

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 430

October 2020

En plein aria

Opera sung in a south London churchyard early on a September Saturday evening; electric piano, violin and cello to accompany – it didn't sound too promising. How wrong one's preconceptions can be. Singers and all musicians have had a dire time of it over the past six months and so to be blessed with an event when a number of very talented people are able to come out of hibernation and show an appreciative audience what they can do as a Gala Showcase for St Paul's Opera was a release for them and, I sensed, for the audience as well.

We were treated to a range of items for which the backdrop of St Paul's lower churchyard provided an unexpectedly fine acoustic for the socially distanced, large, picnicking audience. The regulars will have recognised many of the faces who the driving force, Patricia Ninian (*below left*, singing the 'Flower Duet' from *Lakmé* with Danni O'Neill), had pulled back together for this show, and they did not disappoint. There were newcomers, too, who it is hoped will be seen again in the company's long-awaited production of *Albert Herring*, not least soprano Jenny Hunt (*bottom left*). It is invidious to pull a few names out of a cast so gifted, but I am going to anyway. Jenny Hunt, who sang from *Cavalleria rusticana* was an eye opener, and Tanya and Louis Hurst (*below right*) were stunning duettists, husband and wife in real life but able to give full force to the tensions between Floria Tosca and the ghastly Scarpia. Pianist Panaretos Kyriatzidis directed and his two other musicians, James Widden and Alison Holford (*bottom left*), were masterful. The programme was brilliantly introduced by The Revd Canon Jonathan Boardman, vicar of St Paul's, who clearly has an alternative vocation. I arrived sceptical and went home converted. Thank you, SPO. *Angelotti*



Matthew Carter

Welcome to the first colour edition of the Newsletter in its 55-year history! We hope it will add cheer in these strange times. Our last monthly meeting for 2020 will be held on Zoom. Meetings for 2021 are due to take place on the third Monday of the month (except August and December) at Omnibus Theatre. Members and guests can gather in the bar beforehand and the talk starts at 8 pm. Look out for more details in next month's issue.

Annual General Meeting

As mentioned last month, we decided in line with many charities to postpone our AGM, which had been due to take place on Monday 19 October, until the position with Covid-19 is clearer. Copies of the Annual Report & Accounts 2020 are contained within this newsletter. Committee Members will stay as elected at this time. If any member has a question, please send me an email (address on last page) and I will respond. Details of the November Clapham Society meeting appear below. *Annabel Allott, Chairman*

Monday 16 November, 8pm

The Fatal Illness of Emperor Frederick III of Prussia – a disaster for the world. Dr Ian Calder, whose talk about Shackleton drew a record (real) audience in 2018, returns virtually this year to tell the story of Emperor Frederick III, who possessed almost everything required to become one of the world's truly great rulers – except good health and a reasonably sane heir. The medical management of Frederick's illness by an English expert aggravated his son Wilhelm's paranoia about Britain. Frederick died of a smoking-related disease shortly after his coronation and 'Kaiser Bill' messed things up completely, allowing German military hawks to start World War I. The English doctor's treatment was probably correct, but his medical career, sadly, was wrecked. To register for this Zoom talk, please email Christine Armstrong at christinearms52@hotmail.com and she will send you login details a few days beforehand.

Curtain up at Omnibus

After six long months we're thrilled to announce that we will be reintroducing live performances at Omnibus Theatre this autumn. A taster menu of theatre, music and comedy will take to the stage until the end of the year, with some performances to be made available online for those not yet comfortable attending a live event.

Following last year's smash hit, *Fiji*, Conflicted Theatre will return this October with the premiere of dark comedy *We Were Having a Perfectly Nice Time*. In November powerhouse improv supHER group, *Hell Yeah!*, will hit the Omnibus stage. We shall also be welcoming back EFG London Jazz Festival with a dazzling line-up that includes BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist bass player Misha Mullov-Abbado and award-winning cellist Shirley Smart. Then December sees Elf Lyons with the last hurrah of her Edinburgh Comedy Award-nominated show, *Swan*. To find out more about what's on visit our website: omnibus-clapham.org. Eleanor Grice



Café society Each day in August 2020, award-winning social documentary photographer Jim Grover photographed someone or some group sitting on the same park bench on the Common, erected in memory of 'Honest Tom' (founder of the eponymous snack wagon on Windmill Drive), and asked them how Covid had affected their lives. The process was deliberately random; whoever sat down became Jim's subject for the day. The 'sitters' ranged from brickies to a company director, and their stories and experiences are similarly wide flung. *Covid Tales from Tom's Bench*, 30 September to 31 December, will be on display at Omnibus Theatre Café/Bar Thursdays to Sundays (Thursday, 9 am to 8 pm; Friday and Saturday, 9 am to midnight; Sunday, 10 am to 4.30 pm). Viewing will be subject to safe social distancing guidelines. The exhibition will also be available to view online at Jim's website, jimgroverphotography.com.

Jim's accompanying 'tale' for this picture reads...

Nadine (*far right*) has worked at Honest Tom's for almost 27 years; she works the morning shift Tuesdays to Fridays and comes in from Croydon. She fills the vase on Tom's bench with flowers each week to commemorate Tom, who died last year and who she worked with over all those years. Susanne comes every Wednesday, attracted by 'the lovely food, the absolutely lovely ladies' [who work] in Honest Tom's, and the opportunity to give her dog a sausage.

Has Covid impacted you in any material way?

Susanne: 'I have COPD (a lung disease) and had to stay locked in for two months. I didn't speak to anybody. I didn't see none of my kids, my grandkids. It was depressing, awful. I couldn't wait to get back out. Now I do anything. I spent the night with my grandkids last night. I babysat and cuddled up with them in bed. Someone died in my family of Covid two days after. She was disabled and had a lot of issues.'

Nadine: 'It stopped me working, with Tom's being shut. But I enjoyed being off, being indoors, getting things done, just me and Den (Nadine's husband). It was hard not being able to see my kids and grandkids but you've got FaceTime and all that technology now. Other than that, I quite enjoyed it. I am never off sick. I just have my holidays. And it was nice to have a long break. It's hard being on your feet for six hours each day at my age.'



Jim Grover (detail)

The art of flamenco

On Friday 9 October, Clapham Chamber Concerts is pleased to present the first of its concerts for the autumn, the dramatic Lourdes Fernández (right) Flamenco Company and *Raíces*, at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove. *Raíces* is a broad and bold interpretation of the art of flamenco. Owing to Covid-19, places are limited and tickets are to be purchased in advance. Visit claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk for ticket details, start times and social distancing provisions. Paul Askew, Chair, Clapham Chamber Concerts



Anne Heslop

The Autumn issue is out!

There's a clutch of splendid features in the latest issue of the *Wandsworth Historian*, including the tragic story of William Borradaile, the Vicar of Wandsworth 1822-38; housing for single professional women in Putney between the wars; and an insight into Edwardian drug stores in south-west London. Other items reveal the name of the magazine every Battersea anti-suffrage supporter wanted to read in 1910, and explore the marketing of locally produced top-quality tennis rackets in the 1930s. Copies are available at £3 plus £1.50 p&p from Wandsworth Historical Society, 119 Heythorp Street, London SW18 5BT, or email 020neil119@gmail.com. Cheques payable to 'Wandsworth Historical Society'; online payment accepted. Neil Robson

October walks

We hope to be able to have some ‘real’ walks during October to replace those lost during lockdown. Each will be limited to six people, and routes will be planned to enable walkers to conform to social distancing regulations. Walks are free but it is **essential** to book in advance with the walk leader, who will contact you should it be necessary to make any change. **All walks start at 2.30 pm.**

Wednesday 7 October, Clapham in World War II. Tom Jansz will show how Clapham, in particular the Common, was affected by and adapted to the war. From bomb damage, to shelters, barrage balloons, allotments and ‘prefab’ housing, we had it all here. Leaving from the Clock Tower at Clapham Common Underground Station. Book at tom.jansz@hotmail.co.uk.

Sunday 11 October, Cavendish Road to Narbonne Avenue: The Man who Built a Neighbourhood. Michael Tuffrey will lead this brand-new walk exploring how the streets around Abbeville Road (*Lynette Avenue, top right*) came to be built, revealing the identity of the elusive land agent – a linen draper from Tottenham and



sometime felon – who made it all happen. Leaving from Clapham South Underground Station. Book at mtuffrey@talk21.com.

Wednesday 21 October, Twixt the Commons. Timothy Walker will lead his popular walk on the development of housing between the Commons by speculative builders. Leaving from Clapham South Underground Station. Book at tehwalker@uwclub.net.

Sunday 25 October, Around Park Hill. Alyson Wilson’s walk will follow Crescent Lane towards Park Hill to trace the start of the building of Cubitt’s Clapham Park Estate, as far as Clarence Avenue and back along King’s Avenue. Leaving from Clapham Common Underground Station. Book at alysonwilson.sw4@gmail.com.

Lambeth Archives (detail)

Clapham Common – good works in progress

As we enjoy the last days of warm sunshine of 2020 we can report that the temporary toilets have been removed, with the public toilets and changing rooms reopened, although the latter with restricted use. Whilst the Common remains wonderfully well used, we haven’t seen any repeats of the large-scale semi-organised gatherings of earlier in the summer. The weather is likely to take care of that problem from here on in. We note, too, that Lambeth is looking for £72m of savings and anxiously await how those savings manifest themselves. We have lost significant Park Infrastructure Levy (PIL) money this year (a levy on events earmarked for projects on the Common). Discussions within Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee (CCMAC) will begin shortly on how we deal with that, not



least as winter litter pickers have been traditionally funded from this pot. We are delighted that, thanks mainly to the sterling efforts of Friends of Clapham Common members, we have a 50-plus-strong volunteer army of litter pickers, with an emphasis on areas often overlooked by Council staff. We are keen to expand this group so if anyone is interested in joining please register via the links on our website (claphamsociety.com/news/joint-litter-pick-on-clapham-common), Facebook or Twitter. Many thanks to their chair, Shirley Kermer (*below left, front*), and the 30 volunteers who helped in a socially distanced clean-up of the Common on World Clean-Up Day on 19 September. As the photos show, there was quite a trawl. If only there hadn’t been! Massive congratulations to Shirley and her tireless team.

The redevelopment of the bowling green remains uncertain and subject to possible changes to previously agreed plans. Regarding the new playground design, we have learnt that some of the trees in the area are diseased and thus new equipment cannot be placed underneath them. Therefore it has been agreed that the existing playground will be extended approximately 20 x 4 m into The Spinney with the area under the said trees fenced off.

The landscaping of Battersea Woods to promote more biodiversity will start this month, last a year and be subject to community engagement. Plans are afoot for more wildflower areas, tree planting and a bulb planting scheme.

A larger, more impactful project is the aeration of the wide expanse of Common used for big events. In the past few years this ground has suffered enormously. Despite the obvious disruption that fencing off such a large part of the Common until May will entail, this is essential work. Stage 1

(de-compacting the soil) is complete. Work will now move on to removing current vegetation, levelling out and re-seeding, and the installation of new drainage. Whilst Lambeth has agreed that no large-scale commercial events will be held on the Common during the winter months, the Society remains alert to any change in position on this. A second wave is likely to preclude winter events in any case.

The proposed improvements to footpaths were a casualty of Covid, with monies diverted to emergency transport use. We continue to pressure Lambeth to address the state of many paths on the Common. We would encourage members to take photos and post on social media and to councillors to keep up the pressure. *Andrew Summers*



Ruth Eastman

Impacts of the pandemic on our public realm

We are all too aware of the multiple and dramatic effects Covid-19 and the attempts to control it have had on our personal lives, the economy and society as a whole. People are increasingly asking themselves: what is going to be the new normal, and what will revert to how it used to be? In this article I take a brief look at some emergency measures that affect our streets and how we use them.

In recent months, as we've been emerging from lockdown, a raft of measures has been instigated that could have far-reaching implications for how the public realm is used. Of particular significance has been the decision to suspend some parking and loading bays in the vicinity of magnet stores that have had to introduce queuing systems to provide additional pavement space and, in some cases, extra space for cyclists. For years the Society has made the case for the removal of clutter from our pavements to provide a better experience for pedestrians along the High Street, with only moderate success.

In this first of two articles I will be considering a specific measure introduced using emergency powers during the summer, namely pavement licences. Next month, I intend to cover Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs).

Probably with an eye on our friends across the Channel, and particularly in Paris, where bars and restaurants were allowed to expand their operations liberally into the public realm for the whole summer, the government introduced emergency legislation in June to streamline the process for awarding licences. The Business and Planning Act 2020, enacted on 22 July, streamlined the whole process – and reduced the cost – for hospitality businesses wishing to apply for a pavement licence for serving food and drink and for off-sales of alcohol.

That same month, Wandsworth responded by closing Northcote Road (*right*) and the bottom of Bedford Hill to enable adjoining businesses to take advantage of the new freedoms. Lambeth closed Venn Street (*below*), and pavement licences were awarded to a range of businesses in the vicinity of Clapham High Street, such as those shown on The Pavement (*bottom right*). For some businesses the availability of special licences seems to have come rather late, or run into administrative holdups. This resulted in a loss of critical trade in the school holidays and the height of summer when many more people might have benefitted from the Eat Out to Help Out initiative and literally enjoyed eating out.

For many businesses the initiative has not been plain sailing. A number of applications under the new provisions have been refused for doubtless valid reasons – however applications are not widely advertised; the time allowed for consultation or objection is very tight (limited to seven days); and it is difficult for third parties to keep track of any decisions made or the reasons for refusal. The licensee

is required to display a copy of the licence, but this is not always visible. Regular inspections are being carried out to ensure the licence provisions and other Covid requirements are being adhered to, and Councils have enforcement powers to remove licences where breaches are evident. One hopes that these potentially draconian powers are being applied intelligently – it has been reported, for example, that there have been some difficulties in tracking progress of applications on the website, and retrieving licences issued.

The pavement licences are not a totally unmixed blessing in that the tables and chairs can add to clutter and pedestrian congestion but they clearly offer an important lifeline to a number of valued businesses. Many have taken the plunge in investing in not just smart outdoor dining furniture but also planters, and thus bring life to the High Street. Sadly,

pollution emitted from passing traffic, especially when queuing, the narrowness of many of our pavements, and the dearth of street trees don't offer an ideal environment. We shall have to see how these businesses fare when the weather deteriorates. These licences expire in one year. If this measure is successful in reviving the High Street, perhaps we can look forward to a simpler licencing system going forward. Any feedback on this initiative and on the general issue of pavement widening in shopping streets would be welcome. *Mark Leffler (Photographs and report, written days before the Prime Minister's announcement of the second wave)*



If you have any queries about **The Clapham Society** or have news of local events, please contact 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

