



streathamcommon.org  
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## Members Christmas Party

**Outside at the Bull Pub,  
December 8th, 8.00pm**

Before the party there will be mulled wine and mince pies followed by carol singing starting at 7.30pm by the Christmas tree near the playground on Streatham Common

# Common Knowledge

## From the Chair

My husband, AKA my Proof-Reader, says I start with the same thing every year, but here goes anyway. As we head into winter and look forward to spending some quality time with family and friends over the Christmas period, let us hope there will not be any last-minute Covid restrictions imposed and that we also avoid the torrential rain that has blighted some areas over the past couple of winters.

Looking back, I was so pleased we were again able to hold some of our much-loved events. The Fun Dog Show in September was a great success and had a big turn-out both of people and our furry friends. The puppy category was the first to fill up, hardly surprising with all those lockdown puppies in the neighbourhood!

In the same month, we held a scaled-down kite day, which we re-badged Wind Day in a nod to the day's historical roots. It was a lovely day, albeit sadly short of the one thing kites need — consistent wind! Even so, it was nice to see so many people and children of all ages trying to fly kites and just enjoying the day.

Our AGM in October, at the Immanuel and St. Andrew's Church hall, was attended by about 25 members. After the business was concluded, we held a question and answer session followed by a very interesting presentation from local historian John Brown, who showed some of his vast collection of postcards of a bygone Streatham.

November's Doggy Splash Day marked the end of the paddling pool season. It proved very popular and raised almost £1,000 towards the upkeep of the pool.

As always, I'd like to thank everyone involved with the Friends of Streatham Common but especially the members of the executive committee and volunteers who continue to support all the effort that goes into the Common. Finally, I would like to wish all our members a Merry Christmas and a very happy and prosperous new year. I hope to meet many of you at our Christmas party.

*Tracey Williamson*



## A Painting And a House

To many artists there seems to be a certain magic about our Common. Its panoramic views and dramatic skies have caught the eye of a host of artists, rendering in the medium of their choice the views laid before them. To this host of artists can be added the name of Francis James Turner, born in 1840 and who lived at Firfield, 25 Streatham Common South, where he died in 1921. He was an accomplished and notable landscape and figurative artist and whilst living at Streatham, Francis painted the watercolour shown here, '*The Grove from Streatham Common*' in October 1919. The view looks across the open countryside of Norbury and down towards Green Lane and further to the Wandle Valley and North Downs. The view, from what is now Norwood Grove, also shows the immediate countryside before the spread of suburban housing of inter-war years.

His house was later to acquire further interest when it became the home of Leila Berg from 1955 to 1985. Leila was an established author and famous for her 'Nipper' series of children's books. Her

interest and activities also extended to the world of politics, such that many a meeting of the local branch of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was held in her basement. The basement also contained a small free cinema seating some 23 people and known as Studio 16. In it, the latest foreign films and musicals, plus the Bergs own locally made productions, some of which, it is said, having been filmed on Streatham Common, were enjoyed by friends and relatives. *Graham Gower*

## Café Post-lockdown

Better late than never, The Rookery Café literally re-opened its doors on November 2nd. Rather than only serving customers takeaways as early on in lockdown, or allowing them to sit outside, as happened later, they can now occupy tables inside if they so wish, although there are only six tables to allow enough spacing. Payment can be by card or via the App that has been in use since lockdown, but not by cash.

The outside area and immediate environs of the café remain a bit of a mess. Most noticeable is that the wooden perimeter

fencing is on its last legs. It is beyond repair and Lambeth Council plans to replace it with metal fencing of the type around the playground. The Friends, for their part, have agreed that some of the Parks Investment Levy (charged by Lambeth to organisers of events on the Common) should be put towards the cost of the fencing. It would be nice to think that the owners of the café would also make a donation. Lambeth Council is waiting for the contractor to provide a start date.

The area just outside the fencing took a real beating during lockdown as a result of customers waiting there for their orders. It is now largely bare earth rather than grass and almost certainly needs re-seeding. We are assured this will happen but not until the origins of the leak that is causing part of The Rookery lawn to flood has been traced.

## Moth vs Box

And the winner is Moth!

For the past few years, the low box hedges around some of the flower beds in The Rookery's Old English Garden have been under attack by the caterpillars of the box-tree moth (*Cydalima perspectalis*). This is a relatively new problem because the moth only arrived accidentally in the UK from South-east Asia in 2007, since when it has wreaked havoc wherever it has spread to.

The Rookery's gardeners have fought hard



Newly planted hedge

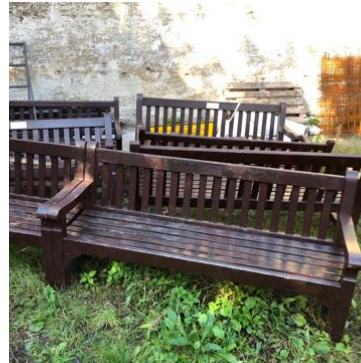
to keep the problem under control, using chemical and (species-specific) biological pesticides, but have now thrown in the towel.

With the help of a £2,000 donation from

the Friends, the box (*Buxus*) will be replaced by box-leaved holly (also known as Japanese holly or *Ilex crenata*). The gardeners and volunteers have already replaced most of one hedge and have ordered more plants to complete the job.

## Rookery Vandalism

When vandals pushed most of the benches on the top tier of The Rookery



down the slope on September 16th, damaging many of them, the news caused widespread disbelief and anger. It was not, of course, the first

instance of vandalism at the site - and there have two more involving some benches since - but it is certainly the worst.

In response to requests, SCCoop and the Friends immediately and gratefully started taking donations towards the cost both of repairs and of installing CCTV.

A total of nine benches were badly damaged. Six of these have been professionally repaired using about £4,000 of donated money but are not yet ready to be re-installed. The other three are beyond repair and will need to be replaced. In due course all the benches will be bolted to the ground to prevent them being moved.

With some reluctance, SCCoop and the Friends feel that it is now time to use CCTV to deter vandalism and identify those involved with a view to prosecution. It is not just the cost of repairs that has influenced the decision but also the time that SCCoop's staff have to spend on making good the damage at the expense of working on the gardens. What and where CCTV might be installed and how it is to be fully funded is under active discussion.

## What's Up?

**Plaudits** - to Lambeth Council for the speed with which ground repairs were made after the Kisstory music event on the Common in September. This year work began immediately after the event had finished whereas in past years we have had reason to complain about the delay.

**Covid** - the testing station that occupies the car park is due to remain where it is at least until spring of next year. Meanwhile, plans are afoot to create a garden within the Common's Streatham Memorial Gardens to commemorate Streatham residents who have died from Covid-19.

**Bins** - a number of rubbish bins on the Common need replacing either because they are worn out or because they are too readily emptied by foxes, squirrels and crows. The Friends have agreed to contribute £2,000 towards the replacements and the other £5,000 will be funded by the Parks Investment Levy. Do not expect the new bins before spring.

**Awards** - London in Bloom has given Streatham Common a Gold Award in the 'Commons of the Year' category and the Local Nature Reserve on the Common has retained its Silver Gilt Award in the 'Large Conservation Area of the Year'. In addition, The Rookery was given a Gold Gilt Award in the 'Small Park of the Year' category as well as retaining its Green Flag Award.

**Flower bed** - work has begun on the Share Community flower bed in The Rookery. Situated just to your left after you leave the Old English Garden heading into the Rock Garden and cascade, the new flower bed is being developed by SCCoop in cooperation with volunteers from Share, a south London charity that provides learning and wellbeing resources for adults with disabilities.

## Events Are Back

We were thrilled to be able to start holding our own events on the Common again this autumn. There were two Bat Walks, Wind



Day (it will be back to Kite Day next year), the usual Fun Dog Show and, as a finale, Doggy Splash Day, which raised almost £1,000 for the paddling pool in which it was

held. A huge thanks to the volunteers who made these events possible.

## Stuck For a Present?

How about a book with a local connection? Here are four possibilities.

"I haven't come to a 'special place'. It's not a pilgrimage to a grand sight of nature, a breathtaking spectacle to make you gasp or squeal and upload the video to Twitter in anticipation of viral acclaim. It's just a morning walk in my local woods at the top of Streatham Common." So begins chapter 16 of local author Lev Parikian's *Light Rains Sometimes Fall* (Elliot and Thompson). The book has 72 very short chapters corresponding, as we learn, to Japan's 72 microseasons in the year. Each season lasts for five days, and the author's local walks in each one, starting in February 2020 during Covid lockdown, inspired this delightful book.

Streatham resident and local historian supreme, John Brown, has two new excellent books in his series of pictorial histories of Streatham. They are *Bygone Streatham in Old Picture Postcards* and *Bygone Streatham Streets in Old Picture Postcards*. Both can be purchased via the Streatham Society's website.

*Without Prejudice*, a page-turning legal thriller by Nicola Williams, another Streatham resident, has been republished by Penguin. Originally published in 1997, when the author was a practising barrister, it has been reissued as part of the *Black Britain: Writing Back* series, selected for republication by Bernadine Evaristo.