



Common Knowledge

April 2012, Issue 44

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Water, Water, Nowhere

A year ago, *Common Knowledge* carried an article entitled *Water, Water Everywhere*, commenting on how boggy the Common was in the winter of 2009/10, with streams everywhere and pools making the footpaths hazardous. One year on, it could hardly be different, with cracks in the ground still present from last summer and restrictions on water use just coming into effect.

How will the restrictions effect the Common and the Rookery? For a start it looks as if the hose-pipe ban that applies to households, will also apply to parks. This means that no watering of the Rookery flower beds via hosepipes will be possible. And apparently neither watering cans nor water bowsers will be allowed to be filled by hose-pipe either, making it very hard to water the plants at all. This will mean that the newly planted willow trees on the Common (see page 3) may go the way of their predecessors, although this time through water restrictions rather than neglect. How ironic that would be, given that the willows have been positioned in order to soak up the rain water that flows towards the base of the Common and floods the footpath.

It is as yet uncertain how the restrictions will effect the water features in the Rookery or the paddling pool. The former is, in any case, currently a theoretical issue because no water has flowed down the cascade for some weeks. The flow, which recirculates, was yet again cut off because of leakages and council finances will determine whether and when the leaks are repaired. Meanwhile water in the ponds is evaporating fast, just as the frogs and newts are spawning, and unless the level is topped up manually or by rain, it could be a poor year for our amphibians.



Easter Egg Hunt



Streatham Common

Saturday 7th April

Meet 2 pm: top of the Rookery

All children and families welcome. Chocolate prizes for successful egg finders.

Plus: best decorated egg competition. Either use a hard-boiled egg or empty egg shell; decorate with anything you like and bring it along! Open to all ages.

Organised by Friends of
Streatham Common.

Rats Abound

A number of locals, myself included, have the impression that there are more rats around on the Common than usual. Most are brown rats but a minority are black rats. Oh how we hate them!

Brown rats, which can also be grey, can have a body up to ten inches long, with a tail of equal length. They live in large groups in burrows, cellars or sewers wherever humans live, especially in urban areas. A female can have five litters in a year, which is about the maximum lifespan of a brown rat in the wild; fights with other rats and predation by foxes and cats keep numbers down. Poisoning can be used to control numbers but Lambeth Council tries to manage its green spaces without resorting to such methods because of the collateral damage to other species and because pest control is not that effective in outside spaces.

You might come across a brown rat almost any-



where on the Common. You'll see them crossing a path, scuttling through the undergrowth or hanging around where people have put food out for wildlife (not including rats).

Black rats, which confusingly sometimes come in a shade of light brown, are, if anything, a little larger and can live longer than brown rats. If you see a rat up a tree it is likely to be the black species rather than the brown, which is a poor climber. In general, brown rats are much more frequent than black rats in urban and suburban areas. During the past few months

there has been a number of sightings of black rats in the woodlands between Streatham Common South and North.

If there are more rats around, why? Could it be that there is more food for them? They are omnivorous and perhaps more food is being left out for pigeons and squirrels or left around after takeaways and picnics. Or is it that the increasingly warm winters mean that fewer rats have been killed by the cold? Or are our local cats and foxes becoming less adept at catching rats?

Whatever the reason, if rats are on the increase nobody is likely to welcome it. So why do we dislike rats so much? For a start, they can carry various diseases. One, Weil's Disease, was in the news a couple of years back when a British Olympic rowing champion, Andy Holmes, died from the disease, which is a bacterial infection carried by rat's urine into rivers and lakes. It is, however, an exceedingly rare disease. Historically, black rats are blamed for the 'black death', bubonic plague, although to be fair to the rats it is not them but the fleas that they carry that transmit the plague bacterium. Do we, perhaps, harbour an innate fear of rats because of the plague? Or is it just that they are much larger and not so 'cute' looking as mice? Change their name from rat to say, supermouse, and would we learn to love them? ♦

Metal Thieves - Over the Christmas holidays metal thieves wrenched the brass sundial off its plinth in the Rookery gardens and also removed the brass commemorative plaques from three memorial benches, the latter an act to beggar belief. The Friends and Streatham Society have offered to jointly purchase a bronze resin replacement sundial (subject to price), which we hope will soon be in place.

“Common Folk”



Patrick Griffiths (left) and Colin Sax have both been working in the Rookery and on the Common for many years.

How long have you known Streatham Common / the Rookery?

P: I have been working here for 21 years.

C: I have known the area for 45+ years.

How often do you work there?

P: Monday to Friday and every other Saturday/Sunday.

C: Monday to Friday.

Which seasons do you like best and why?

P: I like the spring, as it is the start of new growth, many buds and flowers are coming out and the birds, bees and butterflies are an added beauty.

C: Both for work and in general, I like winter, autumn and spring better than summer.

What do you particularly like about the Common / Rookery?

P: I get to meet so many people from all over the world, working outdoors and seeing the benefits of our hard work come to life.

C: The changing seasons. The wildlife: birds, squirrels, foxes etc. People I meet, such as dog walkers and visitors to the Rookery.

What do you dislike?

P: Dogs coming in the English Garden and fouling the area, as this is a no dog zone.

C: Litter, noisy people, vandalism and the theft of plants.

What could improve the Common / the Rookery and its facilities?

P: More signs when approaching the English Garden, the White Garden, and the Rock Garden that clearly state “No Dogs”.

C: It would be good if all the litter bins had lockable lids and if there were more clear “No dogs allowed” signs in the Rookery gardens. More perennial plants and bulbs in the Rookery would be nice.

What changes have you noticed over the years? And which are for the better and which for the worse?

P: For the better, the wasteland being used to plant vegetables and fruits, with the hope of bringing local produce to the community, and Veoila bringing volunteers together, along with tools, to share their experiences, including myself, bringing my knowledge from Jamaica as a farmer. For the worse, global warming means that seasons are no longer predictable and effects the plants, the birds, squirrels and ultimately growth

C: There has been a big improvement in people picking up their dog’s mess. ♦

Whats Up?

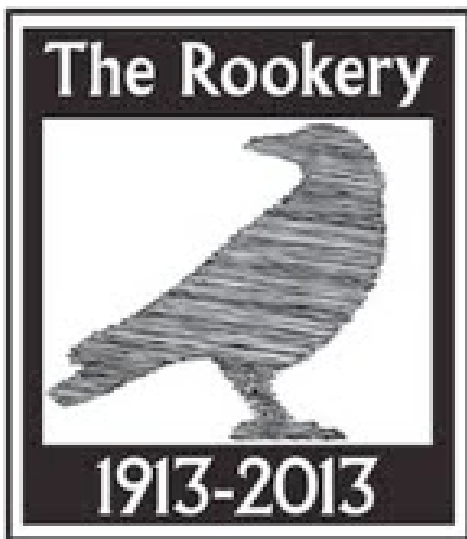
Rookery - repairs have been made to the external wooden fencing and to one of the wooden pergolas in the English Garden. Once again, leakage has resulted in the water cascade that feeds the pools being turned off.

Willow trees - five new willows have been planted along the footpath that runs from the playground to Streatham Common South. These replace some that were previously planted nearby - but less close to the path and in the ‘footprint’ of some events - and most of which died from lack of watering ♦

Rookery Centenary

I am sure all of the Friends love the Rookery Garden as much as I do - a place of great beauty and tranquility.

Next July it will be one hundred years since the garden was opened to the public after a local benefactor, Stenton Covington, raised money to buy the grounds that now form the Rookery and the adjacent



farmer's field, which has the tennis court in it, so that the Rookery could be joined to Norwood Grove.

The Well House was built in the early 18th century to house visitors to the spa which developed around the mineral springs. The adjacent house - the Rookery - was rebuilt and enlarged to accommodate the numerous visitors. This house and garden were presented to London County Council in 1912, whereupon the house was demolished. The gardens were then made over and opened as a public park on 23 July 1913.

Because of its heritage and unique character, the Rookery Garden is on English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and is a Grade II* Garden of Historic Importance. It became a favourite of Queen Mary, who paid a number of visits.

With a view to marking the centenary next year, the Friends of Streatham Common has set up a Centenary Steering Group

and has invited various stakeholders to join. Among them are:

- *Lambeth Council
- *Streatham Society
- *Lambeth Horticultural Society
- *Capel Manor Horticultural College
- *Matthew Wilson, garden designer
- *Streatham Common Community Garden

The group is working together on a number of projects which will lead up to the marking of the centenary. This will be celebrated by a 'party' or event opened, we hope, by a gardening celebrity. The projects we are working on are:

- *Green Flag status for the Rookery and the underlying management plan
- *Various horticultural projects
- *Capital works improvement
- *A *Memories* project

*Having BBC Radio 4's Gardener's Question Time in Streatham

*A leaflet for visitors to the Rookery covering history and horticultural information

In addition, the Streatham Society will be publishing a book on the history of the Rookery in time for the Centenary event.

If you would like to help in any way please let me know. We are particularly looking for people to take forward the idea of the *Memories* project, which would collect and publish individual's recollections of the Rookery, and the plan to have Gardener's Question Time visit Streatham.

Barbara Wright (020 8764 8062)
Rookery Centenary Steering Group

Can you help?

Like most voluntary groups, the Friends of Streatham Common is always looking for more people to get involved. This can be just a little, perhaps a couple of hours at an event, or much more, such as taking on an executive post.

This is a particularly exciting time for the friends as we approach the centenary of the Rookery and have some grand plans to celebrate it. Also there are increasing opportunities to get involved with the Council in the management of the Common. This, along with our growing membership and regular line-up of events and meetings, means there's plenty to do.

We have identified some roles that we are keen to find new people to fill – are you able to help us in one of the following?

Assistant Membership Secretary

Membership outreach - see that regular membership leaflets are distributed to key locations (e.g Rookery café). Run occasional recruitment sessions at the café at weekends. Attend events in Lambeth with a stall of our publications.

Communications Officer

Publicity co-ordinator and newsletter support. Assist newsletter editor with collation of newsletter and distribution. Write additional articles and make links with local papers and Lambeth publications. Perhaps take on poster design, put up posters and run the website.

Event Support

Check that all events comply with Council requirements. Keep good relations with Lambeth events team. Ensure that for each event there is a team to set up and put down the gazebo etc.

Assistant Volunteer Coordinator

To help the volunteer coordinator recruit volunteers for each event.

Dates for your diary

April 7th. Easter Egg Hunt. Meet at 2.00 pm at the top of the Rookery. Chocolate prizes for successful egg hunters and for best decorated hard-boiled egg or egg shell.

May 6th. Bird Box Survey. 9.30 - 11.00 am, starting at the Rookery Café. Our annual check of which birds are nesting in which boxes. Plus some hints on bird song identification.

June 13th. Friends of Streatham Common Annual General Meeting. Time and place to be announced.

June 17th. Band in the Rookery. Free event. Music by John Brown and friends. From 2.00 pm to 5.30 pm.

July 15th. Shakespeare in the Rookery: Twelfth Night performed by the Festival Players. Starting at 3.00 pm. Bring a picnic, bring a rug; performance continues whatever the weather. Buy your tickets on the gate.

Youth Officer

Report on youth issues in the newsletter and to the Friends executive committee.

Family Officer

Provide advice on family issues to the Friends executive committee.

All the above posts are flexible, so let us know if there is something that interests you. We look forward to hearing from you. You can contact us at friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com ♦

Events Licence

Some of you may have been puzzled, if not perturbed, by the appearance of large notices around the Common announcing an "Application for a Premises Licence". Your first thought may have been that this heralded the coming of an open-air pub to the Common – not such a bad idea?

But reading on, you would have seen that the application was for up to 14 activities

on the Common during 2012 that involved plays, films, performances of dance, making music or dancing, as long as alcohol was not being sold. Your concern, then, might have been that this opened the door to up to 14 large-scale events of the kind that take place on Clapham Common, often to the annoyance of local residents.

This is not the case (although such events could, in theory, be separately licenced). Rather the Premises Licence is for 4 ticketed and 10 free community events and not for commercial events. It covers, for example, some events put on by the Friends, including Shakespeare in the Rookery and Band in the Rookery, although not Kite Day because of the sale of alcohol at that event. The Premises Licence is useful to the Friends in that it saves us one of the bits of paperwork and fees involved in getting permission to hold a musical or theatrical event. So thanks are due to Lambeth Council's Event Service, Streatham's Town Centre Management and the Mayor's Outer London Fund.

On the other hand, event organizers this year are voicing concerns that the Event Application Licence that has to be completed by them requires twenty supporting documents, with the warning that if any of these are not supplied the application may be considered incomplete. So, on the face of it, a treasure hunt for children in the Rookery, for example, would need, among other things, an equal opportunities statement, a transport infrastructure plan, fire procedures, a waste management plan and an emergency control plan. What nonsense, you might think.

Whereas this list of twenty supporting documents is arguably appropriate for a major event, it is clearly not for a minor one. This needs to be made clear on the form if organizers of minor events are not to be scared off. Better still, there should be a much shorter list of requirements for minor events ♦

Winning Cakes



Melissa's
prize winning
squirrely cake

There was a fine selection of entries for the Friends third annual cake-baking competition, organised by Liz Owens as part of the Streatham Food Festival and held on March 24. After a great deal of tasting, the judges declared the winners to be:

Adult - Rebecca Bain

Teenager - Melissa Splitz

Children - Zain Ahad and Zaynab Somji.

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