



Commons' Stables Open Day raises record amount for Charity!

The annual Commons' Stables Open Day in 2010 surpassed all previous Open Days in so many ways that even the staff were surprised. The weather was glorious and held fair all day. This was unusual as the day does not normally pass without at least one torrential downpour that sees visitors running for the nearest shelter. People turned up in their thousands and all the stall-holders, mainly local charities, reported a marked increase in interest in their work and in donations received.

The change of date certainly seemed to help too. The Open Day had previously always been held in July, but the Keepers took the decision to change the date to September to avoid a clash with both the British Grand Prix and the World Cup football final.

The regular attractions and displays were as popular as ever, with horse-grooming demonstrations by the Keepers, tractor and donkey rides, riding displays by the Wimbledon Village Stables, dog-handling by Battersea Parks Police, a superb interactive display of birds of prey that enthralled both children and adults alike, and the now infamous Wacky Dog show.

2010 saw an additional attraction at the Open Day. For the first time, we hosted the annual Tug o' War competition organised by the local Wimbledon Village Safer Neighbourhood Police Team (SNT). The competition raises money for charity and, in recognition of the fact that all our current Mounted Keepers are ex-army, the charity chosen was Help for Heroes. Over a dozen teams took part this year and the event culminated in a very exciting final between The Trauma Team (local ambulance service) and the Wimbledon Taxi Pumas, with The Trauma Team the eventual winners.

With entry fees, sponsorship and donations, the competition raised £2,100. Local SNT officer, Sergeant Adrian Sutherland, commented "The generosity of the teams that took part, and also of the visitors attending the Open Day, was amazing and we are grateful that they dug deep into their pockets for a very worthy cause."

The winners - The Trauma Team - from the local ambulance service



In addition to the Tug o' War, the Cake Stall also raised money for charity. The stall, which is hugely popular and is rapidly becoming as big a draw as the Wacky Dog Show, was run by Ali Tennant and Maria Mendes and they raised nearly £3,000 for their chosen charity, the Household Cavalry Casualties Fund.

Wimbledon Common Stables Open Day

Come along to the Annual Stables Open Day on Sunday 4 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 2011 Open Day will be hosting the annual charity Tug o' War organised by the Wimbledon Village Safer Neighbourhood Police Team. All proceeds from the Tug o' War will be going to charity. If you would like to enter a team, please e-mail rangersoffice@wpcc.org.uk

Bird Report 2010

Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath has a huge asset in local bird expert, Dave Wills. Dave spends most of his spare time recording and photographing the birds he sees on the Commons each year, and then producing a comprehensive report. In 2010, Dave was thrilled that the number of species recorded exceeded a hundred for the first time. He commented, "It's testimony to the Conservators and their staff that the conservation management of the Commons is allowing the number of species of birds to flourish." Copies of the Bird List are on sale in the Ranger's Office for £3.

Wimbledon & Putney Commons Conservators

ANNUAL OPEN MEETING

Wednesday 15 June at 8pm

All Saints Church
Putney Lower Common SW15 1HL

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.

Grassland Restoration Work on the Plain

Over the last few years a great deal of planning and work has gone into improving the area of grassland on the Plain. Covering an area of approximately 16 hectares, the Plain, or Meadow as it is sometimes called, is located immediately south of Windmill Road on Wimbledon Common and provides a very important habitat for a host of rare plants and animals.

Classified as lowland acid grassland, this type of habitat has developed on the low nutrient (pH 4 to 5.5) free-draining sand and gravel soils that are a feature of commons and heathland. Sadly, through a combination of agricultural improvement and development, only a fraction of the UK's semi-natural grassland has survived into the 21st century and, because of this, lowland acid grassland has been defined as a priority habitat for wildlife conservation in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath have been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation. The Conservators seek to ensure favourable conditions are achieved on this important acid grassland and heathland site. During the winter months of 2010, the Conservators' staff concentrated on a section

of the Plain where invasive trees and scrub threatened the character of the site. Through the felling of a small number of dense areas of scrub, approximately two hectares of lowland acid grassland is now well on the way to being restored to its optimum condition.

By continuing with our present management strategy for the Plain, not only will conditions improve for small reptiles and mammals, but it should encourage the return of Skylarks to the area. Skylarks are included in the UK Birds of Conservation Red List, and have been identified in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan as a priority species for conservation. Over the last 25 years, Skylarks have suffered a national decline of more than 50% and habitat loss is considered a major factor. Along with many other land-owners and local authorities throughout the UK who are working to improve grassland habitats for Skylarks and other ground nesting birds, the Conservators are restoring their habitat.

While the return of Skylarks to the Plain would undoubtedly be seen as a major conservation success for our local area, the Conservators remain committed to providing the best surroundings that can be enjoyed by wildlife and visitors alike.



The Plain, looking towards the Windmill on Wimbledon Common

The Commons during the Wars

Both Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath, given their size and strategic location, were used extensively by the Army during both World Wars.

In the 1914-18 war, the Commons played an important part in the training and temporary housing of troops before they were sent overseas and a large YMCA building was erected for the recreational needs of the troops. The area between Parkside and the Windmill was also cleared and levelled, and canvas hangars were erected to provide a small fighter station for the aeroplanes used for the defence of London.

Although the Commons were not used for aviation during the 1939-45 war, the Germans had other ideas and, as part of their invasion plans, Wimbledon Common was earmarked to form the main airport for flying-in troops and equipment during the planned siege of London. To counter this, trenches were dug as defensive positions and rows of posts were erected across open spaces to prevent enemy aircraft or gliders landing. Concrete "dragon's teeth" acted as barriers for tanks and a concrete pill-box was built within the old pond

on Parkside, near Wimbledon Village. An ammunition dump was concealed in the trees by Queensmere and barbed wire marked the boundaries of an army camp near the Windmill where heavy guns were sited. The gravel pits and sandy areas became marked with the tracks of Bren-gun carriers and an assault course was set up by Rushmere pond.

The Windmill, being such a noticeable landmark and so close to army camps, did not escape attention and had to be covered in camouflage netting to ensure it could not be seen from the air.

The other parts of the Common that were not used for military activities were turned over to growing corn and vegetables. These

were tended by Italian prisoners of war who were housed in a camp near Southside. During air raids many bombs fell on the Common and required excavation from a considerable depth. Several flying bombs (V1s) fell on the Common, including one on the edge of Rushmere Pond and another at Warren Farm. The only German aircraft to land was a bomber that crashed onto the Royal Wimbledon Golf Course, scattering burning wreckage over the nearby area of Wimbledon Common.



WRITING ROOM, YMCA HALL, WIMBLEDON COMMON CAMP

Election of Commons Conservators - February 2012

Next February there will be an election for Commons Conservators. Under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871, which governs the operation and the management of the Commons, five Conservators are elected every three years by the local electorate, i.e. everyone living within the "levying area" - within 3/4 of a mile of the Commons or within the old parish of Putney.

Three further Conservators are appointed every three years by, respectively, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for the Environment. These appointed Conservators represent the broader interest of the Commons outside the levying area and provide continuity if none of the current Conservators are re-elected.

Anyone living within the levying area can stand for election as a Conservator. Whilst the role is not particularly arduous, it is unpaid and therefore does require a high degree of commitment and an innate love of the Commons. Protecting the Commons is not just about "birds, butterflies and trees". With an annual budget of over £1.5million, considerable business skills are also required. Anyone attending the monthly Board meetings, which are open to the public, will quickly realise that the range of topics covered is vast and includes not only natural history but also finance, administration, security, legal and planning issues. It is of considerable advantage if a Conservator can bring knowledge and experience in one or more of these topics to the Board. To see how these issues crop up it is only necessary to peruse the minutes of the Conservators' monthly Board meetings; these minutes are available at the Ranger's Office, in local libraries and on the Conservators' website. Or better still, why not come along to some of the monthly Board meetings. They are held at 5pm on the second Monday of each month at the Information Centre, which is opposite the Ranger's Office at Manor Cottage. The public can observe

the Board meetings although they may not participate - but you will be offered a cup of tea! The Chairman is generally there from 4:30pm to answer questions from members of the public. Alternatively, any of the Conservators can be contacted via the Ranger's Office (details at the end of this newsletter), and they will be able to inform you of the responsibilities of being a Conservator.

The election is carried out by postal ballot conducted by Electoral Reform Services, and generally the electorate receive their ballot papers about three weeks before the election date. These papers include a ballot paper, a short biography and photograph of each candidate, instructions on how to vote and a pre-paid envelope for returning the ballot paper.

The 1871 Act allows any elected Conservator to stand for re-election and there does seem to be a tendency for such Conservators to be re-elected. This could be taken as approval of the way the Conservators govern the Commons, or it may be because voters only vote for familiar faces. However, this does not explain why, despite the ease of voting, only about one fifth of the electorate actually vote. The Conservators believe that it is in the interest of the Commons for as many people as possible to vote. Let us hope that the 2012 election will set a new trend.

If you have the skills or business experience you think could benefit the Commons, please do consider standing. It is a very interesting and worthwhile role.

Your current Conservators are:

Elected: Mr Andrew Simon (Chairman), Mr David Devons (Vice-Chairman), Mr John Horrocks, Mrs Diana de Coverly Veale and Mr Norman Plastow MBE

Appointed: Sir Ian Andrews, Mr Derek Frampton, Dr Stephen Frank

NEWSBITES

- **Fungi** - The Conservators have agreed that members of the public may pick up to 125g (approx 1/4lb) of fungi for personal consumption. Amounts larger than that will still be confiscated by our Keepers.
- **Swans** - This year we have built some new, and very palatial, rafts for the swans on Queensmere and, as we go to press, they are showing some very promising signs of nesting once again this year. As in previous years, we have implemented the "Dogs on Lead" restriction around Queensmere to give the swans every chance and we are grateful to dog-walkers for respecting this restriction.
- **Windmill Museum** - The Trustees of the Windmill are always looking for volunteers to help staff the Museum when it is open to the public. If you are interested and can spare some time over an occasional summer weekend, please contact Michael Taylor on 07810 753939 or by e-mail mbowestaylor@hotmail.com
- **Wombles needed!** Many people help out and pick up litter when they are out enjoying the Common. If you would like to help, please contact the Ranger's Office and we can provide you with a litter-stick and a rubbish bag.
- **Fires** - During the summer of 2010, we had three large fires on areas of grassland that required the attendance of the Fire Brigade. Please be aware that barbeques are not permitted anywhere on the Commons and we would also ask you to be careful how you discard cigarettes and matches. Whilst the grassland usually recovers, fire can be devastating for wildlife.

Oak Processionary Moth

The caterpillar of the Oak Processionary Moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) (OPM) is quickly becoming a pest in Britain's woods as it causes serious defoliation of oak trees, its principal host. However, the trees do recover and generally leaf the following year.

The hairs from the caterpillars can also pose a serious health risk to both humans and animals as they are poisonous and may cause skin irritation and asthma.

The first infestations in the UK were found in 2006, in the London Boroughs of Richmond, Ealing and Brent. It is thought that the arrival of the moths was as a result of accidental importation of eggs on semi-mature trees. In 2009, six nests were discovered in Richmond Park but during 2010 a total of 300 nests were identified and removed from 146 trees.

Although there have not yet been any recorded sightings of the moths on the Commons, their presence in Richmond Park, and the seriousness with which the Forestry Commission is treating the matter, is giving the Conservators and their staff some cause for concern. The Conservators are currently making arrangements for a number of their staff to be trained in the removal of the nests from affected trees.



Chairman's Report

In my first year as Chairman, among several on-going concerns, we have at last been able to formalise the access rights for a number of houses abutting the Common around Wimbledon Village. This has successfully concluded a process that began in 2004, and which was pursued over a long series of hurdles.

Also in Wimbledon, we have been consulting on ways to reduce the disturbance and litter from young and under-age drinkers on the Common. We hope to have a part of the Common close to Wimbledon Village included in the dispersal order made each year by the police for the Tennis Fortnight. However, the problem goes beyond those two weeks of the year, so we hope to see some additional measures approved in due course.

The summer and autumn of 2010 saw a band of travellers camping at a series of locations on Putney Lower Common and Putney Heath. Each time, prompt action was taken to move them on. We have sought to collaborate with other public authorities on long term measures to discourage a repetition in 2011 and future years.

Sadly, Putney Hospital still remains derelict on Putney Lower Common, despite the enormous pains taken over several years to ensure the Wandsworth Primary Care Trust were not prevented or delayed by rights of way issues in their plan for a medical centre. Now, however, Wandsworth Council have announced their wish to buy the land for a new school, so there may be a lot more progress in the next 12 months than at any time in the last 12 years.

Two proposals have emerged for construction works where the Beverley Brook enters the Thames. Both are likely, at the very least, to involve construction traffic crossing the pleasant footpath along the brook. One is for the refurbishment of the sluice gates, which is expected to go ahead in the coming months. The other

is the well known proposal for the Thames Tunnel (the so-called Super Sewer) to relieve the combined outfalls along the river, including one at the mouth of the Beverley Brook. In both cases, any disturbance seems likely to have a much greater impact on the residents of the Horne Way Estate than on Putney Lower Common. However, the Thames Tunnel proposal still remains uncertain. We are watching the position closely while we wait for the second stage of consultation to begin later in 2011.

For the last three years, we have had an archivist sorting our historic paperwork, paid for by a Levy-payer's generous donation. This has dramatically improved our access to nearly 140 years of accumulated paperwork. Among many other benefits, we have been able to complete the registration of title to the Extension Playing Fields on the west side of the Beverley Brook, completing a process begun in 2002.

2012 will be the centenary of Walter Johnson's book on the flora and fauna of Wimbledon Common. By this time next year, we will be selling a new 60-page booklet to mark that anniversary, which will set out the many changes seen on the Commons over the last 100 years.

The Commons are looked after by a strong team. I pay tribute to Gordon Vincent, the Clerk and Ranger, Chief Executive, and to all his staff, and also to my fellow Conservators, for all they have done over the last 12 months; but most of all to my predecessor, David Devons, who led the Conservators for 8 years and now continues as Vice-Chairman, and as a generous source of advice and support.

Andrew Simon, Chairman

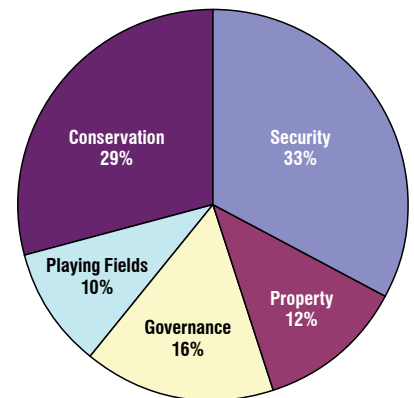
Commons Finances 2010 – 2011

Following a year of deflation in 2009-2010, the financial year 2010-2011 has presented us with the challenge of a return to inflation but with interest rates remaining at historically low levels. This has required particular care to protect the value of our capital assets, including those arising from the forced sale of Mill House a few years ago. The Conservators have continued not to use capital to meet revenue expenditure requirements, and to seek the best interest environment without risk to the capital.

The Levy is by statute linked to the Retail Price Index in the previous September. This meant a reduction in the Levy of 1.4% for 2010-2011, resulting in a loss of income of about £13,000 for the year in a context of gathering inflation, particularly in materials and energy costs. Despite this, the Conservators have been able to sustain the level of care and conservation of the Commons by making a number of savings, including the full-year saving of two staff posts which became vacant in the previous year. Other minor sources of income have remained buoyant, including exceptionally this year, a donation from the media for using the Windmill Road/Parkside corner of the Commons during the Pope's visit. For 2011-2012, the Levy for a Band D property will be £24.87 compared with £23.85 in the previous year.

After years of negotiation with HM Revenue and Customs, the Conservators have secured the entitlement to reclaim almost all VAT paid on direct business expenditure.

Expenditure Breakdown



Gifts and Legacies to help the Commons

Under Section 8 of the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871, the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators is 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 just 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 occasional 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.

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

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