

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 454 March 2023



Ruth Eastman

Clapham Common in the wider London context

The President of The Clapham Society, Martin Drury, prizes our greatest local asset and its broad sweep (long may that last) of unobstructed views.

Opposition to the current proposal to build a 13-storey tower on Clapham Common South Side is widespread and intense. This is not surprising because the Common is a precious place and deserves the highest level of protection.

Not long ago, a French friend observed that London is a city of green spaces. In its centre are seven of the Royal Parks with, further out, Richmond, Bushy and Greenwich Parks and the unfenced expanses of grass, trees and water that were once common land, each the remnant of a medieval manor. Since the 18th century the areas in between have been sprinkled with parks in miniature, the green residential squares that are such a distinctive feature of metropolitan London. So, Clapham Common is not only precious to local people; it makes a significant contribution to the unique character of London.

Appreciation of this significance influenced the founding of the Clapham Society in 1963, the decision to declare much of the Common a conservation area in 1968 and the launch of Friends of Clapham Common in 1998. However, evidence of its appreciation by Lambeth Borough Council, which manages the Common and owns part of it, has been over the years, let us say, patchy. There have always been individuals on the Council and staff who have found ways of helping to promote the long-term interests and protection of the Common, but more often Lambeth's approach has been one of exploitation rather than stewardship.

In 2001 Hal Moggridge, a distinguished landscape architect, and I wrote an article for *Country Life* in which we set out four principles that should, in our view, determine the siting of the tall buildings beginning to pop up all over London. One of those principles was that no building should rise above the trees of (five of) the Royal Parks, that is to say, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, Regent's Park, Green Park and St James's Park. It was a principle worth adopting, we thought, because even then, from the bridge over the Serpentine in Hyde Park, the illusion of remoteness was only disturbed by three buildings, excluding church spires, rising above the surrounding trees. Lambeth, we hope, will reject the proposals for **45 South Side** (see *right*). If and when that happens it would then be timely for this principle to be adopted for the permanent protection of precious Clapham Common. *Martin Drury was Director-General of the National Trust from 1996 to 2001. He was awarded a CBE in 2001 for services to the protection of historic buildings.*

Our meetings take place at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. The talk starts promptly at 8pm and our guests normally speak 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 to the Society. Please arrive in good time before the start. The Café Bar is open from 6pm for drinks and snacks – a great opportunity to socialise with other members before (and after) the meeting.

Monday 20 March

What makes a writer write or a painter paint?

Local authors, novelist **Elizabeth Buchan** and crime writer **Julie Anderson**, discuss the sources of human creativity with particular emphasis on writing – the drama, the inspiration, the perspiration. It will all be covered.

Monday 17 April

Florence Nightingale's London. Florence Nightingale was a legend in her own lifetime, but the Crimean War for which she was so famous was just two years in the career of a woman who lived to the ripe age of 90. When she returned from the Crimea in her mid-30s, she spent the rest of her long life living and working in London. **Julie Chandler** is the co-author of *Florence Nightingale's London*. Using extracts from her book, she explores the places where Florence Nightingale lived and worked, where she bought her perfume (!) and where she wrote her own book, *Notes on Nursing*. Julie, a London Blue Badge Tourist Guide, works in partnership with the Florence Nightingale Museum and, as part of Team Flo, regularly gives talks and leads walking tours.

STOP PRESS: Lambeth College

The deadline for comments on **45 Clapham Common South Side** has been extended again, until 6 March. **Everyone's viewpoint counts, so please, please comment if you haven't already at: lambeth.gov.uk/planning-building-control/planning-applications/search-submit-comment-applications, reference: 22/03713/FUL.** For reasons why you should, see *Newsletter 453* at claphamsociety.com/newsletter.

Sharing the stages – a marriage of true acting talents

Our first talk of the year saw actors **Alison Skilbeck** and **Tim Hardy** recalling their lives on the stage, a platform they still very much inhabit. A married couple who have lived in Clapham for 26 years, they shared reflections on their career thoughts with an audience of friends and Society members. Unusually for our meetings we sat in a horseshoe, so immediately the space felt intimate and warm.



Dana Kubick

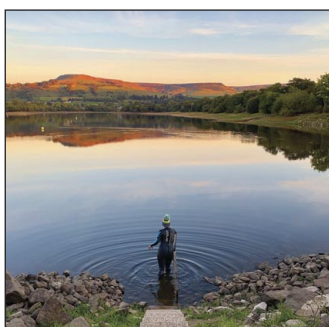
Tim told how his career began as a schoolboy at St Paul's when offered a role in *Twelfth Night*. The part came his way, he said, because no one else was interested. 'They were scraping the bottom of the barrel,' he smiled, confessing he would much rather have been playing cricket. Once on stage, however, he enjoyed 'the taste of the words in his mouth' and decided he would like to act for a living. His parents backed Tim's interest and steered him in the direction of RADA. At the audition he arrived, in a suit and with fresh haircut, looking for all the world like a banker. A fellow candidate was more bohemian in dress with shaggy red hair and brown corduroy jacket. Both were accepted and the scruffier of the two ended up being Tim's flatmate and friend. That actor wannabe was John Hurt.

Alison's first brush with the Bard was life changing as well. Her mother took her, at the age of 13, to Stratford for a week, when they were lucky enough to see a different Shakespeare play every night. Then, the words tasted good in the mouths of Lawrence Olivier, Edith Evans, Albert Finney, Vanessa Redgrave and Charles Laughton: the brightest stars in the British acting firmament before the young Alison's very eyes. The bug took hold and drama became a passion at Oxford. A wide-ranging stage and television career followed, including working closely with Alan Ayckbourn at Scarborough and, like her husband, teaching at RADA.

It was so affecting to hear Tim and Alison trade personal recollections with wit and pearls of wisdom about acting thrown in. Tim's mantra is: don't act, just speak the words that are written. Both agree that storytelling is the thing. United in their endeavours, even at home they work together, often directing each other in their one-person shows. But only in the sitting room, never in the kitchen. That is reserved for shopping lists and work stays outside. **Ruth Eastman** Tim, [imdb.com/name/nm0362764/](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0362764/), is at the Finborough Theatre in 'The Journey to Venice', **28 February to 25 March**, finboroughtheatre.co.uk, and can be seen as *Father Pietra* in 'Dangerous Liaisons' for Starz. Alison, [imdb.com/name/nm0804162/](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0804162/), is in 'The Crown', Season 5, Episode 8, as *Lady Elton*. She will be on the Edinburgh Fringe **2-28 August** at Assembly Rooms in her new show, 'Alison Skilbeck's Uncommon Ground'.

Omnibus Theatre

Celebrate the month of International Women's Day at Omnibus. **SHE** (7-12 March) is an enthralling new play inspired by the Seven Ages of Man speech from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Then an exciting line-up explores life through the lens of womanhood: rage and vulnerability (*Labyrinth*, **11 March**); motherhood (*Mary & Her Monster*, **12 March**); the climate crisis (*Eco Maniac*, **13-15 March**); finding community (*SWIM*, **16-18 March**, right); obsession and body image (*Seen* **00:25, 17-19 March**); culture and myth (*Myth Refreshed*, **18 March**); intersectionality (*AIYAA*, **18-19 March** and *You Are African First Before Anything*, **19 March**); and more. **Omnibus Theatre**, **1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW**. For more information and to book, visit omnibus-clapham.org.



St Luke's Music Society

St Luke's Music Society continues its tradition of presenting world-class pianists with a recital by **Peter Donohoe**, sponsored by hi-fi experts Oranges & Lemons. Peter Donohoe is one of only two British winners of the Tchaikovsky Competition and is one of the most recorded pianists in the UK. His programme will include music by Chopin, Debussy and Albeniz, culminating in Schubert's great Piano Sonata in C minor. **Saturday 11 March, 7.30pm, St Luke's, Ramsden Road, SW12 8HQ**. For tickets and more information, visit slms.org.uk.



Food and Culture Award nomination

Exciting news for the Clapham Book Festival. It is up for this year's southwest London and Surrey Food & Culture Awards. One of ten finalists in the Most Innovative Arts/Community Project category, CBF has been voted for by readers of *Time & Leisure* magazine along with Polka Theatre, Wimbledon Book Festival, Wandsworth Arts Fringe, Tooting Festival of the Dead and others. The winners will be announced at the New Wimbledon Theatre on 20 March, so fingers crossed for the Clapham Book Festival.

Clapham Chamber Concerts

On **3 March**, Clapham Chamber Concerts welcomes back its founders, **Amanda Lake** (violin) and **Jessie Maryon Davies** (piano), for a special performance in memory of their childhood friend Clare Askew. Opening with Britten's characterful Suite for Violin and Piano, Op. 6, the recital will also include Bach's monumental Chaconne, alongside Ravel's jazz-influenced Violin Sonata No. 2. Music by three female composers will also feature: Lili Boulanger, Florence Price and Jessie Maryon Davies herself.

There is a change of mood on **24 March**, when jazz trio **Samba Azul** (right) will perform works by some of the greatest Brazilian composers of the 20th century and today: João Bosco, Edu Lobo, Gilberto Gil, Hamilton de Holanda and André Mehmari.

Both concerts will take place (on the dates above)

at 7pm, at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ.

Advance booking is recommended via Eventbrite at £15, £12 (concessions), £10 (Friends of CCC), £5 (children under 12). Visit claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk for tickets and more information.



The Arts Society Clapham Common

Glass has been made for centuries, but the 1960s saw a revolution in the way it was created, opening it up to artists across the world. In

his talk, **Hot Stuff! The Birth of Studio Glass**, Mark Hill examines the work of six key glass artists from the US and the UK, including Dale Chihuly, Sam Herman, Peter Layton and Michael Harris (1933-1994), whose 'Fish' vase is shown (*left*).

The speaker, familiar to many as a presenter on the BBC1 *Antiques Roadshow*, will also be giving us an overview of the glass market today. **Wednesday 15 March**,

11am, Clapham Picturehouse, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT. Doors open at 10.30am. Tickets cost £10 (visitors and non-members); members free. To join The Arts Society for free entry to this and future events, email claphamcommon@theartsociety.org. **Susan Holder**



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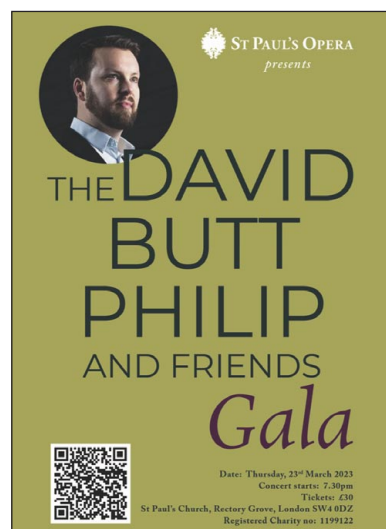
St Paul's Opera – so much to sing about

It is the David Butt Philip season at St Paul's Opera. Many thanks to all who came to his Masterclass in February. Our patron, David, who is affectionately known as DBP, returns to sing with three of his

opera colleagues for the **Gala Concert**, accompanied by two equally gifted pianists. All of the singers, like DBP, are familiar figures at opera houses and festivals across the globe, including Salzburg, Vienna Staatsoper, Edinburgh Festival, Garsington and, of course, the Royal Opera House. To find out who these names are and more about them, subscribe to the SPO website and social media platforms.

Thursday 23 March, 7.30pm, St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ.

Tickets, £30, at stpaulsopera.org. If last year's event is anything to go by, buy early to avoid disappointment. **Friday 21 April** is SPO's **10th Birthday Concert**, so save the date. Look out for more details about that concert next month, or visit stpaulsopera.org. **Tricia Ninian**



Ruth Eastman

A Grey Heron on Clapham Common basks in the late winter sun. Watch it take flight across Mount Pond on our Instagram feed @claphamsociety. Note the acceptable height of the building in the background (see page 1).

Walk to mark International Women's Day

At our November meeting Lambeth Tour Guide Jenny Rossiter (*Newsletter 453*) enlightened us about famous women of our borough. One of her fellow guides, Lena Federico, is leading a walk in West Norwood Cemetery on **Saturday 11 March** (details, *right*), where you will hear about artists, nurses, missionaries and the first person to make a career as a choreographer: ballerina Katti Lanner, who lived and worked in Clapham. £12 per person; 16 people maximum. Meet at West Norwood Picturehouse. You can book (essential) at lambethtourguides.org.



In tune with Bach

Singers who came to the Whitehall Choir Come & Sing (*below*) at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Narbonne Avenue in January might be interested to know that the centrepiece of the workshop, **Bach's St John Passion**, will be performed by the choir with the London Baroque Sinfonia (conductor: **Joanna Tomlinson**) and a dazzling line-up of soloists on **Thursday 30 March at 7.30pm**. First performed on Good Friday in 1724 in Leipzig's Nikolaikirche, the St John Passion is one of the greatest masterworks of sacred choral music. Evangelist: **Thomas Hobbs**; Christus: **Oliver Hunt**; Pilate: **Philip Tebb**; Soprano: **Elizabeth Weisberg**; Alto: **Carris Jones**; Tenor: **Sam Jenkins**. Tickets, £29 and £24, by telephone 020 7222 1061, online at sjss.org.uk, or from a Whitehall Choir member. For more information about Whitehall Choir visit whitehallchoir.org.



Membership and renewals

Clapham is a vibrant place and The Clapham Society is here to help protect it. **New members are always welcome.** This month we are pleased to welcome new member Andrea Beck.

Our Membership Secretary, Jennifer Everett, would also like to remind Society members that renewals for annual subscriptions are due on 1 April. Reminders are attached to Newsletters for those for whom we do not have an email address and who do not have a standing order. Please check that your standing order request with your bank has the correct payment amount: £10 for an individual; £15 for a household; £25 for company membership; plus £10 for postage, if required. If you have any queries, please email Jennifer at membership@claphamsociety.com or telephone her on 020 7627 4770 and she will be very happy to help.

Unbuilt Clapham: The seminary

In 1874, following the restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Britain, Bishop James Danell of Southwark was looking for a site close to his cathedral at St George's, North Lambeth, to train priests for the new parishes.

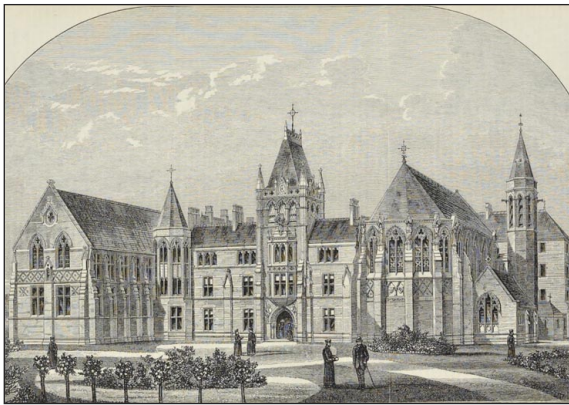
Dunsford Lodge on Clapham Road (opposite St John the Evangelist church) was on the market. The property had formerly been the home of William Cook, a wealthy warehouseman, and his wife, Mary Ann. Described as 'seven acres, well wooded, with a large solidly built house, one half-hour's walk from the cathedral – with advantages of both town and country', it seemed ideal. The original idea was to do a quick conversion. Fundraising for the purchase began and the Duke of Norfolk pledged £7,000, nearly half the amount required.

Soon ambitions grew, and the architect John Crawley was commissioned to design a purpose-built seminary on a much grander scale (*below*) and at much greater cost. By the time the new fundraising target was reached, however, Bishop Danell had died, the diocese had been split in half and Clapham was no longer seen as a desirable leafy neighbourhood. The plan was abandoned, with the seminary eventually built at Wonerh near Guildford. John Crawley, meanwhile, had also died, and his impoverished widow was left pleading for the outstanding design fee to be paid.

In 1883 the Diocese put the site back on the market and Dunsford Lodge fell into the hands of a dynamic, if unscrupulous, developer, Edward Hammond Thompson. Soon the bulldozers arrived, Mayflower Road and its adjacent streets were laid out, and London's expansion continued southwards unchecked.

Mike Tuffrey

Next issue: The railway that never was



The proposed seminary for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Southwark, 1878, to a design by architect John Crawley.



On the streets where we live

We are delighted to report on two pieces of good news for local residents: a **staggered pedestrian crossing on the junction of Clapham Common South Side and Cavendish Road** – many members will know the Society has been pushing for this as far back as 1997 – and a **no-right turn from Cavendish Road (heading towards the Common) into Klea Avenue**.

In relation to the pedestrian crossing (*above*), at present there is an informal and, as residents have commented, dangerous route across Cavendish Road. Transport for London (TfL) note in their communication to local addresses that residents have told them it is difficult to cross at this location. Anyone living or working nearby will have experienced the difficulty of watching cars approach at speed from the South Circular and/or South Side while trying to cross.

Councillors over the years have flagged this point, as has the Society, and after interventions TfL consulted with residents in early 2020. Following that consultation, **the design of the layout has been changed to ban the left turn from South Side onto Cavendish Road for heavy goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes. These will now go around the gyratory before joining the South Circular on Cavendish**. Delays to the plan have occurred owing to both the pandemic and funding restraints but **construction is now planned for Summer 2023** to take place during the school holidays.

In addition to this commitment, TfL has been working with Lambeth Council to address the issue of cars turning right from the South Circular into Klea Avenue and then up to Lynette, Lessar and Cautley Avenues to access Clapham Common South Side. Cars have travelled at aggressive speeds up these roads, endangering children, pedestrians, pets and cars. Signs have recently gone up to signal a no-right turn into Klea Avenue (*right*) and a camera will follow shortly. Former and existing councillors in this ward have supported residents who have pressed for some years to install this new road signage. **The resulting traffic flow will be monitored for 18 months before the signage is made permanent.**

For more details and to offer feedback, contact AInglisJones@lambeth.gov.uk and BCurtis@lambeth.gov.uk.

Alison Inglis-Jones



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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Previous Newsletters and details of our meetings, activities and publications can be all found at claphamsociety.com

