



# Common Knowledge

streathamcommon.org  
Registered Charity 1166961

August 2016, Issue 58

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## Don't Miss This Year's Scruff's Dog Show

Sunday September 11th, opposite the Rookery Café starting at 12.00 noon.

Prizes for  
Cutest Puppy  
Bonniest Bitch  
Handsomest Dog  
Best Veteran  
Best Rescue Dog  
Dog and Spoon Races  
Seven-Legged Races  
Fancy Dress Competition for Dogs



Also parade of the *Pets as Therapy* dogs and numerous stalls.

## From the Chair

You may have noticed a few changes in the Rookery recently. The raised flower bed that celebrated the centenary of the Rookery has now been removed and the area returned to grass. The central flower beds briefly looked a little bare recently while a totally new design for the beds that incorporates herbs, perennial plants and flowers was implemented. The old layout was stunning to look at, but expensive to maintain and was very wasteful. The new design will hopefully avoid these issues.

I'm glad to say the new café is proving very popular and Charlie and Carol have even provided some much appreciated catering to a few Friends' events. The event I probably enjoyed the most this year so far was the barn dance, but it's unlikely to be held in the barn again as the microbrewery project is now going ahead! This will hopefully be in place before the end of the year. We're also exploring the idea of setting up bee hives alongside the barn. This will be a community project shared between the different groups on the Common and the microbrewery has already offered to donate a few hives to start us off.

In the past few weeks it's been interesting to see so many young folk wandering around the Rookery. It appears that the Rookery now contains a few imaginary Pokemon creatures in the new game *Pokemon Go*! These new creatures will hopefully fit in with the other interesting wildlife that we have around the Common. We did however have to draw the line when a long rat snake was found in the Rookery. This creature was taken to a local pet shop where it should be more at home.

I wish you a happy summer on the Common.

## Planting the Rookery

A combination of austerity, sustainability and modernity has spelled the end of the colourful beds of annual flowers that have been a feature of the Old English Garden for many years. Instead, these beds have recently been planted with perennials. The look will be very different but we are promised “exciting, vibrant and colourful” displays.

There are good reasons for this controversial change – good enough that the Friends backed them by purchasing the plants for one of the two replanted areas. Part of the reason is cost: it was expensive and labour-intensive to plant densely packed annuals twice a year. Moreover, annuals need a lot of watering in dry spells, whereas the new plants have been selected for their drought resistance. They have also been selected, where possible, for their attractiveness to nectar-feeding insects.

One of the two replanted areas surrounds the sundial (see photo). The plants for this area were paid for by Anthony Gold Solicitors. They include fritillaries, sedums, hellebores, euphorbias, agapanthus, some colourful grasses, tulips and gladioli. Many have already been planted but about 1000 bulbs will not be added until autumn. The area for which the Friends paid is the group of central beds that face you as you come down the steps from the Water Garden. These have been planted mainly with herbs, such as camomile, hyssop,



chives, oregano, rosemary and several types of thyme.

Lest you might think that this change is out of line with other public gardens, similar changes will be made throughout Lambeth.

## Painting the Common

As a kid I was fortunate. I had two back gardens. One stretched way back from the house and was dotted with garden furniture, flower beds, lawns and vegetable plots - yet marred by the remains of an air-raid shelter. Not the best place to play and run around in, but nevertheless an open area with splashes of greenery and plenty of wildlife. My other garden, so to speak, was just around the corner - a short distance away down the end of Valley Road. Here lay Streatham Common, a green and wooded open space which to a young boy was simply vast and endless.

I could play cricket or football there to my heart's content, climb the trees in the woods, run in and out of the allotments, charge around the Rookery, and at times challenge the good nature of the park keepers. However, it was a different common back then in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Prefabs lined two sides of the common, allotments scarred the upper part and a roadway crossed the top, separating the old pond and woods from the lower slope. By the road lay a patch of coarse gravel marking out the bandstand and seating area, a spot now grassed and naturalised. Indeed, the common I explored as an adventurous and curious child was a far cry from the cultivated open space we see and enjoy today.

As we know, many changes have occurred to Streatham Common, but there is one thing that has never changed. It is something that you cannot overlook and never cease to admire. Simply, it is those panoramic views that sweep around our common. No doubt you have looked westward over the landscape to view the

expanse of the Wandle Valley and the misty shapes of the North Downs beyond. Closer, you can see the heights of Wimbledon Common.

Such views do much to characterise the common and are often enhanced and dramatized by spectacular weather, or by the sunsets that stretch across the sky. For me, the greatest sunsets seen were in my young days playing on the common. Often we stood and gazed at the array of colours that filled the sky at sunset – just as if a rainbow had been laid horizontally before us. But then, before the clean air act, it was pollution that was the colourist in the sky. In years gone by similar views towards the south could be seen and enjoyed from the Rookery terrace, where the sweep of the town and countryside around Croydon was laid out before you. But with the growth of the tree canopy across the Rookery much of this view has been lost, and today it is best seen from grounds of Norwood Grove.

It was these fine panoramic views that attracted many artists to Streatham Common during the 19th century. They came to capture in their paintings the play between landscape and sky in its most dramatic form. Among the many artists of note who came to the common to paint

was David Cox, an individual who appreciated the views offered and the potential for creative painting.

David Cox (1783-1859) was eminent in his profession as a landscape artist and was widely acclaimed for his work during the Victorian period. Today his works command high prices in the art market. We are fortunate that an artist with such credentials drew much inspiration from the local area. It was the nature of the contrasting landscape that encouraged him to paint a number of views of Streatham, particularly of Streatham Common and the immediate area.

One of his close friends was William Stone Ellis, who lived on the south side of the common. Cox spent many Sundays there during the 1850s, taking every opportunity to paint local views. For example, in 1851 he completed *A Field, with Groups of Trees*, a view taken from a field close to the common and which, at the time, was considered to be a most successful representation of English scenery. Cox was a prolific painter and no doubt produced many more paintings of the common that have yet to be found, or are sitting in private collections. Moreover, he was just one of a cluster of 19th century artists who saw artistic potential in the

open countryside and sky seen from the common. There was also Peter de Wint with his 1849 view looking west across the common, Collingwood Smith's atmospheric view of the upper part of the common as seen in 1871, and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Patrick Nasmyth's view from the top pond in 1827 now displayed in Sudeley Castle.



*'Old Streatham. Near the Leafs Avenue' by David Cox showing the view looking west as seen from the high ground of the Streatham Common area. Dated to around 1850.*

But there is one artist in particular who would have

placed the common on the stage of world art. He was no other than Vincent Van Gogh. One day in April 1875, while he was on Streatham Common, he made a drawing of the view about which he commented, *'a large grassy plain with oak trees and gorse. It had been raining overnight; the ground was soaked and the young spring grass was fresh and green'*. Unfortunately for us the drawing has long disappeared, a sad loss not only to Streatham but to the art world as a whole.

Today, the attraction still holds as artists and photographers find creative inspiration when visiting our common – capturing the many aspects of this open space which, beyond question, is one of our much loved and most treasured heritage assets.

*Graham Gower*

## More Large Events

At more or less the same time that those living in the vicinity of the Common had to endure another Garage Nation weekend, (more on this later), Lambeth adopted a new events strategy that could mean there are eight major 'event days' on the Common (as also on four other sites in Lambeth) each year. Although this could mean more funds coming to the Common, it is by no means clear who would control how those funds are spent.

Organisers of any large event on the Common have always had to pay a so-called Environmental Impact Fee. This has ranged from £50 to several thousand pounds: Garage Nation in 2015 paid £3,800. (Organisers of events have also to pay a deposit to cover the costs of repairing any damage – see box.) The Friends then had a big say in how this money was spent by Lambeth. Now there will be Parks Investment Levy instead. This is predicted to deliver at least double the amount of money coming back to the Common but the

All large events are likely to cause damage to the ground and their organisers have to pay the costs of repair. The amount of damage is determined in large part by the ground conditions. Should the ground be too wet because of rain, the event may be cancelled. Unfortunately, that is what happened on the morning of this year's Day of Portugal celebration. However, considerable damage had already been caused in the process of setting up the event, and more was then caused by taking the infrastructure down again on yet wetter ground. Lambeth was commendably quick to make temporary repairs, which will be finalised after the summer is over. Garage Nation had better luck with the weather and caused relatively little damage, which also has been temporarily repaired.

mechanism for allocating it is unclear – will the Friends still have a big say, or could it simply be used to make up any shortfall in the funding for, say, grass cutting, etc?

Another feature of the new Events Strategy is that an increase in the noise level from major events will be allowed. This is to enable Lambeth's parks to compete with other parks that allow greater noise. We and others have objected that the sound levels allowed in, say, Hyde Park, are wholly inappropriate for Streatham Common. The new strategy at least pays lip service to this objection by

*More like this?*



saying that proposed increases will be judged on a case by case basis.

While this year's Garage Nation event still had the same maximum noise levels as last year's, it was again uncomfortably noisy in some locations close to the Common. Parking this year was better controlled than last year in that the residents-only parking on Streatham Common South was properly enforced as was prohibition of parking on the grass on parts of Streatham Common North. On the other hand, the predictable result was more parking problems in other streets. Whereas the Common itself was picked clear of litter, there was again a problem with litter in the main streets used by people leaving.

Garage Nation is expected to be back again next year. Certainly this year's event was a sell out and evidently enjoyed by the thousands who went to it, although not by most local residents. Lambeth Events already has applications for two additional two-day commercial music events on the Common next year, although only one is thought likely to proceed. The new events strategy makes a reference to a vague mechanism by which local residents will be able to have some say in what events will be held but how effective will this be? We hope to explore this more at our AGM on September 1st. *Peter Newmark*

## Snakes Alive

Not what you might expect to find on the path leading into the Rookery from



Covington Way, but that is what a lady did on June 1st. When she showed the 4-5ft long snake to shocked gardener Nick Mawbey, he had the presence of mind to contact Crystal Palace Reptiles who sent

a snake handler to deal with it. It was identified as a Yellow Rat Snake, a species that is not venomous but kills its prey by constriction. It was probably an unwanted pet but was certainly not put there by the Rookery staff to help control rats. Although come to think of it.....

## SCCoop and the Common

Lambeth's co-op parks programme as was has pretty much ended, and it has become clear that without political change, SCCoop's original plans to manage Streatham Common look somewhat unachievable at this time. However what we can achieve is still quite considerable and should be of benefit to the Common.

As things stand at the moment, it looks like the current SCCoop staff will be funded for another two years from October. On top of that we are expecting to receive a share of the Rookery Café rental and the income from leasing the barn as a microbrewery. We are also hoping to receive a small share of the money from the large events on Streatham Common, although this is not certain. On top of this we have our own fundraising income from events such as the Christmas Fair, which will be repeated this year, and the paddling pool campaign.

This should give us an annual budget of between £110k and £150k depending on the amount of fundraising and event income. If so, we will have sufficient funds to go beyond the Rookery and start delivering some services on the Common, the amount of which will depend on our income. The most likely framework for the future is:

1. SCCoop carries on managing the Rookery as now – with plants and repairs funded by our own fundraising
2. Lambeth does the mowing and litter picking on the common, cleans the toilets, and carries out planned maintenance including playground inspections.
3. Lambeth manages the memorial gardens.

4. SCCoop takes on ecological management of the Local Nature Reserve – i.e. the woodlands and acid grassland, but not its mowing

5. SCCoop undertakes repairs on the Common when it has funds – replacing benches, fixing borders, painting, bins, fences, paths.

6. SCCoop manages the tennis court, paddling pool and planned recycling area

7. SCCoop carries out new projects as and when identified and funded

So in summary, SCCoop would be secure until Oct 2018, and will work to improve the Common, the Local Nature Reserve and the Rookery.

And perhaps the biggest win (but don't shout about it) is that if we get this through, we've saved both the horticulture in the Rookery (Grade II listed garden) and the paddling pool – at least for now.

If you want to help shape the priorities for the delivery of the new service, please come to SCCoop's meeting at the Hideaway at 7.30pm on Thursday 22nd September. *Richard Payne, SCCoop*

## Great North Wood

Once covering a swathe of higher land to the south and southeast of London, the Great North Wood barely survived the Enclosure Acts and Industrial Revolution followed by the expansion of London and surrounding towns. A few ancient fragments are left, including the woodland area on Streatham Common, although truth be told this area has not been continuously wooded. Nevertheless it is one of the key sites identified by London Wildlife Trust (LWT) for inclusion in its new Great North Wood project.

Currently in its development stage, the project is thought by its leaders to have a good chance of receiving substantial funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund next year. The bid will be for around

£700,000 over four years. In preparation, LWT is consulting widely with the various councils that own the sites, with the various groups - including the Friends of Streatham Common and the Streatham Common Cooperative - that have an interest and with the public at large.

Should the bid be successful, the Great North Wood project will be able to achieve a variety of aims. Among these are surveys to discover the condition of the sites and the species that live in them. This will inform decisions on what work to focus on in each site in order best to improve the woodlands and benefit their wildlife. How much can be achieved will depend on the number of volunteers that can be recruited to assist the very limited LWT staff.

Another major aim of the project will be to get more people to use and appreciate their local woodlands by means of woodland-based events. Also, and importantly, the project will aim to create a strategy for long-term management of the woodlands.

We wait to see exactly what the project will mean for our own bit of woodland – Lambeth's largest. We already run a fair number of relevant events, such as tree, bird and fungi walks, but we certainly need a good volunteer crew to regularly work on management tasks, some volunteer training and some expert views on how best to manage the woods.

<b>Proposed Key Project Sites</b>	<i>New Cross Gate to Forest Hill railway linesides</i>
<i>Biggin Wood</i>	<i>Nunhead</i>
<i>Crystal Palace Park &amp; Hillcrest</i>	<i>Cemetery</i>
<i>Estate Wood</i>	<i>Norwood Park</i>
<i>Dulwich &amp; Sydenham Hill Wood</i>	<i>One Tree Hill</i>
<i>Grangewood Park</i>	<i>South Norwood Country Park</i>
<i>Horniman Gardens</i>	<i>Streatham</i>
<i>Long Lane Wood</i>	<i>Common</i>
	<i>Spa Wood</i>

## Know Your Trees

Following an excellent and well attended tree identification walk in June, some of



Streatham Common's trees now have identification labels on them.

Currently one example each of 18 different

species is labelled. The great majority of these are native species, typical of woodlands, but three more exotic specimens in the Rookery/Orchard are included. Your challenge this summer could be to find as many as possible. All are reasonably close to footpaths; only two are slightly down hill from the café. The full list is below. After the summer, a few more may be added. Thanks to Iain Boulton, Lambeth's ecology expert, for leading the walk and both supplying and fixing the labels.

Labelled Species	
Alder	<i>False Acacia</i>
<i>Caucasian Wingnut</i>	Ginko or
Cedar of Lebanon	Maidenhair Tree
<i>Common Ash</i>	<i>Grey Poplar</i>
Common Beech	Hornbeam
<i>Common Hawthorn</i>	<i>Horse Chestnut</i>
Common Holly	London Plane
<i>Common Lime</i>	<i>Silver Birch</i>
Common Oak	White Willow
	<i>Wild Cherry</i>

## Grass Cutting

It was extraordinary – some would say delightful – that the grass on much of the lower Common was not mown until late June / early July this year. And when the last section was mown, so was some of the acid grassland area, which should not have been!

This state of affairs has come about because in April Lambeth Council took back in-house the work involved in looking

after the green spaces in the borough, it having been contracted out for many years. (The Rookery was an exception and is still looked after by the Streatham Common Cooperative). The change was carried out rather hurriedly and, rumour has it, the machines that Lambeth took over from the contractors were not up to scratch, slowing down the mowing process, which started in north Lambeth and worked its way slowly south.

The mistaken mowing of the acid grassland, which should be cut only once a year in the late summer, was a result of inexperienced staff being insufficiently instructed. Fortunately the problem was caught before the complete area had been mown. When mowing acid grassland, the grass cuttings should be removed to prevent over-fertilisation of the ground. But they were not removed until two weeks later and then laboriously by hand because Lambeth does not possess a suitable machine.

To some eyes, the lower Common looked better than usual, with high grass, wildflowers and butterflies that are not usually present. Perhaps some of it should be allowed to grow like that every year.

*Peter Newmark*

## Updates

**The Rookery Café** – the new leaseholders have finally signed their lease, having run the café for several months as a holding operation. Now they can go ahead and refurbish the café and its surroundings. This is likely to start fairly soon.

**The Water Garden** – a start is being made on preparing a Heritage Lottery Fund bid to enable the Rookery's cascade to run again and for the gardens around it to be renewed. Complete refurbishment of the cascade will be needed to prevent the water losses through cracks and general deterioration that have led to the water flow being stopped for well over a year.

**Playground** – the project to rebuild the playground on the Common has taken a step forward with the first meeting of the interested local parties and the Project Managers newly appointed by Lambeth.

**Charity** – it's official, the Friends of Streatham Common became a registered charity on 6th May. Accordingly, we will need to contact you to ensure your details are up to date and to explain why we are

introducing Associate and Ordinary Memberships and offering you the choice.

**Footpaths** – at long last, work has been carried out to try and prevent the flooding that made two footpaths impassable after prolonged periods of rain. Drainage has been put in to solve the problem on the path near the playground and the path parallel to Streatham Common South has had a big dip filled in.

### Dates For Your Diary - more details on FoSC and SCCoop websites.

August 21st. **Great British Tennis Weekend.** *Fully booked.*

September 1st. **FoSC AGM.** Immanuel and St Andrew Church hall.

September 11th. **Scruff's Dog Show.** Starting at 12.00, opposite the Café.

September 11th. **Bat Walk.** Meet by the Rookery Café at 7.40pm. Booking essential: email [IBoulton@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:IBoulton@lambeth.gov.uk)

October 2nd. **Doggy Splash Day.** In the paddling pool. To be confirmed.

October 30th. **Internet of Fungi.** Meet by the Café at 9.30am for a fungal walk.

*In addition, SCCoop will be hosting a number of performances in the Rookery.*

August 11-14th. **The Jungle Book.**

August 31st. **Much Ado About Nothing.**

September 3rd. **Monty and Mirabella.**

September 7th. **Romeo and Juliet.**

September 8th. **Taming of the Shrew.**

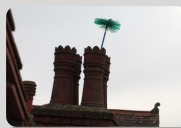


## Black Cat Chimneys

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