

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 425

March 2020

More than meets the eye

The celebrated landscape architect **Diana Armstrong Bell** brings beauty to outdoor spaces. This award-winning local designer, whose practice is in Mackay Road, is anything but local, however, when it comes to her design reach. She may have transformed the Polygon into a tree-lined pedestrian haven in 2013 with architects Marks Barfield but her portfolio spreads from Milan to the Middle East and, in the UK, the cathedral cities of Lincoln, Rochester and our own fair cathedral city.

In January, Diana spoke to the Society, holding the room spellbound as she shared her design secrets. Not for her a return to Repton and Capability Brown. Her inspiration comes from the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935) and the great Iraqi-British designer Zaha Hadid (1950-2016). Malevich was a master



Pat Stockley

of line at unpredictable angles and Zaha, groundbreaking curve. History plays a part, too. Take a commercial project in Suffolk (Chiron HQ). Signs of what came before during an archaeological dig on the 33-acre site – a moated Tudor hall and an Iron Age village – became the muse here. ‘Patterns of the past appear as abstract interventions’ and so rills recall the moat and straight lines ancient boundaries in a ‘landscape seamed with human stories’.

Diana works in town and country; in the latter, often on brownfield sites. Probably her most ambitious project was Parco Franco Verga in a run-down part of north Milan, completed in two

phases (2006/2012). When she first saw the site, a tree in blossom caught her eye, its petals fluttering randomly onto the forlorn earth below. ‘The only bit of hope was that cherry tree.’ This visual snapshot gave rise in Diana’s mind to a series of small gardens, each richly planted and scattered like petals across a green landscape. ‘I called these Fragment Gardens because they seemed to be fragments of former times when the site was once green.’

In a city, Diana regards trees as ‘green architecture’. They create rooms, vistas, even ceilings. Her plantings linking the Sainsbury Wing of (*continued overleaf*)

We meet at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. Our guests normally speak for about 45 minutes, followed by around 15 minutes for questions and discussion. The bar is open beforehand and afterwards. Meetings are free and open to non-members, who are invited to make a donation. Please arrive in good time before the start to avoid disappointment.

Monday 16 March

After 25 years of being at the heart of Clapham’s community, leading arts organisation **Studio Voltaire** is embarking on a £2.4 million refurbishment.

Laura Harford, Curator, will offer insight, including a look at the plans by Matheson Whiteley Architects and the history of the site. The project will increase public space within the site by 233%, introduce a new garden and café and, importantly, provide more affordable studios to ensure Clapham’s thriving artistic community is maintained.

Monday 20 April

Bill Linsky, Chairman of the Brixton Society, will tell us about the markets area of Brixton where there are so many ‘firsts’; not least one of the the first shopping streets in Britain to be lit by electricity. But the story of the markets is more relevant than that. Shops reflect the changing needs and tastes of their customers, and the history of shopping in Brixton mirrors the history of the area.

Underground rivers walk, Thursday 14 May

Join **Jon Newman** on a walk around ancient boundaries of the parish of Clapham as defined by the long-vanished watercourses of the Holburne, Heathwall and Heathwall Brook. This (almost) circular three-mile walk will start at Clapham Common (junction of North Side and Cedars Road) at 6.15 pm and end at Clapham High Street station two hours later. Jon will have copies of his recently published history and walking guide, *The Heathwall: Battersea’s Buried River*, £6.50, available to buy. Email Christine Armstrong (details on back page) if interested. Numbers limited to 25; if necessary there will be a waiting list.

Clapham South deep-level shelter

The uses – past, present and future – of Clapham’s World War II deep-level air raid shelters, which track the Northern Line with their surface-level rotunda, generate ongoing interest and speculation. None more so than the shelter at Clapham South, with its northern entrance on the Common itself.

This remained in use for some years after the end of the war, providing emergency and cheap hostel accommodation for locals whose homes had been destroyed, young cadets attending national events, refugee orphans from war-ravaged Europe awaiting dispersal and adoption, West Indian immigrants who arrived on *HMT Empire Windrush* from Jamaica in 1948, and young people from around the Commonwealth who visited London in 1951 to enjoy the festivities surrounding the Festival of Britain. Eventually this shelter, as with others, was used for archive storage. (As many of you may know, the shelter near Clapham Common station is now used for the cultivation of salad stuffs by Growing Underground.)

Because of its rich history, the Clapham South shelter was handed over to the London Transport Museum (LTM) to manage, with a view to it being developed as an historical resource for the wider public. Accordingly, in December 2015, Transport for London (TfL) was granted planning permission to extend the northern rotunda on the Common to enable its use as a café/



Mark Leffler

restaurant and exhibition space. With funding from a variety of sources, LTM embarked on the mammoth task of clearing 60 tons of steel shelving cluttering the tunnels, removing toxic materials and remedying

a massive mains water leak that was damaging the southern section of the complex. This also entailed extensive investigation and appraisals of the whole domain, in parallel with archival research on how the tunnels had been used during the war and into the early 1950s. A consultation event in 2019 invited views on how the complex might be used, assuming it would become accessible to the public.

Sadly, LTM’s very thorough feasibility and design work has demonstrated the enormity of the task and steep cost of opening the tunnels to the general public as a visitor centre, making this an unviable option for the foreseeable future. Plans to convert the rotunda for public use have also been dropped, although work is required to stabilise and protect the Grade II listed structure from further degradation.

The good news is that LTM is continuing to arrange tours of some of the tunnel complex at Clapham South shelter for small groups (currently limited to the able bodied and over 14s) as part of its Hidden London tours programme. Bookings need to be made in advance at: ltmuseum.co.uk/whatson/hidden-london. LTM has also indicated it is keen to arrange occasional one-off tours for special interest groups, such as the Society. For legal reasons the current restrictions on access need to remain, but options for improving accessibility are being explored.

Finally, LTM is also proposing to create a Virtual Reality fly-through of the shelter complex from the high-resolution 3-D photographic survey it undertook, which it hopes to make available online. Important work continues, too, in tracing some of the people who once stayed or worked in the shelter and recording their experiences for posterity. *Mark Leffler*

(continued from previous page) the National Gallery with the old gallery bear this out: ‘The trees join the walls on either side.’ What interests Diana, too, is not just the artistic challenge but how her projects affect the users. Returning to the Milan park several years after completion to see how it was being used, she met a child whom she had seen playing during her observations, which took place one blisteringly hot summer’s day. When she told him his playground was her creation, he said, ‘We love you, we love your park. We can’t afford to go to the beach so this is our beach; we come here every day. Thank you!’ ‘Honestly,’ she said. ‘it was the best moment of my career.’

One could have listened to Diana Armstrong Bell for hours. To delve deeper into her design process, and possibly steal a few ideas for your own landscape – ‘If you shape it in a certain way it can move towards art’ – refer to her latest book. The publishers placed the Milan project in the middle, hence projects are not chronological, she admits. We can live with that, Diana! Like a delicious chocolate, the book has a chewy centre and your work, generally, has much to feed the mind and soul. *Sculpting the Land: Landscape design influenced by abstract art* is available at £25 from Clapham Books or armstrongbell.com/the-book. *Ruth Eastman*

Where South Side meets the South Circular!

After years of lobbying for a safer crossing for pedestrians where South Side meets the South Circular at Cavendish Road, Transport for London (TfL) has finally published its proposal. Consultation on a proposal to sort out this crossing in 2016 met with widespread approval. At that time, it was understood controlled pedestrian crossings could be incorporated without appreciably affecting traffic flows. The latest scheme is more modest, and controversially proposes banning all private vehicles, not just HGVs, from turning left from South Side into Cavendish Road.



Traffic wishing to travel east will be required to make a right turn beyond the junction onto the gyratory, which already gets very congested with traffic seeking to go north from Cavendish, or west along The Avenue across the Common.

Understandably, this is giving rise to considerable concern locally. By banning the left turn residents know this will displace traffic through the residential district around Abbeville Road, and feed pressures to introduce a range of controls in local streets that are ultimately unlikely to benefit the local community.

TfL is seeking comments on the latest proposals by 13 March, which you can submit by email to: yoursay@tfl.gov.uk. Or contact me (details on the back page) for further information. *Mark Leffler*

Hibbert Almshouses

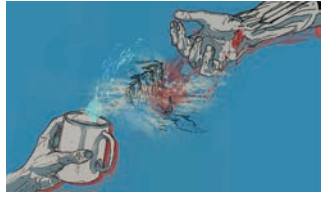
This is a Christian charity responsible for eight almshouses in the Wandsworth Road. We have a good Managing Agent, but the overall responsibility is with the six trustees, who need rejuvenation, and we are looking for a new trustee. Special knowledge of social housing, treasurership, gardening would be welcome or other useful skills. If interested, please email: info@hibbertalms.org.uk or ring Euan Kennedy, Chairman, on 020 7622 4469. Also visit hibbertalms.org.uk. *Euan Kennedy*



Dana Kubick

THEATRE, MUSIC, ART, FILM & TALKS

Omnibus Theatre Highlights include *Can I Help You?*, the late Philip Osment's final and very moving play, which receives its world premiere at Omnibus on **3-21 March**. One night, two disparate souls intending to throw themselves off a cliff delve into each other's past and learn what it truly means to be touched by the magic of hope.



- Lovers of Renaissance writers will be in for a treat with Ben Jonson's *Volpone* by Tangle Theatre, **25 March to 11 April**.
- Cellist Tim Posner and pianist Ljubica Stojanovic return for Sunday Music on **22 March** in a programme ranging from Beethoven to Tchaikovsky. Details and tickets for all the events above at omnibus-theatre.org or call 020 7498 4699.

Paul's Players Part tragedy, part romance, part exuberant comedy, *The Winter's Tale* is a magical story of obsession and redemption. This fast-paced new production – **4, 6, 7 March** – sees violence erupting in a 1950s nightclub. Jealous mobster Don Leontes tears his family apart, but can time restore what has been lost? Look out for Shakespeare's most famous stage direction – plus a special guest appearance by Alex Kingston (*Moll Flanders*, *Doctor Who*, *ER*). 7 pm, St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX. Tickets: £10, including one drink. Space limited so please pre-book. Email admin@stpaulsclapham.org or call 020 7622 2128.



St Paul's Opera There's just time to book for the Masterclass with David Butt Philip on **Thursday 5 March**. You don't have to be an opera buff to appreciate the transformation of a singer from 'amazing' to 'outstanding' in the expert hands of this international tenor. Tickets: £10, £5 (students) at stpaulsopera.org.

• On Friday 27 March the Oratorio Concert for Lent and Easter includes all-time favourites from Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, the Requiems of Mozart, Verdi, Fauré and Duruflé, and Handel's *Messiah*, of course! With regular SPO singers, Michael Hodges will accompany on the magnificent St Paul's Church organ with string accompaniment by cellist Alison Holford. Tickets: £15 in advance through stpaulsopera.org, £17 on the door. Both events will take place at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX.

Festival of Hope *Hope: An Exhibition, 9-21 March*, is curated by local photographer Jim Grover (*Windrush: Portrait of a Generation*, 2018). It will display artwork and photographs by local residents of all ages, children from the local Muslim faith primary school and visitors to the Ace of Clubs, the Clapham-based charity which offers day-centre services for the homeless and vulnerable. There will also be a section devoted to Jim Grover's work, e.g. 'Hoping my pumpkin turns into a carriage, Clapham High Street, 2.18 am' (right). St James Church, Park Hill, Clapham, SW4 9PB. Free, including free refreshments.



Jim Grover



Clapham Chamber Concerts The Lake/Maryon Davies Duo returns on **Friday 13 March** for a special concert, including the Brahms Violin Sonata in G for violin and piano, and works by Biber and Lili Boulanger, as well as Beethoven's much-loved 'Spring' Sonata. 7.30 pm, St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX. Further details at claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk. Tickets (on the door): £15, £12 (concessions), £10 (Friends of CCC), £5 (children).

St Luke's Music Society Celebrate the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth on **Saturday 14 March**, when **Steven Osborne** gives a recital featuring the composer's monumental last three piano sonatas. Generously sponsored by Oranges & Lemons. Tickets: £18, £14 available from slms.org.uk.



Benjamin Ealovega

Clapham Common Film Club This month's screening is *Elvira Madigan*, the 1967 Swedish film directed by Bo Widerberg, on **Monday 23 March**. Based on Swedish legend, it tells of a beautiful 16-year-old tightrope walker, Elvira Madigan, who runs away from her family's circus in the summer of 1889 to be with Count Sixten Sparre, a young lieutenant with two children. Cue the slow movement from Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21, used to famously romantic effect. 7.30 pm, Omnibus Theatre; bar open beforehand and drinks can be taken into the auditorium. Running time: 91 minutes with time for post-screening discussion.



Membership (essential), £35 for the remaining four films in the season. There is also a 'pay-as-you-go' membership option. For more details, email Roger Booker at ccfilmrb@gmail.com.

Battersea Society Uncovering the Effra, **Thursday 12 March**. A talk on the River Effra by author and historian Jon Newman. 6.30 for 7pm, Dimson Lodge, Battersea Church Road, SW11 3YL. Tickets: £5 on the door. Refreshments available.

- AGM, **Thursday 19 March**, 6.30 for 7pm, St Mary's Church, Battersea Church Road, SW11 3NA. A talk by staff from Nine Elms Partnership will follow. All members welcome. Free. Refreshments available.

Remembering Keith Grant Peterkin

Keith Grant Peterkin (24 November 1941 to 18 December 2019) was a resident of Orlando Road from 1978 to 2015.

Rosemary and I attended Keith's funeral in the village of Appleshaw, near Andover, where he and Theresa had a home for some 20 years (though keeping their house and then a flat in London) on 10 January. It was held in the very small Anglican village church to which a marquee had been added at the front, but even that was not enough for the 300 who came. His sons, Hugh and Ian, stood side by side and spoke so well of their father, their parents' good marriage, his kindness and gentleness, his appreciation of fine craftsmanship, and of his career in the silver trade through which many in Clapham came to know him.

Like me, Keith was an Anglo-Scot, but with much more of the Scot in him, having been almost entirely educated in Scotland, and still having the family house in Forres, where there will be a memorial service later. He and Theresa were fond of Scottish Country Dancing, and he was the Secretary to The Highland Society of London for 25 years.

Keith had a good sense of public service, and acted as Vice Chairman and then Chairman of The Clapham Society for four years in the 1980s. He was a sincere Christian and attended Holy Trinity Church during the 35 or so years he lived here. Theresa is a Catholic.

A story that illustrates Keith's helpfulness concerned two silver communion vessels stolen, after a break-in, from Holy Trinity in the 1980s. Keith was going on holiday the following day but, before leaving, contacted a friend in the silver trade and accurately described the vessels to him, suggesting he look out for them in Bermondsey Market. (Amazingly, as it may now seem, this antiques market operated under special rules known as 'market overt' under which a 'good title' could be passed for stolen goods.) His friend attended the market and found the vessels; the holder of them, on being informed that they were stolen, surrendered them. The vessels had been made just after the last war, and Keith approached the silversmith who had made them, now in retirement, and he agreed to repair them, restoring initials which had been rubbed off and replacing two crosses which had been lost at an earlier stage. Good had triumphed!

Keith, died from motor neurone disease, not so long after contracting it, which was a merciful release. Our sympathies go to Theresa, and to Keith's family and friends. *Euan Kennedy*



Membership renewal

The new year for Clapham Society membership starts on 1 April. Reminders are sent to members who do not have a standing order; other members are asked to check with their bank that their standing order is for the correct amount, including postage (currently £10 p.a.) where applicable. Membership rates are: Individual, £10; Household, £15; Business, £25. If you have a query, please contact the Membership Secretary (details on this page). Full bank details are on the Society's website, claphamsociety.com. We always welcome new members, too. *Jennifer Everett*

Omnibus Theatre is looking for part-time box office volunteers

Do you have some spare time? Would you enjoy working with creative people in your local theatre? Omnibus Theatre is a registered charity and multi-award-winning theatre in Clapham Old Town. The heart of our ambitious programme, inspired by our building's literary heritage, lies in classics re-imagined, music and contemporary storytelling. We currently engage over 3,000 under 11s a year through free arts activities and are working with the National Trust property 575 Wandsworth Road to provide storytelling workshops inspired by the house. We believe in affordable tickets and theatre for all. Currently we are looking for volunteers in our box office. Duties include: answering the telephone, visitor enquiries and selling tickets. Four-hour sessions to suit, morning or afternoon, and opportunities for free tickets to shows and concerts when available. Between enquiries there's also ample opportunity to read a book! If you are interested in helping out, please email the Artistic Director at marie.mccarthy@omnibus-clapham.org or call 020 7622 4105. *Marie McCarthy*

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 can be found on our website at claphamsociety.com

