

# The Clapham Society

## Newsletter



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Issue 474 March 2025

### As the London Eye turns 25, Clapham can be proud



Vlad Podoleanu

The Clapham Society's Vice President, **Julia Barfield**, is a leading light in the British architectural firmament. She runs her practice, Marks Barfield, designers of the London Eye, from an office around the corner from the Clapham Picturehouse. Julia's late husband founded David Marks Architect in 1988; when she joined in 1989, Marks Barfield Architects was formed. David is no longer with us, sadly, but his work lives on, the Cambridge Mosque, designed by him, Julia, and a small team of architects and engineers, being one of the most recent and celebrated examples. Other Marks Barfield projects include the Lightbox Gallery, Woking, and the Treetop Walkway in Kew Gardens.

Entering the practice, you are greeted by a vast model of the Millennium Wheel with London spreading out below in exquisite wooden miniature. Behind the wall on which the glass-enclosed model hangs (*above*) is the staircase to the top cinema at the Picturehouse. 'People are surprised by that,' Studio Manager Pippa Small tells me. 'They had to insulate it really well!' The model, funded by Bob Ayling, a Stockwell neighbour and CEO of BA, was exhibited in the Royal Academy Summer Show in 1996.

The 25th anniversary of the London Eye, as the Wheel was renamed in 2011, takes place this March. Having been conceived in Clapham, it seems only fitting that The Clapham Society should mark the occasion in these pages.

Julia and David both studied at the Architectural Association School of Architecture. Afterwards they set up a company making models with other AA friends; they worked at Richard Rogers, making models for him, then as architects and, in Julia's case, moving on to Norman Foster, 'an incredible apprenticeship'. Projects there included the Renault Building and project architect on the Royal Academy's Sackler Galleries. She left to join David.

Initially their practice was at home. 'We won a competition – a particularly big one for a new practice – for a £30 million project, but the client didn't like the fact that we worked from home. So we bought this office. Then came the financial downturn and the project disappeared. Our overheads went up tenfold and we had virtually no work. We invited people to rent space, but we had time on our hands and needed something to cheer us up.' Along came *The Sunday Times*/Architectural Foundation competition (*Continued on Page 2*)

Our meetings take place at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW, at 7.30pm. The talk lasts for about 45 minutes, followed by questions and discussion. Meetings are free and open to non-members, who are invited to donate. The Café Bar is open from 6pm and afterwards for further conversation.

#### Monday 17 March, 7.30pm

**Renoir's Acrobats at the Cirque Fernando and in Clapham too.** The two young circus artists who modelled for Renoir in his Paris studio in the 1870s were unknown until Angeline Wartenberg wrote from Clapham to her niece in California in 1938 to say they were herself and her sister Franziska. From his forthcoming book, *Acrobats and Aerialists in Circus, Music Hall and Beyond, 1850s-1900s*, **Charlie Holland** will show rare photos and tell the tale of the Wartenbergs whose home of many years was in The Chase. A Lambeth resident and former circus performer, Charlie was the Programme Director of London's Circus Space, latterly the National Centre for the Circus Arts. He is the Secretary of the British Music Hall Society and lead organiser of the European Circus History Conference.

#### Clapham Society volunteers party

Thanks to Clapham Society President **Sinclair Johnston** and his wife, **Madeline**, for hosting a party in January for Clapham Society volunteers: Newsletter delivery team, Local History group, Committee members and others who give generously of their time. It was held at their beautiful home, Eagle House, the very same which received a Green Plaque ([bit.ly/3CuQeCr](http://bit.ly/3CuQeCr)). Mark Leffler, Chair, thanked departing committee members Christine Armstrong, Jennifer Everett and former Treasurer, David Brown. Christine and Jennifer will stay on until their big shoes are filled – if running Events or Membership appeals to you, contact them or Mark at their email addresses on the back. Simon Eagles, as many know, became Treasurer at the AGM. Thanks again, Sinclair and Madeline, and all our volunteers!

#### Love books? Want to meet famous authors?

The **Clapham Book Festival** seeks a volunteer PR manager to review media strategy, grow audience and stimulate media coverage to support ticket sales for this year's event on **11 October**. You'll need to be media savvy, enjoy taking photos and have experience. Hours flexible but we'd like you to join our monthly meetings in Clapham. Please email your CV to [claphambookfestival@gmail.com](mailto:claphambookfestival@gmail.com), saying why you are interested. **Penelope McNeile, Trustee**

(Continued from Page 1) to design a landmark for the Millennium. ‘That was when we came up with the London Eye. Nobody won, they didn’t think the ideas were good enough. But we thought our idea was good enough, and we set up the Millennium Wheel Company.

‘A landmark for the Millennium, we thought, shouldn’t be something you just look at. It should be something people can participate in. It was David who had the idea of a wheel, walking to work across Larkhall Bridge. There are long views in both directions and he thought, wouldn’t it be great to see London from a height? A wheel is an efficient way of getting people up high and the journey is as important as the arrival. It is also a symbol of time turning for the Millennium.’

Julia, who is deeply concerned that we are in a climate crisis and as committed to using sustainable materials as she is opposed to

## Professor Mark Ashworth: Local medical hero

In January we were given rare insight into the life of an inspirational man and a great friend of Clapham. Professor Mark Ashworth, for those, like me, who knew him, was enormously knowledgeable, an original and creative thinker, intrigued by the world around him,



Ruth Eastman

warm and, above all, fun. As the evening progressed these qualities emerged as our speakers (*above from left*, Lucilla Poston, Murray Ellender, Adrian McLachlan and Mark’s wife, Susan) revealed more and more about him.

**Dr Murray Ellender**, a fellow GP at the Hurley Practice, described how during Mark’s time there it grew from 15,000 patients in 2006 to 100,000 patients in 2015 in areas of significant deprivation in south London. Mark’s innovations led to such pioneering work as the database eConsult system, now used in one in three GP practices in the UK and accessed by 50 million people nationally. Mark was a popular GP. His mantra, ‘Know your patient, know your care’, was borne out in his every-day practice. He was also a renowned GP trainer, another important part of his legacy.

## Home thoughts from abroad

*BBC journalist Stephen Sackur is new to Clapham. We asked him how he likes it, little realising he’d be writing from India...*

I’m sitting in a Delhi high-rise thinking fond thoughts of Clapham. As you do, or as I do, thanks to a life chasing interviews with international movers and shakers for the BBC. My stopover has heightened my appreciation for my home in SW12. Beyond my hotel window there is a cacophony of car horns, and an acrid tang in the air thanks to chest-tightening levels of pollution. Back home I can breathe without the fear of a rasp in my throat. My street is mercifully quiet – spared even the frantic morning school run on Nightingale Lane – and, if I’m missing exotic fauna and flora, the occasional screech and feather-flash of a parakeet adds a hint of the exotic to the winter sky.

Clapham is green and relatively clean, and I am grateful that locals seem determined to keep it that way. Last year I discovered the magical Eden Community Garden next to St Paul’s in Old Town, an oasis of calm for frogs, bees and butterflies as well as harried humans – all of it maintained by volunteers. The same spirit motivates the Friends of Clapham Common who water the

demolition, Lambeth College included, assures me that the Eye is safe in high winds. ‘On the London Eye we have tuned mass dampers. If the wind blows in one direction, the mass damper goes in the opposite. They have them on tall buildings and on the Millennium Bridge now, too. In really high winds the Eye might not function, but no danger is involved. It may move a bit, but it’s good that it does.’

Congratulations to Marks Barfield for creating this London icon – and more. ‘We negotiated that 1% of the ticket sales should go to the community. I’m proud of that. It’s amounted to millions. Over the years that money has gone to the redesign of Jubilee Gardens, the redesign of the whole of the public realm on the South Bank, and to community groups in Waterloo. It’s being a good neighbour and giving back.’

Asked what Julia would do to improve Clapham, her quick reply was: ‘Plant trees on the High Street.’ Watch this space! **Ruth Eastman**

From early in his career, Mark’s interest in medical research and its lessons for general practice grew. Through Datanet and the Data Use Committee he initiated and developed an important contribution to the story of Population Health, which continues and grows today.

**Dr Adrian McLachlan** described how gathering data across a wide area of London can demonstrate links between the prevalence of 32 medical conditions as they relate to such factors as ethnicity and deprivation.

**Professor Lucilla Poston**, Professor of Maternal and Fetal Health at King’s College London, regards Mark’s work as particularly valuable. The sheer effort required, largely face to face on his trusted bicycle, to persuade all 48 GP practices in Lambeth to contribute data to his studies is contribution enough; he then succeeded in achieving the same in Southwark! Mark’s professorship was richly deserved and surprised this modest man. Through eLIXIR (Born in South London) the research has yielded a far better understanding of health both for mothers and babies during pregnancy, for instance. Thus, he benefits us all. And his PSYCHLOPS mental health outcome measure is used, internationally, by the World Health Organization for guidance on best treatment for people exposed to humanitarian disasters.

**Susan Ashworth** (aka Dr Susan Hill of Great Ormond Street Hospital) spoke to us of the project on their Clapham Old Town house from 44 slides prepared by Mark. With the family’s support they installed a solar farm in 2010 on their roof in a conservation area, a feat well ahead of today’s climate debate. This continues to reduce their energy use from 41,000 kWh/year to 7,000 kWh/year. Mark had asked Susan to ask us what we used. Again, one act can influence the wellbeing of many.

This was a bright and happy evening celebrating the remarkable life of a remarkable man. **Mark Potter**

*A memorial service for Professor Mark Ashworth will be held at Southwark Cathedral on Tuesday 10 June at 11am.*

saplings and do so much else. Before becoming an adopted Claphamite I was sniffy about this Common of ours. I dismissed it as flat, featureless and over crowded. How wrong I was. Now I appreciate the democracy of its open spaces, the buzz of fun it generates on a sunny afternoon, and the joy it brings to London’s dogs (and to the heron who hangs out by Honest Tom’s burger van).

I’m not one for fancy gyms but I’m a big fan of the outdoor exercise machines you can use while watching the traffic drift past the mansion blocks on North Side. And I’ve found a community of tennis players on the Common’s courts who share my belief that it’s the spirit rather than the skill that matters most. It is, after all, the people that make places special. This week my neighbour Joanie is turning 90. We’re going to celebrate it with her. She’s lived in the same house for all her adult life and wouldn’t move for all the tea in China. Or India come to that. So, I’m leaving Delhi soon. Clapham is calling me home.



Ruth Eastman



## Clapham Chamber Concerts

Artistic director and clarinetist **Jonathan Parkin** and his colleague from the BBC Symphony Orchestra, **Thomas Lessels** (left), will be joined by CCC co-founder and pianist, **Jessie Maryon-Davies**, in a programme of Mozart and Mendelssohn. The trio will introduce the audience to an instrument from the clarinet family not often heard on the solo platform: the basset horn. Mozart was hugely fond of the soft, smooth and vocal tones of the clarinet and the basset horn, and he was the first composer to write profusely for both. The performers will explore this through a rarely heard Adagio, as well as a set of variations based on a theme from *Don Giovanni*. Mendelssohn's two characterful *Konzertstück* will also feature, certain to send audiences away smiling! Their in-house composer, **David Wallace** (violinist at last year's Clapham Society summer party), has written *Vignettes from the River Avon* specially composed for these instruments, to be premiered at the concert.

**Friday 14 March, 7pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DX.** There will be a single performance, with interval. More details and advance ticket booking at [claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk](http://claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk). *JP*

## St Luke's Music Society: Different folk!

SLMS presents Royal Philharmonic Society Award winner **Sean Shibe** playing the lute, joined by Scottish contemporary folk fiddler and member of the popular folk group Lau, **Aidan O'Rourke**, in an innovative programme with a strong leaning towards Scottish folk music. Tickets are available from [slms.org.uk](http://slms.org.uk). **Saturday 8 March, 7.30pm. St Luke's Church, Ramsden Road, SW12 8RQ.**



## The Arts Society Clapham Common

This month's lecture is **Betty Joel: Glamour & Innovation in 1930s Interior Design**. Betty Joel ran a furniture-making and design business. At its peak in the 1920s and 30s it employed 50 craftsmen and had showrooms in Knightsbridge. Her clients included royalty, politicians, hotels – the Savoy among them – and theatres. With rare access by the speaker to three surviving schemes, the glamour of 1930s design is brought to life as the story of a determined woman in a world still run by men is told. **Clive Stewart-Lockhart**, a familiar face on the *Antiques Roadshow*, was Chairman of the Society of Fine Art Auctioneers and a Founder Liveryman of The Worshipful Company of Arts Scholars.



**Wednesday 19 March, 11am. Clapham Picturehouse, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT.** Visitor (non-member) tickets, £10; or email [claphamcommon@theartsociety.org](mailto:claphamcommon@theartsociety.org) to join the Arts Society.

## New members and 2025 subscription reminder

Welcome to Mathilde Renauld and Tom Godfrey, and Ugne Vaidotaite. Please can I remind you that **subscriptions to renew membership will fall due on 1 April**. If you have not amended your standing order to the current amount (which started last April) please contact your bank to do so. If you have any questions, feel free to ask; you can email me at [membership@claphamsociety.com](mailto:membership@claphamsociety.com) or telephone me on 020 7627 4770. *Jennifer Everett*

## St Paul's Opera

**David Butt Philip**, one of the world's leading tenors, gathers his friends for our **fundraising gala**. The first of those announced is **Alison Langer**. Here she is at the 2024 Masterclass with David and SPO's director, **Tricia Ninian**. Alison sang with David twice last year; the second time was in *Pagliacci* at Opera Holland Park, where she returns this summer as Violetta. Tickets for the gala are selling rapidly so book soon to avoid disappointment; they are available at the fantastic value of £35, with maybe the slimmest of chances to attend the after party (£55 for concert and party), when you can meet David and friends, at [stpaulsopera.org/dbp-2025](http://stpaulsopera.org/dbp-2025). Keep an eye on our website for news of the remaining friends of DBP to be announced. **Friday 28 March, 7.30pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ.** (Should you want to see David on the international stage first, catch him as Florestan in *Fidelio* live from the Met at the Clapham Picturehouse on **15 March**.)



Matthew Carter

In other news, SPO has been nominated for the Off West End Opera Performance in recognition of Olivia Singleton's role as Adele in last summer's *Die Fledermaus*. Wish her the best of luck! *TN*

## Omnibus Theatre

Omnibus reminds us that its lovely space is available to hire. Email [hiresadmin@omnibus-clapham.org](mailto:hiresadmin@omnibus-clapham.org).

Shows on this month include:  
• **Argos Archives** (Newsletter 473), which continues **until 15 March**. Visit [omnibus-clapham.org/argos-archives](http://omnibus-clapham.org/argos-archives) for tickets and showtimes.  
• **The Society for New Cuisine, 19 March to 5 April**. This deliciously twisted Buddhist-inspired folk fable about power, masculinity and heart-break, which took the Edinburgh Fringe by storm last summer, makes its London debut. Visit [omnibus-clapham.org/the-society-for-new-cuisine](http://omnibus-clapham.org/the-society-for-new-cuisine) for tickets and showtimes.

**Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW.**



## HIRE OUR SPACE

Perched on the edge of the beautiful Clapham Common green space and within a stone's throw of several public transport links, this historic, South London based, public library building is a perfect venue for conferences, rehearsals, workshops, community groups, and meetings

**TUBE:** Clapham Common (Northern Line). We are just a 5 minute walk from Clapham Common Tube station.

**OVERGROUND:** We are a 10-15 minute walk from Wandsworth Road and Clapham High Street Overground Stations.

**NATIONAL RAIL:** We are a 20 - 25 minute walk from Clapham Junction train station, or a 10 minute bus ride.

**BY BUS:** Nearby routes include: 88, 417, 249, 137, 322, 35, 37, 50, 155, 345 and 690

## Studio Voltaire

• **Prem Sahib, Documents of a Recent Past**, continues **until Sunday 23 March**, with an artist's talk on **Thursday 6 March at 7-8 pm**. Tickets: £5, £3 concessions.  
• Online panel via Zoom, chaired by **Luke Syson of The Fitzwilliam Museum, Tuesday 25 March, 7-8 pm**. Tickets: £5, £3 concessions.  
**Studio Voltaire, 1A Nelsons Row, SW4 7JR.** Open Wednesday to Sunday, 10 am to 5 pm. Details and tickets at [studiovoltaire.org](http://studiovoltaire.org).

## Summer wardrobe edit?

Menswear, womenswear and accessories for sunnier days are needed to support Royal Trinity Hospices's 22 charity shops, including the two here in Clapham. Please bag up your donations and drop them into any Trinity shop. If possible, sign up to Gift Aid too, helping the charity claim 25% tax relief on every £1 raised. Free home collections can also be arranged, if that's easier for you, at [www.royaltrinityhospice.london/collections](http://www.royaltrinityhospice.london/collections). **Anna Reid and Nicola Jibson, Royal Trinity Hospice**



## Clapham streets: Elms Road and Abbeville Road 'north'



For the name Elms we have John Allnutt (1773-1863) to thank. Prosperous wine merchant and avid art collector, he and his family lived for 60 years in The Elms, a grand mansion that fronted the Common, just to the south of present-day Elms Road. The picture shows the garden, running from the back of the house.

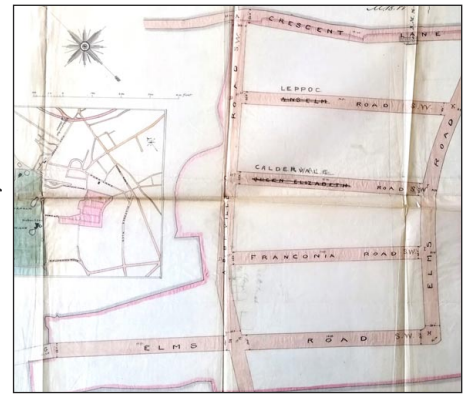
For the development of the road and the adjacent streets, we must thank George Myers (1803-75) and his sons, David and

Joseph. Dubbed 'Pugin's Builder' by local author Patricia Spencer-Silver, Myers branched out into property speculation by buying the mansion with its 32-acre estate from Allnutt's widow for £24,000. (His earlier local building projects had included St Saviours in Cedars Road, the congregational church in Grafton Square – both victims of wartime bombing – and the Royal Victoria Patriotic Building off Wandsworth Common.)

To Myers's vision for a grand avenue with substantial houses we owe the width of the road today and the large houses that survive at the Common end. But development was slow, and the estate didn't really get going until 1881 when the Myers sons applied to the Board of Works to lay out a grid of roads, narrower and more densely built. The names requested were: Franconia, Queen Elizabeth and Anselm (permission for the latter two was refused, with Caldervale and Leppoc respectively substituted); a continuation of Abbeville Road

to be called 'north'; an extension of Crescent Lane at the northern edge and of Elms Road itself with a new section running north (the northern half of today's Elms Crescent, renamed in 1937).

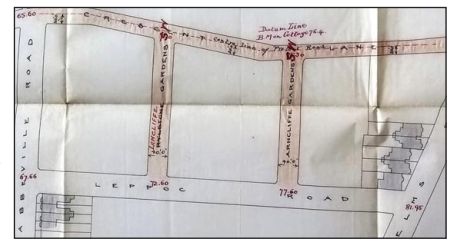
Sadly, we don't know the inspiration for the naming. However, one curiosity



shows up in the archives. In 1882 the brothers applied to create two more roads: between Crescent Lane and Leppoc. These were Rylstone (changed on the map, *below*, to Lancliffe) Gardens and Arncliffe Gardens. Attempts were made to sell four building lots with space for 55 houses in 1883. Neither road was built.

In another quirk of history, the mansion itself wasn't immediately demolished but lived on for a further decade as Eldon House School, until 56-60 Clapham Common South Side replaced it around 1878.

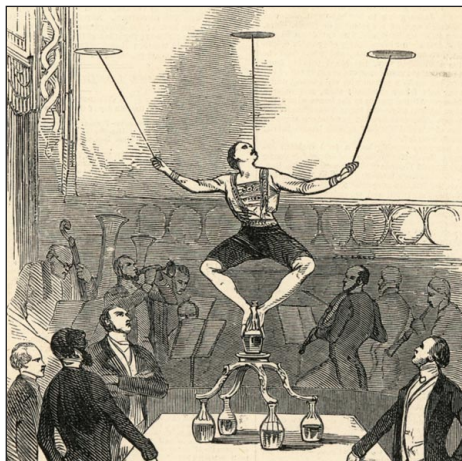
A curio survives at number 60d, likely the original coach house for the big mansion. Unravelling the history of the estate is hampered by David Myers dying intestate in 1888 and his



brother Joseph being judged mentally unfit by the courts to handle his own affairs. As for the original protagonists, both Allnutt and George Myers ended their days, laid to rest among the many other Clapham notables in West Norwood Cemetery. **Mike Tuffrey**

**Next month: A return to Clapham Common North Side**

*If you would like to find out more about your street, email [history@claphamsociety.com](mailto:history@claphamsociety.com).*



## Ringside! Lambeth, birthplace of the circus

The current free exhibition at Lambeth Archives celebrates Lambeth as the birthplace of the circus.

Philip Astley, a former cavalryman returned from the Seven Years War, opened his first 'amphitheatre' on Westminster Bridge Road (now part of the St Thomas' Hospital site) in 1770, featuring trick riding interspersed with lofty tumbling. Astley's remained a well-known London institution until its closure in 1893 and was emulated worldwide. Performers moved easily around Europe, wars permitting. 'The great Dutch equilibrist's bottle feat, at Astley's' (*left*) shows Herr Amidio Neopert from the Cirque Olympique, Amsterdam, in 1846.

Local competitors included Dibdin's and Hughes' Royal Circus and the Canterbury Music Hall. In the 1900s, Sanger's and Smart's had pitches on Clapham, Streatham and Rush Commons. They were followed in the 1980s by 'new circus' shows such as Archaos and Ra-Ra Zoo.

Complementing the posters, documents and illustrations are photographs and objects from the Archives, curated by **Charlie Holland** (Clapham Society speaker this month, *see Page one*), illustrating some of the circus families who lived in Lambeth and performed around the world.

**1 March to 18 April. Lambeth Archives, 16 Brixton Hill, SW2 1ET. Jon Newman**

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

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