



Fu-Manchu – A Clapham Mystery

A recent enquiry from Rev Max Weremchuk of Kerzenheim in Germany raised the somewhat unlikely connection between Dr Fu-Manchu and Clapham. Rev Weremchuk confessed to being a lifelong fan of the character created by Sax Rohmer who appeared in over a dozen novels and feature films in the first half of the last century, rivalling Sherlock Holmes in popularity.

Sax Rohmer was the pen name of Arthur Henry Sarsfield Ward born in Birmingham in 1886. In 1912 he published *The Mystery of Dr Fu-Manchu* about the Chinese criminal mastermind and his ambitions for world domination. Rohmer's hero was Nayland Smith, a less cerebral equivalent of Holmes, lately returned from Burma, and his narrator, and equivalent of Watson, was Dr Petrie. Rev Weremchuk asked for our help in locating Petrie's practice in a 'beastly healthy' district of London.

There are a number of clues in *The Mystery of Dr Fu-Manchu* the first work in the series. The house faces a 'malevolent common' in south west London. The area which is 'not too remote' connects with central London by a tramline that runs in front of the house and a tube station to Charing Cross is nearby. The building faces the south side of a relatively large common with clumps of elms and other trees, crossed by paths lighted by night and with at least one pond called 'Mound' pond. On the north side is an edifice with a clock sufficiently large for its chimes to be heard by Petrie. The only street in the area to be mentioned by name is called Rectory Grove which is to the north of the Common.

We know that Sax Rohmer was familiar with Clapham – indeed he met his future wife Rose Elizabeth Knox on Clapham Common whilst strolling there on a spring evening in 1905. She was from a theatrical family and her youngest brother Teddy was the Knox in *Nervo* and *Knox* which older members will remember as part of the Crazy Gang.

Even allowing for poetic licence the clues all point to Dr Petrie's practice being on Clapham Common South Side but precisely where? It can be deduced that it was on a corner and Petrie describes it as having a side entrance. There have been many changes to South Side since 1912 but we came up with two possibilities. Number 100 was built c1890 and has an elaborate stone doorway in Cavendish Road inscribed 'West Cross'. Just along from this entrance was a heavy wooden door with a grille leading to the

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This year our meetings will be held at Omnibus, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. The bar at Omnibus will be open from 7 pm, and meetings will commence at 8 pm. Our guest will normally speak for about 45 minutes, followed by around 15 minutes for questions and discussion, and the bar will remain open after meetings. Meetings are free and open to non-members, so please bring your friends along.

Monday 16 February

How Fair is Fairtrade? This topical and controversial issue will be explored to mark FairTrade Fortnight 2015. **Nicolas Mounard**, Managing Director of the pioneering ethical trading organisation Twin and its business arm, Twin Trading, will critically assess what fairtrade is and how it works. He will examine if buying fairtrade products such as tea, coffee and

chocolate really does support economic transformation in rural and agricultural communities across developing countries. In addition, he will discuss what impact fairtrade has on women farmers, who disproportionately represent the majority of farmers across the globe.

Monday 16 March

The NHS in Lambeth. Dr Adrian McLachlan, Chairman of the Lambeth Clinical Commissioning Group and a local GP, will discuss the organisation of healthcare services in Lambeth, the demands on GPs and local A & E departments, and progress with moving more services into the community (integrated care). There will be plenty of time for questions.



Christopher Lee as Fu Manchu, in the 1960's Hallam Production

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garden. However, this is a considerable distance down South Side and I am not sure that Clapham Common station, the terminus of the tube line at the time, is 'nearby'. Perhaps the house would have been further north and another possibility is number 78, which was built c. 1888. This is a wildly eccentric detached house on the corner of Cautley Avenue with a row of gables and a corner turret, just the sort of building to catch the eye of Sax Rohmer. Whether it was either of these or another, next time you walk down South Side imagine Fu-Manchu 'with his gigantic intellect, brow like Shakespeare and face like Satan', accompanied by his beautiful Eastern slave girl pursued relentlessly by the 'gaunt, bronzed and steely-eyed' Nayland Smith and it will add an extra dimension to walking the dog!

Derrick Johnson

Black people in Art

In cooperation with the Black Cultural Archives, The Friends of Dulwich Picture Gallery are giving a series of three talks on black people in art at 10.30 am on **Wednesday 28 January, Wednesday 4 February and Wednesday 18 February** at Dulwich Picture Gallery. Go to dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk or telephone 020 8693 5254 to book tickets.

Founded in 1981, the Black Cultural Archives collect, preserve and celebrate African and Caribbean history and culture in Britain. This unique and growing archive includes rare documents, photographs, oral history testimonies and objects from the second century to the present day. The series looks at the representation of black people in art, from classical European art of the 18th century to vibrant 20th century photo journalism, and finally draws on the views of contemporary black artists.

An exhibition at Black Cultural Archives, 1 Windrush Square, SW2 1EF entitled *Staying Power: Photographs of Black British Experience, 1950s to 1990s*, which opened in January runs until 30 June. The exhibition features photographs from the V&A's collection documenting the experiences of black people in Britain during the second half of the 20th century. For details go to bcaheritage.org.uk. A concurrent *Staying Power* display will be on show at the V&A, from 16 February to 24 May.

New Members We are pleased to welcome the following new members: James Bellis, Matthew Buchan and Yuki Molteni, Sandra Chalmers, James and Sophie Champness, Elaine and Quentin Crowe, Simon and Caroline Harris, Jonathan Jours, Jonathan McIver, Jane Portal, and Laraine Stoke.

Local Issues

At our November meeting, a panel of Lambeth councillors and officers joined us to address issues of current concern to members. Questions, which had been submitted in advance, were grouped in topics and introduced by members of the Society with a particular interest in those areas. Taking part were Councillors Linda Bray, Tim Briggs, Bernard Gentry, Nigel Haselden, Louise Nathanson, with Julian Ellerby and Lee Fiorentino from Lambeth's licensing department.

Stephen Allott began by showing photographs to illustrate problems on the Common and noted in particular that a number of recent events had been unsuitable, of dubious legality, too long-lived and/or damaging to the sites where they were held. We learned that consultation in early 2015 on Lambeth's draft events strategy would provide a further opportunity to raise these issues in a broader context.

Mark Leffler then spoke of roads and transport matters. While it was not an unqualified success, with certain problems yet to be resolved, the Old Town project was generally a significant improvement. Of greater current concern was the disruption caused by utility companies' works in the High Street and Clapham Park Road. There appeared to be a lack of co-ordination in their planning and a depressing absence of urgency in their execution. Further issues included shops' encroachment on pavements, and inadequate provision of parking areas for daytime visitors.

Peter Cobley drew attention to the implications and consequences of Lambeth's recent sale of housing in the Lillieshall Road/North Street/Rectory Grove area which had been licensed squats for some 40 years, suggesting that Lambeth could have

handled things better both in dealing with the ousted residents and in seeking to ensure sensitive and appropriate redevelopment of the buildings.

Inevitably the level of interest exceeded the time available for its expression, but in drawing discussion to a close and thanking all for their contributions, Annabel Allott noted that the meeting had clearly offered a valuable opportunity to raise important points and agreed that further such events should be organised on a regular basis. She also reminded members that while the Clapham Society can speak on their behalf on some issues, they should also contact local councillors or council officers direct to raise problems.

Jill Cramphorn

A walk on the Common



During December Dr Iain Boulton of Lambeth Parks and Open Spaces Department led a very interesting and informative walk on Clapham Common, which was much enjoyed by several members. Dr Boulton will be leading more walks in the spring, each focussing on a specific subject, either ecology related – bats, insects, small mammals – or heritage. Dr Boulton is very well informed and enthusiastic about the Common so it is well worth watching out for details of his walks, which will appear in future newsletters.

Clapham Common and Open Spaces

Clapham is entering a critical phase with respect to the use of our Common and Open Spaces. The Clapham Society's Common and Open Spaces Sub-committee has been discussing a way of working for the next ten years. This note shares our thoughts and seeks your involvement and support.

The recent alterations to the landscape of Clapham Old Town, increased street tree planting, and residents' initiatives around trees and planters indicate that Open Spaces deserve attention. The Clapham Common Masterplan, 2007, presents a comprehensive vision for the next 50 years, reconciling the needs and desires of local residents and user groups whilst ensuring the ecological health and integrity of the Common itself. It is very clear however that a voice is needed to support and maintain this vision. This voice must be representative of all residents and interested groups, and be recognised as a significant contributor to the cooperative relationship that Lambeth espouses. Such a voice must have strong contacts with Lambeth and good representation on the Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee (CCMAC).

To this end, this sub-committee aims to:

- provide a forum for all residents and user groups in Clapham, and particularly those who have no garden or open space of their own;
- ensure the vibrant ecological health and physical integrity of the Common and our street tree planting, for future generations;
- understand the complex range of user groups, sports, office workers, mothers and babies, etc. who use the Common, as well as those wanting quiet walking/reading/reflection space;
- support ongoing maintenance and initiatives;
- become a realistic and knowledgeable cooperative partner for the local authority in their planning and operational discussions.

It is clear that such aims are both ambitious and challenging with competing voices. Thus we also should become an active member of the Lambeth Forum of Parks Groups to learn about potential funding and routes for effectiveness. We will focus on the particular where we may be most effective.

We urgently need more individuals on our working group with a plurality of interests. Thus we are:

- appealing for new members who might contribute to broadening the base of our interest and expertise;
- acknowledging some members may only attend for a particular current concern;
- planning to initiate discussions with representatives of various user groups, to seek their advice and support;
- hoping to host occasional open meetings to seek the views of local residents who may have no time or confidence to join groups.

Please contact me (deryn.watson@kcl.ac.uk) if you would be interested in joining us.

Deryn Watson

Convenor, Common and Open Spaces Sub-committee

February at Omnibus

Omnibus is back in full swing after the Christmas break. February events include an Acoustic Night on **Friday 6 February** at 8 pm, Onyx Brass Jazz band on **Sunday 8 February** at 4.30 pm and a family interactive jazz event on **Sunday 15 February** with Tommy Andrews Jazz Quintet at 7 pm.

There will be a special Valentine's Day event on **Saturday 14 February**, *Handa's Surprise* family theatre event on **Sunday 22 February** at 11 am and 2.30 pm and on the same day at 4.30 pm a Chinese New Year celebration with workshop and music.

For full details of all events and bookings go to omnibus-clapham.org, call 020 7498 4699 during office hours or

call in at 1 Clapham Common North Side. Better still join the email list on the website to get regular updates, so that you never miss an event.

Volunteers are always required at Omnibus. Why not enquire about opportunities for involvement with front of house, bar or box office? Details are on the website, or call in to speak to the volunteer organiser when you are passing Omnibus.

Southside Players

Tom Stoppard's 'richest and most ravishing comedy' *Arcadia* will be performed by Balham's award-winning theatre group, Southside Players from **Wednesday 18 February to Saturday 21 February** (half-term week) at Chestnut Grove School Theatre, Boundaries Road SW12 8JZ. Wednesday to Friday performances at 7.30 pm, Saturday at 5.00 pm. Book tickets (£10, concessions £7.50 only on Wednesday and Saturday) online at southsideplayers.org.uk or telephone 07914 657524.

Volunteer House Guides

There is a wonderful opportunity to be part of a small team dedicated to interpreting the extraordinary and intriguing National Trust house, 575 Wandsworth Road. Volunteer House Guides lead tours of the house, speak authoritatively and passionately, using the given narrative to groups of six people or less. They are approachable and ready to respond to questions drawing on their comprehensive knowledge of the house and its collection. Volunteer House Guides must have good communication skills and a friendly manner. They must be able to absorb and learn given information and to present confidently and accurately to small groups.

For more information and how to apply email 575wandsworthroad@nationaltrust.org.uk. You can read more about this unusual house and see pictures of the interior at nationaltrust.org.uk/575-wandsworth-road/.

Clapham Chamber Concerts

Clapham Chamber Concerts continues the season on **Friday 27 February** with a string quartet performance by Amanda Lake and Caroline Simon (violins), Myriam Guillaume (viola) and Richard Jenkinson (cello).

The concert features Mozart's *String Quartet in D major* ('The Violet'), Beethoven's *String Quartet in G major*, Puccini's elegiac 'Crisantemi' quartet, and Borodin's lyrical and delicate *String Quartet No 2 in D major*.

Many readers will know that while St Paul's Church is undergoing some urgent repair work Clapham Chamber Concerts is pleased to have been welcomed by other venues, and this concert will take place at St Peter's Church, Prescott Place, SW4 6BX (off Clapham High Street). Clapham Chamber Concerts looks forward to welcoming the audience to the venue. For more information see claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk. Concert at 7.30 pm (doors open 7.00 pm) Tickets at the door: £12, £9 concessions and students, £5 children.

The history of Clapham Library

Following the unveiling of the Clapham Society Green Plaque on the former library, now Omnibus at 1 Clapham Common North Side (as reported in the last newsletter), Peter Jefferson Smith has written an interesting short article about the history of the library. This is now on the Green Plaque page of our website (claphamsociety.com/Articles/Plaque6.html). One of the accompanying illustrations is a plan of the interior of the library in 1889 showing the arrangement of reading desks and others spaces within the library. There is also an explanation of the Roman stone on the forecourt.



The Roman stone

Similar illustrated histories are on the website for each of the Green Plaques so far erected. So if you spot a Clapham Society Green Plaque and want to know more about the building just go to our website.

Social Media

Members may not have noticed that we now have a 'Latest News' page on our website (claphamsociety.com/news/). This is specifically designed so that we can publicise details of events which reach us too late for the newsletter. If you have any such information please let me know (alysonwilson.sw4@virgin.net) and it will be put on the website as soon as possible. Remember to look at this regularly for last minute local events.

Latest News posts are then automatically put on to Twitter and Facebook, so please Retweet and Like to spread the word to your friends about the events and the Clapham Society.

New Year New Sewing Kit

Sew Over It, our local sewing shop, has just announced a new Pencil Skirt Kit, which contains everything you need to make your own high-waisted pencil skirt in green and navy tartan check wool mix fabric. You can buy on line at sewoverit.co.uk, call in to the shop at 78 Landor Road, SW9 9PH or telephone 020 7326 0376.

If you don't already know Sew Over It and have any interest at all in sewing, whether you are experienced or a beginner, it is worth looking at their website to see the wide variety of classes available.

Musical Extravaganza

The Rotary Club of Battersea, Brixton and Clapham is presenting a concert in Holy Trinity Church, SW4 0QZ on **Saturday 28 February** at 7 pm to display talented young people of the community and to raise funds for two projects in Gambia – the extensions of a water tower in Makymbaya and a playground for a school in Banjol. Tickets £10, concessions £6 on the door, or telephone 07722 042 106.

Spot the fake?

From 10 February, visitors to Dulwich Picture Gallery will be set the challenge to identify a Chinese replica hanging among the 270 Old Master paintings on display. 'Made in China: A Doug Fishbone Project' will explore the nature and importance of the original versus the copy and the role of art as commodity, a subject of increasing importance in our age of global mass production.

Conceived by artist Doug Fishbone and curated by Dr Xavier Bray, Arturo and Holly Melosi Chief Curator at the Gallery, Dulwich will temporarily remove one of its paintings from the frame, replacing it with a replica commissioned by Fishbone and produced by one of China's numerous exporters of handmade oil paintings.

For three months the public will be invited to identify the replicated painting and have the opportunity to submit their answers via an iPad in the Gallery. Those with the correct answer will be entered into a competition to win a custom print from the Gallery's collection, signed by Fishbone. The replica will be revealed on 28 April 2015 when it will hang side by side with the original. Visitors will be invited to return to compare and contrast. How does the brushwork differ? How has the varnished aged on the original? How has the Chinese artist interpreted the style of painting of an Old Master?

Bandstand Beds Work is in progress with Lambeth Council and Groundwork to set up a new community food growing area in the corner of Clapham Common's recycling depot on Windmill Drive. As well as raised beds a polytunnel to propagate plants for other local community growing areas is planned.

There is a lot of work to do on the project and volunteers are needed. So if you would like to get involved in setting up the new growing space, and making use of it, contact ccbandstandbeds@gmail.com.

If you have any queries about **The Clapham Society** or have news of local events, please contact the appropriate person below:

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Details of meetings, activities and a full list of our publications are on **The Clapham Society** website at claphamsociety.com.