

The Clapham Society Newsletter



Issue 438 July/August 2021

Despite the extension of Covid restrictions, all the events in these pages can still take place albeit in a socially distanced way. Enjoy the summer break, wherever you spend it – and hope to see you at our Summer Party, postponed to a later date.



Matthew Carter

Grand opera!

St Paul's Opera performs Puccini's one-act comic opera *Gianni Schicchi* on **Thursday to Saturday 1, 2 and 3 July**, with musical interludes to punctuate the traditional picnic. A few tickets are still available at stpaulsopera.org/news/gianni-schicchi-tickets-now-available (advance booking essential). And if you'd like to volunteer for the **front-of-house team** to help with box office, programmes, bar sales and seating, email info@stpaulsopera.org.

Supporting SPO's aims of promoting emerging artists, **Edwin Kaye** (Simone in *Gianni Schicchi*) is offering singers an incredible opportunity to learn some more weighty repertoire in Verdi's *Nabucco* on **Saturday 17 July, 1 to 6 pm**. To attend the free workshop concert performance, email edwinkaye.bass@gmail.com. Both events are at St Paul's, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ.
Tricia Ninian

Rehearsing *Gianni Schicchi* in St Paul's lower churchyard where the opera will be staged, **Tricia (top) with Jenny Samuel and (below) with Alexandra Dinwiddie and Louis Hurst**



Ruth Eastman

Our meetings are normally held at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. With the extension of Covid restrictions we propose to continue to offer future meetings on Zoom and in person when guidelines allow. Places must be booked in advance. There are no meetings in July or August.

Monday 20 September, 8 pm

The man who made an Edwardian suburb. In the 1880s and 1890s the large mansions around the Common were being demolished and new roads were laid out. In his talk, local resident **Mike Tuffrey** will recount how the neighbourhood around Abbeville Road, with a church, school, police station and shops, came to be built by 1910. He will reveal the decisive role played in the development by an elusive land agent – a linen draper from Tottenham and sometime felon, later a cinema proprietor – and discuss what this tells us about how Clapham continues to change. **To attend at Omnibus**, if we're able to return in person, email history@claphamsociety.com; **to attend on Zoom**, email events@claphamsociety.com. Further details will be sent a few days before the meeting.

Studio Voltaire's new look, soon to be revealed

Tucked away between Nelson's Row and Carpenter's Place a major development has been quietly taking shape. The reconstruction of Studio Voltaire, our local complex of artists' workshops and galleries, should be ready for re-occupation any day now and a grand reopening is planned for **October**. Sadly, the Society had to drop a talk about the project in January this year due to the pandemic, but we are keen to rearrange this, perhaps linked to a visit to see how the new space is being used and to hear how Studio Voltaire hopes to engage with the local community. *Mark Leffler*



Studio Voltaire, architect's impression. Matheson Whiteley, 2021

Summer Party now on course for early August

Same venue, same jazz pianist, different date! Our party with Friends of Clapham Common, originally planned for July, has been moved – subject to a further change in restrictions – to **Thursday 5 August, 6.30 pm**. In line with government restrictions we were obliged to cancel the first date but fortunately the garden venue is still available to us in August.

If you cannot make the new date but have bought a ticket, you'll receive a refund; as numbers are limited, refunds will also be given in the event of oversubscription. To buy tickets, visit bit.ly/SummerParty21. Or post a cheque, made out to The Clapham Society (stating names of attendees), to: The Clapham Society, c/o 20 Malwood Road, SW12 8EN. The party is raising funds for **Wild Clapham**, Clapham's major planting initiative in response to the Queen's Green Canopy, launched in May as a special gift to Elizabeth II for her Platinum Jubilee in 2022. Financial contributions to our project are welcome. You can donate online to Account: 2221 7045, Sort Code: 60 05 34, reference: Wild Clapham, or by cheque, made out to The Clapham Society and posted to: The Treasurer, The Clapham Society, 15 Turret Grove, SW4 OES. Thank you for your donations so far. *Annabel Allott*

Summer walks with the Society

We have plenty of walks to keep you healthy and well informed this summer. On **Wednesday 7 July** **Alyson Wilson** will lead a walk along Clapham Common North Side entitled **Who lived here?**, introducing some interesting former residents. Alyson will be back on **Thursday 29 July** to look at plaques **Commemorating people and buildings** in Clapham Old Town.

On a very different note, **Dr Iain Boulton** will lead two Clapham Common Discovery Walks. On **Sunday 18 July** it will be a **Woodland discovery walk** and on **Sunday 15 August** a **Geological discovery walk**. If you've never sampled one of his enjoyable afternoons you are strongly urged to try one. His knowledge of the Common is unrivalled.

Walks are free (donations welcome) but **must be booked in advance**, regardless of prevailing restrictions. For more details, including starting time and location, and to reserve your place, visit claphamsociety.com/walks/ and scroll down to the appropriate walk. *Alyson Wilson*

Country walks to help Trinity



As part of a range of new activities and events being launched by Royal Trinity Hospice to celebrate its 130th anniversary, you are invited to 'Walk with Purpose'. The hospice has teamed up with Vespucci Adventures to help

inspire you to get out in the great outdoors and get hiking with (permitted) groups of family and friends whilst supporting Trinity at the same time.

For just £10 you will receive a beautiful self-guided Vespucci Adventures signature hiking pack with routes of all levels to choose from, across the UK. Then just grab some of your favourite people to walk alongside you and each make a small donation of £15. Next stop? Wherever you choose!

To get started on your hiking adventure, head to royaltrinityhospice/walk. All of the routes are easily accessible from London by public transport, and your pack will contain all the information you need on the day: map, guidebook, travel tips and pub recommendations!

Whether you're a gentle stroller or seasoned rambler, there's something for everyone looking to take a hike for Trinity this summer. *Polly Balsom*

All the fun of the fair

As mentioned last month, St Paul's, Rectory Grove, is excited to revive its Summer Fete on **Saturday 10 July, 12 noon to 4 pm**. We'll be among the many interesting stall holders so hope to see you there.

New members

We extend warm welcomes to new members Colin Kalra, Karen Stobart and Trinity Restaurant. Thanks, too, for your positive responses to last month's renewal messages. *Jennifer Everett*

Lambeth Heritage Festival 2021

Traditionally September is the month when historical societies and arts venues all over Lambeth combine with Lambeth Archives to offer a variety of events – talks, walks, exhibitions and other ways of showing the rich cultural life of the borough. It starts off with the **Lambeth Local History Fair** which, this year, will be held at St Mark's Church, Kennington, from 10 am to 4 pm, on **Saturday 4 September**. There will be stands with displays of history, information and publications from the borough's societies and museums. At the Clapham Society stand our publications will be on sale and local historians will be there all day to answer your questions. The fair is also a good opportunity to find out more about places to visit in South London. (This event is, of course, subject to prevailing Covid regulations.)

While live events are planned, owing to continuing uncertainty many will also be held online. The full programme will be available online from mid-August and published in more detail in the September Newsletter. *Alyson Wilson*

Brixton Windmill

Friends of Windmill Gardens are pleased to welcome you back to Brixton Windmill. Our next free tours, which take place on the second weekend of the month, are on **Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 July** and **Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 August, all 1 to 5 pm**. On the tour, you will see the original wind-powered machinery and the smaller steam-driven millstones. Now they run on electricity and are used by our volunteer millers to produce Brixton Windmill flour. The tours last 30 minutes and must be booked ahead at brixtonwindmill.org/product/book-brixton-windmill-tour/. Please wear masks and observe social distancing guidelines during your visit. The Windmill Centre pop-up café will also be open, serving tea, coffee and homemade cakes. At other times the café and shop are open weekdays, 2 to 4 pm, and Saturdays, 11 am to 2 pm.

We also offer a guided walk of the Brixton Hill area each Sunday of our open weekends, led by London Blue Badge Guide Liz du Parcq – details and booking on our website (above). If you would like to get involved at Friends of Windmill Gardens or support Brixton Windmill as a volunteer to help with gardening, baking or milling flour, email volunteers@brixtonwindmill.org.uk. *Lucy Bridal*



Membership survey

A huge thank you to all who took the time to complete our survey. We received almost 125 submissions which, out of a membership of around 750, is a reasonable response rate. Most of you went to considerable effort to write thoughtful and constructive comments and observations. Given the scale of the feedback, it will take us some while to distil the results and we look forward to sharing them with you in due course. We asked if anyone was willing to **volunteer for any aspect of the Society's work** and about 20 said you were, but only a handful have taken the next step of getting in touch. The survey was anonymous so it's crucial you do that last part! If you are still interested, please email me at openspaces@claphamsociety.com. *Andrew Summers, Common and Open Spaces*

Photographs at an exhibition

What better way to celebrate nature in bloom than with a visit to Dulwich Picture Gallery's exhibition **Unearthed: Photography's Roots?**

Sunny days call for a cool, calm wander through the history of still life photography; after that, you can soak up the rays in DPG's gardens, or enjoy food and drinks from its café al fresco! Open Wednesday to Sunday, 10 am to 5 pm, the show will continue **until Bank Holiday Monday, 30 August**. Advance booking only. Visit dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk, where you will find much else that is on this summer, or telephone 020 8693 5254.



'Poppies', Richard Learoyd, 2019

The Clapham Book Festival is back

Save the date of **16 October** for the Clapham Book Festival. This year, in a new departure that will let us bring high-quality author interviews and panel discussions to a wider audience all year round, we will also offer live author events and discussions online in partnership with **Time & Leisure** magazine. On **Wednesday 28 July at 7 pm**, I'll be speaking with **Elizabeth Buchan** about her latest book (reviewed below), and her long and successful writing career. Email info@timeandleisure.co.uk for details. *Julie Anderson, Chair of Clapham Book Festival Trustees*

Two Women in Rome

One of our newer members, **Jenny Nicholson**, was delighted to review Elizabeth Buchan's latest novel, having worked in an exclusive Rome nightclub in the 1970s when part of the story is set. Much of the background and many of the city's vivid descriptions resonated.

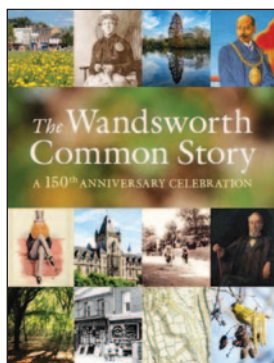
The Eternal City comes to life in Elizabeth Buchan's evocative tale about Nina Lawrence and Lottie Archer, who lived in Rome at different times but were linked by trauma, love and deception. The author tells an intriguing story with great insight into the central characters and masterfully creates a tense and dramatic atmosphere throughout the book, which some proclaim her best yet.

Lottie Archer, whose husband works at the British Council, has become head of the *Archivio Espatriati*, which houses expatriate British and American papers. She is asked to look into a painting of the Annunciation discovered in a box belonging to Nina Lawrence, who died in 1978 but mysteriously had 'No known contacts. No known issue. No claimants'. An appointment is made with a renowned conservator, Gabriele Ricci, to authenticate the painting but, when told that it was among the papers of the English woman Nina Lawrence, Gabriele's face went ashen. After meeting a sinister Vatican official interested in the return of 'The Annunciation' to the Vatican, an unsettled Lottie sets to work on the Lawrence papers and makes a startling discovery about the death of Nina Lawrence and the love affair that changed her life.

In March 1978 Aldo Moro, the ex-Prime Minister of Italy, was kidnapped by the Red Brigade just as he was about to do a deal with the Communist Party which would have been unacceptable to the right. So, is this a plot by the right to discredit the left, and is it possible that it is US backed? Nina, working as a horticulturist, is designing a garden for the right-wing Duke and Duchess of Palacrino and falls under the spell of an American general, who is a friend of the Palacrinos and is suspected of being involved in a shady right-wing group. Was Nina Lawrence all that she seemed?

A love affair, searing political intrigue, an unexplained murder, a funeral with only one priest and a British Embassy official in attendance make for a gripping novel in which the author brilliantly brings all the characters together for a dramatic and heart-rending finale.

Two Women in Rome was published in June by Corvus. It costs £14.99 from Clapham Books, and £4.31 in the Kindle edition.



The Wandsworth Common Story

This book is a revelation! Although I have lived in the area most of my adult life I had no idea that some of the small green spaces we now see, for instance the cemetery on Battersea Rise and Spencer Park, let alone the streets of terraced houses south of Bellevue Road, the sites of Emanuel School and the Royal Victoria Patriotic Building were once part of Wandsworth Common. The original common land, as shown on John Rocque's map of 1746, was a long strip between the River Wandle on the east, Falcon Brook on the west and stretching from St John's Hill right down south towards Tooting – an area of about 400 acres. The present-day Common is now less than half that size.

There was encroachment on to the Common from the early days, but when it came into the ownership of the Spencer family in 1763 this accelerated to an alarming degree. The family took little interest in the area, indeed the 5th Earl Spencer, who was finally forced to yield the Common to public ownership in 1871 (this is the event celebrated by the publication of the book), was said to have visited the Common only once!

The hero of the book is local resident John Charles Buckmaster, who led a vigorous campaign to save the Common for the people. He rallied public support: there were mass meetings, sometimes verging on riots, posters and a strident rallying cry, 'Down with the fences!'

The book has an historical introduction followed by maps and five sections – Nature, Buildings, Society, Culture and Politics – each curated by an expert on the topic who has collected short pieces about their subject (a total of 150 in the book). The pieces are from diaries, local newspapers and various writers, and the result is an eclectic mix of information including stories about gypsies, rat catchers, MG cars, railway lines, lost stations, butterflies, litter, Wandsworth Prison, hangings, and local residents from Thomas Hardy to Beatrix Potter and Kenneth MacMillan. It's a delightful book to dip in to but so compelling you will soon find yourself reading it from cover to cover.

The Wandsworth Common Story: A 150th Anniversary Celebration is published by The Friends of Wandsworth Common at £12.50 by click and collect from the Skylark Café on Wandsworth Common or £16 by post. Visit wandsworthcommon.org/shop to purchase. *Alyson Wilson*

Transport for Londoners

Our Roads and Transport lead, Mark Leffler, has some pressing concerns he would like to share...

On 1 June the Government agreed its latest package of financial support to Transport for London (TfL). This followed lengthy negotiations over how to keep the capital moving after the devastation of TfL's finances by Covid. London is the only city in the UK not reliant on central funding for its transport responsibilities. Protracted lockdowns and social distancing measures have seen a **hollowing out of central London** as a place of employment, entertainment and culture, with the closure of offices, shops,

restaurants, theatres, galleries, schools and colleges and the absence of tourists. This has resulted in a catastrophic reduction in people paying to travel on our buses and trains at the same time as these lifelines have had to run to ensure essential services can continue.

TfL and local councils, meanwhile, have sought to restrict motorised travel throughout London by introducing hastily designed **Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) and Streetspace**, using grants from central government. In addition, the Congestion Zone now operates 24/7. These measures, which favour cycling over all other forms of transport, have proved divisive, and were introduced under emergency powers with minimal consultation. When Streetspace was challenged in the *(Continued on page 4)*

(Continued from page 3) High Court in January, it was held to be unlawful, the **Hon. Ms Justice Lang** ruling that ‘the needs of the people with protected characteristics including the elderly or disabled were “not considered” when the plans were put in place’, and that TfL ‘took advantage of the pandemic’ to push through ‘radical changes’ to London streets, such as banning taxis from using bus lanes to ply for trade. TfL is appealing this decision.

The £1.1 billion secured to keep TfL’s **public transport services** running through to December comes with many strings, including reform of the pension scheme, a freeze on wages, increased fares and cost cutting. TfL must produce a review of bus operations in July that reduces bus mileage by at least 4 per cent across the capital – buses are now back to about 60 per cent usage compared with pre-pandemic levels. Cuts to services in central and inner London are likely to be more swingeing than in outer London, and there will be a severe cutback in night bus services. A review of Tube operations will follow in October.

It is difficult to foresee all the implications of these changes. Unless TfL removes the restrictions introduced via Streetspace, the main road system will have considerably reduced capacity to absorb increased traffic. **Congestion** will increase, longer distances travelled will be necessary, and slower journey times will result.



Mark Leffler

There will also be less capacity to absorb or divert pressures to enable road maintenance, or to accommodate breakdowns or other incidents. While many, especially younger, people may choose

to cycle or walk, for others such a transition may not be so easy and thus those people may become more isolated and vulnerable.

Turning to Clapham, TfL is tackling **graffiti on bus stops** and funding is being set aside for **a decluttering and tidying up of the High Street**. The wands defining the **segregated cycle path (above)** are likely to be reconsidered, although it’s not clear yet whether other forms of segregation will result. New pedestrian crossings in the High Street have to wait till better times, but a **pedestrian phase is to be introduced at the Cavendish Road junction** with South Side, and only heavy goods vehicles will be prevented from turning left here into Cavendish Road. This is welcome news to local residents and the Society who vigorously opposed the previous proposal (*Newsletter 427*, on our website).

As an afternote, I’m sure I’m not the only person concerned about **electric scooters** on our roads and footpaths! Their riders so often put themselves and others in jeopardy by riding, sometimes at speed, with little regard for the law or common sense. TfL has announced a few boroughs where their use would be legitimised as a first-phase roll-out, with a view to introducing regulation on their use. I understand Lambeth Council has asked to be included in phase two. One can only wonder how this will turn out.

What’s new on Clapham Common?

The Society submitted a detailed and extensive submission to the Planning Inspectorate in relation to Lambeth Council’s planning application for its series of **events on the Common**. This will form part of the brief that the Secretary of State will review before deciding whether to grant approval for the substantial structures which require ministerial approval. The Society remains firmly of the view that, whatever the relative merits of individual commercial events and their location, the scale of the events programme is not commensurate with the ring-fenced revenue generated by them.

We are pleased to see the new occupants of the Bandstand café trading at the **Pear Tree Café (below)**. The venue has definitely benefited from a new lick of (apple green) paint plus smart new interior and outdoor seating. Many members will have been sorry to see the former owners of La Baita leave, but we are assured that their departure was their choice. We hope the Pear Tree will become another much-liked and used Clapham institution.



The Common may also be in line for **two more refreshment venues**. There is potential for a small refreshment kiosk by Windmill Drive, and the old changing rooms to the far west of the Common have received several indications of interest from café operators.

Litter is a persistent issue. CCMAC has worked with Lambeth to re-jig and improve litter collection rotas but problems clearly remain, in particular Fridays when the last litter collector finishes at 3 pm. Further ideas have been discussed and new rotas have recently been put in place. If only more people would bin or take their litter home!

Parkrun had hoped to return to the Common on 26 June but, alas, were outrun by the government’s extension of Stage 3. Check [@claphamparkrun](https://twitter.com/claphamparkrun) for updates and volunteer opportunities.

Finally, we are delighted to report that the **events site fencing (below)** was due to have been reduced by 80 per cent by 18 June. The residual 20 per cent, close to the skateboard park, unfortunately requires further work. *Andrew Summers, Common and Open Spaces*



Photographs Ruth Eastman

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

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	David Brown	treasurer@claphamsociety.com	Roads and Transport
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Membership Secretary	Andrew Summers	openspaces@claphamsociety.com	Newsletter Editor
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			Ruth Eastman
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			Dave Cross
			digital@claphamsociety.com

Details of meetings, activities and a full list of our publications can be found on our website at [claphamsociety.com](https://www.claphamsociety.com)

