

Cattle Return to Grasslands

It has been a busy winter on the Common. A large area of Grasslands (on the north side of the Littlewick Road) was cleared as part of our heathland regeneration programme.

Many years ago the common around Horsell would have been covered with heather. This was because people gathered wood and furze (gorse) to use as fuel for fires and to heat their ovens. Cattle would also have grazed on the heath.

Over the years the types of fuels people used changed. First to coal and later to gas and electricity and as a result trees and scrub began to take over the Common. In the last 50 years we have lost over 50% of our lowland heath. The Horsell Common Preservation Society is working with English Nature to return some of the scrub to heath. This involves removing the birch and pine so that the heather can regenerate.

At the beginning of February cattle returned to graze on Grasslands. Last year the Common was not grazed because suitable cattle could not be found. As a result, the grass grew unchecked. There are seven Belted Galloways (*Snowflake, Yebra, Yarrow, Sixpence, Florin, Perry and Peaches*) and one Belgium Blue (*Jo*) on Grasslands belonging to Miller's Ark, an educational centre and farm at Odiham in Hampshire. They are regularly grazed on



Yarrow, one of the Belted Galloways grazing on Grasslands

public open spaces and are placid and used to people and dogs.

The Belted Galloway has a black front and rump with a band of white around the middle. Their thick shaggy coat means they are very hardy and they are also well able to thrive on coarse vegetation. We expect the cattle will perform a useful service eating the old grass. They will probably browse some of the gorse and, with luck, the small pine that continue to spring up.

They are likely to stay for just a few weeks, but we hope that they will return for the summer grazing period between May and October when they should have an even more beneficial effect.

Below part of the 5.5 hectares (13 acres) of birch, gorse and pine that have been cleared on Grasslands.

