



Common Knowledge

December 2009, Issue 38

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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@goolemail.com

Friends website:

www.freewebs.com/streathamfriends/

Join us on Wednesday 9th December at the bottom of the Common, by the Christmas tree, and later at our party

7.00 pm - Mince Pies and Mulled Wine.

7.30 pm - Carol Singing.

8.00 pm - Friend's Christmas Party in the Pied Bull Pub.



Reasons to be cheerful

It's safe to say that fans of Streatham Common can look forward to 2010 for a number of reasons.

1. In a competition decided by public voting, the Common has secured £125,000 to improve drainage and provide marked football pitches (see page 2).

2. The long absent cricket strip will be returned and maintained (see page 2).

3. A new play area will be planned during 2010 on the Common, although it may not be completed until 2011 (see page 6).

4. Kite Day will be returning after a year's break; put April 11th in your diary now.

5. All being well, part of the Common will become an official Local Nature Reserve during 2010.

6. The idea of creating a community garden will be taken forward by the Friends and the Council (see page 5).

7. More events than ever are planned on the Common - make sure we have your email address (ours is on page 5) so we can remind you of them and of opportunities to help.

For now - somewhat early - we wish you all a Happy Christmas and a Cheerful New Year.

Football to return

Within a few months, marked football pitches will be back on the Common – after an absence of more than ten years due to neglect - and improved drainage will mean that the pitches should be usable most, if not all, of the time.

The Friends have long advocated the return of sporting facilities to the Common and were pleased when Lambeth announced in mid-September that an improved games and sports area on Streatham Common was to be one of four major projects competing for £125,000 from the Lambeth Community Action Fund. In an interesting experiment, the winning project was to be chosen by public voting, open to all Lambeth residents on the electoral register.

Naturally, we were delighted to learn in early November that the Common's project had won, accumulating about a third of the 3000 or so votes cast. A ceremonial handing over of a giant 'cheque' made out to



Councillor Jim Dickson, Mayor Christopher Wellbelove and Friend's Peter Newmark and Hanna Colover with the 'cheque' for £125,000

Cricket back, too

Not only marked football pitches, but also a maintained cricket strip, will be back on the Common soon. Until ten or so years ago, there used to be a strip – and long before that, a fully fledged cricket ground – but as with case of the old football pitches, the strip became neglected and eventually disappeared altogether. Welcome back!

Streatham Common took place near the playground on December 6th.

It is not yet certain exactly when the football pitches will be in place but the expectation is that it will be before the end of the financial year. The pitches will be suitable for seven-a-side matches rather than full size and may include provision for erecting temporary goal posts. They will be positioned near the bottom of the Common, but exactly where has not yet been decided.

The other three projects competing against football on the Common would have produced improved facilities at the Willington Youth Centre, an upgrade of the BMX track in Brockwell Park, or computer and shower facilities at Streatham's Darby and Joan club.

Voting was allowed online, by text message or by posting back a card distributed with Lambeth Life. The Friends encouraged voters by means of posters put up on the Common, given to nearby pubs and handed out to people training or informally playing football.

Although the total of 3000 votes cast may not seem

much, given that there are some 220,000 people on the electoral register in Streatham, councillor Jim Dickson expressed pleasure at the level of participation in this experiment in deciding which community projects to fund.

Alongside the competitive bid for £125,000 there were separate bids for £75,000 - which went to the creation of a children's wet play area in Norwood Park - and for £50,000, which is going to pay for a 'trim track' in Brockwell Park ♦

More on sports

Tennis players may have noticed that the Common's court has a new net and that there is no longer a charge for using the court.

Herne Hill Harriers cross-country runners have started running on the Common. A few weeks ago they had a low key event to test the route, the suitability of the venue and the reaction of the public. All seemed to be in order so we can expect to see the runners in full flow soon ♦



Seven new willow trees have been planted near the playground to help prevent seasonal flooding of the nearby footpath.

Sick Acorns



Perhaps you have noticed that for the past two years there have been many horribly deformed acorns on the Common's oak trees - or, to be more specific, the pendunculate oaks. At first, generally in August, greenish protuberances appear on the acorns. They then turn reddish and eventually become brown and woody, by which time they have taken over the whole acorn. The deformation is known as a knopper gall. But what causes the gall?

The answer is a minute gall wasp that lays its eggs in the acorn. When the grubs hatch from the eggs they secrete chemicals that cause the gall to grow. The gall encloses the grub providing food and protection. Eventually the grubs pupate into adult wasps.

Strangely, all these adults are females. They make their way to turkey oak trees, which co-exist in our woodlands with the more frequent pendunculate oaks. In the spring, the females lay their eggs on the catkins of the turkey oaks. Both males and females hatch from these eggs. After mating, the females lay their eggs in the pendunculate oaks' acorns, and the cycle begins again.

Knopper galls were first found in the UK in the 1960s and became widespread in the 1980s. In some years they are found on

almost every acorn, while in other years they are hardly evident. At first there was concern that the result would be decreased fertility of the oak trees, but this seems not to be the case.

How do the squirrels and jays that store very large numbers of acorns for the winter cope with the knopper gall? They avoid acorns with the galls. So in bad years – like this one – most of their acorns come from turkey oaks and other species that do not suffer from galls. As a result there will be more turkey oaks, because the spread of oak trees is largely the result of growth from acorns that have been buried and forgotten. With more turkey oaks there are more possibilities for the gall wasp to successfully continue its life cycle. So, like it or not, knopper galls are here to stay ♦

Memories

Before World War 2, my mother's ambition was to learn to ride a horse and she took some lessons from a girl who had stables on the north side of the Common, behind the houses just east of St Andrew's Catholic School. There were several other stables in the vicinity: the last main stables were off Canterbury Grove, where Chichester Mews has now been built. My oldest children used to go there to watch the horses.

I recall a considerable amount of horse riding on the Common and there was a Horse Ride around its edge. The Ride went down the north side, along the west side, parallel to the High Road (before the road was widened), up the south side to the link road (now closed to ordinary traffic) from opposite the Rookery to Streatham Common North. From there you could either ride across to the north side or go past the Rookery and straight up to where Leigham Court Avenue meets the Common and then turn back and ride through the chestnut trees alongside the road until

the top pond (now a paddling pool) was reached. Incidentally, the trees were a mixture of horse and sweet chestnuts and probably the best source of conkers in the SW16 area.

I remember there used to be a bus stop on the Common opposite the end of Barrow Road, where they built a wood and glass bus shelter before the war. I believe this was one of the first bus shelters to be built in Streatham. The 49 route buses used to turn around in what was then a yard outside the Greyhound pub before going back to Shepherd's Bush. During the war some of the 49s went on up Streatham Common South – because the north side was too steep for the buses to drive up, especially with passengers - across the now closed off link road to Streatham Common North and then up past the end of Leigham Court Road to Crystal Palace via Beulah Hill and Church Road. The return journey took them straight down Streatham Common North.

Before the war there was a round bandstand at the top of the Common, just down from the blocked off link road. After the war a rectangular bandstand was erected slightly northwest of the site of the original bandstand. The new one was enclosed on its west side to protect the bands from the wind blowing up the Common. This, of course, has now gone, too.

During the war, there were allotments right across the Common, from opposite Valley Road on the north side to the south side. To the north of the Rangers Hut by the bottom pond (now the dysfunctional paddling pool in the playground) underground air raid shelters ran parallel to the High Road. They were demolished after the war and the rubble was covered over and grassed. In 1939 a barrage balloon was based at the bottom of the Common on the south side. (Later in the war the nearest barrage balloon was near the top of Norbury Hill.) There was a post for the Air Raid Precaution (ARP) wardens on the corner of the Common opposite what is now Sainsbury's

but was then P.B. Cow's rubber factory. After the war, two rows of 'prefabs' were built on the west and south (south of the bottom pond) sides of the Common. The ones nearest the roads were flat roofed, whereas the ones facing the Common had pitched roofs. *Keith Holdaway*

The first part of Keith Holdaway's Memories appeared in the April 2009 issue. The text is © Keith Holdaway ♦

As Keith Holdaway recalls above, allotments appeared on the Common during World War 2, as UK citizens were encouraged to "dig for victory". Now that there is once again encouragement to grow your own vegetables, albeit for different reasons, could the space shown in this photograph become a community vegetable garden? It is the area that used to be the



plant nursery for the Rookery gardens but is now unused and somewhat derelict. Rachel Heywood, Lambeth's Cabinet Member for Culture and Communities, is on record as saying this would be an excellent use of the area and a council officer will start investigating possibilities in January. Without enthusiastic involvement from the local community, however, the project will never fly. If you would be interested in becoming involved, please let us know now.

Contact the Friends by emailing friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com or get in touch with the Editor, whose contact details are on the front page.

Birds 2009

It has been a good year for 'new' species on or near the Common. Sometimes a year goes by without a single new addition to my list of local species but this year there have been five plus the return of a long lost favourite – the tawny owl.

When we first moved to this area in 1976, tawny owls could frequently be heard hooting from the trees that line Streatham Common's south side, but they vanished many years ago. It was with delight, therefore, that I started getting reports earlier this year of an owl hooting in the woods now and again. In mid-October, Shea Richardson told me that she and other dawn dog walkers were hearing hoots frequently and had even seen an owl. Naturally, I was out at 6.30 the next morning and heard a (distant) hoot for myself. Where did it come from? A resident of Rycroft Road has heard the owl nearby during the daytime, so perhaps it is roosting there. Tawny owls are at their most vocal around now as they are already asserting territory; eggs are laid in March.

As for the new (for me) species, they were mostly fleeting. There was a grey wagtail (grey on top but yellow underneath) paddling around the edge of what is no more than a large puddle near the White House one day in mid-October, two treecreepers were accompanying a large mixed flock of tits that passed through the woods at the end of June, a collared dove visited our garden in July and a common tern flew over the Common in the same month. The only 'new' birds that hung around for some time were jackdaws, most frequently in the large trees near the White House. The jackdaws arrived early in October and I last saw them on 13th November.

If you think you know where the owl is roosting or see any unusual birds, please let me know; contact details are on the front page. *Peter Newmark*

What's Up?

New play area - Funds from Lambeth's Play Pathfinder Programme will become available to create a new play area on the Common next year or the year after. It will be primarily for 8-13 year olds. Early next year, the Friends will be involved in a process of consultation on where the area will be and what it will consist of.

The Rookery -The leak near the main gates seems to have been fixed but the water cascade in the gardens is still not operating; the burnt out pump has been replaced but leakage through the bottom of the pools continues to be a problem. Vandals have destroyed part of the back of the Covington Shelter.

Recent Events

Cowboys & Indians Treasure Trail, 9th August. About 40 children enjoyed hunting for letters displayed on 'horseshoes' and



'tepees' along the trails, and then it was largely over to their parents to try and solve the multi-worded anagram, in most cases with a helping hand from Diane, the Indian Chief, Lara, the Sheriff, or their deputies, recruited from the Friends.

Fun Dog Show, 6th September. More than 50 dogs turned up for this annual event, this year opened by the Mayor of Lambeth and judged once again by Dane Walker from the Streatham Hill Veterinary Surgery, this time together with Councillor Rachel Heywood. Thanks to many helpers at this event but especially to Shea Richardson for organising it and to Lord Dutton for running the raffle and generously do-



nating the prizes. Photographs of all the dogs that won first prizes are on our website. They include the photograph shown here of Daisy, the dog judged to be most like its owner.

The Big Draw, 20th September. Last year this event was a washout but this year the weather was kind and over 60 children enjoyed chalking over the ex-paddling pool in the playground.

Autumn Bird Walk, 8th November (having been washed out the previous Sunday). Around 20 participants notched up 17 species, including great spotted woodpeckers chasing each other around the woodlands and two jackdaws that flew into Norbury Grove on cue.

Volunteer Days, 15th and 29th November. A disappointing turnout for the first of these days but, nevertheless, most of the brambles threatening to take over part of the precious acid grassland area were up-rooted. This newsletter went to press before the second date ♦

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