STREATHAM SOCIETY NEWS

Published quarterly **No 264 Spring 2026**

IN MEMORY OF JUDY HARRIS 1944-2026

Judy Harris on the cast iron bridge at Henry Tate Gardens, Park Hill, Streatham Common (Photo: Mark Bery)

Remembering Judy Harris on page 20

SOCIETY MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm at St Leonard's Church, Streatham High Road/Tooting Bec Gardens. Visitors are welcome, but are asked for a £2 minimum donation towards expenses. Our programme is emailed to members and advertised on our website, Facebook and social media. Selected talks are recorded for viewing on YouTube.

- **Tues 7 July** — ***How Borup's Photography Contributed to Margaret Morris' Early Success.*** Talk by Barbara West
- **Tues 1 Sept** — ***A Year as Master of an Ancient City of London Livery Company and Streatham's Links to the Square Mile.*** Talk by Roger Wates
- **Tues 6 Oct** — ***Black History: In Between.*** Talk by Dr Maud Blair **Please note, this talk starts at 7pm**

TOURS & WALKS Details and tickets at ticketsource.co.uk

- **Sun 12 July** — ***Streatham Common: Healing Waters and Empowering Voices, 1pm***
- **Sun 6 Sept** — ***Leigham Court Road: a Hyper-Local Hike, 10.30am***
- **Mon 7 Sept** — ***St Leonard's Church, Graveyard, Bell Tower and Crypt, 1pm***
- **Sat 19 Sept** — ***Bazalgette the Visionary Engineer, 1pm***
- **Sat 26 Sept** — ***Industralists, Intrigues and Inspirational People of Furzedown, 10.30am***
- **Sun 27 Sept** — ***Henry Tate Gardens, Streatham Common, 2pm and 3pm***

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STREATHAM OUT AND ABOUT

PLANNING MATTERS

ART DECO STREATHAM: NOSTALGIA OR PASTICHE?

Plans have been approved by Lambeth Council to replace the front of the old Regal cinema on Streatham High Road, which is currently decaying and has redundant signage. The applicants claim this would provide a 'reinstatement of the original building heritage' of this Art Deco-style cinema. Their plans include a new mirrored fascia, declaring it will 'stimulate energy to the building', and a new vertical sign off-centre above the former cinema entrance to highlight the name of the building. Sadly, the Streatham Society wasn't consulted prior to the application being submitted.

The Regal cinema in its glory days

Built for Associated British Cinemas Ltd (ABC), the Regal cinema was designed by their in-house architect William Riddle Glen and opened on 14 November 1938. Over the next 62 years, it had several name changes, eventually closing as the ABC cinema in December 2000, but achieving Grade II listed status for part of the structure. The auditorium was then demolished and the Picture House apartments were built in its place, while keeping the building's original façade and foyer. More recently, the foyer has been used as a carpet store but is currently vacant.

Currently looking past its prime

The big issue is how far the changes

are designed to portray the original cinema from 1938 or be selective with certain impressions of an 'Art Deco' style. The building did change at various points in its history, associated with changes in branding. The planned mirrored facia is seen by many as unsightly 'building bling'. The original marquee canopy from when the cinema was first built was, of course, much larger, which added to the presence of the building on the High Road.

This illustrates the dilemma of preserving heritage in buildings. Do you create a pastiche of an Art Deco style in situations like this? Or does that change reduce the authenticity of the building?

WOODGATE TOWERS

As Woodgate Towers (now owned by Barratt London) shoots up on the site of the old Homebase in Streatham Vale, ready to be admired across south London, neighbours have been up in arms about the noise created by demolishing the old buildings. Residents reported their homes shaking with vibrations, and various trees and fences being removed, affecting privacy. Understandably, they are frustrated, having been assured by Lambeth Planning that noise and disruption would be kept to a minimum. They now face a prolonged period of building work, so let's hope Barratt acts as a responsible contractor.

So what can you do when faced with noisy building works from a nearby construction site? Thankfully, in theory, you are protected by law. Building works normally must be restricted to 8am to 6pm weekdays, and 8am to 1pm on a Saturday. As noise is a statutory nuisance, you can report any excessive noise to Lambeth Council's Environmental Health team – and make sure to keep a detailed log of the times that it's happening. If the work itself looks as if it's exceeding the approved plans, you can report this to the Council's Planning Enforcement Team.

Plans showing the extent of the Woodgate Towers development

‘FROM THE PERILS OF STREATHAM HIGH ROAD, GOOD LORD DELIVER US’

The 1.8 miles of Streatham High Road causes much traffic angst. Transport for London’s current multi-million-pound improvement scheme will, according to the blurb, make it easier and safer for people to travel and enable more people to walk and cycle. The High Road is a dangerous stretch of road in general, with 72 collisions reported and 75 people injured in the 36-month period up to 31 October 2024. We await what happens in spring 2027, when the construction work is due to end.

But Streatham High Road has always been a crazy highway, as shown by a search in the annals of 1930s Streatham’s history. Back then, road traffic accident rates on the High Road were far higher.

A button-operated crossing device in Streatham

As the volume and speed of traffic increased in the 1930s, public concerns grew. In 1931, the *Streatham News* exclaimed, ‘From the perils of Streatham High Road, Good Lord deliver us’, triggering a raft of initiatives and resident suggestions on public safety.

Mr Frost of Kempshott Road, writing to the *Streatham News* about the dangers to pedestrians of the High Road’s ‘speedway section’ from Streatham Hill station to the Dip, commented it was an easy way of committing suicide, and the current trend of accidents would require expanding cemeteries. There were even calls for another ambulance station in Streatham because of the high accident rate.

The ever-helpful Streatham Rate Payers Association pushed the suggestion for a pedestrian tunnel under the road by Streatham Hill station, using an existing tunnel connected to the station. A few years earlier they had lobbied for traffic signals for pedestrians along the High Road. Belisha beacons did arrive in Streatham and also railings by Streatham Hill station. Belisha beacons were

A helping hand crossing Streatham High Road by the Tate Library c1932
(Reproduced by kind permission of Lambeth Archives/00507)

introduced by Leslie Hore-Belisha, the then-Minister of Transport, under the Road Traffic Act of 1934. Not everyone liked the crossings, and one installed near the station caused so many problems it had to be removed. The railings were criticised by some as well. 'They've made Streatham look more like a section of Epsom racecourse than a respectable suburb' was one retort.

The conundrum for the council was striking the right balance between pedestrians and motorists. For the motorist, Mr Hawkridge of Kirkstall Gardens, writing to the *Daily News,* criticised pedestrians who dither while crossing the road, claiming they treated the new Belisha beacons with contempt. The *Streatham News* went further, stating that apart from danger spots on the High Road (Streatham Hill station and Greyhound Lane), it was safe to cross as long as pedestrians used common sense. 'If anyone has to stand on the kerb for half a minute then he or she complains of the danger of Streatham High Road – nobody has a minute to spare these days.' Others went even further – Mr May of Leigham Court Road argued that pedestrians should be fined for crossing the road when the lights were red. Local newspapers continued to report public concerns and published gory articles on those mown down on the High Road the previous week.

Meanwhile, magistrates continued to fine motorists for not stopping at

crossings. One Lambeth magistrate firmly stated, 'I'm not going to have pedestrians chased off these crossings by motorists and made to scuttle away like so many mice.' Yet in a famous case, Lady Hailsham, the wife of the Lord Chancellor, had her case for not stopping at an uncontrolled crossing on the High Road, dismissed. Sir Gervais Rentoul, the magistrate (previously Conservative MP for Lowestoft), said that you never could be quite sure whether a pedestrian is waiving their right to cross the road – stopping voluntarily or having their passage interrupted. Not so lucky was Henry Holmes of Fulham who was fined £3 (£180 at today's prices) for not stopping at a crossing on the High Road, scattering seven people and nearly running down a crippled old gentleman.

As today, improving road user behaviour was key. Streatham Councillor Cooper was a proponent of educating pedestrians how to cross roads. His assessment was that people crossed in bunches when they shouldn't. He urged the local police to give lessons on crossing the road. Getting the police more involved was the answer to the problem. So, police did sit in police cars along the High Road with loudspeakers on top, imparting caution and advice to people crossing the road. An interesting 'solution'!

STREATHAM GREEN: PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES?

Those waiting patiently for Streatham Green to be rejuvenated will be pleased to hear that Lambeth Council is taking over the project from InStreatham BID, adding £55,000 to the coffers. Planned work is scheduled to start soon, with completion due by the end of 2026.

One concern is whether the street drinkers who congregate for the views from the Green will disperse or stop drinking. Lambeth Public Health is starting a new campaign to stop street drinking – 'Reducing the Strength' – a 'holistic' approach to the problem. This involves working with local off licences to remove cheap, high-strength booze in certain areas, plus working with partners to create diversionary activities to reduce street drinking.

Tim Whitaker

The Green awaits its transformation (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

EVENTS

RARE TREE JOINS THE WOODFIELD ORCHARD

The Friends of Tooting Common have donated a special rare tree – the True Service tree (*Cormus domestica*) – to the Woodfield Community Orchard. The tree produces a small pear-like fruit, which was used to make cider by monks in medieval times. It might be starting small, but the sapling could grow to 20 metres and live in excess of 500 years. Its planting in February by volunteers will help to preserve the species in the UK, and brings the total number of trees in the orchard to 29.

The True Service sapling in position

Four elm trees, specially selected to be resistant to Dutch elm disease, were also planted at the western end of Woodfield in February. They have been generously donated by Elms4London, an initiative of the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association (MPGA), a charity that has played a vital role in the preservation and improvement of gardens, neglected sites and green open spaces across London. For more details about plantings at Woodfield, go to thewoodfield.org/orchard.

Ruth Findlay

PLANTERS REPLANTED

Contractors have been out in action replanting the planters on the High Road, getting them in shape for the summer days ahead with a selection of perennials and annual flowers. This is great news after the planters had been neglected when the previous contract for their maintenance ended last year.

In December, Streatham Society trustees Trudy Kuhn and Robert Doyle had taken matters into their own

hands and refreshed the abandoned planters with a selection of bulbs and winter-flowering pansies, part funded by the Society.

Robert writes: 'It's good to see that the previously neglected planters on the High Road have been replanted now that InStreatham, our local Business Improvement District (funded directly by local business rate payers), is back in action.'

THE RAILSIDE COMMUNITY GARDEN

Last summer, Lambeth Tour Guide Trudy Kuhn stopped off at the Railside Community Garden that runs on railway land between Wellfield and Gleneldon Roads, on her walk *The Secrets of Streatham Village.*

The garden was created by the Railside Community Garden Association, founded by a group of Streatham residents in 2018 after they saw the potential to convert a disused piece of railway land into a community garden. During 2019 and 2020, they successfully landscaped the area, built planters and established themselves as a community asset. So after many years of negotiations and hard work, their dreams had became reality.

Our guided tour drops in on the Railside Community Garden last summer

The Railside Community Garden is the perfect place to learn about gardening, meet your neighbours, make new friends and improve the local environment. Plus there's the chance to learn more about sustainable horticulture and grow fruit and vegetables, which members share. The flowers they grow help to sustain their bees – yes, they also have hives, which produce delicious floral honey. The garden also holds events throughout the year, including plant sales and family open days. Make time to go along one Saturday morning, when they're open for their weekly gardening session between 11am and 1pm. They're a friendly bunch! For more information, go to railsidegarden.org.uk.

Freda Graham

LOCAL HISTORY MATTERS

FROM WARRANTS TO WINE: A DINNER DATE TO REMEMBER

If you had told Inspector James Henry Jarvis back in 1908 that he would one day be the guest of honour at a dinner hosted by the very women he once hauled off to Holloway prison, he likely would have checked your temperature.

Inspector James Jarvis (Photo: Daily Mail & General Trust. Courtesy British Library

And yet, on 30 September 1936, the *Evening News* reported exactly that: a remarkable reunion dinner where the former 'Terror of Clement's Inn' sat down to break bread with his old adversaries.

Inspector Jarvis's claim to fame began on 12 October 1908, when he marched into the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) headquarters to arrest three prominent members of the movement: Emmeline Pankhurst, Christabel Pankhurst and Flora Drummond.

At the time, Inspector Jarvis represented the stoic face of the Metropolitan Police, tasked with ending the 'Rush on Parliament'. The Pankhursts, the masters of PR, famously made him wait while they finished their tea and posed for a farewell photo on the roof.

The Suffragette newspaper (Image: Schlesinger Library, Harvard University)

His relationship with the WSPU movement was paradoxical. While he was the man who handcuffed them, he was also known as the 'Gentleman Inspector'. Even when Emmeline Pankhurst had boxed his ears to force a technical arrest, Jarvis reportedly took the blows with the professional calm of a man who knew he was a supporting actor in a very grand drama.

By 1936, the War for the Vote was long over, and the former combatants had apparently decided that the best way to settle old scores was over a meal in a West End restaurant. The dinner served as a vivid testament to how much British society had shifted in 28 years.

The suffragettes feel the long arm of the law
(Image: LSE Library Collection, 7JCC/O/02/064)

The guest of honour, Jarvis, now a retired Chief Inspector, sat among women who had once gone on hunger strike under his watch. The atmosphere was described as one of mutual respect. The suffragettes, who once viewed his uniform as a symbol of oppression, now celebrated him as a fair-minded professional who had done a difficult job with unfailing courtesy. Tales were swapped of high-speed chases on foot and the time the Inspector had to navigate a sea of purple, white, and green banners just to deliver a piece of paper.

Mrs Flora Drummond, known as The General in the WSPU, commented, 'He was always a very nice man. He had his duty to do, and he did it with the maximum of efficiency and courtesy. We never resented his frequent appearances in our midst, for he had the most charming way of arresting us.'

It seems that in the end, the Inspector and the suffragettes found common ground. They were both survivors of a time when 'deeds, not words' ruled the streets. Jarvis might have started his career chasing them, but he ended it as their favourite dinner guest – proving that if you wait long enough, your jailer might just become your jeweller.

James Henry Jarvis and his wife Geraldine lived at 14 Rosedene Avenue, Streatham, where he kept one of his most prized possessions – a relic of the women's suffrage war – a long stout chain! He died on 13 February 1947.

Mark Bery

ANATOMY OF A PROPERTY DEVELOPER

In our last newsletter, we featured the history of the Streatham Hill Theatre and its developer Hugh Sewell Kingdon. A visionary entrepreneur he might have been, but his life was not without controversary...

Hugh Sewell Kingdon has been lauded as the visionary for Streatham Hill Theatre and indeed could be in the Streatham's History Hall of Fame. Like a lot of entrepreneurs, however, he frequently became embroiled in public controversy. His early business life was spent abroad and included a scheme selling land to grow pineapples. Accused of nefarious activity, he successfully sued for libel those saying he was just fleecing UK investors. This started frequent appearances in the media.

After his Streatham Hill Theatre investment, Kingdon concentrated on running the Locarno Dance Hall, though not without controversy. In 1929, he operated a colour bar on entry, arguing inter-racial marriage was undesirable, stating, 'So far as I am concerned, there will be no association between black and white at the Locarno.' Three West Indian customers had been refused entry, including a postgraduate of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, a member of the Middle Temple, and a solicitor of the Supreme Court of Granada in the British West Indies. The MP for Camberwell North West raised questions in the House of Commons.

A few years later, Hugh Sewell Kingdon was prosecuted for selling alcohol without a licence at the Locarno Club. He vehemently denied this, and explained that he only belonged to reputable clubs – the Royal Automobile Club and, of course, Streatham's Belmont Bowling Club!

MR. HUGH KINGDON IN LIBEL ACTION

Streatham Amusement Centre Mentioned

HIS REPLY TO ALLEGATIONS IN THE HIGH COURT

Streatham in the headlines with Hugh Kingdon's libel case in the high court

Constantly on the lookout for new get-rich schemes, Kingdon attempted to set up a Twickenham-type stadium for rugby union on Tooting Common, though this never got off the ground. At one point, he thought his work in Streatham was done and looked at emigrating to develop a scheme in South Africa, but that fell through. Controversy followed him in 1934 when, at Croydon Police Court, he was ordered to pay Croydon Council

because he hadn't made his contribution for the cost of making up a road, with the court commenting that 'he had been difficult to deal with'. The riches-to-rags saga continued when he had to pay nearly £100,000 (at today's prices) in damages for a libel case brought against him regarding the Locarno and work by subcontractors. And then the big fall from grace – he became bankrupt.

Political asperations

Less well known are Hugh Kington's political interests and fascist sympathies. In 1931, he participated in the Streatham Parliament (yes, Streatham did have 'a Parliament' to debate political issues of the day, a bit like a sixth-form debating society) and for a time he was 'Chancellor of the Exchequer', representing the United Empire Party. This was the party set up by newspaper owner Lord Rothermere, who thought Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative Prime Minister, was a crypto-socialist and campaigned for the Empire. Lord Rothermere was initially sympathetic to the British Union of Fascists (BUF), and his *Daily Mail* newspaper ran headlines such as 'Hurrah for the Fascists', but he fell out with them over their violence and hostility to Jews.

Madeira Hall, in Madeira Road, held fascist meetings in the 1930s

Kingdon shifted to speaking in favour of fascism and writing for the BUF. In March 1935, he spoke at Dunraven School on the fascist policy for keeping cheaply produced goods from the east out of Britain. Kingdon also wrote for the *Fascist Quarterly* magazine on freedom and the imposition of regulations, arguing that fascism would allow the individual to live according to his own tastes.

Hugh Kingdon died on 19 October 1940, in an air raid by Streatham Common while taking a bath, with his body recovered from the debris 12 hours later. Since 1939 he had worked as a clerk and caretaker at the Lambeth Food Control Centre – a remarkable come-down in his fortunes.

On his premature death, the *Streatham News* sagely stated that, 'He was a man of great ideas, which he pushed through with a keen determination that was almost ruthless... yet possessed a tendency to create opposition that militated his success. Probably no other man has aroused a greater conflict of opinion among local residents as to the wisdom and need of developments.'

Tim Whitaker

FROM GRAND MANSIONS TO A GRAND PARADE

Late Victorian and Edwardian Streatham was a prosperous and thriving south London suburb. Its three railway stations and modern tram and bus services provided excellent transport links with central London, and made the area a popular one in which the aspiring middle-classes of the day settled.

In the opening years of the 20th century, numerous postcard printers published various views of the town, which showed Streatham as an impressive and vibrant place in which to live, with grand shopping parades and plenty of wide-open spaces to enjoy and explore. As we view these postcards today, we get a wonderful glimpse of a bygone Streatham and admire the magnificent old buildings that they depict.

However, we should not forget that many of these early Edwardian views of our town were not intended to depict old images of Streatham, but were published to show a modern, new Streatham, with many of the buildings featured being less than 30 years old at the time.

One such view (below) shows an image of Bank Parade, 426-450 Streatham High Road, opposite Streatham Common, at the junction with Greyhound Lane. It was built in 1890, as the date in the brickwork over the door testifies. Standing four stories high, this was the largest building in south

Bank Parade building, Streatham High Road

Westwell (left) and High Elms (right) opposite Streatham Common

Streatham. Shops occupied the ground floor, with flats on the three floors above, each of which enjoyed magnificent views over Streatham Common.

Bank Parade was built on the site of two large houses that faced the Common, called High Elms and Westwell. In the late 1700s, the surveyor James Edwards, in his book *A Companion from London to Brigthelmstone* [Brighton], describes these as 'two large houses adjoining each other: built with red brick, and pretty lofty: that on the north (High Elms) is in the occupation of J Whitelock Esq. The southmost (Westwell) in Henry Thomas Esq.'

High Elms was a long, low, white house and was occupied by a number of notable residents over the years. Warren Hastings (1732-1818), the first Governor General of India, stayed here when young. It was also the home of Sir John Milton, Assistant Accountant General to the War Office in 1871-1878,

An 1860s map showing the position of High Elms and Westwell houses

Andrew Hamilton's memorial brass in Immanuel church

and Sir Henry Muggeridge, Sheriff of London in 1852-1855.

Westwell was a large, red-brick house and was so named for being the house to the west of the original Streatham mineral wells, which were located at the top of Streatham Common on the site now occupied by the Rookery gardens.

For many years, Westwell was the home of Andrew Hamilton (1793-1853), who donated part of his garden for the building of the nearby Immanuel church, which was constructed in 1854. The Hamiltons also donated £1,000 towards the cost of building the church and, in return for their generosity, the family was allowed to appoint the first three vicars of Immanuel, after which the patronage was transferred to the Rector of Streatham.

Bank Parade, the replacement to these grand houses, was built by William Marriage of Croydon, to the designs of Tooly & Son of 66 Canon Street, London. For many years, it was regarded as south Streatham's premier shopping centre, with many of the area's leading traders operating from the building. Among these was R Higgs & Sons, who ran a dairy business from their shop in the parade. Some years ago, Andrew Hadden, a fellow member of the Streatham Society, discovered some old photographs of the shop and its attending dairy carts, which we feature here.

The premises of R Higgs & Sons Dairies

Another notable trader was Thomas Edwin Park, a local

R Higgs & Sons' fleet of dairy carts outside Bank Parade

butcher. He was a keen collector of landscape pictures, amassing a collection of more than 150 works, most of them by the local artist Holland Tringham, whose name now adorns the Wetherspoon pub on the High Road.

The grand Bank Parade building originally had a glass canopy, supported on ornate cast iron pillars, which provided a grand covered walkway in front of the shops. This structure was removed in 1939, but Bank Parade remains today one of the most impressive buildings in south Streatham and is a fine example of late Victorian architecture.

John W Brown

The impressive Bank Parade in modern times

CHINA COMES TO STREATHAM

Our meeting on 2 June examined the various connections between Streatham and China. Here, one of our speakers, ***Professor Maurizio Marinelli****, focuses on the influence that Streatham had on a reknowned Chinese writer. A recording of this talk is available on our YouTube channel.*

What was a Chinese writer doing in London 100 years ago, and how did he end up in Streatham of all places? His name was Lao She, and his brief stay in our neighbourhood forms part of a much larger story about China's encounter with the modern world. By tracing his London experiences – teaching in Bloomsbury, lodging with ordinary families and writing about his Streatham landlord – we can glimpse how a major Chinese author saw Britain from the inside.

Lao She, born Shu Qingchun in Beijing in 1899, is now widely regarded as one of the most important writers of 20th-century Chinese literature and a key architect of Chinese literary modernism. Growing up in a poor family, he experienced at first hand the legacies of social dislocation, foreign invasion and ethnic discrimination. These early experiences gave him a lifelong concern with social justice and the everyday lives of the urban poor.

Author Lao She

After excelling at school and then working as a headmaster, Lao She came of age intellectually in the ferment of the May Fourth (1919) and New Culture (1916-26) movements, which called for a 'literary revolution' to remake Chinese society. Reformers urged writers to abandon classical prose in favour of plain, realistic literature that could speak to ordinary readers and expose social ills. Lao She embraced this, but refused to discard Chinese narrative traditions altogether, blending modern realism with elements from classical tales, Peking opera, humour and melodrama.

But let's come to Lao She's connection with London, which was a turning point in his life. In 1924, Lao She left China for London to take up a lectureship in colloquial Chinese at the School of Oriental Studies (now SOAS), where he taught the new national language to missionaries, clerks, 'city men' and students. Between 1924 and 1929, he lived in a series of modest lodgings – first with two elderly sisters in the northern suburbs, then a Notting Hill flat, a Bloomsbury hotel, and also in Streatham. These London years were

extraordinarily productive. In Notting Hill, at 31 St James's Gardens, now marked by a blue plaque, he wrote several novels including *Er Ma* – better known in English as *Mr Ma and Son* (1929), which drew most directly on his London experience. His daily commute, his encounters with landladies, workers, clergymen and students, and his observation of London's class and race hierarchies, all fed into this fiction. It was also during these years that Lao She began to be described as 'China's Charles Dickens'. The influence of Dickens was intense and formative: Lao She read Dickens to improve his English and absorbed his techniques of vivid urban description, sharply drawn minor characters, and the use of humour and pathos to criticise social injustice.

Lao She's novel* Mr Ma and Son, *set in London

For Streatham, the most evocative trace of Lao She's sojourn is his short story *My Four Landlords,* written after his return to China, in which he recollects the people who housed him in England. The final landlord in this sequence is Mr Dallman, an elderly Streatham houseowner with a small amount of savings, a deep faith in the *Morning Post*, and a firm belief that his work is sacred and that 'the English were the best people in the world'. Lao She notes Dallman's quiet pride at having served on juries, his repetitive stories about wartime incidents, and his daughter's attempts to earn money by offering dance lessons – details that capture, with wry sympathy, the petty bourgeois anxieties of interwar south London. This Streatham interlude shows how closely Lao She observed the everyday life of the neighbourhood and how it stayed with him when he was back in Beijing.

Taken together, Lao She's London writings are crucial to understanding his contribution to Chinese modernism. London gave him a vantage point from which to see both Britain and China afresh: he witnessed British racism from the receiving end, saw how global capitalism created both wealth and widespread unemployment, and moved among scholars, soldiers, workers and migrants whose lives rarely appear in official histories. He then translated these experiences into a new kind of Chinese prose, committed to portraying ordinary lives in all their complexity. By doing so, he helped shift Chinese fiction away from elite, classical concerns and towards the crowded streets, cramped lodgings and noisy marketplaces of modern urban life – much as Dickens had done, a century earlier, for London.

REMEMBERING JUDY HARRIS

Many of you know that Judy Harris sadly passed away in February. Judy was until recently our membership secretary, and was formerly editor of our quarterly newsletter and a trustee of the Society.

For many years, Judy made a valuable contribution towards helping make Streatham a better place through her dedicated work with the Society and the personal interest she took in all that was happening in the area. With Brian Bloice, who was her partner and Chair of the Streatham Society, she ensured the Society operated effectively for the community. Judy also found time to write books, including biographies of Donald McGill and the Roupell family, as well as the Heritage trails she devised and led for the Society.

Judy frequently expressed how much the Streatham Youth and Community Trust (SYCT) meant to her, describing it as her favourite charity. In recognition of this we have chosen to honour her memory by awarding a one-off grant of £500 to SYCT. This special grant will help fund their residential visit to Great Yarmouth, which plays a vital role in their programme of activities and makes a meaningful difference to those they support.

On the following pages, Judy is remembered by her sister, Jane, and her friend Rt Hon Keith Hill, previously MP for Streatham.

Mark Bery

Judy with partner Brian Bloice, former Chair of the Society

Judy (right) with her younger sister Jane

LITTLE JUDY, MY BIG SISTER

We were both small for our ages, two little girls walking a six-mile round trip to school every day, mainly across fields, with cows... and cowpats. In retrospect, this was amazing, especially as it was on the strength of a bowl of Rice Krispies!

We were brought up in the north-east, on the edge of a rural village in our grandparents' house. Our mother fled a violent marriage when Judy was four and I was two. I have no recollection of those early years – Judy did and they were not good. Mother went home to her parents, where we were not exactly met with open arms. Our grandmother was not enamored of having the shame of a divorced daughter, let alone two small children, thrust upon her. Our grandfather, a lovely man, took us to his heart, thank goodness!

My mother had to take a full-time job, and as she left home early and returned just before our bedtime, it meant that when we were young we saw less of her than the reluctant grandmother. Our daily mantra was – be quiet, be good, don't upset grandmother! My response was to go in the garden with my granddad. Judy, naturally shy and quiet, withdrew into the world of fiction – she became an avid reader. Books were her solace and she aspired to be a librarian.

At school, Judy was deemed to be bright and was pushed up a year, but this

was not a good move. Henceforth, she was always the youngest and the smallest in her group. Eleven plus age 10, A levels at 17, grades not high enough and too young for university. Desperate to leave home, she went to teacher training college at Avery Hill. Her first teaching job was at Fenstanton School in Streatham where she remained, becoming a true city dweller – which suited her and surprised me.

As a teacher she had a successful career. She never sought promotion; her opinion was that a deputy head was the worst job in the school and only undertaken as a step to becoming a Head – which she saw as mainly dealing with parents and governors. She wanted to teach the children.

She met her partner Brian through shared interests. They became a couple – he gained her trust, managing to break through the shell that Judy hid behind. By her own admission, she was wary of letting anyone get close to her, as it might end up in her getting hurt.

Judy and Brian were a truly odd couple – in the best sense! He being tall and thin, and sporting striking facial hair and Buddy Holly glasses – stuck together with masking tape, which Judy coloured black with a felt tip. In contrast, Judy was short and round, describing herself as a badly stuffed pillow – which was nice as Brian referred to her as his cushion. She encouraged Brian to abandon beige and wear more colourful clothes, which he fully embraced – pink shirt, purple tie, red trousers, yellow braces and mismatched socks.

From a shy person who wanted to disappear into the wallpaper, Judy became a party person. She loved throwing parties, saying, 'All I do is provide the venue, the guests bring the food and the wine, and Brian washes up.' Brian was a soul mate – he released her true, mildly eccentric personality and her sense of humour. I never knew my sister could be so funny! Together they devoted time and energy to the Streatham Society and local history group, and the friends they made in their many activities.

Judy was a natural researcher and was proud of her publications. She also spent a lot of effort on our family history, uncovering a few dark truths but also discovering a cousin with whom she struck up a valued friendship.

Her deteriorating eyesight became a real problem, especially after Brian died – he had been her eyes. Technology was the cause of irritation and frustration, life had become a bit of an assault course, and a battle.

Little Judy – determined, stoical and stubborn, my big sister, whom I will miss.

Jane Hansell

Judy with Keith Hill in 2024

JUDY HARRIS
AN APPRECIATION
by Rt Hon Keith Hill, MP for Streatham 1992-2010

Judy and I hit it off from the word go. I enjoyed her wry sense of humour and forthright opinions, and she took a kindly interest in me – in part, perhaps, because of her interest in my profession at the time. She had, after all, devoted a great deal of time to the study of one of Parliament's greatest miscreants William Roupell, MP for Lambeth from 1857 to 1862, when he was imprisoned for 14 years for forgery. Her great book on William and his family – *The Roupells of Lambeth* – was published by the Streatham Society in 2001. My copy contains a compliments slip from Judy on which she writes, 'Thank you for your order – most appropriate yours was the first received from the Streatham Society'. I don't entirely know what she meant by 'most appropriate', but I do know that it's a very good read.

It was the first of a surge of publications, six between 2001 and 2003, the others being *Trailing the Roupells; From Fenstanton House to Fenstanton School; Streatham Heritage Trail: Roupell Park & Leigham Court; Donald McGill's Comic Postcards and the Streatham Connection;* and *A History of Lambeth's Horticultural Societies.* They are all well written and carefully researched.

Although her subjects are apparently somewhat disparate, they all revolve geographically around Fenstanton Primary School on Christchurch Road, where Judy taught for 32 years from 1965 until 1997. Donald McGill spent his last years at 36 Christchurch Road, and the disreputable Roupell's homes (apart from HMP Portland) were at Aspen House and Garden Lane, both within school-bell distance of Fenstanton. Roupell had also been the founder of (and, after his release from prison, the secretary of) the Brixton, Streatham and Clapham

Horticultural Society, and this perhaps fed into Judy's passion for gardens. She was certainly a huge supporter of the Streatham Common Community Garden.

Judy's interest in local history started in her teenage years in Middlesbrough and developed at Fenstanton School where she led Year 6 children in an archaeological dig in the school grounds. However, by her own account, her serious work on Roupell Park and Donald McGill began in 1983, when she joined the Streatham Local History Research Group and enrolled in Brian Bloice's local history class at Granton School. A year later, she and Brian became partners and remained so until Brian's death in October 2015.

Judy joined the Streatham Society in 1984. In 1998, she took on the role of membership secretary and after that responsibility for publications. (She retained the publications job until her death and only gave up the membership role last year.) She was also a committee member and the walks organiser. Most importantly, in 2009 Judy stepped up as the editor of the newly retitled *Streatham Society News,* when failing health obliged the indomitable Brenda Hargreaves to relinquish the editorship of the newsletter *Pump* after nearly 23 years. It was a job Judy carried out with determination and distinction for 16 years until June 2025.

Brian's loss was a great personal blow – when Judy retired as editor she thanked Streatham Society trustees and contributors for their support through 'the last 10 difficult years'. It was also a challenge to the newsletter, to which as Society chair for many years Brian had been a major contributor. But, with the help of John W Brown, Graham Gower and many others, the newsletter was in due course restored to full vigour.

Judy kept on going – and usually walking. It was through walking everywhere that she was provoked into one of her campaigns – against the proliferation of missing-pet posters stuck on Lambeth's listed Victorian stench pipes ('Presumably this is because of the increase in home printing rather than pet kidnappers'). She declared her intention of tearing down every one of them!

She loved the Streatham scene. She was a constant attender at such events as the Streatham Festival, Kite Day, the Lambeth Country Show and the Open Days as well as street parties, where she would set up the Society bookstall.

As she approached what she called 'the big 80', she wrote that this was when you hoped people would be saying 'No, really? You don't look it; you are so active, alert and interesting!' Well, she was all of these things, and more. Judy Harris was a distinguished local historian and a pillar of the Streatham Society. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be her friend.

STREATHAM SOCIETY REPORTS

Rory Luxton with the mock-up of our latest shop plaque

SHOP PLAQUE UPDATES

We have recently received a mock-up of our next plaque and are preparing to order the final product. This will be displayed on Regen Gym, the site of the first location of a Pratts store, which later became the site of the first Waitrose supermarket.

The siting of these plaques has presented a number of challenges, and we were disappointed to learn that gift shop Creative Soul – a major supporter of our scheme – has now ceased to trade in Streatham. Once a few plaques have been installed, we hope other businesses will gain a clearer understanding of the scheme's purpose and choose to join. Ultimately, we believe the plaques will have a positive impact by helping to increase custom to each business – at no cost to them.

Another major setback has befallen what we hoped would be our initial plaque display, celebrating the the UK's first woman press photographer Christina Broom, who had a shop at 87 Streatham Hill. The unveiling was scheduled for 12 June as part of the Wandsworth Heritage Festival, with Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Marissa Roth set to unveil the plaque.

Roadworks and scaffolding at Balfe's Bikes

However, after assessing the site in May, I discovered several unforeseen complications. The major works on the A23 at Streatham Hill have shifted to the southbound carriageway, resulting in pavement width restrictions and the imminent closure of Barcombe Avenue, the side street. To complicate matters, scaffolding now obscures the front of Balfe's Bikes, the intended location for the plaque. According to current plans, roof repairs on the block will continue until November 2026, followed by brickwork cleaning. As a result, we regretfully must postpone the plaque unveiling until 2027.

Mark Bery

RECENT MEETINGS

BALLAD OF WANDSWORTH PRISON

Our fascinating talk on 3 February, ***Oscar Wilde at Wandsworth Prison,*** revealed the story of Wilde's time in Wandsworth, from July to November 1895. This was before he was transferred to Reading, which inspired his poem *A Ballad of Reading Gaol.* At the Q&A that followed, speaker Stewart McLaughlin (right), of the Wandsworth Prison Museum, discussed Wilde's reception and treatment while in the prison.

WORLD OF PHOTOGRAPHY

From left: Dr Stephen Murphy; self-portrait photograph by John Thomson, 1871 (Photo: Wellcome Collection)

At our talk on 3 March, Dr Stephen Murphy from SOAS (School of Oriental and Asian Studies) examined the career of Scottish photographer, John Thomson (1837-1921). Thomson, who lived at 51 (now 53) Woodfield Avenue and is buried in Streatham Cemetery, is often credited as one of the world's earliest photo-journalists. He documented the lives of all sections of society, from Covent Garden flower sellers to the King of Siam, and his remarkable story made for a fascinating talk. Beautiful photography books of some of his prints were on display as well. The talk is available on our YouTube channel.

TALES FROM THE COMMON

The first of our walks for 2026 was Lambeth Tour Guide Yvonne Shorten's ***Streatham Common: Healing Waters and Empowering Voices*** on 22 March. John Brown joined this popular tour to add his recollections of his father taking part in the digging of air raid shelters on the Common in the Second World War.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Two talks on the topical subject of climate change were on the bill for our meeting on 7 April. First, Kevin Martin (front left in photo), Head of Tree Collections at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, highlighted the effects these changes will have on open green spaces. This was followed by Tom Bolton (front right), from the Marine Conservation Society, who outlined the effects on oceans. Our audience heard how addressing these challenges will need thoughtful strategies and a commitment to sustainable solutions to safeguard our natural environments for future generations. Both talks can be found on our YouTube channel.

MEMBERSHIP

We've had a good number of new members this year, including 16 who joined as a result of meeting us at our stall at Streatham Common Kite Day on 10 May. We're pleased to introduce new members Christine Walker, Mark Evans, Victor McGill, Margaret Molloy, Delphine Evon, Jo Ostrowska, Jonathan Leake, Barbara West, Alan Sheldon, Mr and Mrs De Grey, Halina Ward, Paul Stroud, Anita Dyson, Niall Jackson-Keith, Roger Paton, Peter Hicks, Julie Goring, John Brakband, Angela Morgan, Alex Croft, Barbara Kemp, Rafe Suvarna, Tim Davies, Frances Howcutt, Louise Wiggins, David Dew-Veal, Richard Hilsley, Karen Hirst, Ellen Cockerill, George Nicol, Humphrey and Zara Drummond, Peter Johnson, Richard Payne, Clair Wilson, Paul Brewer, Ronnie Hackston, Caroline Hewett, Eamon Pryle, Trevor Hoare, Joanne Dempsey, Colin Conroy and Richard Pujal. Welcome to you all!

We launched the membermojo system last December and it's proved a great asset to the Society, enabling members to update their own details and for us to more easily keep track of membership and payments. We've implemented PayPal on the system, too, making it easier to renew and pay in one go. Please check that you've made a Gift Aid declaration if you're eligible, as it is worth an extra 25p for every £1 you give and won't cost you any extra.

Freda Graham, Membership Secretary

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Published by the Streatham Society.
Printed by **Printinc**: tel: 07974 918601; email: info@printinc.org.uk

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

Registered Charity 283297

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