



# STREATHAM SOCIETY NEWS

Published quarterly

No. 248 Spring 2022

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**ROUTEMASTER AT STREATHAM HILL**  
**Comic Relief - Red Nose Day** (*See p.3*)

**2022 MEMBERSHIP - Have you paid your subscription?**

Final reminders enclosed - see p.26

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# STREATHAM SOCIETY MEETINGS & EVENTS PROGRAMME 2022

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## MEETINGS

Our in-person meetings are held in St Leonard's Church, Streatham.

Non-members are welcome but are requested to donate £1 to help cover costs.

*Tues 7 June* **Annual General Meeting** for members at 6.30pm Followed by:

*Tues 7 June* **Streatham Ice Rink The Early Years (1931-1946)**

7.30pm Talk for all by Saki Hajnal (*Also Wandsworth Heritage Festival*)

*Tues 5 July* **Bygone Streatham** Talk by John W Brown

7.30pm Introducing his latest publication *Bygone Streatham High Road & Streatham Hill in Old Picture Postcards* (See p.29)

*August* No meeting

## EVENTS (See also p.30)

*Also for Wandsworth Heritage Festival & Local History Walks in South London*

*Sun 29 May* **Tours of the Grounds of Sir Henry Tate's House in Streatham**

2 & 3pm Booking essential via Eventbrite. Details at [streathamsociety.org.uk](http://streathamsociety.org.uk)

*Mon 6 June* **St Leonard's Church, Churchyard & Crypt - Guided tour**

1.30pm Led by John W Brown. Booking essential. Also a bookstall

*Sat 11 June* **Sport and Recreation on Tooting Common - Guided walk**

2pm Led by Robert Doyle. Booking essential.

Meet Junction Garrads Road and Tooting Bec Road SW16 1RG

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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.*

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## STREATHAM ROUND AND ABOUT

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### MY ROUTEMASTER MOMENT



*The Bus Crew and Judy Harris on the Routemaster  
at Telford Avenue, Streatham Hill*

On Red Nose Day, March 18th 2022, I decided (without the red nose) to record a planned 137 Routemaster journey collecting donations for Comic Relief. Three return journeys were advertised.

It was a beautiful sunny day so I waited at Telford Avenue, Streatham Hill, for the first departure at 10.14a.m. I was about 10 minutes early and was surprised no-one was waiting. As the bright sun would have made my photograph impossible, I walked to the bus stop in Streatham Place which faced a different direction. Still no-one there.

My plan was to photograph the waiting group then jump on the bus with them. But there was no group; so when the empty bus arrived I took a photograph as it sailed past. Shortly afterwards I caught a service 137 in the hopes of catching up. But we didn't.

After a long traffic delay approaching Sloane Square I alighted and wandered around until the anticipated scheduled return time. No countdown in the bus



*Brian Bloice, our late chairman says Farewell to the 159 Routemaster  
Oxford Street 2005*

shelter and I have no phone app for information. So I caught a service bus back to Streatham Hill and waited - alone.

The Routemaster arrived at about 12.25p.m, two passengers alighted and I was the only one chatting to the bus crew, having a photograph taken by one of them on my camera and donating. By then there were perhaps about eight enthusiasts across the road waiting for the next journey.

Why was no-one there? Has the lure of the Routemaster declined so much since 2005 (*above*)? Were recent Covid restrictions continuing to make the older generation wary? Or perhaps in the Internet age most information is posted close to the event or at the last minute so those who are not online or who check social media infrequently miss out? I guess it is the latter.

Many thanks to the cheerful, friendly crew. I hope the event was worth the effort and donations mounted - but I doubt it.

I would have loved to have been seated upstairs on that empty bus.

### **Postscript**

I don't wish to spoil fond memories of the Routemaster, but mine differ slightly.

I remember, in the late 1950s, falling off the platform when I tried to board a bus as it drew away from the stop. In 1980s Oxford Street I was pushed off a crowded platform a few times. Yes, conductors helped a lot but they could not supervise crowds easily as well as collecting ticket money and giving change.

More recently on a Routemaster journey I realised the seats were less comfortable and narrower than on modern buses. No doubt thanks to expanding bottoms over the years.

Happy days!

**Judy Harris**

## **BELL RIBEIRO-ADDY, STREATHAM'S MP, RECEIVES AWARD**

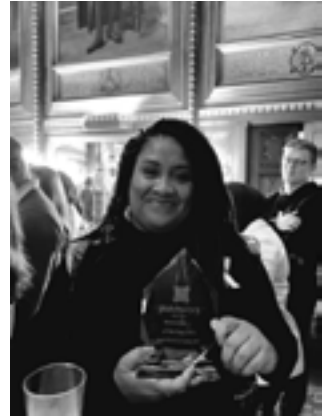
On March 16th, the diversity and inclusion charity Patchwork Foundation declared Bell the 2021 Newcomer of the Year. The award was presented by Patchwork Patron, Mr Speaker, Rt Hon Sir Lindsey Hoyle MP, in Speaker's House (*right*).

The Patchwork Foundation's prestigious annual awards celebrate those MPs who have actively worked with underrepresented and disadvantaged communities across the UK. MPs are nominated by the public, with winners being selected by an independent panel of judges.

Bell was recognised for her efforts to combat digital exclusion amongst children through the pandemic, as well as her championing of refugee rights and inclusion in her community.

In her acceptance speech, Bell expressed her delight and thanks to her team for their hard work in such difficult times. In particular, she recognised the support from the wider Streatham community; from local charities to youth services, faith groups, local Labour members and frontline workers in schools, care homes, NHS, and emergency services.

Congratulations to our energetic and hard-working MP, Bell Ribeiro-Addy.



## **STREATHAM YOUTH AND COMMUNITY TRUST (SYCT)**

### **Support for Ukraine**

Reported in their recent newsletter was the rescue mission to Ukraine undertaken by CEO Angie Coton with her husband and a companion (*photo below*). They drove two vans to the Poland/Ukraine border to deliver supplies. While enroute, they connected with a Norbury based sponsor who was looking for someone to help Natalie, a Ukrainian woman, and her children get to the UK. Angie and friends drove the family as far as Calais to wait for Natalie's visa. They then lobbied MPs and Croydon Council to continue her journey to Norbury. Hopefully, this was/will be successful.

### **Covid lockdown Experiences**

Young leaders from SYCT and Photofusion have put together a film about their experiences during Covid lockdown. It was a 12 week project in which they learned technical elements, cinematography, lighting, camera operating, editing, producing, and interviewing. Photofusion is a Lambeth based charity which works with young people and helps them develop digital and photographic skills. The film's release date is yet to be confirmed.



*Angie and the SYCT Aid to Ukraine Team*

tion of our diverse community and needs our support. Recent Covid restrictions have brought serious problems for all small charities.

For several years I have been an admirer of the work of the SYCT. I strongly believe local charities with a proven record deserve our support, particularly as larger national charities can afford to use social media to quickly raise considerable amounts.

The SYCT runs a number of projects serving the needs and educa-

## **TWO NEW NATURE RESERVES FOR STREATHAM**

Streatham has two new Nature Reserves. They are Unigate Woods and Eardley Road Sidings. Lambeth plans to add more to the 78 already listed. These are chosen for their value as habitat for local wildlife and potential to improve local biodiversity, as well as providing residents with support for their mental and physical well-being.

Unigate Woods with the adjacent Valley Road playing field is one of several open areas within easy walking distance of my home. Hidden behind the houses in Valley Road, it is very popular with local residents. Approaching the woods from Namba Roy Close, opposite Sunnyhill School, I walk along the tree-lined path down to the field where there is a football pitch. A children's play area and adult outside gym add to the facilities. Historically this was known as Curtis Fields, attached to Curtis Dairy, now replaced by housing.

The only drawback is the lack of seating, apart from a rather dilapidated picnic bench. Presumably vandalism is the reason for this. The Friends of Unigate Wood have been active for several years and I have seldom seen litter there.

I thought I knew all our area's wealth of open spaces, large, small and hidden, but Eardley Road Sidings was a delightful surprise. I like others had assumed it was close to Eardley Road. Well maintained, with benches and a picnic area, this woodland is a delight. However, despite the fact that it is almost certainly mainly used by residents within walking distance, some plastic bags containing picnic debris had been left on top of full wastebins, to the delight of foxes, pigeons and rats. The resulting debris was scattered into the undergrowth.

What is wrong with some people? These are locals, not outsiders.



*Unigate Wood, along the path down  
to the Valley Road Playing Field*



*Eardley Road Sidings, entering from  
Bates Crescent, off Abercairn Road,  
through the woods to the picnic area*

These photos were taken in early Spring before the trees were in full leaf. They will look even more beautiful now. Enjoy a walk!

## SOME OTHER SPRING EVENTS

At last restrictions have eased and local events are returning. I very much enjoy supporting these and am puzzled as to why many have few visitors. I recognise I might be unusual in that I am attracted by an event, not its social offerings which are important to most. I also enjoy the freedom of exploring alone. As I do not like crowds (not Covid related) and prefer a variety of options, I do not pre-book.

The first weekend in April, I went to the Streatham Market in Babington Square, another interesting art exhibition in the Woodfield Pavilion, the monthly West Norwood Feast, with its wide variety of stalls and entertainment, then finished with a delightful Open Garden in Trinity Rise SW2.



The following weekend, on a sunny Saturday, I planned a special day. After breakfast at one of my favourite Streatham Hill cafés, I bussed to Mitcham Lane and walked along Moyser Road through Furzedown. First stop was a good exhibition at Sprout Arts. Next a walk past some craft stalls before the recreation ground through to Tooting Library.

Then a bus back to Streatham to Gleneldon Mews where there are now venues for occasional events. Today it was a Makers' Market and Vintage Fair (*pictured*) - beautiful crafts, clothes and accessories, with a coffee stop outside; thoroughly recommended. The next event, from Creative Streatham, is scheduled for Saturday 26th June, 11am-4pm.



Then on to the Lambeth Horticultural Society's delightful Spring Show in St Luke's Church, West Norwood.

Finally, an excellent evening performance of Stainer's Crucifixion in St Peter's Church, Leigham Court Road.

A wonderful day, but too few people visiting. See *Heart Streatham* and websites for these no-need-to-book, mostly free (donations welcome) events. Support our locality - it's worth it.

**JH**



## LOCAL HISTORY MATTERS

### A MATTER OF BONES AND BURIALS



*Schematic Map showing the area known as 'The Leonards'*

You could pass it by and not give it a second glance. A green patch bounded by buildings, dissected by paths and decorated with a weatherworn fountain. Not visually exciting as it carpets the gentle side of a hill, but nevertheless it has survived the vagaries of use as a village green. And there it sits by the High Road as a remnant of Streatham's past. If you did give it a second glance you would see that it's not a typical village green, a picturesque panorama of old England but a functional piece of land and far removed from the vision of such a place. Thus the romantic idea of Streatham village green being one of Merry England is sadly fanciful and not one of archery and village games.

So what can we further say about our tiny village green which hardly appears in our history until modern times? What we do know is that a green existed by the parish church from at least the 14th century when Streatham villager, John ate Grene, presented himself to the manor court at Merton Priory on December 13th 1394. Here he acknowledges that he held five copyhold tenements in Streatham from the Lord. From this we can assume that his properties lay near or by the green. Other than the occasional references to John ate Grene, who happened to be a habitual seller of overpriced ale, we read little of the green until the 18th century, when we are told of repeated threats to enclose this open space, which at times was seen as a piece of common waste.

The origins of our green are probably found in its position, being located by the spring line and where a small stream found its source, a watercourse that in later times became known as the Manor Ditch. This muddy patch of land lying at the top of the hill opposite the parish church of St. Leonard would have been a suitable place for the watering and gathering of livestock when travelling the road through this part of Streatham. However, it appears that this area of ground was not destined to become a traditional village green, sited as it was and seemingly finding its use as a watering place.

So what else can we say about this green of which we know very little? Well there are some historic indicators which gives the green and its surrounding area some historical interest. Perhaps we can start with the story that has floated around Streatham since the 1970s; a story that holds the dark allures of a plague pit, and said to be beneath our green. As a piece of imaginative folk lore you could not go further, and a story seemingly generated by the mounds that once stood on the green and marking the site of wartime air raid shelters. Maybe some bones were unearthed during the construction of these shelters and hence the tale. Although this is unlikely, we do however have some indications of historic activity in this area, as read from the medieval records of Streatham. These interesting snippets of Streatham's early history appear to be associated with the nearby parish church of St. Leonard and could be hinting of possible burial activity in the area of the green and perhaps relating to those terrible times when the dreaded plague of 1348/50 arrived and swept through the houses and farms of Streatham.

This naturally raises the question of where indeed the Streatham victims of the Black Death were buried – whether they were laid to rest in the churchyard or placed elsewhere. Whilst we have no list of those who perished in Streatham



*Streatham Green today*

during the '*Great Mortality*', we can more or less make a reasonable estimation of the local death toll from contemporary records. These indicate that around a third to a half of an estimated population of five to six hundred people living across the parish probably perished. With the haste of burials from this sudden and unexpected calamity the small graveyard of St. Leonard's Parish

Church would have felt the pressure for burial space. Under such circumstances it is not inconceivable that an alternative burial place was sought, as was the case with many other villages and towns across the country and where an isolated or small green space is often said, or thought, to mark such a burial spot.

The boundary of St. Leonard's churchyard was probably laid out and set during late Saxon period when a chapel predating St. Leonard's Church was established. This boundary, which encloses the notably small churchyard that we see today, came into being sometime after AD752, following a directive by Cuthbert, Archbishop of Canterbury, that areas around such a building should be consecrated for burials. Considering that burials have probably occurred in St. Leonard's Churchyard from at least this time, space must have become a premium as burials accumulated over the centuries. Historically the bones of previous burials in a churchyard were often removed and placed elsewhere to make way for new interments, which may well have occurred at St. Leonard's, as there appears to be no apparent mounding up of the churchyard over time, as seen with many other parish churches.

Moreover, it is worth noting that beneath the crypt of St. Leonard's Church is a charnel pit, a feature not normally found in a parish church. This pit is said to be some twenty-one feet in depth and dug during rebuilding works of the 1830s and accordingly filled with the bones displaced by this activity. Although no hint of a plague pit was mentioned during the digging of this pit, it is curious that it should be so deep, and one wonders if there may be more to the origins of this pit than is recorded or thought.



*One of the stone slabs set into the floor of the crypt of St. Leonard's giving access to the charnel pit, said to be some twenty-one feet deep.*

*(Courtesy of St. Leonard's Church)*

Perhaps during these disturbing times of the Black Death some extra-mural burials might have occurred, a possibility hinted at by two intriguing local field names. If we look into the medieval records of 15th century Streatham and of land ownership we come across the names of 'burylondes' and 'cherchelond', names which hold a particular interest. As it reads the name 'burylondes', farmed by William Sleaford of Streatham during the 1440s, talks of a place associated with burials in some form or another, and with 'cherchelond', held by the family of John atte Grene, we can perceive a likely connection with the parish church of St. Leonard.

Furthermore, these two old field names, seemingly located in the vicinity of the green, may also have some association with a late medieval land holding which had the significant title of 'The Leonards'. This Streatham property contained two tenements which sat by the green and some 27 acres of copyhold land which extended from the green to beyond Streatham Station and part bounded by Mitcham Lane and Streatham High Road. By the 19th century this old medieval estate had passed into history along with those other intriguing place-names, save for 'The Leonards'. This historic name was still in use as late as 1821 when a William Borradaile was conveying the house and land to a certain Ralph Fenwick. Later the property was rebuilt as the Manor House, and became one of the notable houses in Streatham and survived until the early 1880s when the house and its parklands were developed as the Manor Park Estate.

Evidently the ancient churchyard of St. Leonard's was the place for Christian burials throughout history. But what about the pagan founders of Streatham, those Saxon immigrants, soldier farmers who came from the continent and made their new homes in the northern part of Streatham during the turmoil of the fifth century AD? Archaeology has found evidence of their settlement activity but has yet to find where they buried their dead. Perhaps their bones and grave goods still lie somewhere beneath the streets and roads of Streatham Hill, unless they were rudely disturbed by the actions of suburban development, as seen with the pagan Saxon cemeteries discovered at Croydon and Mitcham.



*St. Leonard's churchyard as seen today  
after a thousand years or so of burials*

Unfortunately, we are not to know if Saxon pagan burials occurred in other parts of Streatham, as history feeds us with only a morsel or two of information about these remote and distant times. These tantalising snippets suggest possible pagan Saxon settlement along the old Roman Road at South Streatham and in central Streatham. Could indeed the field named 'burylondes' hint of a memory of where the bones of some of

Streatham's early inhabitants may rest or perhaps more to the point, those who suffered the cruel affliction of the Black Death.

Who knows?

**Graham Gower**

## **THE EARL OF STREATHAM - WILLIAM MILDIN KING OF THE JUNGLE**

We continue Thomas Llewellyn Jones's tale of the Earl of Streatham - William Mildin King - who ran away from home when he was 11 and obtained a berth as a cabin boy aboard the four-masted sailing vessel, *Antilla*, bound for African ports-of-call and the Cape of Good Hope.

Tragically, this vessel sank off the coast of French Equatorial Africa but, fortunately, the young William Mildin was washed ashore and was the only survivor of the sinking. There he was befriended by the apes and lived with several African tribes. We continue here his account of his subsequent adventures.

It was in 1884 that he finally learned of a trading post operated by white men in the Chari River, which feeds into Lake Chad.

"Hearing that there were whites in the vicinity, I did not wait one moment more than necessary. I left my wives and children and struck off toward the North. After a 22-day march, I finally reached the trading post, which was located 50 miles south of Fort Lamy."

To his amazement, Mildin discovered on arriving there that he could hardly remember any English! The trading post was manned by Frenchmen, who stared incredulously at the apparently tongue-tied, stammering young man who seemed to know no language of his own and whose skin was burned to a deep cocoa-brown.

Eventually, he managed to make himself understood after a fashion. After three months of delay, he was returned to British control in the coastal Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, from whence he took passage to England. That, however, was in 1885 - the year that several thousand whites and General Gordon were massacred at Khartoum in the Sudan.

Lord Mildin's arrival in Great Britain and the amazing, confirmed stories that accompanied him, were buried under a mass fervent imperial patriotism. When a war is in progress, individual stories take a back seat. And it is suspected that the vast bulk of people paid no attention.

Some years later, when the popular magazines began to relate the tales, the very strict English laws of libel prevented them from too closely identifying the nobleman, or even mentioning the more bizarre details. It was only with his death, in 1919, that such restrictions were removed. By that time, nobody cared.

At any rate, Lord Mildin discovered on his return that his father had died some years before. In the interim he had succeeded to the title and family fortune.

Henry Randolph, Edmund Bennet's legal partner, remembered the rest of the Mildin family story as he read the manuscript in his office in September 1957. Lord William had settled down on his ancestral estates, married a young girl of good - though untitled - family and had one son, Edwin George, born in 1889.

Lord William himself died in 1919. His son never married, living quite alone until his death in 1937.

Less than half a dozen people have had the opportunity of reading these diaries - including the two solicitors and the office staff. For a few weeks later, after consulting with the charitable organizations who were the Earl of Streatham's heirs, a solid wall of silence intervened between the office and the public.

So many new legal questions were involved as to threaten even the enormous size of the Mildin fortune.

For example, under British law a significant portion of the Streatham property was entailed. That means that it must, of necessity, pass to the next direct male heir. If children existed, Earl Streatham had no right to will his property away, even to charity, because under the law it was not his.

In his own handwriting, Lord William had admitted to marrying at least six native women. He had fathered several children by them. These children - and their offspring, might well and properly be considered his legitimate and legal heirs. Possibly one of them, rather than Lord Edwin, should be the recognized 15th Earl.

Publication and attestation of the diaries would be a direct invitation to one of the most exhaustive and expensive series of lawsuits in British history.

And so, there the matter lies. Independent inquiry to French authorities has unearthed confirmation of Lord William's story that he went to the trading post near Fort Lamy. French Army files for 1884 contain a report from the Fort Lamy commander to that effect.

French authorities in the area where Lord William Mildin was washed ashore also confirm the existence of a "white-man-who-lived-with-the-Apes" legend there. They also report many obviously part-white natives who could be Lord William's descendants.

Beyond that?

Well, there can no longer be any doubt that there was a Tarzan. But how Edgar Rice Burroughs heard of him - and whether or not he based his "Lord Greystoke" on the model of Lord William Mildin - that's a good question. Suppose you decide.

And there, Jones concludes his tale. There is no doubt that as stories about Streatham go this must be one of the best. Thomas Llewellyn Jones writes a good yarn, but that is exactly what it is; a yarn, a story, "pulp-fiction" for a cheap American magazine. It is pure hokum, make-believe for young American boys and men to read to pass the time before they took their girlfriends to the drive-in movie and quenched their thirst with a Coke and dined on a hamburger.

Man's Adventure magazine was one of a stable of American "pulp-fiction" magazines published by Stanley Morse in the 1950s through to the 1970s.

The cover of the March 1959 edition, in which Jones tells his tale, features a scantily clad woman tied to a wooden railed fence, while three men in ragged and torn clothes fight over her. A text box on the cover highlights the feature depicted on the cover contained within the magazine in lurid detail and reads “Mary McGonicle, Madame of the Oregon Trail! The incredible story of the west’s only covered wagon bordello”.



*Man's Adventure March 1959*

A bright yellow banner at the bottom of the cover whets the readers appetite further with the words “The Man Who Really Was TARZAN!” And if that was not enough to clinch a sale, a strap line at the top of the cover entices you further with the words “Exclusive: the lost secret of male domination”. By now I think you have probably guessed the type of magazine “Man’s Adventure” was.

Indeed, Stanley publications specialised in this genre of magazine and published several different titles specifically aimed at attracting a young and red-blooded male readership.

As these publications were sold in the USA Thomas Llewellyn Jones Tarzan tale made little, if any, impact in Streatham in the spring of 1959 when it first appeared on the American magazine shelves.

I can find no contemporary references to it in the local Streatham press and not even the News of the World discovered the tale to help fill their pages. Popular English magazines of the day such as “Tit Bits” and “Reveille” failed to reprint the story and so, shortly after it was published, it disappeared from public consciousness.

That was until the arrival of the internet when someone discovered the tale in an old magazine and referred to it on the web. Overnight fiction became fact with the repetition of the story seemingly serving to reinforce the truth of Jones’ tale.

In 2013, Lambeth Council was about to approve the naming of a block of flats in Pathfield Road as Mildin House to honour the town’s connection with the 14th Earl of Streatham until it was pointed out to them by the Streatham Society that no such person ever existed; there never has been an Earldom attached to Streatham and no one called William Charles Mildin ever lived in Streatham in the 1880s, nor died here in 1919.



*South London Press Poster Jan 2013*

Despite all these obvious clues as to the fiction which Jones created, because it appeared on the internet it was automatically taken as fact.

In August 2021 a British television company contacted the Streatham Society seeking our assistance in making a programme about Mildin's life and seeking our advice about his Streatham connections. This is just the latest in a series of enquiries I have received about the 14th Earl of Streatham over the years.

We live in an age when we all have our own truth to tell, regardless of its origin in fact. By the mere act of publishing items on the web fiction quickly becomes fact. So if you believe you are the Earl of Streatham it is no good shouting

it out from your bedroom window, post it on a website and once it is on the internet your truth will be readily accepted by many and your great grandfather will be Tarzan, King of the Apes!

**John W Brown**

## **THE ROOKERY BELLS**

In the papers of the Streatham Antiquarian and Natural History Society (SANHS) in Lambeth Archives, and sundry documents at the Wandsworth Local History Library in Lavender Hill, there are a number of references concerning bells which were located at the Streatham Mineral Wells which subsequently became the Rookery gardens.

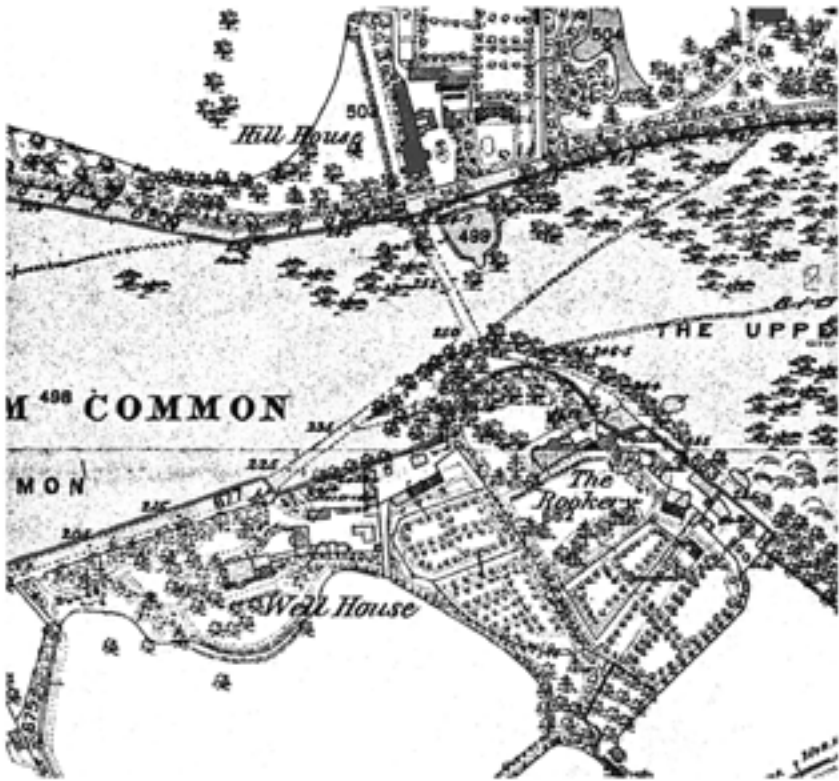
### **1. William Wilkinson's Bell Dated 1804**

In Lambeth Archives (ref SP24/250/STR.1) there is a photograph of a bell cast or William Wilkinson in 1804 which bears the inscription:

STREATHAM WELLS  
WILLIAM WILKINSON Esq  
SURRY (sic) 1804

This bell weighs nearly half a hundredweight and is made of brass. It was discovered in 1922 when Hill House was demolished. Hill House was an old mansion that stood on Streatham Common North, the site of which is now occupied by Hill House Road.





*Streatham Common showing Hill House, the Rookery and the Well House*

The bell was found “up an old and crazy stairway, the entrance to which had to be forced through a locked door. It was secreted under a wooden staircase on an outside north wall of the house near the Dutch kitchen.”

The noted local historian, H Baldwin, wrote in the Streatham News of January 27th 1922, shortly after the bell’s discovery, “The bell probably came from the old Well House when the water dried up and was preserved as a relic”.

This is not entirely accurate as the mineral wells at the top of Streatham Common became contaminated in the 1780s and the business was transferred to a new well in Valley Road. The Well House there dates from 1783 and was built by John Morgan. So the date on this bell of 1804 is 20 years later than this.

At a special Court Baron held on the 18th March 1786 mention is made of William Wilkinson, a merchant of London, being admitted to “one messuage tenement and one acre of land adjoining called STREATHAM WELLS and adjoining Streatham Common” on the 15th November 1785.



*Hill House, Streatham Common North*



*The Rookery*

Hence, Wilkinson acquired the property in 1785, and the following year had the Well House rebuilt to the designs of the architect Michael Searles. I would suspect that it was at this time that the property ceased to be used as a spa and became a private residence.

The house is mentioned by Edwards in his "Companion from London to Brighton" published between 1798 and 1801 in which it is described:

"WELL HOUSE W. WILKINSON ESQ - On the opposite side of the common is the Well House, Here formerly were the wells, and from thence it took its name. It is lately rebuilt and finished in taste by the present possessor, William Wilkinson, Esq."

The house had formerly been called the "Well House" or "Streatham Wells", and eventually became known as the Rookery. James Coster, a merchant, is believed to have changed the name of the house to The Rookery after he bought the property from William Wilkinson in 1826.

Coster lived at the Rookery with his family from 1826-1846 after which he moved to Hill House where he died in 1857. It appears when he moved in 1846 he took Wilkinson's bell with him where it remained until its discovery in 1922.

I have been unable to discover the importance of the date 1804 on the bell. It is possible it was made as an alarm bell. Wilkinson's house stood in an isolated position at the top of Streatham Common and in the event of trouble at the site the bell could have been rung to summons assistance. We do know that in 1813 William Hasledon, alias Samuel Moss, was hanged at the county jail in Horse-monger Lane for committing "a burglary in the house of William Wilkinson at Streatham, in Surrey" so it is apparent the property was vulnerable to such attacks.

Alternatively the bell could have been an adornment to the house used to summons Wilkinson and his family to tea when they were enjoying the extensive pleasure grounds that surrounded their home and were some distance from the property.

The current whereabouts of this bell is unknown. In 1937 it was in the possession of Arthur L Spiller of 50 Streatham Common Northside, and it was he who donated the photograph of the bell to the SANHS in June of that year.

Wilkinson's bell, mainly due to its inscription, has often been confused with the bell that used to hang on the Streatham Well House when the site was in use as a mineral spa and is currently on display in the Chapel of the Geffrye Museum.

Details about the discovery of Wilkinson's bell were published in the Streatham News in 1922, the article reading as follows:

1804 BELL  
DISCOVERY ON HILL HOUSE SITE  
1,000 GALLON TANK ALSO FOUND

An interesting discovery of an ancient brass bell, dated 1804, was made this week by Mr. George Hill, of Streatham, who recently purchased the Hill House site, Streatham Common North, for development.

In company with Mr. Hill a News representative visited the place this week on a tour of inspection, and after the discovery of an old and crazy stairway, the entrance to which had to be forced through a locked door, the bell was located, secreted away under a wooden staircase on an outside north wall of the house near the Dutch kitchen. This discovery may throw some light on the exact whereabouts of the original mineral well in Streatham.

COVERED WITH GRIME

For more than 118 years this old bell, which weighs nearly half-a-cwt., has been in position, and it hangs today, intact on its wooden frame, with the old wheel alongside, to which a chain is attached, leading down into the cellars below.

Covered with the grime of years, it took the united efforts of two men to move the bell, which had rusted into its sockets. Patience and perseverance was, however, rewarded, for ere long, the bell tolled out again as of yore.

Around the base of the bell, beneath the dirt, could be deciphered the following inscription:

“Streatham Wells, William  
Wilkinson,, Esq., Surry.  
1804”

To what use the bell was put a century ago can only be surmised, but the suggestion is that it was tolled when the medicinal waters were sufficiently high in the local wells to be drawn up.

## 1,000 GALLON TANK

Below the bell is a 1,000 gallon tank, still full of water, and it was the broken and dilapidated lid of this which, it was afterwards discovered, had afforded the foothold for the men who moved the bell!

A further search revealed the presence of two large wells, both about 40ft deep. One is in the grounds and the other below the cellar. Above the latter is the complete pump, which is still in working order, and brings up the water from below in a regular stream.

Whether these waters possess any medicinal qualities, and are in any way connected with the spa waters, remains to be seen; but Mr Hill intends having the water analysed to test the theory.

## 2. Rookery Bell Dated 1774 in the Geffrye Museum

This bell is made from bell metal and has the date 1774 cast on it. It is claimed this bell was on the original Well House, or was located somewhere in the grounds of the property, when the site was in use as a Mineral Spa. The bell was possibly rung to advise patrons that the Wells were closing and they had to vacate the gardens before the gates were locked.

This bell appears to have been incorporated into Wilkinson's house and remained in situ thereafter. It is possible this bell replaced Wilkinson's bell when it was removed to Hill House by James Coster in 1846. I have been unable to trace any significance to the date of 1774 cast on the bell.

This bell was eventually acquired by the London County Council (LCC) when they purchased the Rookery in 1912 and converted the property into the pleasure gardens we enjoy today.

When the LCC demolished the house, they kept the bell and rocking mechanism on which it was mounted and donated these items to the Geffrye Museum in November 1913. At this time the Museum was being established by the LCC and was subsequently opened in 1914.

When I corresponded with Rosamond Allwood, the Deputy Director of the Museum, in 1984 she confirmed that this bell was still in the care of the Museum and was on view in the Chapel. She invited me to "give her a ring" and she would make arrangements for me to see it and this I did some time later.

The bell was situated inside the chapel, above the entrance door, and was still attached to the wheel on which it would have originally been rung.

The Museum has recently undertaken a major re-organisation and refurbishment and was scheduled to be reopened in the Spring of 2021, Covid restrictions permitting. Notwithstanding, it is assumed these alterations do not affect the Chapel and the bell can still be seen there.

### 3. LCC Rookery



*William Wilkinson  
Well House Bell 1804*



*The Geffrye Museum - The Rookery Bell  
above the door on the right*

### Hand Bell

Lastly, I understand there is a large hand bell in the possession of Colin Crocker, a member of the Streatham Society who used to work in the Rookery gardens. This was rung by the park keepers shortly before the gardens were closed and the gates locked. This bell would probably date from the time the LCC opened the gardens in 1913 and was certainly still in use when I was a young boy visiting the gardens with my parents on our family Sunday evening walks in the 1950s and 60s.



*Streatham Society plaque on the Rookery Gardens Well*

**JWB**

## DOES LOCAL HISTORY END IN THE 1950s?

World War II ended in 1945. Well into the next century - 75 years later - where are the living memories, the first hand accounts of later years? Those who remember the war years are now at least in their mid-80s. What about the memories of those born after the war, through the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s?

Since the 1980s there has been a vast increase in local history and family research, fuelled by the internet and digitisation. Archives have been inundated with documents from the older generation. Has research from the under 70s been handed down to descendants either by a printed document or via a file, perhaps on a USB stick? Is it published and accessible to others? Or are the many tantalising snippets on social media to disappear into the clouds for ever?

My contribution here is a 'filler' - an article to fill blank pages. I rely on your contributions and hope this will encourage you to write about Streatham memories. My chosen memorable decade is 1955-65, prior to my move to the Streatham area in 1965. I hope it will inspire you to write and record.



I chose two photographs to illustrate. The first shows me (age 10) at Nunthorpe CofE Primary School, mounted in a card holder bearing the legend "School Days are Happy Days". This was in a then rural village near Middlesbrough. There were three classes at the school: Infants (5-7), Juniors (7-9) and Seniors (9-14/15). Those who passed the 11-plus went on to a grammar school leaving the others until a local secondary modern school was built. The Seniors were taught by the Head.

I have long, thick plaits with ribbons top and bottom, round pink NHS spectacles and wearing a matching skirt and blouse made by my mother. I am holding a dip-in pen; desk inkwells were filled by the ink-monitor. We used pencil until the Juniors. We did not use a fountain pen until secondary school when I carried an inkbottle to fill it. Ball-point pens (Biros) were banned.

It is said that modern life began in the "Swinging Sixties". No it didn't - it started in the mid-fifties but there isn't a catchy adjective beginning with F! My first encounter with the new world was when a friend, recently arrived from Peru, wore jeans and a T-shirt. Shocking! I didn't wear trousers until c.1968, when, age c.24, female staff were allowed to wear trousers at my school!

My second photograph (prophetic of my talents in later years!), shows me in 1961 (age 16) as captain of "The Bears" rounders' team, on 4th post, having organised the game and designed our badge - Yogi Bear wearing our school tie.

In 1955 I started at Middlesbrough High School for Girls. Unbelievably, we were allowed to roam the town alone at lunchtime - at 11 - until misbehaviour

from local boys caused a ban for all. I loved wandering the shops and streets alone. I also spent many happy hours after school in the town library.

On wet lunch-times, to 78rpm records on a wind-up gramophone, we girls danced the *Gay Gordons*, *St Bernard Waltz*, *Dashing White Sergeant* etc. Early in 1956 someone brought in Bill Haley's *Rock Around The Clock*. Incredibly our headmistress allowed this and from then the hall on wet lunchtimes was filled with shrieking jiving teens.

I was taken to the theatre, museums and concerts but not the cinema. I remember only seeing Elvis Presley in *Jailhouse Rock* with school friends (scared it would be discovered we were under-age (14) without my friend's mother who had left us to go shopping), and *South Pacific*, celebrating finishing our O-levels.

I joined the three village youth groups: Ballroom dancing, Young Conservatives and Youth Club. Ballroom dancing stopped when jiving took over from the *Gay Gordons* etc and teenage bikers arrived to cause mayhem, despite there being a local village policeman housed nearby.

Talks I remember include (YCs) Learning for Leisure. We were told a future 4-day week would bring enjoyment for all. Even then I thought 4 days' pay would not fund 3 days' leisure. Another (Youth Club) book discussion was the previously banned *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. (I guessed the rude bits.) DH Lawrence's literary talents were lost on me; I just thought he was weird. None of us told our parents what we had read - would this be allowed for young teens today? I was impressed also by a talk on the TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority), formed in 1933, and their efforts to rectify past damage done by stripping land of natural vegetation for the vast prairies. The TVA introduced flood control, reforestation, and continues to provide clean, reliable, affordable electricity.

These talks were over 60 years ago!

From 1962-1965 I trained to teach 9-13 yr-olds at Avery Hill College in London. I didn't want to teach; I had realised by then an early suggestion to become an English teacher was a mistake. But I wanted to leave home and a desperate shortage of teachers meant our facilities and grants were excellent. There were brilliant tutors at Avery Hill but the new thinking was students/children would attend/behave if lectures/lessons were interesting. Rubbish! We avoided lectures except those from tutors who kept an attendance register. I spent much of my student years drinking coffee and playing cards. However I don't regret becoming a teacher - my forte was organising rounders games and other fun events!

And this and the rest, as they say, is history - isn't it?

**JH**



## JOHN CLAY ANTIQUES



*John Clay and his shop*



On a recent bus trip to Sloane Square I was reminded of an ex-Streatham resident I knew in the early 1970s who opened an antique shop in the New Kings Road, opposite Parson's Green.

John and his wife Sue lived then in Knollys Road, I lived in Copley Park SW16, my sister and brother-in-law, Jane and Rob Hansell, had just moved from Drewstead Rd, Streatham, to Selsdon Rd SE27 where they set up a pottery in the cellar. Jane was an art teacher at Clapham County Girls' Grammar School for two years before its closure. Rob became a part-time pottery tutor at the wonderful (Lambeth) Elmwood Pottery, then behind Elmwood Primary School.

John Clay, originally a photographer, started in 18th & 19thC furniture restoration with a fellow ex-Leicester Art College student. He had a restoration workshop in Chapel Road SE27. He met Rob at his Elmwood pottery class, which I also enjoyed. John restored my only treasured possession, a c.1920 Davenport. In 1974 he opened his antique shop above his furniture store in the New Kings Road and, with some setbacks, turned it into a thriving business, enabling him to buy the whole building where they lived with their two children. Sue did the upholstery restoration and ran the office. (John has never even owned a mobile phone - he only uses his landline!)

I spotted their retirement report online and rushed up to see if the shop was still open. It wasn't, but there was John with family and friends busy selling and packing stock before their imminent removal. We enjoyed a chat - their first child I remember as a baby is now over 40!

Their once successful business started declining in the 1990s as sales of large furniture fell, so John then concentrated on restoration. The area, once full of antique shops which I loved, has changed much. John's is one of the last of these to go. High rents, changing fashions and finally the pandemic have taken their toll. John's shop is about to become a coffee shop to join all the others.

John is now 75 and hopes to continue some restoration and read all the books in his library. Good luck and goodbye, John and Sue.

**JH**



## STREATHAM SOCIETY REPORTS

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### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2022

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the 46th Annual General Meeting of the Streatham Society (Charity Number 283297) will be held at 6:30pm on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2022 at St Leonard's Church to transact the following business:

- 1. Minutes of the previous meeting** - To be agreed and matters arising
- 2. Chair's Report**
- 3. Reports and Accounts** - To receive and consider the accounts for the year ended 31st March 2022.
- 4. Appointment and remuneration of independent examiner of accounts** - To appoint an independent examiner for the financial year to 31st March 2023.
- 5. Appointment of charity trustees** - Nominations for the position of Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and other committee members must be received by 5<sup>th</sup> May 2022.  
All committee members are Trustees of the Charity.
- 6. Members' resolutions** - Resolutions should be sent to the Secretary by 5<sup>th</sup> May 2022.
- 7. Any other business** - To deal with any relevant matters raised at the meeting.

**Mark Bery**, Secretary 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022

Following the AGM, at 7:30pm Saki Hajnal will give an illustrated talk on the Streatham Ice Rink-the early years. This is a Wandsworth Heritage event

### ADMINISTRATION MATTERS

**Trustees:** we have a number of vacancies on the Executive including the position of Treasurer which will be vacant after the AGM.

**Volunteers:** we are looking for backup assistance to help at meetings at St Leonard's Church. To help set-up and dismantle equipment and to operate a bookstall at our monthly meetings and at various events during the year.

We are planning to implement a new web site and ask if any members have experience of platforms and may be able to help with the design and implementation.

If you can help in any way or need further information, please contact me [streathamsoc@gmail.com](mailto:streathamsoc@gmail.com)

The majority of members have now given the Society an email address. If you have not done so already, please consider registering an email address. This will greatly facilitate communication and allow us to get messages to you between the quarterly newsletters.

If eligible, please complete a gift aid form (this only needs to be completed once) and allows us to claim back 25p in every pound of your donations/subscription from HMRC.

Contact: <https://www.streathamsociety.org.uk/membership.html>

Why not join our social media community to read our topical posts and even contribute. We now have 3k Facebook members, 1.3k Instagram followers and 1.1k Twitter followers. Access links can be reached from our web page <https://www.streathamsociety.org.uk>

**MB**

## **MEMBERSHIP 2022**

**New members:** We welcome RW Phillips, Hetty Banks, Jan Kuras, Judith Kadifachi & household; P Reynolds & household, Peter Ramell, Mark Polglase, Mike & Anne Morley-Fletcher, Pat Ashworth, a household membership for the Gibson family, Ray Meerabeau, Aisling Rowe & household, Kathleen Maher & household. We hope they enjoy our events and publications.

In addition, overseas members Sue Wright and Angela Larkin, both from Canada, paid in £sterling and receive an e-copy of our newsletter. We have also received several more subscriptions from lapsed members.

We usually lose and gain c.30 members annually, maintaining a steady membership of c.280 in recent years. By early April of this year we had already received over 30 new subscriptions - well above expectations. Sadly, I have received notification of some deaths.

As no members were deducted in 2021 (our free year for existing members) we have (April 5th) some 80 subscriptions outstanding. Hopefully our membership should exceed the estimated 250, despite Covid restrictions.

**Reminders:** These are enclosed for outstanding subscriptions. Please pay now!

**Subscriptions** can be paid via our website or to me by post or at meetings.

**2022 subscription renewals:** To receive our quarterly *Streatham Society News*

uninterrupted, your subscription should have been paid by March 31st 2022. This is the final issue for those outstanding. Payment details are repeated below.

**2022 payments** last until December 31st 2022. Subscriptions remain unchanged at: Individual £10; Household £15. Life membership £180.

**Payment** via BACS is to The Streatham Society (business) account: Sort Code 30-84-68 a/c no 39526068. If you use BACS, please email me confirmation of your payment as I do not have immediate access to the Society's account.

Payment is also accepted by cash or cheque, payable to The Streatham Society, to me at meetings or posted to 125 Thornlaw Road, West Norwood SE27 0SQ.

If you prefer, or if your details have changed, our membership application form can be downloaded then posted or scanned to me.

**Gift Aid declaration:** 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.

**Your email address:** Please supply this for our contacts list as it is now our only method of communication, apart from our magazine. Your details are not passed on to any other group or individual without your permission, as stated on our privacy policy (see our website - <https://www.streathamsociety.org.uk>).

**Subscription acknowledgement:** Membership cards are no longer issued. Online payments will be acknowledged by email; in-person payments will have been recorded at meetings. I have enclosed a final reminder with this *News* issue. If you are still receiving copies after that - you've paid!

**Streatham Society News:** Our quarterly magazine is posted to your address, not emailed. Back copies are available on our website.

### **Life Membership**

Life membership for a couple at the same address is £180. Especially with Gift Aid, this is a very welcome source of income. We now have 36 Life Members, a good percentage of our membership. Particularly welcome to the list are our older members. They may not benefit financially but much will be a donation - with the added bonus of not having to remember to pay annually!

### **RECENT MEETINGS**

February 1 *How First World War stretcher bearers changed medicine forever* Emily Mayhew (c.40 attended).

March 1 *Mother Magdalen Taylor: the work of the SMG Sisters in Streatham from 1888 to the present* Paul Shaw (c.40 attended).

April 5 *Commonwealth War Graves Commission: its history and work* Julie Chandler (c.50 attended).

**Judy Harris**

## BARBARA RICHARDSON'S 90th



*Barbara and Marie, friend and hairdresser, with her birthday cake.*



On Monday 14th February, exactly 90 years after her birth, I was privileged to be one of member Barbara Richardson's guests at her very special celebration.

About 50 guests gathered in St Leonard's Church, which was attractively lit and decorated for the occasion. A wonderful display of food, plenty of chat among friends, who had spent much of the last 2 years under Covid restrictions, preceded live music and a sing-a-long.

Congratulations to Barbara featured with her photograph on our Facebook page attracting 78 'likes', 'loves' and messages.

My photo of Barbara and Marie is not too flattering - they were too busy chatting!



*Barbara, showing her confidence in using the microphone, thanks her guests*

**JH**

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## NEW PUBLICATIONS

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### **BYGONE STREATHAM HIGH ROAD & STREATHAM HILL IN OLD PICTURE POSTCARDS** *by John W Brown*

This third volume in the *Bygone Streatham* series features a collection of old postcard views and promotional pictures of Streatham High Road and Streatham Hill.

The photographs mainly date from the Edwardian and inter-war years, many of which have not been reproduced since they were originally issued around a century or more ago.

In the closing years of Queen Victoria's reign, Streatham was still a comparatively small country town. Three decades later it had merged into the southern suburbs of London and the centre of the town was no longer surrounded by fields and open pasture but was encircled by streets of houses.

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.

The old postcards views of the town were not intended to depict old images of Streatham but were published to show a modern new Streatham, with many buildings featured being less than 30 years old.

This book takes the form of a journey along the High Road, from the southern boundary at the tram terminus by Hermitage Bridge, to the northern end of Streatham Hill where the road becomes Brixton Hill, and is bisected by today's busy South Circular Road which encompasses Christchurch Road and Streatham Place.

The book costs £6 and will be introduced and on sale at John's talk *Bygone Streatham* for the Streatham Society at St Leonard's Church on July 5th at 7.30pm (*See p.2*). Following this, it will be available by order from our website (£8 incl. p&p) and from our bookstalls.



## THE STORY OF St. JOSEPH'S FEDERATION 1872-2022

*Researched and compiled by Valerie McMillan*



To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the school in 1872, this book was published by the Streatham Society in association with the Federation of St Joseph's Junior, Infant and Nursey Schools.

It is available from St Joseph's School (*see their website*). A few copies are on the Streatham Society's bookstall at £6.

Profusely illustrated, it covers: The Opening of the Boys' School (1872); Accepting Girls and Infants (1900); Voluntary Aided Primary School (1944); Separation into Junior and Infant Schools (1978); Becoming a Federation (2011). The Living Memory section has contributions from staff past and present.

Valerie McMillan concludes this impressive history with a recognition of the information recorded in the School Log Books, kept from the first day to 1998. She makes a plea that these should be picked up again and a weekly summary put in by future Headteachers.

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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

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The Streatham Society is participating in some of these events.  
Details and any booking requirements are on websites.

**Wandsworth Heritage Festival 2022** 28 May - 12 June See website and local libraries for full programme. Theme: Education or Sports but also other topics.

**Lunchtime Recitals** *Suns* 22 May & 19 June 11.50am  
St Peter's Church, Leigham Court Rd SW16

**NGS London gardens open for charity 2022** (The Yellow Book)  
See website & booklets from Garden Centres. Including:

**325 Leigham Court Road SW16** Sun 12 June, 2pm-5pm Adm £3 (chd free)  
Light refreshments. Mr & Mrs Martin Cook (*Streatham Society members*)  
Near junction Leigham Court Rd & Leaf Grove (Streatham Common end).  
417 bus stop outside.

**10 Streatham Common South SW16** *Sat 4 July & Sun 28 Aug 2pm-6pm*

Adm £5 (children free) Light refreshments. Lindy & Mark Cuncliffe.

*This garden featured in Streatham Society News no. 246 Autumn 2021*

**Great North Wood Festival** *Saturday 18 June 10am-3pm*

Streatham Common, opposite Rookery Café. Exhibitions, entertainments and walks. London Wild Life Trust in conjunction with SCCoop and FoSC.

**Shakespeare in the Rookery - Midsummer Night's Dream**

*Sunday 19 June 3pm* Open air production - bring a chair. Advance booking available from The Festival Players.

**Butterfly Walk** *Sunday 10 July 2.30pm*

Meet Peter Newmark by Rookery's main gates. Donations to FoSC welcome.

**Local History Walks in South London 2022-2023**

Programme available from: [lambethlocalhistoryforum.org.uk](http://lambethlocalhistoryforum.org.uk) and local libraries

**Barbara Wright's London Tours** See: <https://londonguidedwalks.uk/walks-calendar.php> for an interesting programme including:

**The Garden Village of Pimlico Walk** *Sat 18 June*

Book: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-garden-village-of-pimlico-walk>

**The Brixton Society's Monthly Market Walks** are back. The charge is £5, including the guide book. Advance booking at [www.brixtonsociety.uk/events](http://www.brixtonsociety.uk/events)  
They also run several other walks, advertised in the Local History Walks leaflet.

**Kennington Bioscope** - A series of silent films shown at the Cinema Museum, based in part of the old Lambeth Workhouse, 2 Dugard Way, off Renfrew Rd SE11. Part of an ongoing film programme. See [www.cinemamuseum.org.uk](http://www.cinemamuseum.org.uk)

**U3A Norwood** - Live meetings at the South London Theatre Centre (the Old Fire Station), Knight's Hill SE27. Drop in or see website for a full list of events.

**Lambeth Horticultural Society's Summer Show** St Luke's Church SE27

*Saturday 10 September 2-5pm* Their trading hut near Crown Point is now open  
Sats 2-4.30pm & Suns 10-12.30pm. Members only but visit and join there.

**Lambeth Country Show** *Sat/Sun 16/17 July* Brockwell Park

**London Open House & Open City Festival** *September 8-21*

See: [open-city.org.uk](http://open-city.org.uk)

**Kite Day** - Back again! *Sunday 11 September*

Friends of Streatham Common.

Volunteers needed - email [volunteering@streathamcommon.org](mailto:volunteering@streathamcommon.org)

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### *Facebook*

**[https://www.facebook.com/  
groups/546435545867439/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/546435545867439/)**

This newsletter is published by the Streatham Society

Printed by **Printinc**. Tel: 020 8255 2110      e-mail: [info@printinc.uk.com](mailto:info@printinc.uk.com)

**Final copy date for next issue: July 1st 2022**

**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**