



PETER JEFFERSON SMITH 1939-2018



Plaque in the bell tower

Peter and Holy Trinity Church

Peter had a very long association with Holy Trinity Church, Clapham – he and Anna were part of the 14-26 Club in their youth, and were married in the church in 1964. He researched the history assiduously, cataloguing the archive and producing two excellent visitor guides to the history of the church and the Clapham Sect. For the annual Common Fayre he set up a wonderful exhibition each year with information about Holy Trinity's history, William Wilberforce and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, as well as the many other achievements of the Clapham Sect.

He was very much involved in the work of the Holy Trinity Restoration and Development Trust in the 1980s and 1990s, including the creation of the William Wilberforce Centre. Perhaps his most significant contribution was the initiation of the restoration of the church bells in 1991, which resulted in the formation of an active group of bellringers who continue to ring almost every Sunday morning. The restoration is commemorated by a plaque in the ringing room in the bell tower.

*Rev Caroline Clarke
Holy Trinity Church, Clapham*

Peter and Saving Old Clapham

In the early 1970s a blight afflicted large areas of Lambeth from which Clapham was not immune. The lives of Peter and Anna (with their young family) and many of their neighbours and friends were heavily impacted, and it was to become a major preoccupation of theirs, and of the Clapham Society for a number of years.

Ahead of the reorganisation of London government in 1965, the new London Borough of Lambeth had appointed Edward Hollamby, architect of Thamesmead, as its new Director of Development. A highly regarded architect of the post-war reconstruction era, Hollamby was an architectural determinist with strong ideas about how cities should be rebuilt. A Council report on housing conditions in the borough set the scene for Lambeth to launch a massive multi-year building programme to follow on from slum clearance and post-war reconstruction. This foresaw the acquisition and redevelopment of around 27,000 privately rented and owner-occupied homes. The prime target was modest two- and three-storey Victorian houses with gardens, and the removal of traditional streets. The north side of Iveley Road and Wandsworth Road opposite Peter and Anna's, together with the allotments and parts of St Paul's churchyard in between, were made the subject of a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) in 1971, as well as a number of other streets in Clapham around the same time.

Consternation and dismay about the impending loss of not just their homes but the break-up of established communities, and uncertainties they all faced, brought people together to consider what they could do to oppose the Council's plans. A small action group (CASPA*) was formed, each person bringing different skills to bear, and links were made to similar groups being formed elsewhere in the area. Peter's deep sense of social justice and the importance of community were clearly a driving force, but it was his calm reasoning and intellectual abilities that undoubtedly helped the group to focus its energies and assemble a strong series of arguments and lines of attack for opposing the CPO. Peter was instrumental in persuading the Society to become involved in fighting to 'Save Old Clapham', and was drafted on to the Committee.

CASPA waged an effective campaign both locally and nationally through the press in a series of articles in *The Times* by Halldora Blair**, bringing attention to the human impact of the 'Council Bulldozer' and the Clapham Society effectively lobbied government to arrange for linked Public Inquiries to be conducted by the same Senior Inspector. Two Inquiries on five areas were held in the summer of 1974, with the Inspector releasing his reports following Ministerial approval, finding in favour of the objectors in all five areas the following summer.

As a result, the Council's redevelopment strategy was in tatters. It had become clear that henceforward Central Government would favour housing improvement schemes over redevelopment and local authorities should only seek compulsory purchase powers with great reluctance.

*Mark Leffler
Clapham Society Committee member*

*Clapham Action Saint Paul's Area
** see extracts in *Clapham in the Twentieth Century* pp. 160-168

Peter the neighbour

Peter and Anna Jefferson Smith – because you can't think of one without the other – were the true Samaritan couple of Iveley Road. Their humanity and kindness extended through the neighbourhood and affected many of us. He and Anna shared their lives and meals not only with friends but with the sick and lonely; they gave people lifts to hospitals, doctors and friends; or had their wheelchairs loaded into Anna's car, the one with the mossy-green window surrounds, to go to church.

There are almost too many examples of Peter's contribution to a better world from organising CASPA to save Iveley Road and Wandsworth Road from development to the bellringers at Holy Trinity and St John's. On a personal level, he said comforting words to me on the day I found my husband dead on the floor, and later helped me replace several lost and stolen passports when the Passport Office refused to renew them. His reference signed with his seriously high Civil Service rating worked a bureaucratic miracle.

Although a man of extraordinary learning, a historian of note, a highly-placed civil servant, these acts of compassion, kindness, rescue and friendship were done by a man quietly spoken, seemingly reserved and truly honest; an upright man who loved Anna and was her companion for 54 happy years and cared deeply for his family and his neighbours. I was lucky enough to be one of them. And I shall miss my friend and keeper of my keys.

*Pamela Blackwell Price
Iveley Road*

Peter and the Bandstand

One of Peter's involvements was in the restoration of the bandstand on Clapham Common. Erected in 1890 it is the oldest surviving bandstand in Greater London and one of the largest ever built in England. By 2003 it was a Listed (Grade II) historic building but was in a desperate state of disrepair and was on English Heritage's Register of Buildings at Risk, and officially a dangerous structure.

I had become Chairman of the Clapham Society sharing a determination with Peter to see the bandstand restored. In June 2003 Peter set up a crucial meeting with Lambeth Council. It was chaired by the Chief Executive Faith Boardman, a former colleague of his, which probably helped. Peter's performance won the day. Faith Boardman turned to her team and said, 'Just do it'!

A Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £0.9m was made towards the £1.3m needed for the restoration including improvements to the surrounding buildings and landscape. This also depended upon firm commitments by both Lambeth Council and the community to make up the difference. Lambeth promised to contribute at least £177,000. 32% of the total was for repairs. Much of the structural ironwork had to be removed to workshops. The zinc roof covering and its drainage system needed extensive renewal, as did the underground storage area below the stage. The missing finial and the cast iron balustrade surrounding the stage platform were replicated and the banking around the base was restored to include a spiral ramp for wheelchair access. 11% of the cost was for improvements to the café (now La Baita), new toilets etc. and 21% was for landscape improvements including resurfacing in bound gravel, new underground rainwater drainage and disposal. 10% was for services including CCTV, sound enhancement and lighting. 26% was allowed to cover professional fees, contingencies and inflation.

I sat on the project steering-committee and Peter organised fund-raising. The Clapham Society and The Friends of



Opening of the Bandstand, June 2006 by the Mayor of Lambeth, the late Councillor Liz Atkinson.

Clapham Common combined to raise the community contribution of £100,000. This included some very generous individual contributions.

The project was a great success, often fun, and a source of pride for all. Value and meaning were restored and of course it was Peter who was instrumental in organising bandstand summer concerts which made it a place for music again. It is but one of many things to remember Peter for. He was a friend who will be greatly missed.

*John Adams
Clapham Society Chairman 1998-2007*

Peter the historian

Clapham has been well served by its historians. In the 19th century J W Grover was instrumental in bringing the Atkins Memorials back into the main part of St Paul's Church. For over 50 years until his death in 1990 Eric Smith was the Hon Secretary and Archivist of the Clapham Antiquarian Society researching Clapham's past and producing a wide range of publications. Peter Jefferson Smith was a worthy successor to these two. His knowledge of the area was encyclopaedic, and he added much to our awareness of and interest in our surroundings. He wrote, or contributed to, many publications about Clapham from the survey in 1967 for the first edition of *The Buildings of Clapham* to *Wild About Clapham*, for which he wrote the historical introduction and checked the text in the autumn of 2018, despite his failing health. His short history of Clapham in the Society's first book with colour illustrations *Discovering Clapham* (2007) has become the model for subsequent historical texts.

Peter regularly led walks in our summer programme of guided walks, he wrote the text for some of the self-guided ones and devised special walks tailored for local school children; he undertook with enthusiasm the preparation of local history panels for display at summer fêtes and fairs; he wrote several original and well-researched articles for the series we contributed to the *South London Press*; and he undertook many tasks in relation to our Green Plaque scheme marking notable local buildings which have changed use.

He also did far, far more as convenor of the Local History Sub-committee for many years before handing over to me in 2010. Even then, he was always there with helpful advice often delivered with a wry sense of humour! We shall miss him greatly. We have lost a very special man.

*Derrick Johnson
Convenor Local History Sub-committee*
