STREATHAM SOCIETY NEWS

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BREAKING THE GROUND ON STREATHAM GREEN
Mark Bery and John W Brown plant a tree
to mark the start of the redevelopment of the space.
(Photo Mark Weeks)

50th ANNIVERSARYOF THE FIRE AT ST LEONARD'S CHURCH
5th MAY 1975
(See p.24)

STREATHAM SOCIETY MEETINGS

MEETINGS

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm in St Leonard's Church, Streatham High Road/Tooting Bec Gardens. Booking is not required.

Refreshments are available. Visitors are welcome but are requested to donate £2 minimum towards expenses. Check our website for details and any changes.

Our programme is emailed to members and advertised on our website, Facebook and social media. Several talks are recorded on YouTube for later viewing.

3rd June *6.30* **AGM** followed at *7.30* by **Lost Pubs of South London**
Talk by Sam Cullen. *AGM - see details p.31*

1st July **Streatham's Sleeping Beauty, Streatham Hill Theatre**
Talk by David Harvey and Liz Burton *(Also Wandsworth Heritage)*

2nd Sept **Lambeth Town Hall Formed and Reformed**
Talk by Robert Hardy *(Also for Lambeth Heritage Festival)*

EVENTS

(Also for Wandsworth Heritage Festival)

Mon 16 June **Tour of St Leonard's Crypt, Church, Tower & Graveyard**,
Led by John W Brown and Trudy Kuhn

Sun 22 June **Tours of Henry Tate Gardens, Park Hill**
Led by: *2pm* Robert Doyle; *3pm* John W Brown. *Booking essential*

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The Streatham Society welcomes articles of interest to our members, but the editor reserves the right to edit these. Opinions expressed may not be those of the Society. Articles and photographs may be reproduced only with the editor's permission.

STREATHAM ROUND AND ABOUT

PLANNING MATTERS

NEW SOUTH LONDON ISLAMIC CENTRE BUILDING

The South London Islamic Centre has occupied the old fire station on Mitcham Lane since 1977. In 2022 Planners approved the demolition of the old building following controversy and objections. Local headlines included, "London fire station will be bulldozed for mosque with two gyms, so locals don't have to pray outside."

New design for the South London Islamic Centre, Mitcham Lane

The centre has rethought its requirements and appointed new architects to produce new plans. The new planning permission requested is for the same demolition and erection of a 4-storey building (plus basement) containing an Islamic Cultural Centre for religious, educational, community and leisure use, including an ancillary gym, nursery, conference facilities, retail, and café unit and 2 parking spaces. Part of the reason was to get better visitor flow within the building and make it more effective. The Centre typically gets around 1000 visitors for the first Friday prayer session, and 400 for the second.

Next door's English Martyrs Church is objecting about the loss of daylight, privacy, and the fact the planned new building dwarves the church and surrounding properties as well as traffic and parking problems.

"MODERNIZING" ST THOMAS CHURCH

Plans to graft a modern frontage onto St Thomas Church, Telford Avenue, has attracted huge criticism from local residents. "A plague of brutality on parishioners," a "monstrous marbunkle," and "a sacrilegious attack on parishioners" are just a few of the comments. The plan is for a wraparound modern frontage to the church in stone, Italian red marble, with automatic glazed doors. The church argues this will "evidence the life of the church" in the street at the west end. The extension will house administrative staff of the church, but objectors claim this will be used for events and commercialising the church more.

The current church building is a fine example of early Edwardian ecclesiastical architecture, fitting well into the neighbourhood adjacent to the conservation

St Thomas Church complete with Italian red bathroom marble

area. Designed by Sidney Smith and Spencer Grant the foundation stone was laid by the Lord Mayor of London and other notables in 1901. This replaced the previous church which was in a nearby temporary iron church built in 1885. Sidney Smith is probably one of the most famous architects in South London designing various libraries including Streatham and West Norwood, but also more famously was the architect for the building now used as Tate Britain. The Church is on Lambeth's local heritage list.

Alterations to a listed building can be accommodated depending on design and the host building. Sadly, this new build completely distorts the church's form and in no way does "the new" accommodate the old in this design. If blithely approved, Sidney Smith (and Spencer Grant) would no doubt turn in their graves.

STREATHAM GREEN: A NEW CHAPTER?

Will the ghost of William Dyce put in an objection to his monument being moved?

Plans for vitalising Streatham Green are being examined by Lambeth Council following extensive consultation with the local community. Key features of the new green are "amphitheatre" steps, low level planting, a sensory garden, natural play climbing areas and picnic tables. Wildlife will be attracted, and people will come and enjoy the new vision argue the architects. The pigeons though don't appear to have been consulted. The William Dyce Fountain, a Grade II listed monument in place since 1931, will be delicately (we hope) shifted some yards and now face Mitcham Lane. The fountain was erected in 1862 as a tribute by the local parish to Dyce, a famous Victorian artist, who was Churchwarden of St. Leonard's Church. But moving the fountain could cause challenges for Lambeth planning. There were reports a little while ago about a top hatted figure seen at St Leonard's Church. The person who witnessed this apparition was sure on looking at records this was William Dyce. Now Lambeth Planners are a

tough lot but may be inexperienced about ghostly objections and Lambeth's Local Plan certainly doesn't prescribe on this.

STREET PROSTITUTION IN STREATHAM

Steve Reed MP is running a campaign to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in Streatham. He's demanding extra police on the beat so people feel safe on the street and Streatham doesn't get a bad reputation. But how should this be tackled and what roles the police and the council including planning need to play?

Inevitably this isn't new and dipping into the annals of Streatham Noir history shows how other past social problems have been alleviated – most significantly Streatham's prostitution problem. For a long time the national media labelled Streatham as a hot spot for prostitution, and not just the exploits of well-known picaresque brothel owner Cynthia Payne.

So why was vice rife in a nice leafy green middle-class area unlike other red-light districts? It's a gritty story.

The Early Years

It's difficult to trace the first signs of prostitution in Streatham. Across London, Henry Mayhew's surveys in the 1840s and 50s showed the scale of prostitution linked to poverty – police records showing 8,600 prostitutes at work in London. Lambeth probably closer to the Thames was notorious for prostitution. But Streatham did see the arrival of prostitutes with the Magdalen Hospital for Penitent Prostitutes moving to Drewstead Road in 1869.

Some accounts claim the problem goes back to the Napoleonic wars with soldiers stationed on Tooting Common and prostitutes staying in the area. Other historical accounts claim prostitutes worked on Tooting Common back in the Boer War where army personnel were encamped before going to South Africa. What was probably more significant were the patterns of prostitution operating in central London in the late Victorian and Edwardian period. Though there is evidence of prostitutes living and working locally. In 1903 there was an ugly fight on Streatham Common between a man and two women, one of whom reported the *Streatham News* was reliably known to be a well-known prostitute.

Post World War One: Streatham's morality at grave risk

Post first world war saw a continued increase in prostitution in London which had been elevated during the war, particularly in the West End. This was mainly concentrated around clubs and bars and police grappled to contain the problem. Streatham popped up in the news in 1928 when one of its residents was convicted of taking bribes from owners of nightclubs in Soho to permit prostitution - Sergeant George Goddard, aged 49, a resident of Valley Road who was Head of the Vice Squad at Vine Street police station. In a high-profile case attracting great media coverage he had to account why he had nearly a million pounds (at

today's prices) in his bank account. Arthur Foxson, Manager of the Westminster Bank on Streatham High Road, was even called as a witness. Goddard was sentenced to prison with eighteen months hard labour.

If there wasn't public evidence of a large amount of prostitution happening in Streatham, there was a vigorous local debate about how it was affecting morals. In 1925 the Streatham Christian Council, with its claim that it was "unflagging in its fight for social purity", mounted a survey on the moral condition of Streatham. And prostitution was just one of the sins Streatham was facing. A year on, the Council at its meeting in Streatham Congregational Hall heard Honorary Secretary, the Reverend Ensor, put pressure on the authorities to appoint a woman police officer to patrol the Commons in the district, because of illicit sex happening on these commons. The Bishop of Kingston had already warned the meeting the danger of the feeling that sexual impulses must be indulged. But this didn't seem to prevent acts occurring. And one of the early recorded kerb crawling case was reported in 1938 with two men sentenced for kerb crawling along the top of Bedford Hill. The moral warnings from Streatham pulpits continued throughout the 1930s. In 1940 the Rev Everest, Vicar of St Anslem's Church in Madeira Road, stated Streatham's drop in morals came at a dangerous time when the nation was fighting for its life. Sadly, his own church was destroyed by a flying bomb in 1944.

The Post War Boom

The second world war triggered prostitution across London. The crackdown by police in the West End led to the suburbanisation of prostitution in London including Streatham. Rising car ownership was also key in stimulating more kerb crawling throughout the 1950s, stretching the resources of the police. In 1954, PC Arthur "Nobby" Clark retired as Streatham's one-man Vice Squad, responsible for routing out street bookies, gaming houses and prostitutes. His success evidently was due to him having silver hair and a scholarly air, so in plain clothes wasn't suspected to be a police officer and could nab the criminals. But in his retirement address he signalled the growing problem of prostitution around Tooting Bec Common and the problems this would cause.

This growing social problem in Streatham required an earnest public debate. Step forward Streatham's Rotary Club who in 1956 invited Miss Chave Collission of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene to speak to the businessmen at their three-course luncheon on the need for legislation to be changed and indecency to be punished. But there was sting in the tail of her speech as they were munching their roast lamb, when she stated that the laws "punish the women and let the men go scot free". And for men she observed, "It is a guilt complex they are trying to get out of their system".

Meanwhile continuing reports appeared of prostitution, police arrests and more police patrols on Tooting Common. The Common was becoming the lynchpin of the problem with kerb crawling and soliciting spreading to nearby roads. During

the 1950s and 60s, the notable roads in the area included (but by no means is this a complete list) Bedford Hill, Garrad's Road, Ambleside Avenue, Mount Ephraim Road, Mitcham Lane, Becmead Avenue, Woodbourne Avenue, Kingscourt Road, Woodfield Avenue, Mount Ephraim Lane, Babington Road, Rydal Road, Prentis Road, Tooting Bec Gardens and Baldry Gardens.

In the mid 1950's residents of Garrad's Road and neighbouring roads wrote to the Commissioner of Scotland Yard asking for more evening patrols. They spoke of eight to nine prostitutes regularly using their gardens for sex and women living in the area were frightened. Also noting that several families in the area had foreign maids, and these families felt a responsibility to advise them not to walk near the common at night. Once again, the pulpit warned Streatham of the grave implications. The Rev Angus McMillan, Minister of Lewin Road Baptist Church, warned about the huge number of prostitutes in London (and rising divorces and prison populations) causing a moral decay for Streatham.

1958: The Hyde Park of SW16

November 1958 saw the glaring *Streatham News* front page headlines "It's the Hyde Park of SW16" and "Tooting Bec Common where no girl can walk alone". The Streatham Rate Payers Association had taken up the cudgels in Streatham's fight against the burgeoning prostitution epidemic. They were miffed that the Met Police had failed to come to speak to their meeting where they advocated licensed houses, more bobbies on the beat and heavier fines to act as a deterrent. The following week's headline was "Do People Care" asking whether Streathamites were concerned about the nightly vice parade in that part of the Borough – they felt this wasn't gaining the attention it should. The Ratepayers Association fired off a letter to the Home Secretary to stop prostitution in Streatham - the response was the local police were doing all they can.

The Streatham News

Tooting Bec—"where no girl dare walk alone"

IT'S THE HYDE PARK OF S.W.16

Home Secretary gets protest about vice

Bobby, the man, ends up at the police station

Court hears of bag snatch

The Hyde Park of SW16

1959 saw a slight lull in prostitution with the passing of the Street Offences Act, where women could be arrested for loitering, with the first offence carrying a £10 fine and the third a prison sentence. Interestingly the first Streatham case heard after this new act was Margaret Goggin aged 22 who was caught standing by a wall in a road near Tooting Common. Her response to the court was that she was going out on a walk returning to her home via Garrad's Road. The case was dismissed by the magistrate commenting she shouldn't walk home in a road frequented by prostitutes.

Sex behind the gravestones in St Leonard's Churchyard?

Prostitution in St Leonard's Church Yard?

The new law failed to stop the problem and with the 1960s came a regular flurry of weekly newspaper court reporting prostitution cases. Edna Bowers aged 36 of Barrow Road was arrested for soliciting on Garrad's Road. Superintendent Robert Bateman Head of Streatham Police confirmed prostitution had appeared to be disappearing, but noted that several prostitutes had returned, but trying to allay fears boldly stated, "We are determined to stamp this out". Yet kerb crawling was starting to spread to other roads. In 1960 Fernwood Avenue residents complained to the Rev JP Hodges, Rector of St Leonard's Church, about growing prostitution in their area. This matter was also urgently discussed at an emergency meeting of St Leonard's Parochial Church Council when the Ratepayers Association alleged it was happening in their own graveyard.

Public concern was mounting and in 1965 The Streatham Youth Council published its damning report "The Lost Generation", laying bare the social problems in Streatham including prostitution, stating that morality was falling in Streatham's youth. The rise continued and in 1970 Lambeth Alderman Jack Westbury was quoted in *The Times* bemoaning the increase in Streatham saying that it had spread from the West End.

Streatham though of course had the right ingredients to fuel kerb crawling - major roads, Tooting Bec Common with its woods, nearby quiet roads, and particularly a growing demand in South London. A study in the *Journal of Venereal Disease* in 1970 highlighted that men from "mobile occupations" were far more likely to buy sex. Eighty-five per cent of those studied who had venereal disease had only picked up prostitutes on the street.

1980s: a Worsening Problem

By the 1980s the problem was endemic in this part of Streatham with prostitutes and kerb crawlers playing a cat and mouse game with the police. The police deployed different measures apart from just mounting more patrols. They looked at writing to the owners of cars spotted kerb crawling in Woodbourne Avenue. But

to add further insult to the injury facing Streatham's reputation, Cynthia Payne, brothel owner in Ambleside Avenue, was jailed for prostitution ensuring she became a newspaper headline for years to come. Her story is well known enough, though after twenty-five years we still don't know the name of the local vicar who frequented her premises.

Kerb crawling and soliciting were becoming starker and more aggressive. Gone were the days, as one journalist commented, such as when Duncan Sandys was Streatham's MP, when ladies of the night trolled for business in Becmead Avenue with the polite "Looking for a good time ducks?". In the early 1980s London Weekend Television's London Programme broadcast two documentaries focussing on the problems facing residents around Garrad's Road and the apparent inability of the police to prevent it. It was noteworthy that Balham also was suffering from the same problems as well, though in a different Borough and with a different Police team this meant a fragmented approach to the problem.

Streatham's MP William Shelton tries to get a grip on the problem.

In 1989 William Shelton, Streatham's MP, spoke graphically in the House of Commons of the plague happening in Streatham and acute distress for local residents. Harassment on the streets was deeply affecting women residents – there was one report of a twenty-one-year-old women resident who'd been physically assaulted five times in the previous four years by kerb crawlers. Residents each morning had to sweep away condoms from their gardens and garages. Shelton wanted more police – Streatham's vice squad had only four officers whereas Tooting had a vice squad of eight. He also wanted to bring in legislation for kerb crawling to be a traffic offence with a maximum fine of £1000. His campaign did receive a lot of media attention and support from MPs including fellow Tory MP Hugo Summerson (voted the most romantic MP in 1988), who spoke with direct experience, complaining that a car with diplomatic number plates had leered at his wife and tried to pick her up outside the House of Commons. But Shelton's Bill never made it onto the statute book. Ken Livingstone spoke for more than an hour to thwart its reading. He and some other MPs were keen to decriminalise prostitution so women could work from home. This was part of the broader policy debate of how best to tackle the problem.

Sir William Shelton MP tries to get a grip

Who were the Streatham prostitutes and kerb crawlers?

Late 1980s saw greater resident vigilance in protecting their roads, coupled with council action, and this began to lay some foundations for ameliorating the problem. Though the arrest level increased from 94 in 1985 to 1,158 in 1988 – noting that 30-40 women were continuously being re-arrested. Research showed the average prostitute was arrested 30 times and paid a fine of between £25-40, so

Condoms in the woods off Garrad's Road

on average were paying fines of £750 a year. With pricing at £10-20 for sex in a car and then the risk of being fined, inevitably they needed to get more business. And progressively more of the women had expensive drug problems with heroin and cocaine. Trends in arresting varied largely depending on police capacity and pressure on the police from residents in roads.

So, who were the prostitutes? A Home Office study on Streatham in the late 1980s revealed that most lived between two and five miles away. Yet in some cases they came from further afield and for some unexplained reason Streatham was attracting women from Wolverhampton. The majority of women had been in care or had suffered sexual abuse in childhood, and most did not have suitable employment prospects because of a lack of education and skills. Therefore, Streatham's prostitutes saw themselves as "career women" needing the money to survive just to make a living and pay off fines despite the known risks of being arrested. But it was a precarious life coping with violent clients, angry residents and evading the police. The general rule was they needed to "service" a minimum of four or five clients per day to make ends meet. They did acknowledge the effect of their activities on residents, but this came with the job. But many saw themselves as having a right to work on the streets and thought they were providing a necessary and useful service despite the increasing antagonism from residents. A well-known prostitute paid a friend £40 per day to walk behind her with two Rottweilers to avoid trouble from residents. Yet many thought Streatham to be a safe area compared with working in other parts of London and this was also the era of the Yorkshire Ripper.

The same Home Office study also surveyed the kerb crawlers. This was important in knowing what deterrents might work. Locals at the time estimated there could be 500 kerb crawlers in a busy hour around Garrad's Road and neighbouring roads. The kerb crawlers tended to come from locations some 4-6 miles from Streatham and on average were in their late twenties and thirties and a considerable number were married. Those on police records were less concerned about paying a fine for kerb crawling of £150-250, but rather the effect of publicity and shame. Those arrested frequently tried to evade arrest by persuading the police the matter shouldn't go any further. Wild excuses were rife. One arrested kerb crawler told police he was only asking the young lady whether Sainsburys was open in Streatham at 11pm.

Streatham's citizen power at work.

The late 1980s saw a government push for a multi-agency approach to tackling prostitution rather than just simply arrests. One problem with policing is that different Chief Inspectors had different priorities and even when police did intervene more it had little lasting impact. Angry residents affected started to exert their muscle with pressure on the authorities. A massive 89 per cent of local residents surveyed in this part of Streatham reported that kerb crawling and prostitution was the major problem in their area. House prices were under pressure and there were reports of people who'd innocuously moved into the area not realising it was red light district. Numerous roads had formed their own campaign groups – such as Woodfield Traffic Action, Mount Ephraim Traffic Action Group, the Woodbourne Group as well as the wider and influential Streatham Against Kerb Crawlers group. Solutions were attempted to disrupt the traffic with speed bumps. In other roads residents stood in their roads at 8pm for two or three hours to disrupt trade. But this involved reaction from both kerb crawlers and prostitutes and there were publicised cases of nasty attacks on residents. But the resident groups were successful about mobilising the different local interests and persuade the police and Lambeth Council to take different actions. Residents in the area interviewed were brutally honest about just wanting it moved on from their area. One said, "Once you've had the problem for a few years you think sod it, it's someone else's turn".

Traffic Management - the solution?

One concrete solution was the 1987 election pledge by Lambeth Council for a traffic management scheme to thwart the trade. A successful model had improved things in places like Southampton and Finsbury Park. This finally arrived in 1989 with a series of one-way streets and road closures below the High Road to make it difficult for kerb crawlers to do their pickup circuit. The scheme received widespread support with well over 500 residents supporting the initiative. But its implementation was delayed for three months as Lambeth Council needed to consult with prostitutes affected, causing angst from William Shelton MP and resident groups. The Council's women's rights activists group flagged up the detrimental effect of kerb crawling on women in the area. But Lambeth

Traffic sign in The Spinney to keep kerb crawlers away

Council's spokesperson said, "Prostitutes might be in more danger since they may have to move to less well-lit streets".

The new traffic management scheme became a lauded example of multi-agency working, and did have an effect in reducing the problem, though certainly wasn't an immediate end to the problem. Streatham police noted that the efforts of Tooting Police stamping out prostitution in their patch, just meant that problems shifting down the road to Streatham. And London trade was re-shaping with the crackdown in Kings Cross leading to a dispersal of prostitutes to other areas including Streatham. The local vice squad was augmented with more officers in an effort in tackling prostitution, though campaigners across the Borough saw this as potentially pushing the problem to other areas such as Balham and Brixton. Locally prostitutes working in Balham would move up Bedford Hill into Streatham if the police were cracking down and vice versa.

The squad operated with photo album of those arrested who had not paid fines but it was a thankless job of continuing chasing prostitutes. Officers only worked with the squad for six weeks as there was a worry they would become too familiar with the girls and even the prospects of corruption such as Sergeant Goddard had succumbed to seventy years earlier. One effect of enhanced police activity was that more prostitutes congregated on Streatham High Road outside the Odeon Cinema later in the evening much to the surprise of cinema goers. And the greater police crackdown in turn just meant more pressure on prostitutes to get more trade. In Woodbourne Avenue there were reports of a new "Highwaymen trend", with prostitutes jumping into kerb crawler's cars shouting, "Your money or I tell your wife".

Not in my front yard

Not in my front yard - prostitution on Bedford Hill

Despite road changes Streatham was still making the headlines in the early 1990s. The *Daily Express* had it as one of their top spots for London prostitution in its "Red-Light London" investigation. Mandy, a 21-year-old Streatham prostitute ,told the *Daily Express*, "With the risks of AIDs, the threat of getting beaten up by kinky punters and undercover all over the place, life is much harder. But when I think of the months I spent working in a shop earning less than I can make in one night on the streets, I feel the risks are worth taking."

The Saturday Times carried a triple page spread in 1994 titled "Not in my Front Yard", vividly outlining the urban nightmare affecting the genteel St Leonard's

ward, documenting the rebellion of local residents and the war between them and the prostitutes. It also showed the difficulties faced by the police, the futility of arrests and worries that cracking down shifted the problem elsewhere. *The People* newspaper reported that an Aids infected junkie was threatening punters in St Leonard's Ward offering £15 for unprotected sex. Keith Hill MP was investigating with the council the possibility of a council injunction. In 1998 ITV's documentary "Vice: The Sex Trade" went with under cover cameras on Tooting Bec Common and adjoining roads off Garrad's Road to observe the "routine tart sweep" as described by police. Sixty condoms were found in one small patch of woods off Garrad's Road.

What was evident though was how commonplace the problem was, almost as though prostitutes were becoming a permanent fixture of this part of Streatham's street scene. Chuka Umunna MP later in a Parliamentary Inquiry into solving prostitution, observed how living in Woodfield Avenue as a schoolboy the prostitutes on his street would chat with him on his way to and from school. Other residents didn't quite have the same friendly chats. The *Sunday Times* interviewed a Streatham resident who had found his three-year-old daughter in their front garden with a used condom in her mouth, used the previous night.

It's noteworthy that in a given week in 1997 there were an estimated 7,620 kerb crawlers in London. And just under one in ten males in London revealed they'd paid for sex in the past five years. Keith Hill MP, by now an expert on prostitution, a member of the Parliamentary All-Party Group on Prostitution chaired by Diane Abbott. This committee called for kerb crawlers to have their licences endorsed or forced to do community service. Lambeth Council suffered further embarrassment in 1997 with reports that prostitution had been taking place in the Council's Tooting Bec Gardens homeless hostel.

Naming and shaming

Police really only still had two options - chasing the prostitutes or the kerb crawlers. With kerb crawlers the police and council did try different techniques including funding an initiative to have high resolution cameras to film kerb crawling along affected roads – christened the "name and shame campaign". The council planned to send two copies of a letter explaining the driver had been seen driving in a red light area to their address hoping the driver's partner would see the letter. Another initiative was to ban all non-residential traffic from affected roads from 8pm to 4am.

Tackling the prostitutes also required other actions than just police patrols. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders were slapped on five women in the St Leonard's Ward, but this required the effort of residents to go to court to act as witnesses. With greater police on the streets by 1998 there was a decline of the number of women regularly patrolling the streets from 25 to 16. But David Yates, Chairman of Streatham Community Police against Vice, added: "Funding is the key. If we relax this pressure the girls will be back". And vice squads over this period in-

creased and decreased in strength with residents noting the consequences outside their homes. Streatham police officially had too many units leading to the Vice Squad being disbanded with just two intelligence officers - other officers were subsumed into neighbourhood policing teams. Councillors and resident groups bemoaned this reduction, worried of a resurgence of prostitution. But some police commanders felt they needed to re-prioritise officers to tackle violent crime. Arresting prostitutes always took up valuable police time, each arrest involving two hours of paperwork and then custody suite reports. Plus, once arrested the prostitutes were normally back on the streets within a couple of hours.

Getting out of prostitution

Mounted police patrols on the common 2008

The problem seemed to be more intractable and complex and a report by the Mainliners Working Women's Clinic highlighted the growing significance of crack cocaine. The Lambeth Crime Prevention Trust project commented, "Crack has become the new pimp". Yet what this did signal was greater support services for women facing drug addiction to help them leave prostitution. Police were acutely aware that arresting more prostitutes and kerb crawlers wouldn't solve the problem and thought was given to learning from cities abroad such as Stockholm who employed a more holistic approach to the problem. Chief Superintendent Roger Street of Streatham Police said, "The ultimate goal would be to encourage some groups to assist those women who wanted to get out of prostitution." This support from the council and charities started to be put into place.

But problems continued and an expanded vice squad was back in place with 9 officers including plain clothes and uniformed officers – and police patrols on horseback on the common. Concerns were raised about how effectively Lambeth police and the council have worked with their counterparts in Wandsworth to address the issue together. Anti-vice campaigners wanted an exclusion zone creating spanning the entire area on the borders of Wandsworth and Lambeth, and any court orders obtained to ban prostitutes and kerb-crawlers to be for the whole area. The council did serve injunctions on the three most prolific sex workers on Garrad's Road.

Gradually the problem did subside though even as recently as 2012 there were Police Patrols on horseback to deter prostitution.

Postscript

Whilst prostitution is less on Streatham's public agenda problems still face sex workers. Here is a harrowing story on one Streatham woman supported by the Spires centre selling and being sold for sex. It documents her working week and the risks she faces in her work with clients across London but locally in Streatham with clients at Streatham Hill station, and also in Norbury Crescent, Barcombe Avenue and Kirkstall Road. See: It's What I Know - South London Stories**.**

Tim Whitaker, Trustee Streatham Society

EVENTS

RECORDING PLANTS IN ST LEONARD'S CHURCHYARD

Eight of us spent a happy 75 minutes recording plants in St Leonard's churchyard, Streatham on Saturday 17th March, continuing the South London Botanical Institute's long term survey of the area. This was our first springtime visit for some years; we were able to record c.115 species, of which c.14 were new to the site. Thanks to Susan Simmonds for the photo.

Roy Vickery

FAMILY RESEARCH DROP-IN SESSION

Thanks to everyone involved in our drop-in session on March 27th at Tate Library Streatham. We gave on-line research help of a house or family search to about a dozen visitors. Our team were Marion Gower, Freda Graham, John W Brown and Mark Bery. We will consider another session later this year.

MB/JH

LOCAL HISTORY MATTERS

THE FORGOTTEN MEN

As a newly qualified Lambeth Guide the first walk I put together was the Secrets of Streatham Village. When I decided to walk the group along lovely Wellfield Road up to the old Well House, I was challenged to find stops that fitted with my theme.

Having halted at the Wellfield Centre to talk about the evangelist and philanthropist Arthur Blackwood, a lightbulb moment followed. A stop further up the road overlooking the railway cutting would continue the story. Blackwood had built his mission hall with railway workers in mind. The deep cutting through the hillside connecting Streatham to Tulse Hill must once have been a hive of industrious railway navvies.

As I read about the coming of the railways to Streatham, it hit me how the men who built the railways changed the face of Britain forever. I don't mean George and Robert Stephenson or Isambard Kingdom Brunel, fundamental though they were. I refer to the thousands of men who shovelled, blasted and cut their way through Britain to build the tracks. These were the navvies, named for navigators – a word previously attached to men who "cut" the 18th century inland navigation canals. Railways became the new canals and the name stuck.

Group of navvies with their picks and shovels
(Image Helen Hughes, Victorian Web)

Nothing on the scale of railways had ever been attempted before. Until this time, building a great cathedral or perhaps a Thames bridge were probably the most amazing feats of British engineering. The railways were off the scale in their vastness and technical specifics.

In 1856 the first line to reach Streatham was the West End and Crystal Palace Railway which opened two stations: Balham and Streatham Hill. Two further lines were then built across the parish and Greyhound Lane Station (later renamed Streatham Common) opened in 1862. Streatham Station followed in 1868.

Back in the 1850's, Wellfield Road, formerly Leigham Lane, experienced an increase in traffic. Luckily Lambeth council were not invented back then so this flow remained unimpeded. Wooden huts were built at the east end of the lane to house the navvies that were digging the railway embankment.

During this period of railway mania navvies lived in invariably poor conditions. Contractors were reluctant to accept the burden of housing their workers. Where navvies didn't sleep in lodgings or under the stars, they inhabited squalid communal dwellings or shanties. These were cobbled together from a variety of materials and stood only yards from the line. They were damp, unsanitary and overcrowded. Many a navvy community was overtaken by cholera, dysentery or typhus.

Navvies outside their hut, Leicester, 1890's
(Image Leicestershire County Council)

Towards the end of the 19th century conditions had improved and railway contractors were obliged to provide adequate accommodation. Temporary hutted camps at depots, made of wood or corrugated iron were built. However Streatham's railway arrived at least 30 years earlier, so I imagine that conditions were poor. Specific records are difficult to find.

Railway navvies had hard, often short lives. Their hazardous occupation meant they lived for the moment, especially those working in the tunnels. Health and safety was unheard of, and most men accepted the risk of injury, even death. As a result they worked hard and played hard - drinking binges or randies could last several days until their last farthing was spent. It didn't help that very often the men were paid at a pub; sometimes they were part paid in beer. Pay was good by the standards of the time, and isolation in terms of their nomadic lifestyle together with pride in their unique and prodigious feats of work meant that navvies stuck together rather than mixing with local communities. Unfortunately they had a reputation that preceded them and were frowned upon by polite society.

In the 1850's, George Barton, potman of the Five Bells, then opposite St Leonard's Church, used to take beer down to the navvies working on the railway. By saving his tips George was able to buy the licence of the Manor Arms in Mitcham Lane. Beer wasn't altogether a bad thing as the men required thousands of calories and copious hydration to do their very strenuous work. But the navvies' capacity for drinking was legendary, and on Sundays, their day off, they would drink at the Five Bells. Drunken fights often broke out, which the great and the good of Streatham would witness as they left their Sunday service at St Leonard's.

Five Bells pub c.1880
(Image Lambeth Borough Photos)

Enter Arthur Blackwood, a devout evangelical Christian and inspirational preacher who had come to live in Streatham when he married. Blackwood became increasingly concerned about the poor of the parish and the large number of navvies who had come in to build the railway. Since the beginning of the railway age in the 1830's the moral and spiritual welfare of the navvy had become a cause for concern and general opinion was that bringing religion to these rough and ready men was important. However the navvies seemed to have been neglected by the established churches in Streatham.

Blackwood bought a plot of land near the railway works in Leigham Lane (Wellfield Road). A tarred wooden building was erected which became known as the black chapel. Blackwood gave services and arranged social gatherings and events. It was hoped the services and Sunday school would bring an understanding of the Bible and enthusiasm for the message of the gospel. The wooden hut was replaced by the present building, now known as the Wellfield Centre, which Blackwood opened in 1867. The mission was so successful that people travelled for miles to attend. Most of the time it was overcrowded.

Wellfield Centre, Wellfield Road
(Photo TK)

Despite their hard living the railway navvies changed the way people lived and transformed the face of Streatham. Today we have no idea of the physical strength and staying power needed to perform the manual work of the 19th century. The navvies laid down a rail network which by 1900 interconnected every town and city in Britain.

Welcomed by those who saw progress and profit, there was also local concern about land loss and disfigurement and the creation of artificial boundaries and sub-areas. These influenced and marked out potential plots for future commercial and residential development. Streatham was now easy to reach and was a desirable place for commuters. Population increased from around seven thousand in 1850 to seventy-one thousand by 1901.

Next time you travel on the train through Streatham spare a thought for the navvies who carved out the cuttings, built the embankments and laid the track. They were the unsung heroes of the railway building era, and their remarkable feats of work and endurance were legendary. A forgotten secret of Streatham's village, and its transformation to something like we know today.

Trudy Kuhn

STREATHAM'S ROYAL JEWELLERS

In the hustle and bustle of today,s world, as the traffic races along the A23 and people dash to cross the road or run for the bus, how many have stopped to admire St Leonard's Church and its graveyard and wonder about the rich and the poor who are buried side by side in what was once an oasis of peace and calm, nestled in the Surrey countryside? It might surprise you to know that three, yes three! Royal jewellers are buried in the graveyard.

Robert Garrard died in September 1881, aged 88. The company that was to become Garrard jewellers was founded by George Wickes (1698–1761). Robert became a partner in 1792. He took sole control of the firm in 1802, with his sons Robert (junior), James and Sebastian succeeding him in running the company.

Queen Victoria's crown made by Robert Garrard

In 1843, Queen Victoria appointed Garrard as the first ever official Crown Jewellers, making numerous pieces of silverware and jewellery for the royal family, as well as being responsible for the upkeep of the Crown Jewels. In 1852, Garrard were given the responsibility of re-cutting the famous Koh-I-Noor diamond. He was also the official trophies and silverware supplier, dating back to the first Gold Cup in 1842, and made many famous trophies including the America's Cup, the ICC Cricket World Cup Trophy and trophies for Royal Ascot.

More recently, Garrard made the sapphire engagement ring given by Prince Charles to Lady Diana, on their engagement in 1981. In 2011, Prince William followed in his father's footsteps and gave it to his future wife Catherine on their engagement.

The company remained in the hands of the Garrard family until the death of Sebastian, great-grandson of Robert (senior), in 1946.

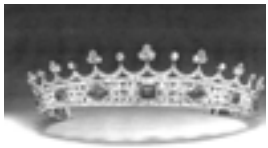
Cornel Constable was a Church warden at St Leonard's in 1760. William one of his sons was indentured on 7 July 1768 for 7 years (for a fee of £30) to Henry Young of Fleet Street, a goldsmith. By 1794 William had entered into partnership with Thomas Grey, already a prominent Royal jeweller and goldsmith located at 41 Sackville Street. One of his famous pieces made was St George and the Dragon in diamonds, rubies and emeralds, with the St George's shield made from one large diamond, surrounded by diamond-bordered with open-backed garter with buckle, tab and motto, all in diamonds. It was made for King George IV when he was Prince of Wales, in 1787/8 for £403 15s 6d. The following year further diamonds were added at a cost of £420.

Unfortunately the partnership only lasted five years and was dissolved on 5 December 1799. William moved a short distance from Grey in the same street and

remained there for a further five years. William died on 14 December 1803 aged 49, and in 1804 his stock was sold at Phillips auctioneers, extending over 31 days and 3975 lots.

Joseph Kitching was born in Streatham on 23 December 1782, and died on 8 August 1861. He was the son of William (1751-1799) and Ann (née Constable) who was the sister to William Constable (above).

Joseph was a former assistant to Thomas Grey the Royal jeweller of Sackville Street. He launched his own business, aged 34, when Grey planned to retire. In the *London Gazette* on 6 May 1817 Thomas Grey announced that 'declining years and ill state of health' had led him to sell his stock and four days earlier, on 2 May, it is recorded that Joseph made his first entry for his new retail jewellery business at Dover Street.



Queen Victoria wearing Joseph Kitching's crown

Working for Thomas Gray provided Joseph with a springboard to fashionable London, and the first ledger of Joseph, covering the period from 1817-21, still in the possession of the jewellery firm of Collingwood, records the earliest royal visitors being Princess Charlotte and Prince Leopold who appear to have exchanged gifts in May 1817 to celebrate their first anniversary. Other clients included the Duke & Duchess of Gloucester, the Duke of York, Caroline of Brunswick, the Dukes of Marlborough and Bedford. HRH The Prince Regent's earliest purchase, made on 12 May 1817 only ten days after Joseph opened for business, was of a turquoise and diamond padlock heart and key at a cost of £27 6s.

In 1824 the jewellery firm of Kitching & Abud was founded, they were appointed "Jewellers to the Queen" and received many commissions from the Royal household.

Perhaps the most famous commission came in 1840 direct from Prince Albert to make a personal gift for his new bride Queen Victoria. Prince Albert asked Joseph to make a sapphire and diamond coronet that he had designed himself. It would become one of Victoria's most treasured jewels and she can be seen wearing it in the 1842 portrait of her by Franz Xaver Winterhalter. It is now part of the V&A's jewellery collection. The partnership continued until 1853 when Kitching either left or retired. He died on 8 August 1861 and was buried at St. Leonard's, where he had been baptised.

Look out for the Streatham Society's tours of St Leonards graveyard!

Freda Graham

STREATHAM - A COLLECTION OF POEMS AND DRAWINGS (Part 1)

The Rookery

The Rookery
1995

If you know of such a place,
Tell me which park in London can
Better that tiny gem, The Rookery.
Hardly bigger than a football pitch or two
It has so much in so small a space,
A stream, a well, an orchard,
A garden (white), another (formal)
Woods, winding paths and
If you're not inclined to walk,
A sun-kissed terrace on which
To admire, or otherwise the view of Croydon.
One sad note only must intrude,
The passing of that splendid cedar,
Which was, for so long,
The pivot of this glorious place.

Pratt's

Streatham High Road
before Pratts disappeared

Oh for the time when I used to stroll,
"Lonely as a cloud",
Up Streatham High Road.
And there I'd wander into Pratt's
Not to shop, you understand,
But to … what? To browse? To reconnoitre?
Certainly not to buy.
I'd look at the carpets.
What to lay in our hall,
Or loo, or dining room?
Assuming it was something I could afford,
Which mostly it wasn't.
Then to the basement, down below,
To watch the latest in TVs
And listen to the Hi-est Fi.
What next? While down here,
Cooking gadgets are worth a look
Followed by fitted kitchens.
What's the time? It's only half past two.
Time for some furniture,
And it's some while since
I looked at all varieties of lamps.
My God! Is it three? It's time
I went and did the proper shopping.
Pratts is now, alas, long gone
And so is my recreation.

David Standfast

MEMORIES OF A SPRING DAY IN MAY 1975

Centuries of history vanish in church fire

Evening Standard 6 May 1975

It is not often you can remember so clearly an event which happened 50 years ago. Your wedding day or the day of the birth of your children are probably the type of incidents we can remember vividly, regardless how far into the past they occurred. However, not ever having been married, or having any children, I am now remembering what was for me an ordinary Monday evening on a spring day that was the 5th May 1975, the evening of which I can still recall so clearly in my minds eye.

As was my custom then, my Monday evenings were spent at my aunt's ground-floor flat in Adare Walk, off Leigham Court Road, where my family gathered to share dinner together. Ever since I, my brothers and sister left home, we all agreed to meet together at least once a week to share a family meal and this custom has continued down to the present day. My aunt was an excellent 'old-fashioned' cook and the meal we normally enjoyed was Shepherd's pie followed by trifle - for me it was the best meal of the week! We would then settle down to watch television and enjoy a cup of coffee and a slice of my aunt's delicious home-made cake or her lovely freshly-baked shortbread biscuits.

Once Kojak had solved his crime of the week and popped his lollipop into his mouth it was time for me to bid farewell to my aunt, my cousin and family and set off on my motorbike for my journey home to Lower Streatham at about 10.30pm.

As I turned into Leigham Court Road the traffic was bumper to bumper and remained so as I turned left into Streatham High Road. Weaving through the stationary traffic, as motorcyclists do, I made a slow journey along the High Road. When I reached the curve in the road by the Odeon Cinema a bright red glow could be seen on the horizon in the direction of St. Leonard's Church.

As I neared Sunnyhill Road, the police had almost given up diverting the cars down the road as the traffic was stationary. In the distance the night sky glowed a throbbing red as the flames engulfed the church in their devastating embrace. I decided to get off my motorbike and push it along the pavement to avoid the detour, and as the church came into view I could see the flames dancing wildly

into the night sky *(right)*. The road was completely blocked by fire engines and the brigade was making a valiant effort to extinguish the blaze.

I remember feeling so depressed as the enormity of the fire dawned on me and the tragic loss of such a huge part of Streatham's ancient heritage became apparent. On my way to work the following morning I passed the smouldering remains of the church; the roof having been completely consumed by the blaze of the night before.

That afternoon's copy of the *Evening Standard* devoted a full page to the fire, which was simply headed 'Centuries of history vanish in church fire'. The following day, the 7th May, a photograph of the church in ruins, was published on the front page of *The Times* newspaper, with the caption 'The historic St. Leonard's Church, Streatham, London, gutted by fire on Monday night'.

The next day, Thursday the 8th May, Margaret Thatcher, the recently elected leader of the Conservative Party, who had only been in post a few months, wrote a personal letter *(right)* to the Rector in which she said: 'Bill Shelton told me about the appalling fire in your church last week, and indeed I saw the photograph on the front page of *The Times*. I am so sorry, but what a blessing that there was no loss of life. Bill Shelton tells me of your determination to rebuild the church and of the support that you are already receiving from the community. You have my very best wishes in your task.'

Bill Shelton was Streatham's MP at the time and had played a key role in Mrs Thatcher's election campaign to become leader of the party and was subsequently her Parliamentary Private Secretary.

Immediately after the fire the future of St. Leonard's Church must have seemed quite bleak but talk of the resurrection of old plans for a massive roundabout to encircle the church to solve the problem of the bottle neck caused by the traffic at the junction of the High Road and Mitcham Lane were quickly brushed aside

by the Rector, Michael Hamilton-Sharp. Standing among the smouldering embers of his church, dressed in his familiar black cape *(left)*, he announced the church would be re-built and St. Leonard's would rise from the ashes, although at that time he had received no confirmation from the Bishop, or the Church authorities, that that would be the case.

Officially, the cause of the fire remains a mystery. However, earlier that evening the fire brigade was called out to extinguish a bonfire on the Glebe, an area of open land next to the church. It now seems likely some of the embers from this fire floated up to the roof of the church where they later ignited the timbers causing the conflagration spotted later that evening by a resident of St. Mary's Convent, opposite the church, who called the fire brigade. Unfortunately by the time they arrived the fire had taken hold and flames were leaping from the church high into the night sky. Despite firemen fighting the blaze well into the early hours of the morning, all that was left standing the next day were the tower and outer walls of the building.

The font in pieces

That morning, as smoke still hung over the remains of the gutted church, the Rector held a communion service in the graveyard using one of the tombs as an altar *(left)*. Fortunately the church had been insured and through the dedication and hard work of the Rector, strongly supported by his churchwardens, Parochial Church Council, the congregation and members of the parish, a new era began for St. Leonard's.

A new church was constructed within the outer walls of the old building to the designs of local architects the Douglas Feast Partnership. Douglas lived at 11a Streatham Common South and was a worshipping member of St. Leonard's Church. He, his associate, David Roberts, and the Rector shared a vision for the new church which rose like a phoenix from the ashes of the old building and enabled the work of St. Leonard's to continue on into a new millennium. Most of the day to day decisions concerning the rebuilding were taken by a small rebuilding committee consisting of the Rector and his two churchwardens, Charles Gibson and Andrew Hicks.

There is one other person whom I should mention in connection with the restoration of St. Leonard's Church who is often overlooked, Inger Norholt. This remarkable Danish lady in her 80s was responsible for the reconstruction, repair and renovation of the monuments, font, and carved stonework of the church. Many of the damaged monuments were taken to St. Andrew's Church, Guildersfield Road, in 30 large wooden crates where they were laid out on a scaffolding platform above the pews in the side aisle. There, in the dark and cold surroundings of the church, Inger painstakingly stuck all the pieces together under the most difficult of circumstances. What entered St. Andrew's as a pile of rubble left as the wonderfully restored monuments we see today.

I had the pleasure of meeting her at that time, surrounded by smashed stone and marble, and marvelled at the outstanding skill and craftsmanship she exhibited in restoring these ancient relics from St. Leonard's Church.

While the church was being rebuilt services were held in the church hall. Eventually, on the 22nd December 1976, the new church was rededicated by the Bishop of Southwark and by May of the following year regular services were once again being held in the building some two years after the fire. In 1999 the final phase of the rebuilding project was completed when the churchyard was landscaped and railings placed around its perimeter

Although, at the time of the fire, I did not attend St. Leonard's Church, I was a member of St. Andrew's Church, Guildersfield Road, where I was an officer in the 92nd London Company of the Boys' Brigade. Each year we would take new members of the company up to St. Leonard's Church for a tour of the building. Originally these were conducted by Philip Morell-Smith, and then later by Michael Hamilton-Sharp, who always attended the tours in his black cape. He was a wonderful guide and we all had great fun exploring the crypt, the belfry and squeezing through the small belfry window out onto the roof of the church to get a glimpse of Streatham from one of the best vantage points in the town.

By such visits I knew the old St. Leonard's quite well and my impressions of the church at that time was that it was a large, dark building with deep brown pews and with most of its windows glazed with heavy Victorian stained glass. The chancel was partly concealed from view by a large wooden rood screen and the walls were completely covered with ancient memorials, some dating back many hundreds of years, all of which added to the sense of darkness and enclosure of the old building.

What a difference to the St. Leonard's of today with its bright, white surroundings and sense of space and light. The fire was undoubtedly a major disaster but the rebuilding was an opportunity which was seized upon to create a new church blending the best of the old with the new.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the chancel which was originally designed by the famous Victorian artist William Dyce. This now provides St.

St Leonard's interior 1975 pre-fire
(left, photo Irene Booth) and today

Leonard's with a marvellous cathedral-like area of apparent antiquity, much enhanced by the inspired decision to place the 14th century effigy of Sir John Ward beneath a canopy of similar date at the west end of the church.

Today, St. Leonard's is a strong, thriving church, proud of its inclusivity and the vibrant role it plays in the daily life of Streatham. It stands at the very centre of our town, as it has for over a thousand years, and embraces the many challenges of its second millennium with great confidence, a strong faith and a firm commitment to continue to serve the local community to the very best of its ability.

John W Brown

JANE AUSTEN - SENSE & SENSIBILITY IN STREATHAM

To commemorate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Jane Austen in 1775 Maureen Stiller gave the Society an excellent talk on the author's life at out April meeting.

Some years ago I met Francis Short, of Thornton Heath, who had extensively researched the life of Jane, and in particular her connections with Streatham. We published a small monograph on the subject in 2011, which marked the 200th anniversary of the occasion in May 1811 when Miss Austen made a visit to our town to see her friend, Catherine Bigg-Wither, the wife of the then Rector of Streatham, the Revd Herbert Hill.

Jane's visits to her friend Catherine Hill, at Streatham Rectory in Tooting Bec Gardens, coincided with the period in which she was just beginning to see the fruits of her labours appear in print. Beginning at the time of the publication of *Sense and Sensibility* in 1811 she continued to keep in contact with her friends in Streatham right up to the time of her death in the summer of 1817.

Jane and Catherine Bigg-Wither had been friends from their teenage years when

both families lived near each other in Hampshire. Catherine was the fifth daughter of Lovelace Bigg-Wither, who inherited Manydown House, near Basingstoke, in 1789 and brought his young family to settle there. The house became the setting for regular dances and dinner parties, attracting many of the young men and women from neighbouring districts, and Jane Austen would often come over from her home at Steventon to attend these events. She formed a close friendship with the whole Bigg-Wither family, but as Catherine was almost exactly the same age as her, she soon became her favourite companion. Jane described Catherine on one occasion as "A nice, composed looking girl".

Jane Austen

In the autumn of 1808, Catherine became engaged to the Reverend Herbert Hill. Born and brought up near Bristol, this clergyman had recently returned from Portugal, after serving as the chaplain to the British trading community for some thirty years. As a bachelor of 59, he was twenty-five years older than his bride, a fact which Jane Austen notes sympathetically: "Tomorrow we must think of poor Catherine", she writes to her sister Cassandra on the eve of their wedding day. The ceremony took place at the church of Wootton St. Lawrence, near Catherine's family home, on 25th October 1808, and after a brief period as rector of a parish near Hereford, Herbert Hill was appointed in 1810 to the living of the old parish church of St. Leonard, in Streatham.

St Leonard's Church in the Early 1800s

Streatham Rectory in the 1820s

Jane Austen's surviving letters provide fascinating descriptions of her visits to Streatham. Her brother Henry lived for many years near Sloane Square, and this provided a convenient place from which to pay calls on other friends and relations in London. For example, as she tells her sister Cassandra in April 1811: "I wrote to Mrs Hill a few days ago, & have received a most kind & satisfactory answer; my time, the first week in May, exactly suits her; & therefore I consider my Goings as tolerably fixed. I shall leave Sloane St on the Ist or 2nd & Eliza (Austen) talks kindly of conveying me to Streatham".

In November 1813, it was Cassandra's turn to enjoy the hospitality of the Rectory. It was also hosting the visit of Catherine's sisters, Elizabeth Heathcote and Alethea Bigg: "You, & Mrs H & Catherine & Alethea going about together in Henry's carriage, seeing sights! I am not used to the idea of it yet. All that you are to see of Streatham I have seen already! …".

The Rectory seems to have been a hive of activity at this time for it was the home to a swiftly growing family. The Hills had just one child, Edward, on moving to Streatham in 1810, but within seven years another four boys and one girl were born. One can only imagine the effect this had on 'quiet Mr Hill', as Jane Austen described him, after so many years of bachelorhood.

In August 1814, Jane paid another call on the Hills and notes the prevailing atmosphere in a letter to her future sister-in-law, Martha Lloyd: "Some delightful Drives in the Curricle has been the sum of my doings. One of our afternoon drives was to Streatham, where I had the pleasure of seeing Mrs Hill as well & comfortable as usual; - but there is a melancholy disproportion between the Papa & the little Children."

At the beginning of 1817, Jane Austen was dying. Unable to travel far from her Chawton home any longer, she continued to write letters, visiting by proxy, as it were, through the reports of her correspondents. In the only surviving letter actually addressed to the Rectory, she sends greetings to the Hill children by writing to Alethea Bigg, Catherine's sister, who was visiting during an unusually mild spell of weather: "I hope this will find all the Streatham party well, neither carried away by the Floods nor rheumatic through the Damps. Kind love & good wishes for a happy New Year to you all, from all our four here. Give our love to the little Boys, if they can be persuaded to remember us. We have not at all forgot Herbert's & Errol's fine Countenances. Georgiana is very pretty I dare say. How does Edward like school? I suppose his holidays are not over yet." Jane died six months later in Winchester.

St Leonard's memorial to Herbert Hill

Herbert Hill continued to perform his clerical duties at Streatham well into his seventies until, in September 1828, aged 79, he died and was buried in St. Leonard's Church where a memorial slab on the floor of the church commemorates his life.

John W Brown & Francis Short

STREATHAM SOCIETY REPORTS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the 49th Annual General Meeting of the Streatham Society (Charity Number 283297) will be held at 6:30pm on Tuesday 3rd June 2025 at St Leonard's Church, SW16 1HS to transact the following business:

1. Minutes of the previous meeting - To be agreed and matters arising

2. Chair's Report

3. Reports and Accounts - To receive and consider the accounts for the year ended 31st March 2025.

4. Appointment and remuneration of independent examiner of accounts - To appoint an independent examiner for the financial year to 31st March 2026.

5. Appointment of charity trustees - Nominations for the position of Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and other committee members must be received by **3rd May 2025**.

All committee members are Trustees of the Charity.

6. Members' resolutions - Resolutions should be sent to the Secretary by **3rd May 2025**.

7. Any other business - To deal with any relevant matters raised at the meeting.

Mark Bery, Secretary 3rd April 2025

Following the AGM, at 7:30pm Sam Cullen will give an illustrated talk on **Lost Pubs of South London**

To aid communication with members it would be helpful to have members' email addresses. For those members who have not registered an email address with the Society and wish to be contacted by email, please include details via the web site (there is a form on the contacts section)
https://www.streathamsociety.org.uk/contact.html
or email streathamsoc@gmail.com

RECENT MEETINGS *(Photos Mark Bery)*

The Artists of the Artists Rifles

Artists Rifles – Burlington House 1890s

The Artists of the Artists Rifles

Patrick Baty

Patrick Baty gave an excellent talk to c.80 at our meeting on February 4th. This featured many Streatham associations including two of our Victoria Cross recipients.

Thanks also to Andrew Hadden for his excellent exhibition *(left)* of Streatham residents who were in the Artist Rifles

Streatham Artists VCs

Geoffrey St George Shillington Cather was born in 1890 at 55 Christchurch Road, Streatham Hill. He served in Artists Rifles 1909-1911, commissioned Royal Irish Fusiliers. KIA 2nd July 1916. He was awarded a posthumous VC.

Arthur James Terence Fleming-Sandes was born on 24th June 1894 at Northstead Road, Tulse Hill. He joined the Artists Rifles on 5th August 1914, commissioned East Surrey Regiment. He was awarded the VC on 29th September 1915.

Geoffrey St George Shillington Cather, the Victoria Cross and Arthur James Terence Fleming-Sandes

Christina Broom, Pioneer Press Photographer

On 4th March Alexis Haslam from Fulham Palace spoke to a very appreciative audience of over 70. Christina Broom (1862 - 1931) and her husband Albert had a stationery shop at 87 Streatham Hill, now Balfe's Bikes *(right)*.

There was also an exhibition of her postcards and an excellent book *Soldiers and Suffragettes: The Photography of Christina Broom* by Anna Sparham, published in 2015.

Jane Austen Woman and Writer

Many thanks to Maureen Stiller *(left)* for a great talk on April 1st to a packed audience of 125 in the 250th anniversary year of Jane Austen's birth. Maureen is a former pupil of Rosa Basset School in Streatham and secretary of the Jane Austen Society. She covered the life of Jane Austen and, yes, we can boast Austen had very strong links to Streatham.

(See article on p28.) **MB/JH**

MEMBERSHIP 2025

New Members

We welcome 18 new members since our last issue: Nadine Patel, Matt Salusbury, Aiden & Christine Schulkes, Alistair Pound, Isabella Bertino, Danielle Fieller, Chris Fowler, Isabel Breslin & Rory Addison, Mary Cowlett, James & Alison Bennett, Christine Iffland, Jane Wroe Wright, Peter Grant, Altaf Samji, Archit Ssan. We hope they enjoy their membership.

Subscriptions

Individual £10; Household £15 (2 named adults); Life membership (single or named couple) £180. These are paid by bank transfer (BACS), standing order, cheque or cash at meetings. See our website or contact JH for further details.

Our treasurer and membership secretary must be informed of direct bank payments. We both need names and details to register membership.

Our system has been slightly updated. As our membership year starts on January 1st so the Spring 2025 newsletter is the last issued until payment is received.

Life Membership is a brilliant way of supporting your Society, donating, and never having to remember to pay a subscription again - specially welcome if it is also Gifted-Aided. Several of our Life Members are/were well over 70 in age when they contributed and their membership was/is much appreciated.

Gift Aid: Tax payers: boost your subscription and any donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1. A form can be sent to you on application or is available on our website to email or post to our secretary *(Contact back page)*. Thank you!

Judy Harris *Membership Secretary and Streatham News Editor*

PUBLICATIONS

STREATHAM TATE LIBRARY BOOKCASE *(Photo MB)*

In a prominent position close to the help desk is the beautifully restored Streatham Society bookcase; now painted white and displaying for sale a few of our earlier publications, including some out of print.

Over 40 years ago this was donated by the Society to house a collection of old histories from the Streatham Antiquarians' Society, the forerunners of our Society. The cabinet was kept locked and the books for reference only.

When the library management decided these books should be on open reference shelves, the cabinet was removed. John W Brown and Brian Bloice collected all the books and inserted Ex-Libris labels for security. Many of these are still on the current local history shelves nearby.

The new bookcase holds an attractive, changing display. Surprisingly the old library stock has resurfaced. Some years ago Brian and I were shown the large Streatham Society stock in the basement which had few sales. I thought they had all been destroyed during later major refurbishment. But no, they are still there! Congratulations to the library staff for an excellent initiative and support.

Hopefully sales will follow.

CRISPIN GREEN - AN APOLOGY

In our last issue I made an error in my publicity for member Crispin Green's book *Meeting Trouble Half Way*.

In a very complimentary email Crispin wrote: '… I should just point out one little error in case readers should take me to be the Soho based Ace TV editor who co-incidentally shares the same name.'

Profuse apologies, Crispin.

His book is available to order through Streatham's Waterstones ISBN-13978-0993458934 - or print on demand through Amazon. **JH**

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The aim of the Streatham Society is to maintain and improve the quality of life for all who live and work in Streatham

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