



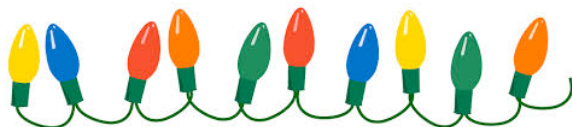
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Common Knowledge, the newsletter of the Friends of Streatham Common, is edited by Peter Newmark: tel. 020 8679 2908; email: peternewmark@gmail.com



PLEASE JOIN US

Wednesday December 6th
**Carols Round the Christmas Tree
and the Friends of Streatham
Common Christmas Party.**

Mulled wine and mince pies from 7.00pm and carol singing at 7.30pm, both by the Christmas tree at the bottom of the Common. The Party starts at 8.00pm in The Bull. Members only but you can become a member on the night.



Common Knowledge

From the Chair

We're approaching the end of the year now, the days are getting shorter and the trees are losing all their leaves. There's certainly no mistaking winter. We even have the sounds of a lone owl calling calling through the darkness just to add that perfect wintry touch. You'd think November would be a quiet month on the common but there's always something happening. On Remembrance Day a wreath was laid on behalf of the Friends to say thank you to those who fell. There were about a thousand people present at the war memorial, mostly people running various organisations across Streatham. You'd think it would be a depressing task but actually I find it quite uplifting to be surrounded by so many positive people. Also the new decorative lighting on the trees at the bottom of the common has been switched on. These should add some Christmas cheer and some additional lighting for the path.

It's been a good year on the common and some of our long-term plans are now coming to fruition. The building work on the playground began this summer and should be finished shortly. But what's hidden is the years of effort that go into making these things happen. I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone working on all the different projects across the common, the committee, the organisers, the volunteers and all our members. It can be hard work but it can also be very rewarding. I hope I get to thank you personally at our Christmas party. I also hope our owl finds a partner.

Wishing everyone a happy Christmas.

Mike Robinson

Cascade To Flow Again

Barring any last minute hitch, the long defunct water cascade in the Rookery should be flowing again early next year. News that a bid for Heritage Lottery Funds (HLF) for this, and for other restoration work nearby, is very likely to be successful was received in early November. Confirmation and the necessary sign offs and paperwork should have been completed by the time you read this.

The bid was led by Barbara Wright on behalf of the Streatham Common Cooperative (SCCoop) which manages the Rookery. Over half of the nearly £150,000 costs of the project will come from the HLF, but SCCoop itself and Lambeth Council have chipped in substantial contributions, with smaller amounts coming from Streatham Society and the Streatham Common Community Garden. The Friends of Streatham Common is also a partner in the project.

The cascade, which dates back to the opening of the Rookery in 1913, has long suffered from leaks as a result of ageing,



and patching the leaks up had become increasingly ineffective to the point where there was no use in trying. The entire cascade, including all the pools and the connecting gullies will now be resurfaced, starting in January. Later on, after appropriate research, the defunct Rock Garden that is nearby will be renovated and replanted. A healthy budget has been set aside to improve and enhance the planting in much of the Rock Garden while saving many of the existing mature specimens, such as the acers, which give this part of the garden its own atmosphere.

In addition, deteriorating crazy paving in the area will be replaced primarily on the steps surrounding the upper part of the cascade. Last, but not least, one of the huts in the Streatham Common Community Garden area will be converted into an education centre and there will a programme of teaching people about the heritage of the cascade.

To enable all of this work to be carried out effectively, the funding allows for three people to be employed part time — a project manager, a garden designer and a community gardener. Volunteers will be recruited for the Rock Garden project.

It will be enormously pleasurable to see and hear water flowing down the cascade again and to have pools of water harbouring aquatic plants, frogs, newts, water boatmen, dragonflies etc.

New Playground

Work is well advanced on the completely refurbished playground at the foot of Streatham Common that is on schedule to open before Christmas. After a stage of removing the old play equipment, the existing hardtop surfacing and the long defunct paddling pool (where once stood a pond), drainage was installed and the whole area was re-leveled and re-landscaped. New play structures are now being installed and the much anticipated new playground is starting to take shape.

Play structures arise



Gone are metal structures: wooden ones have replaced them. Gone is the equipment that inappropriately attracted body builders and gym trainers. Gone are two mature trees, removed to make room for play structures: but a number of new trees will be planted in their place.

The new wooden structures look as though they will encourage imaginative play and offer a wide variety of play experiences. Most are for younger children. Two table tennis tables will be in place for older children or, indeed, parents to use.

Although the banners around the playground mention that there will be a kiosk – providing drinks and snacks for parents and some income for looking after the playground – that announcement is somewhat premature. Lambeth has not yet definitely come up with the ‘phase 2’ funds for this, improvements to the public toilets and, possibly, more. We can but hope.

Landing On Streatham Common

Just imagine our common becoming a landing strip. Farfetched you might think. Yet out of the blue during the late 1920s it was officially announced that Streatham Common was to be designated as an aircraft landing ground. This was soon

made clear when official notice boards began appearing around the common. These carried the stark warning that the ground behind may be used as an ‘Emergency Landing Ground’.

All this began on the 10th May 1927. Not a day of any particular note, but two years after the formation by the Air Ministry of a new command, the Air Defence of Great Britain (ADGB). This new command was created to defend the country against aerial attack, and was initially placed under the command of Air Vice Marshall, Sir John Salmond. In early 1927, the commanding officer of the ADGB made a formal request to the London County Council, the body responsible for a number of large open spaces dotted around London. The request was for certain facilities to be made available for the emergency landing of aircraft upon their open spaces.

This had become necessary as the Royal Air Force was developing its tactics for aerial combat and defence, which entailed the carrying out of various air exercises over England, particularly in the South East. As to be expected during these early years of flight, there was the likelihood of aircraft engine failure over built-up areas such as London. This would see the possibility of aircraft making forced landings. It was therefore essential that the Air Force had designated landing places, particularly in London, as mentioned in the ADGB request.

In response, the London County Council soon agreed that notice boards would be erected on Streatham Common to indicate the boundary of the designated landing area. On these it would state that the ground is liable to be used by air defence aircraft during the hours of darkness, and that when the flares are lit, it would be very dangerous for the public to proceed beyond the notice boards. ADGB would make all the arrangements and supply personnel during air exercises, and that the council would be duly notified.

Exercises apart, it was not unknown for aircraft to make emergency landings on open spaces and Streatham Common was no exception. The drama of a plane landing on the common unfolded in early November 1933 when Pilot Officer Finlay, on returning from the Royal Air Force base at Hawkinge, Kent to the air base at Northolt, Middlesex, experienced engine trouble on approaching the Streatham area. Left with little choice he had to make an emergency landing, and seeing the green open space ahead made his descent towards Streatham Common. As Finlay recounted, the common was 'sprinkled with people' which terrified him as he brought his plane down, during which he had to 'swerve' to avoid hitting a woman pushing a pram. Fortunately he landed unhurt, although his propeller had caught the ground flipping the plane over and damaging the wings and the undercarriage.

Perhaps more like a Biggles adventure is the story of a pilot who landed his Gypsy Moth on Clapham Common, and who had the nerve to taxi his plane to a nearby garage to refuel before calmly taking off. Another flying adventure took place in 1936, when a banner-towing Avro biplane landed, without the banner, in the grounds of an asylum by Wandsworth Common. Not to be outdone, nearby Tooting Bec Common can claim a further soft landing, when the pilot of another Avro carried out a dead stick landing after losing all power.

Returning to Streatham Common, one flying enthusiast decided to pace out the landing strip, which probably stretched across the lower part of the common on a north-south axis, and made the length some 400 yards. Yet, despite all the planning and anticipation, there appears to be no record of any landing taking place on the common during any of the aerial exercises by the Royal Air Force over London. Perhaps it was not as suitable as the flatter and larger commons of Clapham, Tooting Bec, Wandsworth and Mitcham.

The ADGB scheme was rather flawed from the start because it required that the local authority be given sufficient time to light flares across the common in anticipation of an emergency landing. This and the improved designs of fighter and bomber aircraft, plus the construction of purpose-built airfields around London, such as Biggin Hill and Kenley, signalled the end of the scheme. In 1936 the ADGB command was replaced by the familiar names of Bomber Command and Fighter Command.

From 1936 the warning boards dotted around the common gradually disappeared. Once out of sight the 'airstrip' became only a memory to those who knew and frequented the common. Little did people know at the time that such signage was to be a forerunner of things to come. When war came in September 1939, Streatham Common again found itself serving the national interest and subject to the vagaries of war. For one pilot the common was a godsend when he had to make an emergency landing here during the hectic weeks of the Battle of Britain in 1940. Meanwhile, allotments had appeared on the upper slopes and a balloon battery occupied some of the lower area, along with air shelters sited nearby. Breaking the openness of the common rows of prefabricated houses were built along two sides of the common, and it was not until the late 1950s, that the free movement of users over all the common was fully regained.

Graham Gower

Christmas In Streatham

Digging through his vast collection of information on Streatham's past, local historian John Brown has unearthed a fascinating collection of facts about the festive season in our area and has gathered them together in a new book, *A Streatham Christmas**.

Among the numerous photographs in the book are a selection dating from the early 1900s that depict how Streatham High

A Bright and Happy Christmas.



FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW.

A Christmas card drawn by Streatham artist, Arthur Brown

Road used to be decorated for Christmas to attract visitors. They show the street festooned with bunting and flags and huge banners erected at the junction with Mitcham Lane proclaiming 'Welcome to All' and 'Streatham for Value'.

Many other photographs show Streatham blanketed in snow: the earliest of these was taken in 1887, and others dated 1911 show large numbers of people skating on the frozen lake on Tooting Bec Common.

While explaining the origins of Christmas Cards, John Brown gives details of prominent Streatham artists whose cards graced the mantelpieces of the nation. These include Donald McGill, Arthur Butcher (see opposite) and Ellen Warrington, whose painting of the Rookery

gardens was selected by the Princess Royal as her official Christmas card in 1920. He also provides a brief history of the many spectacular pantomimes staged at the Streatham Hill Theatre and the Odeon cinema, starring the likes of Arthur Askey, Frankie Howerd, Bruce Forsyth and Tony Blackburn.

Another topic is the annual Christmas Day swim at Tooting Bec Lido. This event has been held most years since 1908, regardless of the weather, with swimmers often having to break the ice on the pool before they commence their dip. Pictures in the book show a long line of swimmers shivering at the pool-side in the early 1900s before the start of their Christmas Day race.

The book tells wonderful tales of Christmas poultry poaching in Streatham in the 1700s and a brawl at the Christmas service held by the Baptists in their large wooden hut on wheels in 1790. A Christmas ghost story centred on the Odeon Cinema in Streatham High Road is also included.

It concludes with information on various Christmas charity events in Streatham, including annual dinners for the local poor and bequests dating back to 1617 for payments to be made to the needy in the parish on Christmas Day.

Mention is also made of the legacy left in 1648 by Sir John Howland, Lord of the Manor of Streatham, by which the Rector of Streatham is paid £1 6s 8d (£1.33) each year for preaching a sermon on Christmas Day in the parish church of St. Leonards.

If you are short of a Christmas present to either give or request, this book could be your answer.

* A *Streatham Christmas* is available via the Streatham Society's website streathamsociety.org.uk at a cost of £6.25 including postage and packing.

Woodland Works

Several projects have recently begun in the wooded areas of the common's Local Nature Reserve (LNR). These were the subject of a drop-in session held in the Rookery cafe on October 18th.

The most noticeable of the projects is the fencing off of a substantial area within the main woodland. Installation of the chestnut paling started in late November and it will probably remain in place for a few years. It is there to allow an understory of plants to establish itself. This in turn should allow retention of rain water, replenishment of the severely eroded soil level and successful establishment of new trees, which are currently noticeably absent. The area was chosen for its quite high levels of light as a result of the tree canopy being either absent or relatively thin. The fencing is necessary to prevent footfall that would make it difficult for new plants and trees to become established. This project is being carried out as part of London Wildlife Trust's Great North Wood Project.

Another noticeable project has been the partial rerouting of a path that is used to enter and exit the woodland near to the entrance to Norwood Grove from Streatham Common. The old path had become heavily eroded by the flow of run-off rainwater. This had exposed tree roots which were being damaged. Plans to divert the flow of rainwater from lower parts of the path into the ditch that runs along the edge of the common are under consideration.

Less obvious is some work that has been started in the wooded area between Streatham Common North and Streatham Common South. Here the plan is to lift some of the canopy so that the acid grassland underneath can thrive and to try and direct walkers along certain routes rather than have them freely tramping anywhere over the grassland, which is the largest piece of acid grassland in Streatham but is becoming degraded.

The last two projects have been led by the Streatham Common Cooperative's Mered Jones, who is the LNR Project and Volunteers Officer. They are wholly dependent on volunteers, and the larger the volunteer force, the more can be achieved. Work sessions run from 10am to 2pm each Tuesday and Thursday, with longer sessions on the last Saturday of each month. If you can spare some time to help, even if it is only occasionally, please let Mered know by emailing mered.jones@sccoop.org.uk

Recent events

*This year's **Birds of Prey Flying Display**, which took place on July 30th, was marked by a misbehaving falcon. During the first of two scheduled flying demonstrations, the falcon decided that the pigeons flying around the church tower at the bottom of the common were more tempting than the scraps of meat offered by the falconer. Despite many attempts, the falconer could not lure the falcon back and the second flying display had to be replaced by a talk. The missing falcon carried a transmitter and its owner eventually located the bird in Mitcham at midnight. At dawn the falcon was hungry enough that it was reunited with its owner. Despite the mishap a large crowd enjoyed the day.

*On August 13th, a **Family Tennis Day**, organised by Serious About Tennis for the Friends, was attended by nearly 40 people. Parents and children received coaching sessions and also tips about the game while they were playing on four mini courts.

*Iain Boulton, from Lambeth Council, led both a well attended and fascinating geology walk entitled **The Rocks On Which We Stand** on August 20th and a **Bat Walk** on September 8th. The latter not only produced more bats than usual but was accompanied at times by the hooting of a tawny owl.

Dog Days

The Friends would like to pay tribute to John Rhodes for the enormous amount of work he has put into organising the dog show for us for the past ten years. Not satisfied with that, he now organises a day for dogs to enjoy the paddling pool as well. His account of both events this year follows.

This year's Scruffs Dog Show, held on September 17th, was the 20th dog show, and my 10th year as organiser. When I took over we had about 50 dogs entering: this year it was a record 189, with about 2000 people coming to the show, which was opened by the Mayor of Lambeth, Marcia Cameron. Once again the event was blessed with fine sunny weather. Judges from Pets as Therapy and Battersea Dogs Home joined the usual judges from the local vets. The two most popular events were the Parade of PAT (Pets as Therapy) Dogs, which had 25 dogs in the ring, and the Prettiest Bitch competition, attracting a mind blowing 50 entrants. Music was once again supplied by Tony Guest and there were 25 stalls helping out with the fun on the day. The Rookery Cafe supplied a barbecue. The Friends once again supplied the volunteers, helped this year by the police cadets, so a big thank you for their

cheerful and polite contribution to the day. Photographs of the day were taken by Jo and our first aider was Denise. A big thank you to both of them.

The second Doggy Splash Day, an event that came about by accident, took place on October 8th. It allowed dogs to use the paddling pool before it was closed for the year and the money raised has gone towards keeping the pool open for another year. Police dogs were in attendance for the first time and proved a great attraction. Halley Allen provided a home-bake stall and raffle. Over 200 dogs splashed around in the pool on the day. Many people without dogs came along and just sat watching the antics of the dogs and enjoying themselves. Last year, the event raised £900. This year I was hoping for £1000 but we made £1200.

Because I had so many generous donations for the tombola stall on Doggy Splash Day, I am selling the left over items at the Rookery Cafe on most mornings from 9.00 am to noon and all day Saturdays and Sundays. Do come along and take a look. You can also buy the 2018 Dog Show/Splash Day calendar and Christmas cards.

John Rhodes



RENEWAL TIME. If you pay your membership annually, now is the time to renew it using the enclosed form. For any queries about renewal or membership, please contact the Membership Secretary by emailing membership@streathamcommon.org



*Merry Christmas and a Happy
New Year to all the Friends of
Streatham Common*



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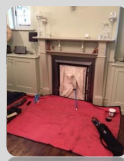


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