

The Clapham Society

Newsletter



Issue 343 December 2011/January 2012

Our new Chairman

I feel very honoured to be elected Chairman of the Society, taking over from Alison Macnair who has done a great job for the last four years. I already know many of you from the Society walks and from the annual summer parties over the years and hope to get to know many more of you over the coming months.

My introduction to the Clapham Society was in 2000 when I bought a copy of *The Buildings of Clapham*, an invaluable guide to the history and architecture of the area. I joined the Local History Sub-committee not long after reading it, and graduated to the main Committee in 2004.

Stephen and I have lived in Clapham since 1984, a time when taxi drivers were still unhappy about picking up a fare going south of the river. We have watched the gentrification of the area, with improvements in property, amenities and restaurants over the last 27 years.

During that time, we have brought up two children, Tom and Rosie, who were educated locally, and now both work in London. I worked for 20 years in innovation and marketing and have spent the last ten years in the voluntary sector. Stephen and I enjoy working on our allotment and cycling around the area in a responsible manner!

Helping with fundraising for the restoration of the Bandstand has been a high spot during our involvement with the Society. The restoration project meant we met many other members, and had a great sense of achievement when we listened to the first concert in 2006.

Over the next year, I hope that the Society will continue to find and deliver projects as important as the Bandstand restoration, helping to build community spirit. This is dependent on maintaining the good working relationship that the Society has built with Lambeth Council officials and other local groups. This relationship is also vital for the work the Planning Sub-committee does so steadfastly and successfully.

One of the most important tasks for the Society continues to be ensuring that Clapham Common is not used as a cash cow for Lambeth. It is a much-valued amenity which should be open for all to use – including parents and children, dog walkers, runners, sportspeople and courteous cyclists. Thankfully we have Anna Jefferson Smith who continues to act selflessly on our behalf.

My job as Chairman will be made very easy thanks to hardworking Sub-committee heads: Maev Sullivan for meetings, Jennifer Everett for membership, Anna Jefferson Smith for the Common, Alyson Wilson for newsletters, publications and various other things, Derrick Johnson for local history, David Brown as the treasurer, Philip Ashford for planning and Jill Cramphorn as the Society Secretary who keeps everyone 'doing the right thing'. Thank you.

Annabel Allott



In 2012 our meetings will take place as usual at Clapham Manor Primary School, Belmont Road, SW4 0BZ at 7.30 pm for 8 pm, except for the May meeting (see below). Brief details of the programme for the year are given below, and more information about each meeting will be given in the newsletter nearer to the time.

Wednesday 18 January

Twixt the Commons. Why did so many bankers and merchants choose Clapham for their homes in the 18th century? How did their villas get replaced by rows of terraced housing? Why does the street grid take its present form and who used to live in the houses? Why did lowly South Battersea emerge as the upmarket 'Twixt the Commons'? **Timothy Walker**, a long standing resident and member of the Society, will answer all these questions and more in an illustrated talk based on his recently published book.

Wednesday 22 February

Mexico 68 – Preparing for an Olympiad. After qualifying as an architect, **John Adams** worked for the Organising Committee of the XIX Olympiad in Mexico City. He will describe the preparations and other events of 1968, a year of significant protest and unrest in Mexico as well as Paris.

Wednesday 21 March

From Clapham governess to African pioneer. **Fiona Leach**, Emeritus Professor of Education at Sussex University will talk about the life of Sarah Winsor, governess in Rev. John Venn's household in Clapham. In 1804 she travelled to Sierra Leone as wife of one of the Church Missionary Society's first recruits. Her tragic story illustrates how a woman's life at that time was bound by her husband's actions.

Wednesday 18 April

Topical issues affecting Clapham.

Brief presentations on a variety of topical issues affecting Clapham will be given by representatives of the various sub-committees followed by a general discussion with the audience. More details will be announced nearer the date.

Wednesday 16 May

St Mary's Church and Monastery.

Father Dominic O'Toole, Parish Priest of St Mary's Church, will talk about the history of the church and monastery and the current restoration programme. This meeting will be at **St Mary's Monastery** in Clapham Park Road, and will thus be an opportunity to see inside this important Clapham building.

Wednesday 20 June

Brixton Windmill. Richard Santiri, Vice Chair and founder of the Friends of Windmill Gardens will tell us about the restoration of the windmill, for which he has been campaigning since 1999, and future meetings and events.

July and August meetings will be replaced by walks. Details will be announced later.

Wednesday 4 July

Summer Party in the garden of the Hibbert Almshouses, Wandsworth Road.

Wednesday 19 September

The greening of a small Victorian terraced house in Clapham Old Town – a follow-up on Iain McCaig's talk last year about ways to reduce heat loss in traditional buildings. **Peter and Jenny Coble** have downsized and modernised a house with the aim of reducing running costs and providing a more comfortable home, whilst at the same time doing their bit to save the planet. Susan Venner, the project architect and specialist in green buildings, will be present to explain the problems involved in constructing both new and old sustainable buildings.

Wednesday 17 October

Annual General Meeting. Our guest speaker will be Clapham Society President, **Martin Drury**, who will talk about the origins, evolution and role of the Landmark Trust which gives new life to worthwhile old buildings. Appointed as a trustee in 1988, Martin retired this year after 13 years as Chairman.

The Clapham Society's second green plaque will be unveiled on Eagle House, 2b Narbonne Avenue on **Saturday 10 December** at 12.30 pm by Lord Hankey, whose family owned the land on which Eagle House was built in 1773. Come and join the celebration!

On the Common – Time to look both ways

As 2011 draws to a close the time has come to assess the effects of lifting restrictions, by Lambeth Council, on the size, duration and frequency of events on Clapham Common during the past year and, critically at the present time, to look ahead to plans for 2012.

In our October newsletter we predicted significant damage to the event site when two large events were held back to back. The outcome is clearly visible in spite of valiant attempts to reinstate the ground. The second event, Sainsbury's Super Saturday promoted by Live Nation, attracted complaints about noise levels on the two days before the one day event. Also the shared pedestrian/cyclist footpath which was fenced off as part of an enlarged event site was left damaged.

What are we to expect in 2012? We learned recently via the Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee, on which we are represented, that George Irvin whose fairs are held on the circus site wanted to hold an event called Claphamland Winter Festival on the grassed area between Long Road, Holy Trinity Church and Rookery Road. The Society has objected strongly to this for a number of reasons. The site would be fenced off for 19 days over Christmas and New Year, block three well used paths, and lead to damage from 25 separate installations. At the time of going to press a final decision had yet to be taken by Lambeth.

Another event likely to cause controversy is a Pride House event, to be held on the Common during the Olympics. This event will last for the duration of the Games and will be on site for 24 days. The Ben and Jerry event, which members of the Clapham Society were instrumental in bringing to Clapham Common in 2005 and at which the Society has been able to promote Clapham and its history, will be moved from its usual weekend. The last Pride event which was held on Clapham Common in 1997 attracted about 250,000 people and because of broken glass etc. made the Common almost unusable for around three weeks. This led to the development of the events strategy, key areas of which have now been discarded.

As members will know the situation surrounding events on Clapham Common is the result of a decision by Lambeth Council to optimise income from parks and open spaces to offset budget cuts across services. In the financial year 2011/12 this has so far produced a sum approaching £500,000 of which over 80% came from events on Clapham Common.

Our concern is that the use of the Common as a revenue stream at this level is unsustainable. Send your comments on these proposals to John Kerridge: jkerridge@lambeth.gov.uk.

The Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee will be holding its Annual General Meeting on **Tuesday 6 December** at 7 pm at Clapham Manor School, Belmont Road, SW4 0BZ. All welcome.

Anna Jefferson Smith

Wednesday 21 November

The Cinema Museum. Martin Humphries, co-founder and Director of the Cinema Museum will talk about the history and development of the museum which is located in the Master's House of the former Lambeth Workhouse in Kennington.

There is no meeting in December.

Omnibus Events

Don't forget the next Omnibus/Clapham Chamber Concerts event at Clapham Library, North Side on **Friday 2 December** at 7.30 pm. The Moonfleet Trio will perform a varied programme including music by Beethoven, Schubert, Mancini and Bernstein.

There will be a special Christmas concert at the Library on **Wednesday 14 December** at 7.30 pm. Tickets (£10 in advance) and more details from claphamchamberconcerts@gmail.com or 07766 910 880.

Clapham Leisure Centre

There will be a 'soft' opening of the new leisure centre in Clapham Manor Street during the first week in December – a chance to see round – and a formal opening with swimming gala is planned for **Friday 3 February 2012**. Watch out for more details.

Stepping back to the 1890s

We are all used to the Victorian terraced house 21st century style – extended upstairs and down, rooms combined, en-suites inserted, and minimal furnishings. What a surprise then to walk back into an original 19th century Victorian house, furnished and decorated largely as it would have been (but with some modern touches).

Christopher Claxton Stevens (a furniture specialist) and his partner Diana kindly invited members of the Society into their home. Christopher gave an excellent introduction to the house, its history (probably originally inhabited by a city clerk) their own interests in architecture and furniture, and what changes – only really obvious in the kitchen – they had made as well as pointing out some of the special treasures.

Every surface was covered in objects exactly as in photos of the period and many were well worth studying. We were free to wander through the house – even with a peek into the cellar and attic. It was fascinating ... wonderful fireplaces, original colour schemes, a moulded ceiling (a new feature to me in such a house), pottery by JS Coleman, metalwork by WAS Benson, a sideboard and tea caddy by George Simpson, some Gillow furniture, a Victorian bath etc, etc.

I did wonder a little whether the city clerk who first occupied the house would have had the quality as well as the quantity of decorative pieces that we saw. I also spared a sympathetic thought for the poor, probably very young, maid who had to clean it all especially in an age of coal fires and gas lighting.

Equally amazing were the modern pieces. Christopher and Diana have commissioned works by the best modern craftsmen, in particular I was envious of the dining table and chairs by Pearl Dot. Mixing the best of old and new works wonderfully and here it also made the house feel very much a home. This was a fascinating evening and very many thanks to Christopher and Diana for allowing us to visit and even providing wine. Another visit has been arranged (see below) and I would recommend you go.

Janet Johnson

A further visit to this house will take place on **Thursday 2 February 2012**, at 6.30 pm. Contact Maev Sullivan on 020 7498 9205 to book your place.

A Forgotten Space in Clapham?

Forgotten Spaces is the title of an exhibition at Somerset House. It is based on a competition run by the Royal Institute of British Architects, in which designers were asked to submit ideas for use of overlooked or forgotten spaces in London.

The entries range from the practical to the way-out. First prize in the competition went to a scheme which is actually starting to happen, to use rooms in the towers of City Churches as low rent studios. Second prize winner was Steve McCoy for an urban climbing tunnel, giving children experience of rock climbing, abseiling and potholing in the heart of the city – to be located in the Deep Shelter under Clapham Common Underground Station. Participants would enter by the shaft at the junction of the High Street and Clapham Park Road (at the corner of the crossroads diagonally opposite the Clock Tower). They would abseil down, then scramble through a simulated pothole at the shelter level, ascending at the other end through a shaft further along the High Street. An incidental benefit would be the opportunity to improve the bleak fort-like entrance structure.

Imaginative and exciting, but one wonders what ‘elf and safety’ would make of it! The exhibition runs to 29 January and is in a remarkable forgotten space, the maze of light-wells and cellars two storeys below the main courtyard of Somerset House. There is more information about the competition on the RIBA website (www.architecture.com) and a history of the Deep Shelters on the Clapham Society website.

Peter Jefferson Smith

Christmas Fair

St Mary's Church, Clapham Park Road is holding a Christmas Fair at the church hall in St Alphonsus Road on **Saturday 3 December** from 12 noon to 4 pm. All proceeds will go towards the restoration of the church tower.

New members

We have recently welcomed the following new members: Patrizia and Robin Cooke-Hurle, Jason Humphries and Trevor Clough, Mark and Naomi Leveson-Gower.

A Christmas Gift

Membership of the Clapham Society makes an excellent Christmas present, especially for a new Clapham resident. Our book, *Discovering Clapham*, is also a useful introduction to the area. All details are on our website www.claphamsociety.com, or check contacts on the back of this newsletter.

Painting Canada

This exhibition at Dulwich Picture Gallery (until 8 January 2012) is a revelation. It shows the work of a group of early 20th century artists, revered in Canada but almost unknown elsewhere, who painted the landscape of their country through the changing seasons with an immediacy and subtlety which has come to represent the way Canadians visualise their country. Many paintings, finished in the studio, are shown alongside the matching *plein air* sketches. The accompanying book by exhibition curator and Director of the Gallery, Ian Dejardin, is a splendid record of a unique exhibition. Don't miss it. More details on www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk or call 020 8639 5254.

Only so much

Michael Glover will be reading from his new book of poetry, *Only So Much*, at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 on **Sunday 4 December** at 6.30 pm. Admission free – just turn up and listen.

Christmas Fayre

On **Saturday 10 December** Holy Trinity Church's Green and Ethical Christmas Fayre will be opened by Kate Hoey MP at 10 am. Stalls will sell fairly traded, green, and ethical gifts, organic food and recycled wrapping. There will be a pedal-powered music centre, live festive music, Father Christmas grotto and beeswax candle making. The event is held to raise awareness of environmental issues within our community and to raise funds for work to improve energy efficiency in the Church. You can also buy your Christmas tree in the churchyard.

Light up a Life

Trinity Hospice's annual carol service will be on **Thursday 15 December**. The lighting of the tree at the hospice at 6.45 pm will be followed by the carol service at Holy Trinity Church at 7.15 pm. For more information about a light on the tree to celebrate the life of a loved one contact Leah Bull on 020 7787 1085 or lbull@trinityhospice.org.uk.

Flock

The current exhibition at the De Morgan Centre features ceramics, glassware, sculptures and drawings inspired by the form and flight of birds. This is a great opportunity to purchase unique Christmas presents by artists including Wendy Ramshaw, Prue Cooper and Anthony Theakston. Telephone 020 8871 1144 for details.

