

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 381

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On **Monday 5 October** at 6.30 pm, Michel Roux of Le Gavroche, who also runs the Roux Experience courses in Clapham at Cactus Kitchen's Cookery School will unveil the Clapham Society's eighth Green Plaque on a notable local building which has changed its use. This will be on Clapham Pottery, 4a Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ, which was formerly the chapel of Ingleton House Boys' Home. Please come along and join the celebration. All are welcome.



Photo: Claire Fry

Clapham Pottery in Rectory Grove

We started our big adventure at the beautiful old chapel in Rectory Grove six years ago in September 2009 with the help of Lambeth Council's Regeneration Department. We had previously been at the Leisure Centre so were delighted to be re-housed and had been able to save enough money to buy two kilns.

It was an instant success. Students poured in, so we were up and running very quickly. We had purpose-built the inside to make it usable as a pottery and managed to do this without disturbing the old Edwardian panelling. Then when we realised we had some money left over each term, we started to invite adults and children who couldn't afford to pay fees, even our very reasonable ones. This too really took off so we started applying to other charities and foundations to expand this work. We seemed to have got this right as several foundations over the past five years have been making small grants to us.

Currently, we have workshops for elderly carers, children from low-income families, Ace of Clubs Homeless Project, Lambeth Mencap, amongst others. Then in 2013, with all this going on, we were forced to actually buy the building rather than rent it from Lambeth, otherwise they would sell it off. This threw us into a spin but we latched on and managed to raise the required £175,000, one way or another in a year! So now we embark on our seventh year with fully subscribed classes of students phoning daily to ask when term starts and a building that can remain in community use in perpetuity.

Our meetings are held at Omnibus, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. The bar at Omnibus is 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 19 October

Annual General Meeting. The guest speaker will be Edward Stourton, one of Radio 4's leading presenters of news and documentaries, who will reminisce on his successful career to date. He was a founder member of Channel 4 news, scripting, producing and presenting.

Monday 16 November

Battersea Dogs and Cats Home. Shaun Opperman is the Veterinary Director of Battersea Dogs and Cats Home. He heads up a team of six veterinary surgeons, 25 veterinary nurses and two animal welfare assistants, across three sites, and is responsible for the health and welfare of the animals under the Home's care. He will talk about his work and the Home's future and his experiences as a co-presenter on Paul O'Grady's *For the Love of Dogs* television programme.

There is no meeting in December.

Naine Woodrow
Coordinator

Overground, Underground – Behind and Below the Common Eye

On **Sunday 11 October** Dr Iain Boulton will lead a guided walk looking at some of the landscape, wildlife and historical features of Clapham Common that are hidden away from public view or the untrained eye, and how they came to be there, what happened to them and whether we can get them back! Meet at the Bandstand for 2 pm start. Please wear sensible outdoor clothing and footwear – and bring your own recollections and knowledge to share with others on the day.

Common and Open Spaces

There are a number of seasonal ‘regularities’ that we are getting used to. Tree pruning, for instance, is one. The ‘Cook Tree’ – the large, old black poplar near the Temperance Drinking Fountain – was recently pruned, and now presents a very different face. Current arboricultural practice would never prune these trees as they grow to maturity. In past times however this was not the case, and once pruned, this must continue otherwise the new branches crowd with excessive leaf and often huge branches break off. Hence the occasional nude look to our Cook Tree is a means of extending its life. And shortly a new relatively low pole-and-chain link fence will be placed around its base to protect the roots.

Storm damage is a regular occurrence; a willow on West Side was lost when one half fell in spring high winds, and the remains of one of the willows damaged near the pond last year have been removed. There are annual considered plans for replacing trees where some have been lost or are too diseased. The Clapham Society is supporting a bid being made to improve biodiversity around the main part of the dump.

There have been two significant walks; one to discuss the Clapham BID potential plans for ‘greening’ Clapham High Street. The preliminary plans have now been received and are under discussion. The other was with Sustrans about the Mayor of London’s proposals for Cycle Quietways across London, that includes local streets and the Common. We made representations which we hope will influence the detailed implementation. The Quietway aims to be a different type of cycle route than those marked on various roads. To this end there was much support for lower speed cycling to be integrated rather than separated from pedestrians. And we should finally achieve the closure of Windmill Drive. The principle was understood that any loss of green space to the Common has to be returned.

The Common continues to be heavily used for many activities, and just sitting on the grass, with a coffee or sandwich. Lambeth is in the process of purchasing more, and larger, refuse bins. The current maintenance team have been meticulous at promptly clearing loose as well as stacked rubbish. This problem is always worst after a major event on the Common, and residents will know of the damage caused during the recent SW4 event, compounded by heavy rain on the last day. The Council inspected the damage and work was immediately put in place for repair and renewal.

There is an understandable tension surrounding large events; these events are popular, including among some local residents, and they add to the income of local businesses. The police have well tested systems for the flow of people between Clapham Common and Clapham South underground stations, and rubbish is regularly being removed. On the other hand local noise levels, though monitored, cause distress as does late night drinking when behaviour can get out of hand. Residents often object to the length of time parts of the Common are fenced off.

This group and Clapham Common Management Committee (CCMAC) are in regular discussion with the Lambeth Events teams and local councillors in the planning, duration and aftermath stages, to try and reconcile the varying perspectives. One recent development is that part of the fees paid to Lambeth by the event organisers is to be channelled back into the local community for spending on the Common. In times of huge budget restraint, this is not insignificant. In addition, the discussions between Parks officers and the local community, via CCMAC, on which I represent the Clapham Society, will I believe lead to a greater understanding of our various perspectives and thus be of benefit to the Common and all its users.

The Common and Open Spaces Sub-committee are always looking for additional members to join us – anyone who just loves our Common and Open Spaces. New members can bring different perspectives. As Convenor, I have had a most enjoyable year, being taught about succession planting, looking out for tadpoles, and learning the difference between a London and American Plane Tree.

Deryn Watson

Clapham Chamber Concerts

This month’s concert is on **Friday 2 October** with a performance by the Ferio Saxophone Quartet. Recently appointed Park Lane Group Young Artists 2015-16, this talented young ensemble will perform a programme to include Barber’s haunting *Adagio*, Arvo Pärt’s minimalist masterpiece *Fratres* and compositions by Bach and Michael Nyman amongst others. The performance starts at 7.30 pm at St Paul’s Church, Rectory Grove SW4 0DX. Tickets on the door £12, £10 Friends and concessions, £5 children under 12 years. Full details at claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk.

Lambeth Palace Garden Party

The Archbishop of Canterbury has generously offered the garden of Lambeth Palace to Age UK Lambeth for a garden party in aid of the charity on **Wednesday 7 October** from 12 noon to 3 pm. The 11-acre garden dates back to the 12th century and is the oldest continuously cultivated garden in London.

There will be homemade cakes, pastries and tarts and other refreshments, and stalls selling Christmas cards and Lambeth Palace produce. There will also be a chance to see the work and activities provided by Age UK Lambeth for older people in the borough. All proceeds will be donated to the charity. Admission £4. If you definitely plan to go it would be helpful if you could email the organisers carolyncripps472@gmail.com or bertie1148@hotmail.com so they can be sure to bake enough cakes!

Wandsworth Artists’ Open House

On **Saturday 3 October**, **Sunday 4 October**, **Saturday 10 October** and **Sunday 11 October** up to 100 artists in Wandsworth will be opening their studios to visitors. There are trails organised by area: Battersea, Putney, Tooting etc. which can be downloaded at wandsworthart.com. You can also search the site by art form – painting, photography, ceramics and so on.

St Luke’s Music Society

On **Saturday 10 October** at 7.30 pm pianist Benjamin Grosvenor is giving a concert of music by Mendelssohn, Cesar Franck, Ravel and Liszt at St Luke’s Church, Thurleigh Road, SW12 8RQ. Tickets are £18, concessions £14 on the website slms.org.uk/2/book.

Feast your eyes on this!

It's been a sizzling summer of ambitious activity for Bandstand Beds! For the past few months the group's members and volunteers have been working with Lambeth Council to clear and prepare part of 'the dump' to create the Clapham Common growing community garden.

Now the polytunnel is up, raised beds have been built and it's time to invite you to have a look around and help celebrate their successes so far. On **Saturday 24 October** Bandstand Beds will hold its annual feast and the opening of the new community garden.

On the day, there will be delicious food made from some of Bandstand Beds' homegrown produce and cooked on the Brixton People's Kitchen mobile stove. As well as noshing there'll be a variety of activities including fruit tree planting, followed by relaxing back and neck massage and face painting for the kids. This free event starts at midday. Everyone welcome! For more information visit bandstandbeds.org or [facebook.com/bandstandbeds](https://www.facebook.com/bandstandbeds).

David Dandridge



Photo: David Dandridge

The Mystery of the Australian Donor

Clapham Library, now Omnibus, was opened in 1889. It was approved by a local vote, influenced by the promise by an anonymous donor of £2,000. The donor was revealed in 1891, as WA Guesdon, a retired Tasmanian businessman who had died recently at his house on Clapham Common North Side.

When his will was published, it was discovered that he had left nearly half a million pounds, mainly to charity, a sum which in today's money would have made him a multi-millionaire. The news attracted immense interest, particularly in Tasmania. Who was he and whence his wealth?

William Andrew Guesdon was one of the many young men who went out to Australia, did well for himself and came back with a fortune. He was born in 1816, in Southwark. His father died in 1830, and William probably arrived in Tasmania in 1833, still only 16 years old.

In Tasmania, Guesdon had a variety of business interests. In 1853 he was one of a group of Hobart merchants who formed the Tasmanian Steam Navigation Co, one of several companies competing for the ferry traffic between Tasmania and mainland Australia. However, his main business was that of auctioneer and land agent. Tasmania was being opened up for exploitation, particularly by mining, and Guesdon not only acted as agent for sales of mining rights and of shares in mining companies, but also invested his own money. Thereby he made a fortune.

The young Guesdon led an unorthodox private life, having four children by two different women, and marrying yet another. Later in life he seems to have reformed. He spent charitably, donating funds to working men's clubs, institutions set up to counteract the temptations of drinking and gambling (not with much success in 19th century Australia). He lived quietly; after he died and his fortune was disclosed, the press reported that he 'led a life of social seclusion and mystery' – unlike his sons, who were enthusiastic supporters of the turf.

In the early 1880s, Guesdon retired to England, leaving his businesses in the hands of his sons. He came to live in Clapham, where he made his will. He left the bulk of his estate to trustees, to be used for charitable purposes in Britain and Tasmania, and nothing to his own children. Possibly there had been some family rift, and the charitable purposes were very vague; so it is not surprising that the High Court was asked to rule. The Court made a substantial allowance to the sons and grandchildren and apportioned the charitable element between Britain and Tasmania.

Time and inflation have eroded the charities, so the most substantive relic of Guesdon's benevolence in this country is Clapham's former Library, now Omnibus.

This account was researched by Finbarr Finnerty, acting on behalf of Omnibus in 2012, who first identified Guesdon as the anonymous donor for the Library, and Peter Jefferson Smith. It was written by Peter Jefferson Smith.

Clapham Opera Festival

The Grand Opening of Clapham Opera Festival 2015 is on **Friday 9 October** at 7.30 pm when Sophie Yelland (mezzo soprano), Ricardo Panela (baritone), Philip Voldman (piano and conductor) and Mari Wyn Williams (soprano) will perform Grand Opera Arias.

On **Friday 23 October** at 7.30 pm White Nights will be an evening of music by Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninov and Balakirev with Raya Kostova (piano), Mari Wyn Williams (soprano) and Thomas Humphreys (baritone).

The Festival continues in November with *La Bohème* on **Friday 20 November** and **Sunday 22 November**, and a special Remembrance Sunday concert of British and French song on **Sunday 8 November**.

For full details of the Festival and to buy tickets go to claphamoperafestival.com. All events are at the Church of the Holy Spirit, Narbonne Avenue, SW4 9LQ.

Southside Players

The next production is *William Shakespeare's Land of the Dead* by John Heimbuch, from **Wednesday 28 October** to **Saturday 31 October**, at Chestnut Grove School Theatre, Boundaries Road, SW12 8JZ. Full details and tickets on the website southsideplayers.org.uk or from the box office 07914 657 524.

Jeremy Brett Memorial Bench

On Saturday 12 September, on the 20th anniversary of his death, an event took place around the bandstand on Clapham Common entitled *Remembering Jeremy*, with readings and reminiscences of the actor, followed by the dedication of a memorial bench. Admirers of the actor, most famous for playing Sherlock Holmes in the 1980s, came from as far as Japan and the USA to the celebration on a pleasantly sunny afternoon. Amongst them were David Burke, who played the first Doctor Watson, David Stuart Davies, Jeremy's biographer, and Roger Johnson, Editor of Sherlock Holmes Journal. Tributes were read from other actor friends including Ronald Pickup and Charles Kay.

Jeremy Brett lived for many years in a flat in Cedars Terrace, on the corner of Clapham Common North Side and Cedars Road, and was a great lover of Clapham Common. Some years ago a tree was planted in his memory near the bandstand, and the bench has been positioned nearby.



Photo: Dana Kubick

Some October highlights at Omnibus

Sunday 4 October at 7.30 pm. Corrie Dick Band of Joy. Led by Scottish drum sensation Corrie Dick, this young super-group performs triumphant original music composed by its dynamic and ever innovating leader. Soaring anthems surge from emotional landscapes awash with exciting grooves and textures. Tickets £10.

Sunday 11 October at 4 pm. Deco Ensemble. Specialising in Iberian and Latin-American repertoire, Deco Ensemble's adventurous programme displays extraordinary breadth and creativity. The ensemble will perform contemporary tango music and songs written by Gustavo Beytelmann and Astor Piazzolla, along with pieces featured on their newly released album 'Encuentro'. Tickets £12, £10 concessions, £5 for under 25s.

Thursday 15 October at 7.30 pm. *So, This Is What Happened...* Sometimes the best stories are the ones we star in ourselves. Come and join the fourth in the series of storytelling evenings. Buy a drink, find a seat and hear a collection of people deliver their 10-minute true stories. All characters appearing in these stories are non fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is intentional. Tickets £5.

Friday 23 October at 8 pm. Perception Festival: Voice – Interrobang: ARTCOP21. A night of comedy and thought that aims to make you question, and exclaim. This month, our theme is the ARTCOP21, the global arts festival that coincides with the 21st UN Conference on Climate Change. Come and discover all the most important facts, scintillating views and hilarious witticisms that you will need to be superbly well informed about this crucial conference. Suitable for ages 12+. Tickets £10, £8 concessions.

Sunday 18 October at 4 pm. An Evening of Flamenco with guitarist Jesse Sebastian. Originally classically trained, Jesse's interest in flamenco led him to leave London and immerse himself in flamenco for four years in Seville. He will be joined by some special guests. Tickets £10.

For the full Omnibus programme for the month and to book tickets go to omnibus-clapham.org or call in at Omnibus, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. Better still, sign up for the newsletter to get regular updates.

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 our website at claphamsociety.com

Demonstration against Heathrow Expansion

Some of us living in Clapham are affected by aircraft noise for 18½ hours per day when the wind is from the southwest. This means that we can't have a conversation in our own gardens and it can be very stressful. If you are interested in protesting against plans for a third runway at Heathrow, please join the Rally organised by HACAN and others on **Saturday 10 October** from 11am to 12.30 pm in Parliament Square. For further information go to hacan.org.uk.

Jenny Cobley