



Common Knowledge

April 2013, Issue 47

Rookery Centenary Special Issue

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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 Rookery centenary is here and we have many events and other plans to celebrate that you can read more about in this special centenary issue. Thanks to everyone involved in this project, particularly Barbara Wright and Sophie Hussey who have given up many hours to make things happen. Also thanks to everyone who signed our petition last year: you can read the response from the council on the Lambeth website on the petition page at www.lambeth.gov.uk/epetitions.

We have been busy since the last edition of *Common Knowledge*. You may have noticed the new Nature Trail on the Common and can read about its opening on page 2. Thanks to Peter Newmark for running this project. Also the top of the Common has now been declared a Local Nature Reserve by the Council, helping to protect this important area.

We had to take the difficult decision to postpone Kite Day to 16th June, given how boggy the Common is after all the rainfall. Later this year we will be looking at options for more youth provision on the Common, and thinking about the café – the current licence is up for renewal at the end of 2014.

The AGM this year will be on June 5th where, among the usual business, we will be reporting back on our proposals for local management of the Common. We set up a working group following the public meeting last year and you can read about its progress on page 8.

All in all, 2013 looks to be one of our busiest ever years and we are running many more events than before. We hope you will be able to come along to some of them and look forward to meeting you. Thanks to all the executive members and other volunteers without whom we would not exist. As ever we are looking for people to help us out, so if you have some time to spare, from an hour at an event to helping us run the Friends, please let us know. You can visit our website www.streathamcommon.org or email us at friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com

Richard Payne

Trail Opens

What better day to open the Streatham Common Nature Trail than the first weekend of spring, I asked myself? The weather would be fair, the first buds would be on the trees and the birds would be in full song. So it was that on 23rd March, 27 hardy souls braved the snow showers that obscured the bud-less trees and silenced the birds to witness David Lindo unveil the trail's information board and then lead the



group around the trail, which was knee deep in mud.

Before that, David, who writes and appears on television as 'The Urban Birder', had spoken about his passion for wildlife in our cities and how it is so easily overlooked. The Nature Trail, and the accompanying self-guiding leaflet that can be picked up in the Rookery café, will help to make sure that Streatham Common's relatively rich wildlife is not passed by.

The trail passes through three distinct habitats. One is the last remaining meadow in Lambeth, the sloping grassland above the tennis court and still known as Hilly Four Acres, the name it had when part of a farm. Another is the woodland right at the top of the Common, the largest wood in Lambeth. The third is the area of 'acid grassland' between Streatham Common North and South. Each area suits certain flora and fauna better than others. The Nature Trail's leaflet provides some detail.

The leaflet has a map of the trail, shows the position of ten numbered wooden posts that are to be found on the trail and gives a little information about what you should look out for at each post. What you might see in practice depends a lot on the time of the year.

The areas through which the trail passes have very recently been designated as a Local Nature Reserve by Lambeth Council, which ensures both that they are more protected than before and that they will be managed in a way that promotes biodiversity.

The Friends, who funded the Nature Trail, hope that it will draw attention to the relatively rich wildlife on the Common and provide educational opportunities. We would like to thank Graziella in the café for allowing us to take shelter from the snow and have the introductory talks inside, Tessa Newmark for photographing the event and VINCI Construction and Mitchellson Formwork and Civil Engineering, two companies that are helping build the new ice rink, swimming pool, supermarket, etc on 'The Hub' site, for installing the information board and posts on the trail. *Peter Newmark*

For your diary (see page 6 for a list of additional Centenary events)

May 11th. [Annual Bird Box Survey](#). Meet at 9.30 am by the café.

May 18th. [Cake Baking Competition](#). In the café grounds at 3.00 pm.

June 16th. [Kite Day](#) from 11.00 am to 5.00 pm.

June 16th. [Band in the Rookery](#). John Brown and friends play acoustic music.

August 18th. [Birds of Prey](#) on display and flying on the lower Common from 12.00 to 6.00 pm.

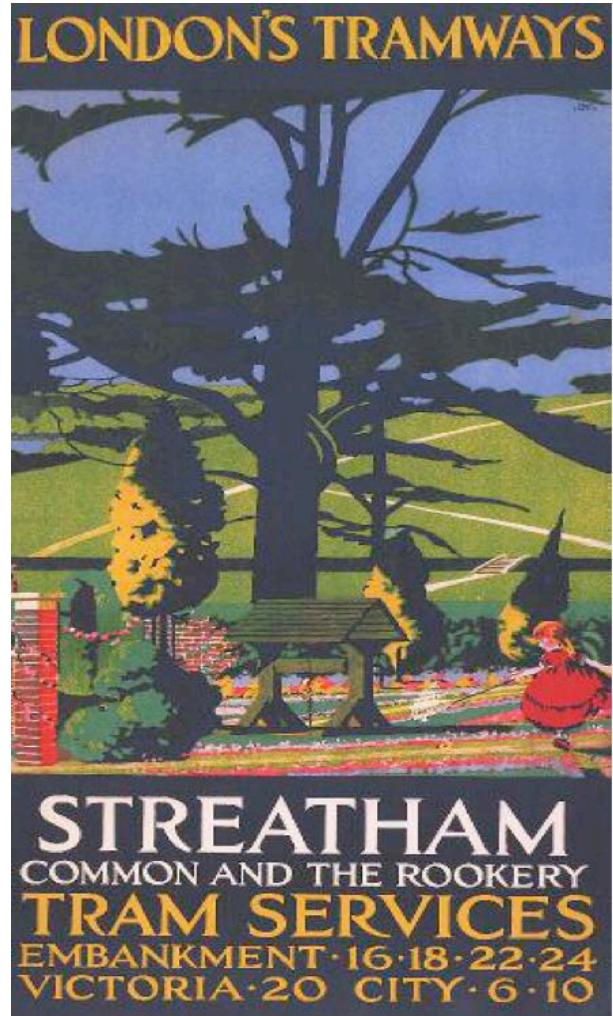
The Rookery's Centenary

On July 23rd 1913, the Rookery at Streatham Common was opened to the public for the first time. To mark the centenary of this event, the Friends of Streatham Common has produced this special supplement to the April issue of *Common Knowledge*, the regular newsletter for its members.

A Brief History

The site of the Rookery Gardens has always played a key role in Streatham's History, before and after the site was opened to the public 100 years ago. In 1790 the area was described on Carey's map as 'Streatham Wells' which highlighted a Mr. Wilkinson's residence, called the Well House. In describing the site in 1673, Aubrey, the historian, says "about fourteen Years since (1659), at Weeding-Time, the Weeders being very dry, drinking of it, found it purg'd them, by which accident the medicinal virtue of them was first discovered". By the early 1700s the site was fully exploited by Thomas Lambert, who was occupying a house at the wells and had developed the grounds as a spa and pleasure gardens for London's Society. However, after 1786, when the house on the site was rebuilt, or extensively remodelled, for its new owner William Wilkinson, the wells were little used for curative purposes.

The house became a private residence when the wells closed. Its new name, the Rookery, is first mentioned in the records of the Court Baron in 1807. James Coster, a silk merchant, bought the property from William Wilkinson in 1826. From about 1851 until his death in 1871, James Hill, a tobacco manufacturer, lived in the Rookery with his wife, Jane Adams. After six years of widowhood Jane, became the fourth wife of Sir Kingsmill Grove Key, Bart, who moved to the Rookery. Both Kingsmill and his wife were generous benefactors. Each year they would hold a special New Year's dinner for the poor of south Streatham which was held in the Beehive Coffee



Tavern on Streatham High Road. The Rev. Sir John Kingsmill Causton Key succeeded to the title after the death of his father and was the last private owner or occupant of the Rookery.

The house and gardens then became available for development but Stenton Covington, a local resident, canvassed other local residents and the local authorities to buy the Rookery. The appeal stated that the intent was to purchase, as an addition to Streatham Common, the three acres of beautiful wooded land known as the Rookery. The appeal was successful and the property was conveyed in 1912 to the London County Council, which decided to keep the Rookery grounds enclosed and separate from the Common. A scheme was prepared for laying out and enclosing the grounds, the formation of paths, the provision of flower beds and herbaceous borders, and the

The Rookery's Centenary



The Rookery, Streatham Common.

conversion of the kitchen garden into an Old English Garden. The house was demolished and the grounds were opened to the public on 23rd July 1913, without any prior announcement. The grounds were passed in 1965 to the Greater London Council, the successors of the London County Council, and then to the London Borough of Lambeth in 1971.

After their opening, the Rookery Gardens became a popular place to visit, not least by Queen Mary who came several times. They have also become the focus for occasional musical and theatrical performances. The gardens are now a place of peace and tranquility, often used as a backcloth for wedding photographs. They are certainly one of Lambeth's jewels in the crown.

Brian Bloice

Local Children Celebrate

For 100 years since the Rookery was opened as a public garden, children have found it a wonderful place for games. Many of these games are the same for children in 2013 as they were in the 1950s or even 1920s: hide and seek in the Old English Garden, rolling down the hill above the cedar tree, playing with the water in the cascades, making wishes at the well.

During June and early July, Streatham residents will be visiting local primary schools to talk about their memories of playing in the Rookery during workshops led by musicians and artists. The works of

art that result from these "Playing the Rookery" workshops will be presented during the Centenary Celebration event on Saturday 13th July. Children who have taken part in school will be encouraged to participate in these performances and bring their families and friends, some of whom may be discovering this hidden gem for the first time themselves.

There will also be a new children's trail and leaflet about the history and plants of the Rookery to complement the new one for adults. We are also contacting local schools to encourage them to visit the Rookery and use it for inspiration for their teaching next term. What better start for a story-writing project than the real life story of the stolen Old Master paintings discovered under a bush in the Rookery!

While some of these activities do not cost anything, we are fundraising to be able to offer others free of charge and would like to thank the members of the Centenary Community Fundraising Group for their sterling efforts to raise funds from events and local sponsorship.

How you can help:

We are sure that we can raise at least £5,000 from the local Streatham community to help celebrate the anniversary of the Rookery and fund improvement works, but we need as many residents and business owners as possible to get behind this. You can help by:

- * Buying tickets for a fundraising event
- * Making a donation or sponsorship
- * Fundraising yourself

We are also looking for more local people who would like to share their memories of playing in the Rookery, in any decade of the last ten, to pass on to the next generation of Streatham children, either by talking in a school or by a recorded interview.

Sophie Hussey

The Rookery's Centenary

Restoring the White Garden

One of the features of the Rookery is its White Garden, a fashionable addition to many public and private gardens around the turn of the century. Perhaps the best known White Garden in the UK is that created at Sissinghurst by Vita Sackville-West but the Rookery's White Garden predated Sissinghurst's by at least 20 years.

Whereas the Rookery's White Garden is still a sight to behold, 100 years on it would be fitting to research garden plans from the past, both in the Rookery and elsewhere, and come up with a new planting plan. This should be in keeping both with the past and with the present, when low maintenance is at a premium. We hope to be able to replant the White Garden so that is capable of tolerating either too much rain or too little and does not need the kind of continual maintenance that was available in the past. Nevertheless, it will require more attention than has sometimes been given to the current White Garden in recent summers. We hope to secure this from Lambeth Council possibly in part with help from volunteers.

It is intended that this project will start in the summer by planning the project with Lambeth Council, followed by researching the best planting plan during the winter and then replanting the White Garden in the spring of 2014. *Barbara Wright*



Past, Present, Future

If you visit the Rookery during the Centenary celebrations, you will find it in the best of conditions. The gardens will be glorious, the water will be flowing, the paintwork will be pristine etc. All told, any visitors should be mightily impressed. Would that was always so.

Like many a park or garden throughout London, or many other cities, standards in the Rookery have been slipping as budgets have, inevitably in the current financial climate, been cut. With the best will in the world, Lambeth Council is not able to spend what it once used to on maintaining the Rookery in a way that would befit such a treasure in amongst Streatham's suburban sprawl. Even with the present budget, could they do better?

Whereas in the recent past, the Rookery had its own devoted gardening staff, now litter picking on the Common, maintenance of the paddling pool and horticultural work in the Rookery are all carried out by the same workforce. Unfortunately, weeds are at their most vigorous and litter is at its richest, during the same months that the paddling pool is open. This makes it well nigh impossible to maintain the Rookery at the standards we would all like.

Beautiful as the gardens will be this year, how can they be kept at the same standard in years to come? Here are some possibilities. First, Lambeth could be persuaded to spend more on upkeep of the Rookery and less on something else. But what? Second, volunteers could supplement the gardeners during the crucial months. But can a regular trusted volunteer group be recruited? Third, local sponsorship could cover the cost of extra seasonal staff. But who might stump up and in return for what? One way or another, let's hope that the Rookery's future is as glorious as it will be this year and has been in the past.

Peter Newmark

The Rookery's Centenary

Rookery User's Survey

Who uses the Rookery and for what? What do they like / dislike most about it? These were some of the questions addressed in a survey of 74 Rookery users late last year. All were locals, three-quarters were adults of working age and three-quarters visited the Rookery several times a month or more. Females slightly outnumbered males.

An overwhelmingly positive view of the Rookery emerged, with tranquillity and peacefulness being the main reason people liked it. The beauty, the plants and the views also scored highly. When the

respondents were asked what they disliked, their most common response was "nothing", although this was closely followed by concerns about maintenance and upkeep.

Comments on possible future improvements were dominated by suggestions of increased staffing, maintenance and a reversal of a perceived decline from previous standards. More plants and a functioning water cascade were also common requests. (Thanks to Iain Forbes for analysing the replies.)

Useful information

The Rookery is at the top of Streatham Common South. It opens at 7.30 am and closes at dusk.

For the latest news on the Centenary celebration and fundraising events visit the Rookery Centenary pages at www.streathamcommon.org or follow @Rookery100 on twitter.

If you would like to help with events or the Rookery now or in the future, email friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com

To join the Friends of Streatham Common, pick up a leaflet in the café by the Rookery or use the Online Membership Form at www.streathamcommon.org

Centenary Celebration Events in the Rookery

April 13th, 11.00am - 3.00 pm. **Volunteer Day** with gardening expert Matthew Wilson. Meet at the café.

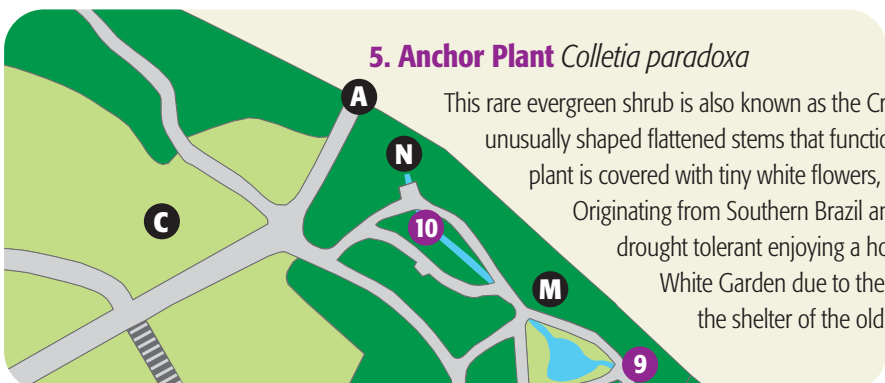
June 9th, 10.00 am - 5.00 pm. **Open Garden Squares** weekend, launch of the Rookery Horticultural Leaflet and tours of the Rookery and the Streatham Common Community Garden.

July 13th, 1.00 - 5.00 pm. **Celebrate the Centenary.** 'Play' the Rookery, music and tours.

July 14th, 2.30 pm. **History and Natural History Walk** around the Common and in the Rookery. Meet by the café.

July 23rd, 7.30 pm. **Unveiling of the Centenary Commemorative Plaque** by the entrance to the White Garden.

July 28th, 3.00 pm. **Shakespeare in the Rookery:** open-air performance of *Romeo and Juliet*.



A sample of the new **Rookery Horticultural Leaflet**. To be launched on 9th June and available thereafter in the café, this leaflet provides a brief history of the gardens and a guide to some plants of special interest.

Community Garden News

This year we are establishing four new 'rotational' beds in the main growing area of the Streatham Common Community Garden. This will be a traditional four-bed rotation system, which will start with potatoes on the ground that we didn't use last year. The next bed will be root vegetables, such as turnips, onions and garlic. The third will be beans and peas and the fourth will grow brassicas.

We are also excited about our fruit garden which is to be funded by the Streatham Action: Active Streatham OLF Project. Apples, pears, blackcurrants, grapes, figs, peaches, apricots and more have been put in safe places awaiting planting out. We are running workshops as well as practical work on planting and caring for fruit.

Recently we worked with Lambeth Council to plant a 40 metre long 'edible hedge' along the southern boundary of the site. About 75% of the plants are Hawthorn and Blackthorn, with the rest being Hazel, Field Maple, Dog Rose, Wayfaring Tree, Guelder Rose and Common Elder. In addition to providing a food crop, the new hedge will also reinforce the existing hedge, increase security along this boundary and provide additional cover and habitat for wildlife, adding to the nature conservation value of the site.

There will be tours of the garden during the days of 9th June, 16th June and 13th July and you can drop in on any Sunday from 12.00 - 4.00 pm.

Kate Daley and Andrew Simpson

Geomorphology

What accounts for the springs that appear now and again on the Common (and in Norbury Grove) and which once upon a time led fashionable Londoners to visit Streatham to take the waters?

The answer lies in the geomorphology of the area. Streatham Common occupies a

swathe of land at the western extremity of the Crystal Palace ridge, the focal watershed of South London. The upper Common, at its interface with the Rookery and Norwood Grove, attains heights between 75 and 85 metres above mean sea level; the lower Common falls away to a lowest point of 45 metres in the vicinity of Streatham High Road. Most of the lower and upper Common areas consist of London Clay, but the highest point – with adjoining areas of Norwood Grove – has a capping of "pebbly gravel and sand .. of uncertain origin", according to the British Geological Survey.

This isolated capping at Streatham Common is exposed and easily identified along informal pathways through the wooded areas, where leaf mould has been worn away by walkers and the loosened soil has been washed away during heavy rain; indeed some of the paths have the appearance of having been artificially surfaced with the material!

The junction between the gravel capping and the underlying London Clay forms a spring line (an occurrence seen at other points around the Crystal Palace ridge, as at Sydenham) that gave rise to the historic spa industry in various localities.

Today, the spring line is visible in the form of an intermittent stream that flows down a ditch marking historic administrative boundaries. The streamlet in turn forms part of the Norbury Brook within the wider drainage system of the River Graveney, an element within the Wandle Basin.

Streatham Common's variety of geological terrain and magnificent viewpoints across the Wandle and Graveney valleys combine to earn the site recognition as being one of

Mystery Members: *can any one put us in touch with members of the Friends by the name of J. Parrett and D.A. Pell? We do not have any contact information for either of them.*

Our Thanks. The proceeds of the Braxted Park Jubilee Street Party helped to fund the cost of printing this issue. Sainsbury's has provided our events with mince pies and Easter eggs.

the finest in London for the teaching of geography and geomorphology, acknowledged by the late Professor Wooldridge of King's College London, who conducted field trips to the area and included it in his text book *London's Countryside*. These views are interpreted on the Common's Millennium panels.

It should be noted that the geological strata of the Common have been disturbed by engineering work undertaken for the construction of the South London Ring Main and for the widening of the A23, both of which programmes altered surfaces and gradients and disturbed drainage, exacerbated by less than sensitive works of reinstatement. *Joyce Bellamy*

Anyone for a Cooperative?

The current grounds maintenance contract the Council has with Veolia is up for renewal next year and this, along with Lambeth's desire to become a 'cooperative council', led us to hold a public meeting on management of the Common last year. Following that, we set up a working group to look at options for more local management of the Common / Rookery.

One idea is to set up a cooperative to manage the Common (not own it). This would be a not-for-profit business that will bid for the contract to provide the maintenance services on the Common. It

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

will employ staff directly who will be permanently based on the Common, including a manager. In time the cooperative would be able to take on projects to improve the Common and look for other funding sources, but we would start small, just providing the basic services.

We are working with the council to see if we can take this approach forward. Much depends on the council confirming the budget available and providing support. Our costings show that if the budget is as initially indicated it should be possible to provide a much improved service based on this model. We will have much more to say at the Friends AGM on 5th June.

Richard Payne

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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

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.