



# Common Knowledge

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## April 2009, Issue 36

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### Cake Baking Competition



Are you an master baker or a novice? Don't worry, just bake a cake and enter it in our competition for the best cake on Saturday 9th May, as part of our Spring Fun Event on the Common. Bring your cake to the Rookery Café by 1.00pm. Judging, by the café's Graziella, will be at 2.00pm, after which the cakes will be auctioned for a local charity.

## Events, events, events

4th April - Spring Bird Walk, 9.00-10.30 am. Meet at the Rookery Café. This is a joint walk with Embrace Cooperation.

13th April - Easter Egg Hunt, from 2.00pm. In the Rookery. With the Park Rangers.

9th May - Spring Fun Event, from 12.00pm to 3.00pm. Kite flying, tug-of-war, giant chess, cake baking competition, bouncy castle. On the Common.

10th May - Annual Bird Box and Breeding Survey, 9.00-10.30am. Meet at the Rookery Café.

10th June - Annual General Meeting of the Friends, at 7.30pm. Venue probably Sainsbury's Café - please check.

5th July - The Manorial Common, a Walk to Explore the Origins and Natural History of the Common. Meet at the Rookery Café at 2.30pm. This is a joint walk with the Streatham Society.

12th July - *Cymbeline*, this year's Shakespeare in the Rookery, starting at 4.00pm.

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Plus the Friends will have a stall at Streatham Festival's Top of the Common Day on 4th July. And Embrace Cooperation has organised a Tree Walk on 11 April at 2.00pm and a Plant Walk on 21 May at 11.30am, both starting at the Café.

# Park Rangers

You've probably seen the Park Rangers ranging over our park – or rather Common – but do you know who they are, what they do and how you can help them? If not, read on.

In a nutshell, the Rangers act as the 'eyes and ears' of Lambeth Council's Parks and Greenspaces department. They patrol 64 sites in the borough – a few as large as Streatham Common and some not much bigger than a back garden – looking out for problems, reporting back to council departments and other interested parties, educating park users and offering advice.

The welcome sight of friendly Rangers on the Common is relatively new. Lambeth Council set up the Ranger service in 2004. At full strength there would be 18 Rangers plus their two managers to cover the borough; at present there are more like 12 because a funding shortage has led to a freeze on replacing those who have left.

So what do Rangers do all day? They have a few fixed duties – for example on our patch they have to open up the car park and Rookery in the morning and lock them up again in the afternoon / evening. The rest of their time they usually will be in one park or another either on the lookout for problems or responding to public information about misdemeanours. Something like half of their work is a result of bumping into members of the public who report a problem or want advice. Most of the rest comes from their own observations, with about 10% coming from phone calls or emails.



*Rangers Lara and Diane*

Asked what the most frequent problems are on Streatham Common or in the Rookery, Diane Nash and Lara Bonici – the two rangers who you are most likely to come across – said misuse of the Rookery, the playgrounds or the paddling pools, and vandalism of the toilets. Vandalism apart, most of the problems are a matter of ignorance. For example, despite the notices, many people are not – or claim not to be – aware of the fact that dogs are allowed only on the top terrace of the Rookery and even then only if they are on a lead, and that no music or ball games are allowed in the Rookery.

A problem that crops up frequently every summer, they say, is that of barbequing on the common, which is not allowed. A more egregious form of frequent misbehaviour is that of drivers who decide to take their vehicles across the Common rather than go around it, especially when they discover that the road that used to link the south side

to the north is closed off.

And what are the most unusual problems Diane and Lara have had to deal with? Top of the list are the day that seven separate wedding parties descended on the Rookery for group photographs, a case of children swimming in the Rookery pond and an instance of squirrels being fired at with an air rifle and a catapult.

Exactly how such issues are dealt with depends on individual rangers but certainly Lara and Diane find it best to be friendly, understanding up to a point, but firm in explaining what is wrong and why. They are seldom met with aggression, even though they have no powers of detention and are not able to issue fines. But their approach

works, they feel, and they almost never have to call in the police.

While not needing particular qualifications, Rangers get training in such matters as conflict avoidance, first aid, dog awareness, and health and safety. They also learn how to deal with homeless people, truants or drunks they encounter.

One place you are likely to run across the Rangers is at public events on the Common or in the Rookery. Some of these are relatively small events organised by the Friends, etc. The Rangers do not have to be at these but generally choose to be, for which we are grateful. Others they organise themselves – such as last year's egg hunt and giant chess tournaments or this year's treasure hunt and volunteer day. These are relatively new to our patch and happen only thanks to the dedication and enthusiasm of Diane, Lara and other Rangers, who have to make time for the events and have no budget for them. The Friends are also grateful to Diane and Lara for their usual presence at our committee meetings – the fact that they are held in a pub has nothing to do with it!

Remember that the Rangers are there for you as well as for the council. Next time you bump into one of them, stop and say hello and voice any concerns. The Common would be less congenial, safe and well looked after without them ♦

*If you want to contact the Rangers you can use email or telephone. The email is [parkrangers@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:parkrangers@lambeth.gov.uk) and the number to ring is 020 7926 6200. This is a call centre that will promptly pass your message on; emails may not receive such quick attention. If you report a serious problem, the Rangers should be on site pretty smartly. If you suspect you are witnessing some criminal activity, call the police on 999 rather than the Rangers.*

## Kites on the Common

There will be an exhibition of kite flying and a chance to test some kites out as part of the Spring Fun Event on 9<sup>th</sup> May. However, we are sorry to say that there will be no Kite Day on the Common this year, as Bob Colover, who has run the Kite Day for the Friends for the past 11 years, has decided to take a break – and well-earned it is, too. We thank Bob enormously for his past dedication and commitment and hope he will be sufficiently refreshed to bring Kite Day back to the Common in 2010 ♦

## Frustrations

Two year's ago, and after a lot of work, the Friends, together with the Common's Management Advisory Committee, produced a Vision Document, setting out a future for Streatham Common and the Rookery. Inevitably, several of the proposals require funds and, in order to have a chance of procuring funds, a detailed management plan, including costings, needs to be in place. To produce such a plan, however, is beyond the expertise of the Friends, so we asked Lambeth Council if they would help, as they did with production of the Vision Document in the first place. The disappointing reply from Peter Jones, Divisional Director Cultural Services, included the following:

*“Developing a management plan remains a high priority. However, I regret there are not the resources at the present time to allocate a project officer to assist the group or develop the management plan in-house within the Parks team. ....We will however keep this under review.”*

We understand that the same applies to the council's laudable hope of having the Rookery awarded a Green Flag Award. This, too, requires a management plan and again there are no funds at present to produce one ♦

# Volunteering

## Volunteer Day

Thanks to Park Rangers, Diane Nash and Lara Bonici, a successful volunteer's day was held on the Common on 1st March. Iain Boulton, the Parks Projects Officer, instructed us in the proper use of the many tools provided and around a dozen locals put in their hard labour over the course of the day. Most of the work was devoted to removing the brambles that had overgrown the remaining small patches of gorse at the edges of the woodland. Gorse, with its beautiful yellow flowers, should be thriving on the type of soil in this area and the plan was to allow it to do so.



On clearing the brambles we discovered that the small remnants of gorse that appeared to be growing at the edges of the large bramble patch actually had their roots at the other end of the patch. Evidently, as the patch has grown, uncontrolled, the flowering bits of gorse have had to keep ahead of the expanding patch in order to survive. By removing the brambles, we have exposed the very long and rather fragile branches that connect the flowering 'ends' of the gorse to the original root. If they don't survive, a future volunteer day may include planting new gorse.

That there will be more volunteer days, you can be sure. Thanks to those who came to this one, and we look forward to seeing more of you at the next, which will

be advertised on the Common and on our website.

## Opportunities to volunteer

We have a number of volunteers who kindly give their time to help at events but we are always on the look out for more. Many hands make light work!

As a volunteer, you can choose to be as involved as you like. You may choose to give just an hour a year, or to become more involved. Your choices are many and varied, and volunteering is a great way to learn new skills, meet people, get to know your neighbourhood and help improve the Common and the Rookery.

These are some of the things you may like to help the Friends with:

- Being creative - helping design or write newsletters, posters and leaflets.
- Getting fresh air! Helping as a steward at events or on volunteer days on the common, putting up posters or delivering newsletters.
- Helping with organizing events, including liaising with the café, council officials and other helpers.
- Or assisting with the more physical side of events - lifting equipment, setting up our gazebo, or shifting the furniture and barriers needed at events.
- Helping run our stall at events.
- Organising public meetings.
- Helping people learn about the wildlife on the Common.
- Assisting with fund raising and recruitment drives.

There will be an evening for volunteers on Thursday 30th April with committee members at 9 Braxted Park, off Streatham Common South, from 6.30pm to 8.30pm. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, please do come along.

Please let me know if you can come on either [gkpics@btopenworld.com](mailto:gkpics@btopenworld.com) or 020 8764 6060.

*Katherine Forster*



# Memories

The ponds of Streatham Common were originally all natural ponds fed by natural drainage. There were also springs all around the area, some of which, including those on the south side and off Valley Road, had medicinal properties. Some of the ponds have long since gone, including those opposite Leigham Court Road and in the extreme southwest corner of the Common, opposite Immanuel Church.

In the mid-1930s, when my personal reminiscences begin, the top pond, opposite the Rookery, had already been concreted over with the walkway around it. (The concrete wall outside the walkway was added during World War 2 when the pond was turned into an emergency water supply.)

However, the bottom pond – now in the playground – was still a natural pond surrounded by trees. It was an ideal place for small boys, like myself, to sail our model / toy yachts. The spaces between the tree roots were the harbours and piers from which the boats were launched.

From which ‘harbour’ the boat sailed and which way the wind was blowing decided whether the boat sailed to another ‘harbour’ around the pond or became stranded in the middle. It usually drifted to the side eventually.

## Bat lovers.

*There may be an opportunity later this year for somebody to become our local bat expert, after receiving training in bat surveys and leading bat walks from the Bat Conservation Trust, which is hoping to launch a Bat Champion project in affiliation with Parks and green spaces in London. If this might interest you, please let Peter Newmark know by email at [friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com)*

Some of the local lads took their shoes and socks off and waded in to collect the stranded boats but most of us were forbidden to do that as the locals, probably from the Greyhound and Pied Bull pubs, had a tendency to throw empty bottles and glasses into the water and these were inclined to break and leave sharp shards of glass at the bottom of the pond.



*The bottom (above) and top ponds as they were in the early 1900s.*



Just before World War 2, the bottom pond was concreted over and given a pathway around it, making the pond smaller. As with the top pond, an outer concrete wall was added during the war when it was turned into another emergency water supply. Neither of the ponds was accessible during the war as they were fenced off.

*Keith Holdaway*

*The text is © Keith Holdaway, and he also kindly provided the picture postcards. The second part of Keith's memories will be in the next issue.*



*February 2nd: the day the snows came. Scaling the 'barricades' to reach the best slope (far left), a snow sculptor, the crowds on the Common*



## What's up?

**Submerged paths** - this winter, once again, the paths at the bottom of the Common became virtually impassable after heavy rains. This is not an easy problem to solve as the whole of the bottom of the Common becomes waterlogged at such times, but clearly a solution could be found. The Friends have raised this issue with the Council, who may find the necessary funds to correct it before next year. I wouldn't count on it.

**Rookery** - it's good to see that some new lavender plants have been put in place on either side of the steps down to the gardens, replacing those that did not survive the original planting. Also good to see that the shelter has been repaired after it suffered some damage from the heavy snowfall in February, and that the collapsing fencing along the path towards the White House has also been repaired, albeit in a makeshift way.

**Local Nature Reserve** - there's a little progress to report in our plan to have part of the Common declared as an official Local Nature Reserve. Following a number of

meetings with council officials, a combined effort is underway to consult informally and then to produce the kind of management plan that is necessary for both Natural England and Lambeth Council to consider the proposal formally. We hope to have this finished by the end of April, following which, all being well, there will be a period of consultation before the formal consideration sometime later this year ♦

### Advertisements

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Steve Atkins 07973430295 or email [seaplumbing1@aol.com](mailto:seaplumbing1@aol.com)

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