Working together to look after Rodborough and Minchinhampton Commons

A helpful handbook
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Introduction

Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons are enjoyed by many people who love them as an open space, a place to enjoy fresh air and exercise. To keep the Commons as a place for all to enjoy for ever, we all have an important role to play. Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons are of national and European importance for their limestone grassland.

The National Trust has owned and maintained Minchinhampton Common since 1913 and Rodborough Common since 1937 and has an obligation to protect the landscape, ecology and archaeology of the area. Our aim is to maintain an open landscape free of modern developments and visual intrusions that would threaten the character and enjoyment of the Commons.

This booklet is designed to provide information for those who live alongside or nearby the Commons about the benefits, rights and responsibilities of being surrounded by these unique open spaces.
In the Middle Ages, the use of land was governed by the manorial system. Food was grown, animals grazed and fuel was gathered. Land remained in the ownership of the Lord of the Manor, but some local people were given rights of use over the poorer areas which became known as ‘common land’.

Today, these ‘rights of common’ at Minchinhampton and Rodborough include the grazing of animals: ‘herbage’ and taking dead or brash wood, gorse or furze: ‘estovers’. The people who are able to exercise these rights are known as ‘commoners’ because they own property within the historic Manor. These rights are usually recorded in the deeds of the residential properties, and in the Commons Register held by Gloucestershire County Council.

Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons are classified as ‘urban commone’. This means that people have a right of access for ‘air and exercise’ and for enjoyment of the area. The Commons include a number of smaller commons including Hyde, Besbury and St Chloe Green Commons.

What is a Common?
Many rare and diverse species are found here. The Adonis Blue butterfly, which can be spotted in June and August, favours limestone grasslands. A wide variety of plant life, including 13 species of orchids, thrives on the Commons. Look out for the rare Pasque Flower in spring and a superb display of Early Purple Orchid and cowslips in May.

The archaeology of Minchinhampton Common is very significant. Most prominent are the defensive earthworks, known as The Bulwarks, which run for over a mile across the common and form the remains of a possible Iron Age settlement of the Belgic Dobunni tribe. Nearby, there is a Neolithic long barrow called Whitfield’s Tump, named after the Methodist preacher George Whitfield who preached to over 10,000 people from the top of the earthwork in 1743. A licence still exists today for services to be held on the mound. The landscape is marked with dozens of small pits, thought to be the remains of wind throw caused by fallen trees, as well as the remains of World War II glider traps.

Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons are one of the few remaining areas of the country that are registered common land and remain unenclosed. The 350 hectares are grazed by around 500 cattle and are also visited regularly by many thousands of people who enjoy walking, cycling, horse riding, having a picnic or relaxing and absorbing the views. Unusually for an area of common, a golf course has existed at Minchinhampton since 1889.

The Commons are within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and parts are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Area of Conservation and an Ancient Monument. The National Trust has to manage this land, established through centuries of traditional rural practices, with great care and the consent of Natural England and English Heritage.

**Why are these commons special?**

Above, left to right: Adonis Blue butterfly; Early Purple Orchid; Pasque Flower.
Left: The ancient Bulwarks on Minchinhampton common
Caring for the Commons

We would welcome your involvement if you would like to help care for these special places.

Volunteer for the National Trust
Consider volunteering to support our ranger team, or join our volunteer groups that meet regularly to manage the Commons.

Contribute to the Advisory Committee
The Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons Advisory Committee is a volunteer group representing the local community, the graziers and the golf club and meets regularly. The Committee advises the Trust on local concerns, working with staff on the management of the Commons.

To find out more, please see ‘Useful contacts’.

The National Trust is responsible for the maintenance and the protection of the Commons and encourages people to follow the few simple rules laid out on the following pages.

Grazing animals are an intrinsic part of the ancient grassland management. Without grazing, the Commons would become dense, scrubby woodland and the rich limestone grassland would not exist, resulting in a loss of views and wildlife habitats. We are constantly battling to keep scrub at bay and are always looking for ways to involve the local community to achieve this.

Grazing is managed by two Commons Committees. The cattle graze the Commons from May and are returned to their farms before winter. The livestock manager, known as the Hayward, keeps an eye on the cattle throughout the summer and is the point of contact in the event that the cattle need attention (see ‘Useful contacts’).
Please take your litter home with you
And please don’t dump household refuse or other waste on the commons.

Please keep animals under control
Please use the bins provided for disposal of dog mess.
Please use the parking areas provided for visitors. Cars parked outside of these areas break down the verges and damage the grassland so that wildlife cannot survive and archaeology is damaged. Please also be aware that we are not able to allow permanent residential parking on the Commons.

Please don't erect signs by the roadside. Charity events can be advertised a week in advance but we ask that signs be removed immediately after the event. Please contact us before you put any signs up.
Living near the commons

If you are lucky enough to live right next to the Commons, we would like to make you aware of the following points:

**Boundaries**
Properties adjoining the Commons have to maintain their own boundaries to keep livestock out (Commons do not have constructed boundaries).

**Right of Access**
As an adjoining owner, your rights of access are most likely to be found in your title deeds. If you wish to know more please speak to your legal adviser. If you have a specific enquiry about rights, you can contact the National Trust (see ‘Useful contacts’).

**Licences**
The National Trust may provide a licence whenever possible where access to the commons is required or there is a need to temporarily use the commons for the maintenance of people’s property.

**Events on the Commons**
The use of common land may be possible by prior arrangement with the National Trust.

**Mowing**
The character and landscape of the Commons is important and therefore activities such as mowing or gardening along tracks and road verges next to private properties is not allowed.

Please remove poisonous plants
Cows range free on the Commons. Please remove any vegetation overhanging the Commons, for instance yew and laurel, from your property and make sure that all garden waste, which is detrimental to wild flowers and livestock, is removed or composted away from the Commons. Daffodils do not grow wild on the Commons and should not be planted.
Useful contacts (information correct at March 2012)

For more information, or if you would like to get involved with Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons, please contact your local National Trust property administrator:

Ebworth Centre, The Camp, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL6 7ES
Tel: 01452 814213
Email: ebworth@nationaltrust.org.uk
Web: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/minchinhampton

Other useful contacts

Minchinhampton and Rodborough Advisory Committee Chairman (Terry Robinson): 01453 885428
Hayward (Mark Dawkins): 07973 326772
Minchinhampton Committee of Commoners Clerk (Jolyon Gardiner): 01452 727334 (day), 01453 764798 (home)
Rodborough and Bownham Committee of Commoners Secretary (Bill Powell): 01453 885507

Further information

J.V. Smith
Where the Cow is King (2001)

Paul Clayden
Our Common Land (2007)
If you require the information contained in this handbook in alternative formats, please telephone 01452 814213 or email ebworth@nationaltrust.org.uk