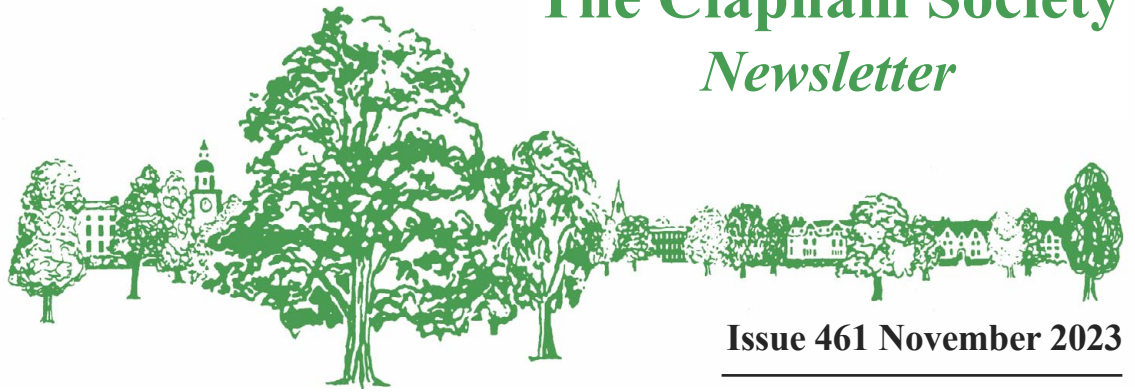


The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 461 November 2023

Jane Morris: the Pre-Raphaelite muse

In September we were treated to insight into one of the most recognisable but least well-known figures of the Pre-Raphaelite movement: Jane Morris, wife of William Morris, also muse and probably mistress of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Our speaker, **John Hawks**, founder of Merton Abbey Mills, director of Wandle Heritage Limited and Curator of the Merton Priory Chapter House Museum, has amassed an enormous amount of knowledge of the movement, and of William Morris in particular, as founder of Merton Abbey Mills where Morris's workshops were located nearby.

Jane was to become the face of Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Although Lizzie Siddal (Rossetti's wife and model for Millais's *Ophelia*), who died young in 1862, is better

known by name, the best-remembered face of the movement is Jane's. Her story is typical of the women who ended up as models for the Brotherhood. Born in poverty in Oxford, Jane Burden was spotted for her beauty and pursued, aged 17, in 1857 by Rossetti and Burne-Jones when they were painting the Oxford Union murals. She was tempted to come to London and be a model. Why not? It seemed a better prospect than life in domestic or college service.

In London, she met Morris who was captivated. Morris was a polymath – poet, designer, craftsman, political radical – and a prickly character. She was an ingenue. They were engaged in six months and married in two years, during which time

she had blended, somehow remarkably, into the bohemian milieu in which she had found herself. They were not an obvious couple and her affections for him were never as strong as his for her. She did, however, maybe as a defence mechanism, adopt a 'rather aloof charisma which held many spellbound throughout her life'. This chimed with her looks. Henry James, Hawks told us, described her as 'a tall lean woman... a maze of crisp black hair heaped in great wavy projections... thin pale face... a pair of strange, sad, deep, dark eyes... a mouth like Tennyson's Oriana.... In sum, perfect'.

She continued to model for Rossetti and, after Lizzie died, the relationship grew into something more, which lasted for many years, with Morris somehow tolerating it. Indeed, the Morrises and Rossetti shared Kelmscott Manor for some while. Always a delicate plant and addicted to chloral hydrate, Rossetti went into a decline, and the relationship cooled. Morris got on with life and his work, both creative and political, and died in 1896 – 'of being William Morris', as Jane put it when asked.

She was not just a face though. She was a popular and amusing hostess, with many friends throughout her life. A talented seamstress and embroiderer, Jane Morris was also a devoted mother, caring for their eldest daughter, Jenny, an epileptic, through to her middle seventies. She died in 1914.

John Hawks gave us a colourful and beautifully illustrated account of the world of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and this engaging character. The many members present clearly enjoyed it. I doubt I am alone in hoping he will return. **Roger Eastman**

John Hawks has generously offered to lead a tour of Merton Priory (details, right).



Dana Kubick

Our meetings take place at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. The talk starts 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 chance to socialise with other members before (and after) the meeting. In the December/January issue, look out for news of talks of meetings planned for 2024.

Monday 20 November

How London's transport shaped our capital.

Transport for London's Heritage Manager, **Edmund Bird**, will 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 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.

There is no meeting in December.

Private tour of Merton Priory Chapter House Museum

Following his popular talk to the Society **John Hawks** has offered to lead a tour of Merton Priory Chapter House Museum at **10.30am, Monday 13 November**. Please note that the building is unheated and toilets are available nearby in Sainsbury's (free parking for four hours; use SW19 1DD for SatNav). Tube travellers should disembark at Colliers Wood, and walk along Merton High Street towards the Sainsbury's/M&S store. Turn left over the river bridge into the store foyer, straight through and keep going towards the Chapter House, which is under the main road bridge on the south side of the car park. It is about a 10-minute walk; for further guidance you can ring John on 07949 593431. The tour lasts around 90 minutes and there are places nearby to eat or picnic in the museum. To sign up, email events@claphamsociety.com by **Thursday 9 November**.



A toast to Tara Wigley

Many of you may have seen a window display of bright blue and yellow books at Moen's recently. Entitled *How to Butter Toast – Rhymes in a Book that Help you to Cook*, it is written by Tara Wigley, with a foreword by Yotam Ottolenghi.

Tara grew up and lives in Clapham, where her parents are long-standing members of

the Society. Her career reads a bit like a fairytale. She read English at the University of Edinburgh, then worked for 10 years in publishing as an assistant to the literary agent Abner Stein and then as a junior editor at Simon & Schuster. In 2008 she gave birth to twins. Publishing lost its lustre and she considered teaching. Then came the Damascene moment.

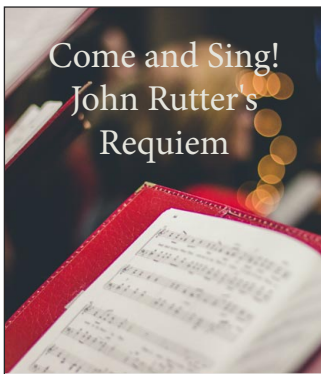
'My friend and I were cooking a dinner for my parents' wedding anniversary. We'd been cooking all day and Katherine said, "Can you imagine doing this every day?" I had never had this strong sense of: I completely can. I love this.' Bundling up her 18-month-old twins, she enrolled on an immersive three-month course at the prestigious Ballymaloe Cookery School in Ireland. Afterwards, she worked in top restaurant kitchens – Petersham Nurseries, The Modern Pantry, Moro – but as a mother of twin toddlers she found the shifts 'brutal'. 'Then I went for a job at the new Ottolenghi restaurant, Nopi, where the interviewer said to me, "I can't see what you're trying to do: work in kitchens with these two-year-old twins." I cycled home thinking, What have I done? For the next six weeks

I was just at home filling people's fridges and freezers and doing a bit of catering. One Thursday I got a call from someone who I thought was my husband pretending to be Yotam (Chris knew he was my Desert Island hero). The caller said, "I've heard you've got a background in words and writing, but you're also a keen home cook, but you're not a pro cook.... Can you start on Monday?"

Convinced it could still be a prank, Tara turned up at the appointed west London address and there was Yotam. 'He said, "Here are my car keys. (It was an electric car. I had never driven one before!) Go to Westfield and get this list of ingredients." I was pinching myself because this was my dream job: day time, food, Yotam, writing, being a home cook rather than pretending to be a pro chef. That was 12 to 13 years ago. It was just the two of us in his tiny galley kitchen. I'd do the mise-en-place, and we would taste and test. Every night I'd cycle home and type up my notes and the recipe, and it grew from there with the writing side taking over.

'Yotam commands huge loyalty from those who work with him. He's a thoughtful, generous person. He really cares: about food, about people. When I joined, he had done *Ottolenghi*, *Plenty* and *Jerusalem*, but we also were writing *The Guardian* columns. *Plenty More* was a body of those and it was also the first book we did together. Then came *Simple*, which was the big one. It became *Ottolenghi Simple* when we discovered a book called *Simple* was coming out from Diana Henry. I love cook books because they're all so different and I love that about Ottolenghi books, that they all say such different things.'

How to Butter Toast, inspired during lockdown while Tara was making pancakes with her three children, is 'a rallying cry to remember that it should all be fun in the kitchen. It looks at all the different ways [in rhyme] the same thing can be prepared, to show that it's never right or wrong: it's either or. If you think it tastes delicious, that's how it should be.' Like its author, the book is upbeat and imaginative. It is available anywhere that sells books, not just Moen the butcher's. Her other go-to local food shops are Moxon's for fish and All Greens in Abbeville Road for fruit and vegetables and lots more. **Interview and photograph by Ruth Eastman**



Come and Sing

A reminder from last month that singers of all voice parts and abilities are welcome to join this Come and Sing event. **Andrei Lebed**, conductor of the Choir of the Church of the Holy Spirit, Narbonne Avenue, SW4 9JU, will lead the afternoon workshop on John Rutter's stirring Requiem on **Remembrance Sunday, 12 November, 2-6pm (break at**

6pm), £10 to include music hire, and the **sing-through at 7pm (free)** with accompaniment on organ, oboe (Claphamite **Helena Mackie**, Principal Oboe of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic) and cello (**Bettina Lawrence-Skeen**, who has played under the composer's baton). The sing-through performance finishes at 8pm. To sign up, email music.admin@holyspirit-clapham.org.uk or visit holyspiritclapham.churchsuite.com/events/b9zr9zso. Dress code for singers: dark/black. Hope to see you there. **Emma Grainger**

New members

A warm welcome this month goes to: James and Sarah Dinwiddie, Gareth Jones and Mary Pittman-Jones, and Gregory and Amita Kronsten. If you or someone you know would like to become a member of The Clapham Society (always an original present – not just for Christmas), email membership@claphamsociety.com, visit claphamsociety.com/join-the-society or come to any of our events when we can tell you more. **Jennifer Everett**

The Arts Society Clapham Common

A child prodigy, the animal artist Sir Edwin Henry Landseer (1802-1873) was celebrated and loved in his heyday for his dogs and his Highland stags; later, for his lions in Trafalgar Square. He finished his days stressed, drunk and mad,

comparing himself to one of his own hunted stags. In **Landseer: 'The Shakespeare of Dogs'** the actor, writer and speaker **Karin Fernald** tells his intriguing story. **Wednesday 15 November, 11am, Clapham Picturehouse, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT.** Visitor (non-member) tickets, £10, or contact us to join the Arts Society for free entry to this



The Monarch of the Glen, 1851: National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh

and future events. For information about a visitor ticket or membership, email claphamcommon@theartsociety.org or come and see us at the Picturehouse before the lecture (doors open at 10.30am). **Susan Holder**

Royal Trinity Hospice

• **The Wandsworth Friends of Royal Trinity Hospice Christmas Fair** takes place this year on **Tuesday 14 and Wednesday 15 November** at St Luke's Church, Ramsden Road, SW12 8RQ. It will be your one-stop-shop for jewellery, gadgets and decorations, fashion items, beauty products, books, food and more. There will also be an auction and a prize draw. All in support of the Hospice. Since 2010, this popular event has raised over £320,000 for Trinity. We are grateful to The Wandsworth Friends of Royal Trinity Hospice for continuing this well-loved tradition, to the stallholders and everyone in the community who make the fair such a great event, and to Knight Frank for kindly supporting it for another year. Find more details and tickets at www.royaltrinityhospice.london. *Anna Reid*



• **Royal Trinity Hospice Christmas cards** are on sale in our charity shops across central and southwest London, as well as in the Hospice reception on Clapham Common North Side.



Featuring 14 new designs, there is something to suit all tastes. At £4.50 per pack of 10, profits will support Trinity's free specialist palliative and end-of-life care provided to those throughout Clapham and beyond. With great green credentials, the cards are glitter and foil free, come in plastic free packaging, and are fully recyclable. Trinity shops will also be offering new and preloved high quality gifts, homeware, clothing and accessories in the lead-up to Christmas. *AR*

Save the dates

• **Friday 8 December, 7.30pm; Saturday 9 December, 3.30pm**
Little Red and the Big Bad... Join Little Red Riding Hood as she journeys into the deep dark woods in this festive reimagining from **St Paul's Opera** of César Cui's enchanting opera of the same name. This is a must for all ages and a chance to discover a little-known work, just made for the Christmas season. Tickets are £20 (£22 at the door) for adults and £10 (£11 at the door) for children. Details and tickets at stpaulsopera.org. *Tricia Ninian*

• **Saturday 9 December, 10.30am to 2pm**
Santa will be dropping into Christmas brunch at **Devas Youth Club**, 2a Stormont Road, SW11 5EN, with two **live reindeer**. The deer will be in the club's outside enclosure, so alert your children and grandchildren to this fun occasion. Tickets will be on sale shortly and details to follow from devasclub.org. Look forward to seeing you there. *Mike Cripps*

• **Sunday 10 December, 3pm**
Calling all singers and musicians! The Friends of Clapham Common are organising **Community Christmas carols** on

Clapham Chamber Concerts

Renowned for outstanding concerts in an informal environment, Clapham Chamber Concerts is delighted to welcome back **Amanda Lake**, **Sophie Rivlin** (right) and **Jessie Maryon Davies** to perform works for violin, cello and piano. Featuring the **Brahms Piano Trio** in B major and **Debussy's** Sonata for Violin and Piano, the programme will also include **Sally Beamish's** *Stone, Salt and Sky* and **Nadia Boulanger's** *Three Pieces for Cello and Piano*. **Friday 17 November, 7pm, St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX**. Please book tickets in advance via Eventbrite at claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk. *Amanda Lake*



Happy Anniversary

A local family-run pizzeria and pasta restaurant on the High Street that has become quite an institution with Claphamites old and young has been celebrating its 30th anniversary of late. Eco, founded by Sami Wasif in 1993, is undergoing a series of major changes that will result eventually in a major transformation of a substantial stretch of this part of the High Street opposite the main Sainsbury's store. Passers-by cannot miss the massive crane recently erected behind the mainly Edwardian façade, where Eco Group is creating new apartments above street level.

To enable the group to undertake the next phase of its ambitious building project I hear the restaurant will need to relocate. I understand Sami has identified a site nearby which should provide a suitable and attractive venue for his loyal customers. More will be revealed in due course. *Story and photograph by Mark Leffler*



the Bandstand in aid of Royal Trinity Hospice. They raised over £2,000 last year for this local charity so close to many people's hearts and hope to surpass that figure with your support. There will be carol sheets for those who want to sing along, mulled wine and mince pies. Make a note to grab a festive hat and join in. If you would like to sing in the choir or play a musical instrument, email friends@claphamcommon.net to register your interest. *Shirley Kermer*



Clapham Mary, a foundling child
 about 9 months old, left in the courtyard
 of Robt. Thornton Esq. July
 13

Unsung hero: Who was 'Mary Clapham'?

One summer day in 1796, an unknown mother trudged the roads from London to then rural Clapham and abandoned her recently born baby girl on the doorstep of one of the grand mansions that lined the south side of the Common. She slipped away unseen.

We only know of this unfortunate infant thanks to an entry in the parish baptismal register (*above*), noting a foundling child, about nine months old, left in the courtyard of Robert Thornton, Esq. Although their identities are unknown, we can only imagine the desperation of a mother unable to support her child and hoping the miscreant father might take some responsibility.

He did not, so the parish officials claimed her soul for God. On Wednesday 13 July they christened her 'Mary Clapham' and then either placed her out for care or sent her to the parish poor house, situated where Clapham North tube station is located.

Meanwhile Robert, scion of the fêted Thornton family, lived the high life. A decade before, he had married Maria, daughter of another prominent south side family: Hannah and Charles Eyre, the King's Printer. He erected a grand orangery (*above right*) in the grounds of his ornamental gardens (still surviving today within the Notre Dame Estate), and there entertained Queen Charlotte and the princesses Augusta and Elizabeth. Later, spending beyond his means and with his stock market speculations failed, he fled to France and then to America, where he died alone in 1826. Maria, his abandoned and childless wife, remained in Clapham, living on north side until her death, aged 77, in 1843.

And what of Mary Clapham? She lived to see the turn of the new century, but only just. An entry in the parish burial register for Sunday 17 August 1800 records her death, aged five, cause



unstated. Tellingly, the officials continued to identify her as the child left in the yard of Robert Thornton, Esq.

Just three weeks before that, Samuel Thornton, Robert's brother, had entertained William Pitt, the Prime Minister, and the men of his cabinet for a grand dinner in the orangery on south side, specially decorated for the occasion. And so life continued, leaving Mary Clapham as a sad footnote in our village history, but standing as an unsung hero for all the wronged women down the years.

Story and photograph by Mike Tuffrey

Next month: Clapham's forgotten surgeon, Margaret Loudon

Events on the Common

On 5 October some members will have received an email from Defra. Those who had objected to Lambeth's application under Commons legislation to allow Festival Republic to enclose c. 79,000 sq m of Clapham Common in August 2024 should have received the Inspector's 20-page report setting out his detailed findings and conclusions resulting from the Public Inquiry held over three weeks in June, and his subsequent site visit on 2 August.

In short, the Inspector has agreed that the steel enclosure and erection of staging and other structures can proceed, subject to the normal planning and licensing procedures to be carried out by the local authority in due course, with the proviso that the area proposed for enclosure is reduced by c. 3,000 sq m to no more than 75,976 sq m (18.77 acres). This would ensure the event would not exceed 10% of the open space (as opposed to common land) as allowed for in the legislation. In arriving at this calculation he has included Holy Trinity churchyard, although it is not part of the Common.

The Inspector accepted that the events would result in a loss of amenity but considered it would be of short duration and would not result in lasting damage. To read the report, search application number COM/3312935 on the Planning Inspectorate casework portal at acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk. *Mark Leffler*

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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