



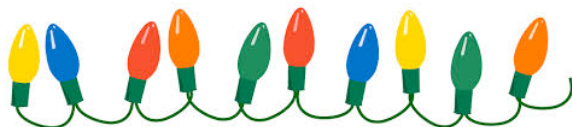
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Common Knowledge, the newsletter of the Friends of Streatham Common, is edited by Peter Newmark: tel. 020 8679 2908; email: peternewmark@gmail.com



PLEASE JOIN US

**Wednesday December 7th
Carols Round the Christmas Tree
and the Friends of Streatham
Common Christmas Party.**

Mulled wine and mince pies from 7.00pm, carol singing at 7.30pm, both by the Christmas tree at the bottom of the Common. Party from 8.00pm in The Bull. Members only but membership available on the night.



Common Knowledge

From the Chair

There's always so much happening on the Common it can be a little difficult to know where to begin. The highlight of the past year for me was probably the barn dance but I also loved going on the guided walks because I always learn something new and enjoy meeting all the people who come along. This year alone we've had walks on birds, moths, geology, trees, bats and fungi.

However, rather than say more about the past year, I'd like to introduce you to what we can expect in the coming year on the Common. The cafe renovation will finished shortly and we are all looking forward to seeing the improvements. The micro-brewery owners have already renovated the barn and are now just waiting for everything to complete before moving in. We have been in discussion with Streatham BID about lighting some trees along the footpath by the High Road. The playground should be completely renovated by the middle of next year. We are also in the middle of applying for Heritage Lottery funding to help repair the water cascade in the Rookery. We aim to have beehives installed in a secure area alongside the barn. And we have been pursuing Lambeth Council to install some new benches and larger fox-proof bins on the Common and wooden bollards where they have gone missing in the car park.

I'd like to finish by saying thank you to everyone who has given a little - or in some cases a lot - of their time to make the Common a better place for everyone. My congratulations to the gardeners for winning a prize for the White Garden. I'd also like to mention John Taylor who first put up the nativity scene at the bottom of the Common 60 years ago and who has been putting it up ever since. Lastly I'd like to thank you all simply for being members of the Friends and showing that you care about the Common. I hope to meet you all at our Christmas party on December 7th in The Bull.

Mike Robinson

Mistletoe

With Christmas on the horizon, you may soon be buying a sprig of mistletoe, along with your Christmas tree. Where has it come from and why it is traditional to kiss underneath it?

The chances are that your sprig will have been imported from northern France, although it is possible that it is British. If so, it is likely to be from the border country between England and Wales, where mistletoe grows in profusion, especially in old orchards. Tenbury Wells, in Herefordshire, has the last remaining specialist mistletoe auction, held about now, and almost all the mistletoe sold there is collected locally by orchard owners and their casual workers.

There is, however, no shortage of mistletoe elsewhere in the country although you would have to search hard to find any in Lambeth, let alone on Streatham Common. Until six years ago there was a fine cluster on the Common but it was lost during heavy pruning of the tree it was growing on. Last year another specimen was discovered but shortly afterwards it too was lost when the tree it was growing on was (mistakenly) cut down during replanting of the Rookery's orchard. That seemed to be it for mistletoe on the Common until just a few weeks ago when a new specimen, shown in the photograph, was noticed very high up in a tall poplar tree.

Mistletoe is a parasite that favours particular trees, including apple, lime and poplar, and is seldom found on other trees, such as oak. Technically it is a hemiparasite, meaning that it is only partially dependent on the tree for its growth. It takes water and minerals from the tree but can produce its own carbohydrates by photosynthesis as it has green leaves. Indeed it is an evergreen as becomes most obvious when the host tree has shed its own leaves in autumn.



If you see a clump of mistletoe high up in a tree, it is almost certainly there because a bird (quite possibly an aptly named Mistle Thrush), which has eaten berries from a mistletoe elsewhere and has been left with seeds stuck onto its beak, has cleaned the seeds off by rubbing them on a branch. One of the seeds has subsequently germinated and started parasitising the tree you are looking at.

But why the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe? According to Richard Mabey's *Flora Britannica* this is among northern Europe's last surviving remnants of the belief that some plants had magic powers and is probably a sanitised version of the medieval belief that mistletoe was associated with fertility. (It was also believed to keep witches at bay, and dispel tumours: in Germany, extractions of mistletoe are still used to treat cancer by proponents of 'alternative' medicine.)

When Christianity came to Britain, mistletoe traditions were deemed pagan by the church and even as late as the 1960s the inclusion of the plant in church decorations was frowned upon in some parishes. However, perhaps fuelled by the revival of Druidism in the 18th century and with it the revival of the beliefs in the magical powers of mistletoe, the hanging of mistletoe in houses at Christmas had become popular in the mid 19th century and kissing under it had gained traction.

Repairing the Common

Largely as a result of the heavy vehicles used before and after major events on the Common this summer, there was considerable surface damage to the Common. This was a cause for concern for the Friends and local residents but we were assured that the damage would be repaired and the costs would be covered by the deposits that events' organisers have to put down. The repair work is now complete.

Fairly soon after the events, rootzone – a sand and soil mix – was applied to the worst areas but the major repair work waited until November, when the ground was softer. First power harrowing was used to mix the rootzone with the existing top soil and level out any rutted areas. Then the whole events area was aerated with a grass slitter, seeded, and lightly rolled. Finally it was verti-drained to help both with decompaction and with drainage of surface water. In theory, at least, these actions should allow the grass surface to recover (just in time for next year's events to damage it again?).

Bee Keeping

A new project aims to place a small number of beehives in a quiet, locked-off area of the Rookery. After a number of possible sites were evaluated, a narrow strip of land adjacent to the the barn

(which is being converted into a micro-brewery) was selected as the best one for the proposed apiary. Particularly as this is close to a public footpath, it will be necessary to design the site so that the bees are not a nuisance to passers by and are encouraged to fly away from the footpath.



Those involved with the project are working closely with the London Beekeepers Association, which is providing all the expertise at present, although we're hoping to train up an interested group who can run the hives going forwards. We aim to sell the surplus honey in the café in order to fund the upkeep of the hives.

If you'd like to take an active part in beekeeping or already have experience then please get in touch with me (chair@streathamcommon.org). This project is being run in conjunction with the Streatham Common Cooperative and the Streatham Common Community Garden group.

Mike Robinson



www.sccoop.org.uk


BIGGER AND BETTER

ROOKERY

CHRISTMAS FAIR

SUNDAY 18 DECEMBER

THE ROOKERY, STREATHAM COMMON

11AM – 4PM

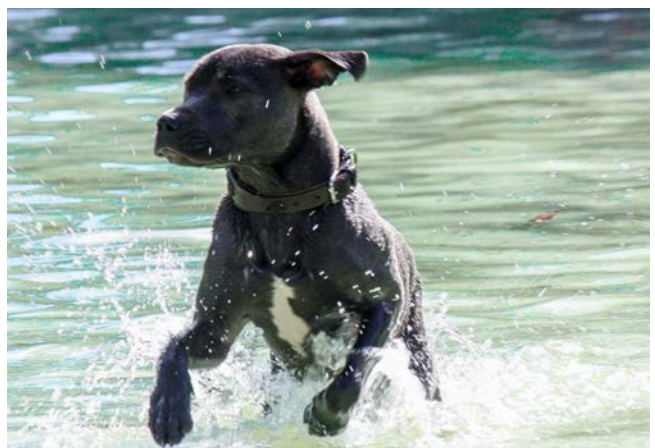
WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO ANTHONY GOLD

Dog Show and Splash Day

This year's Dog Show was one of the best ever, thanks to the mighty efforts of John Rhodes, who also organised a Doggy Splash Day in the paddling pool.

The Dog Show, which attracted 130 dogs, raised £105 for Pets As Therapy and £235 for the Friends of Streatham Common. Vale Vets and Streatham Hill Vets provided the judges and were joined by Mitcham Vets and Easicare Vets in sponsoring the rosettes. Prizes were kindly provided by Tesco, Kong, Disney, Fetch, Fish for Dogs and Beco. Thanks to Tony Guest for the music and the Rookery Café for providing a barbecue.

Splash Day took place after the paddling pool had been closed for the year and gave 150 dogs a chance to frolic in the water and the pool a chance to open again to the public next year. Including the raffle and the cake stall, which was populated by goodies generously supplied by local dog owners, the event raised about £800 for the paddling pool and £150 for Pets As Therapy.



Paddling Pool

The paddling pool was a great success this summer despite the fact that it had been earmarked for closure by the council due to budget cuts. Fundraising by the Streatham Common Cooperative (SCCoop) and the local community and a generous donation by the Horseman Trust raised a working budget of £19k.

This budget covered things like commissioning of the pump, daily maintenance and repairs. It also paid for a member of SCCoop staff to be responsible for opening, closing and litter picking. However we very much underestimated the time it would take to litter-pick and remove people's rubbish at the end of the day. We were regularly removing over 20 bin liners of rubbish a day. This could take up to four hours.

It is a real waste of precious funds to pay a SCCoop staff member to remove people's rubbish. SCCoop put up signage encouraging people to take their litter home, but this had little effect.

During the busy summer months litter is a real problem all over the Common too. In these times of budget cuts we really need to make it clear to the public that they should be taking their litter home as litter clearance has a real impact on already stretched budgets.

The money spent on litter clearance would be better spent on improving our wonderful

green space and keeping the paddling pool open for next year, so that hundreds of local families can enjoy it again. Free entry to the pool means that those families who perhaps cannot afford some of the more expensive summer days out, can pack up a picnic and spend the whole day there.

SCCoop will be starting to fundraise for the paddling pool in the New Year, although the Doggy Splash Day has already kicked off the contributions.

Please keep an eye on our website - www.sccoop.org.uk - for details.

Dom Leary, SCCoop

Remember the Maze?

Local resident and habitué of the café, Tony Guest, was sure he could remember playing in a maze on the Common in the 1950s/60s but could not, at first, find anyone to confirm that his memory was correct. With perseverance, however, he did find a couple of people who remembered it and then, through the I Love Streatham facebook page, he made contact with Debbie Moor. She provided this photograph of herself with the picket fencing maze in the background. Do you have any other photographs that show the maze?



To raise more money for the paddling pool, a 2017 calendar and some Christmas cards have been produced, featuring photographs taken at the Doggy Splash Day. The calendars are priced at £8 and the cards at 50p each or £2 for five. John Rhodes will be selling both at the Rookery Café each day from 9.30-10.30am and in the Community Garden on Sundays from 11.00am to 3.00pm.

Recent Events

In addition to the events involving dogs and geology that are written about separately, a number of others took place since the last newsletter. The **Birds of Prey** display at the end of July attracted around 300 people in the course of the afternoon.



They were able to get close up to various falcons, owls,

hawks etc and also were able to witness two impressive flying displays. One Harris Hawk was over-ambitious in its choice of prey.

Serious About Tennis's free **Tennis Coaching** session for the Friends, which ran in August, was fully booked, with 24 people participating in the two sessions. The youngest participant was 3 and the oldest was 68.

Held at The Railway pub at the end of October, the **Cake Bake Off** attracted some splendid looking entries which turned out to be delicious, too. Also at the end of October, an unexpectedly large



crowd of about 80 came on a **Fungi Walk** led by Eleanor Dare. It had been too dry in previous weeks for

the fungi to be at their most prolific, but nonetheless some excellent specimens were found and identified (but not picked or eaten!).

What's Up?

Playground - contractors for the complete renovation of the playground have been appointed. The hope is that the brand new playground will open by July next year.

Cascade - an outline application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for restoring the Rookery's water cascade to working order and carrying out repairs and planting in the surrounding areas has met with a reasonably positive response. A detailed application will now be prepared.

Green Flag - the Rookery has gained a Green Flag award for another year following an unannounced visit by judges.

Café - the major refurbishment that is taking place and which will result in a redesigned space with an open kitchen, should be finished towards the end of December.

Rookery - Thanks to a generous memorial donation, some ailing rhododendrons by the main entrance to the Rookery have been replaced by dogwoods and witch hazels. These will provide a colourful welcome. The White Garden won a Bronze Gilt award in the 2016 London Garden Society's category "Best Garden in a Public Place".



*Merry Christmas and a Happy
New Year to all the Friends of
Streatham Common*



Geology of Streatham Common

Joyce Bellamy provides the context for a geological walk that took place on Streatham Common in September.

Members of the public have shown interest in the drainage, landforms and general scenery of the Wandle Valley for over a century. In 1910, representatives of local communities met to “secure open spaces and walks along the banks of the Wandle”. Despite the intervention of two World Wars, various sites – including survivals from existing private parklands and grounds that were increasingly at threat from building development – were acquired or donated for public use. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the then Greater London Council in its *Report of Studies for the Greater London Development Plan* postulated that the Wandle Valley had the potential to become a Regional Park – a concept that has since reached fruition.

While the concept has focussed upon the valley floor, it has also been interpreted in relation to the Wandle basin as a whole, including its watersheds. The open spaces of the watershed areas, including Metropolitan Commons, woodlands and ornamental grounds in areas that separate the catchment of the Wandle from those of neighbouring rivers, have their own qualities of interest, including the provision of panoramic views and opportunities for studying the evolution of landscapes.

The emergent liaison organisations at local government and community levels, which have been formed to progress the realisation of the Wandle Valley Regional Park have encompassed the London boroughs through which the Wandle flows – Croydon, Sutton, Merton and Wandsworth. Unfortunately, Lambeth, which contains key areas of the Wandle's eastern watershed that offer fine views across the basin and interesting geological exposures, has lacked the benefit of integration within this network. A

compilation of a study of the Lambeth watershed, which formed an element of the walk led by Lambeth council's Dr Iain Boulton for the Friends of Streatham Common, has helped to remedy the omission.

The walk focussed on the wooded summit of the Common, where Dr Boulton was able to illustrate the presence of heavy gravels capping the underlying London Clay, giving a spring line from which water seeps. He explained that this capping existed along all the high ground of the Crystal Palace ridge, giving rise to a series of rivers and tributaries, the nearest within Lambeth being the River Effra, long since lost underground with the spread of building development. The northern part of Lambeth consists of gravel and sands derived from the history of the River Thames and its tributaries. Dr Boulton's explanation of the distribution of various geological strata and 're-worked' eroded material was aided by circulation of extracts from the British Geological Survey's *Geology of Britain Viewer* encompassing both the bedrock geology of



Streatham Common gravels exposed by a rainwater stream.

the area, formed at a time when the area had been deep below the sea, and the 'superficial' deposits derived from the process of erosion.

Bearing in mind that the late Professor G.W. Wooldridge of King's College, London regarded Streatham Common as an important site for geological education, it might be time to revive the Common and the Rookery as a field studies venue, which could also encompass Norwood Grove and the nearby River Graveney, a tributary of the Wandle.

Joyce Bellamy

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

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