

# The Clapham Society

## Newsletter



Issue 403 December 2017/January 2018

There is no meeting in December. Meetings in 2018 will be at Omnibus, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW as last year. The bar will open at 7 pm and the speaker will commence at 8 pm promptly. The programme for the year is shown below.

### Monday 22 January

***Secret Underground London*** is a comprehensive photographic record of a hidden world which lies beneath the capital but which is not generally seen by the public. In his talk **Nick Catford** includes a miscellany of sites, from the disused tube stations and closed sections of the London underground railway system, many of which were given some other lease of life, to the secret central government and military bunkers – operations rooms and control centres – which protected London against the German bombers during the Second World War. The book also tells the story of London's Cold War bunkers, never used in anger; and similarly the more modest Royal Observer Corps posts. There are air raid shelters, large and small, public and private; mines and underground quarries, some going back to the 17th century, and tunnels of all sorts: pipe tunnels, horse tunnels, tram tunnels, service tunnels, and the tunnel under the Thames Barrier. Last but not least, and not for the fainthearted, is a collection of photographs showing the capital's creepy Victorian cemetery catacombs. Nick will have copies of his book for sale during the evening.

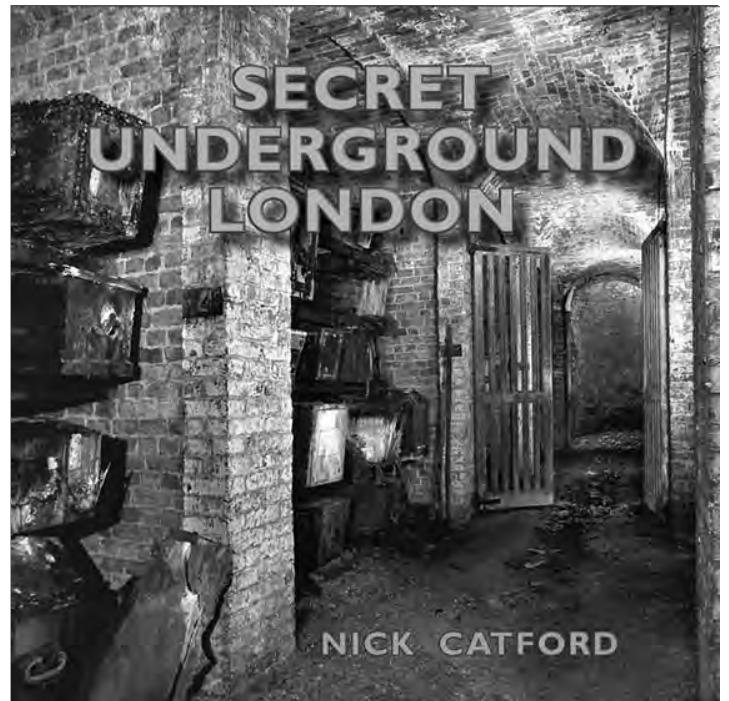
### Monday 26 February

**Shackleton's Heart – not his best bit?** Clapham resident **Dr Ian Calder** has long been fascinated by the extraordinary Antarctic journeys undertaken by Sir Ernest Shackleton, and in particular his repeated breakdowns. Ian and consultant cardiologist Dr Jan Till believe that Sir Ernest had a congenital heart defect. As well as physical heart problems Sir Ernest had a colourful romantic history. Ian researched Sir Ernest's career by learning to manage sled dogs, sailing to Antarctica on a square-rigger, yachting to and crossing South Georgia on skis, and rummaging about in the archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

### Monday 19 March

**Lambeth's Victorian Architecture.** One of our most popular speakers in the past, **Edmund Bird**, returns to tell us about Victorian architecture in Lambeth with a focus on our area. After four books about 20th century architecture in Lambeth,

The next newsletter is the February 2018 issue, which will be distributed at the end of January 2018. Christmas and New Year greetings to all our readers!



Edmund takes us back to the era of intense building activity in south London. Now heritage advisor to TfL Edmund is a former Lambeth Conservation Team Manager and local resident with unrivalled knowledge of local historic buildings.

### Monday 23 April

**Let's Talk: About Old Age And Dementia.** Local journalist and author **Pippa Kelly** began charting her elderly parents' declining years in the national press over a decade ago, describing her battles to secure state funding for them both and her mother's descent into dementia. Since their deaths she has become one of the UK's foremost writers on older people's care and dementia. Her talk will explore society's attitudes towards its elderly, particularly those with dementia, and highlight the uplifting yet unsung initiatives that are changing lives. She will also be signing copies of her novel, *Invisible Ink*.

*continued overleaf*

### Monday 21 May

**The South London Botanical Institute (SLBI)**, in Tulse Hill, was founded by Allan Octavian Hume, who was also a founder of the Indian National Congress, in 1910. The SLBI maintains a small botanical garden, a herbarium and library, and promotes a wide range of plant-related activities.

**Roy Vickery** worked for over 40 years in the Botany Department of the Natural History Museum, and remains a Scientific Associate at the Museum. He is currently president of the South London Botanical Institute, having served as a trustee for many years, including ten as chairman. His present work focuses on the folklore and uses of plants in Britain and Ireland.

### Monday 18 June

**ADA - how Lord Byron's daughter became the patron saint of computing.** Local resident and Clapham Society member, **David Singmaster** is retired professor of mathematics and computer science at London South Bank University and also an Honorary Research Fellow at University College London. He has been interested in the history of computing since arriving in London in 1970. He instigated the erection of the blue plaque to Ada Lovelace in St. James's Square and the Southwark plaque to Charles Babbage in Walworth Road. His chronology of computing is on display at the Heinz Nixdorf Foundation Museum of Computing in Paderborn, Germany.

### Monday 17 September

**Vesta Tilley and Her World** – an illustrated talk (with film clips). Vesta Tilley (1864-1952), was music hall's legendary male impersonator, recognised as one of the most successful performers of her generation, often billed as: 'The London Idol'. Vesta lived in Lambeth for a period, and she was also known for her work in recruiting soldiers during the First World War. She introduced many popular songs e.g. *Burlington Bertie*, *Jolly Good Luck to the Girl who loves a Soldier* and *Following in Father's Footsteps*. Presented by **Keith Fawkes** and **Richard Norman** who are members of the British Music Hall Society for which this talk was created.

### Monday 15 October

**Annual General Meeting.** Guest speaker to be confirmed.

### Monday 19 November

**Past Caring: The History of Bethlem.** Bethlem Royal Hospital was founded in 1247 and was the first institution in the UK to specialise in the care of the mentally ill. The hospital continues to provide in-patient care as part of the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, and has been based in south London since 1930. **Amy Moffat**, Community Engagement Officer from Bethlem Museum of the Mind, will speak about the long history of the institution, whose name Bedlam became a synonym for chaos and confusion.

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## A World War Two bomber on the Common

A former Clapham resident has a childhood memory of a World War Two bomber being displayed on the Common, and has asked if anyone can tell her more.

The display was after the war, probably around 1948, and possibly part of a post-war tour by the RAF to show civilians the aircraft which had played their part during hostilities. She is reasonably sure it was on 'The Ashes' – the area of hard standing used for circuses. The public was allowed to climb up inside what must have been the fuselage of the bomber; she was little more than a toddler and had to be lifted over some of the internal structures.

Can anyone remember any more detail? Was it part of a real bomber? If it was, which one – a Lancaster, Halifax or Blenheim?

There was a previous incident of a plane being displayed on the Common. Lambeth Archives' publication *What to do when the air raid siren sounds* has a picture of a captured German fighter on the Common. But that was 1940, and our enquirer's memory is of a British plane and definitely post-war.

Responses please to [annajs@mac.com](mailto:annajs@mac.com)

*Peter Jefferson Smith*

## New members

We have welcomed the following new members this month: Bonneville Primary School, Patricia and Matthew Carter, Michael Ebdon, Michael and Jill Mann, Marston Properties Ltd. and Gary Youssef.

## Clapham Community Choir

On **Friday 15 December** Clapham Community Choir celebrates the season with a concert at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX. The concert starts at 7.30 pm (doors open 7.00 pm). Admission is free and all are welcome.

We are pleased to announce that the Choir has been awarded a grant in the 2017 Skipton Building Society Grassroots Funding competition for community activities. This money will be used creatively to support a concert next year. The Choir thanks members of the Clapham Society for their support in the bid.

Clapham Community Choir meets on Tuesdays from 7.30 pm to 9 pm at St Paul's Church, and welcomes new members. Contact [singclapham.org](http://singclapham.org).

*Tony Bell*

## Christmas Fayre

Clapham's Green and Ethical Fayre will take place on **Saturday 9 December** from 11 am to 4 pm at Holy Trinity Church, Clapham Common, SW4 0QZ. There will be ethically sourced gifts, clothes, accessories, jewellery and artisan foods, Father Christmas and festive activities for children. Entry £3 adults, children free. A percentage of the profits will go to Emmaus, the charity offering homes and work to those who have experienced homelessness or social exclusion.

## Handel's Messiah

On **Friday 8 December** at 7.30 pm St Paul's Opera will present Handel's *Messiah*. The principal singers of St Paul's Opera and chorus, and members of Clapham Community Choir join forces to bring this Christmas classic to Clapham Old Town. This will include the Hallelujah Chorus where the audience will be invited to join in the magnificent anthem.

St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX. Tickets: £15 can be bought at the door or in advance at [wegottickets.com/StPaulsOpera](http://wegottickets.com/StPaulsOpera).

## Festive Lights Ride

On **Sunday 17 December** Clapham's festive bike ride organised by Omnibus starts at The Polygon at 4 pm. There will be lanterns, lights and entertainers, music, singers and travelling soundscapes. Details and tickets (£5, under 16s free) from [lambethlightsride.eventbrite.co.uk](http://lambethlightsride.eventbrite.co.uk).

## Why Do The Media Always Get It Wrong?

Following the Annual General Meeting in October (the Minutes of which will appear in a later newsletter) our guest speaker was James Le Fanu who combines his job as a local GP with writing a medical column for *The Daily Telegraph*. He pointed out that the medical profession usually comes top in ratings by the public, and journalists near the bottom. Why is that? The answer may be mainly because doctors need to make a correct diagnosis and treatment, whereas journalists just need a good story.

There are basically three categories of stories: the first, and rarest, when a family doctor is convicted of hastening the death of elderly patients (e.g. the Shipman case), the second is the imminent research breakthrough or medical catastrophe, the third, and by far the most common, is the medical scare story. These last are usually contradictory implicating one or other aspect of our everyday lives in some dire disease – the two glasses of wine that increase the risk of breast cancer, mobile phones linked to brain tumours, coffee with cancer of the pancreas, and so on. It is important to mention that each story is based on an article in a reputable scientific journal or a press release announcing the results, and is not just the product of journalists' overheated imaginations.

James showed us many examples of scare headlines, one after another contradicting the last. He also pointed out that doctors and academics can give a misleading spin to their findings to convey the impression that they are much more significant than they are – and to ensure the research funds keep rolling in. He cited, in particular, the panic over Aids in the late 1980s when the risks of its spread turned out to be massively overstated. He showed us many headlines about this and the following stories.

Similarly confusing is the conflicting evidence over meat and dairy products high in saturated fat. After many years the pendulum is swinging back in favour of these products, since the recent increase in diabetes has been attributed to factors caused by lack of these foods. He also discussed the question of the value of statins, and again showed the many conflicting headlines. Finally we heard of the most recent scare – the threat to the future of the human race from falling sperm counts due, it is claimed, to the presence in the water supply of minuscule quantities of chemicals used in the manufacture of ducks and many other plastic products.

Dr Le Fanu's talk was light-hearted and entertaining and he returned to the fact that although journalists need a good story, these are based on serious research documents, from which they may, of course, create particularly eye-catching headlines. Can we blame them for that? Their job is to sell newspapers.



## Things Can Only Get Worse?

Local author John O'Farrell has just published the long-awaited sequel to his 1998 best-selling comic memoir *Things Can Only Get Better*, called appropriately enough *Things Can Only Get Worse?* The book picks up where the original left off, recalling John's political activism in Clapham, Battersea and beyond from the Labour landslide of 1997 right up to Brexit, Trump and the snap election of 2017. Along the way he stood for Parliament against Theresa May, used his comedy writing skills for the speeches of Gordon Brown and Tony Blair and was dubbed the sickest man in politics by the *Daily Mail*!

He also recounts his part in the local parents' campaign for a new secondary school for Clapham which became Lambeth Academy and where John became the Chair of Governors for the school's first eight years. London Mayor Sadiq Khan said 'John O'Farrell has, in his own unique and hilarious way, captured the highs and lows, pride and embarrassment, joy and frustration of being Labour' while *The Sunday Times* said 'Even Conservatives will like this.'

Signed copies are available at Clapham Books, 26 The Pavement, SW4 0JA where personally dedicated copies may also be requested.

## Bland Map of Clapham 1849

Do you have a copy of this map you no longer want? A member urgently requires one. If you can help please contact Alyson Wilson.

## Shop Volunteers

Cancer Research UK has always been a volunteer-led organisation, right from the board of trustees to the shop volunteers. The Clapham shop at 83 St John's Road, SW11 1QY is looking for enthusiastic people to join their team of volunteers. You are asked to commit to two hours or more a week, but can be flexible. Training and support is provided. For more information please pop in to meet Aisha, Shop Manager, call 020 7223 5349 or go to [volunteering5@cancer.org.uk](mailto:volunteering5@cancer.org.uk).

## Clapham Chamber Concerts

On **Friday 1 December** in the third concert of the CCC 2017-18 season Miriam Wakeling (cello) and Panaretos Kyriatzidis (piano) present music by Brahms alongside the music of composers he was influenced by. Bach's Cello Suites have proved popular with audiences and are regarded as cornerstones of the cello repertoire. One of the earliest and best known works for the instrument, they remain to this day one of the most admired of the composer's works. Beethoven and Brahms form the heart of this recital and the two cello sonatas are sublime exponents of the repertoire for both the piano and cello. This concert will be a musically rich and indulgent treat from the CCC series and will also feature a premiere by CCC Composer-in-Residence, David Wallace. St. Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX at 7.30 pm. Tickets £12, £10 CCC friends and concessions, £5 children. For further information email [claphamchamberconcerts@gmail.com](mailto:claphamchamberconcerts@gmail.com).



photo: Ellie Kurttz

## Omnibus Highlights

**Saturday 25 November to Sunday 17 December.** *Zeraffa Giraffa* is an alternative to the usual pantomime in the run up to the holiday season. A co-production with Little Angel Theatre, this new stage adaptation of acclaimed children's author Dianne Hofmeyr's picture book of the same name, is inspired by the astonishing true tale of a real giraffe sent as a gift from the Pasha of Egypt to the King of France. For ages 4-10 years. It is an emotionally engaging tale, told using beautiful hand-made puppets, exploring what it is like to be different.

**Thursday 7 December to Saturday 9 December and Thursday 14 December to Saturday 16 December.** *The Turn of The Screw.* In the tradition of Victorian fireside ghost stories Omnibus Theatre brings us Henry James' classic tale of suspense, horror and repressed sexuality. In this adaptation, a young governess journeys to a lonely manor house to care for an orphaned brother and sister. She is drawn into a terrible struggle for the very souls of the children. But one frightening question tortures the would-be heroine: are the ghosts real or the product of her own fevered imagination?

**Tuesday 9 January to Thursday 18 January 2018.** *The Overcoat.* Scandal and Gallows Theatre return to Omnibus with a delightfully dark and absurdist staging of Nikolai Gogol's famous short story, a biting funny commentary on social disparity that's still all too relevant today.

For more information and booking go to [omnibus-clapham.org](http://omnibus-clapham.org) or call 020 7498 4699.

## Fun Dog Agility Classes

New this month are Dog Agility Classes on Wednesday evenings at 7.15 pm at the Ebony Horse Club, 51 Millbrook Road, SW9 7JD. Classes are in a fully secure floodlit arena and conducted by a qualified dog instructor.

Proceeds go to the Ebony Horse Club, a Brixton based charity that works with disadvantaged children and teenagers. Since 1996 we have helped raise aspirations, education, life skills and well-being of our local children and young people through horses, outdoor activities and mentoring. Situated in one of the most deprived areas in the country our riding centre teaches 400 children and young people a year to learn to ride and look after horses. Our Brixton riders build trust, work as a team and demonstrate resilience, supported by the most natural and patient of teachers, our horses. To learn more visit [ebonyhorseclub.org.uk](http://ebonyhorseclub.org.uk).

Clare Charlton

## St Luke's Music Society

On **Saturday 13 January 2018** arguably the finest British tenor, Mark Padmore, will perform a programme of Brahms, Mahler and Schumann, accompanied by Julius Drake. The concert at St Luke's Church, Thurleigh Road, SW12 8RQ starts at 7.30 pm, with a pre-concert talk at 6.30 pm. Tickets from [slms.org.uk](http://slms.org.uk) or 07951 791619.

## Stuck for a Christmas Present?

Membership of the Clapham Society makes a good present, especially for a new local resident. Details are on our website [claphamsociety.com](http://claphamsociety.com). Or what about one of the several books about the area which are available at Clapham Books, 26 The Pavement, SW4 0JA?

## Light up a Life

On **Thursday 14 December** the lights on the Christmas tree at Royal Trinity Hospice will be switched on at 6.45 pm, followed by a candlelit procession to Holy Trinity Church for a carol service with guest readers. After the service there will be wine and mince pies.

## The Clapham Society on YouTube

The video about the Clapham Society made earlier this year by students at Lambeth College, with the help of Mark Leffler, and featuring Julia Barfield and Peter Jefferson Smith is now on YouTube. Please follow the link <https://youtu.be/13h1sV5uVok> to watch it. Make sure to watch the full five minutes and then Like and Share it. This is our opportunity to spread the word about the Society. PLEASE take advantage of it!

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

<b>Chairman</b>	<b>Annabel Allott</b>
Tel: 020 7228 5551 Email: <a href="mailto:annabel@allott.plus.com">annabel@allott.plus.com</a>	
<b>Acting Secretary</b>	<b>Maev Sullivan</b>
Tel: 020 7498 9205 Email: <a href="mailto:maevsullivan@gmail.com">maevsullivan@gmail.com</a>	
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>David Brown</b>
Tel: 020 7720 7536 Email: <a href="mailto:david.sbrown@btopenworld.com">david.sbrown@btopenworld.com</a>	
<b>Membership Secretary</b>	<b>Jennifer Everett</b>
Tel: 020 7627 4770 Email: <a href="mailto:jeverett@waitrose.com">jeverett@waitrose.com</a>	
<b>Common and Open Spaces</b>	<b>Andrew Summers</b>
Tel: 07977 454229 Email: <a href="mailto:andrew_summers_london@yahoo.co.uk">andrew_summers_london@yahoo.co.uk</a>	

<b>Meetings and Events</b>	<b>Christine Armstrong</b>
Tel: 020 7720 7449 Email: <a href="mailto:christinearms52@hotmail.com">christinearms52@hotmail.com</a>	
<b>Planning Matters</b>	<b>Sarah Bridger</b>
Tel: 07855 458647 Email: <a href="mailto:sarahbridger1066@gmail.com">sarahbridger1066@gmail.com</a>	
<b>Roads and Transport</b>	<b>Mark Leffler</b>
Tel: 020 7720 9370 Email: <a href="mailto:mark.leffler88@gmail.com">mark.leffler88@gmail.com</a>	
<b>Newsletter and Publications</b>	<b>Alyson Wilson</b>
Tel: 020 7622 6360 Email: <a href="mailto:alysonwilson.sw4@gmail.com">alysonwilson.sw4@gmail.com</a>	

Details of meetings, activities and a full list of our publications are on our website at [claphamsociety.com](http://claphamsociety.com)