STREATHAM SOCIETY NEWS

Published quarterly **No. 261 Summer 2025**

STREATHAM MEETS CLAPHAM BEATING THE BOUNDS
New Park Road boundary
(Photo Mark Bery)

ROGER BOWDERY BEM
Congratulations to Streatham's Roger Bowdery who has been awarded the British Empire Medal *(See p.30)*

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.

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

Oct 7 **Rediscovering Black London History in a Victorian Cemetery**
Talk by Dr Jane Jordan

Nov 4 **War Diary of My Father**
Talk by Geoff Simmons

Dec 2 Members' Party

EVENTS

Sept 15 1-3pm **Tour of St Leonard's Crypt, Church, Tower & Graveyard**
Led by John W Brown and Trudy Kuhn *(Monday)*

Sept 21 **Tours of Henry Tate Gardens, Park Hill** *(Sunday)*
Led by: *2pm* Robert Doyle; *3pm* John W Brown *Booking required*

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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

STREATHAM HILL THEATRE'S FUTURE IN THE BALANCE

Streatham Hill Theatre in full use

Lambeth Planners face a tricky decision on Streatham Hill Theatre's future with its planned use as a church. The Local Plan, if we trust it, boldly states, "The council will support the regeneration of the former Streatham Hill Theatre to become a major leisure and entertainment venue alongside workspace for creative and cultural industries". Step forward Ruach Church who bought the building saying they will protect it. Planners face two difficult tests: will the church ensure regeneration of the Theatre as a major leisure and entertainment venue and will there be greater community access and usage for theatre, cultural and performing arts. And above all is there the demonstrable evidence to approve.

Unfortunately, the application doesn't come with hard plans, claiming only that "it will be alright on the night" with funding a big issue. Is this adequate for a custodian of this historic building? Research on usage of cinemas as places of worship (Moving Pictures) shows for many conversions, particularly listed buildings, there can be sensitive restoration paid for - why not here? But the biggest problem is the lack of transparency about planned community usage. Ruach do a lot of good work for the community and cite Kilburn Church as an example of community use. But sadly, there's no evidence the local community get to use that building.

INFILL DEVELOPMENT ACROSS STREATHAM

Abbotswood Place squeezed into the plot of a demolished 1950s corner house

The wrecking ball is being taken to the quaint Victorian cottage on Sunnyhill Road and down on Abbotswood Road, fourteen "housing units" are nearly finished on the site of a corner house. Planners rubbed their hands with glee as these two demolished properties housing just eight people will now house 77. In the planning jargon it's called suburban intensification. Of course, over time buildings change and there is more housing across Streatham.

With a national housing shortage some pundits believe that we need more housing in the leafy London suburbs like Streatham. One architect Russell Curtis claims those living in houses in the suburbs close to public transport have "a moral duty to allow more housing to be built around them so others can benefit". His predictions are that if we had more housing infill then Lambeth could have over 16,000 new homes. The exemplar Borough is Croydon, who since 2017 delivered 2000 homes within developments of fewer than 10 homes. They published guidelines setting out how its outlying areas could be gradually intensified through small site development, identifying low density areas close to high streets or train stations. Curtis claims this is perfectly possible elsewhere and "any objection on the basis of unacceptable change in character is for the birds!" So, the clear lesson is look out in your road where a cunning developer could build a new block of flats or squeeze in a few mini box town houses.

But hang on, this all gets very contentious. Lambeth is the fourth most densely populated borough in England and Wales with 70% of people living in flats. It has around 56.5 dwellings per hectare which is quite dense compared to other boroughs and Streatham itself varies widely according to location. So the issue is then who determines where you can squeeze in extra housing or is this just going to be the equivalent of the Californian housing gold rush. The risk is any sizeable opportunity for additional housing automatically gets nodded through and local objections about it changing the local area completely disregarded. Yet the character of any area is important reinforced by good architecture with social cohesion and social infrastructure essential for good communities. Many testify to the immense battle with planning you must go through to try and protect your area against unsightly developments with failure always on the cards, a bit like living in Dante's eighth circle of hell.

And it's going to get worse. In theory given Sunnyhill Road's precedent you could allow just in that single road six more houses to be demolished replaced by 42 "housing units" housing 90 more residents. Translate that across all streets in Streatham and the immense housing target starts to come down. But where is the community voice in these decisions and the debate about where extra housing should go?

THINKING OF GETTING PVC WINDOWS?

The Streatham Society has been pushing for better protection of conservation areas. In many areas there are examples of unsightly additions over time eroding their overall character. We've kind of accepted this is an uphill struggle, so imagine our surprise when Lambeth Council refused an application for new PVC windows in a flat on Tooting Bec Gardens in the Streatham Park and Garrad's Road conservation area. Anglia Windows suitably annoyed appealed to the Planning Inspectorate. Their case was that other such windows had been installed nearby, they weren't prominent, and were environmentally friendly, concluding that "a fair balance needs to be struck between the ideals of historical preservation and the human rights of individual homeowners." It didn't quite help that Anglia Windows got the name of the conservation area wrong calling it Woolton, which is in Liverpool. The Planning Inspector wasn't persuaded by windows being a human right and threw the appeal out, stating there would be harm to the conservation area and the new windows don't respond to the architecture and fenestration in that area. The moral of the story is there are clear expectations of obligations of homeowners in conservation areas with clear guidance for very good reasons. But we will be looking carefully whether Lambeth's newly found conservation eagle eye continues.

FLEA PARK - THE EARLY YEARS OF WAYWARD STREATHAM GREEN

Streatham Green is being spruced up for a new lease of life, thanks to In-Streatham Bid and a wad of money from the Government's levelling up fund. The jury is out whether it will become the green nirvana parklet in down town Streatham. And the pigeons appear to be agnostic to the proposals from focus groups and community engagement.

In 1901 Herbert Baldwin local historian described it as "a pleasant oasis in the wilderness of bricks". But a quick dip into the annals of Streatham's history reveals its rather problematic past, belying the nostalgic image as a much-loved village green. Indeed, over time, it's been a venerable honey pot for squabbles about the purpose of this small, contested space.

Idyllic early years in Merrie Streatham?

Originally part of Tooting Common it used to be much larger, but as Streatham grew it got nibbled away causing concern locally. One early dispute in 1794 involved Lady Pitches, owner of the Manor House in Streatham, suddenly decid-

ing to fence off the green in front of her house. She didn't want funeral processions up to St Leonard's Church passing her front garden. Outrage followed with the Duke of Bedford as Lord of the Manor stepping in to reinstate public access.

Fencing in the Green: London Government takes control

Streatham Green painting by Holland Tringham 1870

In 1873 the Metropolitan Board of Works acquired manorial rights of the Green, triggering a tussle between London's government and the local council for the next fifty years. Key were local concerns over the Green's condition and lack of lighting. The *Streatham News* in 1893 described it as, "dirty and uneven, a veritable mud trap after dusk", needing tidying up. Another commentator adding it, "had become a receptacle for bones and dirty papers, left by the too frequently disreputable people who lounged there," earning its name - "flea park".

By 1900 the London County Council decided it was time for the Green to be fenced in as an ornamental place with lawns, rather than an unsightly and disfiguring spot. But suspicions were voiced what plans London County Council had for the Green, with opponents claiming it would enclose common land. One letter writer urged Streatham to covet it, before the Council built a covered market or baths and wash houses. Yet there was civic alarm that most Streatham residents were quite indifferent or inimical to its reopening in park format.

Police to be stationed on the Green?

Into the new century the Green continued to attract opprobrium over its condition and anti-social behaviour. One commentator proposed a notice on the Green stating no loitering or sitting after 10pm and a constable to be on duty patrolling the Green to ensure its respectability. However, there was no shortage of ideas for improvement – lobbying for a playground, St John Ambulance Brigade wanting an ambulance station on the Green, and some residents wanting a memorial to King Edward VII erected. But ten years after its "improvement" it still lay in a dilapidated condition with one report moaning, "three dead trees, grass rough and untended with docks in one corner going to seed, are not a thing of beauty". With a war on it the suggestion was that firemen who had moved into their fire

station in 1899 at the top on Mitcham Lane, should cultivate potatoes and vegetables on the bare muddy ground on the Green.

Toilets on the Green?

The 1920's signalled the big new idea - toilets on the Green. New underground public conveniences on the Green with the removal of the convenience on the corner of Mitcham Lane. This had the backing of the Streatham Ratepayers Association, who went further in lobbying for women's conveniences on the Green. Four of its male members were selected to lead a deputation to Wandsworth Council to present the case for women's toilets. But for the next ten years the proposal was batted around by London County Council and Wandsworth Council even with funding secured and the unemployed to build them, but none appeared. Toilets though didn't attract support from all residents with concerns they "injured" the Green.

Wandsworth Council at the helm

Streatham Green in the 1930s

In 1924 Wandsworth Council took over running the Green with twelve conditions, including having to fund its maintenance to the satisfaction of the London County Council. Alderman Plumridge bemoaned that they'd approached the London County Council because of the disgraceful condition of the Green but were now having to pay for it. It still had its fierce critics and a proposal was discussed by Streatham Ratepayers for a row of shops to be built on "the wretched green", as the gap was detrimental to shopping in Streatham. Meanwhile road widening on Streatham High Road in the early 1930s meant further trimming and the loss of three Plane trees. 1933 saw the relocation of the Dyce Fountain into the middle of the Green due to road widening from its previous

location on Mitcham Lane. Valiant attempts were made to improve the Green's condition. Flower beds were replanted and in 1937 the *Streatham News* praised local Girl Guides who had heroically planted three trees on the Green in a fierce gale after singing the Tree Song.

A good site for air raid shelters

World War Two saw air raid shelters on the Green starting with a garden shelter on display and then two semi sunk 50 person shelters. They were still around in the 1950s leading to concerns about the dilapidated state of the Green with an observer stating the shelters were, "subject to youthful misdemeanours during the day and not so youthful misdemeanours at night".

Post war

Reassembling the Dyce Water Fountain in its new location on Streatham Green

Post war the Green continued to receive mixed views but as always, a locale for unsavoury incidents. In 1955 the Green caught fire – helped by a lighted match. Later that year 16-year-old Brian Abbott got impaled on spikes in the railings. In 1961, 90-year-old Mrs Alice Barnes slipped down the grass bank on the Green. But the unsightly grass mounds from the old air raid shelters were removed. In 1965 Lambeth Council took over responsibility for the Green. Over the next thirty years there were ideas for how green spaces across Lambeth could be rejuvenated. Eventually major landscape changes were made in 2003. We now look forward to the vicissitudes of the Green in the next chapter.

Tim Whitaker, Trustee Streatham Society

EVENTS

ST LEONARD'S TOUR AND EXHIBITION

On Monday 5th May. Trudy Kuhn and John W Brown led a special tour of St Leonard's Church on the 50th anniversary of the fire on 5th May 1975.

John's exhibition of the fire and rebuild was still available for attendees of his talk 'Risen from the Ashes' to the Streatham Society on Tuesday 6th May at the church.

This was recorded on YouTube for later viewing.

(Also see p.32)

Mark Bery

STREATHAM BEATS THE BOUNDS

Trudy Kuhn, Emma Fleming and Mark Bery
Beating the Bounds (Photo Freda Graham)

Go to the top of Streatham Common North, and on the Common side you will see a strange metal post with a small square stone friend. For the uninitiated, these are parish boundary markers. The post, dated 1844, denotes the boundary between Streatham and Croydon. The stone, now unreadable, was likely for Croydon parish.

I was about to become intimately acquainted with these little aliens and their buddies. Last November I attended a meeting at the Lambeth Archives to discuss the Streatham Society participating in the ancient custom of Beating the Bounds.

Three events were planned. A walk each by the Streatham and Clapham Societies, and an ambitious tour led by the Lambeth Archives to perambulate the Lambeth boundary on bikes.

The idea of pedalling up Central Hill to Crystal Palace gave me heartburn; so grateful our event was to be firmly on foot rather than a pair of wobbly wheels I went off to plan a route. This is what I found.

Early boundaries were usually defined by land ownership. From the seventh century and the coming of Christianity a system of parish areas gradually evolved which embraced land attached to a particular church. Some ancient existing boundaries were adopted, others cut through previously distinct areas; the important point back then was to define an area responsible for paying tithes to a church.

The Streatham boundary encloses land that has been known as Streatham since Anglo-Saxon times. Streatham parish was a group of farming estates from which tithes were paid to support St Leonard's Church and its rector. By the Middle Ages there were four main areas in Streatham which were all bound to St Leonard's: Tooting Bec Manor, Leigham Court, and the sub-manors of Balham and South Streatham.

Hence the parish boundary was important to village affairs. For the next 500 years or so other administrative demands were heaped upon the church, particularly responsibility for the poor. By the 17th century duties included tasks like road repairs and managing the water supply. Overburdened men of the cloth such as rectors and churchwardens were often quite unsuited for managing these projects. A parallel system gradually evolved known as the Parish Vestry, which had responsibility for civic rather than church affairs.

In the 19th century many more demands were heaped on the creaking Parish Vestry, including the important duty of collecting the rates. This prompted much setting up of boundary posts and markers and the production of parish maps. As usual when money beckons, everyone needed clarity on who should pay what to whom. This paralleled Saxon times when the parish inhabitants were paying their tithes to their church.

So this explains what the bounds were. But why would you want to beat them? The explanation for this odd behaviour is because in times past when there were scant written records and maps and many people were illiterate, the community needed to know its boundaries. Periodically a band of villagers including clergy, officials and often young boys would walk the boundary stopping to beat markers with willow wands. It was important that youngsters knew where their parish started and finished as they would pass this knowledge on to their own offspring. Disturbingly, the children were often bumped against the markers or whipped to help them remember. Please note that no children were harmed during the Streatham Society walk.

Beating traditionally took place every few years at Rogationtide, five weeks after Easter. There would be prayer, blessing of the land and a big party at a local hostelry to finish, all expenses paid by the parish. In bygone Streatham publicans would take turns to host the after party as it was such good business.

If they were lucky, beaters would meet rivals from the neighbouring parish on the way round, and a good brawl or two would be added to the day's festivities.

The whole thing sounded fabulous, and I very much hoped we would run into the Clapham Society group on our perambulations.

By using the National Library of Scotland's map finder to access historic maps, alongside our dear friend Google, I established the total Streatham boundary was over 15 miles long. This was without Streatham Detached, a weird little portion of land bravely standing alone in Knights Hill where it seemed Streatham had ancient rights. A long way to walk in one go, even for the more determined members of the Streatham Society. We would just have to do some of it and if successful, attempt more next year.

John W Brown and group (Photo MB)

24th May was fine while not too hot, perfect weather for walking. Willow wands primed and ready, we began promptly at 10am with an excellent introduction from John (Mr Streatham) Brown at Hermitage Bridge in Norbury. John explained how the River Graveney provided a natural boundary, dependent on the edge of the flood plain of the river. We learned that most boundaries would follow long standing features such as rivers, the ridges of hills, field boundaries and sometimes Roman roads.

Streatham Common North boundary markers (Photo FG)

We proceeded through quiet streets to Hilly Four Acres, the field below the Rookery Gardens. As we walked up the meadow we had our first chance to experience beating boundary markers with our willow wands. Hearty thwacks rang out as enthusiastic beaters walloped the iron posts along the boundary ditch. At least two persons were requested to restrain themselves from behaviour that wouldn't have been out of place at Cynthia Payne's.

John then pointed out a row of majestic boundary oaks planted to mark the line between the parishes of Streatham and Croydon. At the top of Streatham Com-

mon we visited the two markers that began this story, and more thwacks followed. The Streatham Society was fast gaining a reputation for undignified behaviour.

Emma Fleming (Photo FG)

Onward down Leigham Court Road, following the old boundary and ridge of this hill as best we could. Lambeth Tour Guide Emma Fleming treated the group to some fascinating stories about past inhabitants of the beautiful Victorian dwellings that still line parts of this road. Who knew that in 1921 four people died in a suicide pact after drinking poisoned champagne at "The Knowle"? If you want to know more look out for Emma's highly anticipated tour of Leigham Court Road. Champagne optional.

My turn next. After introducing the party to the burrowings of John Tredwell we stopped for lunch at the attractive Hillside Gardens. This was a welcome chance to rest and chat, and to get to know some of the other beaters. For those who want to know, the hardworking John Tredwell became a rich man after starting life as a humble railway navvy. When the railway came to Streatham in the 1850's he had a tunnel cut under his 66 acre estate at Leigham Court so the railway wouldn't scar his gardens and disturb his Sunday afternoons. Fair play to you Mr Tredwell.

Trudy Kuhn and group (Photo MB)

After the lunch break and some rootling around in a hedge I proudly displayed the Streatham and Lambeth boundary markers extant at the corner of Hillside and Palace Roads. The week before I had visited with a set of secateurs to ensure success on the day. John Brown had advised me not to make them too obvious in case the solid metal markers became prey to thieves. Sadly, the destination of many of our lost boundary markers has been the scrap metal yard.

These markers duly beaten we proceeded along the ridge of Upper Tulse Hill

Robert Doyle and group (Photo MB)

and down to Rush Common where I handed over to Robert Doyle. At Rush Common there are 2 markers extant, and possibly another one under the scrub but even the most enthusiastic beaters weren't mad enough to battle through nettles, thorns and discarded syringes.

Robert told several interesting stories including tales of highwaymen, a semaphore station in a converted windmill and Cubitt's Clapham Park. This section of the route was provided with boundary posts galore, and for the very observant, two boundary plaques high up on the wall of New Park Road pharmacy. In fact, New Park Road provided another high point when we did indeed cross paths with the Clapham Society beaters. Fortunately decorum was maintained and we all posed for a large group photo outside the Hand in Hand pub *(photo front cover)*.

(Photo FG)

Our walk concluded at Hyde Farm, just as Streatham starts to become Balham. Beaters retired to either the Hyde Farm café or the Bedford Arms in search of well-earned refreshment. Regrettably there was no post beating the bounds feast, and expenses weren't paid. Perhaps this can be organised for next year when we'll beat another section of our boundary.

Trudy Kuhn, Lambeth Tour Guide

BELMONT BOWLS CLUB OPEN DAY, Broadlands Avenue

Belmont Bowls Club Open Day was held on Saturday 5 April. It was a lovely event in beautiful grounds. It's difficult to believe this quiet oasis is so close to a High Road bus stop. New members welcome belmonthonsec@outlook.com

ROOKERY EASTER MARKET

The Friends of Streatham Common continued their regular activities on Saturday 19 April with an Easter egg hunt and Doggy Splash. I enjoyed watching both.

There were many other Spring and Summer events I wasn't able to visit. **JH**

WOODFIELD BIOBLITZ

In April a Tooting Common Bioblitz was held at the Woodfield Pavilion in partnership with the City Nature Challenge 2025 and the Natural History Museum.

It was an amazing event with a great turnout on a lovely sunny morning. Not so sure about the ostrich which someone recorded but we did see a kestrel! Well done to everyone involved.

Consult their website for ways to support this very active volunteer-led Woodfield community group.

See also the article on p.17.

MB

OUR LIBRARY NOTICEBOARD

In addition to our frequent information posts to members and our wider publicity via our Facebook page and other social media, our noticeboard in Streatham Tate Library also publicises our contacts and related activities.

Prominently situated facing the entrance, it gives notice of our meetings and is regularly updated.

TOURS OF HENRY TATE GARDENS, PARK HILL

Our two popular tours, led by regular guides, Robert Doyle and John W Brown, also part of the Wandsworth Heritage Festival, took place on Sunday 22nd June in lovely weather.

There was an added bonus for our attendees. A very special thanks to Michele Mitchell, a resident of Henry Tate Mews, who showed us around Tate's former art gallery in the house where she lives.

She has also kindly given us permission to use my photographs of the gallery *(below)* as we wish.

Next tours are in September, booking in August.

Mark Bery

HAPPY BIRTHDAY WOODFIELD PAVILION

Happy Birthday Woodfield Pavilion, opened on 6th May 1933. It was once part of the estate of Robert Garrard, Crown Jeweller, who lived at "Woodfield" and is buried at St Leonard's Church.

Today it is a vibrant community hub run by a charity, The Woodfield Project: https://www.thewoodfield.org The Woodfield Pavilion is situated on the 3-acre paddock of "Woodfield" adjacent to Tooting Bec Common.

The above photograph was probably taken by Douglas Wayland, official Wandsworth photographer, and former resident of my house in Woodbourne Avenue!

Presiding at the opening ceremony were Sir Kenyon Vaughan, Chair of the Greater London Playing Fields Association, the Bishop of Kingston, the Rt. Reverend Percy Herbert and councillors from the Metropolitan Borough of Wandsworth and their wives and other local representatives. The Mayor of Wandsworth, Councillor Edwin Brookes (Streatham Resident), pronounced the building and the recreation ground open.

(Andrew Sharp - Former Chair of Trustees, The Woodfield Project.)

MB

LOCAL HISTORY MATTERS

THE ROYAL ASYLUM OF St ANN'S SOCIETY TO PULLMAN COURT - STREATHAM HILL

St Ann's Royal Asylum 1859
Etching, Gower Collection

Pullman Court

I have John W Brown and Mark Bery to thank for awakening my interest in research and local history. Finding missing information, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, or finding links have become a bit of an obsession lately.

My maternal Grandmother Mabel Black and my Uncle George lived upstairs in our house for as long as I can remember. I was close to Mabel who provided a safe, loving environment whenever I chose to stop by, particularly when I was out of favour with my mum! I knew that my Grandmother had gone into service as soon as she left school at 12 years old (the school leaving age) in 1908, as she often shared stories of her family and of her time in service. I also knew that George was born illegitimately in 1916. However, I had no idea until I came to Streatham 3 years ago and found my new obsession, that my Grandmother had been in service in 1916 in St Christopher's Place, off Oxford Street W1 and that the master of the House had signed her into St Pancras Workhouse for the birth of George.

So it was with great enthusiasm and interest that I discovered that St Pancras Workhouse had links with Streatham and my new home.

The Royal Asylum of St Ann's Society was founded in 1709, in Aldersgate in the City of London. Among the original benefactors were William Wilberforce, Henry Thornton and Samuel Whitbread. The mission of the Asylum was "to provide education and instruction in religious and useful knowledge agreeably to the formularies of the Church of England, as well as clothing, maintenance, and home for legitimate children (whether orphans or not, and from every nation) of parents who have seen better days".

The school was built to accommodate twelve boys and by 1790 a girls' school had been added for 12 girls. By 1800 an additional "country" home was opened in Lavenham (Suffolk), but later relocated to Peckham. In 1829 new premises were sought in Surrey, and in June John Roupell, a Southwark Lead smelter, sold 2 acres of land on Streatham Hill to St Ann's for £2272. 10s.

The Brixton Asylum, as it was referred to, was designed by John Henry Taylor and was opened in 1830. The building was of classical design over three floors and housed a total of 68 boys and 21 girls, with a capacity of 150. But it didn't stop there! In 1856 the Asylum was extended and when it was completed in the early 1860's it had room for 238 children, although by 1884 it housed over 350, so the Society built two new schools in Redhill. It remained on this site until 1919 when, due to financial problems and falling admissions, the school closed.

St. Ann's Royal Asylum
Postcard detail,
Keith Holdaway Collection

Between 1888 and 1915, the Streatham building was taken over by the Parish of St Pancras as a workhouse (the link!).

Infirmed and aged men were accommodated in this branch of the workhouse, known as St Ann's Home, temporarily while the main workhouse in St Pancras (Kings Cross) was being rebuilt. Relationships with the neighbours were not always very neighbourly, and the workhouse in 1895 sought an injunction against the South London Tramways Company who owned the tram depot next door to prevent them building an extension on the grounds that it would block out their light.

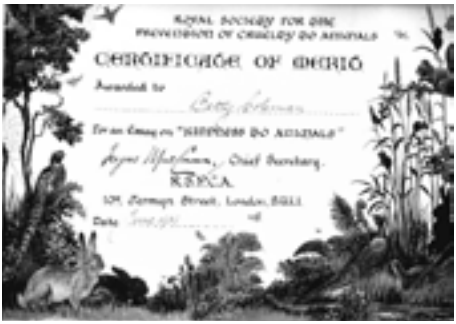
In 1914 the Government used the building to house Belgian refugees. However, it was not considered suitable, so by 1920 it was up for sale, and the building became "Relay House" when the Relay Automatic Telephone Company used it as a factory (established as the Betulander Automatic Telephone Company by Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company in 1913). By 1930 Siemens Brothers had taken over the factory, but it was finally sold in 1935 and Pullman Court was built on the site.

Freda Graham

BETTY COLEMAN 1927 - 2011

In1957 Keith Holdaway and Betty Coleman married. Their sons Martin and Richard, both Streatham Society members, still live in the family home. Keith was well-known as a local historian in the Streatham and Norwood Societies.

Richard submitted the following article to pay tribute to his mother. Betty was a teenager through WWII. This was a time when ordinary women gained independence, particularly when their menfolk were away at war. But afterwards married women usually had to give up full-time employment.



I recently found this RSPCA certificate in amongst my mum's belongings on top of the wardrobe. It was inside an envelope addressed to the headteacher of St Leonard's Girls' School. It was awarded to Mum for her prize essay on 'Kindness to Animals' in June 1939.

My mother was born at 31 Ballater Road, Brixton, in August 1927, into a family of boot makers. My great-grandfather ran a shop in Wimbledon, my grandfather, Arthur Coleman, learnt the trade until he was called up to the Beds & Herts Regiment serving in the catering corps. After the war my grandfather took an apprenticeship in copperplate engraving, continuing in this trade until the General Strike. He married my grandmother, Doris Butler, in 1925. Their house was rented at 14s a week. There were two aunts (Tot and Flo) and occasionally a couple of uncles staying with them. Mum's sister Barbara came along soon after.

Postcard sent to Arthur Coleman at at Ballater Road, Brixton

Grandfather then worked in a shoe factory till 1935. Ann, the youngest sister, was born so Grandad had a house full of women!

When my mother reached school age she travelled from Brixton to Streatham to attend St Leonard's Girls' School until 1935 when the family moved above 201 Streatham High Road. Mum saw the fire at Crystal Palace in November 1936 from here. The move coincided with Grandfather being employed by Lyons Corner Houses (a popular café chain) as a lift attendant and engineer. Soon he became a kitchen porter, being employed at various venues. He was then sub-contracted as head kitchen porter for the Bank of England. At the end of his contract he was awarded £10.

Mum (left), Barbara and Ann (front)

Which brings us to 1939, just before World War II, when this certificate was awarded. The family had moved again to 98 Eardly Road, Streatham. Great-aunt Flo worked in the off-licence below. She spent most of her life as a cleaner. They now had a cat and a dog to keep the mice and rats at bay which came from the adjacent railway line.

Mum grew to dislike living there, particularly the walk to school. The choice was the direct walk through what was known as the 'Boggy Hole' (the foot-tunnel under the Conyer's Road junction railway) which had a bad reputation even in those days. The next was over Mitcham Lane bridge, which later had Home Guard stationed there, and she had to face unwanted remarks from them.

Mum was evacuated to Horsham where she got a taste of country life, feeding the chickens and helping out. She witnessed the downing of a fighter plane when the children went to the aftermath of a burnt out wreck. Later her mother came and took her to Devon. There she told her she was dying of cancer and she would have to take care of her sisters. In 1941 at the age of 14, Mum returned to London where she took a secretarial course. Grandad even sent her for elocution lessons! She applied and was appointed at Gorringe's in Victoria.

In her prize essay, she wrote she had no problem keeping animals as they had looked after Uncle Jim's parrot at Ballater Road. Uncle Jim was in the Merchant Navy. He survived the war and went to Australia with his parrot.

Mr Coleman

From

J. LYONS & COMPANY LTD.

O.B.C. DEPT., CADBY HALL, LONDON, W.14

Your services are required at :

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

ON

Date Tues 14th July and Thurs 16th July and Tues 21st July — Job No.

Not later than 8 AM

Bring this card with you and hand it to the Superintendent in charge.

Waitress's dress must be in perfect condition.

Collar, apron and headgear will be supplied.

You must bring black shoes and black stockings which conform to the highest standards in your establishment.

Section A-B-C-D — No.

Take BLACK UNIFORM.

Please retain pass for remaining dates.

NO JEWELLERY TO BE WORN

THIS CARD IS NOT TRANSFERABLE

J Lyons & Co Services requested of Mr Coleman at Buckingham Palace

On the outbreak of war, one of the first orders of the government was to put down any uncontrolled animal, thousands of animals were put down.

While the Blitz was on bombs fell around Streatham goods yard. Mum's younger sister Ann lived through the worst of this and it would forever affect her nerves. One fateful day there was a heavy raid, the dog had had enough and when the door opened it dashed out. Mum chased after it up Greyhound Lane. When she got to the end she saw it up the top of the common and knew it was hopeless as there was an Anti-Aircraft Unit there. Mum never wanted to keep anything larger than a hamster after that. She thought it was cruel to keep dogs in London and cats killed other animals. As a naive child I suggested someone might have taken the dog. Mum's face went ashen. I didn't pursue it as it was obvious she had cared deeply for it.

In 1944 my grandmother succumbed to the cancer. Until then she had been a nurse. Grandad was an ARP warden, some of the time he was at the Bank of England, but he had a new contract through Lyons with Buckingham Palace, so also spent time as warden there. He had an allotment down at Ridge Road.

It was around this time that there was a dance held at St Leonard's Church Hall. Mum said a shy young boy was there who said another girl was pestering him and would she walk him home to his aunt's. She walked him home and his aunt opened the door and said sternly, "What are you doing bringing girls home?". The boy was Johnny Briggs, who was to became a well-known actor. Mum would later meet him again whilst in the Territorial Army and they would have a drink together.

The war ended and Mum became a secretary at FH Campbell's in Shrubbery Road. She described it as a pokey little office as the warehouse took up much of the space. She helped with orders, clients and suppliers. Frank Campbell was a

well-respected local man, dealing in textiles, and known for his generosity. He was chairman of Streatham and District Chamber of Commerce and had served on Wandsworth Borough Council during the war (there would have to be a separate article on his life). He died suddenly in 1948. Mum continued to work there.

In 1947 Mum joined the TA *(right)* in Mitcham Lane with her sister Barbara. Barbara went to the cook-house, Mum joined the signals. She was always good at cryptic crosswords and had been an Ovaltiney when children were given messages to decipher. (Ovaltineys was a children's club founded in the 1930s and updated in the 1960s to promote the Ovaltine drink.) Soon she was made a corporal, her sister a sergeant. Mum and Barbara met their future husbands, they actually originally dated the other.

In 1957 Mum married Dad. He put a stop to her career even though she had been offered a partnership in the company. Grandfather had purchased 291 Southcroft Road. He retired from Lyons in 1965 and spent the rest of his life with his wife's sisters. We siblings, first my sister and brother then me, would go to the corner shop to buy him cigarettes and whisky until one day I was told they were not serving me as age restriction had come in. Tot worked for a fishmonger's shop in Farringdon until she retired. Ann would eventually marry and move for a quiet life in Brighton.

Betty Holdaway, née Coleman

Mum clearly loved, but found it hard to show affection. I think it was the fear of loss after her mother's death when she was in her teens. She would do anything for us. Both my sister and I gave her a scare as we both had to be revived at birth and she therefore always showed concern at any hint of illness. She loved dancing, gardening and trying something new. Once when travelling through Germany, we

stopped at a restaurant, and were shocked when she started speaking German as there had been no hint she could do so. She had the heart of a lion, all 5ft 4in of her, and would stand up for what she thought was right.

The recent closure of Roger's has reminded me of being dragged around every shop in Streatham, the old Tesco's, Woolworths, MacFisheries, Kennedys, Dewhurst's, then the ladies' shops Richards, Sharman's, and Pratts, through the underwear. But when it came to Rogers I was left outside, with the standing RNIB blind boy collection box *(examples pictured),* sometimes with the company of someone's dog tied to it.

(Thank you to John W Brown for his help.) **Richard Holdaway**

ROGERS

Very sad to see that Rogers has closed down. It was probably the oldest surviving business in Streatham.

It was owned by George John Rogers who lived at 3 Telford Avenue - his son, Frederick Bertram Rogers, was one of the casualties in WW1 and is on the Roll of Honour in St. Leonard's Church.

Thanks to Marion Gower for the information. The advert 1921 and 1972 pictures are from the Graham Gower collection.

Other valued old businesses have also closed recently including Potter Perrin and Bar 61.

A combination of increasing costs and retirement are reasons for closure but the lack

of personal shoppers is also a major factor. Thanks to all for their long service to our community. **MB**

SOURCE OF PLEASURE

Regarding G Gompers' sweeping comment on lap dancing; we all have a personal choice.

While it may cause dislike or antagonism to some, it is also a source of pleasure, exercise and fun to others.

A number of elderly folks' clubs have added this to their itinerary and found it a welcome and enjoyable diversion, both to partake in or watch. Live and let live!

W Hyde, Fieldend Road Streatham Vale.

LAPPING UP LINE DANCING

Due to a horrific blunder and mental blockage on my behalf, my letter "A Source of Pleasure" was written with LINE dancing in mind.

I totally concur with previous readers' views on lap dancing - an entirely different species.

My apologies for any distress my error may have caused.

May I wish everyone a Happy New Year. **W Hyde**

Published by the local Guardian group after American line dancing (in rows) became popular here in the late 1990s.

These letters gave many much pleasure! Gordon Gompers was a prominent member of the Streatham Society, including as newsletter editor. (Ed)

STREATHAM - A COLLECTION OF POEMS AND DRAWINGS (Part 2)

St Leonard's Churchyard 1994

The Bedford Park Hotel, Streatham.
The horse-drawn dray appeared the day Young's took over.
The pub is now a shop!

One-upmanship

Can it be coincidence,
That when the Church of Rome
Built themselves a brand new place to pray
In Streatham, that it was cheek by jowl
With Saint Leonard's, of the opposition.
Doesn't English Martyrs say
I am newer, taller, grander
Than you, and at your age
Will not make up for that.
But English Martyrs does not have
A graveyard where, next the traffic's roar,
A passer-by can sit beneath the trees
And rest and think and ignore
The hurly-burly that is London life.

The Horse and Groom

The spirit of Prince George passed one day
Through Streatham, on his way to Brighton,
As was his wont in more substantial times,
"Equerry," he said, as they passed Streatham Hill,
"Have the coachman stop at that inn,
The Horse and Groom, where we used to stop before.
We'll let the horses take a rest,
And I need a break from these damned seats."
The coach slowed down and out they looked
At *Big Hand Mo's* in all its tawdry glory.
"Onward!" the Prince Regent cried, aghast,
"On to the *Bedford* or *Pied Bull*."

Note: In the mid-90s *The Horse and Groom* was transmogrified into *Big Hand Mo's*, complete with video screens, loud canned music etc.. After a while a little sanity prevailed and the name was restored though not, I fear, the character.

Pavements

If, let's just suppose, you went around
Different cities, different towns,
Feeling the pavements as you went.
Do you think, now ponder well
That some would feel hard, some soft?
Of course not! Why is it then that when you walk
In Paris say, or Rome
That your feet get so much tireder
Than they do in Streatham High?

David Standfast

STREATHAM HIGH ROAD LOOKING NORTH FROM PRENTIS ROAD 1948

The view above is one Streatham Society member Frances Partridge's donation of a fascinating collection of old postcard views of Streatham which make a wonderful addition to our archive.

Some of the images have been captioned by the Society's local historian and archivist, John W Brown (JWB).

A crowded Streatham in the immediate post-Second World War period with the street thronged with Saturday shoppers and a single car having the High Road to itself.

In the late 1940s Britain experienced a period of severe austerity as it recovered from six years of conflict. It is surprising to see so many people on the High Road at this time when the shops had little to offer them.

However, at a time when supermarkets were unknown the weekly shop on a Saturday was a major undertaking for many families.

Note the "Fifty Shilling Tailors" on the corner of Shrubbery Road where men could buy a three-piece made-to-measure suit for only £2.10s (£2.50).

Tyrrells, on the northern junction of Prentis Road, was one of the town's leading drapery stores and large posters advertising the bargains to be had in the store can be seen in the shop windows.

Note the large metal sign of a white lion high over the pavement marking the location of the White Lion public house.

John W Brown

A WALK ON THE HECKLE SIDE

This wonderful photograph from John W Brown's archive was published under the above title in *The Mercury* (the *South London Press and Mercury Group*) in August 2009. John had just started his popular Streatham Village walk by the Dyce Fountain on Streatham Green when a man started doing press-ups in front of him.

I was standing behind the photographer watching the reactions of the gathering of at least 50 people. John carried on speaking regardless, as did the press-ups. The expressions on people's faces varied from ignoring it all, embarrassment, amusement, and disgust.

But for me the reaction of Rosemary Honey, seated, was the most amusing. She sat away from the crowd staring fixedly at the performer, completely expressionless throughout. What was she thinking?

Brian Bloice, our late chairman, was interviewed and publicised the Society's Local History Group. This was a period when Group members were very active. Several gave talks and walks based on their research and publications before their increasing age curtailed activities.

A brilliant legacy, John - who is still leading tours.

JH

STREATHAM SOCIETY REPORTS

EVENTS

ROGER BOWDERY BEM

Congratulations to Streatham's Roger Bowdery who has been awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) in King Charles's Birthday Honours List.

Roger has served our community as an increasingly active, unpaid volunteer for almost 50 years. He has been a member of the Streatham Society for over 10 years, regularly attending and supporting our meetings and events.

We are delighted with this well-deserved recognition.

I asked Roger to summarise the background to the award and he has kindly supplied the account below and the photograph. *(Ed)*

A VERY BRIEF SUMMARY

Well, you can't apply for an honour, you must be nominated. Unbeknown to me Keith Hill had been beavering away in the background for some time compiling the original submission and letters of support from:

Lambeth School Governance Team
Bishop Thomas Grant School
Lambeth Independent Education Appeals Panel
Lambeth Schools Forum
Streatham Darby & Joan Club/Woodlawns Centre
All three previous Streatham Members of Parliament.

Education

Governance

Local School Governor for 48 years. 1977 - present.
Five years Chair of Governors Dunraven School
Currently Governor of Bishop Thomas Grant School.

Education Appeals

Panel member 30 years. 1995 - present

Qualified as an Ofsted School Inspector in 1993 and invited to join the Lambeth Independent Education Appeals Panel in 1995. Longest serving member.

Lambeth School Forum

Lambeth School Forum is a statutory body whose role is to ensure the funding from central government is distributed correctly. Served for the maximum four years 2015 - 2019.

Community

Streatham Darby & Joan Club/Woodlawns Centre

The oldest and first Darby & Joan Club in the country

Invited to serve as a trustee in 2008 and become Chair of Trustees in 2018

Trustee 17 years. 2008 - present.

Community

Organiser: **Streatham Annual Armistice Day Service of Remembrance**

History

Every year since 1922, with a short break 1939-45 and 2021 due to Covid, a service of remembrance, originally organised by the Royal British Legion, has been held at Streatham War Memorial. In 1992 Streatham Royal British Legion collapsed as the last members died and the Southwest London Branch of the Association of Jewish Ex-servicemen and Women (AJEX) took over the organisation.

In 1995 Roger Bowdery from The Office of Keith Hill MP, assumed responsibility for the organisation of the service. It has since grown from six wreaths being laid and a handful of old soldiers attending to over 500 people attending and over 65-70 wreaths laid making it the biggest civilian event of its kind in Lambeth, if not south London, 30 Years. 1995 – present.

Apart from the medal and citation that reads ‘For services to the community in Streatham’ I also get an invitation to a palace garden party, the presentation of the medal itself and the use of the private Order of the British Empire chapel in St Paul’s Cathedral. Unfortunately, I do not get permission to drive a flock of sheep across London Bridge.

I am also advised: ‘The BEM is awarded for exceptional service within a local area, often for sustained volunteer work or innovative projects that have a tangible impact’.

But it’s nice to be recognised!

Roger Bowdery BEM

RECENT MEETINGS *(Photos Mark Bery)*

Risen from the Ashes - 50th Anniversary of the fire at St Leonard's Church

What a great talk was given at our meeting on May 6th by our President John W Brown. A packed audience of c.150 heard about the 50th anniversary of the fire at St Leonard's Church, the rebuild and its background history.

The fire was on May 5th 1975. John published a full illustrated account in our last *Streatham Society News* (Spring 260). John's excellent accompanying exhibition was also on display.

AGM & South London's Lost Pubs

Our AGM at 6.30pm on June 3rd was completed in a record 20 minutes. This was because extremely comprehensive reports had previously been circulated to members and attracted no discussion! All trustees were re-elected unopposed.

At 7.30 well over 100 members and visitors poured in to hear our speaker. Thanks to Sam Cullen *(left)* for a very entertaining talk (including a pub quiz!) on South London's Lost Pubs publicising his book which was also on sale. He looked back at over 200 pubs which have closed in the last 20 years.

Streatham's Sleeping Beauty - The Streatham Hill Theatre

Many thanks to Liz Burton and David Harvey for their very informative talks on the Streatham Hill Theatre at our meeting on July 1st. The meeting was also part of the Wandsworth Heritage Festival.

It was a hot and sticky evening yet c.90 attendees enjoyed the evening - especially the ice-creams in the interval!

Their talks were recorded on YouTube for later viewing.

We wish the resolute David and Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre success in their long-running campaign. See their website for news and how to support.

MB/JH

MEMBERSHIP 2025

New Members

We welcome 12 new members since our last issue: Victoria White & Jason Tarsh, Rosalie & Philip Lawlor, Jan Sinclair, Jennifer Iliff. Katherine Milner, Donal Kane & Carol O'Gorman, Elisa Castagna, Elizabeth Smith, Ellen Blair.

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.

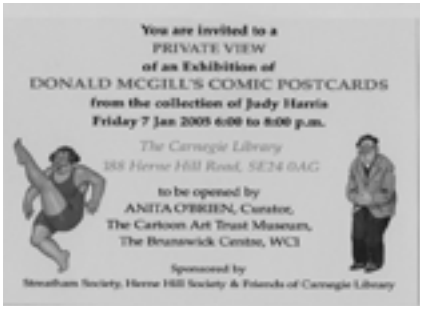
Our system has been slightly updated. As our membership year starts on January 1st so the Spring 2025 newsletter was the last issued until payment is received.

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.

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*

A SPECIAL MEMORY



In April 2024 I celebrated 40 years' membership of the Streatham Society. Five years later I joined the Executive Committee. Also in 2024 I reached that age (80) when one suddenly starts publicising their years, in the hopes that everyone will flatter!

In 1983, I needed to find new interests. I was already researching the former Roupell Park Estate, bisected by Christchurch and Palace Roads, where I taught at Fenstanton Junior School. I was also involved with Lambeth Fducation's local history and INSET plans.

In August 1983 I visited Keith Holdaway's local history exhibition in St Peter's Church. He was interested in my research and told me he had recently formed the Streatham Society's Local History Research Group in order to bring together those actively involved in research. He invited me to bring my maps to their September meeting.

There were seven of us there. I met John Cresswell, a driving force in the Society, Brian Bloice, local history tutor, who was to become my partner, and historian Graham Gower. Graham reported he had met John Brown who was publishing Local History Reprints. The Society's Chairwoman and Vice-Chair were also present.

This small group soon expanded, attracting those researching broad local topics including heritage, sport, the police and cinemas. John W Brown, now our publisher, has much of these stored in his Streatham archive.

Unfortunately, the most significant inhabitants of Roupell Park were William Roupell, dubbed the most corrupt MP for Lambeth, having forged his father's will which originally left his estate to his only legitimate child, Richard, and Donald McGill, famed for his 'dirty' postcards. Explain them to Year 6s!

After my two books were published, my claim to fame was my exhibition in the Carnegie Library, sponsored by the Streatham Society, the Herne Hill Society and the Friends of Carnegie Library, opened by Anita O'Brien, Curator of the Cartoon Art Trust Museum in Bloomsbury. Over 30 picture-frames were loaned for my use by printer Jim Davidson. The exhibition hit the headlines! A press reporter publicised my photo *(above)* and account in local newspapers, including *The Post* and *South London Press*.

After the closure of local book shops, selling books became increasingly difficult and depended on continuing efforts by the author. I gave talks on *Donald*

McGill's Comic Postcards and the Streatham Connection to several groups, including the Sussex Postcard Club in Brighton. At one large meeting I was introduced as "the little girl with the dirty postcards". I was not amused. I never liked McGill's more obscene 'jokes'; much preferring his earlier, cleverer cards. My book was reprinted three times but sales almost stopped when I could no longer give talks.

I had a large collection of McGill's cards, catalogued in albums. I tried to sell the collection but unfortunately the most I was offered was £200 from dealers, which was about a third of their estimated sales' value. I discussed this with Brian Lund, editor of *Postcard Monthly*. He sold donated cards for the charity Children in Need so I donated my collection. Within about 18 months he had raised well over £600 from their sales, with some 30% still for sale. I was delighted.

Bernard Crossley's excellent book *Donald McGill - Postcard Artist (pub 2014)*, meticulously researched, includes new information and corrects all previous publications. **Judy Harris**

THE FUTURE OF OUR NEWSLETTER

Unfortunately, this is the final newsletter issue that Judy Harris will compile. Judy has compiled and edited our very informative newsletter for 19 years (since 2006), producing approximately 85 editions; first with Brian Bloice, then alone safter his death in 2015.

I know many of you have enjoyed reading Judy's newsletters and will join me in thanking her for her dedication. I am very pleased that Judy will remain a Trustee of the Streatham Society as Membership Secretary and will still be responsible for our website publications' orders.

We need someone to manage future newsletter production. Simultaneously, we will be reviewing our newsletter production process and the frequency of editions. We will likely transition to e-newsletters which will be sent by email but will still produce a limited number of hard copies for members without computer access.

To gather members views, I am forming a small working group to discuss options. Any member can be involved in these meetings and if you are not able to join the group we would like to hear your views. Please email me at streathamsoc@gmail.com or write to me; my address is on the last page of this newsletter.

Mark Bery June 2025

Thank you, Mark, other trustees, and all contributors who have helped me continue publishing through the last ten difficult years. I'm pleased the News continued John Cresswell's ideal of a balance between planning and heritage, local events, local history research and Streatham Society reports. **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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