

The Clapham Society

Newsletter

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Issue 472 December 2024/January 2025

This issue contains the full programme of talks for 2025, which will be starting at the NEW TIME of 7.30pm. The Minutes of the AGM, including a report by Alison Inglis-Jones of the inspiring talk by Wild Clapham's Gareth James after the formal part of the meeting, are enclosed separately. On the screen behind Gareth (*below*) is a guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*), planted by Wild Clapham in the scrubland northwest of the Bandstand in 2021. Happy reading and warm festive greetings to you all.

Our meetings take place at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. Our new start time is 7.30pm. The talks normally last for about 45 minutes, followed by questions and discussion. Meetings are free and open to non-members, who are invited to donate. The Café Bar is open from 6pm for drinks and snacks. There are no talks in July, August or December.

Monday 20 January

Professor Mark Ashworth: Local medical hero. Mark Ashworth was keen to talk to the Society about the green energy schemes he had introduced into his Clapham home. Very sadly, Mark died on 8 October, aged only 68, after a brave battle with cancer. We are grateful to his wife, **Dr Susan Ashworth**, to whom we send our deep condolences, for agreeing to have the talk in his honour instead. Susan will give the talk Mark told her she would probably need to give. Two other speakers will celebrate his career: **Professor Lucilla Poston**, a friend and former research colleague at King's College London, who spoke to us in 2022 (Newsletter 446), will be joined by one of Mark's Lambeth GP practice partners.

Monday 17 February

Eden Nature Garden's 25th anniversary. As Eden celebrates its Silver Jubilee, Head Gardener **Benny Hawksbee** will tell us about the successes of gardening for wildlife in an urban environment. As a biologist and self-taught entomologist, Benny will look at the ecological approaches to horticulture and how all of us can create biodiverse and wildlife-friendly environments. Our choice of plants, our understanding of pollinators and the importance of providing food and habitat for solitary bees are all vital in protecting London's biodiversity. The speaker will be introduced by **Philippa Gould**.

Monday 17 March

Renoir's Acrobats at the Cirque Fernando and in Clapham too. The two young circus artists who modelled for Renoir in his Paris studio in the 1870s were unknown until Angeline Wartenberg wrote from Clapham to her niece in California in 1938 to say they were herself and her sister Franziska. From his forthcoming book, *Acrobats and Aerialists in the Circus and Music Hall, 1850s-1900s*, **Charlie Holland** will show rare photos and tell the tale of the much-travelled Wartenbergs whose home of many years was in The Chase. A Lambeth resident and former circus performer, Charlie was the Programme Director of London's Circus Space, latterly the National Centre for the Circus Arts. He is the Secretary of the British Music Hall Society and chief organiser of the European Circus History Conference.



Monday 21 April

In the footsteps of the Clapham war novel. Graham Greene set *The End of the Affair* on North Side and Ian McEwan has two of his characters (in *Atonement*) visiting Clapham and Holy Trinity Church. Clapham has long been the inspiration for novelists, among them local authors **Elizabeth Buchan** and **Julie Anderson**. Each has set one of their bestselling novels, *The New Mrs Clifton* (Elizabeth) and *The Midnight Man* (Julie), in Clapham in 1946. In their talk they will cover how they conducted their research, why they chose the settings and the themes that run through those titles.

Monday 19 May

'Behind the Blue Doors': The bicentenary. **Jim Grover** is a social documentary photographer based in Clapham. In the past eight years he has staged 12 exhibitions and his work has featured in *The Guardian* and on the BBC. Drawing on his interest in local stories about everyday life, he will reveal the 200-year history of Trinity Almshouses on Acre Lane in Brixton. Aspects he will cover include life as an almshouse resident in the 19th century as compared to now.

Monday 16 June

'Gaza Yet Stands'...or does it? Alluding to Messenger's description of Samson's pulling the pillars down in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, **Donald Macintyre** will point out how the poem underlines the age-old nature of conflict over Gaza. Jerusalem correspondent for the *Independent* from 2004 to 2012 and author of *Gaza: Preparing for Dawn*, Macintyre has written for the *i*, Tortoise Media (for whom he also presented a podcast on Benjamin Netanyahu in April 2024) and the *Observer*. Before going to Jerusalem, he was successively Political Editor and Chief Political Commentator of *The Independent*.

Monday 15 September

The dance world of Katti Lanner (1829-1908). Dr Geraldine Morris danced with the Royal Ballet Company, Covent Garden, and later studied dance as an academic discipline. A Senior Honorary Research Fellow at Roehampton University, she has lived in Clapham for 50 years. The second edition of her 2012 book, *Frederick Ashton's Ballets: Style, Performance, Choreography*, was published in November (2024) by Oxford University Press. In her talk Geraldine will focus on Katti Lanner's significance in the world of dance. There were no female choreographers in the 19th century, making Lanner, who ran dance schools in her Clapham home, and Bloomsbury, unique. She provides a striking example of a stage performer who found respectability and financial security when stage work for women was frowned on. Not only did she achieve status, but she was a celebrated and well off member of the Clapham community. It is high time a plaque to celebrate her achievements was mounted on her former home at 40 Clapham Common North Side.

Monday 20 October

Annual General Meeting. Our guest speaker will be announced nearer the time.

Monday 17 November

Clapham's historic street nameplates. These markers tell us more than just street names. Erected on private initiative and then by the vestries, they show civic endeavour seeking to bring order to the growing suburbs. Their designs reflect community pride. The stories of how they were erected – and sometimes opposed by householders – shed light on contemporary attitudes to the role of local government. **Simon Morris** is Publications Secretary of the London Topographical Society and has cycled round the streets of London photographing the old street signs which, supplemented by archival research, will form the basis of his talk.

Tony Bell

Tony Bell (23 April 1943–17 September 2024) was a longstanding member of the Clapham Society and will be sorely missed by many. We extend our deep sympathy to his wife, Val Johnson-Bell. Jennifer Everett, a great friend of Val's, and Tricia Ninian, who knew Tony well from St Paul's Opera, pay tribute.

A celebration of the life of Tony Bell was held at the end of October in the Tim Bobbin, a few doors along from Tony's home. Led by Tamiko O'Brien, a Humanist celebrant, as Tony had been a member of The Humanist Society for a long time, family, friends, former work colleagues and representatives of local organisations were there to give their reminiscences about Tony. The clear message was how much effort he had put into every area of his life and how much his clear-sighted approach contributed to the successful organisation of their operations. A recording of 'If ye love me' by Thomas Tallis, made by the Clapham Community Choir, was their appreciation of his work with the choir. Tony had clearly been a great influence on all who knew him and would be greatly missed. **JE**



When Tony first appeared on stage for rehearsals for St Paul's Opera of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in 2015 as a chorus member playing a wedding guest with flowers in his hair, we knew little of his past, but over the following years we discovered more about his full and varied life, as he painted scenery,

Bulb planting update

Many thanks to all who donated money and to the 20 volunteers who turned up over two weekends to plant 1,500 daffodil bulbs in the green space by Clapham Common station. It was hard work, but gratifying to meet new people and do something positive for our environment. We are grateful for the support from The Friends of Clapham Common and Wild Clapham, and for the co-operation from Lambeth. We all worked together and cannot wait to see the area burst into flower in the spring. *Story and photograph by Michael Barry*



Rodenhurst Road: School Street postponed

Following a discussion by Lambeth Council officers with Iqra, Glenbrook and Harris Academy Clapham, the plan to introduce School Streets on Rodenhurst and roads nearby has been paused. The plan is to work towards a School Street area that covers all three schools within that radius. The current timetable is to launch on 24 February 2025, not November 2024 as originally planned. Councillors have requested that officers keep them informed in good time to keep residents updated. Residents of Clapham Common and Abbeville, please email BCurtis@lambeth.gov.uk and/or AInglisJones@lambeth.gov.uk with your comments. **AI-J**

made props and, most importantly, became the linchpin to SPO becoming a registered, and thriving, charity. The picture (*below left*) shows Tony in our 2018 production of *Così fan tutte*.

Born in 1943, he grew up in Sierra Leone and then west London. He read Modern Languages at St Andrew's University and entered adult life as an academic in Australia and then Jamaica. Whilst in Jamaica he met Val Johnson. They returned to London as a married couple with a combined family of eight children. Settling first in Balham, they moved to Lillieshall Road in Clapham in 1982, which is still the family home today.

Tony remained in academia for all his working life, where his roles included General Secretary of the Institute of Linguists and the General Secretary at the University of London's School of Advanced Studies. He spoke four languages – English, French, Italian and Spanish, the latter like a native. He could also more than get by in Russian and Arabic.

Without Tony, SPO would not be where we are today. He was also just brilliant company. Whether he was coming to a rehearsal and chatting to the cast, or welcoming the audience as our chief front-of-house greeter at EVERY concert, attending achingly long committee meetings and still having a joke and a chuckle at the end, or welcoming us to his garden on summer evenings for meetings and introducing us to the legend that is Marmalade the tortoise, Tony was always there with a smile.

I was privileged to see Tony at home a couple of times in his last few weeks. The last time, I had just returned from holiday and the post-vacation blues were kicking in. It was Tony who cheered me up, telling me how he was enjoying listening to the Proms, particularly the one with our Patron, tenor David Butt Philip, singing in Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*. I must say I felt vindicated in my ignorance when Tony admitted, with a smile, that even he had no idea where the word 'Glagolitic' came from.

Tony, at SPO we miss you so terribly. Farewell, dear friend! **TN**



Carols on the Bandstand

Hope you've kept your diary clear for **Sunday 8 December at 3pm**. This year's event, organised by the Friends of Clapham Common in aid of Royal Trinity Hospice, is generously sponsored by Killik & Co and Aspire Estate Agents. The media

partners are Best of Clapham, and Pear Tree Café will be offering mince pies, mulled wine and raclette, donating a percentage of their takings. There will be bells for the children to ring and carol sheets for all who wish to join in. We have more musicians playing this year and **Derek Carden** will be our conductor. Last year, we raised more than £3,000 for Royal Trinity Hospice and with your support we hope to surpass that. So don a festive hat and come along.

If you would like to sing in the choir, please send an email in advance to friends@claphamcommon.net. **Shirley Kermer**

Clapham Chamber Concerts: Jazz meets carols

Those familiar with CCC's light music concert series will know about the magical sound world of lush strings, clarinet and celeste. Artistic directors **David Wallace** and **Jonathan Parkin** join forces for this concert with David's arrangements of festive favourites performed by Jonathan and the ensemble. The audience will be taken back to the 1930s with Jonathan's retro clarinet music and, for the first time in this light music series, he will be sharing the stage with a jazz singer for some of the Christmas favourites. **Friday 6 December, 7pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX**. Tickets in advance via Eventbrite at claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk.

Royal Trinity Hospice: Light up a Life

Join Royal Trinity Hospice on **Thursday 12 December** to celebrate those who have brought light to our lives. Starting at the Hospice at **6pm**, the event will begin with the lighting of the tree before a candlelit procession to Holy Trinity Church where the Light up a Life concert begins at **7pm**.



Anyone living locally is welcome to dedicate their own Trinity bauble of remembrance. The baubles will be displayed on the concert Christmas tree and on trees at the Hospice.

To register to dedicate a bauble, and for further information, visit

www.royaltrinityhospice.london/light24. Or email Zuzia in Fund-raising at zmastalierz@royaltrinityhospice.london. **Anna Reid**

Omnibus Theatre

An exciting lineup lies ahead this month and beyond:

- **Bill, 3-22 December**, is a riotous, ridiculous, dirty, glittery romp through 70 years of conspiracy, aliens, Americana and the strange life of Milton Bill Cooper. Tickets, £18.
- **St Nicholas, 17-24 December and 27 December to 5 January**, sees Strange Fish present a dark supernatural tale for Christmas by award-winning playwright Conor McPherson. A jaded theatre critic falls in with some modern-day vampires who offer him a new life; his part of the bargain is to help them feed their bloodlust. Tickets, £18.
- **3 Little Pig Tails At Christmas, 14-22 December**. Tickets, £9. A funny and magical winter treat for the young to make them squeal with laughter; bristling with puppets, live accordion music and lots of joining in. Will the wolf succeed in climbing down the chimney? Come and help the little pigs on their snowy adventure.

For tickets and showtimes, visit omnibus-clapham.org/club-life. **Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW**.

St Paul's Opera

The last time SPO performed Handel's *Messiah* was during a brief window of social and cultural activity in December 2020, just before we were all told to curtail our Christmas plans. This year we shall celebrate the classic masterpiece with all the joy we can muster. The concert on **Thursday 5 December at 7pm** is a complete performance. Sung (largely) by our brilliant young professionals with accompaniment by a string and wind ensemble, it will be interpreted in a unique way with visual imagery. (Doors open at 6.40pm; performance lasts three hours.)

On Saturday **7 December at 3.30pm** 'A Family *Messiah*' is a shortened adaptation that introduces children to the oratorio. It centres around a young girl reluctant to play a shepherd in her school's nativity play. With the guidance of her teacher, she embarks on a journey exploring the themes of kindness, compassion and hope, brought to life through the music. With teacher and pupil played by local talents **Nik and Imogen Kempsey**, this new interpretation will include interactive elements such as singing participation and art activities, as well as visual projections to help the children engage with the music. (Doors open at 3pm; performance lasts about 90 minutes.)

For full details and tickets, bought online in advance (£25 for adults; £12.50 for under-18s), please visit stpaulsopera.org. **St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX. Tricia Ninian**



St Luke's Music Society

2025 sees Wandsworth as London's Borough of Culture. St Luke's Music Society joins the celebrations with a programme of late Schubert piano sonatas performed by **Paul Lewis, CBE**, one of the finest British pianists of our time. His concerts sell out fast,

so get your tickets early from slms.org.uk. **Saturday 24 January, 7.30pm. St Luke's Church, Ramsden Road, SW12 8RQ**.

The Arts Society Clapham Common

Two events are coming up, starting with **Christmas: It's a Wonderful Life and the forgotten genius of Frank Capra on Wednesday 18 December**. Hear the behind-the-scenes story of the

greatest Christmas film ever made – starring James Stewart and Donna Reed (*right*). The speaker, **Colin Shindler**, is a lecturer in American and British film and cultural history at the University of Cambridge. He has written three novels as well as numerous television scripts and radio plays; he is currently working on the television adaptation of his novel *Hollywood Nazis*, set in Hollywood during the making of the controversial Warner Brothers film *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*.



On **15 January** the subject is **Great English Mansions: Made in America**. Many of the mansions built during America's Gilded Age were inspired by important English houses. They were resurrected and inhabited by an eclectic mix of millionaires. Through the splendour of the architecture **Mark Meredith** will delve into the characters, quirks, and amusing stories behind these international treasures. Mark lectures regularly in Europe and the US.

Talks start at 11am. **Clapham Picturehouse, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT**. Visitor (non-member) tickets, £10, or email clapham-common@theartsociety.org to join the Arts Society. **Susan Holder**

Clapham streets: Thomas Cubitt's Clapham New Park estate

It is little remembered today that the old Clapham Parish extended as far to the south as Emmanuel Road, bordering Tooting Common, and in the east to Lyham Road at the back of Brixton Prison. That whole area from Acre Lane southwards, today home to some 20,000 people, comprised just two farms. That started to change in 1825 when Thomas Cubitt (1788-1855), master builder of the Grosvenor Estate in Westminster and much more, acquired a 99-year lease on Bleak Hall Farm's 229 acres.

He laid out new roads and started building grand houses. Running north-south was Kings Road, South Road and Loats Road (named after a local landowner and fellow builder); today this is all Kings Avenue. Running east-west was Queens Road and Poynders Road,



Above: Victoria House, 84 Kings Avenue, one of the few Cubitt mansions that remains in Clapham Park today. It was home to General Sir William Napier, who fought in the Napoleonic Wars, and later to music hall singer and comedian Vesta Victoria after whom it is named.

after another landowner; today all is Poynders and subsumed into the A205 south circular. Also east-west was Atkins Road, the family name of the Lord of the Manor who sold Cubitt his lease. A subsequent land acquisition brought in Friday Grove, later Grove Road, renamed Weir Road in 1936 after Benjamin Weir, benefactor of a hospital built there. Completing the original network was Clarence Road, latterly Avenue (Newsletter 467, June 2024); Thornton Road after the Clapham family of evangelicals and anti-slavery campaigners; and, of course, New Park Road.

To Cubitt's vision for a garden suburb we owe the wide streets remaining today. He himself lived here, first on South Side from 1828 and then in the park itself until just before his death. Building started slowly, with only 17 households by 1841, accelerating to c.120 by 1859. His vision never translated into a commercial success, however, and once the railways came, the demography changed. In the 1920s some council housing was built to the east and new streets of modest housing to the south. After the Second World War the large mansions were becoming derelict, and the London County Council stepped in to buy up and demolish most of them, creating the Clapham Park estate with the large blocks of flats we know today.

The process of intensification continues. In 2005 Lambeth Council transferred the whole estate to a housing association for redevelopment. On the corner of Clarence Avenue and Poynders Road had stood one of the first mansions built under Cubitt's direction – Clarence Villa, later House. Begun in 1831 and occupying seven acres, its first occupant was the wealthy gin distiller Joseph Vickers; the last was John Ernest Moore, a solicitor who died in April 1939. Empty by 1950, it was knocked down and the LCC built two three-storey blocks on the site, with 62 homes, some shops and a pub. In turn they were demolished. Now a 10-storey block is nearing completion, with a total of 423 flats in mixed tenures. Rebuilding across the estate is set to continue until 2035. *Mike Tuffrey*

Next month: Street naming off Clapham Common North Side

If you would like to find out more about your street, email history@claphamsociety.com.

Hibbert Almshouse Charity: Clerk

The trustees of the Hibbert Almshouses seek a Clerk to manage their eight terraced almshouses at 721 to 729 Wandsworth Road, in place of our present Managing Agent.

Here is an opportunity to serve your local community and increase your income. We envisage that the duties of the role will involve working eight hours per week, initially, from your own home. Familiarity with property maintenance and the use of spreadsheets and good secretarial skills would be helpful. If you are interested, please email Euan Kennedy, Chair of Trustees, at info@hibbertalmshouses.org.uk for more details. *Euan Kennedy*



Another invitation to visit...

Following the popular visits last winter to the meticulously restored Victorian home of **Christopher and Gladys Claxton Stevens** off Abbeville Road (Newsletter 464), they have kindly offered their hospitality to members again on **Wednesday 15 January**, with a prompt **6.30pm** start. A donation of £7 cash to cover drinks and nibbles would be appreciated. Email events@claphamsociety.com by 10 January, please, if you'd like to come. *Christine Armstrong*

Membership news

A very warm welcome this month goes to Jo Darley, Susie Gent and Jake Johnson. If you would like to join The Clapham Society, please send me an email at membership@claphamsociety.com. *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.

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