

The Clapham Society Newsletter



Issue 466 May 2024



The new Lambeth Archives

Philanthropist William Minet donated part of his Lambeth and Camberwell Estate to the local community for a public park and for a library, which opened in 1890, originally as a lending library. His particular interest was history; he donated his own collection and funded the purchase of many historical collections for the library, which over time became an archive.

In 1940 a bomb hit the building, destroying many books, but all the valuable documents in the basement were saved. The building was rebuilt and, when the Borough of Lambeth was established in 1966, all historic records were moved from the Town Hall and local libraries to form Lambeth Archives. The collection continued to grow but, by the 1980s, space was running out and storage conditions were not ideal.

It was not until 2020 that the perfect situation was found: on Brixton Hill, near the newly refurbished Lambeth Town Hall and Civic Centre. The new Archives opened in February 2024. On the ground floor is the spacious Minet Search Room (*above*), where visitors can consult books on open shelves and documents brought up from the basement strongroom (*below*). The latter stretches underground about twice the length of the ground floor. It is a passive space which uses thermal inertia to maintain a constant temperature and humidity.

Also on the ground floor is the Olive Morris Room, named in memory of the celebrated 1970s Black activist – a flexible space for meetings, education, exhibitions (currently Jim Grover's latest, page 3) and display cases. Facing Brixton Hill, 'Window into Lambeth's Past' is a fascinating timeline of the area's history.



Lambeth Archives is open to all, free of charge. You can find further details and opening hours at lambeth.gov.uk/libraries-0/lambeth-archives.

Alyson Wilson

Sam Mellish (and above)

Our meetings take place at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. The talk starts promptly at 8pm and our guest normally speaks for about 45 minutes, followed by questions and discussion. Meetings are free and open to non-members, who are invited to donate. The Café Bar is open from 6pm for drinks and snacks – a great chance to socialise with other members before (and after) the meeting. For our full list of 2024 talks, visit our website at claphamsociety.com/events.

Monday 20 May

All change (for the better) on Clapham Common. Gareth James is a trustee of the Friends of Clapham Common, its representative on the Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee and the lead for the charity Wild Clapham. Gareth will speak about the changes in approach to improving bio-diversity on the Common, projects over the past three years, plans for the future, and the challenges we face with plant pathogens and alien invasive species in the context of a rapidly changing climate.

Save the date The Friends of Clapham Common Summer Party will take place on **Thursday 20 June**. Details and ticket information next time.

Private tour of Aldwych station

In March **Edmund Bird**, Heritage Manager of TfL and popular speaker at our meetings, showed about 16 of us the rarefied delights of the disused Aldwych Tube station. Opened in 1907, it served workers in the western half of the City, theatre-goers and those travelling to the Inns of Court and Royal Courts of Justice. With a rush-hour-only service since 1958, it closed in 1994 when, with only 450 passengers a day at the end, the cost of repairing the lift could not be justified.

We met outside the entrance to Strand Station, its original name, in the recently pedestrianised (2022) precinct around the Aldwych, which Edmund himself had had a hand in planning. Inside the Surrey Street booking hall, where we entered, a green and white tiled corridor in pristine condition leads to an open lift whose operator back in the day dispensed tickets. Now a spiral staircase is the only way down. No trains obviously, but a wealth of vintage posters, some recalling the station's role as a shelter during the Blitz. Today the space is a film and TV location; scenes from *Atonement*, *Superman IV* and *Mr Selfridge* have all been shot here. Returning upstairs, we were shown the ticket office, complete with old filing cabinets and safe. Thank you, Edmund, for taking us on this journey and, Christine Armstrong, for organising it. **Ruth Eastman** For those who missed this event, the London Transport Museum runs station tours, £45, bookable at ltmuseum.co.uk/whats-on/hidden-london/aldwych.



Ruth Eastman

The Georgians

At our March lecture **Penelope Corfield** (*below*), a professor of history, author, and resident and local campaigner in Battersea, gave us a thought-provoking overview of Britain in the 'long' 18th century, a period of underlying peace and political stability, and the role that Clapham played in it.

With considerable growth by 1800, the population of England and Scotland rose to about 10½ million, still little more than that of



Greater London today, but by the end of the period we had become a world power. However, this empire did not come about from a pre-conceived plan for world domination – Queen Victoria never became an Empress (except of India) – but rather there was a gradual expansion for commercial benefits. This was led by our naval prowess in exploration and trade. English became the language of commerce and there are Claphams in Barbados, South Australia and South Africa. There are also apparently 29 Londons!

The 18th century saw a great increase in literacy and numeracy of both men and women which reached well down the social scale. The first local newspaper appeared in Norwich in 1701 and rather later came the *Clapham Gazette*. The written word, and Britain bred more

than its fair share of world-renowned male and female novelists and poets, had a greater effect on public opinion than did art.

Britain was also at the forefront of inventions and technology, particularly in fields such as clockmaking and the industrial revolution, and Clapham, being on the communications line of the Portsmouth Road, attracted residents who formed one of the hubs of circulating ideas. Perhaps the most notable example in the Age of Enlightenment was the abolition of the slave trade, led by evangelists such as William Wilberforce and the Thorntons and centred on Holy Trinity church. Penelope made a plea that, among the 'Clapham Saints', the Rev. John Venn deserves a better memorial in the parish. Of course, not everyone agreed with the changes: George Hibbert, a Jamaican sugar merchant who had a house on North Side [where Royal Trinity Hospice now stands], campaigned against it.

Continuing this reputation of Clapham being at the centre of public opinion, came rather later the famous expression 'the man on the Clapham omnibus'. Although apparently first used by a lawyer in 1903, he claimed to be quoting an earlier unrecorded use of the term. Penelope's presentation was peppered with such intriguing anecdotes. One of my favourites was the reason that sitters in 18th-century portraits always seem to have their mouths shut: to hide the bad state of their teeth, largely owing to the ravages of sugar cane. If this talk was in some way a taster for her new book, *The Georgians: The Deeds and Misdeeds of 18th Century Britain*, it should be a very good read.

Christopher Claxton Stevens

Following our talk, Penelope came across further information about the origins of the 'man on the Clapham omnibus'. She points interested members to this link: penelopejcorfield.com/monthly-blogs.

(Extremely) good reads

Congratulations to local authors **Elizabeth Buchan** and **Julie Anderson** whose latest books were published last month, on 4 and 30 April, respectively. We are delighted to carry reviews of both. Earlier books by the authors have been covered variously in Newsletters 427, 429, 437, 438 and 449.

Bonjour, Sophie by Elizabeth Buchan

Corvus, £17.99

Brought up by a vicar and his slovenly wife in rural Sussex, teenaged orphan Sophie Morel longs to go to Paris to uncover the truth behind the stories of her real parents' lives in the French Resistance. But the journey in both the literal and metaphysical sense is tough and, to become the independent working woman she wants to be, Sophie has not only to find her French self but to relinquish the Englishness that has become so much a part of her.

In Elizabeth Buchan's masterly hands the decaying vicarage, its ill-matched owners, the claustrophobia of country village life and Sophie's romance with a local farmer amid the flat bird-filled marshland spring to vivid life. The Paris of 1960 with its art, jazz, coffee bars and socialism conjured by Buchan is equally tangible.

Working in a Left Bank art gallery, Sophie digs deeper into her family's past and finds herself faced with awkward choices. Edgy poverty or a luxurious life that robs her of her hard-won independence? The truth about her father's death and his role in collecting artworks from the ruins of the Jewish quarter, or the destruction of her own fragile life and friendships in the French capital?

Buchan's tale of Sophie's coming of age with its rights and responsibilities is a fascinating one that is told with deceptive simplicity. All too soon it's over. It's a clever writer who always leaves the reader wanting more and waiting eagerly for the next book. **Nikki Mohan**

The Midnight Man by Julie Anderson

Hobeck Books, £10.99

This is the fourth novel by Julie Anderson reviewed in these pages and the first in her Clapham Trilogy.

The Midnight Man centres on the South London Hospital for Women and Children. It's 1946. The war is over, the NHS Act has just been passed but is not yet in effect, and many in the nation are scarred. Some are seriously ill, nothing to do with the war, yet treatment, including the chance to be on a vital drug trial in one case, is not free at point of use.

Faye Smith who runs the hospital canteen and Ellie Peveril who mystifyingly pitches up there newly returned from the Nuremberg War Trials and reeling from the sight of her officer fiancé with a glamour girl in a Soho nightclub, hail from two completely different social strata: Faye, a close-knit working-class Clapham family; Ellie, the Close of Worcester Cathedral where her father is Dean. Binding them together is a new-found friendship and, with it, the urgent quest to solve the murder of a nurse, which very likely took place on the Common. Or did it?

Peopled by well-drawn characters and shot through with nuggets of well-researched medical and social history (spot the credit to The Clapham Society's own Alyson Wilson in the Acknowledgments), the story travels full speed ahead through unexpected twists and turns. Its many strands, in the author's hands, are controlled with the dexterity of a marionettist.

A compelling read with a plot you will not forget. Clapham – what an inspired location for a trilogy. **Ruth Eastman**



St Luke's Music Society

St Luke's Music Society ends its 2023/24 season with a return of **The Sixteen**, possibly the best chamber choir in the world, in a programme spanning the centuries from medieval carols to Hubert Parry's *Songs of Farewell*. A few tickets are available if you're lucky; slms.org.uk.

Saturday 18 May, 7.30pm. St Luke's Church, Ramsden Road, SW12 8RQ.





Clapham Chamber Concerts

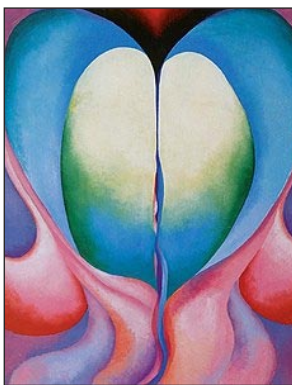
London-based duo Flutes & Frets present music from William Byrd to Ralph Vaughan Williams entitled 'To Make a Long Story Short', journeying through 500 years of British music. Flutes & Frets are kindly supported by Making Music's Philip and Dorothy Green Young Artists scheme. **Friday 17 May, 7pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX.** Tickets are available in advance from claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk.

Omnibus Theatre: *Black Swans*

Two sisters face a difficult decision: how to best care for their elderly mother as her health declines. Rosie, a humanoid care robot, seems like the perfect solution, but soon the sisters will have to reckon with the unforeseen consequences of bringing an artificial intelligence into their lives. **On now until 11 May. Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW.** For tickets and show times, visit omnibus-clapham.org.

The Arts Society Clapham Common

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) rose to almost mythical status as the preeminent Modernist artist in early 20th-century America. In this lecture the speaker,



painter and art historian **Lydia Bauman**, will be looking at her cityscapes, landscapes, animal skull paintings and notorious outsized flower paintings (*Series I, No. 8, 1918*, *left*) and at the

role of her husband, photographer and leading gallerist Alfred Stieglitz, in the shaping of O'Keeffe's career. **Wednesday, 15 May, 11am. Clapham Picturehouse, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT.** Visitor (non-member) tickets, £10, or email claphamcommon@theartsociety.org to join the Arts Society for free admission. **Susan Holder**

Clapham post office update

Lambeth councillors continue to engage with Post Office representatives who have invited applications to run a post office in Clapham. There has been interest from potential applicants; the Post Office will share a further update when there is a confirmed candidate. **Alison Inglis-Jones**

Opera in the heart of Clapham

St Paul's Opera presents *Die Fledermaus*. With its charming farcical plot, complete with masked ball, it's the perfect Summer Festival offering. There are three evening shows, **Thursday to Saturday, 4-6 July**, and a family-friendly matinee on **Saturday 6 July** joined by pupils from SPO's Schools' Outreach Programme with Macaulay, Heathbrook, Bonneville and Reay. Tickets and more details are available from early May at stpaulsopera.org; picnic tables get snapped up, so book them too. The venue is **St Paul's, Rectory Grove**.

Many thanks to the April Trust, Cosman Keller Art & Music Trust and Plumbago Books for their support, and to the Arts Society Clapham Common for showing their support for the first time. To be part of our Summer Festival – we're always on the lookout for help and inspiration – please email info@stpaulsopera.org. **Tricia Ninian**



Jim Grover exhibition: 'Behind the Blue Doors'

This latest show by the award-winning south London social documentary photographer Jim Grover marks the 200th anniversary of Trinity Homes, an almshouse in the heart of Brixton. The story is in three parts and is full of revelations. One part reveals how Trinity



Asylum, as it was originally called, came to be, and highlights the key characters behind its early years who until now have been unrecognised as important figures. Another part reveals how this almshouse 'for pious aged women' operated two centuries ago, including what it took to qualify as an 'inmate'.

The third part tells the stories of some of today's 17 residents, for whom age is no barrier to leading a full life. Guy Hunting, 78 (*right*), for example, is a published author and was once a footman at Buckingham Palace; he scours local charity shops for artworks to add to his collection. Another resident, Christine Holding (*below*), is second generation, her mother having lived here for over 20 years. A former dinner



lady, she volunteers at her local GP surgery. A third is an artist who uses his room as a studio, enabled by a fold-up bed. **19 April to 1 June, Olive Morris Room, Lambeth Archives,**



16 Brixton Hill, SW2 1ET, around the corner from Trinity Homes on Acre Lane and a five-minute walk up Brixton Hill from Lambeth Town Hall. Free. Mondays, 1-8pm; Tuesdays, Thursdays, 10am to 6pm; Fridays, 10am to 3pm; Saturdays, 9am to 1pm, 2-5pm. Closed Wednesdays, Sundays and bank holidays. Visit jimgroverphotography.com and trinityhomes.org.uk.

Story and photographs by Jim Grover

Membership and Gift Aid Declaration

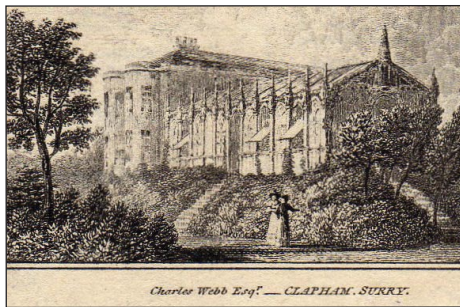
We extend warm welcomes this month to David Gladstone, and Sally and Denis Gross.

Have you managed to return your Gift Aid Declaration to the Treasurer? A copy of the form can be found at claphamsociety.com/GiftAidDeclaration-update.pdf. For further information please email treasurer@claphamsociety.com.

New members are always welcome. Visit claphamsociety.com/join-the-society or email membership@claphamsociety.com if you would like to join. **Jennifer Everett**

Street names: Betwixt the Commons

Many of the roads between Clapham and Wandsworth Commons are named after the big houses first built there or the people who



lived in them. Broomwood Road is named after the house that William Wilberforce lived in, which was first called Broomfield; and Old Park Avenue is named after Old Park, the house of Robert

Dent, built in 1776. Robert's brother, William, lived nearby, giving rise to Dents Road, while the last occupant of his house was Sir John Gorst, leading to Gorst Road.

Bolingbroke Grove was first called Five Houses Lane after the five speculative houses built on it in the 1780s. One house was called Bolingbroke Grove, after the former Lord of the Manor, Lord Bolingbroke, while another member of his (St John) family also had the title Viscount Grandison, the name for another road. The subsequent Lord of the Manor, Lord Spencer, is commemorated in Spencer Park.

The houses along Clapham Common West Side and the families who lived in them are commemorated by Broxash Road, after the house, and Chatto, Webbs and Ashness Roads, after the families. Finally, Buckmaster Road remembers the Victorian campaigner who saved Wandsworth Common from being developed, John Buckmaster; Boutflower Road, after an Anglican priest who died of consumption shortly before becoming vicar of St Mark's; while Morella Road is named after the Countess of Morella, great niece of the occupant of the land used for the road.

The picture (*above*) shows the banker Robert Lovelace's house, 'West Side', built in 1764 and later lived in by the Webbs. It became the largest new house on the Battersea side of the Common and had a fine conservatory of exotic plants, linked to the house by an arcade of roses. *Timothy Walker*

Next month: Clarence Avenue

If you can suggest how your street was named or want to find out more about it, please email history@claphamsociety.com.

Beating the bounds of Battersea

This is a joint initiative between the **Battersea Society** and the **Friends of Wandsworth Common**. Participants can complete the 11 miles or join an activity or section of the walk at a designated time. There will be staging posts at Nine Elms, on Clapham Common and on Wandsworth Common, where participants will be able to learn more about the history of the areas visited. See the Heritage blog at batterseasociety.or.uk/heritage for more information and details on how to register nearer the time. Free but register if you want a certificate! **Sunday 5 May from 9.45am, starting and ending at St Mary's Church, Battersea Church Road, SW11 3NA.**

Events on Clapham Common

Last October the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ruled that events on Clapham Common are in the interest of the general public, so there is a programme of events planned for the rest of the year. Many will be familiar to members: **MoonWalk (18 May)**, the **London to Brighton Bike Ride (16 June)** and **Colourscape Music Festival (14-22 September)**.

Three new ones are: **Vegandale (13-14 July)**, a vegan market near Clapham South Station; a **Burberry Fashion Event (17 September)** next to the basketball courts; and **Oktoberfest (11-19 October)** on the hard football site. These are still subject to final approval from Lambeth.

The proposed Secret Cinema and Festival Republic music events are not happening this year but the organisers of each may re-apply in 2025. If they do, they will be subject to the ruling that no event can take place on Clapham Common that exceeds 10% of the useable space. That would mean that any music event would be somewhat smaller than in previous years. *Michael Barry*

Lights, campaign, action!

After many years of campaigning from the Clapham Society and Clapham Common and Abbeville and Balham councillors (a cross-party effort) as well as the public, Transport for London (TfL) has completed the new Cavendish Road crossing. Work began on 19 December and took far less than the 20 weeks predicted, the crossing having become fully operational around the end of March. We are grateful to TfL for the swiftness of the works. The lights and crossing are a boon to all, especially those with small children and buggies who no longer have to perch on the traffic island but can be certain of safe travel. *Alison Inglis-Jones*



Wandsworth Heritage Festival

This year's festival runs from **18 May to 9 June** and is packed with interesting events. Google Wandsworth Heritage Festival for details.

Royal Trinity Hospice

Make **Wednesday 22 May** a memorable evening at the **Wandsworth Friends Summer Garden Party** in aid of Royal Trinity, now in its 37th year. Mingling in the award-winning Hospice gardens, guests can expect an evening of live music, drinks and canapés. With the return of the Wishing Tree and Live Auction, all money raised will support free palliative and end-of-life care for patients and their families. The event is generously supported again by Savills SW London. For tickets, priced at £50 per person, visit www.royaltrinityhospice.london/Event/wandsworth-friends-summer-garden-party-2024.

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

