



# The Clapham Society

## Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Monday 21 October 2024

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**The 60th Annual General Meeting of the Clapham Society was held at 8pm on Monday 21 October 2024 at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW.**

The Society's President, Martin Drury, took the chair and welcomed all those present (including observers). Approximately 70 members were present.

### **1. Apologies**

Anna Long, Gill White.

### **2. Minutes of the previous AGM**

Approved.

### **3. Annual Report for the year 2023/24**

The Annual Report published with the October 2024 Newsletter was adopted.

### **4. Financial Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024**

David Brown, the Society's Financial Officer and former Treasurer, presented the Accounts. He referred to the challenges to the Society's finances that he had highlighted this time last year, and this was reflected in the accounts being presented. The Committee had taken a number of measures in that year that were now contributing to a much improved financial position for the current year: subscriptions were increased with effect from 1 April 2024; a Gift Aid claim based on updated declarations by members had yielded c. £3,000; Audley Villages were invited, and had generously agreed, to sponsor the Newsletter; individual members generously supported the Summer Party; and steps had been taken to change the provider of the website and IT services. This last had resulted in some upfront costs but this should achieve savings in the longer term.

David was thanked for his report and Martin invited questions. There being no questions, he invited members to approve the Report, which was unanimously agreed. David Brown, having previously surrendered the position of Treasurer, introduced Simon Eagles, a long-standing member of the Society and a Chartered Accountant, to the membership; and recommended him as his successor.

### **5. Election of Officers and Committee Members for the year 2024/25**

The following Officers were elected:

**Mark Leffler as Chair;**

**Alison Macnair as Vice-Chair;**

**Gillian White as Secretary;**

**Simon Eagles as Treasurer.**

The Offices of Membership Secretary and Honorary Legal Counsel were unfilled.

The following Committee members were elected:

**Michael Barry; Ruth Eastman; John Haworth;**

**Alison Inglis-Jones.**

### **6. Appointment of Independent Examiner**

The President thanked Anna Long for her continuing assistance in providing independent assurance on the accounts. The Meeting noted her appointment for a further year.

### **7. Announcements and AOB**

There having been no announcements or other formal business, the President handed the chairing of the remainder of the meeting to Mark Leffler.

### **8. Address by the Chair**

Mark Leffler began by welcoming Simon Eagles and John Haworth to the Committee: he expressed his confidence that both would make a strong contribution, Simon as Treasurer and John with his wide experience as an architect.

Mark reiterated his gratitude to all those who volunteered their time to the Society during the year under review. These included all those members who delivered the Newsletter to members' homes and businesses; Alyson Wilson, and other members of the Society's local history group, who continued exploring and informing others about Clapham's long and eventful past; David Brown, who had managed the vital task of looking after the Society's finances for a further year and was about to hand over that responsibility, with the finances and records all in good order, to his successor; Jennifer Everett, among whose contributions was ensuring that members kept their subscriptions up to date, and organising distribution of the Newsletter.

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The Chair expressed his regret that Christine Armstrong has decided not to seek re-election to the Committee after ten years' service. The talks and visits she had arranged over the years had been excellent. He also appreciated her strong sense of values, and her common sense, as a member of the Committee.

He was delighted that Ruth Eastman had continued to produce an excellent Newsletter over the course of the year, and recognised how it maintained the profile of the Society and enabled effective communication with members.

The Chair then expressed the Society's appreciation of Audley Villages' contribution towards the cost of producing the Newsletter. He hoped the relationship would continue to prosper.

Lastly, the Chair noted that this AGM was Martin Drury's last as President. He noted that Martin had been an active member of the Society since moving to Clapham in the early 1970s. He presented Martin with a modest gift in acknowledgement of his long years of

support, thanking him for all he had done for the community, and in particular for his wise counsel.

After consulting with colleagues, the Chair had identified one clear candidate to succeed Martin as President: this was Sinclair Johnston. His knowledge of the buildings of Clapham was probably unrivalled, and he had played an active role in support of the Society for many years. He was also well placed to bring a wide perspective through his extensive professional and advisory networks who have benefitted from his expertise in historic buildings.

Mark invited members to elect Sinclair Johnston as President of the Society, and to re-elect Julia Barfield as Vice-President. This was unanimously passed.

9. There being no questions or announcements, the formal business of the meeting was declared at an end.

Gillian White, Hon Secretary  
October 2024



*The guest speaker at the AGM was **Gareth James** (above with Mark Leffler, seated), trustee of Friends of Clapham Common and Chair of Wild Clapham. **Alison Inglis-Jones** reports.*

Gareth spoke inspirationally and engagingly. We are most grateful to him for all his work and commitment to the Common. With a background in horticulture and design, Gareth has been working for the last 30 years in the private sector trying to create aesthetically beautiful gardens for the high end of the market. For the last four years, he says, 'I have had to go back to school and have found myself on a very steep learning curve, re-educating myself on how to increase biodiversity and improve the ecological value of the new projects across the Common.' His challenge was to 'create an immersive experience of being in nature for the public', whilst, at the same time, significantly improving a sustainable habitat for wildlife.

Gareth told the audience that the UK has only 53% of

the biodiversity we had prior to the Industrial Revolution. In the last 300 years we have lost 90% of our wetlands, most of them having been drained for development; and since the 1930s, we have witnessed the loss of 97% of our wildflower meadows.

At just over 80 hectares (220 acres), Clapham Common is Lambeth's largest green space. Its official designation is as a Borough-Grade 'Site of Importance for Nature Conservation' (SINC), which means the Common is supposed to offer exceptional ecological value for the whole borough. In keeping with modern ecological practices, Gareth's efforts have been to use scrub islands, trees and meadows to connect areas across the Common for small birds, invertebrates and pollinators, as well as creating step-stone connections to our neighbouring green spaces, such as Wandsworth Common.

Gareth showed us wonderful pictures of the wildflower meadows in bloom, including images of red campion, ox-eye daisies, annual cornflowers and corn marigolds. These provide nectar and habitat to support a wide range of bees, butterflies and other invertebrate species.

The Friends of Clapham Common and Wild Clapham have been leading the charge with tree planting since 2021. In partnership with Lambeth Council, Thomas's Clapham school and the April Trust, they have planted more than 200 trees which include the reintroduction of lost species, trees with improved disease resistance and trees with greater climate resilience.

Gareth also flagged the progress of the new Wetland and Reedbeds project, planned for this autumn (described by him in greater detail in our October 2024 Newsletter, available on our website at [bit.ly/3NOgWYL](https://bit.ly/3NOgWYL)). Grants for the project are coming in, but further support is welcome.