

COMMON RAMBLINGS

Long before Chailey Common became a Wildlife Trust the delights of local flora and fauna had been discovered and appreciated by the common's resident human population – the students of Chailey Heritage.

The common offered a means into which you could escape to a land of your minds creation; a locale for exploration of plants, birds, rabbits, snakes and lizards; a place of solitude, to be at peace with oneself away from an incessant background of chatter. Here to be found were distractions from the tedious routine and discipline of life in a boarding school. Distractions of our own making, as well as those provided by outsiders.

A periodic occurrence, certainly in the autumn when the brackens life was spent and the common turned a shade of burnt amber, was the discovery of fire. I never did understand how these fires got started, or why the local fire brigade and Chailey staff was so unappreciative of student efforts to assist in the extinguishing of flames. Could it have been that we always chose to use switches of the rampant Gorse shrub, the inflammability of which we were unaware?

The resultant black and ugly scarring of Chailey Common gave rise to subsequent guilt for the damage done to wildlife. To this day sight of a burnt area adjacent to a railway embankment or a motorway brings memories so vividly to the fore.

The 50's brought myxomatosis to the rabbit population of Chailey Common, killing them in hundreds. It was morbidly curious to come across a totally blind and brain-damaged rabbit sitting on a footpath, quietly awaiting it's end. It was not an unusual sight to see a student relieving the beast from misery, saving it from a savaging by foxes.

Transit camping by HM Forces spurned a host of trenches, latrines and mess'. We would swarm down to talk, drink strong sweet tea and endeavour to scrounge cigarettes. These National Servicemen were a great bunch of the nations youth, and many a pen friend was made. How sad the next day when, upon returning from school, we found the common as if never disturbed and we wondered if it had been a dream.

And who could forget the forays down to the New Heritage Orchards, not to scrump apples but for clandestine meetings with THE GIRLS, careful not to fall into the hands of staff determined to break up budding friendships. Did they not trust us?

An occasional organised country ramble was always welcomed by the more ambulant amongst students, enabling discovery of lands out of view from St. Georges.

A generation of student miners and archaeologists ventured onto the common, lost in flights of fantasy, to excavate secret underground camps, so cleverly disguised with

sods of grass and fern that they could not be detected until you were upon them, or sinking slowly through the roof into someone's subterranean world.

Such was the common, a place of adventure, discovery, dreams, and romance. Of plants and wildlife, of life and death. Where else could you have received such an education, but Chailey Common?

Peter Sedgwick



Christmas Comment

Its Christmas time, folks say "Good Cheer",
They say the same thing every year
Whilst dragging children round the shops,
The pandemonium never stops.
Buy cards showing leaves of holly,
Every year they cost more lolly.
They send them of to one and all,
Then sit and wait for 'postie's' call.
Tie up gifts with fancy tassels,
Wonder if its worth the hassles.
Buy enough food for an army.
The whole thing's completely barmy!
I don't begrudge a little gift,
It's the commerce makes me miffed;
Christmas time's no longer jolly,
Most find it financial folly.
'our Lord's become forgot I fear,
Drowned in shorts and pints of bear.
I wish I had the faith to say
At Christmas, please find time to pray.
It's not the gifts, but Jesus' birth,
That give this Holiday it's worth.

Bobby Tuffnail

