



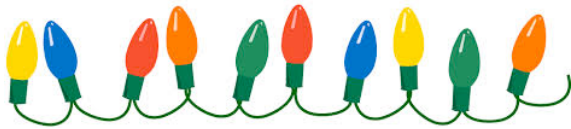
Common Knowledge

December 2014, Issue 53

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Common Knowledge, the newsletter of the Friends of Streatham Common, is edited by Peter Newmark: tel. 020 8679 2908; email:



PLEASE JOIN US

Wednesday December 11th

7.00 pm: Mulled wine and mince pies near the Christmas tree/playground

7.30 pm: Christmas Carol singing near the Christmas tree/playground

8.00 pm: Friends of Streatham Common Christmas Party in the Pied Bull Pub.
Non-members can join up on the night.



From the Chair

2014 has seen momentum build on many key projects. With funding raised locally and from the Heritage Lottery, the new Rookery Design Group has started restoring the Rookery gardens. Community planting days have seen over 40 volunteers help plant them. The Community Garden and London Wildlife Trust are re-planting the Orchard.

We've set up SCCoop, which has nearly 300 shareholders and has now employed its first member of staff, and will be taking on services in the Rookery from February 2015. We've launched the Park Watch scheme, and campaigned to get the funding for regeneration of the playground and yard. We've held public meetings this year on the topics of Rookery Restoration, Events and Urban Woodlands.

We've run an impressive number of events including Kite Day, the Dog Show, Shakespeare, Easter Egg Hunt, Cake Baking Competition, Band in the Rookery, Bird Walks, Bird of Prey Show, Alice in the Rookery, Cabaret, Conservation Day and more. We ran fundraising quizzes and a comedy night.

We've also conducted regular walkabouts and worked on issues such as advertising hoardings, the café, bio-diversity, footpaths, first aid, green waste, signage, our membership processes and much more.

Thanks to all our executive members and huge number of volunteers without whom we would not have achieved any of this. We always welcome new colleagues, and if you can help us in any way please let us know.

Finally, next summer I will be standing down after three years as Chair, so if you think you are, or know, the person for the job, now's the time to get in touch.

Richard Payne

Welcome to The Rookery

The Rookery stands on the site of the Streatham Mineral wells. The Mineral Wells were discovered here in 1659 and established Streatham as a fashionable spa town. Around 1786 a large house known as The Rookery was built on the terrace amid three acres of private gardens and parkland.

In 1912 the area was under threat from developers when local resident, Stenton Covington, led a campaign that saved the site. It was subsequently bought and, with a budget of £1000, the house was demolished and the gardens created by Major Maud, of the London County Council. The new gardens, keeping The Rookery name, opened to the public on July 23rd 1913. Later, more land was added, including the strip of woodland alongside Covington Way.

The terrace and wide lawn, with its magnificent Cedar of Lebanon, are surrounded by Rhododendrons typical of Edwardian gardens. There are stunning views from here to the southern fringes of London and beyond. The wide steps lead down to The Old English Garden, originally part of a walled kitchen garden. A formal layout was created with pretty cottage-style planting, in keeping with the trend for bringing the countryside to the London masses. The old well was retained and an ornamental well-head added. The White Garden was created to the south of the Old English Garden and the Rock Garden laid out where the stables once stood.



The Rookery house (c. 1900). Photo courtesy of Anthony Spain



A postcard from the early 20th century showing the second Cedar of Lebanon. Courtesy of John W. Brown, Local History Publications



Tramways Poster (1927) From the collections at London Metropolitan Archives



Map of The Rookery showing where the buildings used

Rookery Signs

As part of the Rookery Centenary Project and thanks to Heritage Lottery Funding, four interpretative signs will shortly appear in the Rookery - part of the Welcome to The Rookery sign is shown above.

The other signs will be in The White Garden, The Old English Garden and The Rock Garden (where the water cascade is). Each of these signs will combine a brief history of the garden with some photographs from the past and information about plants of special interest.

With these signs in place, visitors will for the first time be able to learn on the spot about the history of the gardens and what is special about them.

New To The Rookery

The Streatham Common Cooperative (SCCoop) has reached an important milestone with the appointment of Dom Leary (pictured) as Manager of the Rookery. He started on November 10th but will not be permanently on site until February 1st, the date on which SCCoop, a not-for-profit organisation*, fully takes over the



management of the Rookery from Lambeth's current contractors, Veolia.

Dom has several years of experience in landscape gardening (a trade he turned to after an acting career that did not take off) and, more recently, as a community regeneration coordinator for a large social housing provider. In that post he gained experience as a manager of budgets, staff and projects, among which were projects to develop and maintain green spaces on housing estates.

This combination of skills helped Dom secure the post of the Rookery's Manager and become the first person to be employed by SCCoop. By February, Dom will be joined by a gardener and the plan is to take on an apprentice later next year.

In the meantime, Dom has to build up an understanding of how the Rookery currently operates, plan for how this might change, build up resources and develop a working relationship with interested parties, including officers of Lambeth Council, which is the owner of the Rookery, and the Friends of Streatham Common, who will be no less demanding of SCCoop than they are of Lambeth Council. (Top of the Friends demands, I might suggest, will be achieving a *permanent* flow of water down the cascade in the Rock Garden rather than one that fails every few months.)

Dom and his team will carry out all the horticultural work in the Rookery. They will also be responsible for repairs and will undertake simple ones themselves. Where greater expertise is required, they will have the flexibility to use local contractors, which should mean that the work is carried out more quickly and cheaply than at present.

Dom will also provide support for the very active volunteer group that has built up around the redesigning and replanting of the White Garden and parts of the English Garden as well help the Community Garden meet their objectives. Over the coming months he hopes to increase volunteering opportunities and partnerships, and start looking for funding for new projects in the Rookery.

When Dom starts hands-on ground management in February, he should be much in evidence. He and his team will have identifiable clothing. When you do see him, say hello and tell him what you think about the Rookery.

Peter Newmark

** SCCoop is owned by the community. Don't forget to become a shareholder. Buy your share for £1 at www.sccoop.org.uk*

White Garden Planting

The research phase finished, action took over this autumn in the Rookery Centenary project to redesign and replant the White Garden.

Work began in September with preparation for planting. This involved removing most of the existing plants, saving some of them, and then digging in over 20 tonnes of mushroom compost. (The subsequent growth of mushrooms provided a meal or two!).

Ground preparation was followed by three planting sessions. The focus of the first was trees and shrubs. The second was concentrated on planting herbaceous

perennials. And the final session was devoted to bulbs. In all, about 230 plants and 1200 bulbs have been planted, representing about 40 species. Most of the plants were purchased through the Heritage Lottery Fund grant to the Rookery but the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association chipped in for the new white roses.

There will be two further planting days in the White Garden next year, with more bulbs being planted in March and some tender plants in April. These will add a further 30 species to the collection. In addition some areas of the Old English Garden (including the large beds at the northern end) will be replanted in spring.

A volunteer group that researched the history of white gardens came up with design ideas and suggested plants to garden designer, Alison Alexander, who devised the final planting plan. She is shown consulting the plan in the photograph, taken at one of the planting sessions. Overall around 40 volunteers helped out with planting, aided by Lambeth staff.



Events Season Past

With no space in the last issue to highlight our many events this year, here is a belated illustrated summary.

April

Kite Day. Despite a poor weather forecast, the rain held off although the wind was sometimes too strong for the display kites. An excellent crowd enjoyed themselves as usual, watching the displays that were possible, flying and buying their own kites and sampling the food and drink on offer.

Easter Egg Hunt. Held in the Rookery, this event was almost overwhelmed by the number of children eager to find three coloured plastic eggs and trade them in for a chocolate egg. There was also a stack of entries for the best decorated egg.

May

Bird Box Survey. A record number of occupied bird boxes was found in this annual survey, with 11 blue pairs of blue tits, 3 pairs of great tits and one pair of nuthatches in residence.

Bat Walk. A huge turn out on a perfect evening but the bats were not playing the game. Although only one bat was seen, at least it was a very obliging Noctule bat, the first to have been recorded on Streatham Common bat walks.

June

Streatham Food Festival Bake Off. A competition for the best home-baked cakes held this year in the Railway on Greyhound Lane and a great success.

Band in the Rookery. A relaxed crowd picnicked on the Rookery lawn while John Brown and friends played their usual eclectic mix of acoustic music.

Walk the Nature Trail. Twenty people joined flower, bug and a bird experts for a leisurely stroll around the trail. Highlights were the discovery of an orchid and sightings of a sparrowhawk and a group of 20 swifts.





July

Catch Me A Tune. A good crowd turned out to enjoy both an evening performance in the Rookery of songs from musicals and a Pimm's bar. Unfortunately rain curtailed the show. A rain-free repeat was performed next day in the Mark Bennett Streatham Centre.

Shakespeare in the Rookery. Festival Players performed *Comedy of Errors* on a summer's afternoon to an appreciative audience that cheerfully weathered a shower or two during the interval.



August

Alice in the Walled Garden. An imaginatively staged show by Sixteen Feet Productions, made full use of various features in the Rookery Gardens. A total of nine performances over two weeks provided many local children a chance to see a captivating theatrical version of a classic book.

Birds of Prey Display. For the second year running, Countrywide Falconry displayed a splendid selection of falcons, hawks and owls on the Common. Some of them performed during the two flying displays. A few lucky people among the hundreds present were given the chance to handle birds themselves.

Macbeth. An evening performance by the Handlebards, four actors who not only arrive by bicycle but make good use of them during the quirky show, enjoyed by all.



September

Bat Walk. Another bat walk, another huge turnout and a few sightings of pipistrelle bats.

Fun Dog Show. 94 dogs competed in eight categories, ranging from Cutest Puppy to the Seven-legged Race. A huge success for dogs and owners alike.



Thanks - without an army of volunteers, enthusiastic and hard-working organisers and, in some cases, sponsors (listed on page 7), these events would not have taken place. Thanks to all.

The Twelve Days of (Streatham Common) Christmas

On the twelve days of Christmas, according to the popular song, “my true love sent to me” a diverse set of gifts. It would be a challenge to find some of these gifts locally but let's see what could be done.

★ *First day: a partridge in a pear tree.* When much of the land close to the Common was still being farmed, more than 100 years ago, there would have been many partridges around but now my true love would have to purchase one online for home delivery. As for a pear tree, there is a large one growing where prefabs were built on the Common to provide temporary housing for people who lost their homes in World War 2. Alternatively, there are three pear trees among the new fruit trees planted earlier this year in the Orchard.

★ *Second day: two turtle doves.* Like grey partridges, these once would have been plentiful on local farmland - but only in the summer as they are migrants. The species is now in precipitous decline in the UK and is highly protected in the wild. There might be a pigeon/dove breeder who could oblige.

★ *Third day: three French hens.* This seems to be a reference to Faverolles, a breed that originated in a village of the same name in northern France. If so, it would be easy enough to purchase three of this popular type of hen from a poultry breeder.

★ *Fourth day: four calling birds.* If, as some pundits say, “calling” is a corruption of “colley”, which was an English dialect word for “black”, then there is no problem as blackbirds are numerous on the Common.

★ *Fifth day: five gold rings.* The rash of pawnbrokers on Streatham High Road

would be a good source. Alternatively, my true love could try a metal detector on the Common but you would need a licence and a lot of luck as the area has been well picked over by others.

★ *Sixth day: six geese-a-laying.* The ponds that used to be on the Common have long since been filled in or turned into paddling pools, active or defunct. So if my true love doesn't want to buy the geese from a poultry supplier, she or he could pop over to Tooting Common and nick some of the Canada or Egyptian geese from the pond there. (The Friends do not condone illegal goose rustling.)

★ *Seventh day: seven swans-a-swimming.* See six-geese-a-laying, although it would be necessary to make a tour of nearby ponds/lakes to accumulate seven swans.

★ *Eighth day: eight maids-a-milking.* There was a time when eight maids might have been found along Valley Road, milking the cows that supplied Curtis Brothers Dairy, which started as a farm about 200 years ago. It subsequently became depot for Unigate Dairy but now lives on only as “The Old Dairy” housing development in Valley Road. Milkmaids are hard to come by these days. But this year's Polish entry for the Eurovision Song Contest reportedly featured “women dressed in low-cut milk maid outfits” who “suggestively churned butter”, so the large local Polish community might be able to help.

★ *Ninth day: nine ladies dancing.* They could have been found during Streatham Festival's “Streatham Uncommon” event in July but not since. Cuban Hideaway on Monday evenings at the Hideaway should be able to provide nine salsa dancers.

★ *Tenth day: ten lords-a-leaping.* A tricky one this. When Streatham Common was the location for a number of large mansions, there were probably more Lords around than now. My true love might have

to resort to the lords-and-ladies growing wild on the Common. This is a member of the lily family and gets its name from the plant's likeness to male and female genitalia, or so they say.

★ *Eleventh day: eleven pipers piping.* Do primary school children still torture their parents with the recorder? If so, that's about the best bet these days. Go back to the 1930s and there was a Streatham Children's Pipe Band.

★ *Twelfth day: twelve drummers drumming.* As part of the excellent Light Up the Common event on November 5th, the parade of lanterns from local primary schools was led by three drummers from South London Samba, who play Brazilian surdos/bass drums and snares. They might be able to provide the twelve that are called for.

Wish List 2015

With the help of a combination of support, funds and volunteers, the Friends would like to see most, if not all of the following goals achieved in the coming year.

Playground. Replace the existing playground by a brand new one, preferably together with adjacent sports changing rooms, improved toilets and a small cafe. Plans for this, which are being worked on by a group of the Friends and are being drawn up by an architect, should soon be ready for public consultation. Meanwhile we await Lambeth Council's final decision on whether to adopt its draft Five Year Capital Investment Plan, which included a proposal to invest £1 million in the playground area.

Rookery Cascade. Find a permanent solution to the recurring problems with the water flow down the cascade of pools in the Rock Garden. The latest problem has been that the largest pool is leaking water, as has happened before, so that the water flow has been halted for weeks while repairs are awaited.

Main woodland. Cut back areas of brambles that are steadily encroaching into the centre of the woodland to give grass and wild flowers a chance to re-establish themselves.

Paths into main woodland. Straighten and open out the two footpaths that lead directly from the main woodland to Copgate Path (which goes from the car park towards the White House) to provide clear sight lines and reduce anti-social behaviour.

Woodland between Streatham Common North and South. Skim the tree tops so that the views from the top of the Common are reinstated. Also remove a few trees to reduce encroachment of the wood onto the grassland, which contains plants and insects not found elsewhere on the Common. And remove any self-seeded saplings that are still growing around the edges of the woodland to prevent its further expansion.

Benches. Replace or repair the most damaged benches on the Common and give the others a long overdue fresh coat of varnish.

THANKS

The Friends of Streatham Common would like to offer many thanks to the following companies and organisations for sponsoring events this year.

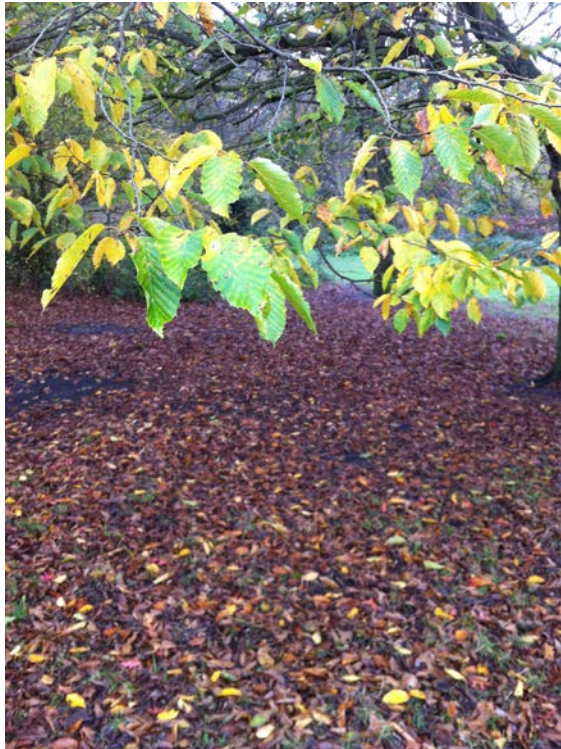
Dexters Estate Agents for the Pimms Bar at *Catch Me A Tune*.

Vale Vets, Streatham Hill Vets, Heart Magazine, Shout Streatham, Dr Doolittles Pet Shop and **Radio Mayday** for the Fun Dog Show.

Anthony Gold Solicitors for the forthcoming Christmas Party.

Photography Competition

Take a better photograph of Streatham Common or The Rookery than this!



Win a prize for the best photograph taken between now and the middle of March 2014. The winning photograph will be chosen by a panel that includes a local professional photographer and the editor of *Common Knowledge* and will be published in the next issue.

Email your entries - no more than two per person - by 15 March 2015 to friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com

New Bins: the clapped-out rubbish bins



throughout the Rookery have been replaced by some smart new ones, helpfully labelled as to their function, in case of doubt.

RENEWAL TIME. If you pay your membership annually, now is the time to renew it using the enclosed form. For any queries about renewal or membership, please contact the Membership secretary by emailing membership@streathamcommon.org or by writing to 9 Strathbrook Rd, SW16 3AT.

Advertisements

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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

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