

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 452 December 2022/January 2023

This issue comes with an insert containing Minutes of the 2022 AGM and an urgent plea to submit comments as soon as possible to Lambeth Council about the proposed development at Lambeth College of seven six-to-13-storey buildings facing Clapham Common. Members may also have received an email from us; if not, and we don't have your email address, please send it to membership@claphamsociety.com. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Local heroine

Our speaker at the AGM in October was **Marie McCarthy**, Artistic Director of Omnibus Theatre, where our meetings and so many key Clapham events take place. She told us about weathering the storm of Covid and we were humbled. Here, in her own words, is what she said:

March 15, 2020 saw sell-out shows in our Theatre and our Studio Upstairs. Live music poured from our new Café Bar, packed with patrons and audiences. We were buzzing with activity. On March 16, 2020 we shut our doors. We cancelled shows that were programmed and hires that were booked in, sent our staff home and lost all prospect of income immediately.

Thanks to our local community, Omnibus Theatre opened in 2013 following a hard-fought seven-year campaign to save the Clapham Library building from property developers. The support we received then was echoed during the fight for survival. With doors locked and lights off, barely a day passed without encouraging words tweeted, emailed or even yelled across the railings. We knew we had to keep connected to the community, audiences

and artists that we had served since 2013 and we responded immediately.

Omnibus Theatre Online launched just two weeks after we shut our doors and attracted 12,000-plus views in four months. We focussed on platforming artists from our cancelled season, splitting donations 80/20 in the artists' favour. Highlights of our online programme included *The Guardian's* 'Hottest Front Room Seat' *WeRNotVirus*, responding to the surge in hate crime towards the East and Southeast Asian community during the pandemic.

We successfully adapted our prolific learning and participation programme to meet new local demands, delivering 16 projects and engaging 2,700-plus people. We launched LunchBox, following an email from a Lambeth headmaster worried about pupils yet to receive their free school meal vouchers. Across a month we delivered 400 free lunches to local young people.

The third year of Routes, our theatre holiday programme for under-11s eligible for pupil premium, was the biggest yet. Responding to the effects of lockdown on the wellbeing of young people, we ran a six-week summer programme engaging more than 100 children. We (*Continued on page 2*)



Ruth Eastman

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Our meetings take place at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. The talk starts at 8pm and our guest normally 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. There are no meetings in December, July or August. The list of speakers for our meetings in 2023 appears below and *over the page*.

Monday 16 January

Sharing the stages. Wife and husband **Alison Skilbeck** and **Tim Hardy**, local residents and actors, talk about their work, together and apart – from Tim's time in Peter Brook's *Marat/Sade* on Broadway, to playing Jesus twice and a salmon and cucumber sandwich once, to Alison's five-year adventure with Alan Ayckbourn and dying as Polly Perks in *The Archers*. For both, the stage is the thing. Both toured the US in Shakespeare, both teach at RADA and both perform one-person shows. Revivals of Tim's *Trials of Galileo* and Alison's *Mrs Roosevelt Flies to London* received five-stars at festivals only last summer.

Monday 20 February

Behind the Shop Facade: The Life of Maurice Dorfman. On Christmas Eve 2019, Maurice Dorfman flipped over the sign hanging in his haberdashery shop door to 'Closed' just as he had done on so many Christmas Eves before. This time he would never flip it back. Five days later he was admitted to hospital; two months later, at the age of 87, he died. Maurice's death represented the end of an era. For a little over 60 years, he and his family had served the local community from Jeannette Fashions, the longest-surviving traditional independent retailer on Clapham High Street. Local documentary photographer **Jim Grover** will reveal the inside track on Maurice Dorfman's extraordinary life story.

Monday 20 March

What makes a writer write or a painter paint? Local authors, novelist **Elizabeth Buchan** and crime writer **Julie Anderson**, discuss the sources of human creativity with particular emphasis on writing – the drama, the inspiration, the perspiration. It will all be covered.

(Continued from column 1, page 1) took participatory activity online for the first time with Story Circle, in partnership with Age UK and Kitchen Table, engaging 40 or more marginalised adults through storytelling workshops promoting creativity and connection.

This journey through early Covid times was one of learning and failing, listening and trying again. Many days we believed we might not make it. We lost seven valuable members of our small team and those remaining became ‘jacks of all trades’: marketing managers stage-managing online broadcasts; producers configuring socially-distant shows; me serving coffees badly!

The spirit of independent theatre pulses through our organisation, energising us constantly to reinvent. In a challenging time across the world and this sector, we have managed to sustain and grow our commitment to artists, audiences and our community, and we are still here thanks to you all.

Monday 17 April

Florence Nightingale’s London. Florence Nightingale was a legend in her own lifetime, but the Crimean War was just two years in the career of a woman who lived to the age of 90. When she returned from the Crimea in her mid-30s, she spent the rest of her long life living and working in London. **Julie Chandler** is the co-author of *Florence Nightingale’s London*. Using extracts from her book, she explores the places where Florence Nightingale lived and worked, where she bought her perfume and where she wrote her own book, *Notes on Nursing*. Julie, a London Blue Badge Tourist Guide, works in partnership with the Florence Nightingale Museum and, as part of Team Flo, regularly gives talks and leads walking tours.

Monday 15 May

Aren’t bees brilliant? This talk by **Dr Paul Vagg** will introduce you to the world of honey bees: what they do for us and how we can help them. The holder of a PhD in beekeeping, there is not much Dr Vagg doesn’t know about his subject. He will look at how we manage bees in a city environment and what it would mean if we were to lose them. We will also learn how a colony is set up and about the life cycle of our honey bees. Everyone can help our pollinators, including bees themselves.

Monday 26 June

Performance is ephemeral while buildings endure. **Iain Mackintosh** and his wife, Jan Carey, have lived in Clapham for 52 years. Both have earned their living in the theatre, Iain as a producer and subsequently as a designer of theatre spaces. He presented the Prospect Theatre Company in a hundred theatres across the world, including Edinburgh International Festivals and in the West End. Then, with Theatre Projects Consultants from 1973, he originated the design of auditoria and stages such as those of the Cottesloe (now Dorfman) at the National Theatre and Glyndebourne in the UK, and the Martha Cohen in Calgary. He has been guest lecturer at conferences in India, Brazil, Taiwan and Eastern Europe. The story is told in his memoir *Theatre Spaces 1920-2020: Finding the Fun in Functionalism* (Methuen, May 2023). The talk will be presented in conversation with The Clapham Society Chairman, **Mark Leffler**.

Monday 18 September

Jane Morris – the Pre-Raphaelite muse. Jane Morris’s highly individual beauty, a symbol of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, was made famous through the many portraits of her by her long-time lover, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In the shadow of her illustrious husband William Morris, she has been unfairly neglected by posterity. **John Hawks**, founder of Merton Abbey Mills, director of Wandle Heritage Limited and curator of the Merton Priory Chapter House Museum, looks at the life and contribution of someone who most certainly was ‘not just a pretty face’.

Monday 16 October

Annual General Meeting. Speaker to be announced.

Monday 20 November

How London’s transport shaped our capital. Transport for London’s Heritage Manager, **Edmund Bird**, will present a talk about the history of the city’s transport development from the Romans to the present day, and how modes of transport influenced the growth and development of London, from the first river crossings to travel by stage coach, omnibus, suburban and underground railway, tram, trolley bus and the motor car. His presentation will include a feature about the evolution of Clapham’s transport networks and how they were the catalyst for its expansion.

An illustrated Events Programme is available at claphamsociety.com/events.

Clapham Chamber Concerts: All English

On **Friday 2 December** artistic director and clarinettist **Jonathan Parkin** presents an all-English programme to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Vaughan Williams. Joining Jonathan are pianist **John Paul Ekins** and tenor **Alexander Hume**. You will also be able to enjoy music by Arthur Bliss, together with songs by our very own English composer in residence, David Wallace. **6pm and 8pm, St Paul’s Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ.** Tickets are £15 (£12 concessions); £10 (Friends of CCC); £5 (children under 12). Visit claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk for advance booking. **Jonathan Parkin**

Battersea Society: Christmas music and Living Streets

On **Thursday 8 December** we celebrate the festive season with songs from the **Battersea Power Station Community Choir** along with readings



and a Christmas quiz. Then on **Thursday 19 January** there will be a talk by **Wandsworth Living Streets**

– the local branch of Living Streets, a national charity which campaigns to create better streets and public spaces for people on foot, aiming to ensure we have safe, attractive and enjoyable streets across the borough. Tickets for both are £5, available at batterseasociety.org.uk/events or on the door. **St Mary’s Church, Battersea Church Road, SW11 3NA. Doors open at 6.30pm for a 7pm start.** **Sue Demont**

St Luke’s Music Society: From Budapest to Bach

Seeing out the old year and ushering in 2023, SLMS presents two completely contrasting concerts. On **10 December** the **Budapest Café Orchestra**, sponsored by Gregsons Solicitors, makes a welcome return to St Luke’s with a programme featuring their unique, anarchic brand of Eastern European folk music laced with humour and Christmas cheer. Remember to book early for a concert that is sure to sell out!

On **21 January** the **Samuel Staples Ensemble** presents a programme of Bach, sponsored by Killik & Co. Violinists **Samuel Staples (right)** and his sister, **Louisa Staples**, have strong local connections as their parents owned Northcote Music.



Samuel and Louisa are now international performers and will be joined by the oboist **Peter Facer** in a programme that includes the Double Violin Concerto and the Concerto for Violin and Oboe. **St Luke’s, Ramsden Road, SW12 8HQ.** Tickets from slms.org.uk; early booking advised.

'Tis the season to be jolly at Omnibus

The Christmas lights go on in Old Town on 2 December, while Christmas trees will be on sale on 3-4 and 10-11 December. Laugh with award-winning Shirley and Shirley's



Geriatric Mums (10-11 December) and welcome back the **Seven Steps Big Band** (18 December) with its mix of swing, Latin, pop and Christmas music. To keep spirits bright, sip seasonal specials in our Café Bar, open weekends from 9am until late. In January look out for a contemporary classical

premiere from brass and woodwind ensemble **Neoteric Ensemble** (21 January). Opera buffs will like *The Maestro* (29 January), a play about Donizetti in which some of his famous arias are sung live. **Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW, omnibus-clapham.org.**

Norman Rockwell's Christmas

The beloved American illustrator of the mid 20th century portrayed life as he wished it would be. So it was that Norman Rockwell was most at home portraying the ideal family Christmas, often with references to Dickens and the English yuletide tradition. Step back in time with **The Arts Society Clapham Common** on **Wednesday 14 December at 11am**, when a bounty of Rockwell's Christmas posters, magazine covers, cards, even Christmas gifts will keep you enthralled.

Charles Harris, our American-born lecturer, shares his own experiences of a US Christmas, from ice skating and sleigh rides to trimming the tree and wondering how Santa got down the chimney. Hear him at the **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 meet us before the lecture starts from 10.30am. **Susan Holder**



'The Discovery', 1956. Norman Rockwell's final cover (of 323) for *The Saturday Evening Post*.

St Paul's Opera

You might be lucky if you act quickly in securing your family's tickets for our Christmas production of **Hänsel & Gretel**. There are a few seats left for **Friday 9 December at 7.30pm** and **Saturday 10 December at 3pm**. Enchantment awaits at **St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ**. Tickets are £20 (adults) and £10 (children and students), from stpaulsopera.com. Look out for more news from St Paul's Opera in February. **Tricia Ninian**



Come & Sing Bach

Whitehall Choir returns to the **Church of the Holy Spirit, Narbonne Avenue, SW4 9JU** on **Saturday 21 January, 10am-5pm**, to sing choruses from Bach's *St John Passion* under the baton of its inspiring conductor, **Joanna Tomlinson** (above right). This is a chance to sing a stirring work, improve your vocal technique and maybe join the choir to perform the full piece at **St John's Smith Square on 30 March**. For full details and to book (£20, singers; £5, audience members at the 4pm sing-through), scroll down to Latest News at whitehallchoir.org. **Ruth Eastman**



Clapham Common Film Club

The new season gets under way on **22 January at 7.30pm**. This is the time to become a member by attending the screening that evening. The film is Pedro Almodóvar's *Broken Embraces*, starring Penelope Cruz. The club screens internationally successful films past and present at **Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW**. For details email ccfilmrb@gmail.com.



Derek Orme (1941-2022)

As many of our readers will know, Derek Orme died suddenly in September at the age of 81. Derek was a familiar figure in the area, having first moved here with his then wife, Claire, in the late 1970s, when they bought and converted a general store on Abbeville Road and launched Ormes Wine Bar and Restaurant. Although neither of them had had any previous experience of the hospitality business, Claire was an accomplished cook and Derek an outgoing and entertaining 'front of house' proprietor. He was also in possession of an extraordinary nose for wine, enabling him to build up a highly individual cellar of wines from all over the world, including those produced in such disparate countries as China and Lebanon. In 1989 the success of Ormes was publicly recognised when it won the prestigious Evening Standard Wine Bar of the Year award.

In the early days there was just one small Greek restaurant on Abbeville Road but the rapid rise of Ormes as one of the most popular places to eat and drink in South London soon led to the establishment of several others, which in turn attracted a variety of niche retail outlets and small businesses. Derek observed at the time that in a relatively short period the competition had increased by 2,000 per cent (his calculation!) in their catchment area. The recent description of Derek by one local resident as 'the man who created Abbeville Village' was no empty claim.

Having a gregarious and exuberant personality and an infectious sense of humour meant that Derek formed friendships easily, and many of the habitués of Ormes became lifelong friends. As well as enjoying an active social life until the end, he played golf badly, watched cricket and most other sports avidly, and took a keen interest in the garden of the house in Elms Crescent that he shared for the last 13 years of his life with his partner, Shirley Cosgrave. He was a devoted and much-loved father to his four daughters (one of whom died in infancy) and his four grandchildren.



What's new on Clapham Common?

We are pleased to report that good progress is being made on three important projects.

First, we have been consulted on plans for the proposed **water play area** to replace the long-neglected paddling pool by Holy Trinity Church. There are clear



Lambeth Council

issues regarding the possible impact on traffic in the Old Town area and the visual impact of the facility within an important Conservation Area. That said, we are generally supportive of the plans and expect them to be complementary to the area and a vast improvement. Initial local consultation was overwhelmingly positive and we will

have a chance to comment and input further at the more detailed planning stage. Everyone is working towards a May 2023 opening date.

Second, and at the time of writing, the **Clapham Common Kiosk** by the new playground near Windmill Drive was on track for practical completion in mid-November 2022. This will provide a welcome refreshment facility for young families.

Third, we are involved in early plans to convert the boarded up toilet block on the Wandsworth side of the Common into a **new café**. The building has been disused for at least 20 years and the café will add to refreshment options for walkers and others using the Common. Initial plans look promising, but more work needs to be done to maximise the site's potential and questions remain over litter management.

Other important work continues on **path restoration** and should start in the next few months; the locations of six new **CCTV cameras** are being finalised; and more **new benches** are on the way. **Windmill Drive**

has been closed to motor traffic since July 2020; full landscaping of the central area is set to start in the spring. Finally, the ever-active and priceless **Friends of Clapham Common** are working with Lambeth to create a larger **wetland next to Eagle Pond** (planned for autumn 2023), including a boardwalk and viewing deck. A large expansion of **wildflower seeding** has also taken place ready for next year, including an area on North Side close to Holy Trinity Church and on the 'grassy knoll' behind Clapham Common Tube station. (CCMAC continues to work with **Studio Voltaire** to see how this space could also be used for installations or art exhibits.) Lambeth is investigating how to facilitate the required new **fast-fill watering stations** for volunteer watering next year. *Andrew Summers*



Ruth Eastman

Unbuilt Clapham: The Clapham reservoir

Water shortages are nothing new. Two hundred years ago the three companies supplying the growing population of south London took their water straight from the polluted central section of the Thames. A series of Parliamentary inquiries in the 1820s and '30s failed to solve the problem, but one came close to turning much of Clapham Common into a giant reservoir. They commissioned the celebrated Scottish civil engineer Thomas Telford (1757-1834) to plan a six-mile aqueduct from the River Wandle at Beddington, going across Streatham to reach Clapham, where the companies would take their supply. Thankfully for us today, the vested interests rose up in complaint; mill owners on the Wandle wanted costly compensation and nothing could be agreed. Eventually a reservoir was built at Brixton Hill, still in use today, supplied from the Thames at the tidal flow. *Mike Tuffrey*
Next issue: The Panopticon – Prison or railway station?



British Library

Metropolis Water Supply. Extract from a plan by Thomas Telford, 17 February 1834.



Click 'buy' for charity

Clapham's Christmas Raffle, now in its 12th year, raises awareness and much-needed funds for our two well-loved local charities, Ace of Clubs and Royal Trinity Hospice. For just £2 a ticket, bought digitally, you could win a fabulous prize donated by Clapham businesses and organisations. Visit go.eventgroovefundraising.com/claphamraffle/. Winners will be announced online via Eventgroove on **12 December**.

Membership news and Christmas offer

We are delighted to welcome new member Georges Chalfoun, who, it was announced at the AGM, will be taking over from Daniel Dovar as our new legal counsel. Daniel and his family moved in the summer. Clapham is a vibrant place and The Clapham Society is here to celebrate that fact and help protect it. If you are looking for a novel Christmas gift idea, why not help Clapham by giving a neighbour or relative a subscription? A year's subscription costs just £10 (individual member), £15 (household of up to three), £25 (company). Membership starting on 25 December 2022 will last for 15 months until 31 March 2024 for the same price. Contact the Membership Secretary at membership@claphamsociety.com for details. To join yourself, visit claphamsociety.com/join-the-society. *Jennifer Everett*

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

