

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 463 February 2024

Happy New Year. It began with a bang when ITV's *Mr Bates vs the Post Office* burst on to our screens, knocking viewers – and the highest levels of government itself – for six. Never has a television programme had such impact and the resolution is still not clear. We have our own issues with the Post Office – not, happily, on the same scale – but the fear that our Crown branch is marked for closure is real and we continue to fight the good fight. Read on...

Clapham Common Post Office campaign

The threatened closure of the Crown post office in Clapham High Street has elicited strong reactions from residents in Clapham and nearby. The Post Office intends to close its Clapham Common branch early this year, after a six-week consultation that ended just after Christmas. The main concern among opponents is the distances that will have to be travelled if our post office closes. Other options are in Battersea, Balham or Brixton. For the elderly, parents and carers of young children, or those who have a disability, there are potential problems of accessibility – to say nothing of increased pressure on already busy branches in the area. All, apart from Battersea, are sub-post offices based in retail spaces.

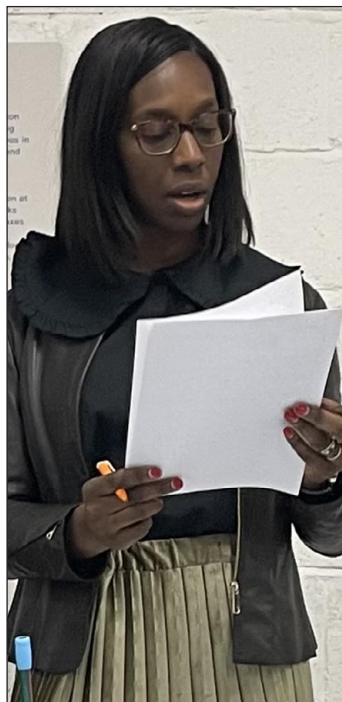
The virtual disappearance of banks on the High Street, following the closures of Barclays and National Westminster (TSB and Metro remain), has meant that the Clapham Common Post Office is more key than ever for those needing to deposit or withdraw cash, as well as to make parcel returns and access the services only offered by a Crown branch, such as benefit withdrawals and passport application 'checking and sending'.

Post offices in England saw an all-time record for personal cash withdrawals on a single day (Friday 22 December 2023) with £62.4 million taken out over the counter. This beats the previous Christmas by over £10 million. When it comes to withdrawing and depositing cash, we need postmasters all year round, ensuring that people can access their cash for free and that businesses have somewhere safe to deposit their takings. You only have to walk in to the Crown post office in Clapham to know that demand there remains high. Very high. On an average day, there are significant queues for the tills and an average wait is around 15 minutes and sometimes longer.

A pre-Christmas public meeting at Studio Voltaire, organised by **Cllr David Robson** (Clapham Town), was packed with anxious residents and addressed by Communication Workers Union representative **Andy Furey**; **Florence Eshalomi MP (right)**, who read out some of the moving letters of protest she had received and included when she raised a question in Parliament on 30 November; and **Cllr Tim Windle** (Clapham Town) among other Lambeth councillors. The Post Office and developers of the site had declined an invitation to attend.

Cllr Robson said, 'The public meeting at Studio Voltaire was affirming for the campaign and all involved. The turnout was fantastic and, so close to Christmas, is a testament to the strong feeling shared by all that our post office must be saved.'

Speakers urged those present to sign the petition, currently more than 5,000 signatures (paper and digital), to be handed in at Downing Street on January 29. A stall (*Continued on page 2*)



Ruth Eastman

Our meetings take place at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. The talk starts promptly at 8pm and our guest normally speaks for about 45 minutes, followed by 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 opportunity to socialise with other members before (and after) the meeting. See the full list of talks for 2024 at claphamsociety.com/events.

Monday 19 February

We need to talk about climate. Robin Cooke-Hurle moved to Clapham for two years in 1979 but then never moved on. Whilst neither an activist nor a campaigner, he has become increasingly interested in climate issues over the past 25 years. In this talk, with flooding, wildfires and heatwaves seeming to confirm that climate change is happening, he will outline the mechanisms which cause it and discuss how our modern lifestyles contribute and the potential impacts on us and the planet if we do not accept that we must change. There will be an opportunity for members of the audience to make their own suggestions and, of course, to ask questions.

Gift Aid Declaration replies still needed

Many thanks to those members who completed and returned the Gift Aid Declaration included with the last newsletter. For anyone who has yet to do so, it is not too late to complete that copy, or to download and scan or print a new one at claphamsociety.com/GiftAidDeclaration-update.pdf and send it to the Treasurer at the address on the form. If you have any queries please email the Treasurer (treasurer@claphamsociety.com) or the Membership Secretary (membership@claphamsociety.com).

Jennifer Everett

(Continued from page 1) staffed by councillors and volunteers at Venn Street Market resulted in large numbers of people signing and on Saturday morning, 13 January, there was a great turnout of supporters including the Clapham WI outside the post office, while customers continued to stream inside in their numbers.

Initial press interest included interviews on the ITV London Evening News on 5 January with Florence Eshalomi MP and **Alyson Wilson (below)**, local historian of The Clapham Society and a long-time customer of the branch. Councillors and the Society



are working hard to ensure this broadcast results in even wider coverage on both mainstream and social media. More action is planned.

Support from local residents has been offered to CWU, the local MPs and councillors. Add your name to the online petition if you oppose the closure.

It is not too late! Visit you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/stop-the-closure-of-clapham-common-crown-post-office.

Report and photograph (above) Alison Inglis-Jones

Utterly transporting

Happy the man who can turn his passion into a career.

Edmund Bird's enthusiasm for his subject remains undimmed since he last spoke to the Society in 2020 with an exposition on the London Underground network and its architectural gems. As Heritage Manager of Transport for London for more than 17 years, few know their subject better.

In November's talk, to a packed Omnibus audience, Edmund cast his net much wider, spanning 2,000 years and examining how transport in all its forms shaped the development of the capital over the centuries, fuelling its expansion into the global centre of power it was to become. For the first 17 centuries of London's history, the dominating influences were the river, its one and only bridge (until even that fell into disrepair), and the horse. It wasn't until the 12th century, when London became the capital city of England, that London Bridge was rebuilt, but the river remained central to the economy of medieval London.

The Georgian period was when things really started to happen: a new bridge (Westminster) in 1750, new and improved roads, the first horse-drawn omnibus in 1829, and the first railway in 1836. Edmund, who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the development of transport in London – and a picture archive to match – took us on a whirlwind tour through the 19th and 20th centuries and a city that was by now the largest in the world from the 1820s to 1925, when it was overtaken by New York. Mass transit, principally the railways, fuelled rapid arterial growth and the development

Urgent: Lambeth College redevelopment

London Realty have put in further applications for redeveloping **45 Clapham Common South Side** (Lambeth College). The deadline for final comments is **Monday 29 January**, so if you get your Newsletter early enough there is still time to act – even if you have commented already. The quickest link to the application (Lambeth Council Planning Application, ref 22/03713/FUL) is bit.ly/42u2LNA; or email planning@lambeth.gov.uk.

A recent mailshot from London Realty to residents in the area setting out to justify the build includes 'computer generated images of how the proposals could look'. Given that some of the new buildings could be up to 13 storeys high, it can only be said that the generated image (*right*) of the two facing the Common look nowhere near that. **Is this the true picture?**



Events on the Common

Festival Republic will not be coming to Clapham Common in 2024. This is mainly due to the campaigning and legal action taken by the Friends of Clapham Common. While the final decision went against the Friends, the Festival decided not to return this year. **AI-J**

of the suburbs while absorbing settlements such as the village of Clapham, which he described as 'set in fields and parkland' and dotted with the 'residences of the wealthy with fields and farms in between'.

The 19th century saw London boom; countless new railways, horse-drawn trams, monumental termini, grand schemes such as one for elevated railways on cast-iron verandahs which were never realised, and Tower Bridge which certainly was. Edmund took us across the 20 road bridges over the Thames which currently exist: some, like London Bridge, with a colourful history, but many which were products of the Victorian era. Nor did he neglect the other Thames crossings: numerous tunnels (four from the late Victorian and Edwardian eras), ferries, and links with the canal system.

The 20th century saw the rapid expansion of the transport infrastructure. The arrival of the Underground system; mass transport on the roads including the advent and, later, demise of electric trams and trolley buses; the construction of major arterial roads in the interwar years; the electrification of the railways; cycle lanes; the Elizabeth Line – each of these and many more aspect of London's transport merit a lecture of their own. Let us hope that Edmund can be persuaded to return again and speak about them. **Roddy Gye**
Next month: Edmund Bird's tour of Aldwych station, 18 March.



Dana Kubick



Carols for the Hospice – result!

The rain stopped, the clouds parted, and the afternoon sun's rays peeped through as the choir broke into the first verse of 'Once in Royal David's City' on Sunday 10 December. Building on the inaugural event of last year, **Carols on the Bandstand** attracted an even larger audience (and choir) in 2023, with song books provided for those who wanted to sing along, in addition to bells for the children to ring and jingle. This is indeed a community event.

Huge thanks to all our singers, most of whom are from local choirs; to our wonderful musicians; conductor Martin Everett; and to everyone who helped to make this festive event such a success, enjoyed by all. Most importantly, it raised over £3,250 for Royal Trinity Hospice.

We also wish to thank Aspire Estate Agents for their generous sponsorship of the event and Pear Tree Cafe for donating 10 per cent of sales of mince pies and mulled wine.

This year, we aim to be even more ambitious to appeal to a broader audience. Our hope is that Carols on the Bandstand might become an annual Christmas tradition on the Common.

Shirley Kermer

Arts Society Clapham Common

If your Newsletter arrives early enough try to catch **James Campbell**, whose December talk unfortunately had to be cancelled, in **Celebrating the Centenary of Winnie the Pooh**. This year marks a century since Winnie-the-Pooh was introduced to children of all ages. In the four iconic books created by A A Milne and E H Shepard, he was first seen in *When We Were Very Young* (1924), while Winnie-the-Pooh and the characters of the Hundred Acre Wood had their own adventures in *Winnie-The-Pooh* (1926); *Now We Are Six* (1927) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928) gave us more wonderful poems and stories. This lecture on **Wednesday 31 January** looks at the genius of Milne and his ground-breaking collaboration with Shepard.

The speaker on **Wednesday 21 February** is author, magician and historian **Ian Keable**. The 1700s was a period when the people of England seemed to be especially gullible. In **The Century of Deception: The Birth of the Hoax in the 18th Century**, Ian

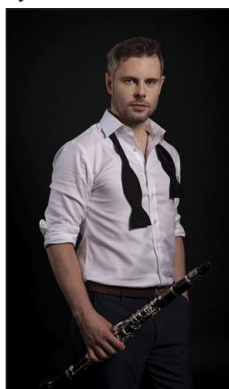


demonstrates how 18th-century hoaxes are notable not only for being imaginative but also because of the differing motives of the tricksters. Mary Toft, satirised (*above*) by William Hogarth, tricked doctors into believing she had given birth to rabbits!

Both lectures are at the **Clapham Picturehouse, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT, 11am**. Visitor (non-member) tickets, £10, or contact us to join the Arts Society for free entry to this and future events. For information about a visitor ticket or membership, email claphamcommon@theartsociety.org or talk to us at The Clapham Picturehouse before the lecture starts (doors open at 10.30am). **Susan Holder**

Clapham Chamber Concerts: Clarinet and piano

An Englishman in Paris is a recital of French music by clarinetist **Jonathan Parkin**, now a member of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and a familiar face on the Clapham music scene, and his prize-winning duo partner, pianist **Sebastian Stanley**. They will play favourites from the clarinet repertoire, including sonatas by Poulenc and Saint-Saëns alongside music by Debussy, Ravel and Francaix. Don't miss this opportunity to hear exquisite music performed by exceptional artists. **Friday 2 February, 7pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX**. For tickets and more details, visit claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk.



From Clapham to Cakehole: Jo Brand in conversation with John O'Farrell

One of the UK's best comics, Jo Brand will be in conversation with award-winning author and comedy writer John O'Farrell, followed by a Q&A session when audiences can ask Jo their burning questions. Within the intimate setting of Omnibus Theatre, Jo will share stories from a career in which she has been entertaining audiences across the globe for over 30 years. All proceeds (Jo and John have waived their fees) are in aid of Omnibus Theatre's Learning and Participation programme, which includes Routes and Kitchen Table. **Sunday 18 February, 7pm. Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW**. Tickets (£75, £50, £30) from omnibus-clapham.org.



Viktoria Chikalo

Also at Omnibus

The Olivier Award finalist play, *Ten Nights*, comes to Omnibus Theatre from **7 to 21 February**. When Yasser decides to take part in Itikaf, sleeping and fasting in the mosque for the last ten nights of Ramadan, he soon regrets his decision. But as he navigates smug worshippers, shared bathrooms and recurring thoughts of chunky chips, Yasser's isolation forces him to confront a side of himself he has been trying to keep hidden. Find out more at omnibus-clapham.org/10-nights.

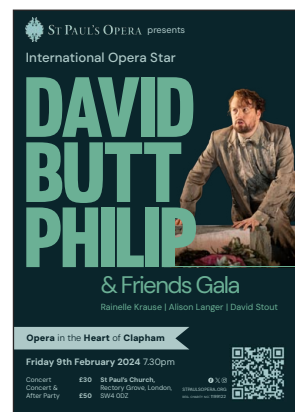
So much to talk about after the show...

Theatre Club at Omnibus is a *free*, informal, post-show conversation that anyone can join. It's like a book group, except we talk about performances at Omnibus. If you're uncertain about what you think of a play, or curious to hear how others respond, Theatre Club is for you – and it's perfect for people who see theatre alone. For details, visit maddycosta.blogspot.com/p/theatre-club.html. **Maddy Costa**

St Paul's Opera gala

Internationally acclaimed tenor **David Butt Philip**, patron of **St Paul's Opera**, returns to SPO on **Friday 9 February**, bringing with him some top-notch singers to present an evening of favourite operatic repertoire. Fellow singers include soprano **Alison Langer**, with whom he will be singing at Opera Holland Park in July in *Pagliacci*. 'We last shared the stage there back in 2020 in the OHP lockdown gala, so it's a long-overdue reunion,' he says. 'I have also managed to persuade not one but two stars of the ENO production of *The Magic Flute* later this month: **Rainelle Krause**, a mighty impressive Queen of the Night, and **David Stout**, who will sing the key role of Papageno. What a brilliant opportunity to preview this world-class production.' As well as seeing an amazing line-up in an intimate setting, there's a chance to meet the cast at the after party.

St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ, 7.30pm. Bookings and further information at stpaulsopera.org/david-butt-philip-and-friends-gala. Concert only, £30 (£35 at the door, subject to availability); concert and party, £50 (advanced bookings only). **Tricia Ninian**



St Luke's Music Society: Horn trio

The wonderful young horn player **Ben Goldscheider**, a past BBC Young Musician of the Year, returns to St Luke's, this time with his own trio, which includes violinist **Ben Baker** and pianist **Huw Watkins**. The programme will feature their own (trio) arrangements of the Mozart and Brahms Horn Quintets. Ben is now gaining international notice, with *BBC Music* magazine hailing him as 'a young man with a timeless gift'. **Saturday 10 February, 7.30pm. St Luke's Church, Ramsden Road, London SW12 8RQ**. For tickets and further details, visit slms.org.uk.



Clapham street names: new local history series

For our third series we are going to explore the history of the naming of local streets, a subject of fascination to many. Some names are obvious from local connections, but others are quite obscure and even after prolonged research, the origins can prove elusive. Initially there was no control over street naming and developers were free to choose the names they wished, often including short terraces or villas in a street, which led to a proliferation of similar names. There was also no consistent form of numbering. What a nightmare for the postman!

This all changed in 1855, when an Act of Parliament set up the Metropolitan Board of Works, the first London local authority, which was later to become the London County Council (LCC). Included in the Act at the request of the Post Office was the power of the Board to control street naming and numbering.

Rationalisation started, and it would continue for many years. Between 1856 and 1912, the Board of Works (and later the LCC) eliminated 29 New Streets, 33 William Streets and 36 James Streets. From then on, developers were required to submit their proposed names to the Board for consideration. If they were thought to be appropriate, they were approved. But many were rejected, and the Board had a list of suggested alternatives.

A similar situation exists today, though administered by the local authority. When a developer puts forward a new street name in Clapham, Lambeth Council consults the Fire Service and the Post Office, but also local historians. We are asked to comment, and sometimes developers ask our advice in advance. *Alyson Wilson*

Next month, Michael Tuffrey will tell the story of the streets in the Abbeville Road area. *If you would like us to find out more about your street name, or you have any interesting information about it for us, please email history@claphamsociety.com.*



London County Council Act at the request of the power of the Board to and numbering. and renaming soon continue for many and 1912, the Board LCC) eliminated 29 Streets and 36 James

One of our Instagram followers messaged...

'Hi everyone, I am a third-year environmental science student at the University of East Anglia, although I have grown up and lived by the



Common for the past 21 years. I am conducting my dissertation on 'How women view and use Clapham Common' and would appreciate it if you could fill out the survey on the link below. In my dissertation I will also be discussing how the Council and various local community groups view the Common. The survey, which you can find at

forms.office.com/e/fpUAHxaA9V, is anonymous and no data will be recorded. Thank you, in advance, for completing it.' *Safia Dovell*

Farewell to a faithful volunteer

Until last April, Stewart Pedge was one of our stalwart Newsletter delivery volunteers, who carried on even in illness. His nephew, Robert Pedge, sent in this tribute. We extend our condolences to his family, and remain grateful to Stewart for his valiant contribution to the Society.



Stewart was born in Wanstead Hospital on 12 May 1948, the son of Manor Park Londoners Mary and Jack and brother to Roderick. He grew up in Manor Park, attending Thomas Lethaby County School for Boys in East Ham. He had a long and very successful career as an investment banker, which took him from London to Guernsey then Bermuda and Hong Kong, where he met and

married his wife Ros in 1983. They returned to the UK in December 1989 and took up residence in Clapham South, making many good and close friends. They both loved the vibrant and busy life in Clapham and it was soon very much home. Not long after returning, they had two Cockapoos, Patrick and Enza, who they enjoyed walking on the Common every day. Sadly, Ros died in 2015 but Stewart continued to live life to the full in Clapham until he passed away on 30 November 2023.

Stewart was a member of The Clapham Society. He was a gentleman: a quiet, honest, generous man who enjoyed the art of conversation. He will be missed by many: family and friends.

Charity begins at home

Decluttering – why not donate to a **Royal Trinity Hospice** shop? Donations of good-quality men's and women's wear is needed to stock our 22 London shops, including in Clapham. Clothes, shoes, accessories, handbags, small gifts, collectables and books are welcome at all our branches. Visit www.royaltrinityhospice.london/shops for your nearest shop. Free home collections can be arranged within three miles of a Trinity charity shop. All donations will be sold in support of palliative and end-of-life care supporting people at home or at the Hospice. Royal Trinity Hospice shops were the proud 2023 winner of the Charity Retail Environmental and Sustainability award, thanks to their mission to be London's answer to sustainable fashion. *Anna Reid*

Membership news

Welcome to Stephen Crawford. If you or someone you know would like to join The Clapham Society, we would be delighted to hear from you. 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*

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

