

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 433 February 2021

Just when we thought the dark cloud was lifting, the numbers rose and Lockdown Three was announced. The vaccine is starting, but for good reason we must still exercise caution. In terms of events, Zoom and online remain the order of the day. Enjoy what is on offer, keep safe and, remember, spring is around the corner. Truly.

Eden Community Garden – celebration is in the air

As this tranquil – and aptly named – haven adjacent to St Paul’s Church, Rectory Grove marks its 20th anniversary, key players who took part in its early story look back on its creation. Kate Paul reports

‘Matrimony Place was dangerous to walk through at night,’ recalls Julian Lush, who helped raise funds to renovate the steep alleyway that ran alongside St Paul’s. ‘It also had horrible mesh netting strung between concrete pillars, placed there at the start of World War II when the railings were removed as part of the war effort. It was decided to install new lighting, to replace the whole path – which was very uneven – and to put in the good cast-iron railings that are there today.’

Justine Allain Chapman, the vicar of St Paul’s at the time, had the idea to transform the waste ground beside Matrimony Place. ‘The space was being used by dog walkers as a shorter walk out, so it was pretty disgusting.

I wanted to make that whole area more lovely. For me it was about the Five Marks of Mission, the fifth being about treasuring the earth.’

‘It took two years to clear the space, parts of which were waist deep in fly-tipped stuff, and to work out our next step and who we could get funding from,’ says Katie Isbester. ‘I think one of the great lessons of Eden’s 20th anniversary has been the huge number of people who have been involved in it. The teamwork is moving. We brought in people from the community, we listened to each other, and we’ve been recognised at a national level for what we have achieved. We are a 16-times Green Flag Award Community Winner.’

Philippa Gould, Chair of Eden since 2008, reflects, ‘During this year of lockdowns we’ve been discovered by so many people: locals have been just slack jawed walking into this space round the corner from where they live, yet which they had no idea existed. There’s as much passion now as there was at the start. Benny [Hawksbee, Eden’s current gardener] has a real vision for the garden and we have a wonderful community of volunteers. It’s a good thing.’
To learn more about Eden Community Garden, to donate or to help as a volunteer when the restrictions lift, please visit edengardenclapham.org.



In normal times our meetings are held at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side. The bar opens at 7 pm and the talk starts at 8 pm. Our guest speaks for about 45 minutes, followed by 15 minutes for questions and discussion. Meetings are free and open to non-members, who are invited to make a donation. Owing to the pandemic, our next two meetings will be held on Zoom, also at 8 pm. To book your place (during the appropriate month), email events@claphamsociety.com. Login details will be sent 24 hours beforehand.

Monday 15 February

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

Monday 15 March

Ready, steady, census! With the decennial census almost upon us, David Gwyther, Census Engagement Manager for North Lambeth, will speak about its importance and the practicalities of taking part. Households across Lambeth will soon be asked to participate in the nationwide survey of housing and the population. Information from the ‘digital-first’ census will help decide how local services are planned and funded. This could affect things like doctors’ surgeries, housing or new bus routes. The March meeting is your chance to find out more, and David will be happy to answer your questions at the end – you can read his article for us about the census on the back page.

NOTE: Our previously planned talk for March, Patricia Ninian on St Paul’s Opera, has been rescheduled for as early as possible next season, February ’22, when the future of live music performance, we all hope, should be more certain.

Battersea Society walks

Trustee and local heritage expert Carol Rahn researched and photographed hundreds of buildings and structures in Battersea that helped Wandsworth Council compile its Local Listings register. At 6 pm on Thursday **11 February**, you can join this virtual walk to see and hear about some of these listed buildings and open spaces, including curiosities such as the striking 1988 Brian Barnes 'Battersea in Perspective' mural (**left**) in Dagnall Street. To book, email events@batterseasociety.org.uk. Zoom login details will be sent out 24 hours beforehand.



Discovering Battersea's Open Spaces – a walking guide (**right**) would make the perfect

companion on your daily socially distanced constitutional. There are six offerings to choose from: Vauxhall Cross to Battersea Park; East Battersea and the Commons; Clapham South to Clapham Junction; Wandsworth Common to Battersea Reach; St John's Hill to Battersea Park; and Battersea Park to Battersea Reach. Each walk is impeccably researched and conceived with key landmarks, historical background, even bus routes to get you started (should you need). The slim publication slips effortlessly into the pocket yet the contents can only be described as compendious.

Well done, Clare Graham, Battersea Society's Chair of Open Spaces Committee, for creating the guide and plaudits, too, to our own printers, PowerPrint, for producing it. Available for just £5 from batterseasociety.org.uk (free p&p) and Clapham Books (for collection), 020 7627 2797, email: shop@claphambooks.com. **Sue Demont**



Questionable behaviour at Westminster?



Simon Berthon (**left**), novelist, historian and BAFTA-winning television documentary producer, is a long-time resident of Clapham. Society members may have seen him at the Clapham Book Festival, where he has interviewed writers and broadcasters such as Frank Gardner and Kate Adie. Simon's latest novel, *A Time to Lie* (HarperCollins, £12.99), was published in December 2020 to great acclaim: 'Utterly gripping' (Gavin Esler); 'A pulse-pounding thrill-ride that hooked me from the chilling opening' (crime author Chris Whitaker).

Simon brings the knowledge and experience of working in current affairs television to his Westminster-set thrillers, although, he admits, 'The genesis of ideas is mysterious. *A Time to Lie* began with a simple proposition. I'm not sure where it came from, but I thought what if a former friend – and flatmate from youth – of a newish Prime Minister sidles up to him at a moment of celebration, engages him in conversation and whispers in his ear a question composed of four simple words: Did we kill her?'

Thus *A Time to Lie* begins, after the bones of a woman's hand have come to light at a London building site. The story plays out in the world of Parliament, Special Political Advisors (SPAds), party conferences and the secret services 'against what I hope,' the author adds, 'is a believable scenario which underlies that appalling question'. **Julie Anderson**, chair and co-founder of the Clapham Book Festival, and author of *Plague* (Claret Press)

A Time to Lie is available for collection from Clapham Books, 020 7627 2797, email: shop@claphambooks.com. The Clapham Book Festival 2021 is scheduled for 16 October.



We're on YouTube!

A reminder, if you missed our November 2020 meeting about Peter Jefferson Smith's book, *The I'Ansons – A Dynasty of London Architects & Surveyors*, that there is now a video of the talk available on YouTube. Presented by Alyson Wilson, Andrew Saint and Timothy Walker, the Zoom call explores their collaboration in the book's posthumous completion and the extraordinary family of architects and surveyors who people its pages. You can access the video via our website, claphamsociety.com, and clicking on 'Latest News'. For a more tangible record of the I'Ansons, of course, the book is available at £20 to order and for collection from Clapham Books (contact details, left). In due course, we hope to be putting other Clapham Society talks on YouTube.

A shimmering evening's music... in the bleak midwinter

On 14 December at St Paul's Church, the Clapham Chamber Concerts audience thrilled to the retro soundworld of clarinet, celeste (a magical keyboard instrument with hammer-activated chimes) and strings. The idea was to cast away the cares of Covid temporarily and to take those safely distanced present tripping over the rainbow to a place of sparkle, misty moods, frost and candlelight.

The brilliant Jonathan Parkin (clarinet), who curated the programme, led Ensemble SW4 together with CCC co-founder Amanda Lake (violin) and CCC's composer-in-residence, David Wallace (celeste). David arranged the music for the seven-piece ensemble, featuring five string players accompanying the clarinet and celeste. Among the light music treats were revivals of rarely heard early-20th-century pieces by Clarence Raybould and Walter Mourant, which demonstrated the clarinet's extraordinary tonal range and Jonathan's technical mastery of his instrument. More familiar Christmas classics – excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* and Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, as well as Irving Berlin's 'White Christmas' and Leroy Anderson's 'Sleigh Ride' – filled the air too. But the high spot had to be David Wallace's fantasy on Gustav Holst's 'In the Bleak Midwinter'. Christmas is over but his musical scene-painting at youtube.com/watch?v=aquvGE2_OFw together with his superb arrangement of *Hansel and Gretel*'s 'Evening Prayer' at youtube.com/watch?v=OmmhUuJylso live on. Do listen. As soon as the pandemic provisions allow, the CCC season will continue. **Paul Askew**



Back soon!

While live performances at Omnibus Theatre have been postponed owing to the current restrictions, Omnibus has an exciting month of international online theatre experiences planned for February. **Wayang Kitchen**, a Malaysian-based theatre company which fuses food and performance, is collaborating with Omnibus to present a new show which will take you on an immersive, edible journey. **Out of the Wings (right)** also returns in February to celebrate theatre in translation from the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking world. The company will present a mix of scratch nights, round tables and rehearsed readings. Events are being finalised as we go to print, so for further information and booking details please visit omnibus-clapham.org.



Cathy Cobby

Now there are nine

‘Life on the ponds of Clapham Common has kept me going during lockdown,’ writes member **Jenny Cobby**. ‘My daughter, Cathy, photographed these newly hatched Egyptian goslings last autumn. There were originally ten but now there are nine. They have since become very popular with visitors to the Common and get fed regularly – luckily with the right food, I think.’

If you have a story that has moved you during lockdown, or a photograph of a special moment of local interest, send it by email to news@claphamsociety.com and we'll do our best to include them.

New members

This month, we would like to welcome Valerie and Philip Bingham, Clare and Simon Galton, and Rachel Pickering. If you are interested in becoming a member of The Clapham Society, or know of someone who would, please email membership@claphamsociety.com. We would love to hear from you. We are also keen for new members with expertise they can bring to the Society, which champions this vibrant corner of south London and its history.

Gresham College lectures

Members may be interested in some of the free online history lectures from Gresham College. This month's include: **England's Tudor Reformation**, 6 pm, Wednesday **3 February**; **The Secrets of Darwin's Greenhouse**, 6 pm, Monday **8 February**; **Mata Hari**, 6 pm Thursday **11 February** (part of cultural historian Joanna Bourke's successful series on Evil Women); and **Giotto and the Early Italian Renaissance** by Valerie Shrimplin, 1 pm on Tuesday **16 February**. There is also a medical lecture by Chief Medical Officer for England **Professor Chris Whitty** on the **History of Vaccination** (who better?) at 6 pm on **10 February**, which will look at how vaccination has transformed healthcare.

You can register for all the lectures above from now to 1 April using your email address via the ‘Register’ link on the webpage for the lecture, and you will get a reminder ten minutes before it is due to start. Many previous lectures are also available to view online. For more details and future talks, visit gresham.ac.uk.



Calling all local (and future local) history buffs

The Wandsworth Historical Society has produced a comprehensive newsletter with web links to heritage trails, museums, libraries, Zoom talks and many more resources for historians young and old – parents and grandparents, for example, will want to check out museum activities for children in lockdown. To receive a copy of the newsletter, email pamela.greenwood@btinternet.com.

New Year, new Common – and issues still to consider

Despite the dark cloud of a third national lockdown Lambeth Council, in consultation with the CCMAC of which the Society is a standing member, has made good progress on a number of initiatives in relation to the Common. The renovation of the **playground (below)** by The Spinney, for example, should be completed by the time you read this. It represents a big improvement on what was there before. The associated mess at the Greenways site by Bandstand Beds should also improve, although we continue to engage with Lambeth regarding a long-term solution to that site which has been an eyesore for so long.



A key consideration for 2021 will be whether funding can be allocated to redevelop the **paddling pool** in Old Town whose aged mechanics seem continually to let down residents in summer. Other matters include the poor state of the **footpaths** and the feasibility of a **community café** where the boathouse sits between Long Pond and the basketball courts.

Litter remains a problem, exacerbated by an increased use of the Common and food and beverage detritus as a result of a rise in takeaways as a result of lockdown rules. We are pleased that Lambeth will retain the services of two litter pickers every Sunday. (Usually there is no weekend litter collection from October to April.) The 50-plus-strong army of voluntary litter pickers, mainly assembled by The Friends of Clapham Common, will be much reduced by Lockdown Three, but contact them if you'd like to volunteer once restrictions permit by emailing friends@claphamcommon.net.

Some of our members have noticed big white marks on about 50 **trees** around the Common. These require work because of disease or damage that could result in injury to passers-by, property or traffic. We met with Lambeth's tree officers and their love of trees along with state-of-the-art equipment means they will do what it takes to preserve them. Where necessary, the programme will begin, logically, with those closest to busy roads, followed by pathways and finally to trees furthest from footfall or traffic.

The controversial proposal to redevelop the former **bowling green** site and pavilion to create a Putt In The Park facility remains very much alive. Despite the proposal having been rejected by Wandsworth's Planning Committee, the developer is appealing and our current view is that the appeal may succeed if based on technical grounds alone. This process will take up to six months, as will the need to obtain Secretary of State consent. Legal advice taken previously by the Society indicates that Lambeth can fence off and provide a licence to a private company for recreational use. No viable alternatives to the c. £35,000 rental income we estimate Putt In The Park will be paying have been forthcoming and Lambeth has now signed Heads of Terms with Putt In The Park. So, we understand Lambeth is now committed and unable to consider alternatives. Assuming the appeal is successful and permission is forthcoming from the Secretary of State, only Putt In The Park can now withdraw from the agreement.

Councils, however, are not impervious to local concerns. In this instance, because the site lies within the borough of Wandsworth, it is Wandsworth Council that must determine licensing matters related to the proposal. **Members opposed to this development** should express their views to the Wandsworth councillors who represent wards on the west side of the Common. We suggest that interested parties use the next few months to examine the proposals (certain details of which, such as an artist's impression of the development, have been lacking). We have made it clear to Lambeth and to Putt In The Park that local stakeholders need to be kept better informed.

To end on a note I am sure all our readers can agree on, we are delighted that over the course of the past month the Common now boasts an additional 42 **bird and bat boxes** with a few more still to be put up, and the planting of 250 **spring bulbs**. A big thank you to all the volunteers who did this on behalf of the local residents. *Andrew Summers, Common and Open Spaces*

census 2021

Households will soon be asked to take part in the census. This once-in-a-decade survey gives the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales. Carried out every ten years since 1801, with the exception of 1941, the 2021 census will be the first run predominantly online.

David Gwyther, Census Engagement Manager North Lambeth, Office for National Statistics, explains

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has appointed a census engagement manager to support Lambeth residents and help make Census 2021 a success. As manager for your area, I will help organisations, charities, faith groups and community leaders within the borough to raise awareness of the census and highlight its value to residents taking part. Census Day is Sunday 21 March, but households across the country will receive letters with online codes allowing them to take part from early March. The census will include questions about your sex, age, work, health, education, household size and ethnicity. For the first time, there will be a question on whether you have served in the armed forces, as well as voluntary questions for those aged 16 and over on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Results will be available in 12 months, but personal records will be locked away for 100 years. If you want to get involved and earn some extra cash, **the census team is hiring people like you in exciting temporary roles to make Census 2021 a success**. To find out more, visit censusjobs.co.uk. 'A successful census will ensure everyone from local government to charities can put services and funding in the places where they are needed most,' says Iain Bell, deputy national statistician at the ONS. 'That's why it is important everyone takes part and we have made it easier for people to do so online, with help and paper questionnaires for those who need them.' (Visit census.gov.uk.)

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

Chairman	Annabel Allott Email: chairman@claphamsociety.com	Meetings and Events	Christine Armstrong Email: events@claphamsociety.com
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Treasurer	David Brown Email: treasurer@claphamsociety.com	Roads and Transport	Mark Leffler Email: transport@claphamsociety.com
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Details of meetings, activities and a full list of our publications can be found on our website at claphamsociety.com

