



# Common Knowledge

December 2013, Issue 49

## *Inside this issue*

- 2. Rookery Centenary Gardens Project
- 3. Memories
- 4. & 5. Events Photographs
- 6. Welcome Back, Ice Rink;  
Unwelcome Back, Travellers
- 7. Youth Facilities
- 8. Stag Beetles

*Common Knowledge*, the newsletter of the Friends of Streatham Common, is edited by Peter Newmark: tel. 020 8679 2908; email: [peternewmark@gmail.com](mailto:peternewmark@gmail.com)



To all Friends of  
Streatham Common  
and their families.

## From the Chair

Looking back at the year, it's amazing how much we've all managed to achieve. We've installed a new nature trail and the top of the Common has been declared a Local Nature Reserve. We've celebrated the rookery's centenary and won funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to help restore the gardens. The Rookery has won a Green Flag Award for the first time. We've hired a part time organiser to help manage the Rookery Centenary Gardens Project and we've started a Rookery Gardening Group to help keep the gardens looking at their best.

We've put on more events than ever before including Kite Day, Dog Show, Shakespeare, Easter Egg Hunt, Cake Baking Competition, Band in the Rookery, Bird Walks, Birds of Prey Show, Rookery Centenary Events and more. A fundraising group raised over £8000 towards the Rookery Centenary. We've created a new website and vastly improved our communication with the Council over issues relating to the Common.

We've held four public meetings this year dealing with the Rookery Centenary, the Co-operative Parks Programme, Rookery Gardening and Youth Provisions. We've also been working hard to make sure we have a plan for Streatham Common and the Rookery that helps them weather the cuts coming in parks funding over the next few years. The plan involves setting up a local co-operative to manage the Common/Rookery: there is more on this at [www.sccoop.org.uk](http://www.sccoop.org.uk).

Looking forward to next year, we're setting up a Park Watch scheme, working on the Rookery Centenary Gardens Project, establishing the local co-operative, setting up a group to come up with schemes amongst others to regenerate the playground area, and last, but certainly not least, running our popular events.

If you would like to help in any way, email us at [friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com) or visit our new website at [www.streathamcommon.org](http://www.streathamcommon.org)

## Rookery Centenary Gardens Project

Hello, I'm Charlotte, and I recently started in post as the Rookery Centenary Gardens Project Coordinator. I am excited to take on this role as I strongly believe in the power of volunteers to make positive change in local communities. I have been a volunteer at numerous community gardens across London including a market garden in North London running a weekly veg box scheme, a social enterprise growing salad on the roof of a supermarket, and a new food project in Burgess Park supplying food to local restaurants. Throughout this work, I have seen the way in which gardening unites people from a diverse range of backgrounds and I find this very inspiring.

One of the main aims of the Gardens Project is to provide opportunities for volunteers to be involved in shaping the future of the Rookery. This will mean many different things to different people from helping to sweep leaves, to choosing a flower for the White Garden, to recording a childhood memory to be used on the planned signage.

Over the next 18 months, there will be a range of ways for volunteers to be involved in the project, including visiting local archives and historic gardens, designing new planting plans, and helping to plant and maintain the new designs. We hope that the new planting plans will echo the identity of the garden in times past, whilst also incorporating the ideas of people living in the area today.

*Rookery Volunteer Mornings last from 10.00 am to 12.00 pm. Meet at the café.*

*The next few dates are  
Friday, January 17th  
Friday February 21st  
Friday March 28th  
Saturday April 19th*



As a result of the project, the Rookery will benefit from improved pathways, new planting and signage, and regular opportunities to help with garden maintenance. If you would like to be involved in any aspect of the project, or know a community or school group who might be, then please don't hesitate to get in touch with me by emailing [rookery100@streathamcommon.org](mailto:rookery100@streathamcommon.org).

I also work as Development Officer at Streatham Common Community Garden and I am looking forward to developing links between the community garden and the Friends.

*Charlotte Dove*

## Memories

I have known the Rookery for most of my life, having learnt as a child to ride my bicycle, first on Norbury Grove's gentle green slopes and then venturing further, when competent, to the Rookery.

As a young working adult and already tired of London's commuter chaos, I applied to work at the Rookery. It seemed the sensible thing to do; I knew it, loved it and sought its stillness.

I was, I think, the youngest member of staff in 1967 and Bill the Foreman, somewhat bemused at the new slightly-built female

trainee gardener, tested my resolve by giving me responsibility for sweeping the rock garden paths and main steps first thing each morning with a besom broom, having first shown me the "correct" way to use it. My early days were spent under his careful guidance and also that of Ray, his assistant foreman, and Cecelia and Eileen whose main responsibilities were the care of the Old English Garden and the White Garden. I was keen and learnt quickly, punctuating my work with weekly trips to college at Waterloo for theory lessons, and fortnightly trips to Finsbury Park (on the commuter run again) for practical tuition.

Starting at 7am all year bonded me with the many moods and shades of the season reflected in the Rookery's calendar, the songs and habits of small birds, frogs in the rockery pools, and squirrels, mostly around the top lawns. It hardly sounds like work does it? It was,

#### **Our schedule, from memory**

*Start, 7.00am.*

*Break for breakfast, 9.00-9.30am.*

*Morning break, 10.30-10.45am, usually in the cafe at the top of the Rookery.*

*Lunch, 12.30-1.30pm.*

*Tea break, sometimes, depending on duties, in the café.*

*Home, 4.30pm.*

however, often quite heavy and repetitive, as gardeners will know. On days when the weather prevented any outside work, we would often be assigned to the potting shed to scrub and stack all the terracotta pots, re-bundle support sticks, and clean the tools. Arduous yes, but fun as it gave us all time to chat, complain about our wages (£7.00 a week for me) and share jokes. Ted, Bob and Ray were the practical jokers and were responsible for my absolute annoyance and disgust at finding a dogs "calling card" in the middle of my newly swept, weeded and trimmed rock

garden. I stomped off to the shed for a shovel and broom only to return to find it missing! I'd not stopped to listen to the sniggers from the shrubbery which turned into roars of laughter as, with good humour, they emerged tossing the plastic replica to each other.

Bee was another member of staff. Her sole responsibility was for the greenhouse, where she taught me propagation and patience. Bee was to be obeyed and was regimented in her skills. I was somewhat uncomfortable working alongside her initially, although she was always kind to me, because she was unforgiving if seedling trays were not configured military style! We always had a plentiful supply of bedding plants.

I can recall us all in a line, moving one step at a time slowly along the top lawns prodding aerators into the turf, the back-breaking work of scarifying each lawn, and Bill with his lamb's foot penknife bending to measure the length of the grass to ensure it was uniformly even - well that's what he said anyway. The edges were always trim and "keep off the grass" metal plaques were firmly placed where the public had no option but to see them and comply. "After all", Bill would say "If the Gov'nor's not 'appy, then I'm not 'appy, and you won't be 'appy either".

I didn't work at weekends or evenings unless there was entertainment on. My favourite job was always donning the waders and sweeping down the pools in the rock garden. If there was a short shower of rain I would often sit under the Gunnera plants until it passed. On the top lawn by the gate we would often find pieces of broken crockery from the old house. The White Garden was said to have been planted for the young lady of the house who was jilted at the altar!

I was very happy there and hope that you, like me, have happy Rookery recollections.

*Jill Gunter*



With the last issue of *Common Knowledge* focussing on the Rookery's Centenary events, there was no room to mention the many other events that the Friends put on before and after the centenary. Here, then, is a pictorial record of most of them. On this page, the photographs clockwise from top right are of the Easter Egg Hunt, Kite Day, the Birds of Prey Display, Band in the Rookery, Cake Baking Competition and Kite Day again. On the page opposite, clockwise from the top right, there are three photographs of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Rookery (performed despite the occasional rain shower), then one of a Bird Walk and finally three from the Fun Dog Show. Thanks to those who took the photographs, including Patrick Fernandez, Jane Parke and Nick Wright.









*Presentation of the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association London Spade Award for 2013 to the Rookery Centenary Steering Group. Its Chair, Barbara Wright, is flanked by Brian Bloice, Chair of Streatham Society, and Andrew Simpson of the Streatham Common Community Garden.*



## Welcome Back, Ice Rink

Streatham's new ice rink (together with a gym and swimming pool) opened on November 18th. It's great news that, after a three-year break, Streatham's long association with ice skating has re-started.

It is also worth recollecting the successful battle, three years ago, to prevent a temporary ice rink being built on Streatham Common. That was the proposal in March 2010 after Tesco had insisted it could not keep the existing rink open until the new one was built, as originally planned. Lambeth Council, which had promised there would "continuity of ice", had therefore to find a site for a temporary rink. After a vigorous local campaign ("Hands Of Our Common"), the council changed its mind and selected Brixton for the temporary rink.

There remained concerns that Tesco would somehow escape from their promise to build the rink on the Hub site and that the Brixton site would become permanent. Having been reassured that this was impossible, the campaigners were next

concerned lest the superstore would open and the rink etc be long delayed. The campaigners therefore insisted that the contract with Tesco stipulated that the store could not open first.

In fact it did - but only by a week. Tesco opened on 18th November, as did the new new gym. But the ice rink, along with the swimming pool, only opened a week or so later.

According to an article on the building.co.uk website, the ice rink is only the second in the world to have been built above a swimming pool. This created a huge challenge because the pool is kept at around 30C°, whereas the ice above it is at -5C°. The answer was to have a 150mm concrete slab between the two and a very demanding form of insulation of the rink's cooling pipes that lie above the slab.

## Unwelcome Back, Travellers

In early November a group of travellers made one of their infrequent but unwelcome visits to the Common. Unusually they drove into the woodland area rather than settling between Streatham Common North and South. Fortunately they stayed for only 24 hours; unfortunately many lorry loads of what appeared to be household and business debris were left behind, scattered in and outside the woodland. In addition the travellers' vehicles badly churned up the sodden ground outside the woods

The rubbish was subsequently removed by Lambeth Council but, because of the size of the vehicles used and the state of the ground, further damage to the ground was inevitable. The damage will be repaired when conditions are better. The very considerable cost of removing the rubbish and repairing the damage will be born by the council unless a successful prosecution can be brought. This seems unlikely as the fly tipping was not



witnessed. Circumstantial evidence - whenever travellers visit, piles of rubbish are left behind - is apparently not sufficient.

If it is impossible to bring a prosecution for fly tipping, which can carry very substantial fines or even imprisonment, could the travellers be prosecuted for breaking the byelaws that prohibit driving or staying overnight on the Common, for which there is ample evidence? I have not been able to get an answer to this question from the Council. But I could hazard a guess that the costs of bringing a case would be much more than the maximum fine of £500 for breaking a byelaw. Nonetheless a successful prosecution might act as a future deterrent.

What can be done to prevent further fly tipping? Barriers such as wooden posts or logs could be put all around the Common but there is a very large circumference to cover. Another way to prevent fly tipping is to ensure that residents and businesses know that if they allow their rubbish to be taken away by dodgy truck drivers they, themselves, could be prosecuted if any of the rubbish can be traced back to them. But the temptation will always be too great for some.

Ideally, next time the travellers' vehicles park on the Common the police and/or the Council should arrange overnight surveillance to collect evidence of fly

tipping so that a successful prosecution becomes possible.

Whereas we should respect the nomadic lifestyle that some travellers choose to live, they need to behave like responsible citizens in return. *Peter Newmark*

## Youth Facilities

At the public meeting held on November 9th on 'Youth Facilities on the Common', those present were in broad agreement that more such facilities were needed. They were unanimous about the need to redevelop the playground, the buildings and the disused paddling pool at the bottom of the Common, creating a new playground, a possible water play area or skate park, better toilets, sports changing rooms and perhaps a café.

It was also felt that at the top of the Common the paddling pool should be converted to either a skate park or other provision or water play area if the bottom pool was not used for this purpose, that the café should include community and visitor facilities and that sensitive youth facilities should be provided in the woodland.

There was less clear agreement about where to site which facilities and exactly what plans should be taken forward. The meeting agreed that further research and consultation was required and a number of people volunteered to join a working group to explore these ideas further and try to progress the research, consultation and plans.

Have you seen our smart new website at [streathamcommon.org](http://streathamcommon.org)? Many thanks to local website designer Caspar Kennerdale, who operates his company AgilityWeb from the Hideaway Workspace, for offering to create the site for us.

You have until 9th January to add your name to the online petition calling on Lambeth Council to ensure that the renewal process of the lease for the Rookery Café, which expires at the end of December 2014, is carried out in an open and transparent manner. Search for "Lambeth petitions" and sign online.

## Stag Beetles

I have never before been asked if I would like three stag beetles. But that was what local expert, John Lock - who studies these magnificent creatures in Richmond Park - asked me earlier this year. An excess of beetles had hatched in his garden and he thought some of them might be welcome on Streatham Common.

Having jumped at the opportunity, I released them on a fine summer's evening. One of them posed for the photo below. As it happens, a few days later I spotted a stag beetle on the Common but could not tell if it was one that I had released. And not long after that, while on a bat walk on the Common, John caught a stag beetle in mid flight.

It is usually the males that fly, looking for females. After mating, the females lay their eggs underground in the vicinity of decaying wood. The eggs hatch within a few weeks and the larvae feed on



decaying wood for anywhere between four and seven years before turning into the adult beetles that one sees in flight. After mating, most of the beetles soon die.

It is John's view that there is insufficient underground decaying wood on the Common to support a good population of stag beetles. He suggests digging trenches into which some large fallen timber can be rolled so that half of its girth is underground. We'll be doing this sometime in the spring and hope many of you will come along and help. Watch out for posters early next year.

*Peter Newmark*

## Advertisements

*(to advertise, please contact the editor)*

### Alexander Technique

You can improve your posture, mobility and reduce pain.

*Special Christmas offer:* 1 hour introduction £26 and second session FREE.

More at [www.alexandersouth.co.uk](http://www.alexandersouth.co.uk)  
Local daytime, evening and Saturday sessions available; call Geraldine Gleeson on 0208 679 6131 or 07568157000, or email [info@alexandersouth.co.uk](mailto:info@alexandersouth.co.uk)

### 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.

### 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](mailto:seaplumbing1@aol.com)