

## Considerate Cycling on Clapham Common

On Monday 29 November 2010 the local Safer Neighbourhood Team, Park Rangers and Parks Officers braved the cold winter weather to engage with cyclists using Clapham Common.

Over the months there has been a marked increase in concerns from members of the public regarding the speed and lack of courtesy that many cyclists are displaying when using the track across Clapham Common.

Separately, the Safer Neighbourhood Team recently carried out an exercise during the morning rush hour on the Common – with a speed gun – and clocked speeds of up to 27 mph. They also witnessed several near misses at the ‘Give Way’ points. Fortunately these speeds were restricted to the minority, with most averaging out at around 12 mph. Whilst the speed limit within Lambeth’s Parks and Green Spaces is 5 mph, we appreciate that this is extremely slow for cyclists and a more respectable 12 mph is the ideal pace for cyclists to maintain and is a fair compromise. Anything faster should be left for the roads. Lambeth cyclists also endorse the ‘hierarchy of road users’ which in parks means preference for pedestrians.

During the operation, we stopped over 200 cyclists to remind and raise awareness that pedestrians have priority at ‘Give Way’ points. The exercise resulted in many positive comments from both



cyclists as well as Common users.

Most of the near misses tend to occur during the morning school run and school children and parents were also spoken to, as many younger riders did seem to have a tendency to just shoot straight across without stopping to look at

who may be crossing their path.

Feedback from the cyclists was that many dog walkers are failing to control their dogs in this area and we indeed witnessed this more than once. Whilst dogs do not have to be on a lead to be under control, it is obvious who is going to come off worse in a collision. One dog walker has suggested we move the bins slightly further away from the track to minimise the need to pause in the area and this has been taken on board by the Common Manager.

We want everybody to enjoy the Common, there is after all more than enough space for all. It is fair to ask that dog walkers keep closer control of their dogs, cyclists slow down and parents encourage their children to look around.

*Lara Mifsud-Bonici*

*Lambeth Parks and Trees Support Officer*

**Our regular monthly meetings are held at Clapham Manor Primary School, Belmont Road, SW4 0BZ. The entrance to the school in Stonhouse Street, through the new building, is NOT open for our evening meetings. Use the Belmont Road entrance, cross the playground and enter the building on the right. The hall is open from 7.30 pm when coffee and tea are normally available. The talk begins promptly at 8 pm and meetings finish by 9.30 pm.**

### Wednesday 16 February

**The Clapham Sect.** Stephen Tomkins, historian and journalist, will talk about this remarkable group, centred on William Wilberforce, who fought for the abolition of the slave trade and slavery, and for many other religious and moral causes. They had a lasting impact on the morality and politics of Victorian Britain. Publicity for Stephen Tomkins’ recent book has generated controversy about their acquiescence in aspects of slavery (‘Do-gooder sect far from saintly’ as a local paper put it). How should we assess them, whether against the standards of their own times, or our own?

### Wednesday 16 March.

**These were our Sons.** Local historian, Naomi Klein, will describe her research on the 574 names on the Stockwell War Memorial of men who died in the First World War. Starting with just their names, she has traced most of them and unearthed many of their personal stories. She will tell us how she used a variety of public records and information from families, and share with us some of the lives she has recaptured. She will also tell us about the three Burleigh brothers commemorated on the memorial at Holy Trinity Church, Clapham.

**Spring Workshops** In a busy February programme The Papered Parlour offers workshops in Contemporary Quilting, Sewing, Shoemaking, Screenprinting and Silversmithing. Details at [www.thepaperedparlour.co.uk](http://www.thepaperedparlour.co.uk) or telephone 020 7627 8703.

## Planning News

Since last September we have been notified of about 110 applications, reviewed some 30 of them and made representations on 11. They are summarised below.

**25-33 Macaulay Road.** Objection to another application for Plot J, the part of this large site behind George West House. Despite some changes from last year's plans the proposed building continues to have a negative impact on Orlando Road residents as well as providing poor standards for its own residents; overall it is trying to get too much development on to the site.

**BT cabinets.** BT is currently installing numerous bulky green metal cabinets in the pavement to supply high speed broadband. While supporting the intention, many of the proposed positions are clumsily selected, and we have encouraged the re-positioning of some towards more discreet locations.

**89-93 Clapham Common South Side and 1/1A Lynette Avenue.** Objection to an application to make alterations to the hotel and for approval to legitimise the presently unauthorised use of 1 and 1A Lynette Avenue as a hotel annex. We welcome improvements to this hotel but its creeping expansion into the residential side streets is an inappropriate use of buildings which should be used as homes, and the modern styled entrance facing the common is unsuitably designed.

**36-38 Abbeville Road.** Objections to three associated applications by Sainsbury's to convert the existing empty restaurant into a Sainsbury's Local. The shop front design is unsuitable and the presence of a national supermarket chain will diminish the commercial diversity which is so characteristic of the Abbeville Road Conservation Area.

**151-153 Clapham High Street.** Objection to an application to put even more signage on the front of this building, the upper levels of which are already covered in advertisements.

**43 Netherford Road.** Observations on the design of suitable replacement windows for this listed building, an old court house.

**17 The Pavement.** Objection to the conversion of the first and second floors at the rear of this listed building into a flat with very poor quality accommodation.

## On the Common

Once more the news of Clapham Common is good and not so good. On the positive side has been the withdrawal of all three pedestrian controlled crossings on The Avenue (the South Circular as it crosses Clapham Common) from Transport for London's list of 145 traffic signals for potential removal. Along with others, the Clapham Society lodged a strong objection to this proposal.

Much less positive has been a proposed policy change for Lambeth's Parks and Open Spaces which would lead to the removal of restrictions on the size and frequency of events. The financial situation in which local authorities now find themselves has led to a view that income should be maximised where possible. Under the title *Optimising the income generation potential within Cultural Services*, the report now being consulted on suggests 'that income (from Parks and Open Spaces) will obviate the need to secure additional reductions in expenditure budgets both within cultural services and potentially elsewhere within Council services'. Clapham Common is particularly vulnerable to over-exploitation because of its size, popularity and excellent public transport links. The Society is preparing comments on this report.

## Chamber Concerts

On **Thursday 17 February** at 6.30 pm at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX, there will be a family concert, when the Naiades Wind Quintet accompanied by violin and cello will perform Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite* and Debussy's *Children's Corner*. Tickets £10, £8 (concessions) and £3 (under 12s) available on the door.

There are two related children's music workshops: On **Saturday 12 February** *Peter and the Wolf*, and on **Saturday 19 March** *Carnival of the Animals*. Inspired by two of the classical repertoire's greatest works for children Jessie Maryon Davies and Amanda Lake will be using singing, percussion and movement to devise a musical masterpiece. This is a fantastic opportunity for children to interact with young professional musicians and learn more about some of the instruments performing in the February concert. The morning's session will end in an informal performance for parents and carers.

The workshops will be held at Stockwell Community Resource Centre, 1 Studley Road, SW4 6RA. From 9.30 am to 11 am for 4 to 7-year olds, and from 11.15 am to 12.45 pm for 8 to 11-year olds. Tickets cost £15 per child or £25 for two siblings. Limited places so book early at [claphamchamberconcerts@gmail.com](mailto:claphamchamberconcerts@gmail.com).

## New Plaque Unveiled

On the cold morning of 17 December a small group of people gathered outside 5 Canford Road to witness the unveiling of Wandsworth Council's latest green plaque by the Mayor.

The plaque commemorates the Clapham Sect, whose members campaigned against slavery and the slave trade, and marks the site of Battersea Rise House, where they met. The Sect was a group of wealthy Clapham businessmen and religious philanthropists who got together in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Many of them were related to the Thornton family, local landowners, and Battersea Rise House was the home of one of them – Henry Thornton – and, for a time, William Wilberforce, his cousin. It was William Wilberforce who steered through parliament the act to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire which was finally passed in March 1807.

The house was demolished in 1906 and Bowood, Canford, Muncaster, Alfriston and Wisley Roads together with parts of Wakehurst, Culmstock and Chatto Roads were later built on the 22-acre estate.

The unveiling of the plaque was enlivened by the presence of a lady from a neighbouring house whose 90th birthday it was and, in addition to being photographed with the Mayor, she received a spirited rendering of Happy Birthday to You!

Derrick Johnson

## David Perkin

We are very sad to report the recent death of David Perkin, a loyal and long-serving Clapham Society member. David was Secretary of the Society at one time, and despite increasing ill health he remained until his death an active member of the Common and Open Spaces and the Local History Sub-committees as well as a regular leader of local walks, a newsletter deliverer and the Society's representative on Lambeth Local History Forum.

His funeral will be held at the Church of the Holy Spirit, Narbonne Avenue on **Tuesday 1 February** at 12 noon. A full appreciation will appear in a future newsletter.

**Down the Junction?** One of our members was recently told by a North London friend that when Crossrail is completed in 2017, Farringdon will become Britain's busiest train station, knocking Clapham Junction off its perch. Will that be the time to rename it Battersea Junction?





## Tree planting

On 8 January the Mayor of Lambeth, Dr Neeraj Patil, planted the 75th tree on Clapham Common as part of the programme funded by the Friends of Clapham Common and Trees for Cities, and supported by Lambeth Council. As well as tree planting there was a well-attended social event which was much enjoyed in spite of the very cold weather.

The project has been led by Peter Burke-Murphy, until recently Chairman of the Friends of Clapham Common, with much appreciated input from Diana Bell, landscape architect and Clapham Society member.

## An Unpredictable Life

For our last meeting of 2010 Maurice Stewart entertained us with a light-hearted ramble through his nearly seven decades of life in the theatre. His mother, whose family would not allow her to go on the stage, was determined that her youngest son should fulfil her thwarted ambition, so from a very early age he was singing and dancing at school and at local events. At the age of 11 he won a scholarship to the Italia Conti Stage School in London, and left his Midlands home to live with a family in Clapham. Tea at the Art Deco Odeon cinema in Clapham South (now Majestic Wine) on his first visit to London made a lasting impression.

At the time the Italia Conti was as much a theatrical agency as a school, and Maurice was regularly in shows, so that when he was 16 his mother insisted that he use his earnings to buy a house in Fitzwilliam Road, which provided a base when he was in London and an income from letting out rooms. That remained Maurice's home until last year!

At the age of 15 – the minimum age allowed for touring – he left the school to join a touring group, all under 21 years old, which gave twice-nightly shows and had a special railway wagon to transport them with scenery and props to a different town each Sunday evening.

Though this life allowed little time for formal education Maurice emphasised the sense of responsibility which was instilled in actors from a very early age.

Moving into stage management, a year in repertory at Barrow-in-Furness – 50 plays in 50 weeks – followed before Maurice joined the first London cast of *Oklahoma* at the Drury Lane Theatre. He left this to do National Service in the RAF, but came back to it again two years later on a UK tour. We heard how he managed an ice show, before joining Jack Hylton's company as stage and then company manager. In this role he was responsible for bringing large-scale technically complicated shows to the London stage, which included presentations of the Spanish Armada and the San Francisco Earthquake!

Maurice's life seemed to become increasingly frenetic and varied, as he went to Paris to learn how to put on a Folies Bergère show, took the Old Vic to the USA and wrote a play which was bought by the BBC and was so successful that they commissioned him to write and direct more. He was also freelance directing and involved with television at the time when the second BBC channel was starting.

He was lecturing and conducting workshops in universities in the USA and had become a founder of the Puppet

## The Bandstand

As members will surely have noticed the grass 'berm' around the base of the band-stand has completely failed to stand up to the treatment it has received since the restoration project finished. It has proved an irresistible challenge to children, cyclists, fitness enthusiasts..... you name it.... and it is reduced to a bald and often muddy slope for most of the year. After many months of discussion Lambeth Council have settled on a more appropriate and durable solution, so there is a good chance that the berm will be re-surfaced with granite setts before the summer. There is still just over £3,000 left in the restoration fund which the Society has in safekeeping and which will go towards funding this improvement.

*John Adams*

## New members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members to the Society: Darren McHugh, James Hall, Ron Langrish and James Timbrell and Melanie Oxley.

## Come and Sing

The newly-formed Clapham Community Choir meets every Wednesday from 7.30 pm to 9 pm in St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove SW4 0DX. Led by animateur and pianist Jessie Maryon Davies, the choir is open to absolutely everyone – no audition, choral experience or note-reading skills required. It's all about singing good music of all styles and origins and having an excellent time doing so! The cost is £5.00 per session. For more information contact Jessie at [claphamchamberconcerts@gmail.com](mailto:claphamchamberconcerts@gmail.com)

Centre (originally based at Battersea Arts Centre). He has more recently taken a great interest in oral history and is a contributor to the British Library Oral History Theatre project. By the end of the evening we were exhausted and exhilarated by Maurice's amazing journey through life, and greatly amused by his stories of life in the theatre, and the anecdotes and celebrity name-dropping which ranged from Josephine Baker to Sol Hurok.

Maurice concluded by saying that fate had played a huge part in his exciting life: he was always ready to take on a new challenge when it was presented, which happened to be quite frequently. He reminded us of the very many unsung heroes of the theatre – the talented backstage cast, from shoemakers to wig makers, without whom the stars could not shine. He also commended the theatre as a place where young and old work well together, and the generation gap is not an issue.

Maurice's enthusiasm would have kept us entertained long beyond the allotted time, so after a few questions he was very warmly thanked for a most enjoyable evening. More about Maurice Stewart's 'unpredictable' life and a transcript of his interview for the British Library archive can be found on his website: [www.mauricestewartuk.co.uk](http://www.mauricestewartuk.co.uk)

## Twixt the Commons

Timothy Walker has lived in Old Park Avenue, off Nightingale Lane, for twenty-five years, and his book is a meticulously researched history of the development of the local area. Currently known to estate agents as 'Twixt the Commons', it has gone by many other names, developers, residents and railway companies united in using any name but Battersea.

The wider context in which development took place was that of the growing suburbs of South London and of Clapham in particular. Clapham has had a varied press, and much of it is quoted. 'A highly eligible place of residence' – 'that sanctified ville' – 'Nobody visits nobody, unless they're somebody' – 'it will soon be the melancholy task of some suburban Gibbon to write "the Decline and Fall of Clapham Common"' – '[Battersea Rise is] 'a most desirable situation and respectable neighbourhood' – ' "The first thing to do," said Psmith, "is to ascertain that such a place as Clapham Common really exists." '

Building twixt the Commons started in the eighteenth century, with handsome country villas for the rich, whose spacious gardens filled the former farm land. These new families were largely incomers and had no emotional attachment to the land, and therefore no qualms over selling up for development when it became profitable to do so. Land was an investment, an important fact in the history of the ownership of many of the new houses.

The first development, round 1860, was Chatham Road. The houses were small, and many of the first occupiers skilled workers; there were six pubs. Later developments generally had larger houses, with occupants higher up the social scale. Very roughly, development went from north to south, and by the time Old Park Avenue was built around 1890, the houses were clearly intended for the well-

off professional classes. A prospective tenant, who wanted to carry on her trade of making ladies' tea gowns, was smartly seen off.

Money mattered. Later Victorians could get much advice on the income a respectable couple would need to rent a house and employ a living-in servant. There is also plenty of literature on how these families lived; this ranges from agony aunt-like handbooks, to studies of social historians, to memoirs of residents, including the humorist Stephen Potter, who was brought up in Old Park Avenue. The late Victorian house emerges as private, over-furnished and draughty.

*Twixt The Commons* thus uses written material from a wide range of sources. It also has a wealth of statistical detail, from Census returns to rate books, sale records and tax valuations. With an ambit from wider South London to the unsatisfactory construction of the English kitchen range, it is a treasure trove for study of local nineteenth-century housing. And did you know that the Northern Line was overcrowded in 1936?

*Twixt the Commons* by Timothy Walker. Paperback, 416 pp illustrated is published by and obtainable from the author, at 24 Old Park Avenue, SW12 8RH, [tehwalker@uwclub.net](mailto:tehwalker@uwclub.net), price £20.00, or from Clapham Books, 120 Clapham High Street, SW4.

Peter Jefferson Smith

## Clapham Choirs Festival

On **Saturday 12 February** the fourth Clapham Choirs Festival will take place at St Peter's Church, Prescott Place, SW4 6BX from 2 pm to 4 pm. The local school choirs entertaining the community this year will include, Macaulay, Parkgate House. Sacred Heart, Heathbrook and La Retraite. Admission is free and there will be a retiring collection for the Mayor's Charity Fund.

## St Paul's Church Appeal

Last November, St Paul's Church kick-started its £400,000 fundraising appeal with a bang at the annual community Bonfire Party.

St Paul's has been at the heart of the community since the 12th century and currently provides a building and award-winning outdoor space for the whole community. In order to continue its work St Paul's needs the help and support of Clapham. The building needs major restoration; the complex east end roof is in disrepair, the electrics need replacing and a new crèche and kitchen are essential.

The campaign has got off to an impressive start following a successful grant application to English Heritage, which has offered a substantial award of £85,000.

Last December, the Fundraising Committee welcomed the wider community to an official launch at St Paul's. Architectural plans for the crèche and kitchen area were on display, guests toured the entire interior and learnt historical facts about the Grade II listed site. The milieu of music recitals, carols and seasonal refreshments guaranteed a successful event that saw an impressive turn out – despite the inches of snow!

Existing resources from grants and donations mean that St Paul's is already halfway towards reaching the £400,000 total, but a substantial amount still needs to be raised.

The community can help St Paul's to reach the target by donating personal significant gifts, by participating in a programme of activities (currently being planned), or in a fundraising challenge or event. Every penny raised will directly benefit the community in Clapham.

For further information and ways to get involved please telephone 020 7622 2128, email [appeal@stpaulssw4.org](mailto:appeal@stpaulssw4.org) or visit [www.stpaulssw4.org](http://www.stpaulssw4.org).

Denize Belingy

Church Warden, St Paul's, Clapham

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 [www.claphamsociety.com](http://www.claphamsociety.com).