

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 443 February 2022

Clapham books!

Society member and theatrical wigmaker **Angela Cobbin**, MBE, has had a stellar 50-year career. She has worked at Madame Tussauds, the Royal Opera House, the National Theatre, in the West End and on Broadway. Her recent autobiography, *My Name is Not Wigs! Or... the day I thought Pavarotti was a stagehand*, is enjoying



Dana Kubick

wide critical acclaim. Peppered with photographs and amusing anecdotes, it's of interest not just to the general reader but also of help to those looking to join the theatre backstage. Endorsed by Judi Dench, Michael Gambon, Francis de la Tour, Richard Eyre and Simon Callow, to name but a few greats Angela has worked with, the book was reviewed

last month in *The Stage* and had a spread devoted to it in the *Mail on Sunday's You* magazine. You might be able to catch Angela on *Woman's Hour* (45 plus minutes in) on BBC Sounds. £12.99 from Clapham Books and browndogbooks.uk. *Ruth Eastman* (Omnibus Theatre benefitted from Angela's work, her husband, George Owen, tells us as she was able to invite big names such as Celia Imrie, Alison Steadman, Judi Dench and Michael Gambon to do an 'In Conversation with...' at the theatre. Both Dame Judi and Sir Michael have since become Patrons of Omnibus Theatre.)

Many will remember **Sam Roberts'** talk (May 2017) and Clapham Walks (September 2018; July 2020, virtual) on **Ghost Signs**, the



Roy Reed

faded painted advertisements on walls and gable ends reminding us of the businesses and products which were at the heart of our past and which just about survive as aspects of our contemporary urban archaeology: household names like Hovis, Gillette and Boots, as well as more obscure and

local: The Music Roll Exchange in Clapham High Street and Deane & Co Chemists (*above*) in The Pavement. Now (*Continued overleaf*)

Our meetings take place at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. The talk starts at 8pm prompt and our guest normally 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. In current circumstances we encourage audience members to take a lateral flow test no more than 36 hours prior to the meeting and only come, of course, if the result is negative; please wear masks throughout.

Monday 21 February

St Paul's Opera – how did that happen? In the short, dark days of January 2013, a plot was hatched to put on an opera at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove. The mad minds involved (for you'd need to be mad even to consider staging an opera from scratch) were the then vicar, Deborah Matthews; parishioner Patricia Ninian; and Patricia's singing teacher, international soprano Jennifer McGregor. Puccini's one-act opera, *Gianni Schicchi*, was chosen and the performance, just one night, was a sell-out. The die was cast. For this talk, **Patricia Ninian** will explain how St Paul's Opera has grown. It now stages an ambitious opera over three nights every summer (2020 being the obvious exception), concerts and an annual masterclass (*see page 2*).

Monday 21 March

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 – Guy's and St Thomas' Trust. Illustrating the 'Developmental Origins of Health and Disease' hypothesis with examples from scientific literature, it 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 which lead to premature birth, gestational diabetes and pre-eclampsia.

Our April meeting (William Morris: Arts and Crafts and so much more) will now take place on 11 April.

See our next issue for details.

Greetings from the Chairman

Many members will be aware that Annabel Allott, who led the Society for the past 10 years, stood down as Chairman at our AGM in October. I have been elected to take on this role and want to take this opportunity to place on record, on behalf the Committee, our sincere appreciation and gratitude for Annabel's leadership, hard work and generous support which she has given over the years.

As a society we are fortunate in being able to harness the expertise, energy and enthusiasm of so many members – all (*Continued overleaf*)

(Continued from column one, page 1) Sam and his photographic collaborator, Roy Reed, have combined with Isola Press to produce a most exquisite book, *Ghost Signs*, detailing the processes of creation of all of these signs over the years, their calligraphy and artwork, and the chequered history of their preservation. Fifteen years of hard work and passion have gone into this volume, which is beautifully designed and illustrated. I doubt anyone who has the good fortune to pick it up will not be captivated and then go around London, eyes up, trying to spot the ghost signs as they go. £25 from Clapham Books, isolapress.com and good book stores. *Roger Eastman*

(Continued from column two, page 1) volunteers – who serve on our committees, distribute and deliver the Newsletter, lead our walks, and help at fairs and events. At the AGM three additional members agreed to serve and were voted on to the main Committee: Alison Macnair, who is a previous Committee member and Chair; Lee Roberts and Stephen Savage. A further member, Alison Inglis-Jones, has been co-opted. Subsequently, Alison Macnair was voted by the Committee as Vice Chair of the Society.

I am keen to establish as priorities for the new year communication and engagement with our members, and our ability to fundraise for worthwhile causes. For some time we have found it difficult to contact members on matters of pressing importance. Few use social media, and messages on Twitter and Facebook go largely unread – although of late we've had some great responses on Facebook and Instagram, so thank you. We are doing our best to improve our social media. A piece describing how to engage with us appeared in the last Newsletter, and in this issue our Membership Secretary has asked members to supply their email addresses so we can update our database and reach you when urgent items arise. I hope you will help her by doing so!

Meanwhile, many members are concerned about the impact of large commercial events on the Common and the restrictions on free access that result. It is increasingly clear this can only be resolved through legal action, but the Society must ensure it has an adequate fighting fund if we are to argue our case effectively.

Many members came to the wonderful Summer Party last August, a joint event organised with the Friends of Clapham Common (Newsletter 439). Together we raised a considerable sum for planting on the Common. The Society should also, I think, raise funds for 'The Queen's Green Canopy' appeal, which launches this year. This is a tree-planting initiative designed to provide a legacy in honour of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

During the autumn visitors to the Common will have noticed that a substantial number of trees (about 70 so far) and shrubs have been planted. The planting programme has been designed, with Lambeth Council, to increase biodiversity, resilience to disease and climate change, and also to provide visual appeal. The restoration of 'Eaglet' Pond (next to Eagle Pond) to provide a habitat for invertebrates and amphibious species should get underway this spring.

We'd be interested in your thoughts on these or any other matters. Thanks for your support. *Mark Leffler*

De-cluttering? Think of the Hospice

On **Saturday 12 February** Royal Trinity Hospice shops will host a Stock Drop in the Hospice car park (30 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0RN) from **10am to 3pm** to collect donations, which will raise the vital funds needed to deliver free care. The team gratefully accepts clothing, shoes, handbags, jewellery and homeware – all of good quality, please. For a list of what you can donate, and what the team is unfortunately unable to accept, visit www.royaltrinityhospice.london/donations. *Polly Balsom*

Lambeth Lockdown talks

There are just two talks left in this series by Lambeth Local History Forum members and hosted by Lambeth Archives. On **Thursday 17 February** Alyson Wilson will speak about Clapham in World War II, followed on **Thursday 17 March** by Jean Kerrigan talking about the Brixton Windmill. Talks are held on Zoom at **7pm**. To book, email archives@lambeth.gov.uk.

Battersea Society talk and film

On **Wednesday 9 February, 6.30-7.30pm**, there is an online talk about American artist James McNeill Whistler and his Battersea connections. Hosted by archivist and author **Jon Newman**, it features Whistler's famous *Nocturne: Blue and Gold – Old Battersea Bridge* now in the collections of Tate Britain.

Later in the month, on **Thursday 24 February, 6-8pm**, the **Battersea Society Film Night** will be taking place at the Royal College of Art, Hester Road, SW11 4AN (£5 per person payable in advance online at or on the door). They'll be showing the classic 1970s action movie *Brannigan*, starring John Wayne, Richard Attenborough and Judy Geeson. You can book both events by visiting batterseasociety.org.uk/events. *Sue Demont*

Our grateful thanks to Sue Demont for her inspirational talk at our November meeting about 'Battersea's First Lady – The Life and Times of Caroline Ganley MP'. Sue brought her subject alive, shedding light (with no notes!) on a pioneering figure in British politics and public life never chronicled before, a woman with no financial or educational advantages yet who made her mark in the corridors of power and beyond. Inspirational indeed! The book is available from the Battersea Society for £7.50 at batterseasociety.org.uk; click on 'Shop'.

Friends of Windmill Gardens needs you

The Friends of Windmill Gardens is a local residents' group set up in 2003 to campaign to restore, preserve and enhance the Brixton Windmill and Windmill Gardens. The Friends would like to hear from you if you can spare the time to help with publicity, IT (WordPress, Google Drive), social media, blog and newsletter content, marketing (MailChimp) and account management (selling event hire to organisations). To express interest or learn more, please email mark@brixtonwindmill.org.



St Paul's Opera hits the ground prestissimo

We start the new year with a Big Birthday Bash on **Friday 11 February, 7.30pm**, a celebratory evening of opera and cabaret. Tickets are limited so don't delay. We are also delighted to welcome back international tenor David Butt Philip on **Thursday 3 March** when he will be running his hugely popular masterclass for SPO vocalists. Details and ticket information to follow at stpaulsopera.org. Both events are at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove. *Tricia Ninian*

Music for the season

Clapham Chamber Concerts is delighted to welcome for the first time vocal ensemble **Is Cantores** on **Friday 4 February** with music for Epiphanytide, Candlemas and Lent. Is Cantores enjoys presenting music from the Early Renaissance to the present day. The London-based group brings together leading choral singers who have sung together for over ten years, as well as regularly appearing with the likes of Tenebrae, The Sixteen, Polyphony and the Gabrieli Consort. There will be two performances of one hour in length, at **6pm** and **8pm**, at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove. More information and booking details are available at claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk. *Paul Askew*

The Studio Houses of the Holland Park Circle

In the second half of the 19th century an extraordinary group of purpose-built studio houses was built on the edge of Holland Park. At their centre was the house built by Frederic Leighton, an inspiration to other artists who commissioned homes of their own. Combining domestic accommodation with studio space and space for entertaining, they provide fascinating insights into the wealth, status and taste of successful artists of the period.



Narcissus Hall at Leighton House Museum

curator of Leighton House Museum and 18 Stafford Terrace. For tickets, £10 visitors (members free), or to join, email claphamcommon@theartsociety.org. Susan Holder

Clapham Arts Society (the local branch of leading arts education charity the Arts Society) is hosting a lecture at the Clapham Picturehouse on **Wednesday 16 February, 11am** exploring these artists' houses to determine why their owners invested so much in their creation and the uses to which they put them. It will be presented by **Daniel Robbins**,

Keeping active in winter

Bandstand Beds Association (BBA) on Clapham Common is a hub of local activity. As well as growing food in the community garden on Saturday mornings, it runs a Grown-up Gardening session for the over 55s, in partnership with Froglife's Wild Times – a dementia-friendly project which gives a safe space for people with higher needs to enjoy nature alongside the community.

From now until March, when it's too cold to be outside in the garden, Bandstand Beds and Froglife are keeping the **Monday afternoon (2-4pm)** sessions going in the hut (former One O'Clock Club) in the Spinney, a short distance from the garden and, crucially, warm! Activities include assembling and decorating bird boxes, seed sowing and other garden/wildlife-related themes. Tea and cake are offered too.

For information visit bandstandbeds.org.uk, or to find out more about Wild Times email victoria.peet@froglife.org.

Clapham Common Film Club

Our next screening is *The Third Wife* on **Sunday 13 February**. This 2018 Vietnamese film from Ash Mayfair is an atmospheric feature debut which explores repressed desires against the resplendent but emotionally suffocating landscape of late-19th-century rural Vietnam. It tells the story of a young girl who enters an arranged marriage to a landowner, presenting its commentary on female independence in a vividly seductive manner. Mayfair is a director/writer who was born in Vietnam but educated in the UK and US. She won gold at the New Directors Competition at the Chicago Film Festival in 2018 and further awards at Toronto and San Sebastián.

The film runs for 92 minutes, starting at **7.30pm** at Omnibus Theatre. The bar will be open beforehand and there will be time for post-screening discussion. Members can bring guests and the club operates under the government's Plan B arrangements. Omnibus encourages all attendees to take a lateral flow test before attending. New members are warmly welcomed. For further details about this season and membership, email Roger Booker at ccfilmrb@gmail.com. Roger Booker

Dark comedy at Omnibus

Omnibus Theatre returns with a spectacular line-up. February and March kick off with their established development space for new voices, *Engine Room*, in addition to performances by Queer House, Body Politic and Varjack-Lowry. The season culminates with the brand-new dark comedy *SAD (right)*, Omnibus Theatre's first in-house production since 2019's five-star intergalactic adventure *The Little Prince*, directed by Artistic Director Marie McCarthy. For tickets visit omnibus-clapham.org.



Two Temple Place exhibition

'Body Vessel Clay' looks at one of the world's oldest forms of making – ceramics – and its evolution from domestic object to fine art. It explores clay disrupted and reimagined by Black women, beginning in 1950 with the seminal Nigerian potter, Ladi Kwali. With historic material and dazzling new work, it examines gender and race, and the politics of clay manufacture and ownership across continents. **Until 24 April**, Two Temple Place, WC2R 3BD. Free. Visit twotempleplace.org.

An actress is mourned

It was with great sadness that the death of long-time Clapham resident Ruth Grater (stage name Ruth Silvestre), 92, was announced in late December. She and her husband, Mike, moved to Rodenhurst Road in 1963 from a flat in Trouville Road to accommodate her 'about-to-be-homeless' singing teacher and grand piano. (The singing teacher lived with them for five years.)

Ruth was a singer and actress, appearing in West End productions of *Kismet* and *Flower Drum Song*, then as the lead role of Aldonza (Dulcinea) in *Man of La Mancha* in 1968. She was also in numerous BBC productions. (Some members, Alyson Wilson writes, may remember her in 'Gone Beyond Recall, British Music Hall?', reported in our February 2007 Newsletter.)

Also an author, Ruth wrote *The Sunflower Trilogy* series about Bel-Air de Grezelongue, the deserted house in southwest France that she and her husband bought and fell in love with as they renovated it and became part of the local community. Her final book, *Before the Sunflowers*, describes her childhood marked by poverty yet, despite the outbreak of World War II, (Continued overleaf)



With opera singer Danielle de Niese backstage at the Coliseum after a performance of *Man of La Mancha* in May 2019. Danielle was in awe of Ruth, who had played Aldonza the last time the musical had been on in the West End

(Continued) she headed to university (Goldsmith's College, University of London), where she met her future husband. She qualified as a teacher, but what she really wanted to do was sing. Determined to follow her dream, she found an agent who landed her work in cabarets, on cruise ships and eventually in the West End. She was one of the original trustees for Cara (Care and Resources for Aids), having lost dear actor friends to Aids.

Ruth had many Clapham friends and in her later years participated in local activities such as Janet Buck's exercise classes in the Contact Centre, the South London Choir, French conversation meetings, a book group and a women's group. She was also an active committee member of the Club for Acts and Actors in Covent Garden. She and her husband worshipped at Southwark Cathedral to which she carried on driving after Mike's death until it was too difficult to park. More recently, Ruth worshipped at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Narbonne Avenue. Michael Grater, an author too, wrote children's books including the Alf Gorilla series. She is survived by her two sons, Adam and Matt. *Jane Sleightholme*

Planning news: 42 Clapham Manor Street

Hurlingham School applied in January 2021 for planning permission to use and develop 42 Clapham Manor Street for a GCSE and A-level college for 350 pupils plus staff of around 50. The site, presently used by the London Russian Ballet School, already has permission for an extensive development following a successful appeal against local



authority refusal in 2017.

That included not only a large basement excavation, but also the development out of the entire rear yard area. However, that was never built. The development was permitted at that stage as, although it was recognised that it would harm the heritage asset (the site is

listed), the public benefits of having a world-class ballet school providing culture, health and recreation for the locality outweighed that harm.

The current proposal, whilst expanding on the basement excavation and retaining the development of the rear yard, does not offer those same public benefits, but instead proposes to operate a private school from the site. Concerns have been raised about a number of features of the proposal, including the lack of real public benefit, the over-development of the site, the logistical difficulties of access by the students, the intention to utilise the local gym and library, and the failure to provide any outside recreational space (contrary to statutory requirements).

The Planning Applications Committee was due to hear the application last November. There has been extensive opposition to the proposal; more than 60 objections were received by Lambeth and local councillors are opposed to the scheme. Despite the application having been submitted in January and the objections and concerns having been fully laid out to Lambeth, the matter was deferred at the hearing in November, as it was said there were issues which needed further consideration. These were not identified, nor has any further clarification been forthcoming. Lambeth have yet to notify of the date of the deferred hearing.

Latest on the Common

Putt in The Park's planning application to take over our **bowling greens** has been submitted to Wandsworth Planning Committee, case number 2021/4506, and although the closing date for comments was advertised as 18 December, at the time of writing the application is still open for comment. Currently there are 640 written objections, not only from private individuals

in our community but also, significantly, from a considerable number of civic amenity groups, including among many others the Open Spaces Society, interest groups like the Friends of Clapham

Common (FoCC) as well as numerous local councillors.

Opposition to this private commercial venture that would fence off and destroy what is currently a green living landscape (seen, **above**, last month) is both strong and deep rooted. We hope the Wandsworth Planning Committee will listen to the voice of the community. A date for the hearing hasn't been set as yet.

Until we have a clear decision that rules out Putt in The Park, Lambeth Council cannot consider alternative uses for the greens and the pavilion. Suggestions have been put forward that include the creation of a wildflower meadow or an ornamental community pollinator garden designed with benches for quiet contemplation on one of the greens, maintaining the other as a safe place for small children to play and children's clubs to use. The Friends have registered the greens as Assets of Community Value and we would be interested to hear your views. Please email friends@claphamcommon.net. *Shirley Kermer, Chair, FoCC*



Ruth Eastman

STOP PRESS: We have been given to understand that the Planning Inspectorate intend to hold a **Public Inquiry into Major Events on the Common** after the May elections. *ML*

New members and a New Year's request

We extend warm welcomes in this issue to new Society members Bryn Abrams; Owen Davies and Fiona Monroe; and Leon Smith.

As we enter 2022 **please can all members send me their current email address** so that our database is up to date? Email membership@claphamsociety.com with the subject line 'Email address'; if your name is not obvious from your address, add it in the message – otherwise none required. By providing this you give The Clapham Society permission to send Newsletters and other information to you as part of your membership. Your personal details will not be passed to any third party. Our Privacy Policy appears in full at claphamsociety.com. *Jennifer Everett*

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

Chairman	Mark Leffler chairman@claphamsociety.com	Common and Open Spaces	Andrew Summers openspaces@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

