

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 436 May 2021

This month we report on activities coming up in Clapham – virtual and in person – worthy causes, and the sensitively orchestrated dismantling of the flowers for Sarah Everard at the Bandstand. We also hear from a celebrated local actor, Toby Jones, OBE, who was intrigued to hear more about the Society. Thank you so much, Toby, for talking to us.

Our meetings are held at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, but with restrictions still in place May's event will be held on Zoom at the usual time of 8 pm (log in a few minutes beforehand). Our June meeting is scheduled to be at Omnibus in person, but the meeting will also be on Zoom. Please email events@claphamsociety.com to book (in the appropriate month, please). Login details will be sent a day or two ahead. More information about the June meeting next month.

Monday 17 May, 8 pm

Discovering Battersea's Open Spaces: a walking guide. Dr Clare Graham has lived in Battersea since 1983. She has a PhD in architectural history and worked as a curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and as a heritage consultant. A trustee of the Battersea Society since 2018, she is Chair of its Open Spaces Committee. During the first lockdown she put together the Society's first publication – the title of her talk. In this meeting Dr Graham will take us through the process of producing and promoting her book, as well as showing us some highlights of her walks.

Monday 21 June, 8 pm

The life course of health – we can't start soon enough. Professor Lucilla Poston, CBE, Head of the Department of Women and Children's Health at King's College London (KCL), will update us on pregnancy research at King's College London and Guy's and St Thomas' Trust. Illustrating the 'Developmental Origins of Health and Disease' hypothesis with examples from scientific literature, she will show how this is influencing public health advice about parenthood and the management of common complications of pregnancy. Professor Poston holds the Tommy's Charity Chair of Maternal and Fetal Health. Her research team aims to improve the health of women and their children in the UK and, globally, by better understanding the processes that lead to complications in pregnancy, particularly premature birth, gestational diabetes and pre-eclampsia.

Toby's world

One of the joys of Clapham is it's hard to go for a walk without bumping into someone you know – or maybe recognise. That was the case recently when Toby Jones, plugged into his AirPods, was pounding the same pavement as me. One of Britain's leading actors, Toby is a familiar face in these parts. I have always wanted to interview him for the Newsletter and by happy coincidence my walking companion, and great friend, was able to introduce us. Hearing a bit about the Society, he agreed to the idea and, as so few of us have seen an actor perform live this past year, the chance to hear about that world from one of its most seasoned exponents seemed too good to miss.

We met again in Battersea Park where Toby rolled up on his bicycle. The early April sun was shining, passers-by were in good spirits knowing the Easter weekend lay ahead, and two people Toby knew stopped to chat.

BAFTA Award-winning actor Toby Jones has a list of credits for stage, film, television and radio so long he's a national treasure. *Capital* (BBC1, 2015), about a fictitious Clapham street and its multi-faceted population in which he plays the troubled investment banker Roger Yount, is the project nearest home.

'I went to see John Lanchester, who wrote the book, to chat to him about it,' Toby explained. 'John lives in Clapham and, although I live in Stockwell, we seemed to have a common experience. That perpetual London ferment of property development, sales, marriage, divorce was something I had been seeing a lot in the period he was writing – people "souping" their houses up, residents having to live with builders in the street. *Capital* plays into that. When the executive producer, Derek Wax, pitched it to me he said, "For me, it's like a modern Dickensian novel. It's looking at a community and how everyone is linked, how we've all got to live together."

'Quite apart from the fact that I live near the area – although it was largely shot in Tooting,' Toby smiled, 'that notion was very appealing to me. All my adult life I've lived in London. The streets I walk down, I'm constantly trying to find out how they work.'

Alfred Hitchcock (*The Girl*), Truman Capote (*Infamous*), Dobby (*Harry Potter*, admittedly in heavy digital disguise), the title role in *Uncle Vanya*, Percy Alleline (*Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*) – this is an actor whose many roles, all a far cry from Roger Yount, are as varied as they are compelling. Is it good luck that he lands these juicy parts? 'I know (*Continued on page 2*)



Portrait by Seamus Ryan

(Continued from page 1) that I'm fortunate. I'm in a job where people tell me what I'm like and they pay me for it! If someone says you're Tarzan, it's my job to make myself be Tarzan. If they say you're a bus driver, I better learn what it takes to be a bus driver.' That was the case, coincidentally, with *Don't Forget the Driver* (2019), which he co-wrote for BBC2 with his friend Tim Crouch. Wacky yet compassionate, it was gripping but all too shortlived thanks to Covid but iPlayer will ensure it lives on.

BBC iPlayer is also still serving up the long-running *Detectorists* (2014-17) for which he won the BAFTA in 2018. In it he co-stars with its writer Mackenzie Crook and Rachael Stirling, his faster-than-he-could-make-it-spending wife in *Capital*. About the nerdy but endearing world of metal detectorists, it's engaging, beautifully shot in East Anglian countryside and razor sharp in human observation and detail.

As a writer himself, I asked Toby if he was ever tempted to tweak the script. 'Mackenzie Crook is a meticulous writer. He told me he'd written the part with me in mind. However when he said it was a comedy, I said I wasn't sure but asked him to send the script. He emailed me the dialogue and it was faultless! What I loved about it was that it wasn't asking to be laughed at, wasn't asking to be anything. It was about two people, two very clear personalities, who the audience could relate to. They're not waiting for the next laugh line. They're immersed in their problems and those of the other characters.

'The only additions were when I suggested things I might do physically and he would maybe adjust his dialogue. He's an illustrator and a musician; he can do anything, Mackenzie. He's really into nature – and metal detecting! Often during takes he'd be finding stuff.'

Toby's additions to *Detectorists* – I regretted not asking if they had involved the brilliant potato hurling scene – could have been informed by his two years, after reading Drama at Manchester University, at the L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris, which specialises in physical theatre. Toby told me he remains profoundly influenced by its training.

In a twist of roles Mackenzie plays the lead in the Radio 4 series *Marcivaldo* (broadcast in April), which Toby wrote and narrates. Based on short stories by Italo Calvino about an unskilled worker – and irrepressible dreamer – in northern Italy, it's on BBC Sounds if you missed it on *Woman's Hour*. Listen and you get why Toby is so busy. Every word he utters hits home.

Early in the first lockdown Covid darkened the Harold Pinter Theatre, where Toby had given 70 performances of *Uncle Vanya*. It was reworked for television and in December 2020 BBC Four audiences were treated to its acclaimed production (now on BBC iPlayer). The virus at that point was showing no signs of abating, so how did they manage the close contact demanded of the

actors? 'It was August and there were still lots of masks, lots of washing, cameras in different zones. We had to be in quarantine beforehand and you couldn't go off stage into the auditorium in off periods; you had to stay very much with the actors.' Well, the safety restraints didn't show. It was a winter evening's television that few who enjoy good drama and ensemble acting will forget.

Coming next from this prolific man is *First Cow*. 'About early settlers in Oregon, it's about two guys who run away from the groups of hunters they're employed by, and they come across the first cow ever to be seen in the area. The cow has been imported by me, an English factor who exports pelts back to the UK, to give me milk for my tea. One of the runaways – a cook – sees that he can make cookies from the milk, so....' Spoiler alert! Kelly Reichardt, who lives in Oregon herself, writes and directs. Toby hails Reichardt as an 'exceptional writer and director'. *First Cow* opens in UK and IE cinemas on 28 May.

Later in the year, we'll see Toby as the newspaper proprietor Sir William Ingram in *The Electrical Life of Louis Wain*, with Benedict Cumberbatch (**below**) in the title role as the surreal cat artist and Claire Foy. *A Boy Called Christmas* with Kristen Wiig, Sally Hawkins, Maggie Smith and Jim Broadbent follows.

With so many interesting parts, does he see one as his crowning achievement? 'One of the great luxuries and privileges of my job is that there's no ladder that I'm trying to reach the top of. They are just all different rooms that I'm going in. It doesn't matter if they're big roles, small roles, film roles or radio roles, as long as there are always more rooms to go to,' Toby says, 'that's the thing.'

This is the 30th anniversary of when Toby left Jacques Lecoq. 'I've revisited a lot of that work through teaching, which I've always done and enjoyed,' he says. 'We were encouraged to watch the world, not just people but phenomena. Everything moves and is useful when you are acting, when you are moving! An actor talking about their world can sound recherché. The thing I would say about this training was that it was concrete. It wasn't about how you felt – but about how what you did was read by an audience.'

Toby, we read you loud and clear. *Ruth Eastman*



Courtesy of MUBI



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Summer Party with Friends of Clapham Common – save the date!

The Clapham Society and Friends of Clapham Common are planning a Summer Party in one of the most beautiful gardens in London, right here in Clapham, on **Thursday 8 July, 6.30 pm**, restrictions permitting. At the event we will launch our joint fundraising appeal, Wild Clapham, to invest in native trees and shrubs for the Common. Tickets, £15, to include canapés and a welcome drink. **Please email events@claphamsociety.com if you would like to reserve a place.** More details will appear in our June Newsletter. *Annabel Allott*

Clapham Society and Wandsworth Heritage Festival walks

Clapham in World War Two is the subject of **Tom Jansz's** walk on **Wednesday 5 May**. Starting from Clapham Common Underground Station at **6.30 pm**, Tom will lead the group along the South Side of Clapham Common describing the various activities on the Common during the war, and how Clapham was affected. All walks must be pre-booked by email. This walk is fully booked, but if you would like to be added to the waiting list by email Tom (tom.jansz@hotmail.com) as soon as possible.

By June the regulations will be eased slightly, and a larger group allowed but you must still book for our two walks in early June which are part of the Wandsworth Heritage Festival. On **Wednesday 2 June**, **Timothy Walker** (tehwalker@uwclub.net) will lead his popular walk **Twixt the Commons**, leaving from Clapham South Underground station at **6.30 pm**. Then on **Tuesday 8 June** **Gillian Robinson** (thenightingales95@gmail.com) will lead a brand-new walk entitled **Mostly Medical** which will take in the length of Nightingale Lane, leaving from Wandsworth Common Station at **6.30 pm** and terminating at Clapham South Underground Station.

If you wish to do your own walk, we have seven leaflets for self-guided walks, each about a different area of Clapham, £1 or £5 for the set. Details and the area covered at claphamsociety.com/clapsocpublications.html or email history@claphamsociety.com. *Alyson Wilson*

Battersea Society talk

Local Hero – The Story of John Buckmaster is a Zoom talk on **Wednesday 12 May at 6 pm** by Dr Sue Demont, co-author and co-editor of *The Wandsworth Common Story*. As a St Mary's Church warden and Battersea Vestry member, the polymath John Charles Buckmaster (1820-1908) led the fight to save Wandsworth Common from developers 150 years ago. To book, email events@batterseasociety.org.uk. Logins will be sent out 24 hours ahead.

Clapham Chamber Concerts

On **Friday 21 May** CCC returns to St Paul's Rectory Grove with clarinettist Jonathan Parkin and his duo partner pianist Sebastian Stanley in a programme including themes from Verdi's *La Traviata*, Joseph Burgmüller's *Sonatina* and Arvo Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel*. Two performances, at **6 pm and 8 pm**, will adhere to Covid safety guidelines. For tickets, £15, £12 and £10 (Friends of CCC), email claphamchamberconcerts@gmail.com, stating time and number.

Omnibus Theatre and Café

Omnibus will be opening its doors again soon, safely staging live theatre this summer. Keep an eye on their website, omnibus-clapham.org, where you can also sign up to their newsletter. The Omnibus Theatre Café Bar starts table service again on **Friday 28 May**, so come and enjoy a hot drink, cheeky tippie or light bite.

Ribbiting little creatures!

This spring at Eden Nature Garden there has been excitement in the dozens of frogs populating our pond. We provide a haven for them and other important species, such as bees who drink from the water. Currently the pond's liner is damaged, which leaves it in danger of running dry later in the year and threatens the homes and health of these creatures. We are seeking local help to restore it to a healthy, functioning pond and create an improved, accessible visitor space with new decking, fencing, gates and signage. We are very grateful to those people who have supported us so far in approaching 50% of our target. Any amount is appreciated and will help us to protect biodiversity in the heart of Clapham. To find out more or donate, please visit uk.gofundme.com/f/eden-nature-garden-save-our-pond.

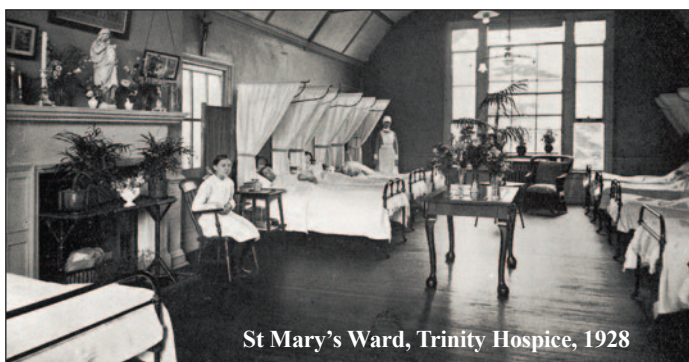


The glitz that was Downton

Andrew Prince was commissioned to produce jewels for the main characters in *Downton Abbey*. The experience inspired his Zoom talk **From Downton to Gatsby – Jewellery and Fashion, 1890-1929** on **19 May at 11 am**. Log in (10 minutes beforehand, please) to hear Andrew guide you through that extraordinary period, when the great fashion houses collaborated with the finest of jewellers to produce works of outstanding opulence. You'll also hear about the clients who commissioned the jewels and how they were worn with the sumptuous gowns. Email claphamcommon@theartsociety.org; members free; visitor (non-member) tickets £10. *Susan Holder, The Arts Society Clapham Common*

Cause for celebration

Royal Trinity Hospice on Clapham Common North Side is celebrating its 130th anniversary. The hospice, which provides free end-of-life and palliative care for people across central and southwest London, is the oldest in the UK. It will mark the occasion in various ways throughout the year. There will be celebrations of Trinity's history and opportunities for the local community to help ensure the hospice's future by supporting it with fun activities and events. The hospice team would like to hear from anyone with memories, stories and/or photos that reflect Trinity through the years. To share them and/or find out more, please visit royaltrinityhospice.london/130. *Polly Balsom*



St Mary's Ward, Trinity Hospice, 1928

Wild Clapham

For many of us during lockdown, the Common has been a much-loved space for exercise, reflection and the chance to wave at a friend or two. This is your chance to give something back to the Common for present and future generations. We will be raising funds and looking for volunteers for three very exciting projects we are supporting this summer. In partnership with Friends of Clapham Common and Lambeth Council, we plan to redefine the paths through Battersea Woods to create planting beds for woodland groundcover.

We will also create a watertight, clay lining and a viewing platform for the small pond next to Eagle pond, and plant flag irises, marsh marigolds and water forget-me-nots to support amphibious life. Finally, we plan to make corridors of low-growing scrubland to help fledglings and insect pollinators. If you would like to donate, please write a cheque to The Clapham Society 'Wild Clapham' and post it to Chairman, The Clapham Society, 32 Bellamy Street, London SW12 8BU; or you can donate by bank transfer to Account 2221 7045, Sort Code 60 05 34, reference 'Wild Clapham'. Thank you in advance. *Annabel Allott*

Updating your tech? Formed a year ago in lockdown one, Community TechAid (CTA), until April known as Lambeth TechAid, has worked with 70 south London organisations to enable over 500 local residents to get online. CTA recycles and distributes donated digital devices to community organisations including Age UK and local schools. As demand soars, CTA volunteers aim to double their distribution to new community members in 2021. To learn more or donate, visit communitytechaid.org.uk.

New members This month we welcome Elizabeth and Benjamin Buchan, Victoria Lishman and Jeannette Croft. If you'd like to join the Society we'd love to hear from you. Visit claphamsociety.com/join-the-society or email membership@claphamsociety.com.

Where have all the flowers gone?

Two days before the end of March Ian Ross, Head of Parks and Leisure Services at Lambeth Council, alerted Clapham councillors and the Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee (CCMAC) that a plan was in place to dismantle the sea of flowers, candles, teddy bears, messages and tributes laid in memory of Sarah Everard at the Bandstand.

‘As you will appreciate,’ his message read, ‘we have been inundated with suggestions for what can happen to the items left. Sarah’s family, confidentially through the police, have asked that the memorial cards and messages be retained, which we will arrange. Lots of people are offering to volunteer but we are mindful that the process needs to be managed sensitively and also be Covid safe.’

It was agreed that all items would be recycled and reused wherever possible. With that in mind, on 1 April a team of volunteers, including the Friends of Clapham Common, members of CCMAC, the Clapham Society and the Clapham Women’s Institute, set to work on what would prove to be a monumental task. There were so many tributes.

We salute Lambeth Council for the thought and organisation that went into this delicate operation. The Parks team were outstanding, as were all the volunteers, not least Gill White, Secretary of The Clapham Society, who was there throughout save for a dash home for lunch.

Every shred of plastic was removed and disposed of, with each bunch of flowers divested of its cellophane wrapper and plastic or rubber bands, untied or snapped, so that the flowers could go to be composted. Wandsworth Parks offered their facility so that compost could be made and kept separately for future use to plant a tree in Sarah’s memory.

Beautiful petals were saved to be dried, and all the potted plants were sorted and distributed to women’s refuges and charitable bodies, where they were appreciated and admired. The cards and messages of condolence were saved for the family, and the teddy bears and candles were sent to the Council’s energy-from-waste station as their origin or British Standards compliancy status were unknown.

‘It was an exhausting task,’ admitted Shirley Kermer, Chair of Friends of Clapham Common. ‘We hadn’t fully taken in the enormity of it. But it was a moving experience too and one that we were proud to be involved in. We worked pretty much nonstop from 8 am for six hours. We had a tireless team, the Parks staff were marvellous, even passers-by pitched in to make it a wonderful community effort. It was a special day, punctuated with moments of appreciation as something particularly beautiful was spotted, and of course the depth of feeling for Sarah Everard and her family was palpable throughout.’

‘By the end it was satisfying to see the Bandstand, clear and ready for the delight of happy children to play around. We need the children back to put a smile on our faces, don’t we?’ We do indeed. *Report Ruth Eastman and Shirley Kermer. Photographs Dana Kubick*



Survey about Clapham Common

Enclosed with this Newsletter you should find a copy of the survey, which we mentioned last month. If you receive your Newsletter by email, you’ll be sent a link so you can complete it online. (Please only fill it in once!) We would appreciate as many of you as possible participating; it only takes a few minutes and you don’t have to answer every question. In due course it will go on our website for the benefit of non-members and hopefully future members too. Thanks for taking part. *Andrew Summers, Common and Open Spaces*

If you have any 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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Common and Open Spaces	Andrew Summers Email: openspaces@claphamsociety.com	Newsletter Editor and Social Media	Ruth Eastman Email: news@claphamsociety.com

Details of meetings, activities and a full list of our publications can be found on our website at claphamsociety.com

