



streathamcommon.org
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Common Knowledge

From the Chair

Spring is traditionally a time for change and hopefully you'll have noticed a few small changes across the Common. We have now finally managed to persuade the council to upgrade a number of the bins to something a little more fox- and bird-proof. We have also had two replacement benches installed to take the places of broken and missing benches. Most importantly for me was the replacement of the broken manhole covers on the Common: the old broken covers have been surrounded by metal barriers for the past two years and these looked completely out of character on the Common. Thankfully the council finally agreed to do the work.

The Inkspot microbrewery now has all the paper work sorted out so the Rookery barn will be equipped out in the coming months and the brewing of beer not too far after. This does, of course, mean we won't be able to have another barn dance this year. I still remember the last one rather fondly but hope we can get our thinking caps on and come up with an alternative. All the same, I'd like to wish Inkspot good luck with their endeavours.

We have been busy organising lots of events over the spring and summer months. You will find a full list of events up to the end of June on page 5 but let me draw your attention to those of the next few weeks: a Spring Bird Walk on the 8th of April, a Bat Walk on the 21st of April, a Walk with Insects on the 23rd of April and Kite Day on the 14th of May. I hope to see you at one of the events or perhaps just taking a stroll around the Common.

19TH ANNUAL KITE DAY
STREATHAM COMMON
SW16 3BT
SUNDAY 14TH MAY 2017
11 AM - 5 PM
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Lambeth's Plans For Parks

Following Lambeth Council's decision last year to take back in-house the job of looking after its parks, green spaces and cemeteries, teething problems soon became evident. Now, however, the latest staff restructuring has been completed, new machinery has been purchased and new plans are in place. Among those of interest to us are the following, some good, some not so good.

- * Instead of a parks manager, who was regularly around, the Common is now the responsibility of one of the four new very busy operational managers, in our case the one whose prime responsibility is for infrastructure maintenance, the park's repairs team and sports pitch marking across the whole of Lambeth.
- * (As is very evident) there will be less litter picking on the Common in winter and none on winter weekends, although covering the whole of Lambeth there will be a team of extra weekend litter pickers from April to September, providing coverage from 7am to 7pm.
- * Cleaning of the toilets will be brought back in-house: this applies only to the toilets by the playground as those by the café are now cleaned by the café staff.
- * Commercial dog walkers using the Common will have to pay for a licence.
- * Wandsworth's dedicated Parks and Events police will be available to deal with any travellers on the Common (subject to final agreement).
- * With luck, the drinking fountains will be operational again: it is true that the one outside the Rookery has never quite *stopped* working until recently.

So what can we expect? For a start, the grass should be cut regularly this year after last year's shambolic efforts. These were put down to teething problems and to the fact that Lambeth purchased a large quantity of old and fairly useless vehicles, machinery and equipment from the departing contractors. Second, there will be less of a regular presence of a manager

who is familiar with the Common, which means that it will be more incumbent upon members of the public to report problems. Third, litter is going to be more of a problem in the winter but possibly not worse than normal in the summer, especially as five new animal-proof litter bins have recently replaced old ones.

Fundamentally, all the changes are the result of the budget for Lambeth's parks and green spaces being cut to the bone. So changes have been made to try and make the best of a bad situation. The total parks budget for next year will be about £2.75 million but almost £2 million of that goes on staff costs. Operational costs, utilities and trees account for another £670,000. This leaves, for example, only £50,000 a year to purchase the materials needed for essential repairs across the borough; non-essential repairs on the Common therefore only stand a chance of being carried out if funded by events held here: even these funds are likely to be used for essential work when the meagre central budget runs out. Another example is that the total budget for ecology and biodiversity work across the borough's parks is £12,000, which does not go far. Fortunately for Streatham Common, SCCoop has recently employed somebody to recruit and run a team of volunteers to carry out such work (see page 6).

Garden Museum

If you have never visited the Garden Museum, on the South Bank next to Lambeth Palace, you should soon (but not quite yet*), if only to see The Rookery featured on the Garden Wall at the entrance to the new courtyard. The tiles that make up the Garden Wall each have a photograph of a garden printed on them. Joyce Bellamy, a long standing executive member of the Friends of Streatham Common, generously sponsored one of the tiles and chose to use a photograph of The Rookery on it.

**The museum will reopen in May after a major redevelopment.*

How Old Is Streatham Common?

Have you ever wondered how old our common is? Perhaps not. But if you have, it is probably older than you thought. The open space that we see and enjoy today as Streatham Common is a remnant of the ancient Surrey countryside, albeit much changed and modified over time and appearing to us now as a formalised open space.

Nowadays we see our common as two visual areas, one of open grassland, the other of woodland. But before the common was formalised, following its acquisition by the Metropolitan Board of Works in 1884, the open space was mostly one of semi-controlled wildness. Bushes, brambles, pits and ponds, ruts, gullies and boggy areas were characteristics of the common. The woods at the top that we see today were not there and the edges of the common were invariably ragged and often ill-defined.

In historic times this somewhat unkempt open space was maintained and controlled through a series of regulations known as the Customs of the Manor. These were laid down and enforced by the local manor of South Streatham and its manorial court, a system that continued well into the 19th century. These ancient customs gave local villagers who had acquired 'common rights', the use of the common or 'waste', these being areas of land considered unsuitable for agricultural use.

These land conditions, caused by the local geology, were observed by the early inhabitants of the area as they set about laying out their agricultural estates. This probably took place during the late Saxon period as people were establishing their settlement patterns. By the time of the Domesday Survey of 1086, an embryonic Streatham Common would have been formed as the feudal system took shape.

To determine the boundary of the common, our predecessors looked to natural features seen in the landscape, such as changes in contour levels, watercourses,

and pronounced landmarks. On observing the shape and form of the common you will notice that the contour lines along parts of its north and south edges begin to slope away, features that would have been more pronounced in earlier times, and as such were taken to delineate this part of the common. This use of the contour line to mark the common boundary can also be seen on the right side of the path leading to Norwood Grove. Here the fence to the Rookery gardens and the tree line above Hilly Four Acres, the meadow that has the tennis court at its foot, marks the original edge of this part of the common, the meadow - originally part of Streatham Farm - being a recent addition. With no natural features to mark the common's western edge, use was made of the embanked and metalled surface of a Roman road (presently the A23/Streatham High Road). This was constructed during the early 2nd century AD to link the South Coast and Weald with Roman London.

To delineate the eastern/southern edge of the common, the boundary makers made use of a natural watercourse emanating from the spring line at the top of the common. The line of this watercourse and its ditch, visible in the photograph below, can be seen today as it progresses down from the corner of the common at Crown Lane to Covington Way. This boundary is best seen at the edge of Hilly Four Acres and has quite a history. It was used to mark the boundary between the Brixton and Wallington Hundreds. These were Saxon administrative divisions which find



their roots way back in the 9th century, and indicate to us that people were exploring the local geography when establishing their political and social boundaries. This boundary was subsequently used to mark the Streatham/Croydon parish boundary and later to mark the limits of Metropolitan London with Surrey County. Now it serves as the Lambeth Borough boundary and separates Streatham Common from Norwood Grove (Croydon).

Today the common stands out as a green feature in our townscape, but until late Georgian times it would have been indiscernible from the surrounding fields and meadows. Only hedgerows, ditches, tree lines and local knowledge would have enlightened you to the boundary between common and private land. Separating the fields and woods on the north side from the common was a narrow and rutted trackway which led to Crown Point and beyond. This was called the way to 'Dullige', presently Streatham Common North/Crown Lane, a route which in origin dates to the Saxon period, if not earlier. It was for centuries the route used by the villagers of Battersea when taking their livestock for summer pasture (transhumance) in the woodlands of the high ground of Penge.

It is at the top of the common that we find further indications suggesting the antiquity of the area. Early and modern map evidence show the common interrupts the route of what appears to have been an ancient cross-country trackway. The alignment of this trackway, which in part is represented by the route of Russell's Footpath starting at Streatham Station, begins at the high point of St. Leonard's church and ends at Beulah Hill, close to the pond by the Conquering Hero Public House. It seems that this trackway had become redundant by the time the common was being laid out and terminated at a point opposite the common by Henry Tate Mews (Park Hill). Nevertheless, the trackway can be picked on the other side of the common, where it is represented by

the footpath that leaves the common to pass between the properties of Ryecroft Road and then continuing as Arnalls Road/Gibson's Hill to join with Beulah Hill, an old route skirting the Great North Wood.

In Streatham Common (along with Tooting Bec Common, which in historic times was also called Streatham Common), we have a prime heritage site of historical and environmental value. We can be assured that it has been an economic and social asset to local people since the days of Norman England. It is quite probable that our Saxon predecessors recognised the nature of the common and through their appreciation of its impoverished nature determined the area to be 'waste'. So, it is to those early inhabitants that we owe much. It was they who unwittingly endowed us with the open space which we now enjoy, and appreciate, as Streatham Common.

Graham Gower

Welcome Little Owls

Two years ago I wrote that Little Owls were an unusual visitor to the Common. But they have proved me wrong.

Since then, these rather cute birds, which are only about the height of a starling but looking larger because they are far chunkier, have been regularly seen or heard in the winter months. (If you have heard a 'terwit-terwhoo' call it is not a Little Owl but a Tawny Owl.) In the winter of 2015/2016 one or two Little Owls were frequently seen or heard along Streatham Common South, either on the rooftops of the houses or on the plane trees on the edge of the Common.

This winter, owls were again sometimes seen or heard along Streatham Common South at dusk or later in the evening. But they were more regularly seen or heard in the line of ancient oak trees on the edge of Hilly Four Acres, the meadow that has the tennis court at its foot. These two locations are favoured because both are on the edge of substantial areas of long grass in which the owls can hunt. They feed on

small mammals, beetles and worms, either swooping down on them or running after them on the ground. Preferred hunting times are from dusk until midnight and around dawn. During the day, especially if it is sunny, the owls will often doze in the semi-open on the branch of a tree.



The big question is whether they are breeding here. They nest in a hole in a tree and lay their eggs in April or May. The eggs hatch after a month and the youngsters first leave their nest about a month later. If you are lucky enough, in two or three months time, to come across a group of youngsters like those in the photo, please let me know.

Peter Newmark



Members of the family of George Tuson, last Chair of Streatham Common MAC, planting a memorial tree in the Rookery's orchard.

Dates For Your Diary

For more details of these events put on by the Friends of Streatham Common, go to streathamcommon.org

Spring Bird Walk, 8th April
Meet by the Rookery Café at 9.30am

Bat Walk, 21st April
Meet by the Rookery Café at 8.15pm.
Limited places; booking is essential - email IBoulton@lambeth.gov.uk

Walk with Insects, 23rd April
Meet by the Rookery Café at 10.30am

Bird Box Survey, 13th May
Meet by the Rookery Café at 9.30am

Kite Day, 14th May
On the lower Common, from 11.00am to 5.00pm

Plant Walk, 2nd June
Meet by the Rookery Café at 7.00pm

Band in the Rookery, 4th June
On the Rookery lawn, afternoon

Friends Annual General Meeting, 7th June

Summer Tree Walk, 11th June
Meet by the Rookery Café at 2.00pm

The Merry Wives of Windsor, 9th July
On The Rookery lawn, starting at 3.00pm. Advance tickets via crbo.co.uk

Moths in Close Up, 22nd July
Meet in the Community Garden at 9.30am

Birds of Prey Flying Display, 30th July
From 1.00pm to 5.00pm, on the lower Common.

Improving Biodiversity

In 2013, after a sustained push by the Friends, Lambeth Council declared a large part of Streatham Common as the first (and still only) Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in Lambeth. This recognised the high value and natural interest of the area and gave this area added protection. Part of the process involved creating a five-year management plan for how to look after and improve the area in terms of its ecology and biodiversity. Unfortunately, there has been more neglect than improvement so far. Symptomatically, perhaps, Lambeth has not even got round to putting up signage to say that the LNR exists.

All this is about to change thanks to SCCoop (the Streatham Common Cooperative) which has hired Mered Jones as LNR Project and Volunteer Coordinator. Working about a day a week on average, Mered's primary task is to recruit and manage a team of volunteers to carry out as much as possible of the work prioritised in the LNR management plan. SCCoop has also purchased the tools necessary for the work.

Getting off to a quick start, Mered ran several volunteer sessions during March in the woodlands; other areas will be tackled in due course. One early goal was to clear out the dead and dying elm trees from part of the small wooded strip at the top of Hilly Four Acres (the meadow with the tennis court at its foot) with the plan of planting hazel trees there instead. Elm trees always succumb to Dutch Elm disease so are of little value, whereas hazel is better for wildlife and can be coppiced.

Much of the volunteer work will be carried out in the winter months to avoid disturbing nesting birds during the spring and summer. Apart from work in the woodlands, there are also plans to conserve and improve the area of acid grassland that lies between the unused road by the paddling pool and the footpath that runs between Copley Park and Valley

Road. And in the next month or two, when woodland work comes to a halt, surveys of bugs and butterflies are planned.



Mered comes with the experience and attitude to make things happen. He has managed conservation projects and volunteer groups in several London boroughs and spent six years in charge of grounds maintenance for three large parks in Southwark. He also has experience of bringing in large groups of corporate volunteers for a day's work, something he hopes to replicate here.

Look out for Mered, pictured above, on the Common and don't hesitate to join his volunteer team, whether regularly or occasionally. If you are interested in helping, email mered.jones@sccoop.org.uk

What's Up?

Café - the smart new premises of the Rookery Café seem to be well appreciated and used. The owners have now applied for permission to sell alcohol and play recorded music, opening up some intriguing possibilities.

Microbrewery - the last legal agreements were signed in March, so Inkspot can finally get on with turning the barn in the Rookery's yard into their microbrewery. This involves a trip to China to purchase the equipment! Inkspot has also promised rapidly to make good the unsightly area by the entrance from Covington Way that was

created when their power supply was installed.

On the Common - two benches, five bins and two manhole covers have recently replaced their lost or broken equivalents. The tarmac on the footpath near to the Memorial Gardens has been replaced and patches of damaged tarmac in the car park have been repaired. These repairs were prioritised by agreement between the Friends and Lambeth Parks and were paid for by funds derived from events held on the Common last year.

Streatham, 1985

A review of a 2016 biography of the late Angela Carter, a renowned novelist and journalist who was brought up after the war in Balham and went to Streatham and Clapham High School, led back to a book review she published in the London Review of Books in 1985 and from which this is an edited extract.

“Piggery triumphant has invaded even the pages of the *Guardian*, hitherto synonymous with non-conformist sobriety. Instead of its previous modest column of recipes and restaurant reviews, the paper now boasts an entire page devoted to food and wine once a week: more space than it gives to movies, as much as it customarily gives to books. Piggery has spawned a glossy bimonthly, *A la Carte*, a gastronomic *Penthouse* devoted to glamour photography, the subject of which is not the female body imaged as if it were good enough to eat, but food photographed according to the conventions of the pin-up. The colour plates are of awesome voluptuousness. Oh, that coconut kirsch roulade in the first issue! Even if the *true* foodie knows there is something not quite ... about a coconut kirsch roulade as a concept. It is just a bit ... just a bit *Streatham*. Its vowels are subtly wrong. It is probably related to a Black Forest gâteau.”

The Crib at 60

Last Christmas may have faded in your memory but it is not too late to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the crib that each year appears at the bottom of the Common, near the playground.

That it does so is thanks to the efforts of John Taylor, who built the crib in 1956 and has been keeping it in good nick ever since. John is associated with the Streatham branch of The Knights of St Columba, based at St Bartholomew’s Catholic Church in Ellison Road.

On December 3rd, to mark the occasion, the Friends presented John Taylor with a plaque, thanking him “for 60 years of dedication in arranging the crib on Streatham Common 1956-2016”.



John Taylor, centre, being presented with the plaque by Jane Parke and Mike Robinson, Chair of the Friends.

Four days later the Friends held their annual carol singing by the crib and the Christmas tree followed by their Christmas Party in The Bull pub. Thanks to Sainsbury's for the mince pies and mulled wine that lubricated throats before the singing and to Anthony Gold Solicitors for contributing to subsequent lubrications at the party and for providing generous raffle prizes.

KITE DAY NEEDS HELP

Our biggest event of the year, Kite Day, which is on Sunday May 14th, always needs many volunteers to help it run smoothly. If you have a couple of hours to spare any time between 8.00am and 6.00pm on the day, please either phone Heidi on 07802 571297 or, preferably, send an email to volunteering@streathamcommon.org

WATCH OUT FOR *The Streatham Sketchbook* due to be published in July. Focussing on the area's contribution to the arts, it is a collaboration between London historian Mireille Galinou and Streatham-based artist Jiro Osuga. For more details visit yourlondonpublishing.co.uk

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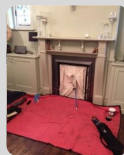


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