



Common Knowledge

August 2011, Issue 43

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This unique view of the Common was taken with an camera lofted on high by a special kite. The photograph shows a portion of the huge crowd that attended what many reckoned was the best Kite Day ever, on 10 April. Yet again we owe a huge thanks to Bob Colover for organising the event and for the many others who put in the time and effort to ensure its success. And thanks too to Dave Hollingworth for providing the photograph.

Cricket on the Common

On September 11th, starting at noon, a formal, if light-hearted, game of cricket will be played at the bottom of the Common to celebrate the return of a cricket strip to that area after a gap of many years. Anyone interested in partaking, whether female or male, young or old, should contact Colin Hutton on 8677 9728.

Colin is the author of a new book on the history of Streatham cricket and, as he records below, Streatham Common has a long relationship with the 'summer game'.

Streatham Common has for many centuries served as an open space for the multifarious use of those living nearby. By the turn of the 19th century it extended over 66 acres and was described as two thirds of fine turf, fed by sheep...on which neighbouring inhabitants take the recreation of playing cricket. The upper slopes were covered with bracken and gorse etc., while livestock drank from the ponds. Although the lower slopes also had a pond and were frequently boggy, they were clearly the better location to play cricket thereon.

It is not known when cricket was first played on the Common, but it was first mentioned in the *Daily Advertiser*, which noted that on Monday 26th July 1731 Streatham played Clapham at home.

On Friday 9th July 1736, Streatham felt strong enough to challenge London on a



ground at the rear of the White Lion public house. George Williams was the licensee there between 1736 and 1758 and is said to have been the Streatham cricket captain in 1745 and to have provided refreshments at a number of 'grand' cricket matches during that period. What is certain is that he was present when, on 28th July 1752, Streatham played Wandsworth on Streatham Common.

On Wednesday 20th August 1800, a cricket match took place on the Common between Streatham and Clapham for a 100 guineas wager, being the return match of an earlier game. But some more unusual matches have also taken place on the Common in its history, including teams of one-armed versus one-legged players, married versus single men, and teams comprising five ladies and six gentlemen. Perhaps most unusually of all was a match pitting a man and his dog against a one-armed man and his young son!

In 1856, Canterbury Diocese, as Lords of the Manor of South Streatham gave permission to enclose an area of land on the lower slopes of the Common exclusively for the use of playing cricket. This area was called the 'ring' and was marked by metal poles chained together and padlocked. Their temporary removal allowed matches to be played. Payment for the 'ring' was shared equally between the teams using it – generally Streatham Cricket Club, founded 1805, Streatham United Cricket Club, founded 1858 and Streatham Albion Cricket Club, founded 1880. The latter two teams had evolved from earlier elevens and their rivalry was intense. Streatham Cricket Club – the senior gentleman's team - played an annual fixture against the other two combined as The Village Cricket Club until World War 1.

In 1889, the Metropolitan Board of Works paid £5 to take over ownership of the Common and it was thought that the playing of cricket was being

scrutinised and that the statute allowing it might be repealed. Consequently, a petition signed by 753 Streatham residents was presented at the subsequent proceedings and the case won. At this time there were over seventy cricket teams in Streatham, comprising every aspect of community life including schools, churches, shops, pubs, businesses, uniform organisations and even family teams.

The young and the not so young have enjoyed playing and watching cricket on the Common since at least 1731 and it is hoped that the improved facilities now present will encourage the community to continue the tradition.

Colin Hutton

The author's *Streatham and the Summer Game; A History of Cricket in Streatham 1731-2010 and The Streatham Cricket Club* can be purchased for £16,25 from the Streatham Society by emailing admin@streathamsociety.org.uk

Is it a Rook?

"Is that a rook or a crow?" I can't tell you how often I've been asked that question of the large black birds on Streatham Common. My answer is always much the same: "If it's on the Common, it's a crow", although more recently I've had to add that it might just be a jackdaw.

So why then do we have "The Rookery"? It is presumably because some time after the Well House, which used to stand near where the café now is, was rebuilt and extended in 1786, it was renamed The Rookery to reflect a nearby rook colony.

An early 1900s photograph exists of a rookery still in elm trees on the Common and rookeries could still then be found centrally in, for example, Gray's Inn Square. Now one might see the very occasional rook flying over Streatham but one would have to go to the 'green belt' to find a rookery.

Crows - or carrion crows to give them their proper name - thrive in the London area and have been increasing in number in recent times. There are always some on the Common, a few pairs breed here and groups of up to 40 birds can sometimes be seen.



They are not my favourite birds for a number of reasons. Crows will eat anything, dead or alive, and it is hard to feel friendly towards a bird that will peck the eyes of a badly injured pigeon, take nestlings or birds' eggs, if it can find them, and be in and out of rubbish bins or bags. They also are ever on the lookout for birds of prey and will pester, often relentlessly, any kestrel, sparrowhawk or owl that they notice. (It is this behaviour that sometimes draws my attention to the presence of such a bird, for which I am begrudgingly thankful.) Crows are in general the most unloved species in the country.

So could that bird you saw be a jackdaw? They are plentiful in, for example, Richmond Park and at the Beddington Landfill Site but seldom seen here. Look out for a bird that is smaller than a crow, has a pale eye and has grey on the back of the head, which is only obvious in good light.

For the sake of completion, could that large black bird on the Common be a raven? Categorically, no! The only ravens you will see on the ground within very many miles of Streatham are the pinioned birds in the Tower of London and their Ravenmaster would never let them walk all the way here!

Peter Newmark

Letter to the Editor

Although I have only recently got a dog, which I walk regularly at the top wooded area of Streatham Common adjacent to Copgate Path, I have already have had some very bad and shocking experiences in doing so and am disappointed that there is no community safety policing of this area on a daily basis.

A few weekends ago my young children and I interrupted two men at 4.00 in the afternoon having sex a few metres from, and in view of, the pathway. I am open-minded, have no issues with homosexuality and believe that consenting adults are free to do what they want within their own homes but I do not wish and certainly do not wish my children to witness such acts of public indecency in a public park.

More recently I was alone and saw two men lurking in the bushes, one of whom was touching himself inappropriately whilst watching me. I tried to call the police but had no phone signal within the park.

I now feel intimidated about using my local park and feel that certain individuals are making the Common a no-go area at any time of the day. I have never seen any community police or park rangers in this small problem area. Many dog walkers are

elderly women, some of whom have unfortunately had similar experiences to myself.

Streatham residents need to feel safe within their parks and feel like they can let their children play freely without the risk of witnessing public acts of indecency. Our open spaces are for the recreation of the entire community and no part of them should be surrendered to the few whose illegal and indecent acts drive everyone else away.

Justine Spencer

Editor's note: it is our impression that there has been an increased police presence on the Common in recent times and the following response that Justine Spencer received from the police when she sent them a longer version of her letter indicates a further increase: "Just to reassure you that upon receiving your e-mail we have urgently met with our police colleagues and arranged for police patrols to be stepped up at that location. We have also tasked an additional police team we refer to as the ASBAT team which usually deals with anti-social behaviour hotspots in Lambeth; in addition we have tasked the partnership mobile CCTV enforcement van to be deployed around Streatham Common and specifically around the area you mentioned in your e-mail."

Community Safety will be the focus of the Friends public meeting to be held on 2 November and we hope that a member of the local police force will address the meeting ♦



Four fine photos of the Common / Rookery are on the front of these **new notelets**, which can be purchased via our website or by phoning Katherine Forster on 8764 6060.

The price is £2 for a pack of four. The four can be either all of the same kind or one of each kind. The photographs were kindly provided by local photographer Nick Wright.

Dates for Your Diary

4 September. Fun Dog Show. Starting at 2.00 pm at the top of the Common near the car park.

11 September. Cricket Match. Starting at 12.00 noon. To mark the return of cricket to Streatham Common, come and watch a 40-over match to be played on the new artificial turf strip near the playground.

8 October. The Big Draw. In the playground from 1.00 to 3.00 pm. Let your children loose to create chalk drawings on the theme of The Drawing Age.

29 October. Bird Walk. Discover autumn birds, starting at 9.30 by the café.

2 November. Public Meeting. On the theme of Community Safety. Place / time will appear on our website and posters.

Early December. Carol Singing. At 7.30 at the bottom of the Common by the Christmas Tree. Date to be announced.

Volunteer Days. If we can find somebody (could it be you?) to run them, we will set two dates for volunteers to carry out conservation work on the Common. Dates will appear on posters.

Unwanted visitors

Summer has brought an outbreak of campers and travellers to the Common. One lot of campers left behind an awful mess as well as damaging a tree by having a campfire under it. A group of travellers planted themselves opposite the cafe on the day before Streatham Festival's Big Day Out was to be held there there. Fortunately they agreed to move on before the event. The same group reoccupied the site on 28th July but again were talked into leaving the same day. They decamped to Sainsbury's car park leaving bags of rubbish behind. Our thanks to the Park Rangers, the Parks Department and the police for cracking down on these illegal visitations. If you see anyone camping or moving vehicles on to the Common, please report it immediately ♦

Recent Events

Our busy season of spring/summer events kicked off with a **Bird Walk** on 9 April during which the recently arrived summer visitors - blackcap and chiffchaff - put on a fine vocal performance. The day after was **Kite Day** (see the front page). And on 25 April an excellent **Royal Easter Parade** for children was held in the Rookery. Next up, on 8 May, was the annual **Bird Box Survey** (ten boxes were occupied by blue tits) and a week later it was the turn of the annual **Cake Baking Competition** (photos on the Friends website). On 19 June, John Brown and friends put on an enjoyable afternoon of acoustic music entitled **Band in the Rookery**. Our **AGM** came next (see next page).

Finally, there were two events that formed part of the Streatham Festival. On 9 July some 60 people joined a walk addressing the **History and Natural History of Streatham Common** - arranged jointly with the Streatham Society. And the next day over 350 people watched a splendid performance of **Much Ado About Nothing** in the Rookery, enhanced by the fine weather.



Sadly, Theatre Set-up, the company that has performed a Shakespeare play in the Rookery for many years, it's assets are up for sale and we do not know if it will exist next year. If not, we shall endeavor to find an equally good replacement.

Update

Park Rangers

The previous issue of *Common Knowledge* prematurely, as it turns out, bid farewell to the Park Rangers, following the announcement by Lambeth Council that the service was to be axed. Since then the wheels of bureaucracy in the Council have been very slowly turning while it has also dealt with public and union representations. We can only hope that there is a positive outcome. Similarly, and for the same reasons, the restructuring of the Parks department has not yet happened.

Constitution

An amended constitution for the Friends was adopted at a special meeting held before the AGM.

Community Garden

The steering group behind the plan to set up a Community Garden in the old walled nursery part of the Rookery has formed a committee and agreed a constitution, with a view to registering as a charity. It has also met with council officers, who are supportive of the project and with whom the group is discussing how exactly the garden would operate. The group is now inviting anyone who is interested to join the project and help in whatever way they can by, in the first place, registering their interest at:

groupspaces.com/StreathamCommonCommunityGarden

Vandalism

Two picnic tables in the Orchard have been seriously damaged by fire, the toilets near the playground have been attacked, nearby fencing has been damaged, swings have been damaged and barbecues have caused burn marks on the cricket strip.

Annual General Meeting of the Friends

A summary of the main points follows:

- An increase in membership to 176 in the past year was reported.

- A surplus of £1700 for the past year was reported.
- All the officers were re-elected - they are listed on the Friends website.
- The Friends and the Streatham Common Management Advisory Committee agreed jointly to fund the creation of a Nature Trail on the Common.
- Councillor Steve Reed, Leader of Lambeth Council, spoke to the meeting and outlined the Council's idea of transferring the running of parks and commons to Community Trusts, to which resources and the power to make decisions would be handed; more on this in the next issue ♦

Advertisements

(to advertise, please contact the editor)

St Bartholomew's Orchestra would welcome membership applications from string players of reasonable orchestral standard. The orchestra rehearses in Saint Bartholomew's Hall, Ellison Road, SW16, on Monday evenings and has a full programme of concerts. Thanks to substantial sponsorship, subscriptions are unusually low. Details of the orchestra are available on www.stbartsorchestra.co.uk

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