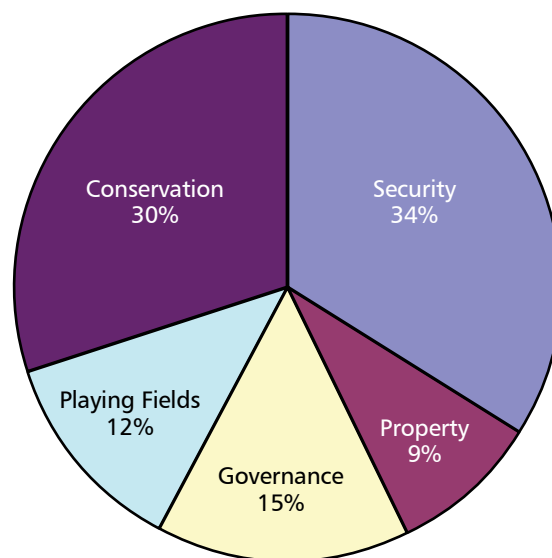
Gifts and Legacies to help the Commons

Under Section 8 of the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871, the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators are a body corporate with perpetual succession. This means that the body corporate exists separately from the individual Conservators. The Conservators as a body corporate are also a registered charity. Therefore, there is no inheritance tax on legacies bequeathed to them, and any gifts can be offset against the donor's income tax. The annual levy barely produces enough to cover the salaries and related costs of the staff running the Commons, so that the

Conservators depend on income generated by other means, eg from the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields, from allowing filming on the Commons and from selling items such as logs and cards.

If you would like to support the Commons by means of a donation or legacy, please contact Gordon Vincent, the Clerk & Ranger, Chief Executive, at the Ranger's Office (see contact details below). Not only would the Conservators be most grateful but your gift would be used to benefit the Commons for present and future users.

Expenditure Breakdown



For more information on the issues highlighted in this newsletter log on to www.wpcc.org.uk

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