



Common Knowledge

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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@googlemail.com

www.freewebs.com/streathamfriends/friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com

Join us on Wednesday 8th 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 - Friends' Christmas
party in the Pied Bull pub**

Looking ahead

We have recently witnessed two casualties of the current economic situation and almost a third. First came the news that Lambeth had decided to save costs by cancelling the public firework display on the Common. The display in Brockwell Park was also cancelled, but Clapham Common's display survived. Then we learned that the new Government had cancelled the scheme that was to fund an already planned natural play structure (see page 5). And finally, penny-pinching nearly meant we were without a Christmas tree at the bottom of Common this year. It seems more than likely that further cuts lie ahead, especially as green spaces are understandably not going to be top of the list for the considerably reduced funds that Lambeth has to juggle. If there are significant extra costs attached to the planned Nature Reserve or Community Garden or Green Flag for the Rookery will these also be casualties? Will Lambeth make sensible decisions? Or should we consider taking matters more into our own hands? Lambeth's attempt to push the 'Cooperative Council' model is based on the premises that empowering local citizens to look after their own patch is likely to result in better standards and better value for money (not least through more voluntary work). But it would surely be an impossibly tall order for a small group of inexperienced volunteers to manage anything on the scale of our Common. This point has been made quite forcibly to the council by the Lambeth Parks and Green Spaces Forum, which has stated that it is not the role of Friends' groups to substitute for the work of paid employees. Rather the groups and their volunteers are there to 'add value'. In addition the Forum has objected to a council proposal to remove restrictions on the use of green spaces for events so that more money-making large-scale events can be held. A period of consultation now ensues. Let us know your views.

Community Garden in Rookery Nursery?

The Friends public meeting in October discussed the idea of a community garden in the Rookery. The meeting was enthused by hearing from Therese Stowell about the community garden set up this year in Ruskin Park. The meeting then split into discussion groups, which produced lots of good ideas and a group of people who volunteered to develop the plans further.

What is a community garden?

Basically it is a space where everyone can come to grow produce and share the harvest. Unlike an allotment nobody has their own section and everyone joins in on communal tasks – sowing, weeding, etc. And everyone decides what happens to the produce. It is usually shared by members but some schemes sell a part to fund future activity or for good causes. Anyone can join and put in as much or little volunteer time as they are able.

Some gardens are just about growing vegetables, some include fruit or even flowers. Some are open to all, others are specifically set up to teach novice gardeners or have a wider social benefit such as working with disabled people. There's no fixed rule – other than it has to be democratic and accountable.



Where could it be?

The proposed area (part of which is shown in the photograph) is behind the brick wall in the Rookery and is what used to be a nursery for growing plants. Part of it is currently used by the contracted gardeners. If the project goes ahead, the council would renegotiate the contract so that the gardeners would be relocated or would share the space.

So what might it comprise?

That would be for the members to decide. Some of the ideas that surfaced at the meeting were:

- Not just growing vegetables but flowers and herbs to reflect the area's history
- A focus on providing growing space for people without gardens
- A desire to reflect the wide variety of people and communities of Streatham in the membership
- The provision of therapeutic activities

How would it be run?

There would be an agreement with Lambeth council who own the land. There will be a management group. It won't be a project owned by the Friends or any other organisation – it will be partnership of lots of local people and groups. So far a small group of people, including representatives of Sustainable Streatham and Friends of Streatham Common, as well as local residents, has volunteered to take plans forward. They will develop some ideas of how to broaden the membership, priorities for the project and how it can be managed. After that, the members will decide how it is run day to day - including how to share out work and produce. And after further consultation, a defined project will be presented to the council. *Stephen Blann*

If you want more information or want to get involved please contact me at stephenblann@hotmail.co.uk ♦

From Water Trough To Flower Container

Standing at the top of Streatham Common, opposite the Rookery Café, is one of Streatham's listed monuments - a large pink granite water trough.

Today, the trough usually contains a variety of plants and serves as a flower container, but in days gone by it contained fresh drinking water from which horses would quench their thirst while travelling along the High Road.

Written along the sides of the trough are the words "Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association". The Association began life in 1859 as the Metropolitan Free Drinking Fountain Association with the aim of providing pure drinking water to the public to help counter cholera and provide working men with a refreshing alternative to beer and spirits. The organisation was founded by Samuel Gurney MP, a nephew of Elizabeth Fry, the famous prison reformer.



The first of the Association's fountains was placed against the wall of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Holborn Viaduct, where it can still be seen today. In 1867, the remit of the Association was extended to include drinking troughs for cattle, horses and dogs.

By 1880, over 390 fountains and more than 400 troughs had been erected throughout London. Figures compiled by

the organisation showed that in one day it was not uncommon for in excess of 1,800 horses, oxen, sheep and dogs to drink at a single trough with over 8,000 people quenching their thirst at a single fountain in London at the height of the summer.

The Streatham trough was donated to the Association by an 82-year-old widower called William Ward, who lived at No. 4, The Lawn, Brixton Rise. Here he resided in some comfort, with Emily Whittingham, his housekeeper, looking after him, assisted by a housemaid, Elizabeth Gray. Also living at the house was Frederick Gray

from Hertfordshire who looked after the garden and did odd jobs around the premises.

In 1854, William founded the City of London School for Girls, which still operates today and counts among its former pupils Daphne Marchant, twice Mayor of Lambeth, who resides in Streatham

Common South, just a stone's throw from the old water trough.

William Ward was obviously an animal lover, and in 1880 he decided to purchase the trough so that the many horses pulling carts, wagons and buses along Brixton Hill and Streatham Hill would be able to refresh themselves from it.

On behalf of Mr Ward, the Association erected the trough on the eastern side of Streatham Hill, just to the north of Streatham Hill Station. The location was well chosen as it also enabled the horses that pulled the hansom cabs based at the nearby station to use it.

In 1895, the cable car tram service was extended from the tram depot opposite Telford Avenue to Streatham Library. The continued use of the water trough became impracticable as carts and wagons would block the tram lines whilst horse drunk there. It was therefore decided to relocate the trough to the bottom of Streatham Common, opposite Greyhound Lane.

A number of photographs taken before the First World War show horses making good use of the trough in its new location, with

dogs also drinking from a lower basin at ground level.

In January 1916, the trough was the scene of a sad tragedy when Ernest Hart, a 28 year old brewery foreman of Dingwell Road, Croydon, committed suicide there. He was found dying by the side of the trough having swallowed poison, preferring to die than be rejected for military service with the army.

The trough remained at the foot of the Common until 1974 when Streatham High Road was widened and it was relocated to its present position opposite the café.

At the eastern end of the trough, carved in the granite, is a simple inscription that records the generosity of an old gentleman whose love of animals prompted him to leave us this legacy. It reads "The Gift of W Ward Esq of Lawn House Brixton Hill 1880".

John W Brown

(Text and photograph © John W Brown)

Wanted !

The Friends need a team of volunteers to help with specific tasks at our four or five annual major events on the Common, such as Kite Day, the Shakespeare production and the Dog Show. The tasks are these:

- collecting any necessary equipment for the event from the Friends lock-up on near the Rookery.
- setting up our gazebo and stall, when needed
- putting away the gazebo and equipment in the lock-up afterwards

The gazebo and equipment can be carried but a car can be useful on occasion. The group will also be responsible for keeping the lock-up tidy and ensuring that equipment works.

If we get enough volunteers, we will be able to organise a rota so nobody would need to turn out too often. Some reasonably strong volunteers would be particularly welcome as would an offer to be team leader. At the risk of being ageist, it would be good to have some younger helpers, too.

*Barbara Wright, Chair of the Friends
friendsofstreathamcommon@gmail.com*

In Praise of Dead Trees

Trees on the Common can be felled by storms, council ax-men, disease or old age and every lost tree is a pity (and should be replaced). However, there is something to be said for dead or dying trees, too.

1. dead branches on still standing trees are a great place for birds to perch and see or be seen. For example, this September, a kestrel spent the best part of two weeks perched on dead branches and looking for prey in the long grass of the meadow above the tennis courts - so much easier than having to hover above the meadow! And it is not uncommon to hear, and then spot, a great spotted woodpecker shrieking for attention from the top leafless branch of a dying tree,

2. dying trees have softer wood, which makes them ideal for birds that create, or shape, holes in trees for their nests.

Woodpeckers are amongst those, as are nuthatches and ring-necked parakeets. Look out for parakeets nesting as early as January and listen out for noisy young woodpeckers in their nest come April or May. The soft wood of decaying trees also provides nesting sites for bees - on a warm day, check out the large tree in the middle of the road at the top of Covington Way.

3. dead or decaying wood is good for fungi. In autumn look especially on wet rotted



logs for a variety of fungi and look on standing tree trunks for large 'bracket' fungi sticking out off the trunks like a shelf.

4. piles of decaying logs are a fine place for invertebrates, not least the fabulous but threatened stag beetles, which can be seen flying in May or June.

The Friends have been creating some piles of logs in wooded areas of the Common to encourage stag beetles, fungi etc. Please don't treat them as a source of fire wood ♦

Apologies - in the last issue's account of how the ice rink was kept off the Common, particular acknowledgment should have been made to Joyce Bellamy for drawing to the attention of us all, but especially council officers, the specific protection conferred on the Common by an 1844 Metropolitan Commons Supplemental Act.

Celeb ☆ **Corner** ☆

Connections between the Common and two celebrities of their time have recently come to light. One is Elizabeth Mackintosh who, under the pen name of Josephine Tey, was a leading writer of detective novels in the years after the Second World War. She lived at 235 Covington Way until her death at the age of 55 in 1952. The other is comedian Benny Hill, who at the age of 17 during the Second World War, "endured what has now become a clichéd showbiz apprenticeship: traipsing around long-gone music halls, kipping in concrete air-raid shelters on Streatham Common, doing his Cagney impression for London impresario Harry Benet and becoming Assistant Stage Manager for a show at the East Ham Palace", according to author Andrew Collins. Whether Benny Hill ever frenetically chased Elizabeth Mackintosh around the Common is not recorded.

What's Up?

Local Nature Reserve - the period of consultation is almost over, whereupon Lambeth Council should soon be in a position to make the decision as to whether to go ahead with creating the reserve. Meanwhile the Friends have applied to the Big Lottery's Community Wildlife Fund for funds to create a Nature Trail. We envision a self-guided trail, with an interpretative board at its start, numbered way posts along the route and a leaflet providing information about what can be seen from each post.

Play Structure - government cuts have seen an end to the planned natural play structure for 8-13 olds. This was funded through the Play Pathfinder scheme, which has been cancelled a year short of completion. It had funded a number of projects elsewhere in Lambeth over the past two

years but unfortunately the one on Streatham Common was among those scheduled for this year.

Football / Cricket – work has at last been completed and all that is left is for the grass to grow over disturbed areas before the football pitches can be marked out and the cricket strip given markings and stump holes.

Rookery - the cascade is operating properly again and the wooden fencing along the paths near Covington Way has been nicely renewed. The Friends hope to see a Green Flag application made in January and have drafted their sections.

War Memorial - a new plaque on the war memorial at the foot of Streatham Common North was unveiled at this year's Remembrance Day service there ♦

Recent Events

September brought with it the annual **Fun Dog Show** and very successful it was, too. Around 100 dogs attended. Photographs of the winner of each category can be found on the Friends' website. This year's **Big Draw** in the playground in early October also went well, with numerous young-



sters armed with chinks adorning the dis-used paddling pool with imaginative and colourful pictures. An autumn **Bird Walk** in November was not helped by a relative

absence of birds but nevertheless a total of nearly 20 species were seen or heard, sometimes fleetingly. Three **Volunteer Days** organised by Park Rangers Diane and Lara in October and November resulted in some excellent conservation work, especially on the acid grassland. Finally, although not Friends' events, it is worth noting both the very successful **Pedal-Powered Cinema** put on by Sustainable Streatham in a marquee at the foot of the Common and the equally successful **Six Mile Race** Common Herne ♦



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