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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

the 21st streatham kite day

sunday 12th may 2019
11am - 5pm | free entry
streatham common
sw16 3bu

single & multi line
kite demonstrations
kites for sale
food & drink stalls
local community groups
live music: rapture riders

sponsored by
douglas & gordon
friends of streatham common



streathamkiteday.org.uk

Common Knowledge

From the Chair

Things are generally doing well across the Common. Our new oak trees had a hard time last year in the extreme heat but the trees that failed have now been replaced. The work on the cascade is now finally coming to a close and the last of the plants in the Rock Garden should go in shortly. Our bees are also looking very active and we hope to be selling honey this year. Even the brewery has finally started brewing its craft beers in the barn.

We have requested a fallow year on the Common with the intention of stopping the council's music events. Our main complaints concern the ongoing damage to the Common and how little money comes back to the Common but a full list of objections was sent to all members. A major difficulty has been that the council both decides on whether an event can take place and also profits from holding that same event. We will be attending a scrutiny commission to look into this side of things.

Events run by the Friends are quite small scale in comparison but they're held either to raise money for the Common or to benefit the local community. Unfortunately, finding volunteers for these events can be quite hard. We do have plenty of people signed up as volunteers but just not enough stepping forward when needed. It's good fun helping out and volunteering for just a couple of hours will give you a saintly glow that lasts for weeks.

Mike Robinson

Frozen Charlotte

This 7cm-high figure was dug up in the Rookery's Rock Garden in 1976 by gardener Beatrice Baybutt. It was identified soon after as a Frozen Charlotte, a type of doll that was wildly popular in Victorian times and still being made in the early 20th century.



The dolls were originally manufactured around 1850 in Germany and were typically naked, unjointed and made of white porcelain. They were primarily sold as bath toys and some of them were able to float.

The name Frozen Charlotte only became attached to the dolls once they were exported to the USA. A popular poem (and related ballad) at the time was Seba Smith's *A Corpse Going to a Ball*, telling a macabre tale of a girl called Charlotte who ignored her mother's advice to wear a coat over her ball gown in order to keep warm while her companion, Charles, drove the 15-mile journey by sleigh on New Year's Eve:

*"O, nay! O, nay!" young Charlotte cried,
And she laughed like a gypsy queen;*

*"To ride in blankets muffled up,
I never would be seen.
My silken cloak is quite enough,
You know 'tis lined throughout;
Besides I have my silken scarf,
To twine my neck about."*

Alas, on arrival she had frozen to death:

*They reached the door and Charles sprang
out,
He reached his hand for her;
She sat there like a monument,
That has no power to stir.*

Poor frozen Charlotte quickly gave her name to the porcelain dolls. Thereafter some were sold dressed in gowns and some laid in coffins. Other varieties of Frozen Charlotte had painted facial features, were painted black, or had hair. The dolls were made in various sizes and the smallest, about 2.5cm, were sometimes hidden in cakes. Manufacture continued until the 1920s so this specimen is unlikely to be less than 100 years old.

Thanks to Colin Crocker, another past Rookery gardener, for lending this object from his extensive collection of local artefacts.

A squirrel, pigeon and parakeet-proof bird feeder being put in place near the Covington shelter in the Rookery. It was purchased (along with two very large sacks of birdseed) by the Friends thanks to a donation by the late John Cresswell.



Van Gogh on the Common

Wouldn't it have been nice if *Van Gogh and Britain*, an exhibition that runs at Tate Britain until 11th August, featured the sketch of Streatham Common that the artist made while he was living in London. Alas it is lost, as acknowledged in the exhibition catalogue, which says that only about half of the artist's ten or so known London sketches survive. But it is worth telling the tale of how we know about it. (Even for those who have read about this before in these very pages, I can perhaps, add a little twist.)

At the age of 16, Vincent van Gogh started work at an art dealers in The Hague. Four years later, in 1873, he was transferred to the London branch of the company and found lodgings first in Brixton and then in Kennington. While in London, he spent a good part of his free time walking in south London and visiting the Royal Academy and other art galleries. Accounts of these activities and the artists he grew to admire are contained in letters he wrote to his

brother, Theo, and others. One letter to Theo, dated April 1875, mentions a drawing of Streatham Common.

When he wrote the letter he was lodging with the Parker family in Kennington Road. It was on the day that their 13 year old daughter died of pneumonia that a distraught Vincent walked to Streatham Common, carrying with him the book of the poems of Edmond Roche, a French poet. Inspired by his surroundings, van Gogh made his sketch of the Common on the book's title page. The letter still exists but the book, alas, has gone missing.

The letter has been translated into English and is displayed on the webexhibits.org pages of van Gogh's letters. Parts of the translation and the letter itself are reproduced below.

As you will see, a "Sketch by Vincent" is also shown on the web page. This has led some people and some other websites to believe the sketch is that of Streatham Common. But look at the sketch in the

original letter below and you will see in the foreground a figure in a boat on a rather large expanse of water.


Could this be the pond that was then at the foot of the Common, where the playground now stands? Even van Gogh's artistic licence could surely not stretch that far. Indeed it does not: further on in the letter, Vincent provides the text of a Roche poem that is included in the book and that was inspired by Camille Corot's etching of the large pond on the property he inherited from his parents in Ville d'Avray. It is this etching that van Gogh illustrates in the letter.

Will his sketch of Streatham Common in the book ever be found?

Dear Theo,

Enclosed is a little drawing. I made it last Sunday, the morning when my landlady's little daughter died; she was thirteen years old. It is a view of Streatham Common, a large grassy plain with oak trees and gorse. It had been raining overnight; the ground was soaked and the young spring grass was fresh and green.

Relevant paintings:



"Sketch by Vincent," Vincent van Gogh
[Enlarge]





The Rookery, as featured on a tiled wall in the Garden Museum in Lambeth. As the insert shows, the tile was donated by Joyce Bellamy, who has very recently stepped down from her long active involvement with Streatham Common. Joyce was a founder member of the Streatham Common Management Advisory Committee and, following its demise, joined the executive of the Friends of Streatham Common. With her long association with the Common and her knowledge of its history, Joyce was able to take all us upstarts to task on many occasions and would never let out of sight the Metropolitan Common Supplemental Act of 1884, which enabled the adoption of Streatham Common as a public open space.

Joyce has taken a special interest in promoting the views from the Common over the Wandle Valley, which informed the positioning of the millennial benches, in the fascinating geology of the Common and in the Rookery's centenary celebrations in 2013, to which she brought special knowledge from her long involvement with the Metropolitan Gardens Association. The Association's London Spade Award for 2013 was given to the Rookery Centenary Steering Group. Farewell and thanks, Joyce.

Events Coming Up

More details will be found on our website or via Twitter, Facebook and posters. Alternatively you can sign up on our website to be sent email alerts.

April 7th, **Spring Bird Walk**, meet by café at 9.30am.

April 20th & 21st, **Easter Egg Hunt**, in the Rookery.

May 10th, **Bat Walk**, book with iboulton@lambeth.gov.uk, meet by the café at 8.45pm.

May 11th, **Bird Box Survey**, meet by café at 9.30am.

May 12th, **Kite Day**, 11.00am to 5.00pm on the lower Common.

June 5th, **AGM**, 7.45 in the café.

June 15th, **Band in the Rookery**, 3.00-6.00pm.

June 23rd, **Family Picnic** to celebrate 21 years of the Friends of Streatham Common. On the Common.

June 29th, **Birds of Prey Flying Display**, 1.00-5.00pm on the lower Common.

July 7th, **Shakespeare in the Rookery – *Much Ado About Nothing***, starts 3.00pm in the Rookery.

July 13th, **Moths in Close-up**, 9.30am in the Community Garden.

July 13th, **Butterfly Walk**, meet by the café at 3.00pm.

July 17th, **Purple Hairstreak Butterfly Survey**, meet by the café at 7.00pm.

Youth Football

The number of young children enjoying football training and matches on the Common is growing every year, helped in recent times by three marked pitches. At present the club that organises all of this is named Furzedown United but from next season it will be re-branded as Streatham United.

Morris Nelson, the volunteer manager of the club, is passionate about supporting youth through sport and spends many hours each week ensuring that this happens. From small beginnings on Tooting Common, the club is growing year on year since moving here. Last season there were four teams, this season there are six (under 9s, 10s, 11s, 12s and 13s plus an under 7s development team). Next season he will be working in partnership with Sported to increase the number of girls playing in the teams and even to create a separate team for girls.

Matches in the London County Football League are played on Saturdays during the season. In addition, developmental sessions for younger children are held on Saturdays and training sessions for older children from 6 – 7pm on some weekdays during the season. When the season ends, there is a summer training programme. Training is at Bishop Thomas Grant School in the winter but on the Common from April. Morris is supported in all this by six volunteer coaches. Over 100 children play league football each Saturday.

On Sundays from 1.30 to 2.30 there is a free Community Kick About for families. On average, some 50 people of all ages participate in this but as many as 95 have turned up.

The Friends would like to thank Anthony Gold for its generous support of our Christmas party and Sainsbury's for providing the mulled wine and mince pies before the carol singing around the tree.

Council Changes

With a relatively new Chief Executive and a new Council Leader, Jack Hopkins, there has been the inevitable reshuffling of the council's structure. Should you be interested, Parks and Leisure Services now comes under the neighbourhoods subdivision of the Environment and Streetcare subdivision of the Residents' Services directorate.

More pertinent to the management of the Common is the fact that sports and leisure services have now been integrated with parks – hence "Parks and Leisure Services" – rather than being separate. In principle, this should make it easier, for example, to coordinate the repair of ground damage from events. A further change is that from April 1st, tree maintenance will be brought in-house rather than being contracted out. This should improve the tree management on the Common, especially as the budget for replacing each felled tree by a new one has been restored.

In another development, parks in the south of Lambeth now have their own Parks Development Officer, meaning the Friends (and others) now have one person to go to if, for example, asking about installing new benches or gym equipment on the Common.

Consultation on Events

Until May 5th, Lambeth Council is running a public consultation on events in its parks and open spaces in preparation for a new events strategy to start next year. The brief online questionnaire can be found by clicking on Consultations on Lambeth's homepage. There are only four proposals. They suggest more financial transparency, a simplified way of calculating the Parks Investment Levy (the approximately 20% of the income from an event that is ring-fenced for enhancements in the park where the event was held), more emphasis on having events on non-grassed areas to reduce the pressure on parks, and earlier

community engagement on proposed events. What's not to like?

There are no questions, however, about such contentious issues as how many large events can be held in each park, what the maximum noise levels should be, whether certain kinds of events are unsuitable for certain parks etc. Comments on these issues can be made in boxes provided. We encourage you to spend the five minutes it takes to complete the survey and to make use of the boxes.

Kisstory on the Common

July 27th and 28th is not a weekend to look forward to unless you like loud music, 8,500 fans, parking problems, anti-social behaviour etc. At a sometimes noisy community consultation session in which about 35 locals voiced their concerns about the event, which this year is called *Kisstory On The Common*, representatives of We Are The Fair (the company that manages the event) and Lambeth Events were told, in no uncertain terms, about unacceptable problems with the past large music events. Among examples were the anti-social behaviours of festival goers heading home and the failure to make good the damage to the ground caused by events that involve large vehicles driving on the Common. The full list of objections raised by the Friends can be found in the FoSC Response to the Kisstory licence application on streathamcommon.org.

Spring Signs

Look around and the early signs of spring are evident all around the Common. Celandines (strictly Lesser Celandines) are already flowering in damp areas. They are



hard to miss with their bright yellow star-like flowers and glossy dark green leaves. Celandines, a member of the buttercup family, are considered a

harbinger of spring and each year provide one of the first sources of nectar for insects.

Another blossom just bursting out is that of Blackthorn. Bushes of this prickly plant are dotted around the common.

Their tiny flowers are creamy white.

Come autumn, some of the flowers will have become sloes, small

purple plums that are inedible but when steeped in gin provide the colour and flavour of sloe gin.



Gorse bushes may have had a few flowers over the winter but are now at their best, covered in bright yellow flowers among the green, needle-like leaves. Are you one of those for

whom gorse has a strong smell of coconut? Not everybody can detect it.

Some trees are also showing signs of life. Hornbeams, of which there are a fair number around, are currently heavy with large pendulous catkins. The seeds of the female catkins will be pollinated by wind borne pollen from the male catkins. Each resulting small nut has a single wing attached to it, causing the ripe nut to spin as it falls.



Another tree springing to life is the Horse Chestnut. Their red-brown sticky buds are already

opening to reveal the early version of what will turn into spectacular candle-shaped structures carrying 20 or more flowers, some of which will deliver conkers in the autumn.

A succession of other plants and trees will be springing to life over the next few weeks. Added to which, migrant birds from southern Europe or northern Africa are starting to turn up, adding to the variety of bird song on the Common.

Happy Spring!

SCCoop renewed

The Friends were relieved by the recent news that Lambeth Council has agreed to provide SCCoop (the Streatham Common Cooperative) with core funding for another year, albeit at a considerably lower level. There had been rumours that the Rookery would instead revert to being managed by council staff.

The Friends were fearful for what this would mean for the Rookery's gardens, which have greatly improved since SCCoop took over in 2015. Much of this was a result of SCCoop building up a large and keen volunteer force, working both in the gardens and on the Common.

SCCoop has also been very successful in raising additional funds, both allowing the paddling pool to remain open after the council removed funding and enabling a programme of conservation work in the Local Nature Reserve. Had the council taken back the Rookery from SCCoop, the Friends feared that the volunteer network might fall apart.

Whats Up?

Cricket mat – problems of buckling with the recently installed cricket mat have been dealt with.

Ground repair – another attempt is underway to repair the ground damage caused by large events – mainly by a circus and fun fair last year but also by music festivals in previous years.

Oak trees – about half of the line of new oak trees that were planted this time last year parallel to Streatham Common North have been replaced as they did not survive last summer's exceptional dry spell. This year they will be looked after by Lambeth's new in-house tree team.

Local Nature Reserve work– selective tree felling has been carried out in the fenced off area of the woodland to allow more light in, the development of an understory and the prevention of soil erosion. Several potential stag beetle homes were created from the logs. In addition, a start was made on managing the seasonal stream on the eastern boundary and a large number of tree whips were planted on either side of the metal fence that forms the boundary between Lambeth and Croydon in order to create a hedge to enclose it.

Notice boards – the Friends have cleaned up and repainted the inside of the three enclosed notice boards on the Common.

Power point – Lambeth has installed an electric power point which the one licensed ice cream van will soon have to plug into rather than running its engine all the time.

A formal survey of the Common's butterflies was initiated last year, involving a weekly walk along a fixed route using an agreed methodology to record what was seen. If you would like to be involved this year, there is a training session for potential volunteers on Saturday April 20th. Meet Ed Malins by the Rookery Cafe at 3.30 pm.

Membership Information

If there is a letter enclosed with this newsletter asking you to renew your membership, please complete the form and return it with your payment.

Better still, please switch to paying by Standing Order, which saves both you and us some time and effort. You can set up a Standing Order via the enclosed form, or go to our website – streathamcommon.org – and follow the instructions for how to set up the Standing Order either with your bank or via PayPal.

If you already pay by Standing Order, you need do nothing.

If you have any queries about your membership, please email membership@streathamcommon.org

If you are not already receiving emails from the Friends of Streatham Common providing information about forthcoming events etc, all you have to do is go to the bottom of the our website's homepage – streathamcommon.org – put your email address in the box near the foot of the page and press SIGN UP.

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