

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 465 April 2024

Omnibus Theatre: A royal visitor calls

It was an honour to be among the invited guests at the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh, HRH Prince Edward, to Omnibus Theatre last month. The occasion was the unveiling of a plaque to commemorate the royal visit, marking 10 years of Omnibus Theatre.

Tables in the impeccably arranged café were set aside for various groups, including The Clapham Society. After coffee and cakes we were treated to a scene from the one-man play *Ten Nights* and an 'on-stage' chat with the actor and stage crew. A writer's workshop, started during lockdown, was our second stop – complete with jazz combo. Edward, meanwhile, had moved upstairs to hear a children's choir from Heathbrook School.



George Owen

During the unveiling the Duke showed himself to be witty, charming and engaging but also in tune with the occasion. With cameras flashing, he spoke to many of the guests including, at our table, the architect Julia Barfield, Vice President of the Society. When Julia said she had designed the London Eye, he said, quick as a flash, 'Yes, the landmark that was meant to have been there for a year.' I felt privileged, next, to tell him a bit about the Newsletter. I gave him a copy (neatly placed by Omnibus on our table). He asked how often it came out and when I replied, 'Ten times a year,' he said, again without missing a beat, 'I had no idea so much happens in Clapham.' I then introduced him to Alyson Wilson as my esteemed predecessor as editor and the Society's local history guru.

Massive congratulations to Omnibus on choreographing this memorable visit and many thanks for making The Clapham Society a part of it. A lot does happen in Clapham! When the official photographs become available we'll let you know. **Ruth Eastman**

De Morgan art tour

If you have ever wondered what happened to the Pre-Raphaelite paintings and ceramics in the beautiful library of the De Morgan Centre in West Hill, you will be excited to learn that although most are in museums and galleries across the world, the De Morgan art store is in Stockwell. A visit is by appointment only and we have organised such a rare event. **Sarah Hardy**, Director of the De Morgan Museum, will welcome us and then talk about the formation of the collection and its local links before showing us the gold drawings by Evelyn De Morgan and sketches for tiles by William De Morgan among its treasures. **Friday 17 May, 9.45 for 10am**. Email events@claphamsociety.com; payment, £12, and joining details will be in your reply. Limit: 10 members.

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, although this month the talk needs to be booked and members have preference (see below). The Café Bar is open from 6pm for drinks and snacks – a great opportunity to socialise with other members before (and after) the meeting. Our full list of talks for the 2024 season is available at claphamsociety.com/events.

Monday 15 April

The future of personalised nutrition. Professor of Genetics and author **Tim Spector** came to national prominence during the pandemic because of his role as lead researcher behind the world's biggest citizen science health project – the ZOE Covid study of over four million people for which he was awarded an OBE in 2020. His current work focuses on the microbiome and nutrition, and he is co-founder of the data science company ZOE Ltd, which has commercialised a home kit for personalised nutrition. Through his pioneering scientific research, he has been shocked to discover how little good evidence there is for many of our most deep-rooted ideas about food, and why almost everything we have been told about food is wrong. The community of around 100 trillion microbes that live in our colon is key to our digestion, appetite, mood, metabolism, and control of our immune system – and to how we respond to most drugs and foods. Understanding how our unique microbiome profiles are influenced by specific foods is paving the way for the new era of personalised nutrition, which is breaking the dogma of 'one size fits all' advice.

NOTE: Please book ahead (essential) by emailing events@claphamsociety.com by **Wednesday 10 April**, stating the names of the people in your group and confirming that they are all paid-up members of The Clapham Society. Seating is limited to 100 spaces and preference will be given to members; if there are any spaces left, non-members will of course be considered.

Membership and Gift Aid Declaration

This month we welcome Emma and Richard Bassett, and Andrew Smith. Thanks to members who returned the Gift Aid Declaration with the December/January and February Newsletters. 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 form at claphamsociety.com/GiftAidDeclaration-update.pdf and send it to the Treasurer at the address given. Any queries, email treasurer@claphamsociety.com or membership@claphamsociety.com. If you would like to join The Clapham Society, email membership@claphamsociety.com or visit claphamsociety.com/join-the-society. **Jennifer Everett**

Post Office closure: A glimmer of hope?

After a long campaign from residents, The Clapham Society, the Clapham WI, councillors, MPs and the Communications Workers Union (CWU), the Crown Post Office on Clapham High Street closed on 6th March, following a final protest and a sit in.

This is despite the Post Office receiving over 6,000 objections via paper and online petitions, a public meeting, a well-attended protest march, regular attendance outside the Post Office to make residents' views known and significant media coverage.

A large post card, signed by hundreds of residents, was delivered to the office of Nick Read, Post Office CEO, at Post Office HQ in the City by the CWU and Clapham Common and Abbeville Councillor, Alison Inglis-Jones (*above, centre*). We were told that Nick Read left the building by a back entrance rather than meet us. Residents from Ealing and their MP appear on the right of the picture. Sadly, Ealing Common Crown Post Office is also closing.

There is some cause for optimism, however. An email from the Post Office confirmed that representatives will be meeting with councillors and the MPs to discuss alternative provision for services on the High Street, as well as a new site proposed in Clapham Park. The communication says that the Post Office are well aware of the issues regarding access for Post Office products and services and they are exploring every option available to restore the service in the area. This follows Post Office employees having been seen on the High Street looking for a unit, and conversations held with residents. All involved in the campaign will be pressing now for at least a four-position unit.

Plans are afoot to keep the pressure on the Post Office with a 'Where's our Post Office?' campaign with supporting posters, leaflets and social media. The Clapham Society will update everyone on developments via social media and the Newsletter.
Alison Inglis-Jones



Redevelopment of 45 Clapham Common South Side: Decision reached

Despite a great crusade run by The Clapham Society and supported by so many local residents, the planning application from London Realty to develop the Lambeth College site was approved by Lambeth Council's Planning Committee on 27 February. Four members voted in favour with one against and one abstention.

Robust objections, including the almost 200 lodged with planning officers, were made by local Clapham councillors as well as an independent planning consultant and residents. It was clear that the argument for more affordable housing in Lambeth won the day, despite the lead planning officer saying that this was 'not an ideal' application: affordable housing makes up 35%, not the 50% which would have been an improvement.

However, this is not a straightforward situation. The construction industry is facing the worst recession it has experienced for some time. Private housing – the largest construction sector – suffered a significant fall in 2023 after a spike in mortgage rates negatively affected housing market demand. Many housebuilders have reported a drop of around 25-35% in demand. The effect of this is likely to continue for some time, with the rising cost of labour also maintaining pressure on developers, driven mainly by labour shortages and the cost-of-living crisis. Increased risk to lenders is also a factor in the current crisis.

The timing of demolition and subsequent construction on the site may well be subject, therefore, to significant delays. Residents in the as yet unfinished Thornton Park development at 44 Clapham Common Southside, same developer and managed by Southern Housing, are still struggling to manage the very difficult living situations that have arisen there due to the collapse of Henry, London Realty's contractor.

There is still no sign of a replacement contractor, probably owing to the difficulties facing any new contractor who will have to complete existing work that has not been addressed for almost a year. Most believe that the developer is facing a significant loss on the completion of that site.

Councillors will be watching and are in constant communication with both London Realty as well as residents of Thornton Park to make sure that the voice of the community continues to be heard.
Alison Inglis-Jones

We need to talk about climate change

Reassuring the audience at the outset that he was neither activist nor campaigner, **Robin Cooke-Hurle** proved to be an engaging and very well-informed enthusiast on his topic of climate change. He first explained the inevitability of planetary warming by greenhouse gases (GHGs), a fact established by 19th-century scientists. Simply put, rising GHGs increasingly restrict radiated and reflected energy from the sun escaping back to space, so more heat is retained and the world heats up. Atmospheric levels of GHGs are now strikingly higher than cyclical peaks, which have happened since prehistoric times, and the world temperature is a worrying 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Robin showed us that in the UK, at least, response to climate change is having good effect; the use of GHG-generating fossil fuels has more than halved since 2010 and increases in renewable energy and nuclear power are making demonstrable contributions to energy generation. As a ray of optimism crept in, we were reminded of the soaring use of non-sustainable aviation fossil fuels. Electric cars, however, are not the panacea once thought on two counts: they produce twice the amount of CO₂ in manufacture than that of a conventional fossil-fuel guzzler and, because of heavy batteries, need excess energy to move around. Despite the continued predominance of internal-combustion engine cars, globally car CO₂ emissions are falling steeply, giving some hope, but rather mitigated by Robin's subsequent fact: whatever we do to reduce emissions is too late, for the GHGs already released will generate increased heating of the atmosphere for some time

yet. So we must just be patient and prepare for a time when these GHGs have dissipated, around the 2030s.

Robin rehearsed the environmental impacts of climate change – sadly all too familiar, even to urban-dwelling south Londoners, after one of the wettest – and warmest – Februarys on record. The potential for mass migration not only of people but also of animals (including those animals



Dana Kubrick

which spread disease) and the impact on agriculture resulting in food insecurity added to an expanding list, which inevitably will change the world in our lifetime.

So what will it take to reverse the downward trend? Many of us feel we cannot make enough of a contribution to make a difference, but we should recognise that every little helps. The discussion with audience

members following Robin's talk centred on the short-term goals of many leaders and people; notably immediate wealth versus longer-term global survival. But also, said one participant, what can we do without plastics? Inevitably, as our speaker said, alternatives will emerge if there is a need and financial drive.

Many thanks to Robin Cooke-Hurle for an excellent talk, and for making us all think about what we should do about climate change – individually, nationally and globally.
Lucilla Poston

A spring in our step

Our first guided walk of 2024 is the **History of Clapham Common** on **7 April**, led by **Tom Jansz**, and on **26 April** **Iain Boulton** leads his fascinating **Bat Walk**. If you prefer to walk independently you can download copies of our seven self-guided walks, each of a different area of Clapham. Further afield there are many interesting walks in the 'Local History Walks in South London' leaflet, available in libraries and leisure centres and at Omnibus Theatre. You can find the full programme of walks for 2024, including start times and the walks leaflet, at claphamsociety.com/walks. *Alyson Wilson*



Clapham Chamber Concerts

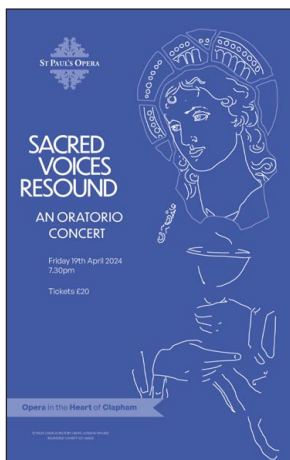
Clapham Chamber Concerts welcomes **Sarah Bennington** (flute), **Amanda Lake** (violin), **Lydia Abell** (viola) and **Alicja Kozak** (cello) for their next performance in a programme of Beethoven's String Trio in D major, and flute quartets by Mozart and Beethoven's student Ferdinand Ries. The concert will also include Copland's *Two Threnodies for Flute and String Trio* and *Three Divertimenti* from CCC composer-in-residence, David Wallace. **Friday 26 April, 7pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX**. Tickets available online in advance at claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk.

International Organ Day: Recital and have a go yourself!

St Paul's Church presents an afternoon of organ recitals and presentations, culminating at 6pm with Choral Evensong sung by the St Paul's Church Festival Choir. This is a come-and-go-as-you-like free afternoon of music, and a chance for anyone of any age to have a go on a pipe organ (no experience required). You can even join the choir, or see what's involved at an open rehearsal. The event is part of the Royal College of Organists' International Organ Day. **Saturday 20 April, 2-6pm, followed by Choral Evensong. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX. Alan Saggerson**

St Paul's Opera: Oratorio concert

In the dark days of April 2020, SPO had to shelve plans for its oratorio concert as the pandemic and lockdown took hold. Four years later we are delighted to return to this format, extending our offering beyond the operatic canon. Our line-up includes sopranos **Isabella Roberts**, **Louisa Tee** and **Patricia Ninian**; mezzos **Alexandra Dinwiddie** and **Natasha Elliott**; tenor **Matthew Cooke**; and baritones **Thomas Litchev** and **Ashley Mercer**. Arias and ensembles from oratorios will feature first, with a performance of the **Mozart Requiem** in the second half. **Friday, 19 April, 7.30pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ**. Tickets, £20 or £22 on the door, subject to availability. Book at stpaulsopera.org/news-sacred-voices-resound. *Tricia Ninian*



St Luke's Music Society

The Scottish **Maxwell Quartet** make their debut with St Luke's Music Society in a programme of music by Haydn and Beethoven, including the late Opus 131 Quartet, and their own arrangements of Scottish folk music. To echo *The New York Times*, 'Take note of the Maxwell Quartet... They bring charisma and a sense of adventure to their programmes.' **Saturday 13 April, 7.30pm. St Luke's Church, Ramsden Road, SW12 8RQ**. For tickets and further details, please visit slms.org.uk.

Royal Trinity Hospice: Walk with Purpose

Trinity invites the local community to get out into the Great British countryside and make a difference by taking part in a Walk with Purpose, organised in partnership with Vespucci Adventures, curators of day hikes. As well as being given a route, walkers will receive information about the local history and nature along their chosen walk, as well as recommendations for nearby coffee shops and pubs. All that remains is to get a group of your friends or family together, to raise funds for your local charity. For further information, please visit www.royaltrinityhospice.london/Pages/Events or email fundraisingteam@royaltrinityhospice.london.

We also have a save the date. The Wandsworth Friends Annual Summer Garden Party is on Wednesday 22 May. *Anna Reid*



Omnibus Theatre: The Pinot Princess

This dark comedy follows a struggling actor trying to liberate herself and break through gender stereotypes by playing a punk Virgin Mary on stage. A lapsed Catholic, our heroine questions the labels bestowed by religion and society. Not to mention those bestowed by her disapproving mother. Will speaking her truth lead to redemption? Or will she fall into yet another large Pinot? **2-14 April. Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW**. For tickets and show times, visit omnibus-clapham.org.

The Arts Society Clapham Common

Women have worked as artists for hundreds of years, often struggling against societal expectations and institutional barriers. An exhibition at Tate Britain from 16 May to 13 October will showcase the work of women artists in Britain from the 16th century to the First World War. The speaker **Dr Amy Lim**, an art historian and curator, specialises in British fine and decorative arts. She runs an online art dealership and has published articles and essays on a variety of art-related topics.

Wednesday, 17 April, 11am. Clapham Picturehouse, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT. Visitor (non-member) tickets, £10, or email claphamcommon@theartsociety.org to join the Arts Society Clapham Common for free entry to this and future events. *Susan Holder*

Tulip fever

Our garden will be open on **Sunday 28 April, 12-5pm**, and **Tuesday 30 April, 5.30-8pm**. We have 3,000 tulips this year, including the show-stopping 'Fire Wings' (*right*). All our bulbs come from Bloms. **51 The Chase, SW4 0NP**. Proceeds go to the National Garden Scheme. *Charles Rutherford*



Clapham street names: Did a nightingale sing here?

There has probably always been a track or path between Clapham and Wandsworth Commons which allowed the movement of cattle and sheep between the two for grazing. It was originally called Balham Lane or Balham Wood Lane, most likely the former, as described in a Battersea Rate book dated 1604. That track, now a busy road, is called Nightingale Lane, but when and why was the name changed? Surprisingly there is no easy answer.

The name Nightingale Lane was approved in 1897. *The List of the Streets and Places within the administrative county of London*, published by the London County Council between 1912 and 1927, suggests that until 1838 it was known as Balham Lane. Newspaper articles and rate books from the start of the 19th century, however, suggest otherwise; we have several references to Nightingale Lane in both, pre-1838. So it would appear that Nightingale Lane was known as such before its name had been officially approved. But why Nightingale? Many sources claim that Victorian developers working in the area heard nightingales singing. This is unlikely as the name was established well before the Victorian era.

It remains a mystery, but the precursor to Transport for London, Underground Electric Railways Group, which built the Morden extension, obviously liked it because the Northern Line station we know as Clapham South was initially going to be called Nightingale Lane, Balham North having been rejected as the third option. Vitreous enamel signs within the station were made and installed with that name but, in 1926, just prior to opening, the UERG changed its mind and chose Clapham South instead, having to cover over the original Nightingale Lane signs with the new name. We would love to hear from anyone who knows more. **Gillian Robinson**

Next month: Betwixt the Commons

If you can suggest how your street was named, or want to learn more about it, please email history@claphamsociety.com.



Clapham Common update

We are delighted to announce **Michael Barry** as The Clapham Society's new representative on the Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee (CCMAC). Much is afoot already and Michael will be updating us on developments throughout the year. Here is Michael's first report:

- Currently there is a programme underway to replace or repair many of the park benches. Around half of the 104 benches on the Common will be replaced and a further 15 added. The aim is to remove benches in poor condition and have one design of bench used across the Common in keeping with its heritage status.



Michael Barry

- Work began last month to turn Windmill Drive into a Low Traffic Neighbourhood with extensive re-landscaping.
- There is funding approval for the derelict toilet block to be converted into a café and for improvements to be made to the old bowling green pavilion in preparation for leasing some time in the future.

As part of the redevelopment of the bowling green there are discussions to re-locate two tennis courts to the site to make way for four paddle tennis courts although that has not been agreed yet.

- There is a proposal to convert the hard-surface football pitches adjacent to the fairground site into an all-weather pitch using tyre-crumble infill. This would be 70% funded by the Football Foundation but is being opposed by Wild Clapham and The Friends of Clapham Common who have concerns about the material used; the EU has recently banned this substance because the release of microplastic is a health risk to players and the wider environment.

Congratulations, David Dandridge

At the recent Lambeth Civic Awards ceremony David Dandridge, chair and a founder member of **Bandstand Beds Association**, won the Volunteer of the Year award. This is a well-deserved honour and a great result for Bandstand Beds, following the 10th year of successfully developing our community garden on Windmill Drive. **Nigel Haselden**

Battersea Society talk

Ceramic artist and architect **Maria Gasparian** was commissioned by Wandsworth Council to create a public artwork for the new housing development on the Surrey Lane Estate. In **How Battersea's mosaic heritage influences modern artwork** Maria will share her research into Battersea's rich mosaic past and how it links to the Randall Tesseræ project in Surrey Lane. **Thursday 25 April, 6.30 for 7pm. St Mary's Church, Battersea Church Road, SW11 3NA.** Tickets cost £5 and are payable in advance at batterseasociety.org.uk, or on the door. **Sue Demont**

The Wandsworth Historian

The **Spring 2024 issue** is out. Cover stories include 'Enemy aliens in WW1', 'The tale of a 19th-century master baker' and 'Getting your clothes washed between the wars'. Published by the Wandsworth Historical Society, it is available (£3 plus £3 p&p) by emailing 020neil119@gmail.com. Cheques are payable to 'Wandsworth Historical Society' but online payment is preferred. **Neil Robson**

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

