

# The Clapham Society Newsletter



Issue 427

May/June 2020

Normal events may still be on hold but one thing lockdown cannot deny us is a good read. So, this month, we shine the spotlight on books, three of them by Clapham authors, along with other news of local interest. We sent the April issue digitally at the start of the pandemic; if you missed out because the Membership Secretary did not have your email address (she would still be very happy to have it – see details on the back page), you will receive the printed copy with this issue. Keep safe, keep well and keep reading!

## VE Day 2020

It had been planned that the 75th Anniversary of VE Day on 8 May would have been celebrated at national and local level. This would have meant major events such as military parades and memorial services, and at the other end of the spectrum local communities entering into the spirit with street parties. Members of the community who lived or served during World War Two, or



*Socially distanced celebrations 2020-style in SW4, a far cry from the 1945 crush in Trafalgar Square.*

those who could recall VE Day in 1945, would have a special part to play. Sadly, the unseen enemy, coronavirus, struck. Many of us will have watched the BBC programmes to mark the occasion: extensive

footage of the 1945 jubilation, including the speeches of King George VI and Winston Churchill, and interviews with those who were there at the time mixed with live items by musicians and performers the regulated two metres apart. In Clapham (an area that has no claim to have suffered more severely during the war than many other parts of London) the celebration also had to be scaled back. In places, however, union flags and bunting were to be seen, and some of our more enterprising neighbours managed a 1940s-style tea party (or perhaps even cocktails?) on a doorstep or at a front gate. The ladies always seemed to set the pace as some of the more 'daring' appeared with the hair style and dress of the period. It seemed so totally correct that the last word was with the Queen as she addressed us, very much a figure of stability over those 75 years. It was also good to see her ATS cap on her desk! *RCC*

*Dana Kubrick*

## Brixton Windmill

Despite open days and events having to be rescheduled because of lockdown, Brixton Windmill's volunteer millers continue to produce flour while observing the strict UK government guidance on social distancing. Supplying local retailers and donating to two local foodbanks, we are working to support the community. By becoming a Friend of Windmill Gardens, you can help sustain the future of Brixton Windmill and support our education programme, open days and community events. You will also be entitled to 10% off our merchandise. Visit [brixtonwindmill.org/get-involved/membership](http://brixtonwindmill.org/get-involved/membership).

*Jean Kerrigan,*

*Chair, Friends of Windmill Gardens*



*Volunteer millers in protective garb at Brixton Windmill.*

## For the record

Lambeth Archivists have not been idle during lockdown! Conscious of the fact that few personal records survive from the last pandemic, the Spanish flu of 1918-20, Lockdown Diaries is an initiative to ensure that these extraordinary times are recorded for posterity. The archivists are asking us all to help them build an archive of the pandemic in Lambeth. They would like not just photographs and videos, but diaries, scrapbooks, poems, artworks – anything that catches your eye and will tell future generations about our strange lives during lockdown in 2020. Why not make an audio recording of a self-isolating person (by telephone or face to face appropriately socially distanced), video a home-schooling session or ask a child to make a decorated mask or a pictorial diary? I even wonder if a guide to our lockdown vocabulary would be an idea! Start making your own collection, build it up and keep it safe until it is ready to donate to Lambeth Archives later in the year. For more details visit [love.lambeth.gov.uk/lockdown-diaries](http://love.lambeth.gov.uk/lockdown-diaries) and if you have any queries email [archives@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:archives@lambeth.gov.uk). Lambeth's hard-working archivists have also been busy giving local history talks and walks on Zoom throughout April and May. These may whet your appetite for what can be seen at the Archives at the Minet Library, once it reopens. The talks will eventually be available online. Details from [archives@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:archives@lambeth.gov.uk). We are especially interested in how the walks work, because we fear that our regular walks programme may not be able to resume until restrictions ease and are thinking of trying out the virtual model. Watch this space! *Alyson Wilson*

## Mediating Empire: An English Family in China, 1817-1927

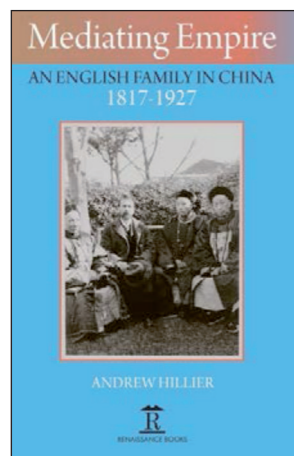
By Andrew Hillier

(Renaissance Books, RRP £75, on offer at £45; email [direct.orders@marston.co.uk](mailto:direct.orders@marston.co.uk))

Only connect... Famous words of E M Forster, who was baptised at Clapham's Holy Trinity church and who explored, in fiction, the relationship between British imperialism and India. Clapham has its share of imperial connections, some reaching further eastwards to southeast Asia and China in particular. Andrew Hillier's *Mediating Empire* examines Britain's presence in China through the lens of one family, his own.

'My grandfather, Harold Hillier, was a keen genealogist,' Andrew explains. 'But, apart from career summaries and a few obituaries, his work didn't really indicate why the family was there. I knew, for example, that his father, Harry, had been "in the Customs" but this didn't mean much to me. Later, I learned that China's Imperial Customs Service, in which Harry was a Commissioner, formed the backbone of the country's economy for over 60 years. It was a key, if controversial, element of Britain's informal empire.'

'I thought I should try to find out more but it wasn't high on the agenda. Then, in 1976, Jim Hoare and Susan Pares moved into the flat below us on Abbeville Road. They worked in the Far Eastern section of the research department of the Foreign Office and



Jim told me how valuable the family archive was. A few years later, he telephoned me from the embassy in South Korea, where they'd been posted. He was standing in front of the foundation stone of the embassy, laid by the wife of the British Consul, 'Mrs Walter C Hillier, on 19 July 1890'. So, with Jim's encouragement, when I retired I undertook a PhD at Bristol University and then developed my dissertation into what I hope is an engaging account of how this family shaped and was shaped by empire.'

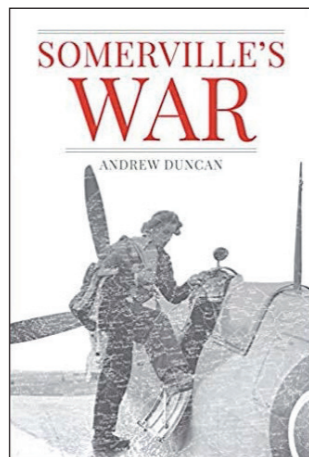
The women in the family are particularly important. 'I've been able to bring their lives out of the shadows,' Andrew says. 'I had 60 letters from

## Somerville's War

By Andrew Duncan

(Vineyard Books, £10.99)

Following the recent celebration of the 75th anniversary of VE Day you might find reading about World War Two appeals. If fiction is your preference, there is *Somerville's War* by Clapham author Andrew Duncan. This novel evokes the tranquil, timeless and sometimes petty-seeming world of rural southern England and its response to war, from the pilots of the RAF and Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) to the Special Operations Executive (SOE) agents and the spymasters at the famous 'finishing school for spies' at SOE Beaulieu, renamed SOE Somerville in the novel. Beginning at a sailing club on the Somer (Beaulieu) River, the novel takes the reader to wartime London and thence to occupied France, as a large and varied cast of characters, crossing generational, class and national divides, contributes to the war, often for very different reasons.



'I grew up at Beaulieu, Hampshire,' says Andrew. 'I inherited a house there and now divide my time equally between Clapham (and my London-based publishing business) and Beaulieu. It's such a head start in writing a novel, especially a first novel, if the geography is at your fingertips. Beaulieu is a unique place; I love the variety of the scenery and the closeness of the sea. It really got under my skin as a young man. Also, I felt that the place itself could be a character in the novel in its own right.'

World War Two is deeply embedded in the national psyche and features strongly in popular fiction. 'Yet I had some more or less original material,' Andrew explains.

'Neither SOE Beaulieu nor the ATA women pilots have received much attention in fiction. It's also a bonus, especially in attracting potential readers, that Kim Philby taught at SOE Beaulieu and features, thinly disguised, in the novel. Another central character is a young woman ATA pilot. 'Leonora is partly based on my mother, who was one of those pilots.'

'Although it was hard to get her to talk, I did come to understand what the experience was like for her and, consequently, I felt I had the insight to write about it. Those women were doing "men's work" long before such roles became gender neutral and this seemed to me of special interest to modern women and men. I wanted to show the moral dimension of courage operating in women in the same way as it does in men and explore female aggression, a considerable thing.'

Events in *Somerville's War* take place in 1940 and the book captures the attitudes, prejudices and mores of the time. 'Yes, I tried to recreate that,' Andrew agrees. 'But I wanted to go further. At the heart of the story is the Brigadier, a man who is really a Victorian. The whole story is in his mind, though told by others. So it seemed right to have a traditional story structure – patrician storytelling as he might have done it, with characters developing gradually. In modern quality commercial fiction, there is often superb plotting and action, but sometimes at the expense of rounded characters. I wanted to tell a good story, which is still a page-turner, but with three-dimensional characters, not cardboard cutouts. Fortunately, people say that's just what it is.' *Julie Anderson*

my great, great grandmother, Eliza Hillier, describing her life in Hong Kong. Her husband was the colony's Chief Magistrate from 1846 to 1856. He died when she was 28, leaving her with four children under the age of eight and one more on the way – an extraordinary life, but one which typifies the experience of so many British "empire women" and their unsung contribution to normalising Britain's overseas presence.'

As a contributor to *Historical Photographs of China* ([hpcbristol.net](http://hpcbristol.net)) Andrew is co-ordinating a project focusing on regimental photographs. 'Britain's military presence in China was almost continuous from the start of the Second Opium War (1856) until the late 1930s,' he says. 'The regimental collections give a fascinating insight into daily life outside the combat zone and how it helped shape Sino-British cultural relations. They're an invaluable resource for British and Chinese historians, but at risk of disappearing because of lack of funds.'

He is interested in exploring the lives of "ordinary" westerners in the Far East. 'I'm now researching the wives of China

consuls. There must be plenty of readers whose forebears were in China and who have mementoes of that time. I'd love to hear from them and try to piece together their stories.' *Only connect* indeed. *Julie Anderson* (A longer version of this article and the conversation, above, with Andrew Duncan can be found on Julie's website, [jandmanderson.com](http://jandmanderson.com).)

## Clapham Book Festival

It is with great regret that the Trustees of Clapham Writers have decided to cancel the 2020 Clapham Book Festival originally planned for 3 October at Omnibus Theatre. Given our paramount concern for public safety, the uncertainty around the Covid-19 virus (even post-lockdown) offers insufficient guarantees for our audiences, authors and volunteers. We will concentrate instead on producing an extra special Book Festival in 2021 and look forward to seeing you there. *Julie Anderson*, Chair, Clapham Writers. *Julie's next novel*, *Plague* (Claret Press), will be published in September.

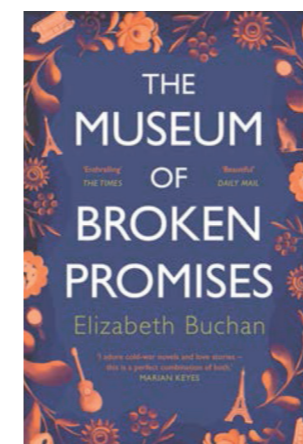
## The Museum of Broken Promises

By Elizabeth Buchan

(Corvus, £8.99/£14.99)

Like a good actor, a good novelist is never the same twice. For which reason Elizabeth (Lizy) Buchan never disappoints. There is much to admire in her writing: fluency, sincerity, observation, compassion. Most members will know this brilliant Clapham writer as the co-founder with Julie Anderson of the Clapham Book Festival. Her penultimate book, *The New Mrs Clifton*, was actually set in Clapham, a fractured post-war dystopia of blind prejudice and family secrets.

*The Museum of Broken Promises*, her latest novel, centres on another dark chapter in history, 1986 Prague, three years before the Velvet Revolution. Atmospheric and taut, it is the beautifully drawn, cleverly constructed journey of 20-year-old English au pair, Laure, who works for a dysfunctional and politically dubious family; taking her charges to a marionette theatre one afternoon, she meets and falls in love with a dissident rock musician, Tomas. Their affair is passionate, but always fraught



with danger as the Party 'goons' are never far away, watching and reporting. Fast-forward to present-day Paris where Laure has founded a museum filled with objects that represent promises broken. Her painful story is told through flashbacks and revelations (or not) to a young American interviewer desperate to place her first scoop in *Vanity Fair*. The twists and turns of the plot – and shifts in time and location – are as deftly managed as the intricate strings of a marionette.

The idea for the museum came during a trip to Prague where the author visited the Museum of Communism. A Bakelite telephone, the inspiration for the insistently ringing intruder in one chilling scene, was among its displays. But what of the characters themselves? 'Glamorous, reckless Tomas has his genesis in The Plastic People of the Universe, a dissident rock group in Czechoslovakia before the Velvet Revolution. Petr, Laure's employer, is the product of politics which have an "ism" attached. After the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, communism seemed a good alternative. Very often good people find themselves being led down thorny paths in times of upheaval and Petr "arrived" as a character after I had read several contemporary memoirs.'

'Setting up a museum,' Lizy continues, 'is Laure's way of dealing with her trauma after her experiences in a communist society. I had to make her young and impressionable before she matures into a warier, slightly damaged, woman and, thus, someone who will find running the museum healing.'

Lizy once told me that a chance remark could spark the idea for a novel. 'Yes, that is still the case – it could be a snippet on the radio or an anecdote. Rome is the setting for the novel I am writing now. That is because I stumbled across a book, *Dolce Vita Confidential*, which shows how Rome picked itself up after the war and became an epicentre for glamour – presenting an interesting, sometimes dark, background against which I can set a story of a murder mystery and political intrigues in which the paintings from a medieval book of hours will be crucial.'

Buchan's novels are meticulously researched. 'Research can be addictive,' she admits, 'but too much weighs down the characterisation and narrative. I say this, having weighed down my first novel with every detail about the French Revolution I could muster. Mistake. Subtle, sparingly applied detailing, on the other hand, can make a novel take wing.' Lizy's other top tip for novelistic cruising at high altitude is an early-morning power walk across the Common before the day's writing begins. 'I think I must know every blade of grass!' *Ruth Eastman*



**Supporting our local bookstore** During lockdown books are available to order from Clapham Books, 020 7627 2797, or email [shop@claphambooks.com](mailto:shop@claphambooks.com); please allow about four days for delivery. We have been told that the shop may reopen in a limited capacity in early June.



## Flaming Dene: A Victorian stunner, actress and nude model

By Eilat Negev and Yehuda Koren

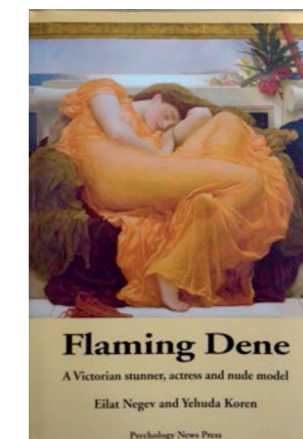
(Psychology Press, £16.99)

Many of you will know the story of how Lord Leighton's famous painting *Flaming June* was found in a house in Clapham during renovation in the 1960s, and the young Andrew Lloyd Webber lacked the £50 required to purchase it. They may also know that Leighton's model was Dorothy Dene, who once lived in The Chase, where a blue plaque commemorates her. This story is told briefly on our website ([claphamsociety.com/Articles/article15-flaming-june.html](http://claphamsociety.com/Articles/article15-flaming-june.html)) and in much greater detail in the transcript of a talk given to the Society by David Perkin in 2001 ([claphamsociety.com/Articles/article2.html](http://claphamsociety.com/Articles/article2.html)).

The authors of *Flaming Dene* give a much more comprehensive account of the family, the relationship of Dorothy Dene with the Pre-Raphaelite artist Frederic Leighton, and of artists' models in late-19th-century London, which included girls as young as eight years old modelling nude. The double standards regarding nudity at the time are quite extraordinary.

Abraham Pullan, Ada's father (her family name was Pullan before she changed her own to Dorothy Dene), was a moderately successful engineer until disaster struck when his wife, Sarah, was paralysed by a spinal injury on the birth of her tenth child; soon after, Abraham was declared bankrupt and abandoned his family. The two eldest children, Ada, aged 18, and her 20-year-old brother, Thomas, took control of the family: Thomas of the boys, ensuring that they received an education leading to professional qualifications, and Ada of her four sisters. Opportunities for young women were very limited at that time, but by great good fortune the girls were all beautiful so that, first, Ada and then her sisters turned to modelling for artists. It was at this time, early 1880, that they moved to Clapham where they lived for the next decade.

Ada initially sat for artist Louisa Starr in the Holland Park area, where many artists had studios, and she was soon spotted by Frederic Leighton. That sealed her fate. She became his favourite model and muse for the rest of his life. The relationship was ambivalent and a source of endless speculation. Ada was in love with Leighton and he was



obsessed with her but a confirmed bachelor – his lavish house and studio (open to the public now as Leighton House) was a true bachelor pad. He was known to have had relationships with both men and women but not, it would appear, with his devoted model. Ada changed her name to Dorothy Dene, probably at his suggestion, to further her ambition as an actress. The four sisters also changed their names and became successful models, only one of them leaving the family group to marry an artist.

Despite Leighton's support and encouragement Dorothy's acting career fluctuated and she always returned to model for him when asked. She can be identified in many of his paintings, but *Flaming June* is the which made her famous. That was the last time she modelled for Leighton (she was already 35 years old) and the last time she modelled at all. Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1895, the year before Leighton's death, the painting became hugely popular, was much reproduced and Dorothy Dene became a household name.

This deeply researched book is as valuable to the reader for its commentary on life in the late 19th century as on its chief subject, Dorothy Dene. *Alyson Wilson*

## ROADS AND TRANSPORT

In these unusual times it's probably easier to report what isn't happening in this sphere of activity, aside from noting the length of queues patiently forming along our pavements, the number of joggers pounding our pavements, and the fact that many cars remain unused for days or weeks on end. Certainly, the air is cleaner and birdsong seems more joyful. Encouragingly there is also an increase in activity in Clapham as enterprising local restaurateurs and cafés reinvent their business model to enable re-opening to customers. This notably includes Eco who have turned the former Santander into a greengrocer with a difference. Each day brings something new.

**Rodenhurst Road** Following strong local opposition from residents, Lambeth decided before lockdown to shelve their proposal to introduce a partial closure of Rodenhurst Road at the King's Avenue end to deter parents from clogging the area when dropping off and picking up pupils at Iqra School.

**No left onto Cavendish Road** Another road scheme, this time proposed by Transport for London (TfL), that generated heated opposition was the proposal to ban left turns onto Cavendish Road from Balham-bound traffic on Clapham Common South Side. This is linked to the introduction of a long-promised controlled pedestrian crossing at this junction. We understand that this decision has been put on hold, together with many other proposals subject to consultation, and staff working on these have in the main been furloughed. It is clear TfL's finances have been severely impacted by the Covid crisis as revenues from tube and bus operations have plummeted and enhanced safety measures have been put in place.

**Closure of Clapham South tube station** The Society objected, but to no avail, to the closure of this station during the crisis. We recognise that many key workers live in our area, and rely on the Northern Line, which provides a vital link to major hospitals along its axis both south and north of the river. *Mark Leffler*

## PLANNING

**Holy Trinity Clapham** Proposals are afoot to make significant alterations to our historic church, Holy Trinity, on Clapham Common. So far, we have commented on outline proposals prepared by HMDW Architects Ltd prior to their pre-application discussions with Lambeth. Alterations being considered are the removal of pews to create a central open area for a massed congregation, the enlargement and enclosure with glass of the west classical portico, and the demolition of the north and south Edwardian transepts to be rebuilt in the same style but bigger.

**Telecommunication tower and equipment on common land** We have lodged a strong objection to an application to install telecommunication equipment on land near Clapham Common tube station adjacent to the footpath linking The Pavement and South Side. This is common land – a small but important area that has benefited recently from landscape work undertaken by the local Business Improvement District.

**Larkhall Rise railway bridge** We are puzzled to have received this retrospective application for work carried out on the bridge last year. We reported then that Lambeth had told us that Network Rail had permitted development rights to do the work. We have objected strongly to this application and have urged that the solution pursued last year be reconsidered.

**Clapham South Tesco car park** This application for a residential development, which was reported in the July/August Newsletter last year, has been given approval in spite of the Society's objection and concerns.

**Public participation in planning during lockdown** In early May Lambeth conducted a Planning Application Committee online for the first time. We are looking to see how well procedures put into place operate and will be reporting difficulties experienced to London Forum who are monitoring the situation in all the London boroughs. *Martin Pratt*

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## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

The following people have joined the Society: Kate Bright, Roger and Susie Dillon, Paul Lavery and Petra Shepherd. We welcome them and anyone else who would like to join (details are on our website). Thank you to all who have renewed their subscriptions for 2020/21. If you have not yet done so, I would be grateful if you could make a prompt payment before the renewal deadline of 30 June. Please check that your bank has paid the right amount and amend your instructions to reflect the current subscription: Individual, £10; Household (up to three named members), £15; Business, £25. Postage of £10 should be added if you receive your newsletter by post. Contact me if you have any queries. In the event of a late cancellation of a meeting or walk, we would like to be able to contact you by email. Rest assured it will not be used for anything else (see our Privacy Policy on The Clapham Society website). If we do not have your current email address, please send it to me (contact details below). *Jennifer Everett*

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**Anthony Davison, Fundraising Director at Royal Trinity Hospice writes...** 'After closing our charity shops and cancelling our fundraising activities for the foreseeable future in March, we launched an urgent appeal for funds. We would like to thank every single member of the community who has supported our appeal to raise the £3 million shortfall we expect to see as a result of lockdown. Through your donations, some short-term government support and significant cost-cutting measures at Trinity, our immediate future is looking less precarious. It is becoming clearer, however, that we may be waiting some time before we can resume fundraising and reopen our shops. If you can help us secure the vital regular income we need to get back on our feet please visit [royaltrinityhospice.london/urgent-appeal](http://royaltrinityhospice.london/urgent-appeal).'

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

<b>Chairman</b>	<b>Annabel Allott</b> Email: <a href="mailto:annabelallott@outlook.com">annabelallott@outlook.com</a>	<b>Meetings and Events</b> Tel: 020 7720 7449	<b>Christine Armstrong</b> Email: <a href="mailto:christinearms52@hotmail.com">christinearms52@hotmail.com</a>
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Details of meetings, activities and a full list of our publications can be found on our website at [claphamsociety.com](http://claphamsociety.com)

