

The Clapham Society

Newsletter

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Issue 475 April 2025

John O'Farrell in conversation with Toby Jones

It was my privilege to interview the great Toby Jones earlier last month, as a packed house at Omnibus heard him share the inside story on the many roles he has played for stage and screen. These have ranged from Dobby the House Elf in *Harry Potter*, to Alfred Hitchcock, Uncle Vanya and Truman Capote. Top of my list was the title role in *Mr Bates versus the Post Office*, which perhaps more than any other television programme in our lifetime has demonstrated the immense power of drama and story to engage the public and ultimately change the law.



Seamus Ryan

I asked Toby whether it was time he played a 'baddie', and his perfect answer was that he has just been cast as Satan! When an audience member asked him which actors had inspired him most, his surprising answer was Robert De Niro and Eric Morecombe which, I think, illustrates his range of interests and talents.

We also discussed how hard it is today for young people to break into the arts unless they have financial backing from parents. This, of course, is partly what the whole evening was about: raising money for Omnibus to continue its excellent work helping young people engage with theatre.

Toby Jones' next film, *Mr Burton*, is about the teacher who mentored and encouraged Richard Burton. Perhaps the next Toby Jones out there might be a young local talent who never would have found their path without Omnibus Theatre, Clapham, and the generous people who continue to support it. If you would like to help Omnibus please scan the QR code here. **John O'Farrell**

John O'Farrell's most recent novel is 'Family Politics'. He wrote 'Just For One Day', the Live Aid musical, which will be coming to the West End in May.



Local campaigning secures new Clapham post office

The first version of this article reported on the opening of the new post office on 20 March, news of which arrived just after March went to press! The opening has since been put back to 17 April, owing to a few legal delays, but it is still very much a local success story, as Alison Inglis-Jones writes.

Those passing the site of the former Crown Post Office on Clapham High Street, on any Saturday morning in the early part of last year, will have seen local residents, voluntary sector groups, MPs, councillors and CWU officials collecting petition signatures, waving placards and chatting to passers-by on the subject of the Crown Post Office closure. MPs and councillors took a 2,000-signature petition to Downing Street, held a rally (*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 for drinks and snacks, and after the talk for further conversation. Our talks can be found at claphamsociety.com/events.

Monday 28 April, 7.30pm

In the footsteps of the Clapham war novel. Graham Greene set *The End of the Affair* on North Side and Ian McEwan has two of his characters (in *Atonement*) visiting Clapham and Holy Trinity Church. Clapham has long been the inspiration for novelists, among them local authors **Elizabeth Buchan** and **Julie Anderson**. Each has set one of their bestselling novels, *The New Mrs Clifton* (in the case of Elizabeth) and *The Midnight Man* (Julie), in Clapham in 1946. The second book in Julie's Clapham Trilogy, *A Death in the Afternoon*, will be out, in fact, later this month. In their talk, the two authors will cover how they conducted their research, why they chose the settings and the themes that run through those titles.

Would you like to be our next Events lead?

One of the greatest advantages of being a member of The Clapham Society is the chance to attend our talks, held at Omnibus Theatre 10 times a year (not at Christmas time or during the summer holidays). In this key and exciting role you would be the linchpin for lining up interesting speakers. In the past we have had actors, writers, medics, environmentalists, gardeners, bee specialists, opera singers and, most recently, a circus performer to name but a host! September's talk is organised by our Local History group.

Some speakers approach us; others arise from personal connections. The Events lead liaises with Omnibus with regard to diaries (our traditional slot is the third Monday of the month) and on the night settles the speaker in, with Omnibus staff there to help with tech and mics. Speakers are lined up a year ahead and the full list appears in our December/January Newsletter and on the Events page of the website. Occasionally we have small tours, announced in these pages, when members can sign up

After 10 years, I am handing on the baton but I will be available to help my successor with advice and a smooth handover. To find out more or express interest, email events@claphamsociety.com. It's an exciting role and vital for keeping the Society wheels turning. **Christine Armstrong**

Benny Hawksbee – a force of nature

On a cold February night, with little to hint at spring around the corner, the upper room at Omnibus was standing room only to hear something of the work overseen by the extraordinarily talented head gardener, **Benny Hawksbee**, at the Eden Nature Garden. Eden, if you don't know it, is the strip of land that runs alongside Matrimony Place by St Paul's Church in Rectory Grove. We learned from that Monday talk how instrumental Benny has been



Matthew Carter

in transforming the community space from a wilderness into the delightful eco-paradise it is today.

Philippa Gould, Chair of Trustees for the charity Eden Nature Garden, introduced Benny, and heralded the celebrations to mark the 25 years of the garden's existence. Setting the scene, she outlined how the garden has slowly been transformed with the addition

of the smart railings, championed by Clapham Society member Julian Lush (who was present for the talk) and the initial work of the first head gardener, Stephen Barney. Benny acknowledged Stephen as a significant influence on his gardening life, having taken him under his wing for five years before handing over the reins of responsibility.

Benny grew up in South Wales. He obtained a degree in Marine Biology from Cardiff/Swansea University and spent post-grad years in the Mediterranean and Costa Rica working on turtle conservation projects. He moved to London when funds dwindled but quickly discovered that an office environment did not suit him. The event that to change his life was his mother's suggestion to accompany her on a Bumble Bee Safari in Wales. From there, there was no going back.

Benny kept the packed audience enthralled with numerous photos of not only the evolution of the garden's layout and planting over the past 25 years, but also with the extraordinarily detailed shots of numerous resident insects he has recorded in the garden – mostly bees but also wasps, moths and butterflies, and the common frog.

His talk informed and inspired, as he cited the various ways the garden nurtures and attracts its invertebrate population. Memorable natural examples were: holes in the ground, which serve as nests for the mining bee; the fuzzy flowers and leaves of *Stachys byzantina*, which provide lining fodder for the nests of wool carder bees; and the allure of roses for leaf cutter bees.

The audience was invited to get involved with Eden Nature Garden, either by visiting or volunteering (regular sessions are run on Thursday mornings year round) and to celebrate Eden's 25th at a garden party to be held on 18 May. Watch this space for details. **Patricia Ninian**
You can follow Benny on Instagram [@bennyhawksbee](https://www.instagram.com/bennyhawksbee).

51 and 52 The Chase open for NGS

Garden designer **Charles Rutherford** of *51 The Chase* is opening his garden again for the National Garden Scheme, this time with his neighbours opposite at 52, as he explains here.

I worked closely with the owners of 52 The Chase to make a space of calm with an area for entertaining. We planted in December 2023 and today old climbing roses and well-established camellias fuse with acer and hydrangeas. A cascade links the terraced beds



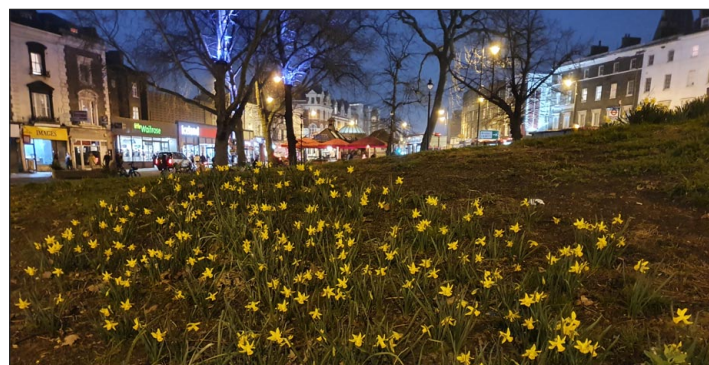
Maciej Groman

of tree ferns, hostas and Musa, with Darley stone and Gault brick adding to the sense of sanctuary.

The garden at 52 The Chase will open with us at 51 on **Sunday 27 April, 12-5pm**. We are also opening at 51 on **Tuesday 29 April, 5.30-8pm**. We have 2,500 tulips on their way up and changes have been made to give the garden more planting structure. There will also be June and August openings of both gardens.

Gardening in Old Town and the High Street

Want to make the business district of Clapham look more inviting? The Clapham Business Improvement District (BID) has employed a professional gardener, Paul Day, who would be grateful for a little help with clearing litter, weeding, planting and watering for a couple of hours a week. Gardening tools and advice will be on hand, so you don't need to be experienced. It's a great chance to spend time outside, meet new people and make Clapham a bit more beautiful! Email michaelbarry@claphamsociety.com if you think you would like to get involved. Many thanks, meanwhile, to all who took part in a recent Clapham Society bulb-planting initiative. We hope you'll agree that the results look fantastic. **Michael Barry**



Mark Leffler

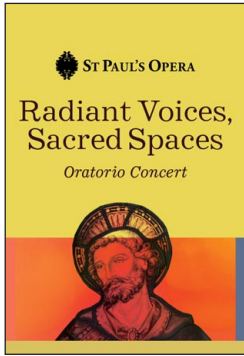
(Post office, from Page 1) outside the Post Office Headquarters, and marched up Clapham High Street with many members in support to the Temperance Fountain on the Common. Marchers were addressed by the MPs Florence Eshalomi and Bell Ribeiro-Addy, Assembly Member of Lambeth Council Marina Ahmed and Clapham councillors (Newsletter 464, March 2024). Venn Street Market kindly hosted a stall, staffed by councillors, to add to the petition numbers. The Editor of this Newsletter, Ruth Eastman, led a delegation to Lambeth Council to thank councillors for their support and request that local politicians add to the pressure to maintain services for local

people. This intense local effort was rewarded on 19 February 2025 with the announcement that a brand-new post office would be opening its doors at 82-84 Clapham Park Road, SW4 7BX.

There will be four service counters and longer opening hours, six days a week: Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm; Saturday, 9am to 2pm. The new post office is stepping in to keep essential postal and banking services accessible for the community: bill paying and mobile top-ups; travel extras; identity, licensing and money services.

Residents have applauded the convenient location of the new post office and are delighted to see the return of this essential amenity.

St Paul's Opera: Oratorio Concert



Radiant Voices, Sacred Spaces present arias and ensembles of the oratorio repertoire, with the Fauré Requiem providing a fitting finale. We are thrilled to welcome back George Ireland, who will be returning after the success of conducting last summer's *Die Fledermaus*. Soloists include regular SPO contributors – **Patricia Ninian, Jean-Max Lattemann and Ash Howard** – with soprano **Anna Gregg** making her debut with St Paul's Opera.

Friday 25 April, 7.30pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ. Tickets (early booking advised) cost £22 and are available at stpaulsopera.org. **Patricia Ninian**

St Luke's Music Society: String quartet

The 2024/25 season continues in a concert with the British debut, generously sponsored by Killik & Co, of the international Viatores Quartet, based in Berlin. The quartet is led by **Louisa Staples** whose father, Andy, ran Northcote Music Shop for many years. Their performance will feature quartets by Britten and Debussy, finishing with Beethoven's great late String Quartet No 16 in F major, Op 135. Tickets from slms.org.uk. **Saturday 26 April, 7.30pm. St Luke's Church, Ramsden Road, SW12 8RQ.**



The Arts Society Clapham Common

Sculpture in Britain: Today and tomorrow. British sculpture enjoyed a renaissance in the 20th century, with Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Anthony Caro and Elisabeth Frink leading the way. But who came afterwards and with what effect? Among the next generation were **Rachel Whiteread, Antony Gormley, Maggi Hambling** ('Scallop', 2003, Aldeburgh, stainless steel, *below*), **Anish Kapoor, Richard Long and David Nash**. All six are world renowned and still working as hard as ever today.

After looking at a range of their work, art historian and former Tate guide **Ray Warburton** will review the weird and wonderful sculptures that have adorned the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square in recent years, as well as those proposed for 2026-28.

Wednesday 16 April, 11am. Clapham Picture-house, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT. Visitor (non-member) tickets cost £10; or to join the Arts Society email clapham-common@theartsociety.org.



Ray Warburton

Studio Voltaire

- **In House: Ree Bradley and Pete Gomes.** 2 April to 25 May. (Preview Tuesday 1 April, 6-9 pm.)
 - **Philip Hoare and Jake Grewal in conversation.** Saturday 5 April, 11am to 12 pm.
 - **Sophie Seita: Artist Talk.** Tuesday 8 April, 7-8.30pm.
 - **Saturday Talks: Thomas Kennedy on Jake Grewal** (exhibition closes Sunday 13 April). 12 April, 3-3.30pm.
- Studio Voltaire, 1A Nelsons Row, SW4 7JR.** Open Wednesday to Sunday, 10am to 5pm. Details and tickets at studiovoltaire.org/whats-on.

Omnibus Theatre

• **Mushroom Language, 5 and 6 April,** by Ali Matthews and Company. A play about the cycles that shape us: eruption, reproduction and decay. In an eerie and funny homage to folk horror, two human performers absorb and mimic 'mushroom language' through ritual and power dynamics. Who are these creatures, and what are the mushrooms trying to tell them? omnibus-clapham.org/mushroom-language-a-fungal-gothic.



• **The Guest, 8-26 April,** by Cockahoop Theatre. Ricky and Joe love a glass of wine in their garden sitting under Ricky's beautiful vine. But it's getting hotter, the cracks are starting to show, and a stranger comes knocking. The results are painful, funny and all beg the question: what would you do? omnibus-clapham.org/the-guest.

Gardening to soothe heart and mind

Royal Trinity Hospice are opening their doors to **Wandsworth residents** interested in joining Bereavement Gardening groups. Working in the Hospice gardens, the sessions are for people connected to someone who has died under the care of Trinity. People accessing bereavement services in Wandsworth can also ask for a referral. Attendees are under no pressure to talk about their bereavement but are in the company of others with a similar experience. The sessions, free, are led by a Senior Counsellor and Trinity's bereavement volunteers, and will take place in spring and autumn, when there is plenty of snipping, clearing and wheelbarrow loads of leaves to take care of. Gardening sessions last around 90 minutes, with all tools provided. If being in the fresh air in a caring environment after the loss of someone special resonates with you, please email Laura Newman at lnewman@royaltrinityhospice.london. **Anna Reid**

Wandsworth Historian

In this issue we reflect on the legacy of slavery in Wandsworth, reappraise the significance of Walter Cromwell, who lived in Putney and whose son, Thomas, became Henry VIII's chief minister, and explore the life of Britain's foremost Asian art dealer, Sydney Moss of Wimbledon Park. We also look at light industry in Earlsfield between the wars, the social impact of Edwardian roller skating and stained glass by Wilhelmina Geddes. The magazine is published by the Wandsworth Historical Society, wandsworthhistory.org.uk, at £3 plus £3 p&p. Email 020neil119@gmail.com to buy a copy. **Neil Robson**



Hans Holbein portrait of Thomas Cromwell. The Frick Collection, New York/public domain

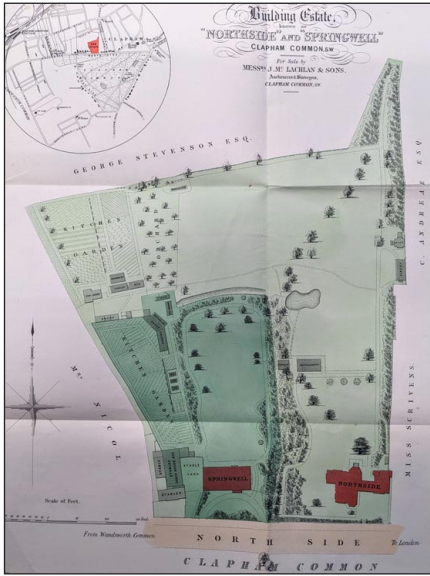
Wandsworth Industrial Museum walks

Sunday 27 April. Morden Hall Park stableyard to Merton Abbey Mills. Inspect the buildings and machinery of the former snuff mills owned by the Hatfeild dynasty who donated Morden Hall Park to the National Trust, then learn about innovations in textile printing in mills alongside the Wandle. Finish by browsing the shops and having lunch at a venue at Merton Abbey Mills. Walks are free and start at 12pm, generally taking 90 minutes to two hours. Please email john.sheridan08@gmail.com to book.

New members and how to join

We extend warm welcomes this month to Duncan Adams, Katie Knight and Connie Adams; Saimo Chahal (The Clapham Society's new **Hon Legal Counsel**) and Stephen Pierce; Anthony Coleman; and Patrick O'Donnell. If you would like to join the Society, visit claphamsociety.com/join. Subs are a very reasonable £30 for a household; £20, individual; and £50, business. **Jennifer Everett**

Clapham streets: North Side



In its earliest days, Clapham Common North Side stood flanked between the Common's northern edge, and fields and pastures leading down to Lavender Hill. This was before a flurry of building activity saw a number of grand villas being erected along its stretch. Of the streets running off North Side today, Wix's Lane is considered to be the oldest. Once a footpath through fields, it became a key feature in

the landscape, providing rear access to the gardens and outbuildings of the North Side villas, the plots of which were designed to connect to the lane. It bears the name of Charles Wix, a local bricklayer who built its first house in 1780. Wix lived on the southern corner of his eponymous street until his death in 1820.

To the west of Wix's Lane, Taybridge Road, Jedburgh Street and Tregarvon Road have more recent histories. The early 1800s saw two

of North Side's famous villas erected – Northside and Springwell. The frontage of their residential estate ran across a wide stretch of the road, occupied by the current numbers 64 to 79 Clapham Common North Side. The estate ran north, halfway to Lavender Hill, and was described as including 'lawns, meadows, conservatories, glass-houses, capital stabling' as well as 'pleasure grounds'. It was one of the last Georgian villa estates to fall to Victorian redevelopment.

All good things must come to an end and by 1885 the land – seen in green in the estate plan (*left*) – was put up for sale, inviting transformation. The auction listing described the 7.5-acre estate as 'ripe for immediate profitable development', assuring prospective buyers that it came 'absolutely free from any restriction as regards buildings'.

Redevelopment, however, would not start until after a second sale in 1894, when Henry Nicholas Corsellis, a prominent Clapham developer, acquired the freehold and built 180 new houses on the plot where these three streets were carved out. Marney Road, approved the same year (1896) as Jedburgh and Tregarvon bears the name of the historic Corsellis family estate, Layer Marney, in Essex.

John Cathles Hill, another prolific suburban developer of the time, was responsible for the southernmost end of Taybridge Road, as well as Forthbridge Road. Born in 1857 in Dundee, Cathles Hill may have been paying homage to his heritage in the naming of these streets, as both reference celebrated Scottish landmarks: the railway bridges Forth and Tay. *Ugne Vaid*

Next month: Crescent Grove

If you would like to find out more about your street, email history@claphamsociety.com.

Mudlarking finds by the new wetlands

Since 2017 *Jessica Forde* has been a registered mudlarker along the Thames. In December 2024, she saw the wetlands near Eagle Pond being created and felt sure they could yield up some amazing local history artefacts. She sought permission and the rest is... history!



Within the first few days I discovered a Victorian Rawlings stoneware ginger beer bottle complete with Royal warrant, followed by what seemed to be a rubber bottle, but was in fact a WWII Northover Drill projectile used by the Home Guard.

More finds followed: a Victorian London & South Western Railway uniform button; a George V 1917 penny and a George VI 1942 halfpenny; marbles; a Victorian alley gob; and a bone and ebony domino piece. Conor and Joel, who have been working on the site, soon caught the mudlarking bug too, and found a Victorian cobalt-blue octagonal poison bottle. More recently an early 1900s mother-of-pearl button emerged. I have also found beautiful pottery and china fragments. This small area of Clapham Common has offered up a fascinating time capsule of objects.

See more of Jessica's finds on Instagram [@flint.fossilandforeshorefinds](https://www.instagram.com/flint.fossilandforeshorefinds).

Jessica Forde

Abandoned Lime Bikes, a growing problem

Councillors have had complaints about badly parked Lime Bikes. These cause difficulty for those negotiating buggies or wheel chairs, pedestrians generally, and drivers trying to park. For the elderly and the visually impaired, they are a trip hazard. Ensuring our streets are easy to navigate means holding Lime to account and ensuring their bike users follow the company's own advice on parking in designated bays, available at li.me/en-gb/london-parking. A recent complaint about badly parked bikes on Cautley Avenue was submitted to help.li.me/hc/en-gb/requests/new, and the bikes were tidied that day. You can also email your councillor: contact details can be found at gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors. *Alison Inglis-Jones*



Sinclair-Johnston

Car Free Days

Lambeth Council are arranging Car Free Days this spring and summer. The idea is to give communities an opportunity to come together and local businesses to use the road, not just the pavement, to provide their services. Visitors and residents will get to experience how these streets would feel without cars. The dates are: **Abbeville Road – Saturday 17 May; Prescott Place – Sunday 29 June; Voltaire Road – Every weekend from 18 April to 5 October.** *Nicola Doal*

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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Vice Chair	Alison Macnair vicechair@claphamsociety.com
Secretary	Gillian White secretary@claphamsociety.com
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Membership Secretary	Jennifer Everett membership@claphamsociety.com

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Previous Newsletters and details of our meetings, activities and publications can be all found at claphamsociety.com.

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