



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@gmail.com

Fun Dog Show

**September 2nd, 2.00 to 4.00 pm
Opposite the Rookery Café**

With prizes for

- *Cutest puppy 4 -12 months
- *Dandiest dog
- *Bonniest bitch
- *Best rescue dog/bitch
- *Dog and spoon race
- *Seven-legged race.

► Plus raffles, stalls, PAT dog parade.

Show theme: who would you like to be?

From the Chair

So, if you haven't heard, Barbara Wright has stepped down as Chair of the Friends and I've taken over.

First many thanks to Barbara for her work over the last few years, and also to all the other officers and volunteers in the Friends. For the events we have run since the previous newsletter I'd like to pay particular thanks to their organisers, Clair Wilcox, Heidi Nicholson, Colin Finlayson, Peter Newmark, Bob Colover and Liz Owen. Sometimes it's easy to forget that everyone gives up their time for free. I'd also like to welcome the new committee members and look forward to working with you all over the next year.

One thing to note from the Annual General Meeting is that we have unfortunately had to increase the membership rates after ten years as we were no longer covering our costs.

Going forward we will be looking again at the issue of how the council manages the Common, and the council's objective to encourage more local management from groups such as the Friends. This is important to look at now as the current contract with Veolia, who maintain the Common, is coming towards its end. We are keen to hear your views on the matter and will be holding a public meeting on the issue in October.

Now that the Park Rangers have gone, we will be looking to establish a Park Watch scheme which essentially involves local residents in filling some of the gaps, particularly in reporting problems to the council and police. We will be looking for volunteers to help both run and be part of this, so if you are interested please let us know.

As ever, we are always looking for people to help, so if you have any time to spare (large or small), please let us know, or please contact us on any other issue you have about the common.

Richard Payne

Community Garden Progress

A year on from when the Streatham Common Community Garden was but a committee with ideas and a website to generate interest, there are now weekly working sessions, the first vegetables from the garden and expansion plans.

After some ground clearing sessions last autumn and a break in the winter, working sessions started up in the spring, first monthly, then every other week and finally every Sunday. Over the various working days, there have been over 100 different volunteers, with between 5 and 50 (for the first clearing day) coming to each of the sessions. As well as general work sessions, we have held sessions providing instruction on companion planting and water conservation.

Most of the site is now planted with vegetables and the first crops planted earlier in the year are ready for harvesting. There will be a produce barbecue in August to reward the volunteers but there is also a plan to sell produce to generate income for the project.

Groundwork has produced a landscape plan which will form the basis of further restoration of the garden in the autumn. This will involve turning the large main bed into a series of smaller beds with paths to make the garden more accessible.

Now that the garden is established, we will place more effort on fundraising and also in forming partnerships with local schools and voluntary organisations as part of the group's commitment to public benefit. We have also applied to Groundwork for support to enable us to become a 'growing hub', which would mean the garden could act as a demonstration project and resource for others, once it is fully operational.



Community garden - before and after



After discussions with a Lambeth council conservation officer (the garden is in a conservation area) and with the help of Lambeth College, we intend to restore the two beds that we are currently using as enclosed beds to their original function as cold frames. In the longer term, we hope also to restore the greenhouse, perhaps in time for next year's celebration of the Rookery's centenary.

Stephen Blann, Vice-chair, Streatham Common Community Garden

Rare Visitor

A few years ago I got chatting to a man near to the allotments on the far side of Biggin Wood and he claimed that there was a cuckoo there every year. I raised an eyebrow but did not say that I thought it was he who was cuckoo.

Yes, but go back to 1885 and the delightfully entitled "A Gossip on the Wild

Birds of Norwood and Crystal Palace District” by W. Aldridge says that cuckoos are not uncommon in Streatham and surrounding areas. They were doubtless still there in 1909, when Charles Dixon in his “The Bird-Life of London” records them not only in such places as Clapham and



Peckham but even in Battersea Park and Hyde Park. Not long after that, however, suburban development must have started driving cuckoos further and further from London. Now very few breed (by laying their egg in the nest of another species) within 20 miles of the centre of London.

When cuckoos last bred in this area I can't say but these days it would be exceptional even to see or hear one, and if one did it would be a chance visit by a tired or hungry bird migrating over London. I had never come across one on Streatham Common, while living here for about 35 years, and as far as I can ascertain, neither had anyone else.

So May 17th this year was a red-letter day. Taking our dog out in the morning, we were almost immediately told that a cuckoo had been heard, and any disbelief was rapidly dispelled when we, too, heard it calling from the woodland area. A number of other people also heard it that day and even the following day, although as far as I know, nobody saw the bird, which is often the case with cuckoos.

As the cuckoo was ‘cuckooing’ it must have been a male. They can call either in flight or while perched on a tree. This individual had probably only arrived in the UK a day or two earlier after a two month migration from sub-Saharan Africa.

A great deal has been learnt about the cuckoo's travels in the past year as a result of satellite tags fitted to five males born last summer in East Anglia. The tags are solar powered and every few days transmit signals that are detected by satellites. The five birds took very varied routes through Europe and parts of Africa but all ended up remarkably close together in the Congo. All but one survived the winter there and set out for the return journey, but only two made it back to East Anglia. The other two succumbed - probably to bad weather - in Algeria and Spain. This year another 14 cuckoos have been tagged, some in England, some in Scotland and some in Wales and even now are being tracked as they head south.

The data gathered from these birds by the British Trust for Ornithology may help to explain why the cuckoo is one of the fastest declining migrants in the UK, with numbers halved in the past 25 years. Could May 17th 2012 be the last time ever there is a cuckoo in Streatham? Let's hope not.

Peter Newmark



Rookery Centenary

An update on progress towards celebration of the centenary in July 2013.

Green Flag - a mock inspection indicated that the Rookery would be granted Green Flag status, although some improvements would be carried out before the real inspection next year, assuming a Management Plan is ready in time.

Floral displays - carpet bedding and some new flower beds are being designed.

Gardeners Question Time - an application has been submitted for this popular radio programme to come to Crown Lane Primary School next summer.

Leaflet - the design of a leaflet providing historical and horticultural information on the Rookery is almost complete.

Book - Streatham Society has published a book entitled *Norwood Grove and The Rookery, Streatham Common - the History of Two Georgian Estates in South London* by Brian Bloice and Daphne Marchant. See review opposite.

Memories Project - there must be lots of people with happy memories of visits to the Rookery. The Friends of Streatham Common in partnership with the Streatham Society is looking for your memories – which we will collect for display at the centenary. Over the next year we will also be publishing them from time to time. So please sharpen your pencils and think back, write down your memories and either email them to friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com or give me a call.

Barbara Wright 020 8764 8062

Did you know?

In 1921, the Princess Royal chose a painting of the Rookery for her official Christmas card.

The Rookery was laid out as an Old English Garden with a White Garden that pre-dates Sissinghurst's by 20 years.

Flowers for the gardens used to be grown from seed on site.

The London County Council designed the Rookery as a country idyll in the city, yet it was opened without any ceremony.

Norwood Grove & The Rookery, Streatham Common - the History of Two Georgian Estates in South London

by Brian Bloice and Daphne Marchant.
Published by and available from The Streatham Society, admin@streathamsociety.org.uk

Published only a couple of weeks ago, this excellent booklet (32 pages) provides a rich historical account of the two estates of its title and of the local benefactor who helped bring them into public use. Daphne Marchant starts with two pages on the benefactor, Stenton Covington, who roused local residents and raised sufficient money to ensure that the areas that are now known as the Rookery and Norwood Grove did not fall into the hands of developers. She then provides descriptions and a history of the gardens and the house - commonly known as the White House - in Norbury Grove, followed by an account of its residents over the years. Finally she returns to detail how the gardens were saved for public use and opened by the late Duke of Windsor in 1926.

Brian Bloice then takes over with a history of the Rookery house and gardens. He tells how the original house that used to be on the site was built to accommodate the increasing number of people who visited the area in the late 17th century to drink Streatham's mineral water drawn from local wells. The house became a private residence once the wells closed and changed its name from the Well House to the Rookery. A good deal of detail about the various owners over the years is provided, culminating in an account of how the house was demolished and the site brought into council ownership and opened to the public in 1913.

The well written and highly informative text is copiously illustrated with early maps, paintings and photographs of the more illustrious owners of both houses and a large collection of early photographs of both sites.

Peter Newmark

Events

Our usual rich programme of spring and summer events kicked off on March 31st with a **Bird Walk** around the Common; 21 species were noted, with a pair of confiding goldcrests as the star attraction. The following day was **Kite Day** - the 14th.



It was a beautiful sunny day but the wind was only intermittent. As soon as the wind got up, the sky was filled with kites. A huge crowd enjoyed the day, even if the lack of wind was

frustrating for some of those who turned up to give displays. On April 7th, around 160 children turned up for the **Easter Egg**

Hunt in the Rookery, which was a little frantic but great fun. Twenty children also entered



the Decorate an Egg competition. The annual **Bird Box Survey**, carried out on May 6th, revealed only seven occupied boxes, the fewest ever; the very poor weather was probably to blame. **Band in the Rookery** on June 17th attracted a good crowd of all ages who enjoyed an afternoon of fine weather and folk music, once the musicians turned up. Finally, the annual **Shakespeare in the Rookery** performance took place on July 15th, with Twelfth Night put on by the Festival Players. Thankfully the weather was good, but the immediately preceding days and

weeks of poor weather meant that a smaller crowd than last year turned up. Nevertheless, the excellent production was watched with rapt attention by close to 200 people ♦

Friends AGM

The AGM was held on June 13th and was well attended. Once the standard business was over, officers were elected for the forthcoming year; they are listed in the accompanying box. Barbara Wright stood down as Chair and was thanked for her many and varied contributions to the Friends over the past four years. Richard Payne was elected to replace her. Councillor Sally Prentice, whose brief as Lambeth Council Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and the Olympics also includes Green Spaces, took questions from the audience and confirmed that it was Streatham Common's turn for the firework display this year. After the break, Brian Bloice gave a fascinating talk on the history of the Rookery house and gardens, based on his contribution to the new publication by the Streatham Society, reviewed on page 5♦

Friends of Streatham Common officers elected at the 2012 AGM.

Chair - Richard Payne

Vice Chair - Peter Newmark

Acting Secretary - Jane Parke

Membership Secretary - Helen Barnard

Assistant Membership (Outreach) - Nina Whitehouse

Treasurer - Nick Cattermole

Fundraising - Sophie Bain

Events and Volunteer Co-ordinator - Katherine Forster

Newsletter Editor - Peter Newmark

Executive Members - Stephen Blann, Shea Richardson, George Tuson, Joyce Bellamy

Dates for Your Diary

September 2nd. Fun Dog Show from 2.00 to 4.00 pm opposite the Rookery Café. See front page for details.

October 13th. Big Draw from 1.00 to 3.00 pm in the playground.

October 24th. Public Meeting. "The Future Management of Streatham Common and the Co-op Council." Venue and time to be announced.

October 27th. Autumn Bird Walk. Starting at the Rookery Café at 9.30 am, ending at 11.00 am.

December 12th. Carol Singing around the Christmas Tree at the bottom of the Common.

What's up?

With Lambeth Council having a considerably reduced budget for the Common and the Rookery this year, the Friends were asked to create a priority list of what needed doing. Many of the high priority items have already been attended to or soon will be.

Rookery cascade - work has begun to, yet again, fix the leaks so that water can flow down the cascade. The largest pool was emptied, saving some goldfish and newts - and cracks in the lining have been resealed. However, as the working hypothesis had been that the main problem was with the pipe that recirculates the water from the bottom pool to the top, it remains to be seen whether sealing the cracks will solve the problem.

Orchard - one of the picnic tables damaged either by a barbeque or by vandalism has been restored and the other soon will be.

Paddling pool - repairs to pipework were completed just in time for the fine weather

and the damaged inspection covers were replaced.

Nature Trail - progress has been made by the Friends with designing the interpretative board that will be at the start of the trail, near the car park. This board and the marker posts around the trail will be installed in the autumn. With luck, Lambeth Council will at the same time confer Local Nature Reserve status on the areas through which the trail passes.

Damaged surfaces - the poor weather during much of the events season has resulted in some damage to parts of the Common, especially where the fun fair vehicles had to drive across it. Anyone holding an event on the Common or in the Rookery has to provide Lambeth with a deposit to cover the repair of damage - in the case of the Friends, the deposit is £500. Therefore, if the event organisers do not repair the damage themselves, Lambeth has the funds to do so. Generally, however, repairs are not carried out immediately as grassland is good at restoring itself, up to a point♦

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