

The Clapham Society Newsletter

Issue 324

February 2010

Parakeets

Colonies of the rose ring-necked parakeet, *Psittacula krameri*, have been established for years in parts of west and south-west London and the Thames Valley. There are urban myths about how they got here – that they are descended from a breeding pair released by Jimi Hendrix, or that they escaped from the Shepperton studio set of the film, *The African Queen*. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds says they were established here in the 1960s but the population only began to grow significantly in the 1990s. We are now used to seeing them, and hearing their squawks, among the trees on Clapham Common and even in our gardens.

Researchers from the Biology Division at Imperial College are carrying out a study aimed at finding out how many parakeets there currently are in the UK and what, if any, threat they represent to native species. They have asked for information about roost sites – one has been identified in Brockwell Park (among the poplars to the south of the ponds) – but so far no-one has been able to say whether parakeets are roosting in Battersea Park or on the Common and if so, where.

The researchers conducted a parakeet count on 3 January when volunteers stood by the roost sites for the afternoon and recorded, with freezing fingers, the number of parakeets they saw flying from tree to tree and gathering at dusk. There is to be another count on 11 April and once again, the researchers are looking for help. If you have spotted a roost or are willing to help with the count, email parakeet@imperial.ac.uk.

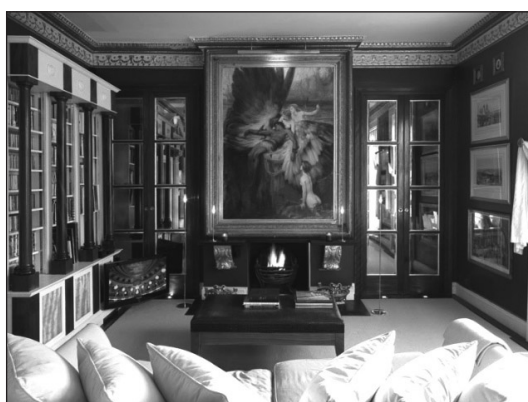
Alison Macnair



Our regular monthly meetings are held at Clapham Manor Primary School, Belmont Road, SW4 0BZ. The entrance to the school in Belmont Close, 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 most meetings finish by 9.30 pm.

Wednesday 10 February

Sycamore House, Old Town. Tim Gosling, who lives and works from his home at Sycamore House, started the concept of a working museum four years ago. The history of the house provided the perfect space and background for his passion for designing classical furniture.



He will show maps, paintings and photographs of the site of Sycamore House from the 14th century to the building of the present house in 1787 and explain the many changes to the property during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The talk will be illustrated with published pictures of the interior he

has designed for the house, including restoration of the listed cornices. The inspiration and the furniture he has designed as one-offs are all to become part of the history of Sycamore House. He will also briefly touch on the background of the design world in England during the 1780s from which the design for Sycamore House evolved.

A graduate in theatre design, after a few years Tim Gosling moved on to design furniture and interiors, joining David Linley in the late 1980s. His recent book, *Gosling, classic design for contemporary interiors*, published with the V & A and the Wallace Collection includes pictures of Sycamore House as it is now with Tim's bespoke furniture designs in situ. The foreword was written by Tim Knox, Director of the Soane Museum which has provided much of Tim's inspiration.

Wednesday 17 March

Safer Neighbourhoods. Since 2006, every London ward has had its own Safer Neighbourhood team, involving the police and local people. This meeting will provide more information about how these teams work and an opportunity to discuss matters relating to community safety and crime reduction.

Clapham Society Concert

On 18 November – a few days before the feast of St Cecilia, patron saint of music – some 70 members and guests gathered in the upper hall at Clapham Manor School to hear English music played and sung by young musicians from the Clapham Chamber Concerts stable.

The concert began with a selection of songs – some familiar, some less well-known – by Purcell and Vaughan Williams, sung by Marcus Farnsworth (baritone) and Aoife Miskelly (soprano) with Jessica Maryon-Davies at the piano. Amanda Lake and Jessica then played Vaughan Williams' lovely rhapsody *The Lark Ascending* in the arrangement for violin and piano. After the interval, we heard more songs, this time also including pieces by Britten and Gurney; and the evening ended with Elgar's Sonata for violin and piano.

This – like all Clapham Chamber Concerts events – was an excellent opportunity to hear at the beginning of their careers a number of musicians whose names may well become familiar to us before very long, and it was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who came. Clapham Chamber Concerts was set up by Amanda Lake and Jessica Maryon-Davies to give young professional musicians the chance to develop their repertoire and gain experience. There are three series of concerts per year, held at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4. The Spring 2010 series began in January. Details of the next concerts are shown below. To join the mailing list, email claphamchamberconcerts@gmail.com.

Clapham Chamber Concerts

On **Friday 26 February** the Alea Quartet will perform extracts from Bach's *Art of the Fugue*; Mozart's *String Quartet in G* and Dvorak's *American Quartet*.

On **Friday 26 March** the Kandinsky Winds, an exciting young wind trio, will perform work by Beethoven, Mozart and *Divertissement for oboe, clarinet and bassoon* by Francaix. Concerts start at 7.30 pm at St. Paul's Church, Rectory Grove SW4 0DX. Tickets, £9 and concessions, are available on the door.

Clapham Choirs Festival

On **Saturday 6 February** from 2 pm to 4 pm Clapham's third Choir Festival will be held at St Peter's Church Hall in Prescott Place (just off Clapham High Street, almost opposite Sainsbury's). Choirs taking part include those of Macaulay, Bonneville, Sacred Heart, La Retraite and Parkgate Schools as well as St Peter's Church Choir.

The Mayor of Lambeth and local MP, Kate Hoey, will be present and the event is free with a retiring collection for the Mayor's local charities.

Trinity Hospice new building

Some members have recently mentioned that they have not yet seen the new building at Trinity Hospice. You still have the chance to do so, since several Open Days are planned in the next few months. They are as follows: **Wednesday 17 February, Saturday 20 February, Wednesday 24 March, Saturday 27 March, Wednesday 21 April, Saturday 24 April**. The Wednesday visits are from 5 pm to 7.30 pm and Saturday from 10 am to 12 noon. To reserve your place telephone Nichola on 020 7787 1012. Don't miss this chance to see a spectacular modern local building!

Congratulations to Trinity Hospice, and in particular to the gardener Michael Halman, on the award of the Silver Medal in the category of 'Best Larger Hospice Garden' at the London Gardens Society Large Garden competition. Trinity Hospice also received the 'Best End of Life Care Design' award in Building Better Healthcare.

A crooked financier in Clapham

We are grateful to our member Sylvia Foster for bringing to our attention Jabez Spencer Balfour (1843-1916), a speculator and crook whose activities prefigure some of the events which have rocked the financial world in recent times.

Balfour speculated in property development, raising money through the Liberator Building Society, which by the end of the 1870s he had made the largest in the country. He entered Parliament and became well known as a highly successful public figure. However, the economic recession of the early 1890s revealed that his schemes had no solid foundation. His London bank failed, followed quickly by the insolvency of his network of interlocking companies. The demise of the Liberator robbed many small savers of a lifetime's savings. Balfour fled to Argentina, was extradited and was given a long prison sentence.

After his release, he lived for a time in Nightingale Lane. The *Daily Mail* wrote

Our website

We have re-vamped the Clapham Society website, which is now in nine main sections: the Home Page which describes the aims of the Society, and then sections covering our main activities and key areas of involvement, the events planned for the current year, our publications, on-line versions of the year's newsletters and a searchable archive of earlier newsletters, a section on local history, a membership application form, contact information and links to related websites, and finally a photo gallery of Clapham scenes.

The local history section includes a new article – a lecture given on 15 April 1859, by Henry Whitehead, a curate at Holy Trinity Clapham, called *The Oldest Inhabitant*. It is a light-hearted look at Clapham over the previous couple of centuries. The following extract gives a flavour of the lecture:

'I sometimes think that there are a good many old persons with full use of their mental faculties in Clapham as compared with other places. Very recently a woman whom I was accustomed to visit died in the High Street in her hundredth year. She was deaf and blind but very shrewd in her way.

Mr. Greenwood tells me that he had a patient a few years back in this neighbourhood who died a hundred and five years old. There is an old lady in Bromell's Road in her eighty-fourth year who is a wonderful reader. She will read a long work, of the smallest print, and it may be requiring considerable thought to understand, in a very few days, and will give a very good account of its contents. Unfortunately she was not brought up in this place, or I doubt not I should have had many of her reminiscences to entertain you with.'

Have a look at the new website! Visit www.claphamsociety.com.

when he died: 'Of recent years he was a well-known figure – though his actual identity was never guessed – on Clapham Common, where on sunny days he would sit on a seat and read the newspapers – a quiet, calm, mild-mannered old man, kind to the children playing about him. On Sunday he would go to chapel and sing. The collection plate never passed him unavailingly'.

Balfour's story is told in *Jabez: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Rogue*, by David McKie (published 1995), from which this quotation is taken. A moral tale for our times?

Peter Jefferson Smith

The New Wandsworth Museum

Wandsworth Council have now confirmed a 20-year lease for the new Wandsworth Museum on the site of the former West Hill Library. They have agreed to support the new museum with a grant to cover the lease on the building for the first five years, with potential for further funding. The lease also allows the museum to move to new premises after five years if, as is hoped, agreement is reached with the developer of the Ram Brewery site to use the historic end of the Ram Brewery.

The museum moved its offices to West Hill last December and renovation and redecoration is due to start in February, ready for a 'soft' opening in early May and full opening in June. Meanwhile the Museum's education programme continues and volunteers are needed. If you would like to be involved email educator@wandsworthmuseum.co.uk or telephone 020 8875 8323.

To celebrate the confirmation of the lease a special event will be held on **Thursday 4 February** at 7.30 pm at the Brewer Building, St Mary's Church (just south of Putney Bridge). The Museum Director, Andrew Leitch will address the meeting, there will be a viewing of the DVD *Send them to the country* – a re-enactment of a World War II evacuation by pupils of Beatrix Potter School. The headmaster of the school will introduce some of the original evacuees and there will be a wartime music sing-along, drinks and snack. You are invited to join The Friends of Wandsworth Museum in this celebration.



On the Common

The ever-growing popularity of Clapham Common was demonstrated during the snowy weather in January. These photos were taken two days apart and illustrate just how well trodden by feet and paws the Common became.

January meeting

We were much impressed and pleased that more than 30 members turned out on a cold, snowy evening in January to see the DVD of *Common Voices: Past and Present*, an oral history project to which we contributed last summer. This involved some older members of our local community (several Clapham Society members) sharing memories of their childhood between about 1948 and 1960 with Year 6 children from Bonnevill School. The DVD brought home to the audience the striking changes in life over the last 50+ years, and showed the value of an inter-generational discussion. The children were quick to seize on the fact that while they have far more material benefits and possessions, they have lost the freedom enjoyed by an older generation. Several speakers mentioned that their parents would send them off to play on Clapham Common for the day, with a packet of sandwiches and instructions to be back by 8 pm! The children were amazed by (and envied?) this, but had difficulty in imagining a sweet ration of one Mars Bar a week, no television, a few home-made toys and handed-down clothes.

The DVD is available in local

libraries and will be shown to other community organisations. If you know of any group which would be interested to have a showing contact the project director, Tricia Holland, triciaholland@talktalk.net.

Tricia went on to introduce the next project planned by Big-Up Films, the Clapham-based group of filmmakers and artists which she leads. To build on the community links already formed they have just applied for funding for an oral history project focusing on World War II in Clapham. They have already recruited some volunteers, but are actively seeking more. If you were living in Clapham, and preferably at school, between 1939 and 1945 or know anyone who was, or if you would like to be involved in the project in any way, please contact Tricia Holland.

Note: Some members were doubtful whether this meeting would go ahead due to the bad weather. We aim never to cancel one of our scheduled meetings since it is impossible to reach everyone who may plan to attend. If you wish to check or have any query about a meeting you should telephone Maev Sullivan on 020 7498 9205.

Studio Voltaire

The annual members' exhibition at our local gallery in Nelson's Row, just off Clapham High Street, opens on **Thursday 25 February**, with a preview the previous evening from 7pm to 9 pm.

Studio Voltaire is an artist-led gallery and studio complex established in 1994, which has developed a reputation for supporting artists at a pivotal stage in their careers through an ambitious public programme of exhibitions, commissions, live events and offsite projects. Studio Voltaire provides a much-needed resource of affordable studios to London-based artists. The key objective is to create a supportive and critical atmosphere to develop diverse artistic practices and help provide career opportunities.

For more details and opening times call 020 7622 1294 or go to www.studiovoltaire.org.



Paul Nash: the Elements

Opening on **Wednesday 10 February** at Dulwich Picture Gallery is an exhibition of work by Paul Nash, one of the most admired of British 20th century artists. Nash painted beautiful landscapes of the Downs and classic images of two World Wars. The exhibition includes paintings, watercolours and photographs from the whole of his career.

The Director's free exhibition lecture is on **Thursday 18 February** at 12.30 pm in the Linbury Room. For details of gallery opening times and charges go to: www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk or call 020 8693 5254.

Joseph Powell

We were delighted recently to have a call from a lady who is a great, great, great, great-granddaughter of Joseph Powell whose prints of Clapham, particularly of the Common, are so familiar to many of us who live here. She is researching her family history and was thrilled to find we still had copies of the prints available. She took several for her family members – but we still have some left and they are available **free** from Alyson Wilson (contact details below).



This picture of a dairy in Abbeville Road – now an estate agent – can now be seen in the new photo gallery on our website. See page 2 inside.

Visit the Olympic Park

Did you know that the Olympic Delivery Authority offers free bus tours of the Stratford site of the 2012 Games? Already the waterways which criss-cross the Park have been cleared, overhead pylons removed, the main stadium is up, the wave-like roof of the Aquatics Centre is in position and construction of the Olympic Village is under way. It is really exciting to see the Olympic Park taking shape, and to witness the transformation of the area. Tours take place at weekends and some weekdays. Telephone 0300 2012 001 to book your tour.

A Date for your Diary

At our April meeting on **Wednesday 21 April** Peter Doble Vice-Principal of Lambeth College and Chris Harding, a partner in BDP, one of the UK's leading architectural practices which designed the recently-opened Sixth Form Centre overlooking Clapham Common, will talk about the design and construction of the building. The new centre accommodates 1200 students and features a performing arts centre and an information learning centre, amongst other 21st century educational facilities.

The Last Trams in Wandsworth

The autumn 2009 edition of *The Wandsworth Historian* includes memories of trams in 1950, an article about the Victorian preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (who lived in Nightingale Lane), a contribution from a survivor of World War II air raids in Putney and much more of interest. Copies are available from ngrobson@tiscali.co.uk for £3 plus £1 postage.

Trumpets at St Luke's

On **Saturday 20 February** acclaimed trumpeter and raconteur, Crispian Steel-Perkins, will play a variety of trumpets and a broad range of music at St Luke's and Eton College organist, David Goode, will play a sonata by Naji Kakim on the recently restored organ.

The concert begins at 7.30pm at St Luke's Church, Thurleigh Road, SW12 8RQ. Tickets £16 (concessions £12) from the box office: 07951 791 619.

Join a class

The Papered Parlour classes continue throughout February, with: *Make a Dress* on **Saturday 6** and **Sunday 7 February**, *Design a bag* on **Saturday 13 February**, *Make a pair of earrings* on **Saturday 20 February** and more dressmaking on **Saturday 27 February**. Check out their website: www.thepaperedparlour.co.uk or telephone 020 7627 8703 for details.

New members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members this month: Christine Boyes and Jan Boczkowski, Michael, Anna and Kimberley Carroll, Dorothy Czartoryska, Nigel and Alison Newbery, Fran Wellby and Nick Jones, the Holy Family Sisters and London's Chartered Surveyors and Valuers.

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