

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 446 May 2022

Safeguarding the next generation

It was a privilege to listen to **Professor Lucilla Poston CBE** speak at the March meeting of the Clapham Society on 'The life course of health: we can't start soon enough'. Professor Poston, a Clapham Society member, is the Tommy's Charity Professor of Maternal & Fetal Health and based at St Thomas' Hospital, and Head of King's College London's School of Life Course Sciences and Population Health.

She leads a large multi-disciplinary research team, which investigates disorders of pregnancy, including premature birth, pre-eclampsia and the complications arising from maternal obesity. Her own research centres on maternal nutrition, obesity and



gestational diabetes, with a focus on the early-life origins of health and disease. Professor Poston made the point that this is an often under-researched area but one that is key to optimising the wellbeing of the population at large.

Professor Poston led the audience through a fascinating talk on the health issues faced by pregnant women and the need to address

these from the very beginning of a child's life, with a flow of follow-up questions from those present. We were meeting in the spacious upstairs theatre at Omnibus.

Important research by Professor Poston and her team has been achieved in the London boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark. She works with highly talented multi-disciplinary teams that include doctors, scientists and young people. This research, locally based, focuses on those women studied who are at risk of obesity, diabetes, pre-eclampsia and Covid-19 during pregnancy, and the increasing concerns about how these issues affect the development of babies in the womb and children in later life. She mentioned that, whilst it is reassuring that the Covid-19 virus is seldom transmitted from mother to baby, severe maternal Covid infection may sometimes affect the baby's health.

Professor Poston explained how crucial it is for women to have a healthy diet prior to, as well as during, pregnancy. Access to fresh fruit and vegetables, and a reduction in sweet and fatty foods are essential in order to avoid obesity in mothers, childhood obesity and the risk of liver disease in offspring. In her presentation, she flagged up the increased likelihood of stillbirths, pre-term births and fetal growth restriction linked with some mothers' unhealthy lifestyles.

Professor Poston said that she welcomed recent increases in support from the government but stressed that, in order to focus on solutions, more finance was needed to address these key issues. It was a pleasure to have a scientist of her erudition in our midst. Let us now hope that the government shows as much interest in her work as her Clapham Society audience did. *Alison Inglis-Jones*

We would love to see more of you at our Clapham Society meetings, which never fail to inspire. They take place at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. The talk starts at 8pm and our guest speaks for about 45 minutes, followed by 15 minutes for questions and discussion. Meetings are free and non-members are invited to make a donation. The Café Bar is open from 6pm for drinks and snacks – a great opportunity to socialise with other members before (and after!) the meeting. Omnibus is encouraging but not enforcing the wearing of masks; its most up-to-date health and safety guidelines can be found at omnibus-clapham.org/health-and-safety.

Monday 16 May

Grime and glamour: London's wartime volunteer ambulance service. Debutantes, taxi drivers, First World War veterans, car mechanics, knitwear models, secretaries – all kinds of people signed up to crew the London Auxiliary Ambulance Service during the Second World War. What were their lives like? What was the impact of working night after night during bombardment? **Naomi Clifford**, whose latest book, *Under Fire*, explores the diaries of a London Auxiliary Ambulance driver in Chelsea, brings some of that world to you, including a look at ambulance crews operating in Clapham.

Monday 20 June

Lambeth Palace Library: The new building and its collections. Lambeth Palace Library's new building was completed in July 2020 and opened to the public in November 2021, housing the historic books, manuscripts and archives of Lambeth Palace and the Church of England Record Centre in purpose-built conditions for the first time. In his illustrated talk **Giles Mandelbrote**, Librarian and Archivist of Lambeth Palace Library, will explain the reasons for the new building, how it was achieved and what it now contains. After working for nearly 15 years as a curator at the British Library, Giles took up his post at Lambeth Palace Library in 2010, the year of its 400th anniversary celebrations.

Clapham Crooks – Adam Worth: the real Moriarty?

Over the next few months we propose to bring you a series of articles by members of the Local History group, entitled 'Clapham Crooks'. This is the first in the series. Read on...

In 1886 a wealthy American gentleman, Henry Raymond, moved in with his wife and two children to a large house just off Clapham Common. Henry Raymond was not the anticipated respectable new neighbour, but a well-known international criminal, Adam Worth. His 'career' started in the American Civil War, when he would enlist to obtain a bounty payment, desert and re-enlist elsewhere under another name to get another bounty. Once, he even faked his own death.

Worth moved on to pickpocketing, forgery and an audacious bank robbery in Boston, Massachusetts, before joining up with two others and moving to Paris. After operating an illegal gambling den and defrauding a diamond dealer, he moved to London where he adopted his new name. By this time he was controller, banker and main beneficiary of an international criminal gang and his Clapham house was under regular surveillance, but he managed to avoid arrest. His most spectacular crime was the theft of Gainsborough's portrait of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, from Agnews saleroom in 1876. He had intended to use it as a ransom to get a member of his gang out of prison, but that failed and he kept the painting himself.

Henry Raymond's luck finally ran out in 1892 when he was caught red-handed committing a robbery in Liège, Belgium, and sentenced to seven years' hard labour. On his return to England he was ruined, but he still had the painting and negotiated a deal to return it to Agnews in 1901. He died the following year. The painting was bought by the American financier and art collector, J P Morgan, whose family kept it until 1994 when it was sold to the Duke of Devonshire and returned to its real home, Chatsworth House.

Adam Worth/Henry Raymond is thought to have been the inspiration for Arthur Conan Doyle's villainous Professor Moriarty – 'the Napoleon of crime'.

Another version of this story is on our website at claphamsociety.com/articles/14-the-real-moriarty/. There is also a book entitled *The Napoleon of Crime: The Life and Time of Adam Worth, the Real Moriarty* by Ben Macintyre, to order from Clapham Books. **Alyson Wilson**
Next month: 'Letter bomb inventor lived in Clapham'



Dana Kibick

Events at Brixton Windmill

The popular Brixton Beer and Bread Festival returns to Windmill Gardens on **Bank Holiday Monday, 2 May**, 1 to 5pm. No need to book; just turn up. Brixton Windmill will be open for visits on **National Mills Weekend, Saturday 7 and Sunday 8 May**. We will release the brake on the sails on Saturday and, depending on the wind, you may see them turning. Windmill tours are £5 per person, last 30 minutes and can be booked at brixtonwindmill.org/product/book-brixton-windmill-tour/. On **Sunday 15 May at 1pm** there is a guided walk of the Brixton Hill area by London Blue Badge Guide Liz du Parc. Book at brixtonwindmill.org/visit/guided-walks/, £12 or £6 for concessions (children free), and meet at Brixton Windmill, Windmill Gardens, at the top of Blenheim Gardens, off Brixton Hill, SW2 5DA.

Come and sing in Clapham with The Bach Choir

Focussing on highlights from Handel's great oratorio, *Messiah*, The Bach Choir is having a training day for choral singers led by its Musical Director, David Hill. Anyone who has ever sung under his baton will know what a thrilling, and educational, day it will be. **Saturday 14 May, 11am to 4:30pm, Holy Trinity Clapham, Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QZ**. Tickets and more details at thebachchoir.org.uk/concerts. **Sara Jenni**

Discover the history of Battersea Park

Join members of the Battersea Society for a walking tour around historic Battersea Park, led by Blue Badge Guide Christopher Hayden. Free but please register in advance at batterseasociety.org.uk/events. **Meet at the Pear Tree Café, Battersea Park, SW11 4NJ, Thursday 19 May, 11am; finishes at 12.30pm. Sue Demont**



Tallis Scholars at St Luke's Music Society

The latest SLMS season ends with a concert by the world-famous Tallis Scholars. The programme is an innovative exploration of sacred texts over the centuries, for example, a 16th-century setting of 'O sacrum convivium' by Thomas Tallis, and then the same text as set in the 20th century by the French composer and organist Olivier Messiaen. The concert is nearly sold out, but some tickets remain available at slms.org.uk. **Saturday 21 May, 7.30pm, St Luke's Church, Ramsden Road, SW12 8RQ.**

Swift action needed

Swifts (*Apus apus*) spend their winters in Africa and return to Britain to breed between May and July. Gregarious creatures, they nest, feed and migrate in groups. They mate for life and return to the same nesting site year after year, which makes them vulnerable to building improvements and demolitions. You will know them for their aerobatic flight over the rooftops and gardens of Clapham, screeching joyously as they race around feeding on flying insects such as aphids and midges (but not bees or wasps). Clapham is remembered as having hundreds 30 years ago; these days we are lucky to see a dozen.

The swift population in Britain has halved in the past 20 years, owing to the loss of their nesting sites (high-up ledges and crevices in eaves with wide-open flying access) and general decline in insect prey. The species is on the UK Red List of Conservation Concern. The situation is so urgent, in fact, that 'Save our Swifts' is the cover story in the latest issue of *Nature's Home*, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) magazine.

How we can help. There are several initiatives already underway on Clapham Common designed to increase biodiversity of insects, mammals and amphibians through planting flowers, trees and shrubs: Wildflower Furrows; Wild Clapham (for which the Society has a Donate button on its website); and Lambeth Council's Bee Roads 'greening areas'. Gardeners can avoid insecticides and garden poisons to preserve flying insects. Protect nest sites during building work by not impeding access. (Two nest boxes have been erected on the northwest corner of The Polygon, which play swift calls twice a day. We'll report back if they attract the birds. According to the *Nature's Home* article, swift nest boxes are also being put up in 70 London schools to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.) Let us know if you have swift activity near you and especially when you see your first returning swift this May. Email heatherkay@btinternet.com. **Heather Kay**



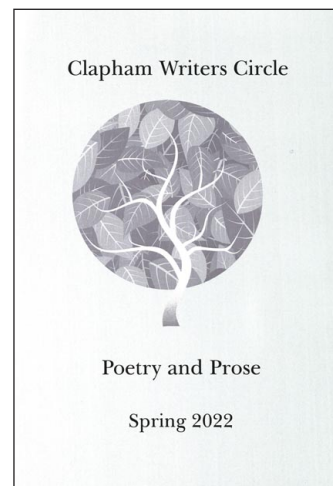
New work from Clapham Writers Circle

The Clapham Writers Circle collection 'Poetry and Prose: Spring 2022' is a kaleidoscope of genres and styles from a loose affiliation of writers who live in south London, many of them in Clapham. They meet monthly to discuss any and all aspects of their writing lives. This is a collection of their more recent work, following on from the success of the 2020 Booklet (Newsletter 429).

The writers bring their varied life experiences to the discussions, always with a view to improving their work and supporting their fellows. This collection includes formal poetry, prose poems, short stories and extracts from longer works.

Sometimes the setting is London, sometimes elsewhere. There are contemporary and historical stories; responses to and reflections on the world.

This is a miscellany to dip into, an assortment of small treats and pleasures. It runs to 54 pages and costs £5. You will find it on sale at Clapham Books. **Julie Anderson**



Repairers wanted to save the planet

St Paul's Eco Church Group is launching a community Repair Café and looking for volunteers to fix small household appliances such as kettles, toasters and vacuum cleaners. Do you, or does someone you know, have the skills to prevent items like these from being sent to landfill unnecessarily? Or would you simply like to be involved? If so, please email Allison at sw4repaircafe@gmail.com. The events will happen quarterly at a location on Clapham High Street. **Allison Clark**

Summer at Omnibus

Join Omnibus Theatre for its Summer 2022 season full of glittering festivals, thrilling world premieres and bold new writing. In May, we have a double bill featuring 24, 23, 22, a new beat-blasting gig-theatre show by award-winning company Chronic Insanity, as well as *Untitled Sparkly Vampire Play*, Ashley Milne's explosive reaction to compulsory heterosexuality, obsessive teenage girlhood, and the feeling of being young and entirely alone.

Later in the season, a line-up of artists will set up camp at Omnibus Theatre for a celebration of queerness and theatre. *96 Festival* is back by popular demand, opening the day of London Pride, 2 July, and running until 17 July.

Summer wouldn't be the same without any mention of Edinburgh. As part of our *Edinburgh Previews*, we will welcome some of the most exciting new work before it heads north to the biggest theatre festival in the world. Find out more at omnibus-clapham.org/whats-on.

Ellie Grice



Venn Street Market – the menu expands

Two new stalls are at Venn Street Market. North Sea Seafood offers fresh fish caught off the Norfolk coast. The other newcomer, Woodmill Game, is a specialist purveyor of wild and sustainable Scottish game. Details at vennstreetmarket.co.uk. **Kate Greening**

New members

We are pleased to welcome new members Max Stegner and Andrea Stratford Collins. **Jennifer Everett**

Public inquiry into events on the Common

Members who submitted representations to Defra regarding Lambeth Council's recent application for Festival Republic to return to Clapham Common this summer should have received an email from Common Land Casework of the proposal to hold a virtual public inquiry (accessible on Microsoft Teams) in May, requesting that all those wishing to speak should confirm this by 7 April.

We now know that some 500 representations were submitted, of which just 11 supported the event going ahead. **The inquiry is scheduled to last at least 11 days, commencing at 10am on 24 May, and closing on**



Dana Kubick

9 June. However, additional days have been set aside in the event they are needed for 13-15 June. We understand that, at the time of writing, 40 individuals have indicated that they wish to speak at the inquiry.

The Society submitted a detailed objection to the holding of these major events,

reflecting the many concerns raised by members in the survey we conducted last year. (Please email me or Gill White, our Honorary Secretary – addresses below, if you wish to see a copy of our objection.)

The Society and the Friends of Clapham Common have briefed legal counsel to represent us at the inquiry. While his attendance and that of his team will be limited it will incur heavy costs, and we still need to raise funds to support this action.

It is wonderful that many people have said they will speak but it is important that as many people as possible attend and make their own views known to ensure the Inspector hears the full story from residents about how fencing off 20 acres for hosting big events adversely affects enjoyment of the Common. **Members wishing to address the inquiry have been advised they need to submit their statement of case, proof of evidence, and relevant extracts of supporting documents by 6 May.** The Inspector has set out a timetable of key dates leading up to the inquiry.

Some of you will be aware that Lambeth submitted a separate application to Defra regarding a range of smaller events on the Common. The closing date for representations was 25 March. The Society's submission on this mainly sought clarification of ambiguities and omissions in the application. Again, copies can be made available to members. **NOTE:** An important refinement to our website has been introduced. When visiting claphamsociety.com you will see a 'Donate Now' button on the Home page. Clicking on it gives three options: Campaign Funding; Wild Clapham & The Queen's Green Canopy appeal; and General Expenses. (Assistance with legal funds would come under Campaign Funding.) Your Committee looks forward to your continuing support for the work of the Society. **Mark Leffler**

Larkhall Bridge closure

*The Larkhall Bridge Action Group held a lively, well-attended public meeting at St Paul's Church on the evening of Tuesday 28 March. **Alison Macnair and Lee Roberts** report.*

In the December 2020/January 2021 Newsletter we published an article by Vadim Jean, Chair of the Action Group, which reminded our members of how the Bridge had been closed in 1998 for being structurally unsafe and, after local controversy, was re-opened for light traffic, in an eastward direction. The Bridge was closed again in October 2020, originally as part of Lambeth's Covid-19 emergency response. Permanent closure is now proposed to facilitate Transport for London's Cycleway 5 (formerly Quietway 5) running from Norbury to Waterloo, via Clapham Manor Street, Cresset Street, Bromells Road and Larkhall Rise. This route was originally identified as a potential Healthy Route in Lambeth's Local Plan in 2017.

The article described how the Bridge was closed with only two days' notice and hinted at opportunism by Lambeth planners using Covid to create a concentrated Healthy Route that banned motor vehicles. The closure was legally limited to 18 months and lacked any enforcement provisions.

Closure of the Bridge has increased congestion on the High Street in the south and on Wandsworth Road in the north, as



well as creating more traffic in adjacent roads. The Council's own figures show goods vehicles increased by 95% in Clapham Manor Street and 49% in North Street, and cars by 84% in Voltaire Road and 24% in North Street. In August 2021 the police were called to Clapham Manor Street because of gridlock. A resident with disabilities told the meeting how she and her husband, who also has disabilities and is a care worker, were unable to get to work.

From 28 March this year, the 2020 Order has been replaced by an Experimental Order, which involves tests on resultant air quality and traffic flows. Leaflets were delivered to local residents in some of the affected roads on the day closure took effect. From 13 April, drivers who cross Larkhall Bridge can be fined £130, and Lambeth Council will monitor air quality, promising to engage residents as results emerge.

A heated debate is developing between residents' demands to use their cars across Larkhall Bridge *versus* Lambeth Council's interpretation of TfL's Cycleway Strategy. We can expect vigorous exchanges right up to the planned decision date in September 2022.

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

