



# The Clapham Society Newsletter

Issue 347

May 2012

## Events on the Bandstand

The summer programme of events on Clapham Common Bandstand starts in early June, with Becontree Brass Band on **Saturday 2 June** and The No Frills Band on **Sunday 3 June**. Paddy Egan Band will perform on **Saturday 9 June** and London Consorts of Winds on **Sunday 10 June**. All concerts start at 3 pm and are free.

## The New Library

There has been a delay in the completion and handing over of the new library building in Clapham High Street, and at the time of writing a definite date for the opening is not available, but it is likely to be in early June. We shall give full details in our next newsletter.

## May Day Parade

On **Monday 7 May** the grand May Day parade will go from Windrush Square up Brixton Hill to Brixton Windmill, where there will be a festival with music and entertainment in Windmill Gardens. For details go to [www.brixtonwindmill.org](http://www.brixtonwindmill.org).

## Summer diary dates

The dates for this year's local summer fairs are as follows: St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove **Saturday 9 June**, Holy Trinity Fayre **Saturday 16 June** and Abbeville Fete **Saturday 30 June**.

## Royal Devotion

An exhibition celebrating the Diamond Jubilee and the 350th anniversary of the Revised Book of Common Prayer opens in the Great Hall of Lambeth Palace on **Tuesday 1 May** and runs until 14 July. For more details and to book go to [www.lambethpalacelibrary.org](http://www.lambethpalacelibrary.org) or 0844 8471698. Lambeth Palace Library, Lambeth Palace Road, SE1 7JU.

**NOTE: This month's meeting is NOT at our usual venue.**

**Wednesday 16 May – at St Mary's Monastery, 8 Clapham Park Road, SW4 7AP. St Mary's Church and Monastery.** Fr Dominic O'Toole, the Parish Priest, will talk about the history of the church and monastery. He will be outlining current plans for the restoration of the church and the landmark spire, and for use of the monastery. There will be an opportunity to see some of the interior of these important Clapham buildings. The church was built in 1849 by William Wardell and is a fine example of the early Gothic revival. It was extended in the 1880s by JF Bentley, who in 1892 also built the monastery. JF Bentley, who is best known as the architect of Westminster Cathedral, lived in Old Town.

This meeting will be at the Monastery and **not** at our usual venue. Please enter by the door in the far left corner of the church courtyard. Doors open at 7.30 pm, and the meeting begins at 8 pm.

### Wednesday 30 May

We have arranged a special walk as part of Wandsworth Heritage Festival, exploring Nightingale Lane and the surrounding area. Led by Derrick Johnson. Meet at Clapham South Underground Station at 6.30 pm.

### Wednesday 20 June

**Brixton Windmill.** Richard Santiri, Vice Chairman and a founder of the Friends of Windmill Gardens will tell us about the 14-year struggle which has finally led to the restoration of the windmill. With the help of a £2m Heritage Lottery Fund grant the windmill has now been restored, a part-time education officer has been appointed to work with local schools and guides are being trained to give tours of the windmill.

**Brixton Windmill** has been shortlisted for a Museums and Heritage Award for Excellence 2012. The awards celebrate best practice within museums, galleries and heritage visitor attractions, and Brixton Windmill has been shortlisted in the Restoration or Conservation category. The result will be announced during May.

**This meeting will be at our normal venue, Clapham Manor Primary School.**

**July and August meetings will be replaced by the following walks.**

### Wednesday 18 July

A guided walk along Clapham Park Road to Park Hill and the surrounding area. Led by Peter Jefferson Smith.

### Wednesday 15 August

A guided walk round Clapham Old Town, the heart of historic Clapham. Leader to be announced later.

For both walks meet at the clock tower outside Clapham Common Underground Station at 6.30 pm. All walks last about 1½ hours and are free of charge.

# Sarah Winsor: from Clapham governess to African pioneer

Professor Fiona Leach addressed our March meeting on the life of Sarah Winsor, one of three women she has been researching, all wives of early 19th century missionaries. It was the time of the Evangelical Revival, of the campaign to abolish the slave trade, of the creation of a new home for freed slaves in Africa, and of the start of the modern missionary movement in Africa. The Clapham Sect was involved in all of these. As Professor Leach explained, we know much about these exceptional people, but too little about the ordinary and long forgotten.

Sarah Winsor was an ordinary woman, modest and retiring. Born in York in 1773, the daughter of an innkeeper, through family circumstances she had to find work as a governess. By 1801 she was with the family of the Rector of Clapham, the Revd John Venn, helping to look after his seven children. Three events were to shape her future. In 1799 Zachary Macaulay brought 24 children from Sierra Leone, to be educated in Clapham at his African Academy; and in the same year the Church Missionary Society (CMS) was founded. Thirdly the CMS, having failed to find British volunteers, recruited as its first missionaries two Germans. In 1802 Peter Hartwig and Melchior Renner came to Clapham, partly to improve their English and to acquire religious instruction but also to learn Susu, the dominant language of the region around Sierra Leone, from the children at the Academy.

After 15 months in Clapham and shortly before he was due to go to Sierra Leone, Hartwig announced that he and Sarah were to marry. Venn and the CMS were dismayed, and there was disturbing gossip: but marry they did, and the CMS allowed Sarah to go out to Sierra Leone with her husband (and also after reflection, endorsed its male missionaries marrying, so that as many as two-thirds took wives with them during the first decades of the 19th century).

Sarah and her husband were probably ill-equipped and ignorant of what to expect. The voyage was long and dangerous; the climate was hot and humid, and they arrived not long before the rainy season. There was a risk of attacks by the French, the black settlers from America were discontented with their

treatment by the British authorities, and all around Freetown the slave trade still went on. Sarah started teaching, the first woman (in fact she was the first person, male or female) to teach for the CMS. A year later she wrote two letters home, which explained the difficult lives the missionaries were leading, and at the same time Renner wrote that Sarah had been too ill to attend Church for five months. Hartwig was widely disliked and quarrelled with Renner. Eventually the Governor sent Hartwig up country and persuaded Sarah to go back to England, since he thought he could more easily deal with her husband in her absence.

After a year in England, Sarah was told by the CMS to prepare to return to Africa, but there was an unexplained delay. That was a disaster for her, since in the interim relations between Hartwig and the Governor had got worse. The trigger was the return to Sierra Leone from the African Academy of William Fantimane, the son of a local chief who invited the missionaries to establish a settlement on his land. When the Governor refused to let Hartwig go with William, he left in a rage and went to live in the house of a Mrs Williams, an English slave trader. When the CMS learned of Hartwig's desertion, they cut off Sarah's allowance.

Sarah found a position as governess with a family in Scarborough. Then in 1814, she got a letter from Hartwig: the CMS had agreed to take him back as a translator of African languages, and he asked Sarah to return. Reluctantly she did so, but by the time she got to Sierra Leone, Hartwig had again left Freetown. Renner found him, but he was ill, and died a week after his reunion with Sarah. She resolved to stay in Sierra Leone and teach, but died of yellow fever six weeks later. There was a cruel twist to the story. Renner explained later that Hartwig had been ill and destitute when he asked Sarah to return; but by the time she left England he had once again left the CMS and gone back to live with his African 'wife'. Sarah's story is a sad example of a wife sacrificing everything for an undeserving husband.

*Peter Jefferson Smith*

## Omnibus and Old Clapham Library

In February Lambeth Council put the old Clapham Library up for sale or lease and 14 bids were received, including one from Omnibus, the charity set up by local residents, which, if successful, plans to turn it into an Arts Centre. The Council are still deliberating on the building's future and a covenant dated March 1908 between Ross Ltd, 2-3 Clapham Common North Side (now Experian/QAS) and Wandsworth Council, which restricts the use of the building to the storage of books, needs to be investigated in detail prior to the disposal of the building.

**Centenary Exhibition.** May 2012 marks the centenary of Clapham-born author and playwright Pamela Hansford Johnson. Her daughter Lady Avebury, who is the patron of Omnibus, will mount an exhibition of her works together with letters and memorabilia at Clapham Library in May up to the closure of the library. Pamela Hansford Johnson wrote 27 novels and several plays which were performed in the West End. As a teenager she was the girlfriend of Dylan Thomas and was later to marry physicist and novelist CP Snow. To mark the centenary Macmillan are republishing her novels.\*

The planned closure of the old library is dependent on the completion of the new facility on Clapham High Street which has been delayed. At the time of writing we have no confirmed date for the closure, but Omnibus is planning to hold an event on the final evening to celebrate 123 years of continuous community use of the building as a library by the burghers of Clapham. Guest speakers, entertainment and refreshment will be provided and everyone will be welcome to mark this historic occasion.

Further information on both events is available on the Omnibus website [www.omnibus-clapham.org](http://www.omnibus-clapham.org) or from [george.owen@omnibus-clapham.org](mailto:george.owen@omnibus-clapham.org).

*George Owen, Chairman, Omnibus*

## Peter Holland

We were sorry to hear of the death of Peter Holland, a loyal member of the Society who for several years was responsible for sending out the newsletters to those on our mailing list. Peter was a knowledgeable botanist, and an enthusiastic member and supporter of the South London Botanical Institute.

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\*The Clapham Society's book, *Clapham in the Twentieth Century*, has several extracts from Pamela Hansford Johnson's biographical book *Important to Me: Personalalia* describing her childhood in Clapham and her romance with Dylan Thomas. There is also an extract from her novel *An Impossible Marriage* which is set in Clapham. *Clapham in the Twentieth Century* is now reduced to £6 – contact Alyson Wilson or see order form on our website [www.claphamsociety.com](http://www.claphamsociety.com).

## Maurice Stewart

We are sad to report that Maurice Stewart died recently. Many members will remember him for the imaginative entertainments he devised for the Society – including the 2003 celebration of the tercentenary of the death of Samuel Pepys in Clapham, and the evening based on British Music Hall in 2007. He gave an amusing account of his life in show business at one of our meetings, and he took part with huge enthusiasm in our ‘Common Voices’ project with children from Bonneville Primary School. Maurice lived most of his life in Clapham, and contributed much to local life. A full tribute to him will be published in a future newsletter.



*Maurice Stewart sharing childhood memories with children during of our ‘Common Voices’ project in 2009*

## Spring, art and cake

Art and Cake in SW4, Clapham’s art and craft collectibles fair returns on **Saturday 5 May** from 9.30 am to 6.30 pm at its regular venue, Clapham Methodist Church, 121 Clapham High Street, SW4 7RJ. This free, one-day, event offers Clapham locals, artists and craft designers a place to come together as a community to enjoy art and crafts.

Held in a glass-walled indoor setting the monthly event is organised by SW Review (formerly SW4 magazine) and provides an opportunity to buy new works from local artists, along with hand made craft designs. Also featured are stalls exhibiting homewares, fashion, jewellery, and collectibles as well as vintage and contemporary designs. Visitors get an opportunity to indulge in plenty of cake and sweet baked treats, and the event also offers a parent-supervised, free play area for children.

With high quality items priced from £5.00 upwards, the event is said to create a vibrant art and craft collectibles market place for Clapham’s community. Joan David-Kaye, creative director, said: ‘We provide artists with a visible platform on the high street and a place for the local community to share in the pleasure that art and crafts brings. Our two favourite things are art and cake; both provide much pleasure and derive from a creative process, and this is something we like to celebrate’.

For further information and to sign up for the free mailing list email [artbazaar@thesw4magazine.co.uk](mailto:artbazaar@thesw4magazine.co.uk).

## Gardens open in May

Two gardens in Clapham Manor Street are open for the National Gardens Scheme (NGS) on **Sunday 20 May** from 3 pm to 6 pm. No. 40 is a large garden divided by arched apple trees, with a cobbled courtyard, a stream and two ponds, while No. 44 has the emphasis on lush green planting with white flowers.

Slightly further afield, 38 Killieser Avenue, SW2 4NT is open on the same day from 2 pm to 6 pm. This is a well-established country style garden with unusual perennials, a cascade and rose arches.

On **Sunday 27 May** Trinity Hospice has an Open Garden Day from 12 noon to 4 pm. This is a family fun day and attractions include children’s entertainers, a homemade cake stall, hog roast, and vintage hair and make-up. And of course, you can also see round a very attractive garden. Tickets are £5 for adults and children under 12 are free.

© Paul Anant

## More garden matters

On **Tuesday 15 May** at 6.30 pm the Director of the Garden Museum, Christopher Woodward will be giving a talk entitled *A History of Garden Visiting*, which is linked to the exhibition on that subject currently on at the museum. Arrive early to see the exhibition before the talk begins at the Garden Museum, Lambeth Palace Road, SE1 7LB. More details at [www.gardenmuseum.org.uk](http://www.gardenmuseum.org.uk) or 020 7401 8865.

**Open Garden Squares Weekend** is on **Saturday 9 June** and **Sunday 10 June**. This is a fantastic opportunity to see as many as you can manage of the 212 gardens open this year, many of which are not normally open to the public – all for the cost of one ticket (£9 in advance or £12 on the day). For details of the gardens open and to buy tickets go to [www.opensquares.org](http://www.opensquares.org).

Friendly, enthusiastic volunteer helpers are still needed at some gardens. The duties are to welcome visitors, check and sell tickets and ensure that the garden is treated with respect. In exchange for one half day’s duty a volunteer receives a free ticket for the two day event. If you would be interested in helping contact Jock Blakey on 07707 066 765 or email [vol@opensquares.org](mailto:vol@opensquares.org).

## Postponement Apologies

Clapham Art and Antiques Fair has been postponed until further notice due to unexpected events. The fair was due to take place on **Friday 27 April** and **Saturday 28 April**. The organisers regret that the event is unable to take place as planned and would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused. For further information or to sign up for the mailing list email [editor@artculturesouthlondon.co.uk](mailto:editor@artculturesouthlondon.co.uk).



© Anna Jefferson Smith

## Repair of the Event Site

In recent years the Society has lobbied for more thorough restoration of the event site at the end of the summer. The practice of spiking and reseeded was not sufficient to compensate for the heavy impact of large events and much of the area had become increasingly compacted. In mid April we were very pleased to see a team from the firm Terrain Aeration carrying out treatment to the worst patches. The process involved putting a probe down to a depth of one metre then forcing in compressed air to lift the compacted soil improving drainage and killing off anaerobic bacteria.

## On the Common

On 29 March Lambeth granted a Premises Licence to Pride House Ltd to hold an event on Clapham Common from 25 July until 12 August, in conjunction with LOCOG. There were a number of objections including one group who were represented by David Matthias QC, an expert in the field. Subsequently events took an unexpected turn when it was discovered that the site had been sublet for a large music/dance event on Saturday 4 August. This event was to be run by Eastern Electrics in whose publicity there was no mention of either Pride or the Olympic Games. Tickets had been on sale for a month for the event at a 'secret venue'. Six arenas were promised.

The Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee and the Clapham Society have been vociferous in their opposition to the Eastern Electrics component of the Pride House event and at the time of going to press are seeking advice on the legality of such sub-letting. The risks to public safety related to security, when emergency services will be stretched by the Olympics and the first anniversary of the London riots, and the likelihood of public nuisance from unacceptable noise levels, suggest that conditions of the Licence may well be breached. We have asked for an urgent review by the Lambeth Safety Advisory Group.

## Wandsworth Heritage Festival

This annual festival, packed as usual with enticing events, commences on **Saturday 26 May** with a free Open Day (11 am to 8 pm) at Battersea Arts Centre, Lavender Hill, SW11 5TN. You can book a tour of the building ([www.bac.org.uk](http://www.bac.org.uk) or 020 7223 2223) and attend short talks, music and films about people and activities associated with the building since 1893. On the same day Wandsworth Museum is holding free craft activities for children ([bookings@wandsworthmuseum.co.uk](mailto:bookings@wandsworthmuseum.co.uk) or 020 8870 6060).

On **Sunday 27 May** at 11 am there is a two hour Battersea History Walk, and at 2.30 pm a guided walk of the highlights of Wandsworth, including the Huguenot burial ground and Wandsworth Prison. Another walk on **Monday 28 May** goes from Battersea to Balham taking in places associated with local authors, Edward and Helen Thomas. Our own walk, as mentioned above, on **Wednesday 30 May** is led by Derrick Johnson and covers the Nightingale Lane area.

There are a number of fascinating talks, including *Captain Oates, Antarctica's Tragic Hero*, by his biographer Michael Smith on **Tuesday 29 May**, *Putney Velodrome* on **Thursday 31 May**, and another Clapham Society contribution to the event, on **Wednesday 6 June** a talk about the long-distance runner, Violet Piercy, by Peter Jefferson Smith who has been attempting to trace the history of this publicity-seeking, serial litigant, yet elusive lady.

The festival continues until 10 June with a host of events organised by the various local societies, historians, Wandsworth Museum and others. The full programme, with details of how to book for each event, is available at Wandsworth Libraries and at Wandsworth Museum.

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

### Chairman

21 Clapham Common West Side, SW4 9AN  
Email: [annabel@allott.plus.com](mailto:annabel@allott.plus.com)

### Annabel Allott

Tel: 020 7228 5551

### Planning Matters

45 Rodenhurst Road, SW4 8AE  
Email: [pjashford@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:pjashford@yahoo.co.uk)

### Philip Ashford

Tel: 020 8674 1727

### Secretary

552 Wandsworth Road, SW8 3JX

### Jill Cramphorn

Tel: 020 7720 3343

### Common and Open Spaces

22 Iveley Road, SW4 0EW

### Anna Jefferson Smith

Tel: 020 7622 8285

### Treasurer

15 Turret Grove, SW4 0ES

### David Brown

Tel: 020 7720 7536

### Newsletter and Publications

22 Crescent Grove, SW4 7AH  
Email: [alysonwilson.sw4@virgin.net](mailto:alysonwilson.sw4@virgin.net)

### Alyson Wilson

Tel: 020 7622 6360

### Membership Secretary

30 Trinity Close, SW4 0JD

### Jennifer Everett

Tel: 020 7627 4770

### Meetings and Events

2 Fitzwilliam Road, SW4 0DN

### Maev Sullivan

Tel: 020 7498 9205

Email: [maevsullivan@gmail.com](mailto:maevsullivan@gmail.com)

Details of meetings, activities and a full list of our publications are on our website at [www.claphamsociety.com](http://www.claphamsociety.com)