



Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

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LUDSHOTT COMMON IN WARTIME

Part 3 in a series concerning the history of our Open Space Properties

From about 1933, the land at Ludshott had been used by the Military for training purposes, but at the beginning of the Second World War the whole area was requisitioned. Although initially there was relatively little impact on the vegetation as the 1940 Annual Report records that work on the Common was not seriously hampered by troops, despite damage by tanks and vehicles. Two high explosive bombs fell between Headley Hollow and Grayshott Hollow in July that year and in October a 20-acre fire was caused by incendiary bombs.

However, from 1941 Superior Camp was being constructed and the general area of the Common was used for tank training. This continued until the Common was derequisitioned in July 1945, by which time every bit of vegetation on the main heathland area had been obliterated, so much so that a Dakota aeroplane with engine trouble landed on Timber Way in 1944, mistaking it for a temporary airfield.

Although the land was now back under the management of the National Trust, there was a major residual problem caused by soil compression and oil impregnation from the tanks, so that any rain just ran off the surface down into the valleys. In 2007 one can still see the erosion ravines in the valley bottoms that were created at that time. The water that flowed down the Pond Road valley caused major flooding in Arford village.

Sir Edward Salisbury, the Director of Kew Gardens, visited Ludshott in 1945 to advise on the revival of the vegetation, and a claim was made against the MOD for restoration of damage to the habitat and the cost of flood prevention operations. Although the Army constructed many small barriers across the erosion ravines in 1946, the claim was not settled until 1948, after which major works were carried out including building a dam at the east end of Pond Road, in Fullers Vale, but despite this some flooding continued at Arford for at least the next couple of years until new plant growth stopped the water flow.

In the meantime, the Committee had to wait for the vegetation on the open areas to become established and it was not until 1953 that they embarked on a programme of creating a new pattern of tracks across the Common, which was continued in the following two years. Agreement was reached with Hampshire County Council on Bridleways in 1967 and the Royal Engineers built the bridge across the erosion ravine at Ludshott Hollow in 1972, completing the routes across the Common that we know today.



Air photograph of the common from about 1965. Headley Down is at the top left of the photo. Superior Camp is just right of centre and Waggoners Wells is right of centre at the bottom.

PLANTS OF THE COMMONS

A series on their flora and fauna

Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)

The Scots pine is a coniferous tree and one of the most familiar tree species on the commons, “Cathedral Pines” being a much loved aspect of Ludshott. Coniferous trees, as the name indicates, produce their seeds from cones. They are generally evergreen, can have scaly leaves, or, as in the case of the pines: needles.

But are Scots pines indigenous to this part of the country? Do these trees really belong as part of our heathland flora? The name suggests not; botanists have differing views; but our poor acid soils are certainly suitable for their growth and it is possible that pine forests were the climax vegetation here during the last ice age. Some propound that pines were planted in situ from approximately the 17th century as they are a good source for fuel, timber, charcoal, turpentine, resin and tar. Others think that they grow as a result of the wind dispersing the seeds from planted ornamental specimens in aristocratic landscape gardening schemes dating from the 18th century. An isolated cluster of Scots pines in the countryside is supposed to have indicated overnight grazing for cattle droving. Whatever the answer these pines form a feature in the landscape, creating part of the mosaic of differing habitats on the commons. Individual specimens develop into quite lovely trees.

However natural regeneration continues to happen, and without the grazing which would have controlled their growth, many young pines need to be removed, by hand, to maintain the open heathery areas. When young their characteristic pyramidal or conical shape, and minimal needle-drop when cut, make them ideal as Christmas trees. Volunteers, guided by the wardens clear many for this purpose but, more importantly, conservation management work is achieved at the same time.



One of the mature trees at Cathedral Pines



A young pine on the common

Each tree grows one whorl of branches every year until maturity when the character of the tree changes dramatically. Lower branches are lost and the crown becomes flat-topped or rounded, with the branches sparsely arranged high on the trunk which can rise up to 120 feet (36 m). The bark, reddish or grey-brown, and cracked, at the base of the trunk changes to orange-red or pink, and scaly, on the branches, contrasting well with the dark blue-green foliage. The needles which grow in pairs, are usually twisted and at about 2½ inches (6 cm) long are shorter than other pine species. The small crimson female flowers and the yellowy bunched male flowers are carried on the same tree. The female flowers grow into the seed-bearing cones which take two years to ripen, and each stage of their growth can be found on the adult trees. The seeds have a wing and are released when the grey-brown cone scales dry out and open.

Collect a dropped cone, hang it up and use it to ‘forecast’ the weather: open when it’s dry and closed when it’s wet!

Keith thanks all the volunteers who contributed to the Christmas tree cutting day, and is planning further “outings”.

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

At Christmas the tree sale at Dunelm car park was well supported and successful.
The mulled wine and mincepies were much appreciated.

WHAT IS A DISCOVERY CENTRE and WHY DO WE NEED ONE IN THE WHITEHILL-BORDON AREA?

By Colin Brash

Membership Secretary of the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons; Vice Chairman, Woolmer Forest Heritage Society

When we need to refer to a book we go to the library. When we want to look at a tool made by man in the recent or distant past, or a natural object such as a fossil, precious stone or even examples of a bone, where do we go but to the local museum. In a similar way we can now look it up on the Internet, if we have a computer. Not everyone has.

In a discovery centre you might have a library, where one can borrow a book, CD, DVD, Video, or look up a reference etc., as a central learning centre. Under the same roof could be a 'museum' environment with exhibits, displays and research resources. Ideally no further away from your home than either the library or the local museum is now. You would be able to meet a friend, have a cup of tea, study in a quiet area or use a computer in the 'Internet Café' as well. There could be an art exhibition or talk on local history you could attend or you may want to hire a meeting room. Exact facilities would depend on local requirements, though a definite need would be longer opening hours so more people can use the facilities which are available.

Why do we need such a Discovery Centre locally? We have very good libraries in Bordon and the surrounding villages, with computers available. The Hampshire Library Service has kindly allowed the Woolmer Forest Heritage Society to install a display case in Bordon library, which has a new display about every 6 months, sometimes provided by another local society. Indeed from March our National Trust wardens will be mounting an exhibition similar to the one that has recently been in Liphook library. Hopefully this is a first step to a discovery centre. However, to bring to the local population

a taste of what history has occurred locally, and why, and combining it with an up to date learning environment might be difficult though not impossible. Hampshire Library Service has started the process of re-launching libraries by converting Gosport Library into the first Discovery Centre in Hampshire and proved how popular the concept is. Work is beginning on the Winchester Library, due for completion in 2007, Basingstoke and others will follow.



The two photographs above show the display currently set up at Bordon Library.

The area we live in is important to us because of its location in relation to where we work and play. But, how much do you know about it historically? Do parents and/or their children ask questions such as the following and where do they go for the answers?

Why did the Army come here in the mid 1800's? Why did King John have a hunting lodge in Kingsley? Why did the Romans build a road from Chichester to Silchester which passes close to Woolmer Pond and through Neatham? Why did Bronze Age people build so many barrow mounds (grave sites) in this area? Why do we find an abundance of flint tools locally?

And what about the natural habitat? Why do commons such as Passfield, Broxhead, Ludshott, Bramley, Slab, Kingsley etc., exist where they are? Why does Whitehill Parish have all 12 native species of Amphibians and Reptiles resident? What part has Woolmer Forest played in the history of our locality? After all Woolmer Forest used to cover parts of Kingsley, Selborne, Greatham, Liss, Rogate, Trotton, Bramshott and Headley.

Our Societies and others like us, who are interested in finding out about our local history and heritage, by recording and preserving what we have left, want to alert the people of Whitehill and Bordon, and the surrounding area, to what a wonderfully rich and varied history and natural environment is on our doorstep. A Discovery Centre in Whitehill-Bordon surely would help us to achieve that aim of showing we all care about where we live and how its past has an influence on us today.

The Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons
are people who may, or may not, be National Trust members, but who have a direct interest in the local National Trust properties and are therefore willing to help maintain the conservation work on these important areas, much of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Areas for birds (SPA), by subscribing annually to support the cost of essential work on the Commons.

USEFUL CONTACTS			
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WHAT'S HAPPENING

The winter period enables the Wardens to press ahead with important management tasks, as once the spring arrives, and especially the bird nesting season starts, most clearance and tree felling must cease.

On Ludshott the contract wardens, Amanda and Luke have been “softening” the margins of the 2006 tree clearance area. Young growth is gradually re-colonising and it is pleasing that so many heather seedlings have germinated, beginning the return of these opened-up spaces to heathland. Chris together with the Southern Electricity contractors have created further wildlife corridors whilst completing the safety clearance work that was

needed under the power lines. Jim and the new tractor have been fully engaged in swiping and foraging, and also in defining tracks that had become overgrown. Due to the amount of rubbish that is dumped, it has been decided to close off with banks, the two ‘pull-ins’ on B3002. During the next couple of months a certain amount of grading and re-surfacing of the main car park at Dunelm will be carried out and a new ‘rustic’ seat will replace the vandalised one at the viewpoint on the entry path to the Common.

The Environment Agency and Natural England have agreed the re-building work necessary on the sluice at Hollywater

Pond which should be finished by the end of March. Also at Passfield the contractor has completed the scheduled tree safety work along the B3004 and surrounding roads.

The Wardens’ exhibition in Liphook library, by courtesy of Bramshott and Liphook Preservation Society, was in place for four months and a similar one is now to be seen in Bordon library, by courtesy of the Woolmer Forest Heritage Society. We are grateful for the opportunities these displays have given to publicise the local work of the Trust.

Chris Webb is taking a well-earned sabbatical this spring.



Top left: Admiring the new tractor
Top right and above: Cutting trees for the Christmas sale

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.

Saturday 9 June
Meet the Wardens at Dunelm Car Park for Coffee and a Management Exhibition

Guided walks: Look for posters on the Commons and in the press for details.
There will be a £1.00 charge per person.