

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 325 March 2010

More trees for the Common

The fiftieth tree in the programme for Clapham Common led by Trees for Cities and the Friends of Clapham Common was planted in February. The event was attended by Councillor Christopher Wellbelove, Mayor of Lambeth. The English oak tree was among a group planted near the junction of Clapham Common North Side and The Avenue.



Our regular monthly meetings are held at **Clapham Manor Primary School, Belmont Road, SW4 0BZ**. The entrance to the school in Belmont Close, through the new building, is **NOT** open for our evening meetings. Use the Belmont Road entrance, cross the playground and enter the building on the right. The hall is open from 7.30 pm when coffee and tea are normally available. The talk begins promptly at 8 pm and most meetings finish by 9.30 pm.

Wednesday 17 March

Safer Neighbourhoods. Every London ward now has its own Safer Neighbourhoods team, which brings together the police and local people to develop and implement measures to reduce crime and nuisance and improve community safety. At this meeting, representatives of the Clapham Town Safer Neighbourhoods team and panel will talk about their work and discuss ways of tackling these issues locally.

Wednesday 21 April

Lambeth College Sixth Form Centre. **Peter Doble**, Vice-Principal of Lambeth College and **Chris Harding**, a partner at BDP, one of the UK's leading architectural practices that designed the recently-opened building overlooking Clapham Common, will talk about its design and construction. This new building accommodates 1200 students and features a performing arts centre and an information learning technology centre, amongst many other 21st century educational facilities.

New members

We have welcomed the following new members this month: Mary Anstice, Jim Leaver, Elisabeth Morse and James Wilkinson.



We have been asked by a reader if we can suggest a location for this picture. Any ideas? Please send them to the Editor.

Reminder

Annual subscriptions are due on 1 April. If you pay by cheque a reminder is attached to this newsletter. If you pay by standing order please check to ensure that it is for the correct amount and also, if you receive your newsletter by post, that £5 has been added to cover the cost. The current rates are: Individual £6.00, Household (up to three members) £9.00, Business £15.00, Additional for postage £5.00. If you have any queries contact the Membership Secretary.

Haunted Clapham

One of our members is researching a book about haunted Clapham, and would welcome ghost stories about the area. Do you know of any haunted houses, or interesting ghost stories set in Clapham? Battersea Rise, the home of the Thornton family on the west side of Clapham Common which was demolished in the early 20th century was said to have a ghost. Apparently this was an old gentleman in a flowered dressing gown who would appear in one of the bedrooms and draw back the curtains of the four-poster at midnight.

If you have any relevant information or would like to help in any way please contact Jim Leaver by email jwl6558@yahoo.co.uk or telephone 07533 769085.

Wandsworth Heritage Service

During the last year this service has made great advances. The very restricted opening hours have now been changed and the service is available for all the hours that Battersea Library is open, and library staff are helping with the heritage search room. The heritage book collection is now properly catalogued and arranged. New rules have been introduced for the search room, lockers provided and copyright forms introduced.

The catalogue has been improved and updated and previously uncatalogued items have been listed and made more accessible. These include the letters of the poet Edward Thomas, various material (including title deeds) relating to Battersea Park, records of the Wandsworth Home Guard and of ARP incidents in Battersea and Wandsworth from 1939 to 1945. More than 250 historic maps have also been sorted and re-hung so that they can be more easily consulted.

New cataloguing software has been installed and all existing archive catalogues transferred to it, including all those that have previously been available on the Access to Archives website. All the recently catalogued material has been added and a plan drafted to help prioritise future cataloguing projects. The new online archive catalogue is now available. It includes records relating to all areas of the borough from the 16th to the 21st centuries and can be accessed from www.calmview.eu/wandsworth/calmview. There is also a link to the catalogue from the heritage pages on the Wandsworth website. A new online service of digitised versions of photographs in the collection has been started and is regularly added to. This can be seen at www.flickr.com/wandsworthheritageservice.

All this is extremely good news for those researching Clapham local history who always need to remember that much of the area was once in the borough of Wandsworth and that it is important to check Wandsworth Heritage Service as well as Lambeth Archives. Wandsworth Heritage Service is at Battersea Library, Lavender Hill, SW11 1JB. Telephone 020 8871 7753 or email heritage@wandsworth.gov.uk.

Planning News

Since November we have been notified of some 85 applications, reviewed fifteen and made representations on seven, most of which are summarized below.

220 Broomwood Road. Objection to a proposal to create a new basement area in the front of this house, one of a terrace of listed houses.

53-63 Old Town. The ground floor commercial unit of the development is to be a Sainsbury's Local. Putting aside the impact this may have on independent local traders, the glass elevations on to Grafton Square are to become one large and garish advertisement instead of a window into the store. We have objected to this aspect of the scheme.

68 Venn Street. Objection to a revised plan for this land at the back of the Post Office Sorting Office, which is an overdevelopment of the site and will continue to damage the amenity of residential neighbours.

Site of 83 Park Hill. Objection to an application to build new housing in the back garden of this site; it creates very poor quality accommodation and damages the character of the conservation area.

7 Offerton Road. Objection to a large mansard roof extension which completely changes the form and character of the building.

Land 581-597 Wandsworth Road. Comments on how a scheme to build four homes on this sensitive site between the listed St Paul's Church and Wandsworth Road properties, can be refined to minimise its impact.

New Listed Building

The Coach House at 56 Nightingale Lane, which was open for a Clapham Society visit on last May has been added to the statutory list (Grade II). See NL 316, April 2009, for description and picture.

Future Clapham

The leisure centre has now been closed and demolition work has already started on Mary Seacole House. The new leisure centre is projected to be ready in November next year. The developer has succeeded in securing government funding through the Kickstart programme to make up the shortfall arising from the present recession. Further information is available on www.claphamone.com.

A Film by Spencer Ludwig

David Flusfeder will be reading from his new novel, *A Film by Spencer Ludwig*, on **Thursday 25 March** at 7 pm at Clapham Books, 120 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UH. The critic, Al Alvarez, has described Flusfeder as 'a genuinely original writer with a fine ear and fluent style' and this book as 'a classy original novel – wry, sad, tough-minded and stylishly written.' A short film will also be shown on the evening.

Clapham Chamber Concerts

The final concert in this series is on **Friday 26 March** when the Kandinsky Winds, an exciting young wind trio, will perform work by Beethoven, Mozart and *Divertissement for oboe, clarinet and bassoon* by Françaix. The concert starts at 7.30 pm at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX. Tickets, £9 and concessions, are available on the door.

To make sure you receive details of the next series of concerts in good time email claphamchamberconcerts@gmail.com to join the mailing list.

Sycamore House

On yet another freezing February evening more than 80 members and their guests came to our meeting to hear Tim Gosling talk about the history, restoration and current use of Sycamore House in Clapham Old Town, which is his home, business and house museum.

After pointing out the site on an early map and explaining the gradual spread of the village of Clapham from the present St Paul's Church area towards the Common, Tim gave us a brief introduction to the history of classical building in England which started with Inigo Jones's Banqueting House in Whitehall in 1619. By the time Sycamore House was built in 1787 the style was widely used for modest houses as well as grand mansions, and the work of designers such as the Adam brothers was well-known and much copied. Tim showed pictures of an original cornice in Sycamore House which exactly replicated one of 1768 by Robert Adam in Syon House.

We then had a pictorial tour of Sycamore House as it is now. Some original features have survived more or less intact – cornices, windows, doors and fanlight, while others, including

an apse in the dining room, Tim has restored. Sadly no original fireplaces have survived. Interestingly, Tim pointed out that at the period the house was built dining rooms were only just beginning to exist as separate rooms for eating. Earlier a 'crumb' cloth was laid on the floor and small, probably folding, tables were brought out from the sides of the drawing room. He showed us his interpretation of classical features, like columns flanking a door based on an Adam drawing, and how he incorporates contemporary necessities – for instance, uplighters in skirting boards. He has a strong antipathy to downlighters, which are NOT allowed in his house.

We saw the dining room chairs he has designed based on the Greek klismos chair, and a fireplace with Egyptian features taken from the temple at Karnak. We heard about paint scrapes and how, during the restoration, Tim had found layer after layer of paint from cream and magnolia to a deep porphyry red, according to the then fashionable taste. It was an intriguing journey round the house showing how original features can be combined with 'new' designs based on classical precedents.

Tim also gave us a short history of the house and its residents. It ceased to be a private house in 1841, when it became a school, first for girls then for boys, and by the early 20th century it was a laundry. The laundry increased in size, gradually filling the extensive garden, and went from strength to strength eventually gaining four royal warrants. We saw pictures of the laundry buildings and workers over the years, the arrival of machinery and a visit by the Duchess of Gloucester in the 1980s. The Sycamore Laundry finally closed on this site in 1994, when Sycamore Mews was built on the former garden and the original house turned into flats.

The talk concluded with some pictures of other houses Tim has worked on and of his recent book which describes these as well as giving details of various historic techniques he still uses. We are grateful to him for sharing with us his research and for bringing an historic Clapham house so vividly back to life. Some pictures and information about the work of Tim Gosling can be seen on his website www.tgosling.com. Many of the historical pictures are on his blog <http://timgosling.wordpress.com>.

WW2 Young Voices' Heritage Project

Following on from a successful Heritage Lottery funded intergenerational project *Common Voices: Past and Present* which focused on growing up in post-war Clapham, Big Up Films, a Clapham-based group of community arts educators, are currently developing a second project, *WW2 – Young Voices*, which will be focusing on childhood memories and life in Clapham during the Second World War. Using a multi-sensory approach to optimise reminiscence and heritage learning (the sounds, smells, tastes and sights of the war), Bonneville Primary School pupils will conduct oral history interviews with eight people who were children at the time to capture their memories and experiences. They will also develop story-boards and create a multi-media 3D installation of an air-raid on Clapham during the Blitz and props for dramatic reconstructions which will be filmed along with the interviews, songs and archive footage for a DVD film to be showcased from July 2010 in a programme of events and distributed with a resource pack and an accompanying booklet for schools, libraries, archives and community groups.

Were you living in Clapham, and preferably at school, between 1939 and 1945? Would you be willing to share your memories with a small group of children (aged 9-10) as part of their learning to explore what it was like to be a child in Clapham in the Second World War, during one Tuesday or Thursday in May?

Other opportunities to take part in this exciting project as a member of the Steering Group (between April and June 2010) will include: free tailor-made oral history training and reminiscence, intergenerational and dramatising memories training (8 and 9 April), training days in archive research at Lambeth Archives and the Imperial War Museum and visiting interviewees (14 to 20 April), assisting with filmed oral history interviews, dramatic reconstructions and creative heritage activities in Bonneville School during May, help with producing accessible resources for celebration events and distribution from June to October.

Lunch and refreshments would be provided and any expenses paid. For more information and if you are interested in taking part as a member of the Steering Group or as an interviewee, please contact me by telephone 020 7720 0695 or email triciaholland@talktalk.net.

Tricia Holland, Project Coordinator

Young Musicians

The ninth Clapham Young Musicians' Festival will take place at Holy Trinity Church on **Saturday 6 March** from 6 to 8 pm. The Festival provides a platform for some of the most able young musicians across a wide area. As usual, choirs feature prominently, ranging from the 7+ age-range through to Emanuel School's barber-shop ensemble. London's Centre for Young Musicians will provide movements from Bach's Sixth Brandenburg Concerto and a Haydn symphony. A rock group from Lambeth Academy and the award-winning vocalist and guitar-player Harry Housego are among those offering variety and contrast. All 300+ participants will join together in a grand choral, orchestral finale.

The concert is, once again, generously supported by the Rotary Club of Battersea and Clapham, enabling all proceeds to be donated to the charity 'Help for Heroes'. Tickets, £3.50 (free for children and students) will be available on the door, or in advance from antony.lefleming@gmail.com.

Abbeville Road Fire Hydrant

In spring last year three former Clapham men, Bruce, Norm and I, who grew up in Abbeville Road and Crescent Lane through the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, met up for a nostalgic walk around south Clapham and the Common. As dusk fell we walked along the north side of Abbeville Road and at the bend just past Elms Road we noticed a decrepit and sad remainder of the once pristine Standing Fire Hydrant, pock-marked from corrosion but still standing proud and vertical. We walked further, recalling having had to learn its location when we were at Bonneville School and Mr Gibson was headmaster. We recalled sometimes daring to vault it as we walked along the road – there were no parked cars to hinder this athleticism in the times we recalled. Then I excused myself and dashed back to take pictures, feeling that the rarity was worth a photo or two.

The next day I did some research by telephone and email, and discovered from Thames Water that the Standing Hydrant was disconnected from the mains, but there was substantial disused pipe work beneath it which probably helped anchor it in the ground. They said the Metropolitan Water Board had passed on no records of Standing Hydrants, or if they had, these were no longer traceable. I was also told that Thames Water did not claim ownership and were therefore not liable for its upkeep or demolition.

The Fire and Rescue Service denied all knowledge of this Standing Hydrant and were of the opinion that they were all removed as traffic and pedestrian hazards in the 1980s or earlier, as they became redundant with the usage of underground hydrants. They could not say whether any others existed around London.

Thames Water confirmed that they were unable to find any record of remaining Standing Hydrants in the Thames Water jurisdiction, and that the Abbeville Road one was likely to be the sole survivor; there was no explanation as to why it was left when the others were removed.

Lambeth Council were happy to get involved and promised to look further into it. After some delay they agreed to clean it off and repaint it in its original colour. They asked for a colour suggestion, and three local residents who recalled the colour got together with a colour chart and agreed the closest match, which was sent to Lambeth. Much later there was another site visit with a contractor, after which a coat of paint of the wrong colour was slapped on with no preparation. I drew this to the attention of the council and within a month or so the proper job was effected. Today we can see the repainted Standing Hydrant – the last of its kind in Greater London – non-functional but proud in Abbeville Road.



Peter Skuse

St Matthew Passion

On **Saturday 27 March** the Festival Chorus, conducted by David Fawcett, will perform Bach's St Matthew Passion as a prelude to Easter. The drama of Christ's last days is portrayed with some of the most beautiful and dramatic music ever written. The performance begins at 7.00 at St Luke's Church, Thurleigh Road, SW12 8RQ. Tickets at £10 and £6 can be booked on line at www.slms.org.uk or by telephone on 07951 791619.

French Conversation

Would you like to improve your French, ready for the holidays? Our group holds an hour-long French conversation session on alternate Wednesday mornings from 11 am to 12 noon in the Abbeville Road area. We have been meeting for nearly five years, but would now welcome a few new members. This is a self-help group – from near-beginners to fairly fluent. There is no entrance test and no fee! If you are interested contact Celia Bibby on 020 8673 0568.

Still far from downhill all the way

Under this heading an article in a recent issue of the *Antique Trades Gazette* about a sale of vintage ski posters starts: 'Whether in Chamonix, Courcheval or Clapham, for those occasions when conversation grinds to a halt over the Tartiflette what better decorative talking point than an eye-catching vintage ski poster?'

If you have any queries about **The Clapham Society** or have news of local events, please contact the appropriate person below:

Chair

119 Clapham Manor Street, London SW4 0QU
Email: alisonmacnair@fastmail.co.uk

Alison Macnair

Secretary

552 Wandsworth Road, London SW8 3JX

Jill Cramphorn
Tel: 020 7720 3343

Treasurer

15 Turret Grove, London SW4 0ES

David Brown
Tel: 020 7720 7536

Membership Secretary

30 Trinity Close, London SW4 0JD

Jennifer Everett
Tel: 020 7627 4770

Meetings and Events

2 Fitzwilliam Road, London SW4 0DN
Email: maevsullivan@gmail.com

Maev Sullivan
Tel: 020 7498 9205

Planning Matters

45 Rodenhurst Road, London SW4 8AE

Email: pjashford@yahoo.co.uk

Common and Open Spaces

22 Iveley Road, London SW4 0EW

Email: annajs@mac.com

Newsletter and Publications

22 Crescent Grove, London SW4 7AH

Fax: 020 7622 7899

Email: alysonwilson.sw4@virgin.net

Details of meetings, activities and a full list of our publications are on **The Clapham Society** website at www.claphamsociety.com

Philip Ashford

Tel: 020 8674 1727

Anna Jefferson Smith

Tel: 020 7622 8285

Alyson Wilson

Tel: 020 7622 6360