

# The Clapham Society Newsletter



Issue 354

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## Omnibus

**Omniiwho?** Omnibus is a local group dedicated to creating a vibrant local arts centre in the historic old Clapham Library building. The group was originally formed as 'Old Clapham Library SW4' (OCLSW4) in 2006. It immediately set out to keep the library building in public hands, for public use.

An attempt to get the building listed, to protect it from demolition or unsympathetic development failed, but over time OCLSW4 gained a profile and managed to engage with Lambeth Council who were supportive of its aims. As time passed, the group grew and set about developing its creative vision and building a business plan.

**Omniiwhy?** After much thought and discussion, the name Omnibus was chosen for its associations with inclusiveness, comprehensiveness, the locality and a memory of the library tradition. The mission was to create an iconic new destination for the arts in Lambeth; to create a programme of activity that embraces arts, community and educational work that is attractive to a diverse range of local audiences which we see as being particularly poorly provided for in Clapham. Omnibus also achieved charitable status, which will be very important to its financial success.

**Omniiwhat?** As the shockwaves from the financial crisis hit, the prospects for Omnibus winning the bid to run the building

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Our regular monthly meetings are held at Clapham Manor Primary School, Belmont Road, SW4 0BZ. The entrance to the school in Stonhouse Street, 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. Meetings are free and non-members are very welcome.

### Wednesday 13 February

**Edmund Bird**, Heritage Advisor to the Greater London Authority and Transport for London, former Head of Conservation at Lambeth and Camden, will appraise the architecture of Lambeth, with a special focus on Clapham, of the period between the wars (1918-1939) – an era of enormous change with new building styles and new building types appearing throughout the borough as Art Deco, vernacular, Neo-Georgian and early examples of the Modern Movement all jostled for position, transforming much of Lambeth.

### Wednesday 20 March

**The new US Embassy building in Nine Elms.** Construction work on the new US Embassy will commence in 2013 for a planned 2017 completion. Lynne Platt from the Embassy will tell us why it is moving from Mayfair and how the Embassy will fit into the new neighbourhood, which is itself a welcome regeneration project for the Nine Elms area.

## Planning Problems

The Planning Sub-committee is finding that more time than usual is being spent on arguing the case for protecting historic buildings in Clapham, even when they are listed. The response to demographic and social change is a fact of life but valued character and significance in old buildings is increasingly at risk in the face of changing values and expectations, especially in space and taste – the most fickle of all and the agent of often irreversible loss. Current applications and issues include:

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looked grim, but this didn't deter us. We campaigned, we raised funds, we cajoled and we pleaded. We mounted a series of very successful events with local luminaries Miriam Margolyes, John O'Farrell, Mark Thomas and Arthur Smith all performing at the Library to great acclaim, raising funds and our profile. The wonderful local music group, Clapham Chamber Concerts mounted several events too, including a beautiful evening with the Moonfleet violin trio, which showed that even without celebrities, Omnibus can attract a viable audience. Most recently, we hosted a wonderful devised piece called *Hush* by students from the Brit performing arts school in Croydon, which made creative and poignant use of the now-vacant library. In the evening Junction Jazz added a musical twist.

**Omnisuccess!** Meanwhile the campaign to secure the library continued. We submitted a detailed proposal to Lambeth and Chair George Owen gave an eloquent and impassioned speech to the full council chamber which received resounding applause. In the end, despite the financial constraints upon them, Lambeth saw the value in our cause and awarded us a lease to run the building as an arts centre for all and this was finally signed on 21 December. But money is tight, so the terms of the lease are tough, meaning we have to achieve success without subsidy and earn enough to pay the rent. None of this would have been achieved without the generous donations from the local community and, as with any project like this, in its nascent phase fundraising will continue.

**Omninext.** The builders move in this month to carry out the refurbishment and we are delighted many of them will be tutors and students from Lambeth College, just across the Common. We open for business in the spring with an exciting programme being developed by Head of Programming Mickey Smith from Peckham's Bussey Building, supported by General Manager Sam Toolan. For more information: [www.omnibus-clapham.org](http://www.omnibus-clapham.org).

**Omniplea.** If you are interested in helping Omnibus, please contact me: [george.owen@omnibus-clapham.org](mailto:george.owen@omnibus-clapham.org) or Sam Toolan: [samtoolan@googlemail.com](mailto:samtoolan@googlemail.com).

*George Owen*

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**New members** We are pleased to welcome the following new members: Joan Inglis, Tom Lewis, Michael Marriott, Michael and Lucy McHugh, John Ost and William Simpson.

**42 Clapham Manor Street** (Grade II Listed), once the General Dispensary, was designed by JT Knowles, Senior. It was erected between 1850-53 following the cholera epidemic of 1848 and was paid for by public subscription.

The Russian Ballet School has outgrown this building and its proposal for a massive studio extension and virtual re-building of the rear range would be a gross over-development of the back-land site and an assault on the form and character of the listed building. It rides rough-shod over Lambeth Council's Conservation Area statement for this area which sets down what should be respected in planning applications. This includes requirements of scale, form, materials and space between buildings such as the garden areas behind the terraced houses in Clapham Manor Street. We consider the sheer mass and height of the proposed concrete clad extension will have unacceptable impact on the space and amenity of the surrounding buildings, gardens and open space. Conspicuously out of context and scale with both its surroundings and the host building, it will block views across rear gardens and disrupt the spatial continuity.

Even though the original interior was lost in a fire and the rear range altered, the overall form is still very critical to the mass and architectural integrity of the whole. The Victorian Society's post-fire report noted that the original arched windows at the rear were 'quite fine' and that 'the presumption for the preservation of the surviving form of an important listed building must be considered'. The proposed extension does not do this. English Heritage considers the proposal damaging. We hope that the Council's planning committee is listening.

**49 Clapham High Street** (Grade II Listed) is currently occupied by Hatfields Restoration, and in 2009 was the subject of a Clapham Society talk and visit. The freeholder proposes a change of use from B1 (Commercial) to seven residential units with a mansard roof and extensive physical alterations.

The building comprises the original early 19th century house (formerly Brooklands) plus the extensions of around 1860 to the rear which were added to accommodate the Catholic school and (later) Carter's Boys' Home and then Dr Barnado's. It is one of the most interesting buildings in Clapham – an important social and physical document of its history as a private house, school, and orphanage, which uses are still perceptible in fabric, internal arrangement and detail. Much of the special interest of the building lies in this physical manifestation of former use which was presumably an important factor in its listing.

Whereas all the past users of the building have, through the positive use of inherited space-plan and character, largely preserved that special interest, this proposal will obliterate it. Continuity by means of a commercial space-use similar to the existing would be a better means of ensuring the survival of such an important local building which could otherwise be seen as a building at risk.

*John Adams*

## **Lambeth's money-raising affects Clapham**

Late last year Lambeth auctioned two houses in North Street and three in Lillieshall Road. Ultimately they plan to sell the 15 listed buildings in Lillieshall Road, six in North Street (two of them listed), all in Rectory Gardens and several in Rectory Grove. Most are houses retained by Lambeth after they lost the two 1970s Compulsory Purchase Order Public Inquiries.

Although the borough-wide principle of selling off individual housing may be acceptable, it reduces the number of rentable houses, of which there is a shortage. We are concerned because these are the only early 19th century artisans' houses in Clapham Old Town remaining in their near original state. Any unauthorised work to a listed building is a criminal offence and selling the houses without careful control of internal and external alterations (of which there is already evidence) will impact on their character as a group. The interiors, with features such as original fireplaces and panelling, could be lost.

This Society is helping the Council by identifying features worthy of retention. So far surveys of five houses have been passed to Lambeth's Conservation Officer and English Heritage for use in discussions with the new purchasers, who may not be aware of the constraints applicable when altering listed buildings.

The sales are regrettable, but need not be a bar to sensitive modernisation. Our ideal solution would be to formalise the existing housing association and through this, fund sensitive repairs in Old Town, particularly Lillieshall Road, North Street and Rectory Gardens. This would have the additional benefit of maintaining a rented housing stock, which is more flexible than owner occupation.

*Peter Cobley*

## The Cinema Museum

For our last meeting of 2012 Martin Humphries, co-founder and director of the Cinema Museum in Kennington, gave us an interesting talk on the history of the present site and the development of the museum. The museum is located in the Master's House of the former Lambeth Workhouse. The 'new' workhouse was opened on this site in 1871 to accommodate 820 people, who were divided into various groups: male, female, children, 'able-bodied good' and 'able-bodied bad'. In 1898 Charlie Chaplin, as he mentions in his autobiography, was admitted to the workhouse with his mother and brother, Sydney. Later in life, he was to take his mother to live with him in Los Angeles.

Martin's co-founder, Ronald Grant, who had collected cinema memorabilia from childhood, started work at the age of 15 as an apprentice projectionist in Aberdeen. He later moved to London to the British Film Institute and then to Brixton Ritzy. On a holiday visit to Aberdeen, Ronald happened to learn that a chain of local cinemas had closed and all the contents were in store and about to be destroyed. Very soon he had arranged two pantechinons loaded with everything from projection equipment to carpets, handrails, doors and cinema organs, heading for London. It was clear that the growing collection needed a home, and in 1896 Ronald and Martin set up the Cinema Museum. After several moves it finally found a permanent home in the former workhouse in Kennington.

Martin showed us many pictures – several icons of Art Deco design – which reminded many members of the audience of cinema-going 50 years ago. He had also brought along samples of carpet, commissionaires' uniforms, and various signs and posters.

We heard many interesting anecdotes and facts about early cinema going. Did you know that at one time metal tokens were issued (instead of paper tickets) and the shape varied so that the usherette could tell in the dark which part of the cinema had been paid for? Paper tickets did not come in until after WW1. And we heard about 'faked' war stories made in the days before cameras were at every battle site. During the Boer War a north country company, Mitchell and Kenyon, had actors to re-enact a battle scene (usually in the countryside around Blackburn) and it was enlivened with smoke bombs and gunfire! But then many of us had forgotten that not long ago performances were continuous

## Another Plaque Unveiled

At midday on 4 December, in bright sunshine, the Society's third commemorative plaque was unveiled on the former Odeon Cinema at Clapham South by Martin Humphries, co-founder and director of the Cinema Museum. About 30 members of the Society were present most of whom repaired to The Avalon, 16 Balham Hill, for a brief but enjoyable reception. The occasion was enlivened by the presence of Morris Hardcastle (alias Robert Holden) in the full uniform of a cinema commissionaire of the 1930s, complete with megaphone.

The Odeon, which opened on 16 April 1938, with a film called *Blondes for Danger*, could accommodate an audience of 1822. It had a stylish interior with a tearoom and balcony foyer. In October 1940 the cinema was badly damaged by enemy action, which destroyed half of the front façade. The damage was sheeted over and the cinema reopened almost immediately. The Rank Organisation closed it in September 1972 and wanted to demolish it and replace it with a block of flats. Permission was refused and it reopened as The Liberty in 1974 showing Asian films. It finally closed in 1979 and the auditorium was demolished in May 1985 with the foyer being converted to Majestic Wine Warehouse which is still in occupation. The rest of the building was rebuilt as flats and renamed Foyer Apartments. The art deco façade was saved and with its faience tiles and characteristic fin still gives the impression of an Odeon Cinema of the 1930s now embellished with a Clapham Society explanatory plaque.



*Martin Humphries, Director of the Cinema Museum, Annabel Allott, Derrick Johnson and cinema commissionaire, Morris Hardcastle beneath the newly unveiled plaque.*

and the audience came in and out at any time, and could even sit through a film more than once.

Martin gave us a taste of the treasures to be found at the museum, and mentioned that a special exhibition of commissionaires' uniforms will be held in March. He also mentioned the extensive archive housed in the museum, which is accessible by appointment. The museum has regular screenings of classic films and a variety of events throughout the year. For full details of these, as well as how to find the Cinema Museum (2 Dugard Way, SE11 4HT) and visiting information go to [www.cinemamuseum.org.uk](http://www.cinemamuseum.org.uk) or telephone 020 7840 2200.

## Clapham Chamber Concerts

The next concert is on **Friday 8 February** at 7.30 pm at St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX. The programme is Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro*, *Trio for Flute, Viola and Harp* by Debussy and Brahms' *Clarinet Quintet*. Tickets on the door at £10, £8 concessions, £3 children.

**Wandsworth U3A** At the meeting on **Monday 18 February** David Evans will talk about rationing during and after WW2. *Fair Shares for All* is at Earlsfield Library, 276 Magdalen Road, SW18 3NY starting at 2 pm.

**North Side** Improvements to surfacing, tree-planting and traffic calming measures along North Side are generally to be welcomed, but the prioritisation and re-alignment of Rookery Road so as to allow Rookery Road traffic to stream down Macaulay Road is causing local concern. It will generate rat-running down a road at present relatively free of through traffic and will, in effect, return to the layout that was within memory altered to the present one because it was a dangerous accident spot.

## On the Common

The Claphamland Winter Fair event initially scheduled to take place over Christmas and the New Year at the northern end of the Common was withdrawn by the organisers. This was as well since the saturation of the Common after persistent rainfall would have made environmental damage inevitable had large amounts of equipment and heavy footfall been brought to the site.

The Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee is holding its Annual General Meeting on **Wednesday 6 February** at Clapham Manor Primary School beginning at 7 pm. All are welcome.

**Relief at Last!** The September newsletter pictured the secondhand public lavatory labelled 'Lower Marsh' which had been standing, unusable, in a fenced off builders' compound opposite Clapham South station for many months.

Readers, particularly those travelling via that station, will be pleased to learn that the lavatory is now in operation and stands proudly in its own enclosure with a newly planted tree and correctly labelled 'Clapham Common'.

**Pilates classes** Kamila is a BASI Pilates instructor who teaches mixed ability classes every Wednesday from 7.30 pm to 8.30 pm at St. Stephen's Church, Weir Road, SW12 0NU. She is also available for private sessions and for small group sessions. Contact: [kamilablackborn@gmail.com](mailto:kamilablackborn@gmail.com) or telephone 07919 364739.

## Wandsworth Pubs

Have you ever asked: 'Doesn't that building look like a pub?' 'What did that pub used to be called?' 'What does the name mean?'

Well, a useful little booklet published by the Wandsworth Historical Society can answer most of these questions. It's called simply *Pubs of Wandsworth* by Dorian Gerhold and gives a brief history of the development of drinking places in the borough, a couple of maps and then lists alphabetically all the pubs known to have existed or still existing with some historical notes. The list is interspersed with some photos. I particularly like the Prince of Wales, Garratt Lane ... beer consumption there must have been considerable if it needed two drays at one time!

As it is only 36 pages it can't answer all your questions (perhaps a future edition could cover the architecture) but it's an excellent little reference and encourages one to try a few more of the area's drinking establishments (for local history purpose only of course). Copies are available price £4.00 plus £1.50 for post and packaging from Dorian Gerhold, 19 Montserrat Road, London SW15 2LD. Cheques payable to 'Wandsworth Historical Society'. *Janet Johnson*

## Ideas that changed the World

A series of lectures at Dulwich Picture Gallery examines some of the most significant ideas from Plato to Multiculturalism and from Psychoanalysis to European Law. On Tuesday mornings at 10.30 am, £10 per lecture or series discount. For full details go to [www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk](http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk) or telephone 020 8693 5254.

## Christmas Miscellany

For their first event in their new premises Omnibus invited students from the Brit School to do a performance for local primary school children. There was also music from Junction Jazz, talented musicians and long-term Omnibus supporters.

The devised piece called *Hush*, from students on the Community Arts Practice Course at the Brit School, used displaced characters from various children's books; separating the 'goodies' from the 'baddies': Peter Pan from Captain Hook, a Ghostbuster with no ghosts etc. We saw the 'baddies' first, determined to find the 'goodies' in order to fight them. Meanwhile, the 'goodies', with their sworn enemies gone, also discovered that life was less interesting with no one to try and defeat. Every hero needs an anti-hero and, realising this, even Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort were thrilled to be reunited at the end.

The evening performance I attended was rounded off with more Junction Jazz and the cast of the production singing, and the audience joined in too to sing carols.

Altogether, it was a gentle, friendly evening, more a taste of things to come than a grand opening. When I asked my seven-year-old son afterwards what he thought, he said, 'It was fun, funny and exciting!'. So a job well done and, well, watch this space! *Tabitha Owen*

## Handel's Messiah

On **Saturday 16 March** Antony le Fleming will be directing Handel's *Messiah*, Parts 2 and 3 'from scratch' at Holy Trinity Church, Clapham, SW4 0QZ, commencing at 10 am with the performance at 5 pm. Entry fee £10. There will be extra optional note-learning sessions on **Monday 4 March**, **Monday 11 March** and **Friday 15 March** at 7.30 pm. To register interest contact Antony le Fleming: [antle Fleming@gmail.com](mailto:antle Fleming@gmail.com) or telephone 020 8761 4397.

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

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

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