



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

From the Chair

The Friends have been busy since the last edition of *Common Knowledge*. At our regular meetings of the executive committee, as well as overseeing events on the common, we have discussed a number of initiatives.

At one such meeting we had a presentation from Trax club who create community-run, sustainable, urban bike tracks in the UK, and they asked us to consider the possibility of creating a BMX track on the Common. Clearly this is somewhat controversial, and although our instinct is to encourage the use of the Common and provide facilities for young people, there may alternatives to a BMX track. Please let us know your views.

We have also had a presentation about setting up a Park Watch scheme (like a Neighbourhood Watch for the Common), which will give people somewhere to report crime and anti-social behaviour. We will hold a public meeting on this next year. Any such scheme will need a coordinator: let us know if you would be interested in this role.

Since our last edition, Katherine Forster has had to step down from the volunteer coordinator role, so a big thank you to her for all her work over the years. I'm very pleased that Iain Morris has agreed to take over, and also that Evelyn Wood has agreed to help out with the Secretary's job.

The council has made many cuts over the past few years, but it was great to see the fireworks back on the Common this November after a planned three-year gap. We will be working to make sure they return again in 2015.

Richard Payne



Please come and join us on Wednesday 12th December

7.00 pm: mince pies and mulled wine by the Christmas tree near the playground.

7.30 pm: carol singing around the tree.

8.00 pm: the Friends Christmas party in the Pied Bull pub.

(Thanks to Network Rail for providing this year's Christmas tree.)

Rookery planting

One of the consequences of Lambeth's budget cuts has been a reduction in the time that is spent by gardeners in the Rookery. As a result, two flower beds that were until recently planted with annuals were replanted in October with robust perennials. The species were chosen also to provide good ground cover, thus suppressing weeds, and to be tolerant of both too little or too much water.



Garden designers, Alison Card and Linda Ham, volunteered their time to research the species and design their planting. They chose a pink and white theme, provided by geraniums, Japanese anemones and astrantia, among other species. Lambeth supplied the plants and tools, and ten horticultural students from the Gunnesbury Park campus of Capel Manor College carried out the planting under the watchful eyes of their tutors and with assistance from Clarence Riley, the Parks and Open Spaces Officer for our area.

After the day, Alison said: "I think the beds will look pretty good by July. The plants may not be the most exciting but they entirely in keeping with what is already in the Rookery and should survive well in the difficulty heavy clay with neither maintenance nor irrigation."

Other areas may be replanted to become low maintenance in the run up to the Rookery centenary next year ♦

Restore the Rookery!

While the Rookery gardens have appeared rather run down for much of this year, they are starting to look better now. However, there is a real concern that standards will then slip again, especially with yet more budget cuts looming. With that in mind, the Friends have set up a petition urging Lambeth Council to support the Friends wish not only to have the Rookery restored ready for its centenary in July 2013 but then to have the gardens maintained permanently at a standard that befits their Grade II listed status. The petition is online at www.lambeth.gov.uk/epetitions. Please add your name *before the end of the year* and encourage others to do so ♦

There will be two days in the spring when volunteer groups will be helping to spruce up the Rookery Gardens for their centenary. If you might be able to lend a hand please let us know by emailing friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com

A Robin for Christmas

Very recent in-depth research into Christmas cards (I just dug deep down into the drawer where we have stashed the ones we will be sending this year) has revealed that 66.67% (two of our three choices) feature at least one robin. Whereas extended research might show that Baby Jesus, Father Christmas or angels knock the robin off its perch, the red-breast – an alternative name that survived into the twentieth century – has an enduring association with the festive season. How come?

Although robins are occasionally found in Yuletide images of the eighteenth century, they seem to have become commonplace in the mid-nineteenth century, when sending cards to friends and family really took off. Perhaps it was an association between the red of the robin's breast and

the red of the postman's uniform in Victorian times that increasingly led artists to put robins on Christmas cards. But it



may also be because the red of a friendly garden robin provides cheer during the dreary winter months.

Without a doubt, robins seem to be the friendliest of all birds.

It is a common experience of gardeners that no sooner does their fork turn over some earth than a robin appears close by. Friendly this may seem, but you can be sure that it is the dug up worms that are on the robin's mind rather than any thought of becoming best friends with the gardener.

While robins may at least appear to be friendly towards humans, they are not towards other robins. In fact, they are fiercely territorial and will quickly see off any invader. I have seen a pair of rival robins so locked in aerial battle that they fell to the ground still grappling, and were not parted until I picked them up.

When you take a walk over the holiday period, even if you don't see a robin, you are likely to hear one. Robins sing throughout the year, apart from a few weeks in mid-summer when they are moulting. What's more, they frequently sing at night; those nightingales that Vera Lynn, Nat King Cole and countless others say sang in Berkeley Square, must have been robins. (The "Red, red robin" that "comes bob-bob bobbin' along" according to Al Johnson, Dean Martin et al. is not a robin as we know it but the member of the thrush family that Americans call a robin.)

Both males and females sing, and their singing becomes more intense as spring approaches. In Emily Brontë's poem "Redbreast, Early in the Morning" she describes the song as wildly tender. Myself, I'd call it wistful. Take a walk and decide for yourself ♦

Memories

As told by Lord Harris of Peckham to Peter Newmark

I lived on Gibson's Hill from 1950 until 1962 and went to Streatham Grammar School. The school used to play cricket and football on Streatham Common and I was in both teams. Cricket was played at the foot of the Common, where it was flat, but the football pitch was further up on a slope, which made it much harder to play in one half of a match than in the other.

As a footballer, I used to play on the right wing, but in one match, when it was snowing, I injured a cartilage and so was placed in goal for the second half. This has really stuck in my memory for two reasons. The first is that I let in six goals, meaning we lost the match 8-2. The other is that I could never again play other than in goal, and this resulted in my becoming interested in horse riding instead.

When I joined the South London Riding School, based in Canterbury Grove, I was 13 years old. We rode three times a week on Streatham Common for about an hour. For the first year I rode one of the stable's horses but my father then bought me my own horse, Vixen. She had previously been ridden in point-to-point races and was rather frisky. On one of the first occasions that I rode her on Streatham Common she took it upon herself to head for home at a gallop. Fortunately one of the other riders in the group managed to hang on to her. She was Pauline Chumley, who lived in Gleneldon Road, and was to become my wife. I rode Vixen for four years before selling her to a friend.

In 1957, when I was 15, my father died and I took over the family business (carpet shops). In the same year, I took up show jumping, although I continued to hack out on Streatham Common. We used to have show jumping competitions in Norbury Park. I became quite an accomplished show jumper, winning gold at the

The pond that young Philip Harris paddled in.



Edenbridge show in 1959. One of the other riders there was David Broome, who won bronze medals in the 1960 and 1968 Olympics, on horses that I owned. This year, one of my horses – Hello Sanctos, ridden by Scott Brash – helped Team GB win a gold medal for show jumping at the London Olympics. So you can trace a direct path from Streatham Common to Olympic Gold!

My other memories of Streatham Common include paddling in the pond (now the non-functional paddling pool in the playground) at the bottom of the Common and going to Olly's Owl Shop. This was near the ice rink and I would buy Dinky Toys there. I would also go to the shop in the White House in Norbury Grove to buy sweets. And we would have family picnics on the Common. One other memory is going to see a boxing match held in Streatham Ice Rink and featuring the British heavy weight, Don Cockell. (His previous fight in 1952 was as a light heavyweight against Randy Turpin; Balham-born Cockell went on to win the Commonwealth Heavyweight title the following year.)

Streatham Common was an important part of my childhood. Long may it last.

(Lord Harris of Peckham is the Chairman of Carpetright plc. Through the Harris Federation he has provided financial support for many schools in South London and has helped to found a number of Academy schools, including the Harris Academy South Norwood and the Harris City Academy in Crystal Palace.)

“Who Should Run the Common?”

This was the title of a well attended public meeting held on October 24th. Although there was no definite answer to the question, the great majority of those present agreed that there should be an increased local involvement in the running.

The meeting was first addressed by Councillor Sally Prentice, whose portfolio as a cabinet member includes parks, Ann Corbett, Lambeth's assistant director for community safety and Alistair Johnstone, the Parks and Open Spaces Operations Manager. They outlined two possible ways in which the local community could be more involved in managing Streatham Common and the Rookery. One was for a group broadly representing the community to cooperate with the Council in making decisions both as to how to spend the funds allocated to the Common and as to how the contractors are performing. The other was gradually to take over completely from the Council the task of running the Common.

Those present then split into groups to consider the pros and cons of adopting either (or neither) option. After the results were presented, a vote was taken. A majority favoured the cooperative option. A sizeable minority looked further towards full independence and only a few people thought it best to leave things as they are. The Friends are now hoping to find a small group of people to take the ideas forward and come up with a proposal fairly shortly. If you are interested, please email the Friends Chair, Richard Payne, at Richard@rhpayne.com

Membership information

Annual fees for 2013 are £6 for an individual, £12 for a family and £2.40 for concessions. Payment or any queries should be addressed to the Membership Secretary at 13 Braxted Park, SW16 3DW, or emailed to friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com

Local Nature Reserve

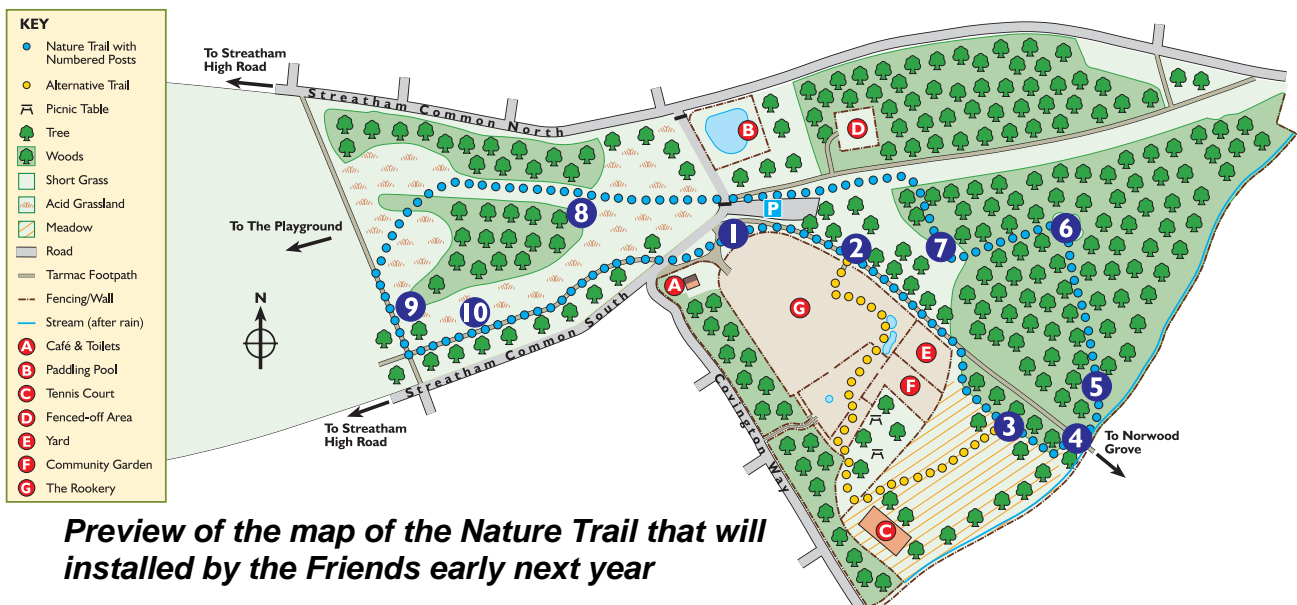
As well as a great place in terms of history, heritage and culture, Streatham Common is also important as a place to see and enjoy wildlife. Well, that's now being officially recognised and celebrated by a large part of the Common (plus a small bit of the Rookery) being declared as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) – the first one ever in Lambeth. Under powers conferred to it through the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, Lambeth Council has been working with the Friends to designate parts of the Common as a LNR, and this was formally approved by council's cabinet on 12th November. This designation recognises how important the whole site is for local wildlife, as well as its role as a vital 'green lung' for residents to enjoy and experience nature close to where they live and work.

Following cabinet approval, the Council and Friends will be working together to produce and publicise the official LNR declaration, and are aiming for the LNR to be officially launched in early 2013. As well as new information signage, there will be a calendar of volunteering events to help manage the LNR, along with a series of walks and talks in the spring and summer to explain how it's being managed and the wildlife that you can see.

Streatham Common is home to an extensive variety of wildlife including bats, birds such as woodpeckers, small mammals and many different wild plants or trees, as well as important wildlife habitats such as woodland, acid grassland and native hedges. This is why Streatham Common and the Rookery have long been designated as a Borough Grade Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), which has not only recognised their importance for biodiversity but has also helped support the justification for the areas to become an LNR for the borough.

Designating the Common as a Local Nature Reserve gives it extra legal protection from possible future developments that could harm wildlife and public access, such as encroachment from housing extensions around the Common's borders. LNR status also recognises the hard work of the Friends in protecting and promoting the Common as place to visit and enjoy. The Friends have successfully raised funds to create a new signposted nature trail around the Common, which once installed will help publicise and encourage the area's biodiversity as well as its use for educational activities.

Commenting after the LNR had been approved, Councillor Sally Prentice, Cabinet Member for Culture for Lambeth Council, said: "By declaring Streatham



Common a Local Nature Reserve we are giving it extra legal protection so its value as a habitat for wildlife is preserved for present and future generations. The Friends of Streatham Common play a vital role in helping the Council manage the Common, and have worked with the Council closely on these plans.”

Iain Boulton

Events

The annual **Fun Dog Show** was held on September 2nd and was a great success, with around 100 dogs taking part. New this year was a hilarious seven-legged race. The **Big Draw** on October 13th had children chalking colourful and imaginative pictures all over the ex-paddling pool in the playground. The 25 people on the **Bird Walk** on October 27th were regaled by frequent flocks of redwings and fieldfares - members of the thrush family that migrate to the UK for the winter - flying over the Common.

Whats Up?



Rookery - a new fountain, provided by the Friends, is up and running in the round pond, its predecessor having been destroyed by vandals many years ago. Also, the Council has provided a somewhat curious “To The White Garden” sign to replace the previous short-lived one.

Playground - vandalised play equipment has been replaced and the faulty entrance gates fixed.

The Lodge

Right at the top of the Common on Streatham Common North is a house called The Lodge. It has been used for various purposes by the Council over the years including, most recently, housing the graffiti-busting team. When they left, The Lodge was occupied by squatters.

Now the hope is to develop it as a family and community source especially for outdoor learning and play. This aim is endorsed by the Friends. If you would be interested in helping to develop the site and raise funds, email family@crownlane.lambeth.sch.uk

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Vale Veterinary Clinic

David Salisbury Jones has been looking after Streatham's pets for the last 25 years at his clinic at 130 Streatham Vale.

To discuss your pet's needs or book an appointment call 0208 679 6969. You can take a virtual tour of the surgery or download information sheets at <http://www.valevets.com/>. Or check our "Vale Veterinary Clinic" Facebook page.

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