



# Common Knowledge

August 2020, Issue 70

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*Common Knowledge*, the newsletter of the Friends of Streatham Common, is edited by Peter Newmark: email [peternewmark@gmail.com](mailto:peternewmark@gmail.com)

Again this issue is half its normal size because coronavirus restrictions on activities and work on the Common have left rather little to report on.

For a similar reason, we have delayed the Friends AGM until October in the hope that we can then hold it at a venue rather than attempting an online meeting.

We still hope to run the Bat Walk, scheduled for 7.00pm on 25th September, starting by the main Rookery gates. Numbers will have to be capped and any regulations followed. Booking is essential: email [Iain Boulton - iboulton@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:Iain.Boulton@lambeth.gov.uk)

Mike Robinson, our previous Chair, has set up a volunteer group to help out with removing litter from the Common. To join, email [volunteering@streathamcommon.org](mailto:volunteering@streathamcommon.org)

## From the Chair

Well, I started my previous piece with the phrase “what strange times we find ourselves in” and here we still are three months later! Are we still to call them strange times? I hope everyone has managed to stay safe (and sane) throughout lockdown.

Meanwhile, over the last few months, the Common first had the opportunity to recover from past damage from events, with grass springing up on bare patches, but has since suffered from lack of rain and increased usage for exercise, leading to many new bare patches and paths.

As lockdown restrictions begin to ease, the Common has become more and more used. The playground has reopened, and it seems to be very busy every time I go past. I am also pleased to see the return of Streatham Football Club to the Common and what a fantastic sight to see the cricket pitch being used for matches on Saturday mornings.

The Rookery has been running on reduced opening hours for the past few months so that the gardening volunteers have been able to attend smaller sessions each morning before opening. Now it is returning to normal opening hours, but do not be surprised if you see some sections cordoned off so the SCCoop team can continue to work on them whilst maintaining social distancing. We are very pleased and excited that Mered Jones, the head ranger, is back with us and working hard.

Of course having the Common look so inviting has a downside as well. We have seen lots of people out enjoying the space, but on occasion a group spoils things by having loud music and/or barbecues and leaving huge amounts of litter behind. In addition we have had a number of illegal large gatherings where the police have had to come and disperse the crowds. At times parking has been chaotic along Streatham Common South and neighbouring roads. There is now a greater presence of traffic wardens in the area and we hope this will at least discourage illegal parking and alleviate the problem.

I hope everyone can make the most of the Common over the last weeks of summer, and hopefully by the next issue of *Common Knowledge* there will be something other than Covid to talk about.

*Tracey Williamson*

## Sensory Garden

Towards the end of last summer the Streatham Common Cooperative formed a partnership with British Home to create a Sensory Garden within the Rookery.

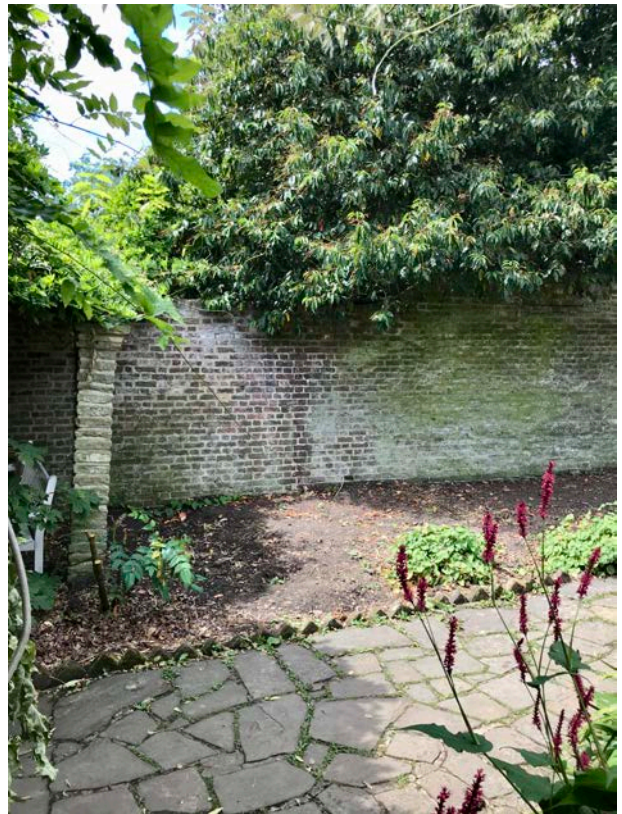
British Home is a charity supporting people living with neuro-disability and has been based at Crown Point, right on the fringes of Streatham Common, since 1892. The proposed area (see photo) is within the Old English Garden. It has been chosen for easy wheelchair access from Covington Way and it is an area that has been waiting for a purpose.

The Old English Garden was created in 1912 within the walls of what was thought to be a former kitchen garden. It seemed the perfect place to develop a Sensory Garden, a stimulating journey through the senses that can be used by everyone, regardless of disability.

Kate Daly will be working on the design for this project. As a volunteer garden designer for the Rookery, she has been closely involved in re-designing areas of the Old English Garden, which are looking particularly beautiful now.

Kate grew up in Streatham and much of her childhood was spent on Streatham Common and in the Rookery. She has incredible knowledge of its history and a deep understanding of plants and space working in harmony for all to enjoy.

The plan we are working on with British Home will involve raised beds, so that wheelchair users will have the ability to touch, smell and work with as many of the plants as possible. The materials used to create these beds are being discussed. The planting in the raised areas will be informal, trailing out of the beds, to soften and blend with the surroundings. Edwardian gardens were created with very natural planting within a strongly structured framework and this will be continued in the Sensory Garden.



Already the fantastic team of volunteers, under the guidance of Nick, the Rookery's head gardener, and Kate has started to clear the area. Any established plants already there will be utilised and if not appropriate for the space, then re-planted elsewhere within the gardens.

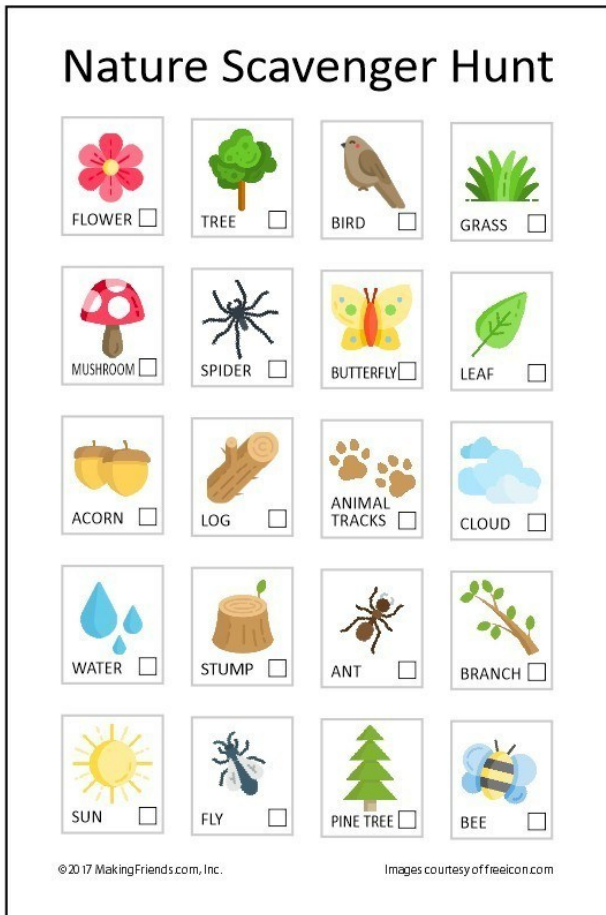
Our aim is to create an exciting, stimulating, therapeutic space filled with colour, scent, texture; the sound of grasses swaying on a breeze. Something for all. That's what's so wonderful about a Sensory Garden, it has endless possibilities. *Rebecca Mays*

## Long Summer Days

School holidays - a seemingly joyous occasion if we hadn't already spent four months with our children home schooling and the like.

So what now? Is our return to freedom going to continue or might we be confined to our homes and local stomping grounds once more?

Call me boring but I've discovered that my days (and my children's) go much more



smoothly when we have structure. As an adult, writing a schedule for each day can speed up the day, getting us to kid's bedtime more quickly or slowing it down so that we can get more achieved. Without it, I end the day thinking what the hell have I/we done?! And dreading the thought of another day.

Whatever we schedule in our day it always includes time outside in nature...the antidote to most things (especially caged children). That's when I feel so lucky to live where I do - near Streatham Common. With the grassy areas, the woods up at the top and the Rookery Gardens there are a host of activities and games to be had. Most of these cost very little or nothing at all. Rain or shine we are out there at least once a day.

What are we doing? A simple walk, a running race, taking the scooters/bikes out, rolling down a hill, flying a kite, playing hide and seek, building a den, a picnic, French cricket, collecting things to make a

miniature dinosaur/fairy garden, blackberry picking, a nature hunt, making a woodland bookmark or woodland cards to send to relatives (who need cheering up), leaf printing, making a pine cone owl, spotting how many different trees we can recognise and learning those we can't.

With a little effort and forward planning the days become relaxed and something to look forward to (just remember to take snacks with you so the 'hangry' monsters don't ruin it all!). If you throw yourself into the games as well (however much you hate the thought), I guarantee you'll have fun too.

There is so much inspiration on the internet and Pinterest etc. Look out for people with Instagram accounts like *fiveminutemum*. The library is another great source of inspiration for my family.

The Rookery Cafe is running the 'Eat out to Help out Scheme' which gets you 50% off food and non-alcoholic drinks.

How lucky are we to have the space of Streatham Common as our playground!  
*Claire Hopkins*

*"We hear (from people we don't know very well at all) that Streatham Common has the edge for dogging..."*  
*"And Richmond Park for deering. What's your point?"*

*So went the Twitter banter related to the unofficial, lighthearted World Cup of South London Parks, of which 32 were entered for the competition (on Twitter). Streatham Common narrowly beat Richmond Park to gain a place in the quarter finals, only to lose to Tooting Common in the semi-finals, who in turn lost to Crystal Palace Park in the final.*

**If you have any membership enquiries, [membership@streathamcommon.org](mailto:membership@streathamcommon.org) is the address to email.**

## Diversifying FoSC

I was only dimly aware of the Friends of Streatham Common (FoSC) before being asked to write this article. But I have known the Common well for over 30 years and most days I walk around it. My use of the Common increased after my daughter was born. As a toddler and right into primary school she and I were playing on the Common and in the playground nearly every day and we would invite playmates to join us.



They loved the open space and we have enjoyed many celebrations under 'the big tree' in the Rookery, which has presided over many of our life events and lent us her shade! We used to enjoy flying and buying kites at the annual Kite Day festival and I'm a recent convert to the wonderful yearly competition for dogs and their owners!

However, out of ten people I spoke to that live in Streatham, know the Common intimately and are passionate about the importance of this wonderful wild resource on our doorstep, only two had heard of FoSC. They recognised the aim of the organisation as one shared by the whole community. A common sentiment emerged though: an acknowledgement that it is run by a committed group of men and women, many of whom happen to be older and white. The evident consensus was that to outsiders the group appears tight-knit and impenetrable, making it difficult for the few Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) members who join to feel confident in

staying long-term and altering long established norms.

One comment from a friend was telling: when asked about her awareness of the FoSC, she said "I know of them, they're there protecting the Common and I would get involved if there was a campaign, but they're a small group of people doing their own little thing". This perception is unfortunate, if unsurprising, because of the hard work that FoSC puts into planning events that appeal to the whole community and into conserving the Common.

Speaking as a woman from a Black Caribbean background, I admit that the idea of conservation is one that is new to us; we are not very confident as to how we can get involved and make a contribution. However, many BAME people are involved/committed to voluntary activism and organise events and campaigns on a variety of issues reflecting their religion, profession or socio-political interests. Now more than ever our collective community has a heightened awareness of exclusion of BAME communities and the door is wide open for FoSC to promote itself and attract members of these communities to get involved. FoSC needs to become more visible through signs/leaflets on the Common and in places frequented by the BAME population of Streatham. Outreach could be diversified through members engaging with users on the Common to create a dialogue about the work of FoSC.

The organisation has to be genuinely ready to be open to people of a different age group, ethnic and/or cultural background, who may well have a very different perspective as to what Streatham Common is for and will want to see some of their ideas implemented. I believe that if the FoSC promotion to involve people from a diverse background is as visible as 'the big tree' is to all who visit the Rookery, then the organisation will find a surge of interest and new members from varied communities.

*Maxine James*