



Common Knowledge

August 2018, Issue 64

FRIENDS OF STREATHAM COMMON

WITH

STREATHAM KITE DAY &
STREATHAM DOG SHOW

CELEBRATING
20 YEARS

1998 - 2018

#NATURE | #CONSERVATION | #ACTION

As proclaimed on the cover, this year we celebrate 20 years of the Friends of Streatham Common (FoSC) as well as 20 years of Kite Day and the Dog Show, major events organised by the Friends. To mark the occasion, we have solicited contributions from several past Chairs of FoSC as well as from John Cresswell who, through his involvement in the Streatham Society in the 1990s, was instrumental in setting up FoSC, Kite Day and *Common Knowledge*, which he edited for the first couple of years.

We have also trawled through all the back issues of *Common Knowledge* to unearth items that demonstrate how the Friends of Streatham Common began and its major achievements. If there is one theme that emerges from this trawl, it is that history repeats itself. There seems never to have been a time when council budgets were not being cut nor when the management of the Common was perfect! FoSC has spent its first 20 years trying to fill some of the gaps, while acknowledging that Lambeth Council usually does its best given the financial constraints under which it operates.

The brief quotes below are from the issues of *Common Knowledge* dated as shown. The first three issues pre-dated the formation of FoSC and were produced by the Streatham Common Management Advisory Committee (MAC), which withered away as FoSC grew.

October 1997 "It is now imperative that a Friends' group be formed..it could help in seeking funding for projects, and provide the manpower for events and improvements".

February 1998 "First the good news... we recognise there are many people around with good ideas and wanting to give practical help. To harness this energy, we have set up a Friends of Streatham Common. Their area of interest will include the Rookery and Memorial Gardens and the adjoining fields, as well as the Common. ...The Friends will have greater involvement with the public, arrange events, create better wildlife habitat, provide resources for schools, search for funding - and much, much more."...A Wind Day has been offered to the Friends by Streatham Society as a new concept."

August 1998 "There can be no doubt that the Common's most consistent users are those exercising their dogs. While some may regard this as an area of conflict of interest, we must be realistic..... As a celebration of these canine users, there will be a dog show on Saturday 5th September."



November 1998 "Another on-going saga has been the refurbishment of the Kiddies' Playground. It was regrettable that so many problems were encountered during its erection. It was formally opened by the Mayor on October 24th. The Mayor also

Being the Secretary of the Streatham Society meant access to other initiatives and meeting persons with new ideas: if I achieved anything, it was by helping facilitate other people's plans. The Streatham Society had gained good status during the 1980s. We helped set up the Friends of Brockwell Park and the Friends of West Norwood Cemetery; we helped set up Streatham Against the Roads (which helped foil plans to put a new motorway across Streatham Common); we listed and helped protect buildings facing Streatham Common; and we ensured the London Loop walking guide included Norbury Park and the Common.

In 1996, when Lambeth Council decided to contract out the maintenance of Streatham Common and the Rookery, a Streatham Common Management Advisory Committee was set up to help monitor the performance of the contractors and to be proactive in the running of the areas. This committee proved us 'amateurs' rather out of our depth at the beginning of the Friends, two years later, when it had become evident that there was a need for local people to become active in running events on the Common and raising funds.

The first ever event organised by the Friends was March Wind Day, the forerunner to Kite Day. I knew of the aspirations of a local resident who wanted a pure kite event, but I suggested an event covering other aspects to make it more novel. Being a Japanophile and well aware of their concept of venerating Nature, I proposed an event, where as well as kites, there would be an artistic and scientific celebration of the wind with mobiles, wind-chimes, Aeolian harps, wind-blown seeds, etc. I failed to get sufficient support to sustain all these concepts, and the kites just had that "Wow!" factor to sustain it, anyway.

John Cresswell

planted two new willow trees." [There were still problems in March 1999.]

March 1999 "The Friends are to fund the restoration of the Wishing Well in the Rookery Gardens which was vandalised two years ago. It is likely to cost over £1000: the price to pay for mindless actions."

June 1999 "Desmond Masters, one of the Vale Artists, has kindly contributed a logo for the Friends. It took much agonising over how best to symbolise the



uniqueness of the Common. The leafiness was an obvious feature, but to this is added the wishing well - a symbol of the days when the

Common was a resort for the taking of medicinal waters."

April 2000 "As part of Lambeth's Parks Improvement Budget, we have been awarded £10,000 to install a series of benches and information plaques at the major viewing points on the Common."

Winter 2001 "The Friends want to repair the Covington Seat (in the Rookery) by the Spring.. It was suggested the Friends approach Lambeth with an offer to repair the seat as well as paint the gateposts to the Rookery and ask that Lambeth fund improvements to the car park area at the same time."

Summer 2003 "On the weekend of Friday, June 6th, twenty two travellers' caravans appeared from nowhere on Streatham Common. When they left on the following Monday [they also left] piles of builders' rubble including what looked like asbestos roofing, old washing machines, mattresses and much more."

June 2005 "Lambeth has given the Streatham Common Management Committee - on which the Friends are represented - £10,000 towards producing a Management Plan for the Common... Three of our own committee members are among those now working on a preliminary *Vision Document*."

Twenty years ago Lambeth Council organised every aspect of the Common's management - but suddenly they didn't have the funds to do the job properly or to run events and we had to step in. However, individual Council staff continued to give us all the help they could.

We took over events such as the Shakespeare in the Park as well as starting new ones such as the Kite Day (originally Wind Day), the Dog Show and an annual jazz concert by the Ken Mackintosh Big Band. I'm glad to see from the FoSC website that many of these are still going and that new walks and events have been added. For the millennium, with the help of the Council, we organised the millennium direction signs and a series of new benches. Streatham Common is on section four of the Capital Ring Walk and we provided information and pictures for this. *Founding Common Knowledge* was one of our achievements and I'm glad to see that it's still going strong.

One of our failures was the redesign of the playground. As part of the planning consent for the new Sainsburys the company donated money towards new playground equipment. Sadly we didn't really have the expertise to manage this and I see that our design has been replaced by a much more professional installation. I'm glad to see that local groups have been much more successful in restoring the Grade II listed Rookery Gardens than we were and that they achieved Green Flag status.

Gerry O'Brien, Chair 2000-2003

December 2005 "The Friends of Streatham Common website is in creation stage, held up a little as we search for a contemporary map of the common."

December 2006 "The more observant among you will have noticed the bird boxes and bat boxes that are now on many of the mature trees around the woody area of the Common, They were purchased by the Friends and put up by the Council."

August 2007 "After much hard work, many drafts and two and a half years, the consultative *Vision Document for Streatham Common and the Rookery* has finally been published." [This document was seen as a forerunner to a management plan for the Common but, alas, that has never been produced, although there is one for the Local Nature Reserve.]

December 2007 [By this time, the views from the benches installed in 2000 had become obscured by the growth of trees as they have become again.] "For some time, the Friends and the MAC have been requesting that the views are restored by cutting back the 'offending' trees and this took place in November."

December 2009 "In a competition decided by public voting, the Common has secured £125,000 to improve drainage and provide marked football pitches." Also "The idea of creating a community garden will be taken forward by the Friends and the Council."

August 2010 "Four months ago, Lambeth Council offered Streatham Common to Tesco as the best place for a 'temporary' ice rink that needs to be in place before the current rink is demolished and until a new permanent rink is built as part of the Hub. The Friends strongly objected to the idea..and joined with other groups to form the Hands Off Our Common protest group. Our protests have not been in vain as the council has now changed its mind."

Having held the office of Vice Chair of FoSC, written the Streatham Common Vision document and run the annual Shakespeare in the Rookery for three years, I took over as Chair in 2009 after the death of Gordon Richardson. The period was one of internal consolidation and a great deal of external change with an increased number of events based on a stable model of volunteer support and modest funding, combined with a determination to see the Rookery receive acceptance by Lambeth as a special place that it needed to protect.

The external changes took the shape of the reduction in Council funding which brought about the closure of the Ranger service and the dragging of the Common into the regeneration equation for Streatham due to the Council's proposal to place a temporary ice rink on the Common. Interest was growing in the idea of the community using the redundant plant-growing area in the Rookery and we made the decision to suggest that a separate group be formed to run this as the Streatham Common Community Garden, which is indeed what transpired after we held a public meeting on the subject. Also during my tenure the Streatham Common Management Advisory Committee merged with FoSC.

The year after standing down, I chaired the Rookery Centenary Steering Group.
Barbara Wright, Chair 2009-2012

December 2012 “The Friends have set up a petition urging Lambeth Council to support the Friends’ wish not only to have the Rookery restored ready for its centenary in July 2013 but then to have the gardens maintained permanently at a standard that befits their Grade II listed status.”

April 2013 “What better way to open the Streatham Common Nature Trail, funded

by the Friends, than the first weekend of spring, I asked myself? The weather would be fair, the first buds would be on the trees and the birds would be in full song. So it was that on 23rd March, 27 hardy souls braved the snow showers that obscured the bud-less trees and silenced the birds to witness David Lindo unveil the trail’s information board and then lead the group around the trail knee-deep in mud..... The areas through which the trail passes have very recently been designated as a Local Nature Reserve by Lambeth Council.”

August 2013 “On July 23rd 2013 the Rookery on Streatham Common celebrated 100 years since it opened as a public garden....As part of the plans for the Rookery’s centenary, an application was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore the Rookery to its past glory.... The bid to the HLF was prepared by local volunteers, mainly from the Friends of Streatham Common....On June 6th we heard that the bid was successful.” [The HLF money enabled re-planting of the White Garden and some of the Old English Garden, new signage about the Rookery and some re-laying of the crazy paving. Also in early 2013, Lambeth Council secured Green Flag status for the Rookery and the Friends gave a new centenary sundial to the Rookery, having previously presented a new figure for the fountain.]



August 2013 “As you may already be aware, Lambeth is now consulting on their Co-operative Parks Programs...As part of this process, the Friends are proposing setting up a local co-operative to manage Streatham Common.” [SCCoop, the Streatham Common Co-operative, eventually started operating early in 2015, but only in the Rookery, although it now also operates in the Local Nature Reserve and the Paddling Pool.]

April 2014 “Streatham Common Community Garden, working in partnership with the Friends of Streatham Common and Lambeth Council, has now started to restore the Rookery Orchard to its original function...On 23 February, 20 volunteers... helped plant nine apple and three pear trees.”

August 2015 “Over the past year, residents, the Friends of Streatham Common, SCCoop and others have campaigned to get long overdue investment into Streatham Common...now we have a commitment for £1 million to redevelop the playground and lower yard area...The Friends have commissioned the company LUC to draw up some draft plans.” [The new playground opened at the end of 2017: work on the yard area has yet to begin.]

August 2016 “It’s official, the Friends of Streatham Common became a registered charity on 6th May.”

December 2016 [The first] “Doggy Splash Day took place after the paddling pool had been closed for the year, and gave 150 dogs the chance to frolic in the water and the pool a chance to open again to the public next year.” [The money raised contributed to the cost of running the paddling pool, following SCCoop’s decision to keep it open after Lambeth Council withdrew any funding for it.]

August 2017 “Streatham Common is to benefit from a major new project run by the London Wildlife Trust...the Great North

When I took over as Chair in 2012, we were facing both challenges and opportunities. The challenge was how to improve facilities and standards just as large cuts in the regular parks’ budgets were being pushed through. We were lucky - we had the centenary of the Rookery coming up in 2013, and Barbara Wright (my predecessor) was now able to dedicate her time to obtaining much needed funding for centennial restoration work through the Heritage Lottery Fund and in raising the profile of the gardens.

The centenary brought about a revival in events, from fund-raising quizzes, public meetings and comedy nights, to theatre and celebrations in the Rookery. Our long-standing events, such as Kite Day and the Dog Show went from strength to strength. We were also lucky to be able to support and enjoy the Community Garden’s amazing restoration of the old nursery.

This all created a great momentum and enabled us to take advantage of another opportunity - Lambeth’s Co-operative Parks Programme - through which we were able to set up the Streatham Common Co-operative to take over management of the Rookery, build on the gains made from the centenary, fill some of the gaps left after the park ranger service was cut, and later save the paddling pool from closure.

We also lobbied Lambeth hard to get a £1,000,000 commitment for our designs for a new playground and to get part of the common declared as a Local Nature Reserve. We opened a new nature trail. The Rookery gained green flag status for the first time, we set up a park-watch scheme, and this newsletter went colour!

I enjoyed my time as Chair hugely. Thanks for the great support from so many volunteers. So many people care about the Common. I mean really a lot!

Richard Payne, Chair 2012-2015

Wood project ... aims to revive and reimagine a wood that once covered a large swathe of land lying south-west of London." [FoSC and SCCoop are major stakeholders in the part of this project that covers the Common.]

December 2017 "Barring any last minute hitch, the long defunct water cascade in the Rookery should be flowing again next year. News that a bid for Heritage Lottery Funds for this, and other restoration work nearby, is very likely to be successful was received in early November." [There was no hitch, the cascade is now flowing and other work progresses. SCCoop was the driver for the bid; FoSC is a partner on the project.]

April 2018 "Streatham Common has some magnificent mature trees on it ...but these trees will not live for ever...so if we want continuity of mature trees we need to plant new trees now...After careful consideration the council has agreed to plant a row of 16 English oak trees along the north side of the Common..The trees will be part funded by the Friends, and planted later this spring."

What's Up?

Beehives - FoSC's two beehives, just inside the gates to the Inkspot Brewery and Rookery yard, are now up and running, although you will have to wait until next year for honey. Training of volunteer bee keepers has begun.

Ground damage - although Lambeth has been carrying out work to repair the damage from events on the lower Common, it is far from recovered, in part because lack of rain has meant the grass seed has not germinated and in part because of continued use of the area.

Drought effects - while the recent long spell of hot dry weather has meant the paddling pool has been a godsend, new plantings have suffered. Most of the line of new oak trees on the north side of the

Common, in part funded by FoSC, look as though they are dead, as does some of the new vegetation in the playground and most, if not all, of the new tree whips planted in the woodland. Apart from the last of these, the cost of replacements should be covered by agreements with the contractors who planted them.

Rookery Progress

We've been busy on the Rock Garden refurbishment in all three parts of our work: research, design and implementation.

Researching the garden's history occupied us in the earlier months of the year. Recently a few of us have been writing up and editing this work. Image selection is yet to be finalised and permissions gained before publication as a leaflet and an online resource.

Since late spring, we have looked at planting design styles (amid changing social outlooks) from the Edwardian era through to the present day, woodland planting and planting in moist soils and bog gardens. We have also looked at an approach to planting design that looks wonderful and costs less to maintain. The volunteers have been working up their own designs for a display, coming soon.

Ruth Hennem, who recently joined us as Community Gardener, has also worked with volunteers on practical implementation. They have measured the Rock Garden to enable my drawing it up in AutoCAD. They have also made the first phase of plant removals and are removing random stones that take up planting space in the borders but which no longer contribute to the rock landscape. The ponds now have floating islands populated with native plants to provide a better environment for all the toad, frog and newt spawn. It was important to front end this part of planting to ensure water health. Most importantly, the pond and channel structure has been refurbished, the pump is working well and water flow is good.
Lee Heykoop, Project Garden Designer

Events Coming Up

August 19th, **Tennis Open Day**
10.00am to 2.00pm. Booking via
streathamcommon.org

September 2nd, **Kite Day** 11.00am
-5.00pm, on the lower Common.

September 7th, **Summer Bat Walk**,
meet 7.45pm by the Rookery Café.
Book with iboulton.lambeth.gov.uk

September 9th, **Scruffs Dog Show**,
12.00-5.00pm opposite the Rookery
Café.

October 7th, **Doggy Splash Day**,
11.00am to 4.00pm in the paddling
pool.

October 20th, **Fungi Walk**, meet
11.00am by the Rookery Café.

For more details go to streathamcommon.org

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