



Common Knowledge

August 2014, Issue 52

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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

BIRDS OF PREY FLYING DISPLAYS



**10 August 1.00-5.30pm
On Streatham Common**

An array of hawks, falcons, owls etc will be on display all afternoon on the lower Common, with flying displays at 2.30 and 4.30.

A free event but donations to the Friends of Streatham Common welcome on the day.

From the Chair

This month, we've made a significant step forward in our plans to establish a local not-for-profit social enterprise, 'SCCoop', to take over management of the Rookery later this year, and eventually all of Streatham Common in 2016. The council has approved (subject to a few conditions) a grant of £20,000 to enable us to hire our first member of staff, the manager, and purchase the equipment we need to get up and running. SCCoop is hoping to begin services in the Rookery by the end of the year.

You can purchase a share in SCCoop for £1 from www.sccoop.org.uk. However, you may be wondering how the relationship between Lambeth, the Friends and SCCoop will be going forward, and why you should be both a member of the Friends as well as joining SCCoop.

The answer in a nutshell is that whereas SCCoop is a business, established by the Friends but run by professionals, accountable to the council and local people to run public services, the Friends is a group of volunteers that looks out for the common, runs campaigns, raises funds, organises fun and informative events, and feeds back concerns to the council and its contractors.

Although we are confident that SCCoop, being owned by local people and not-for-profit, will be better at delivering the services that we want, it is vitally important that the Friends carries on its work. In time, no doubt, we will become just as vocal about what SCCoop could be doing better as we are now about the council and the current contractors.

Richard Payne

Coincidences

After moving to Streatham in 2007, Sophie Hussey (currently overseeing the completion of the Rookery Centenary Project for the Friends of Streatham Common) frequently took her two young daughters to the Rookery. Then by coincidence, in 2012, she bumped into Richard Payne (Chair of the Friends) whom she had barely seen since they had both been undergraduates at the same Oxford college about 20 years earlier. Richard persuaded Sophie to join the Friends and take on the task of raising funds for the Rookery's centenary celebrations in 2013. And this set in train a much greater coincidence.

The Friends' plan for the Rookery's Centenary evolved under Sophie's guidance into a project that aimed to gain Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF). With some knowledge of HLF funding, Sophie (who is a professional arts fundraiser) knew that it would help the bid if the project included the recruitment and training of volunteers in heritage matters.

Thus was formed a group who were to carry out research on garden design. One aim was to find out as much as possible about the design of the original Rookery flower gardens, and especially the White

Garden, with a view to replanting some of the gardens, both to reflect the original design and to allow for the fact that the number of gardeners would be considerably fewer than when the gardens



were first planted (see page 6 for more information on the research).

Sophie was not directly involved with the research but was copied on all emails. In May this year, she noticed an email to a researcher from a Johnnie Brownrigg, who knew that his family had a connection with the Rookery. As her maternal grandmother's maiden name was Brownrigg, Sophie's curiosity was piqued. And, yes, it turned out that this was one and the same Brownrigg family and therefore that, by complete coincidence, Sophie had a family connection to the Rookery.

The connection is as follows. Sophie's great, great grandmother was the daughter of Sir Kingsmill Grove Key's first wife: when he married his fourth (and last) wife, he moved into the house she was living in as a widow. That house was The Rookery, which was demolished in the process of turning the land on which it was built into the Rookery as we now know it.

There is a wealth of information about Sir Kingsmill Grove Key in a book published last year by the Streatham Society.* Suffice it here to say that he co-owned a very successful business manufacturing agricultural machinery and married Mary Sophia Hahn in 1842. They had four children, a boy and three

girls, and were living in Wandsworth when Mary died in 1855.

One of the daughters was Louisa Marion Key, born in 1840. In 1872, when she was

living on Streatham Common North with her father, whose third wife had by then died, she married John Annesley Brownrigg, an Irish immigrant and Streatham GP. Five years later, her father married Jane Adam Hill, who lived in The Rookery.

John and Louisa had a son, Norman, who was Sophie's great grandfather and the grandfather of Johnnie Brownrigg, who wrote the emails that Sophie saw. Johnnie has Norman's diaries for the 1890s. In them Norman several times mentions visiting The Rookery - see page 6 for a diary entry.

In summary, it is a fine coincidence that Sophie's great, great, great grandfather lived in the Rookery from 1877 to 1900. His daughter, from whom Sophie is directly descended, never lived there but no doubt went to The Rookery to visit her father, Sir Kingsmill, and her sister Laura. The photograph, kindly provided by Jeff Cooper - another Key descendant, shows Laura seated on the right hand end of the carpet and Sir Kingsmill standing over the group, probably in the grounds of The Rookery.

Peter Newmark

**Norwood Grove & The Rookery, Streatham Common: The History of Two Georgian Estates in South London by Brian Bloice and Daphne Marchant.*

Birds of Prey

On August 10th, around 20 different birds of prey, from all over the world, will be on display on the Common (see front page) and several of them will be flown during the afternoon. But what wild birds of prey can be seen on the Common? The answer is only two with any frequency, and one of those is nearly always heard rather than seen.

Sparrowhawk – a smallish hawk that is fairly often to be seen gliding or circling over the Common. Occasionally one can shoot by at low level in pursuit of a small

bird. Sparrowhawks turn up in gardens too: I have had the unpleasant experience of seeing one yanking a greenfinch off a bird feeder. If perched, their yellow eyes and legs stand out. Sparrowhawks breed on Tooting and Wandsworth Commons but seem not to on Streatham Common.

Kestrel – easily identified when it hovers, looking for prey. Twenty years ago kestrels used to be regularly seen on the Common and used to breed nearby. However, unlike almost all other UK birds of prey, they have been in decline and it is now rare to see one over the Common. A few years ago one would take up residence in Hilly Four Acres, the field above the tennis court, and hunt down prey in the long grass, but no longer. The reason for the kestrel's decline is not clear but it may well be the result of a decline in two of its favourite snacks – voles and house sparrows.

Buzzard – a large bird of prey that has been rapidly increasing in numbers in the UK. It now breeds on the fringes of London and occasionally one will drift high over the Common.

Hobby – a summer visitor, which overall resembles a small peregrine, and just occasionally flies over the Common, sometimes chasing insects on the wing.

Peregrine – with around 20 pairs breeding in the London area, the occasional peregrine flies over the Common. They



nest on the Quadrant building in Sutton but no longer on the (no longer appropriately named) Nestle building in Croydon. Another regular nesting site for this powerful falcon

is on the top of Charing Cross Hospital.

Red Kite – a frequent scavenger in London 300 years ago, the red kite was on the point of extinction in the UK in the 1950s but has bounced back following a programme of reintroduction. The first reintroduction site was in the Chiltern Hills and red kites are now a regular sight on the north west outskirts of London. They can also be seen every now and again passing over the Common. Look out for their forked tail.

Tawny Owl – a reddish-brown bird about the size of a large pigeon. Tawny owls are regularly heard hooting in or near the woodlands in winter months. The best time to hear them is at dusk or dawn, when you might be lucky enough to see one, too. As tawny owls are generally resident in one area, they may well breed on or near the Common, but there is no firm evidence that they do.

Peter Newmark

New Constitution

At a Special Meeting on 25th June, the Friends of Streatham Common voted to adopt a new constitution. Given the size of the organisation, the executive committee decided that it would be sensible to apply for charitable status but we knew from prior experience that our existing constitution was not considered charitable by the Charity Commission.

Charitable status will offer FoSC a number of advantages. We will be able to claim Gift Aid on donations by individuals who are UK taxpayers, meaning that for every pound donated FoSC will actually get £1.20. In addition, becoming a charity puts FoSC in a position to apply for a wider range of funding opportunities because some will only give to registered charities.

To ensure the new constitution has the best possible chance of being accepted by the Charity Commission, FoSC's new constitution is based on a Charity Commission model. The charitable objects are, nevertheless, specific to FoSC and these are:

1. To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the public open spaces of Streatham Common, the Rookery (Grade II* listed garden), Streatham Memorial Garden and associated public open spaces.
2. To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment in the areas of the charity's operation.
3. To promote the provision of public facilities for recreation and leisure including children's play areas, nature reserves, wildlife and gardening activities.

Day-to-day you will notice little different about FoSC and its work, including the running of events.

As a result of applying to becoming a charity, FoSC has also elected seven members of its Executive Committee as trustees, whose job it is to ensure the good governance and management of the charity. These are: Richard Payne, Heidi Nicholson, David Malley, Camilla Ray, Peter Newmark, Iain Morris, Tracey Williamson and Sophie Hussey.

If you would like to receive a copy of our new constitution, please email me at membership@streathamcommon.org or telephone me on 07802 571297.

Heidi Nicholson, Secretary

Friends Officers elected at the AGM

Chair - Richard Payne

Vice Chair - Camilla Ray

Treasurer - David Malley

Secretary - Heidi Nicholson

Newsletter Editor - Peter Newmark

Rookery Centenary Liaison - Sophie Hussey

Volunteer Co-ordinator & Membership - Iain Morris

Fundraiser - Tracey Williamson

Communications & Publicity - Amy Chalkley

Park Watch - Ambika Bowles

Executive Committee Members - Nick

Cattermole, Joyce Bellamy, George

Tuson, Shea Richardson, Stephen Blann.

The White Garden - Past, Present, Future

The White Garden in context

“Whoever had the inspiration to plan part of the ground solely for white flowers must have been blessed with the simplicity of genius. The Garden is unique, and offers a charming prospect to the eye.” Writing in the *Westminster Gazette* just after the newly acquired and redesigned Rookery Garden opened to the public in July 1913, this commentator was impressed by the White Garden's innovative colour palette. White gardens were becoming fashionable among the elite of the day, but the Rookery's popular White Garden remained unique among London's public parks until well into the twentieth century.

William Robinson, an Irish gardener who came to England in 1862, was a key influence on gardens like the Rookery. Robinson advocated 'wild gardening', rejecting carpet bedding and overly formal gardening styles in favour of the dense planting of hardy perennials in naturalistic drifts. 'Wild gardening', combined with the Arts and Crafts movement's regard for rural traditions, led to the trend for mixed herbaceous borders using hardy perennials.

Gertrude Jekyll, a friend of Robinson, was another hugely influential garden designer. A trained artist, she did much to popularize colour-themed borders. The White Garden created at Hidcote by Lawrence Johnston in the early 1900s, one of the first of many English white gardens, was influenced by both Jekyll and Thomas Mawson, author of *The Art and Craft of Garden Making*.

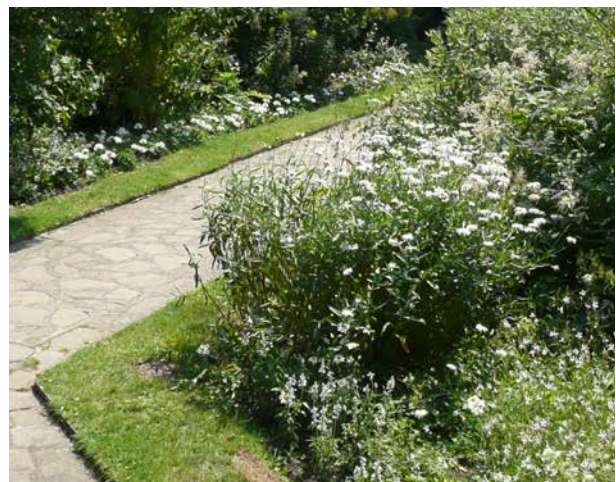
The most famous popularizer of the idea of white gardens, Vita Sackville-West, did not start to plant her 'grey, green and white garden' at Sissinghurst until 1949. She gardened in the tradition of Robinson and Jekyll, and was influenced by Hidcote. As her mother briefly owned a house in Streatham, she might even have gathered

inspiration from the Rookery's White Garden!

Thanks to the *Westminster Gazette's* enthusiastic reporter, we know that the first White Garden planting scheme included roses, foxgloves, hollyhocks, phlox, pansies, violas, and sweet peas – all fashionable plants of the time. There is no complete historical record of planting in the garden, but sources show that it has changed over the years, reflecting fashion and fluctuating park budgets. At times the planting has been quite daring: in 1922 the *Streatham News* reported on Brugmansia plants growing in the White Garden. These tender exotics spent their winters under glass in Battersea. Another snapshot comes from a *Gardener's Chronicle* article of 1927 that describes lilies, foxgloves, phloxes, campanulas, grasses, box, violas and an old apple tree – probably a remnant of the orchard that once stocked the fruit bowls of The Rookery itself.

White gardens are enjoying a resurgence, and many of the plants used in today's white gardens are modern cultivars of those chosen by the Rookery's Edwardian gardeners. Some of the plants and ideas under consideration for the White Garden's redesign might have stuck them as novel but, given the rapid pace of change in their own era, they would no doubt have taken it all in their stride.

Terka Acton



The White Garden now. How will it look next year?

Researching the roots

In preparation for the replanting of The White Garden in the Rookery, we were keen to learn something about The Rookery house that once stood on the top lawn, as well as its grounds and the family of Sir Kingsmill Grove Key, the last owner-occupants. Were the rumours true that the White Garden was originally laid out for a Victorian wedding? If not, then who inspired its creation and when? Our research has taken us to libraries, archives and collections across London, where we have waded through a sea of documents and pondered archival photographs, postcards and maps. We have discovered fascinating people who have shared their thoughts and stories and helped us piece together our evidence into a picture of The Rookery as it was and its transformation into the gardens we know today.



Rookery Volunteer Design Group in White Garden

At the time of purchase by the London County Council in 1911, The Rookery grounds were somewhat neglected but left as they were on the death of Lady Key in 1901. They contained a terrace with conservatory, lawns, areas of woodland with shaded pathways, a rose walk, a kitchen garden with greenhouse, stable yards and an orchard. Johnnie Brownrigg

has kept the diaries of his grandfather Norman, in turn grandson of Sir Kingsmill Grove Key: 'After a good lunch, he would walk down to the lower lawn with his grandmother, who used a bath chair, and pick mulberries, plums and blackberries in the orchard'. The mulberry tree still bears fruit, in what is now the Community Garden.

Major Philip Maud became Chief Officer of Parks for the London County Council in 1911, following the retirement of J.J. Sexby. Sexby had been responsible for the planning of several of the new London parks, notably Brockwell Park, where his idea of turning the former kitchen garden into an Old English Garden proved so popular that it became the model upon which many parks were subsequently designed until the 1920s. In his plan for The Rookery, presented to the Parks committee meeting in July 1912, Major Maud proposed to retain and improve as many of the existing features as possible including the paths, lawns, terrace and rose walk. He proposed forming flowerbeds on the north side of the terrace, an alpine garden in place of the old stables, steps up to the terrace and, following Sexby's model, an Old English Garden in place of the house's kitchen garden, with herbaceous borders to its south.

Sadly, the plan itself is now lost to time but the earliest postcards and photographs from 1913 illustrate it was carried out largely as Major Maud intended. Importantly, we see the proposed herbaceous borders, while not described in any document, were to become The White Garden. The layout was much as it remains today with grass borders along the wide beds planted exclusively with white flowers, a circular bed at the foot of the steps and the familiar white benches. So our White Garden was not made for a Victorian wedding after all: the real vision behind its creation remains illusive.

Rachel Chapman

Other Gardens

To supplement our research on the best way to re-invigorate The Rookery gardens, some of us have been able to visit other gardens for inspiration. We chose to concentrate on either gardens of the period or other White Gardens. The White Gardens were at Arundel, Sissinghurst and the Secret Gardens of Sandwich. We also looked at a fully restored Jekyll garden at Upton Grey.

The Sandwich Garden was designed in 1911, and was created to show off the fragrant and exotic Regal Lily (*Lilium regale*) which had been introduced to Britain from China in 1903. There are no lilies there now, probably because they are so susceptible to pests, but the small garden has some intense white planting contained within box hedges. It is a quiet area of the garden as a whole.

The White Garden at Arundel is another small, quiet garden. It is a semi-shady garden, with only one border able to contain sun-loving plants. The garden is outside the chapel and tall *Trachycarpus fortunei* echo the pillars and give a tantalizing glimpse of what is to follow when the visitors leave the white garden and find their way into The Earl's garden. The White Garden at Arundel can be seen as the calm before the party.

At Sissinghurst, we were fortunate to be able to speak with the Head Gardener who explained how the garden would have looked in Vita Sackville-West's time. It is due for renovation next year but it was a good experience for us to look at the structure and planting in a garden on a larger scale and to see some lovely roses.

Upton Grey gave us an idea of how Gertrude Jekyll was such an influence on the designs of the period. The Rose Garden, with its peonies and surrounding planting scheme, were very reminiscent of The Rookery's Old English Garden.

Kate Daly

For Membership Enquiries, please use these new contact details: email membership@streathamcommon.org or write to 9 Strathbrook Rd, SW16 3AT.

What's Up?

Rookery - the very smart new crazy paving, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, is in place. The damaged sundial has been replaced. And the cascade is once again flowing.



Woodlands - the ruts, caused in part by last November's visit from travellers and in part by the vehicles needed to remove the mess left behind, have finally been filled in.

Volunteers - a very welcome 70-strong group of volunteers from Lloyd's bank spent a day in late July pulling out invasive thistles, cutting back brambles etc. on the Common and in the Rookery, removing self-set saplings in the woodlands and painting fencing around the cafe and the picnic benches in the playground.

Public Conveniences - the long out of action loos near the playground are back in action following repairs.

Budget Woes - although only four months into the financial year, well over half of Lambeth's 2014 budget for the Common/Rookery has already been committed.

Do Not Miss

August 10th: **Birds of Prey Displays:** see front page for details.

August 7th -17th: **Alice in the Rookery.** A promenade performance for children and adults. Morning, afternoon and early evening times, depending on the date. Details on our website and on posters.

August 29th - **Macbeth.** A madcap, 4-strong troupe of players .. and their bikes. In the Rookery at 6.30pm.

September 7th - **Fun Dog Show.** On the upper Common, 1.00-5.30pm. Prizes for the Cutest Puppy, Prettiest Bitch, Most Handsome Dog, Best Veteran, 7-Legged Race, Dog and Spoon Race, and Best Rescue Dog.

Recent Events

We have put on more - and more varied - events this summer than ever before. In the next issue, after the events season is



over, we will look back at the events with a photographic record. As a taster, here is a shot of the first flowering orchid that anyone can recall on the Common and found during 'Walk the Streatham Common Nature Trail' on July 8th. Meanwhile, a huge thanks to all the organisers and the many volunteers who made our events season possible.

Advertisements

Forest School

Join our after-school club for 5-11 year olds. Sessions will be held in Streatham Common Woods on Thursdays from 4.00-5.30pm for six weeks, starting on September 11th. Run by Gemma Hindi, an experienced and qualified Forest School Leader. To book, email treemenduslearning@gmail.com

SEA Plumbing

We are a local company that can provide a reliable plumbing service from a new tap washer to a complete bathroom refit. If you would like any advice or a free estimate then please call us on 07973 430295 or email seaplumbing1@aol.com

Vale Veterinary Clinic

Coupled with over 25 years of experience & our state of the art facilities, we are proud to announce our new discount scheme. It covers your pet for all their preventative treatments and expert advice, giving you complete peace of mind.

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