



Common Knowledge

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Common Knowledge, the newsletter of the Friends of Streatham Common, is edited by Peter Newmark: tel. 020 8679 2908; email peternewmark@googlemail.com

For Your Diary

Fun Dog Show - Sunday 6th September. 2.00 - 4.00pm, opposite the Rookery Café. Prizes for:

- * Dog with the waggiest tail
- * Bonniest bitch
- * Dog most like its owner
- * Dog with the scruffiest coat
- * Dandiest male
- * Most obedient dog

Big Draw – Sunday 20th September, from 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm.

Bird Walk – Sunday 1st November, 9.00 am. Meet at the Rookery Café.

This Sporting Life

On the next two pages you will find a summary of the current sports and fitness activities on the common. It may look impressive, but it isn't. Until the 1970s there was a cricket pitch on the common and for at least ten years after that the cricket strip was maintained. Now even that has long gone. In the 1980s there were still marked football pitches and (basic) changing facilities. Both are now gone. Somewhere along the line, it seems, Lambeth council decided to focus sports on some green spaces at the expense of others, including Streatham Common. The fact that the changing facilities were reaching the end of their life didn't help matters, and an attempt by the Friends and others to raise funds for new facilities was unsuccessful.

With the current push of the drive against obesity and towards fitness and the pull of the 2012 Olympics in London, now is surely the ideal time to try and reverse the historical decline of organised sports on the Common. We were glad recently to find that Councillor Rachel Heywood, Lambeth's new Cabinet member for Culture and Communities, is in agreement (see page 5).

What would really help drive matters forward is clear evidence of local demand for more facilities. So is there a champion out there for bringing back cricket matches to the Common? Or football pitches and matches? Or anything else - how about a Trim Track on the Common, for example? If so, please step forward and work with the Friends to help make the Common a magnet for sports and fitness.

Sport on the Common

Football – there have been no formal matches on the Common since the demise of the changing facilities and marked pitches in the 1980s, but every Saturday morning, from 10.15, Tony Goldring, a Community Sports Worker, runs a two-hour training session for 5-13 year olds. After a warm-up, the children are taught ball skills and then play a match. Children of exceptional promise can move on to training in an academy and then even to training with a league club. Tony has been running these sessions for the past ten years and has an affiliation with Chelsea FC. At least three boys who trained on the Common are now playing with prominent clubs, including Crystal Palace. Contact Tony Goldring on 07932 942262.

Tennis – there is a single court on Hilly Four Acres. It can be booked by telephoning 0845 1308998. There is a fee of £4.50 per hour for adults but use of the court is free for anyone under 16. (This information is from some time ago and cannot be checked because the sign on the court is currently unreadable!).

Horse riding – since the demise of the last local riding stable, riding has more or less ceased on the Common. The only horses seen recently have belonged to the mounted police, who occasionally patrol the Common or exercise their horses

there. Provision for horse riding was enshrined in the Streatham Common Act of the 19th century and it would be good if riding would come back to the Common.

Kite flying – the Common lends itself well to kite flying and is much used for this purpose. It has also been the site of an annual Kite Day for the past decade and, although the chief organiser took a break this year, we hope that Kite Day will be back in 2010.

Running – Herne Hill Harriers athletics club, which is based at the running track on Tooting Common, has long used the Common for a variety of training purposes. From September to April, the slopes adjacent to Streatham Common South and North are used on Tuesday evenings by sprinters to build their strength and by the club's Young Athletes Group for general

training. The club's middle-, long-distance and cross-country runners train every Thursday evening by running up Covington Way to the car park and then back via Hilly Four Acres. Until 15 years ago, the club organised cross-country races over the



Common and Norbury Grove. These were then moved to Brockwell Park but the club is currently hoping to move them back to Streatham Common, which would be supported by the Friends.

Fitness training -- a company called Active Healthy Minds organises a one-hour session of stretching, walking / jogging and toning exercises every Thursday

at 7.30 pm, starting at Norbury Pond, on Beulah Hill, and then coming on to the Common. The session is open to anyone and costs £2 a time. Contact Julia McCabe on 07758 570656.

Postnatal fitness training – every Monday appropriate exercises and a run/jog on the Common for mothers with prams are organised by a company called Buggyfit. The activities are suitable for all levels and last about an hour, starting at 10.00 am at the café. Each session costs £6 (or £30 for six sessions). Contact Michelle Murray on 07779 193221.

Walks – each Thursday, starting at 1.00 pm from the Rookery Café, there is a free walk around the Common area. The walk is part of Lambeth Council's Active Walk Scheme, lasts for about an hour and is often led by a Park Ranger. Just turn up!

School sports – local schools often use the Common for their sports days and St Joseph's College uses Norwood Grove for cross-country runs.

Individuals – many individuals run, jog, or walk for exercise on the Common. Some seem to be obsessive, some diligent and some reluctant. Other individuals practise their martial arts, train for boxing, etc. In addition, good weather brings out personal trainers with their clients.

Cricket – there have been no formal matches since the 1970s (see opposite for the history of cricket on the Common). For some time after formal cricket stopped, the cricket strip was maintained and it used to attract informal / impromptu games. When maintenance ceased, the deteriorating strip was still used for a time. Since then there has been very little cricket on the Common, although a couple of years ago there used to be a group of exceptionally keen young men who played every summer Sunday morning from about 6.00 am until breakfast time ♦

A Brief History of Cricket on Streatham Common

Cricket has been a popular pastime on Streatham Common for around 200 years. Streatham Cricket Club was founded at the Horse and Groom Public House (the present day Big Hand Mo's pub in Streatham High Road, near Streatham Hill station) on Monday May 5th 1806.

The club was originally limited to 40 members who each paid an annual subscription of five guineas, thus ensuring that the exclusivity of the group would be limited to the gentry who could afford the fee.

For almost 80 years the club played their home fixtures on the Common, where their wicket was roped off to protect the surface of the pitch from the public.

In 1888, when the Metropolitan Board of works took ownership of the Common, the terms of purchase included an obligation to continue to maintain the area that had been roped off and formal cricket continued to be played there well into the 1970s.

The Streatham Cricket Club subsequently moved to its own ground which occupied a site now covered by Gracefield Gardens, named to commemorate the great cricketer W.G. Grace, who played there on a number of occasions at the turn of the 20th century.
John Brown

More like us. The Friends of Streatham Common welcomes the arrival of the newly formed Friends of Tooting Common and wishes them all the best. Their website, which includes a questionnaire, is <http://www.friendsoftootingcommon.org.uk/mac.html> ♦

A Note from the Chair

Hi. I am the new chair of the Friends of Streatham Common and thought I would let you know what I think are the important issues over the coming year.

Just prior to our Annual General Meeting, we held a walkabout on the Common for Rachel Heywood, Lambeth's new Cabinet Member for Culture and Communities. It is worth reading her subsequent note for the AGM which you will find opposite. It mentions a number of long standing issues that are very difficult to shift within Lambeth and we need to get better at the politics of getting things to happen. Lambeth has budget constraints so we will only get so far without voluntary help and the ability to raise funds. Both of these need Friends who are willing and able to help. Despite this walkabout and note we do not yet have further commitment from Lambeth on these issues.

What this says to me is that the first two priorities over the next year will be:

- Increasing our membership and getting more local business, clubs, schools, specific users (e.g. parents with young children) to join and add their weight to our voice.
- Getting Lambeth to honour these long identified projects. This may need a concerted local campaign.

Because of the need to increase membership, the Executive has decided not to hold a public meeting in the autumn as we usually do but instead to get out and about on a membership drive. We may also organise a survey of the public and what they want from the Common and the Rookery.

Another issue is events. The Executive gets too involved in running events when we need to be concentrating on lobbying to get the Common and the Rookery in better shape. Also we get tired and need a break!

We would love to have some more people to help with events and our membership drive. We also need a couple of stronger individuals who live near the Common and could help us move the equipment we need for events from, and back to, its storage site. This only needs to happen about 30 minutes before and after the events. We first need some help with this for the Fun Dog Show on 6th September.

Lastly – I am stepping down from running the annual Shakespeare play in the Rookery, which I have managed for three years. This will mean that that the event will not run next year unless someone can take on my role. This would be a great pity after 27 years of Shakespeare in the Rookery.

The running of the event is now divided into the pre-event organisation (Katherine Forester) and coordination on the day, which I have run. Two people could take on the role of event coordination on the day if it was felt to be too much for one person. We will need to know whether we have found a coordinator or two by October so we can let Theatre Set-Up know if the play is going ahead next year.

Please contact Katherine on 020 8764 6060 about any of these roles – or me on 020 8764 8062 about the Shakespeare.

Lastly, someone has suggested we give a trophy for a sporting event on the Common. Can anyone suggest a suitable event for which the trophy can be awarded?

Barbara Wright

The Friends website is at <http://www.friendsweb.com/streathamfriends/>

Our email address is friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com

From Councillor Rachel Heywood's note for the AGM. We have added a few explanatory notes in italics. She prefaced her list with a reminder that spending on all but essential maintenance had to be frozen last year and that this year's budget was still uncertain but that at least the freeze on recruitment had already been lifted.

Production of management plan –

Friends would like a Management Plan for the Common as a next step from the Vision Document (*produced by the Friends and the Management Advisory Committee in consultation with the Council in 2007*). The plan for Clapham Common – probably a comparable project – cost a great deal of money and took 18 months to complete. I would like to suggest that rather than delaying for the foreseeable future, we approach Streatham in a step by step way. We could possibly produce a Management Plan for the Rookery – which would allow us to apply for Green Flag status there, subject to work being done – and work on applying for Local Nature Reserve status for other parts of the Common, with full consultation. I have asked officers to let us know if we could do this, and when. I think this is the obvious next step for you.

Green Flag status – the first step is of course the Management Plan. This is a good tool to help raise funds to make the improvements necessary to achieve green flag status. We could work on the Rookery, but items such as repairing the water feature are estimated to cost c £70,000. I think the Rookery is a very special space and that we should be seeking to do all we can to make these improvements. I am looking into possible funding for this.

Sports on the Common – I was surprised (to say the least) to see your sporting facility, in all its lone splendour. We clearly need to develop sporting provision on the Common. I have suggested that we explore the possibility of developing a bid to radically improve the facilities and that we

investigate possible funding sources. This is a major piece of work and will need full consultation – however we are committed to improving sporting provision in open spaces and possibly running them through a community trust model. Streatham is a very obvious candidate to benefit from a development programme and I have asked for it to be amongst our top priorities.

Play on the Common – We need to review the issue of the (*lower paddling pool*), which cannot be used in its current form or condition. Investment (*into play facilities*) of £60k will be made through the 'Play Pathfinder' fund in 2010/2011.

Tree replacement/planting – I mentioned Lambeth's tree survey and upcoming strategy to you. We also talked about planting some fruit trees – ideally of species which would have originally been planted there – in the orchard area and we should be able to do that.

Nursery area (*the hidden and derelict area in the Rookery where the gardener's huts are*) – I have asked officers to comment on whether a part of this space could be used by the community as a city garden/food growing area. This would mean Veolia (*the contractors*) reducing their use of the site. I think that starting a community garden of this type would be a very positive thing and an excellent project

Drainage (*to prevent parts of the paths across the lower Common from becoming submerged in winter*) – very expensive but I realise this is a problem. Officers have suggested planting particular species of trees that might alleviate the issue.

Better support for the Friends – this I something I am determined to put in place for all Friends Groups who work incredibly hard. This might for instance help to support meetings, newsletters and fundraising activity and I am thinking about ways to do this, perhaps modelled on the way we are supporting town centre forums ♦

Rookery Problems

Many of you will have noticed that since February water has been flowing from a manhole across the main entrance to the Rookery and that no water has been flowing down the cascade in the Rookery gardens. At the time of writing, the former problem has been reduced but not yet stopped with a little bit of plumbing (which could presumably have been done six months ago), while the latter may be on the way to being solved by replacing a burnt out pump (but this may not be the only problem and meanwhile the 'ponds' are drying up and their wildlife with them).

What is most unsatisfactory is that it has taken so long for either problem to be addressed. Only after concerted complaints in June by the Friends and by local councillors David Malley and Julian Heather did anything happen. We also discovered that the complement of gardeners in the rookery had been reduced from three to one, with the result that pruning and weeding were getting way behind. We are glad to learn that as of mid-July there are three again ♦

Recent Events

Bird Walk, 4th April. An excellent turn out of 40 people saw such birds as a chiffchaff (just arrived from Africa), a green woodpecker, and two pairs of nuthatches – one investigating a nest box, and the other a hole in a tree. Those who stayed right to the end were thrilled by a spectacular display of four sparrowhawks.

Easter Egg Hunt, 13th April. For this very successful event, run by Park Rangers Lara and Diane, 190 children each had to find plastic eggs hidden in the Rookery to earn a small sweet reward. Winners of the prizes of large Easter eggs (kindly donated by Sainsbury's) were (under 5 years old) Sara, (5-8) Jon-Vai, and (8-12) Ryan.

Spring Event, 9th May. Visitors enjoyed themselves with amusements that included a bouncy castle, face painting, giant chess, kite flying demonstrations, tugs of war, sack races, wheelbarrow races, and running races. The cake baking competition attracted 12 entries. Congratulations to



Winning cake-baker Jessica

Jessica on winning 1st prize with a delectable cake. Susan Good came 2nd and Mary French 3rd.

Bird Box Survey, 10th May. On a lovely morning, 17 people helped in the annual survey of the 36 bird boxes on the Common. At least ten boxes were occupied – seven by blue tits, two by great tits and one by the nuthatches seen exploring the box on the bird walk in April. Although we could not see the birds in the boxes, Nick McAdoo was able to watch great tits nesting inside a box in his garden, not far from the Common (see opposite).

The Manorial Common, 5th July. About 80 people turned up for this walk, which explored the history and natural history of Streatham Common. Graham Gower of Streatham Society and Peter Newmark of the Friends led the walk and introduced the crowd to the history, habitats, wildlife, geology and geography of the Common.

Shakespeare in the Rookery, 12th July. Theatre Set-Up's production of Cymbeline, performed as a comedy in the magic Celtic tradition, was watched by a crowd of about 250 people (the largest of the company's tour so far). Thanks go to the many volunteers who worked so hard to make this a very successful event. And, thankfully, the rain was confined to the interval ♦

Birds in a Box

Two years ago, long before the credit crunch, we bought one of those bird boxes that have a small night-vision camera hidden inside that you can wire into your TV. This enables you to get an intimate view of the family life of birds – much more interesting, we thought, than the average TV soap. We fixed the box high up a hawthorn tree in our back garden, well out of the reach of cats and sheltered from prevailing winds. Day after day, during the nesting period, we tuned in, only to see an empty box. In the end, we gave up and practically forgot its existence.

A year later, I was mowing the lawn when I chanced to see a great tit hop into the box. Turning on the TV, upturned mouths and was it the father?) at- what looked like a se- terflies, worms and were told that the aver- ing the nest was we were glued to the grew bigger and bigger wings and their par- cramped confines of their time also seemed suggesting the presence of quite a few fleas! That apart, however, it seemed to be a very clean nest, for the parents would spend a good deal of their time, once they had fed their brood, picking up what looked like little round sacks of excrement and remov- ing them from the nest.



there they were! Seven little one stressed-out mother (or tempting to feed them with lection of half chewed but- other assorted insects. We age time from birth to leav- around three weeks and so TV screen as the fledglings and started to test out their ents' patience in the the nesting box. A lot of to be spent scratching,

Finally, the day came when the parents would only bring food to the box's entrance, thus encouraging the braver ones to come out for their first flying lesson, watched with interest by our cat! The next day, the nest was empty and that was that. *Nick McAdoo*

New Booklets

Streatham Heights Footpaths and Woods is a new publication in the Streatham Heritage Trail series, published by the Streatham Society, and guides one on a fascinating walk that includes the top end of Streatham Common North. Graham Gower, who is also the author of the excellent *Streatham Common* booklet in this series, provides a wealth of fascinating information about the area and its history, focussing especially on the origins of the footpaths that used to serve the area when it was countryside and the stretches that still remain. To purchase a copy, telephone Brian Bloice on 8764 8314.

Embrace Your Environment - Streatham Common is one of the outcomes of an 18-month community project on the natural history of the Common that was funded by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to Embrace Corporation Ltd. The leaflet contains some information on the history and the natural history of the Common and includes a walking tour and map. It is nicely presented and illustrated but marred by a text that is poorly edited. For now, the leaflet is available only on the web - its cover via <http://www.ecomotion.org.uk/?id=9572> and its 16 pages of text via <http://www.ecomotion.org.uk/?id=9573>

Streatham Civic Award

On 3rd April at Streatham Town Hall, the late Gordon Richardson, who was Chair of the Friends of Streatham Common at the time of his death, was awarded a thoroughly well deserved, posthumous Civic Award. The citation read as follows:

Gordon Richardson sadly passed away last year and is much missed among Streatham's community activists. For the last 5-6 years, Gordon had chaired the Friends of Streatham Common. In this role he led an organisation which is effective in pressing for improvements and maintenance of the common. He was unstinting in pressing the council where appropriate but also quick to praise good work,

During Gordon's tenure the Friends ran many popular events on Streatham Common which included the annual dog show, Shakespeare in the Rookery, Kite Day and regular nature and bird walks. Gordon was a gentleman with a rye sense of humour: he will be much missed. ♦

What's Up?

Logs - several new large logs have appeared along the edge of Streatham



Common South. These are intended to prevent vehicles from driving over or onto the Common.

Benches - the annual re-varnishing of benches on the Common and in the Rookery has taken place and the vegetation that has threatened to overgrow some of the benches has just been cut back - better late than never.

Cuttings - the piles of cuttings that were left after volunteer days in October 2008

Friends Executive Committee

At the 2009 Annual General Meeting, the following elections were made:

Chair Barbara Wright
Vice-chair Peter Newmark
Secretary Jenny Morgan
Membership Secretary Helen Barnard
Editor of Common Knowledge Peter Newmark
Treasurer Nick Cattermole
Fundraising Officer Stephen Blann
Event and Volunteer Coordinator Katherine Forster
Executive members Joyce Bellamy, Sheila Derrick, Jane Parke, Shea Richardson, George Tuson.

and in March 2009 were finally removed in June - again, better late than never.

Footpath - resurfacing of the degraded Vicarage Footpath, which leads from Valley road to Sainsbury's, took place in July. Come winter, we will find out whether it has been sufficiently levelled and cambered in order to prevent the accumulation of large puddles of water that have been a problem for that path (among others).

Alexander Technique

Local daytime, evening and Saturday sessions available. All enquiries welcome.

Call Geraldine Gleeson on 0208 679 6131 or email info@alexandersouth.co.uk. Find out more at www.alexandersouth.co.uk

S.E.A. Plumbing

We are a local firm that can reliably help you with your domestic plumbing needs and with bathroom fitting. If you would like to discuss your needs and to arrange for an estimate, give me a call.

Steve Atkins 07973430295 or email seaplumbing1@aol.com