

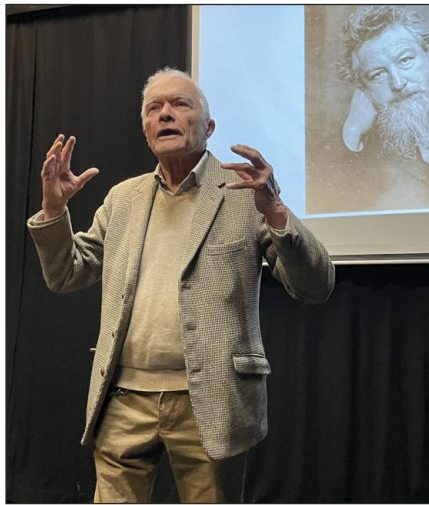
The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 447 June 2022

William Morris: Arts and Crafts and so much more



Dana Kubick

John Hawks provided fascinating insight into the talent and personality of William Morris – poet, artist, political activist, textile designer, writer, printer and architectural conservationist. At a packed Society meeting, John, who launched Merton Abbey Mills on the River Wandle

upstream from the site of Morris's works, provided a detailed glimpse into the work of this extraordinary man who was so closely associated with the British Arts and Crafts movement.

William Morris was born into a well-to-do family in Essex. While reading Classics at Oxford, he was heavily influenced by the medievalists and became close to artists such as Edward Burne-Jones and, later, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the architect Philip Webb. Much of his focus on medievalism came from the buildings in Oxford as well as the wider movement in Britain. This was a form of Romanticism that rejected the influence and effects of the Industrial Revolution and, instead, searched for a sense of community and locality which Morris believed was a better mode of living than that of his own time.

We were shown wonderful photographs of the Red House in Bexleyheath, Kent, where Morris lived before moving to London with his wife, Jane Burden. (Theirs was a complicated marriage, heavily influenced by other relationships.) The design of the Red House was a joint effort, with Morris responsible for the interior, while Webb designed the exterior. Being L-shaped, the house was unusual for its period and derived its name from the colour of the bricks and tiles used in its construction. There was a considerable Neo-Gothic influence in the architecture, which was fashionable at the time.

Morris founded a business with Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Webb, providing tapestries, wallpaper and other decorations, which became very popular for houses of the period. Morris's works, and those of his partners, were in demand and his style still permeates many interiors today.

Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire, which has recently been reopened to the public, was rented by *(Continued on page 2)*

Our meetings take place at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. The talk starts promptly at 8pm and our guest speaks 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. The Café Bar is open from 6pm for drinks and snacks – a great place to socialise with other members before (and after) the meeting. Omnibus is encouraging, but not enforcing, the wearing of masks; its up-to-date health and safety guidelines can be found at omnibus-clapham.org/health-and-safety.

Monday 20 June

Lambeth Palace Library: The New Building and its Collections.

The new building of Lambeth Palace Library was completed in July 2020 and opened to the public in November 2021, housing the historic books, manuscripts and archives of Lambeth Palace and the Church of England Record Centre in purpose-built conditions for the first time. In this illustrated talk **Giles Mandelbrote**, Librarian and Archivist of Lambeth Palace Library, will explain the reasons for the new building, how it was achieved and what it now contains. After working for nearly 15 years as a curator at the British Library, Giles took up his post at Lambeth Palace Library in 2010, the year of its 400th anniversary.

There are no Society meetings in July and August.

Save the date: Summer Party, 20 July

We look forward again to hosting our Summer Party with the Friends of Clapham Common. Numbers are limited, so book early to save your place. Tickets, £20, which must be bought in advance, include a welcome drink, canapés, live music and the chance to win exciting prizes in a beautiful local garden. After the success of last year's party, the proceeds will go to **Wild Clapham** again, which is already making a huge impact on Clapham Common (see page 4) and chimes so well with the Queen's Green Canopy initiative to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee. For tickets, visit bit.ly/SummerPartyJuly2022 (scanning the QR code, *above*, on your phone camera also takes you to the site), or post a cheque, made out to The Clapham Society and stating names of attendees, to: The Treasurer, The Clapham Society, c/o 15 Turret Grove, SW4 0ES. If you can help on the night, we would love to hear from you too. Please email events@claphamsociety.com.



Richard Roxburgh

(Continued from page 1) William Morris. Many of the barns at the manor that were associated with his life and work are also open to visitors.

In addition to his place in the design firmament, William Morris was known as a poet whose work was much influenced by visits to Iceland and an extensive knowledge of Icelandic sagas and poetry. He was also a socialist activist and founded the Socialist League.

The life of this remarkable man, 'one of the outstanding figures of the 19th century', proclaimed our speaker, was neatly unpacked for us, and this article does not do justice to the wonderful evening and excellent portrayal of one of Britain's greatest artists.

Alison Inglis-Jones

Local History walks and talks

Depending on when you receive your Newsletter, we have three walks coming up. They take place on **Tuesday 31 May**, The Development of a Victorian Suburb; **Saturday 4 June**, Mostly Medical; and **Wednesday 22 June**, Clapham Common: Women of South Side over 200 years. For further details and to book, visit claphamsociety.com/walks/. Don't forget that our pack of seven self-guided walks is available at Clapham Books for just £5.

- You can also read a new **Local History article** on our website. This is a fascinating report by Mike Tuffrey about his search for a lost map of Clapham. We hope to use this map as the basis for a series of local maps on our display boards at events this summer. Visit claphamsociety.com/articles/41-daniel-gould-surveyor/.
- **The Lambeth History Unlocked talks**, given on Zoom in the past few months (including Alyson Wilson's **Clapham in World War Two**), are now available on the Lambeth Local History Forum YouTube page at bit.ly/LLHYoutube.
- **Wandsworth Heritage Festival 2022** offers a wide variety of walks, talks and exhibitions between **Saturday 28 May to Sunday 12 June**. Talks range from **Oscar Wilde at Wandsworth Prison** to a **History of the Ram Brewery (1533-2020)**. Full details of the programme are available in Wandsworth libraries and at bit.ly/388sR2g.

Battersea Society events

Swimming with the Tide – the Story of Battersea's Lost Baths is an illustrated talk by local historian Sue Demont. By the 1900s Battersea boasted some of the finest municipal swimming baths in England, including the country's largest indoor pool at Nine Elms. Find out more about these and other, more dubious, aquatic options within Battersea on **Wednesday 1 June, 6-7pm** (refreshments from 5.30pm) at St Mary's Church Battersea, Battersea Church Road, SW11 3NA. The talk is the Battersea Society's contribution to the Wandsworth Heritage Festival (see above).

- On **Sunday 26 June, 11am to 12:30pm**, join **Roy Vickery**, President of the South London Botanical Institute and previously a botanist at the Natural History Museum for 30 years, for a **90-Minute World Tour: Exotic and Extraordinary Plants in Battersea Park**. Meet at Rosery Gate, Battersea Park, near the corner of Prince of Wales Drive and Chelsea Bridge Road, SW11 4NJ. Both events are free, but please register in advance via the Events page of batterseasociety.org.uk.
Sue Demont

Clapham Crooks – Martin Ekenberg, the Clapham Letter Bomber

Martin Ekenberg (1870-1910), alias Justus Felix or Ziskas, was an internationally known Swedish scientist who lived at Fairview, Clarence Avenue, for the last few years of his life. He is best known, however, as the creator of the letter bomb.

Despite a lack of formal education in childhood he obtained a doctorate from the University of Königsberg in Germany. His peers felt he lacked 'solid knowledge' and christened him Dr Humbug. Ekenberg was incredibly talented and creative. He developed a method of determining the fat content in milk; he pioneered purifying herring oil for use as a lubricant; and was the first to invent a method to clean and preserve fish onboard ship. He received several awards for his innovations but most were commercial failures and he lost many influential and wealthy backers.

In 1904, Ekenberg moved to London, settling in Clapham. He did not have a forgiving nature, nor did he forget those whom he thought had thwarted him. He devised the letter bomb and travelled to Sweden, to send them to four of his former colleagues, in 1904, 1905 and 1909. The last two, both in 1909, were accompanied by letters to newspapers and it was these that were his downfall. His handwriting was recognised and the police were informed. A house search found bomb-making equipment and a printing machine in his Clapham home.

Ekenberg died in Brixton Prison before his extradition to Sweden for trial. The cause was unknown but thought possibly to have been due to self-inflicted poisoning. He married twice. Both wives died in unexplained circumstances but their servants reported that their deaths occurred after Martin had prepared the tea himself.

For a more detailed account of Ekenberg's life in Clapham, please go to claphamsociety.com/articles/letter-bomb-inventor/. *Gillian Robinson*
Next month: Jabez Balfour, Member of Parliament and renowned fraudster

Arts Society Clapham Common

Can a single year adequately encapsulate an artistic environment in British art history? This lecture, **The Art of 1935**, explores that year's many aspects of decorative and fine art, demonstrating how these artistic forms reflected the period in a fitting and cohesive manner. The fully illustrated talk, set against the backdrop of the 1935 Silver Jubilee

Celebrations of King George V and Queen Mary, examines among other contemporaneous art forms the work of the celebrated British portrait photographer, Cecil Beaton; magazine, poster and Penguin paperback book design; architecture, 1935 Silver Jubilee memorabilia, commemorative stamps, locomotive design, stylish cruise liners and Art Deco interiors.

Now a freelance art consultant and lecturer, the speaker, **Pamela Campbell-Johnston**, has more than 20 years of experience lecturing to undergraduates, adult groups, and to Friends and Patrons of the Royal Academy of Art.

Wednesday 15 June, 11am, Clapham Picturehouse, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT. Tickets: £10 visitors and non-members; members free. To join the Arts Society for free entry to this and future events, email claphamcommon@theartsociety.org. You can also come and see us at the Clapham Picturehouse before the lecture; doors open at 10.30am.

All the fun of the fair

St Paul's Church is hosting its annual Eco Summer Fair on **Saturday 11 June**. This is the second year the fair has had an 'eco' designation and there will be even more pre-loved and upcycled items on offer. The churchyard will be full of fair staples such as the cake, bottle and Pimm's stalls, as well as old-fashioned games for all ages. This traditional community event with wonderful raffle prizes is a highlight in the Clapham summer calendar. **12 noon to 4pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ. Admission: £2 (adults), £1 (concessions), under-16s free.**



'Jeune Fille en Vert' by Tamara de Lempicka



Studio Voltaire exhibition and private view

Members who attended Laura Harford's talk in January will be excited to learn that Studio Voltaire is presenting the first institutional exhibition of **Maeve Gilmore**, which opened in May and runs until early August. Maeve Gilmore (1917-1983) was a painter, writer and illustrator, and much of her work was autobiographical. Beginning with assured early self-portraits and still-life studies, Gilmore developed more explorative narrative works influenced by the Modernist and avant-garde movements she studied during her travels through mainland Europe.

Often working beyond canvas, Gilmore made use of the styles and techniques of applied arts in large painted screens, furniture and illustrative murals which encompassed entire rooms of the family home. Later in her career, semi-abstract works took on spiritually inspired and gestural qualities but figurative painting remained a central concern, with family life a constant subject throughout her practice. In a series from the early 1950s Gilmore paints her children in athletic or gymnastic poses; elsewhere they are shown with the family cat or one of their father's many taxidermy birds. Although often depicting familiar subjects, Gilmore's works appear surreal and dreamlike.

Gilmore was born in Acre Lane, less than a mile from Studio Voltaire, and much of her archive has remained with family members in Clapham. She was married to the author **Mervyn Peake**. Nearly four decades after her death, this is a rare opportunity to experience her work. **Until 7 August, Wednesday to Sunday, 10am to 6pm. Studio Voltaire, 1A Nelson's Row, SW4 7JR. Free. A private view of the exhibition is available to 30 members at 2-3pm on Tuesday 5 July. If you are interested, please email events@claphamsociety.com.**

Omnibus Theatre

The summer season is well underway at Omnibus, and June kicks off with **Dreamers**, a vital exploration of the aftermath of the 2019 Hong Kong protests presented by Papergang Theatre. To dream is a 2019 Hong Kong euphemism for attending a protest and, by



keeping it at that, maybe you can talk about what happened without paying a price. This powerful show asks: what of the dreamers and their dreams now?

After the show, make your way to our Café Bar, where we have officially ushered in Aperol season. Come in for a spritz on Fridays, Saturday and Sundays, and soak in the rays in our garden.

Monday 6 June to Saturday 11 June. Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. For tickets and further details, visit omnibus-clapham.org/whats-on/. Antonia Georgieva

Jonathan Parkin and Ensemble SW4

Clapham Chamber Concerts is delighted to welcome some of London's leading young wind players to give a special summer gala concert. Presented and led by CCC artistic director and clarinettist, Jonathan Parkin, the concert will celebrate some of the finest works for wind ensemble, including **Dvořák's** exquisite **Serenade for Wind Instruments**, one of the most glorious chamber works ever written, and **Beethoven's Wind Octet in E flat**, an early work full of Mozartian charm. There will also be a rarely heard work that dazzles and entertains by Hungarian-born British composer, **Mátyás Seiber**, bringing us into the 20th century.



Don't miss this chance to be serenaded by winds in a stunning acoustic on a summer evening. **Friday 24 June, 7.30pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ. Tickets: £15, £12 (concessions), £10 (Friends of CCC), £5 (children under 12). Book in advance via Eventbrite at claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk.**

Herring (with a Clapham twist)

Tickets for the St Paul's Opera's production of Benjamin Britten's comedic opera **Albert Herring** (supported by the Cosman Keller Art & Music Trust) are now on sale for performances on **Thursday 7, Friday 8 and Saturday 9 July** at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ. Britten composed the opera in 1947 and set the story in the turn-of-the-last-century fictitious Suffolk town of Loxford. We noticed amusing parallels with 21st-century Clapham, so that is where this production has been placed.

As well as two stellar casts of singers who regularly perform on the London stage, you will see familiar Clapham faces and children from local schools. A true community event.

To buy tickets, you can scan the QR code (*below*), which will take you to the tickets sales page on our website. Choose your preferred date and why not reserve a picnic table, too, to enjoy the event with friends in the rustic grounds of St Paul's Church?

You can learn more about the opera (words and music) at **What's it all about, Albert?**, an **insight event** at St Paul's on **Friday 17 June, 7.30pm**. The evening will be hosted by Reverend Canon Jonathan Boardman, the vicar of St Paul's, with a presentation from musicologist and emeritus senior lecturer at King's College London (and Claphamite) **Christopher Wintle**. There will also be a panel discussion with SPO's Stage Director, Annemiek van Elst, and Musical Director, Panaretos Kyriatzidis, with music provided by our cast. Tickets are free; to book, subscribe to our website, stpaulsopera.org, if you haven't already.

If you would like to become involved in the event yourself, feel free to volunteer for the backstage and front-of-house teams. Email info@stpaulsopera.org if you are interested. **Tricia Ninian**



Membership news We are pleased to welcome **new members** Geoff Roy, Nikki and Krishna Mohan, and Natasha Vowles. Please note that **annual subscriptions** are due on 1 April each year with a three-month grace period in which to pay. Most members have paid for 2022-23 but there are still some missing payments. Please check that your standing order has been paid for the correct amount, or make a bank transfer (60-05-34, 22217045), or post a cheque without delay. My address and details of rates are on the membership application link at claphamsociety.com/join-the-society/. Please email membership@claphamsociety.com if you have any queries or, if you do not have internet access, telephone me on 020 7627 4770. **Jennifer Everett**

Stop press Word just in from Heather Kay (NL 446): seven swifts have been sighted over Old Town. She herself saw five 'high in the sky over Streatham Hill, calling evocatively – a delight'.

Newly seeded meadows – watch these spaces!

Three recently completed wildflower meadows between the playground and the Bandstand are the latest venture in a series of projects from Wild Clapham to help improve the biodiversity and ecology of Clapham Common. Although this area currently resembles a huge, empty BMX-bike park, with excavated soil surrounded by large hummocks of earth, if we get some rain that will quickly change.

The meadows have been extensively seeded with 22 species, including Cornflower, Field Scabious, White (and Red) Campion, Ragged Robin, Lady's Bedstraw, Tufted Vetch plus many more, as well as four fine grasses. Patches of new grass are visible, but our changing climate means we could not rely on the April showers to guarantee speedy germination.

The aim of this ongoing project between **Wild Clapham and the Big City Butterflies scheme of Butterfly Conservation** (butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/conservation-projects/england/big-city-butterflies) is to slow the rapid population drop in the UK's butterflies and moths. Three-quarters of these species are in serious decline and less than one per cent of the landscape on the Common provides a viable habitat to support their recovery.

Like many of the new biodiversity projects on Clapham Common, the design and execution were highly complex, but we hope the result will look deceptively simple once the plants have established themselves. Creating low-fertility, sustainable meadows was the key objective and we now have three separate wildflower areas with grass pathways in between to lend an immersive experience for the public. The surrounding 'bunds', or hummocks, were, in part, a solution to the excess soil generated by the meadows' construction (400 tonnes no less). They also serve to create a sheltered, warmer microclimate and a conceptual 'fence' to reduce footfall and allow the plants to grow.

It will take two to three years for the meadows to become properly established but, due to the lack of rainfall so far, this season's display may be disappointing. We have plans in place, however, to reseed and bulk up the planting with perennial plugs in the autumn. The meadows will be viable for 10 to 15 years and we should see an increase in about 21 species of butterflies, as well as, generally, more bees and other pollinators. It will be interesting, too, to compare future photographs. The meadows were not sited by the playground (left) deliberately, but what a happy coincidence that they are near an area where children will see and respect them as part of the Clapham Common landscape. Maybe, one day, the children and local schools will become involved themselves? **Gareth James**



This is a showcase project for the charity and campaigning group Butterfly Conservation, who will continue to monitor the site, offer feedback and help with improvements if needed. Wild Clapham is a joint initiative with the Friends of Clapham Common and The Clapham Society. The project is approved and supported by CCMAC and Lambeth Council. On 20 July, The Clapham Society and the Friends of Clapham Common will be holding a Summer Party to raise funds for this important cause to preserve the natural environment of Clapham. Details and ticket information for the party are on page 1.



Photographs Ruth Eastman

Clapham Common Bandstand concerts

Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee (CCMAC) is pleased to announce the programme of concerts on the Bandstand this summer. The programme kicks off with **Common People (right)** on **Saturday 4 June**, showcasing the talent of Clapham's diverse community, including students from the Academy of Contemporary Music in Bromells Road. **There will also be stalls** that day including Froglife, a national wildlife charity committed to the conservation of amphibians and reptiles; Dr Bike, who will be on hand to service bicycles; and The Clapham Society, who will be selling publications and do a history walk of the Common at 4pm. **The concerts all take place from 2 to 4pm.** They are free and are funded by a grant from Lambeth Council. Technical support is supplied by Omnibus Theatre.

Here is the line-up. Sink into a deck chair and enjoy the sounds. **Saturday 4 June**, Common People; **Saturday 11 June**, Brass United Social Club; **Sunday 12 June**, Los Domingos; **Saturday 18 June**, Junction Jazz; **Sunday 19 June**, The Crooks Saxes;



Saturday 25 June, Lambeth Wind Orchestra; **Sunday 26 June**, South London Concert Band; **Saturday 9 July**, Putney & Wimbledon Brass Band; **Sunday 10 July**, The Honeys; **Saturday 16 July**, Real Voices; **Sunday 17 July**, Crystal Palace Band; **Saturday 23 July**, Tequila Brass; **Sunday 24 July**, Graham Pike Big Band; **Sunday 31 July**, London City Brass. Band details at claphamcommon.info/summer-concerts-on-the-bandstand-3/. **Simon Millson, Chair, CCMAC**

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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