

The Clapham Society

Newsletter

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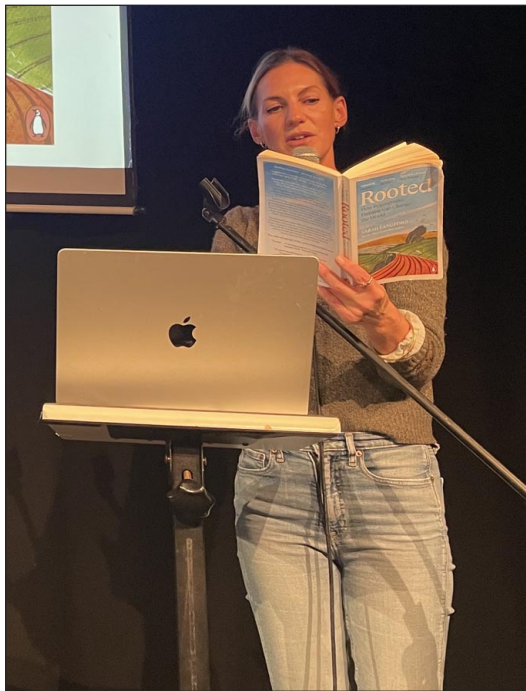
Issue 482 December 2025/January 2026

Rooted in regenerative farming

'It would have been an unlikely thing, ten years ago, to be told I would be standing here talking about farming!' With this opening remark we were treated after the Annual General Meeting on 20 October to an engaging talk by **Sarah Langford**. For an hour Sarah focussed on her experience over the past seven years as an unlikely farmer, but you sensed she could equally have entertained us with interesting talks on her experience as a barrister, mother and writer.

Sarah had been a criminal and family barrister for ten years until, as she put it, she did 'a very stupid thing in having not one but two babies'. This isn't easy if you are expected to be in court every day. At that point she chose to leave the Bar.

This was the first of two significant events that radically altered Sarah's life. During her second maternity leave she became a writer, signing her first book



deal when her youngest child was ten days old (the boys are now 11 and nine). *In Your Defence*, published by Penguin, is a memoir of her experience as a barrister. It relates the stories of 11 trials (clients' identities disguised, of course) in which she seeks to 'make an impenetrable legal system human' for the reader.

The other major event was the decision in 2018 to rent a cottage in Suffolk near where Sarah's then husband, Ben Gummer, had grown up; his father had realised a lifetime's ambition of being a farmer by acquiring 180 acres of arable and 50 acres of pastureland. Ben had just

lost his seat as an MP in the 2017 general election and, as both she and Ben were effectively unemployed, Sarah volunteered to manage the farm, thinking, 'How hard can it be?'

She retrained as a farmer at the Royal Agricultural University at Cirencester and a new career began. It was a time of great change in agriculture. Brexit and the overhaul of the subsidies system had significantly affected the business model. Farming was held responsible for the ecological ills of the world. Sarah received a distinction at Cirencester and approached her new challenge with the clarity of thought and forensic analysis she would have mustered as a barrister.

She peppered her talk with intriguing extracts from her second book, *Rooted*, and illustrated it with a mesmerising array of facts and figures showing the impact modern farming methods have on global warming. Sarah explained how she was faced with a moral dilemma: whether to use her farm to produce food for the nation, or to rewild it to save the planet. She met (*Continued on page two*)

Clapham Society talks take place at Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW, at **7.30pm**. The talks are free for members and open to non-members, who are invited to donate. They last for about 45 minutes, followed by Qs&As. The Café Bar is open from 6.30pm, and after the talk for further mingling. Find more about our talks at claphamsociety.com/events. The first three of the new season appear below. Further 2026 dates for your diary are (all Mondays): 20 April, 18 May, 15 June, 21 September, 19 October (AGM) and 16 November.

19 January

Van Gogh and his poetry. Michael Glover will talk about Van Gogh and his lifelong love of poetry, and also read from *Vincent's Poets* (2024), his own book of poems written in response to Van Gogh the man, his life, his ideas and his paintings. Michael is a Clapham-based poet, art critic and editor who has contributed regularly to the *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, the *New Statesman* and *The Tablet*. His many books include *Great Works: Encounters with Art* (2016), *John Ruskin: A Dictionary* (2019), *Cambridge Central Mosque* (2024) and *Searching for Ezra: A Ragbag of Frustrations* (2025). *Thirst* (December 2025), will be the focus of an Omnibus Theatre event (*details, page three*).

16 February

Mills of the River Wandle. The Wandle was once described as the hardest-working river for its size in the world. It has been home to mills since Roman times, and 13 mills were listed in the Domesday Book of 1086. At one point the Wandle had around 65 mills operating along its 12-mile length. This talk looks at the river and its industries. Our speaker, **Mick Taylor**, has been a volunteer at the Wandle Industrial Museum since 2007. 'My fellow volunteers call me the museum general manager,' he says, 'but this is not something I necessarily agree with!'

16 March

Knee deep in tahini: 15 years of writing with Yotam Ottolenghi with some rhyming recipes. Our speaker **Tara Wigley** will talk about how she got into the world of food – from turning up at The Ballymaloe Cookery School in Ireland to working, six months later, in Yotam Ottolenghi's home kitchen, testing and writing recipes together. She will talk about being Ottolenghi's writing collaborator and how she juggles this with her own passion for writing fun rhymes about food. She will read short sections from her solo books and then demo a quick recipe that she loves – no cooking, just food processing!

(Continued from page one) the challenge with the benefit of prior knowledge. Her grandparents had been farmers, acquiring their tenancy in the 1950s five years after wartime rationing had finished. They had all too vivid memories of hunger and, as such, her grandfather had been very clear about his role: to be a hero feeding the nation. It was like rediscovering a blueprint. Sarah was fortunate to have inherited her grandfather's farming diaries from 1939 to 2008, which proved a practical resource.

'The further backwards you look the further forwards you can see.' Sarah kept this well-worn saying in mind when thinking about what a modern farmer should be today.

She developed her approach to regenerative farming using traditional methods without the use of chemicals and 'introduced' us to other British farmers who apply the same principles of rotation and diversity. After years of decline, she affirmed, for young farmers there is a sense of change. Farming is becoming creative, interesting and sociable again. **James Dinwiddie**

Sarah Langford's latest book, 'Rooted: Stories of Life, Land and a Farming Revolution' (Penguin), is available at good bookshops.

Membership and distribution vacancies

We would like to thank **Jennifer Everett** for many years of dedicated service as our **Membership Secretary**. Jennifer has managed our membership with great care and efficiency, helping to keep the Society running smoothly and ensuring our members feel valued and connected. We are immensely grateful for all she has done.

As Jennifer takes a well-earned step back, we are looking for someone to take on this important role. She has worked closely with the Committee, Treasurer and Newsletter Editor, helping to maintain membership records, managing renewals and subscriptions, and assisting with the distribution of our beloved Newsletter. She points out, however, that distribution could become a separate role. To that end we are seeking a **distribution volunteer** as well, so two key roles.

If you think either or both roles are for you, they are rewarding ways to get involved with the Society and play a part in our future. We have a wonderful membership and, with new initiatives underway, we are excited about bringing in a new generation of members to share in our work and love for Clapham. If you are interested, please email me at chair@claphamsociety.com. **Jake Johnson**

Anna Ancher: 'Painting Light'

Dulwich Picture Gallery has a knack of finding under-recognised artists to inhabit its excellent special exhibitions space. Often they are women. The painter Anna Ancher (1859-1935) is the latest and by no means least. There has never been an exhibition of Denmark's most famous female artist in Britain before and this latest at Dulwich is a revelation.

Anna was born in the fishing village of Skagen (pronounced, locally, Skäyen) on the northernmost tip of Denmark where two seas meet. She was raised in a conservative family which recognised her gift early on and encouraged it. Her parents, Erik and Ane Brøndum, who ran the local hotel, Brøndums, allowed her to take painting lessons in Copenhagen and then to travel throughout Europe learning to paint. Her travels included six months in Paris, but she chose to go back to Skagen where she stayed for the rest of her life, marrying another painter in the Skagen group, Michael Ancher. (The name sounds similar to 'anchor' but with a short 'a'.)

The village (now a town but still small) was a magnet for artists in Anna's day, its wild surrounding landscape and wonderful ever-changing light being the draw. Anna and her family's hotel were at the heart of the artists' activity. Unlike others in the group, she created paintings mainly of life indoors and of the local people she knew and loved. A notable exception of an uninhabited interior is *Brøndums Annex* (1916) (left).

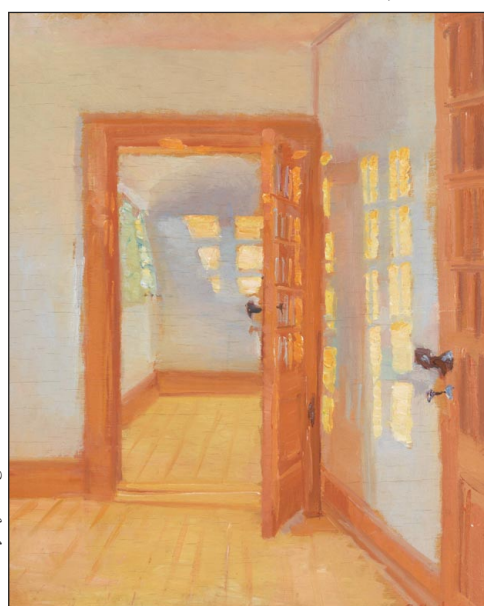
Anna Ancher is an artist of her time but somehow transcends it, her style bearing clear influences of the Impressionists and their successors. She is not afraid of brightness or colour, using a varied and at times bold palette. Her use of light to accentuate her subjects is exquisite, sometimes verging on the abstract but never departing from tender. **Roger Eastman**

Until 8 March. Dulwich Picture Gallery, College Road, SE21 7AD. Tickets are available at dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/whats-on/.

For more about Skagen and Anna Ancher's world, we commend this online article by 'The Observer' art critic Laura Cumming at bit.ly/47SI9mB.



'Sunlight in the Blue Room' (1891). Courtesy of Skagens Museum



Courtesy of Skagens Museum

David Butt Philip season

Each year at St Paul's Opera we feel lucky to welcome back our patron, David Butt Philip. In the next six months alone, he will be in six different European cities: Vienna, Berlin, Munich, Valencia, London – and Milan, where he will be making his debut at La Scala in March, singing Siegmund in *Die Walküre*. There are also trips to Seattle and Cleveland while, next summer, David will be at Glyndebourne, singing Bacchus in Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*. SPO will be there in droves. In between all this globetrotting, David will be with us for two exclusive evenings at St Paul's Opera.

The first is his **Masterclass on Thursday 22 January at 7.30pm**. 'This is always a favourite of mine at SPO,' David says. 'I can clearly see the potential in the candidates. St Paul's Opera provides young singers with vital first opportunities. In 2025, four

alumni joined Garsington's Alvarez Emerging Artists' Programme, while others featured at Glyndebourne, Longborough, Opera Holland Park and Grange Park Opera. SPO's supportive environment helps artists build the solid foundations for professional success on national stages.' Tickets for the masterclass are £15.

David will be back again on **Friday 13 March** to present his **David Butt Philip & Friends Gala**. This evening is always a sell-out so secure tickets early, available at £45 with a limited number of combined tickets, to include the after party, at £75. All funds raised will go towards the Summer Opera Festival production of Verdi's *La traviata* (watch here for more information).

Both events (and the Summer Opera Festival) are at **St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ**. Tickets are available at stpaulsopera.org. **Tricia Ninian**

The Arts Society Clapham Common

Two lectures are coming up, starting with **Christmas-Inspired Music on Wednesday 3 December**. Having had its roots in Rome during the fourth century AD with chants like 'Veni redemptor gentium', Christmas music has gone on to become one of mankind's most enduring cultural and religious phenomena. Whether it is heard as part of the liturgy or at the cinema, it never fails to trigger a sense of wonderment. Using carefully chosen sound recordings and film clips, **Professor Raymond Holden** will trace the history and impact of Christmas music from its origins to the present day. Born in Australia, the speaker is a critically acclaimed writer, conductor, broadcaster and lecturer. He has performed with the Philharmonia Orchestra, the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of the Emilia-Romagna and the New Symphony Orchestra of London. He is currently Emeritus Professor of Music at the Royal Academy of Music.

On **Wednesday 21 January**, **Tyler Butterworth** will shine the spotlight on **The Golden Age of British comedy**. It is said in our theatrical history that there was such an age. It ran from the 1970s to the 1980s and occurred as we started to drift away from theatres and radios, and found ourselves living through a wonderfully rich period of television comedy. Some say this period has never been bettered. The speaker grew up in a theatrical family and spent 25 years as an actor working extensively in film, television, theatre and radio. He then worked as a development producer in television documentaries. Now, he produces walking audio guides to cities across Europe for private clients. He lives in Sussex where he walks on the South Downs and the South Coast.

Talks start at **11 am** (doors open at 10.30am). **Clapham Picture-house, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT**. Non-member tickets £10, or email claphamcommon@theartsociety.org to join.

Omnibus Theatre

• **Clapham Lights**. Our annual festive light switch-on is on **Friday 28 November, 4-9pm**, at The Polygon when the magical flying bear switches on the Clapham Old Town Christmas tree lights (**6pm**), with the help of our soon-to-be-announced auction winner. The event features a **winter market**, mulled wine, live jazz and carol singing to get you in the festive spirit. Drop into Omnibus Theatre between **3.30 and 5.15pm**, where **little ones can make their own decorations** with a local artist. This experience is completely free and will be followed by a glowing procession over to the tree for the switch-on.

• **The Many Faces of Eve, 6, 10 and 11 December. Presented by Lisa Gornick**. In this one-woman show, award-winning filmmaker and performer Lisa Gornick takes one of her favourite films, *All About Eve*, as a starting point for a playful re-imagining. She once dreamt of being Bette Davis – now she draws, voices and embodies every character, from ingénue to icon, creating her own feminist, punk-spirited response to a Hollywood legend. Using pen, pastel, watercolour, voice and music, Gornick strips back the glamour to reveal the raw sketch beneath. Tickets £16, £14 concessions.

• **Oldilocks and the Three Bears**. **Garlic Theatre** return with their festive family fun to bring an amusing and warmhearted celebration of the classic story starring a naughty old lady, who looks very familiar, and three funny bears who love their breakfast. Garlic Theatre hold young audiences spellbound with lovingly crafted puppets, music – and some steaming bowls of porridge. Tickets £9, £7 under 12s.

• **Thirst, 14 December. Presented By Michael Glover**. Poet Michael Glover (*see page one*) will compere a Christmassy evening of poetry, music, song and theatre in the Omnibus Common Room to celebrate the publication of *Thirst*, his new book of poetry. Poems to be read will include a tribute to the magnificently indolent sheep of Achill Island. Others, read by Michael himself, will be intertwined with the mysterious music of Anton Webern. Tickets £16, £14 concessions.

Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW. For tickets and the **January programme** visit omnibus-clapham.org.

Carols for the Hospice on the Bandstand

Friends of Clapham Common are delighted to announce that this year's carol singing event will take place on **Sunday 7 December at 3pm**. We'll have musicians and choir members to lead the singing, carol books for everyone wishing to join in, and bells for the children to ring, under our inspirational conductor, **Derek Carden**. Please don your festive hats, wrap up in your warmest clothes, bring your friends and family, and enjoy singing all your favourite carols while sipping mulled wine and enjoying a mince pie. So much festive fun and all for a great and important local charity close to many of our hearts: we'll be collecting for Royal Trinity Hospice.



We're still looking for wind and brass musicians and part singers to join our choir, so please email friends@claphamcommon.net to register your interest and availability. Thank you! We look forward to seeing you there. **Shirley Kermer**

Light up a Life at Royal Trinity Hospice

As mentioned here last time (bit.ly/4p6o2rU) the Royal Trinity Hospice Light up a Life event is on **Thursday 11 December**, starting at **6pm** in the front garden of the Hospice. More details including how to leave a dedication, can be found at www.royaltrinityhospice.london/ual.

Clapham Chamber Concerts

The **Castell Quartet** returns, following a successful CCC debut in May 2025. Led by Artistic Director **Amanda Lake (below)**, the group offers a seasonal opening of Corelli's *Christmas Concerto* (arr. Lake), a short work culminating in a Pastorale depicting the shepherds of Bethlehem.



The programme also includes Mendelssohn's *Four Pieces for String Quartet*, whilst Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 74, 'Harp', brings the programme to a powerful close. **Friday 12 December, 7pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ**. There is an interval. Tickets £18, £12 Friends of CCC and their guests, £5 children (five to 18 years). Universal credit

and other benefits, pay what you can at the door. Book in advance at claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk.

Then on **Friday 30 January**, CCC will host a piano recital by **Chenyin Li** centred around Chopin's *Ballades*. Ticket information and further details as before.

Studio Voltaire

Visit the final weeks of our exhibitions **Hilary Lloyd, Very High Frequency** and **Hilary Lloyd and Dennis Potter, Seeing the Blossom**, both **until Sunday 11 January**. **Studio Voltaire, 1A Nelsons Row, SW4 7JR**. Visit the website at studiovoltaire.org/whats-on. Free admission Wednesday to Sunday, 11am to 6pm. (Studio Voltaire will close for a festive break between from Wednesday 24 December until Friday 2 January.)

Membership news

We extend a warm welcome to new members Noelle Britton; William Burke-Nash, Holly Kelly-Byrne and James Burke-Nash; Laszlo Horvath and Mustafa Tekman; and Joseph Tetlow. New members are always welcome. You can find more details on our website by visiting claphamsociety.com/join. **Jennifer Everett**

Clapham street names: Along the High Street

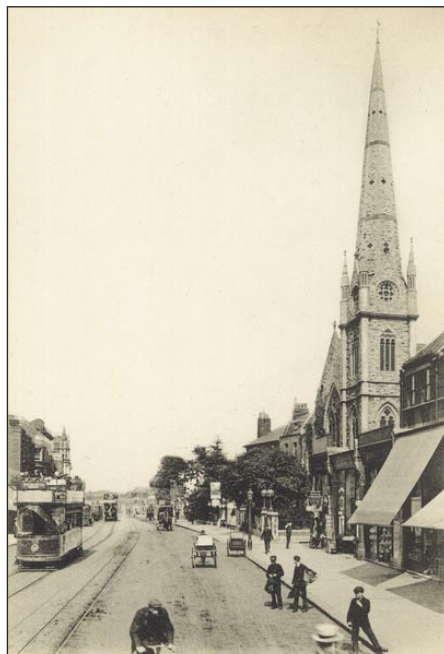
Of all the roads in Clapham, the High Street must be the one to have changed most in the last 250 years. Look carefully, however, and you can still find the traces of its earlier history.

Originally known as London Road, it served as the main exit from the village, with few buildings. The land near the present railway bridge was a flourishing nursery garden in the late 18th century. Then, around 1800 the street began to take shape. The surviving, large, detached houses near the corner of Tremadoc Road were built

around 1810. One (number 49) later became a Dr Barnardo's boys' home, with an extension built on the garden behind, now surviving as Lion Yard.

The 1830s saw terraced houses built on the opposite side of the street, set back with long front gardens, now with single-storey extensions that are used as shops. Elizabeth Cook, widow of the explorer Captain James Cook, lived in one of these houses.

Then on the site of



Lambeth Archives

the present library and Mary Seacole Centre was Clapham Grammar School, founded in 1834. Notable pupils included the four sons of Charles Darwin and two Herschel boys, later famous scientists. Look down Carpenters Place to see the remains of the school chapel, which has since been incorporated into a building entered from St Luke's Avenue.

From the 1840s the name High Street was being used, and the arrival of the railway in 1867 at Clapham station marked a turning point, with shops and small businesses opening up. An imposing Wesleyan chapel was built in 1874 (*left*), rebuilt in the 1960s after wartime destruction. With the coming of trams into London about a decade later came a major depot on the site of the present Sainsbury's store, also much damaged during the war and later a transport museum.

The turn of the last century brought the Temperance Billiard Hall in 1908, still standing at 47, to provide the working man with entertainment outside the public houses, followed in 1911 by Clapham Public Hall (at 35) for events and theatrical presentations. This was also the time of the early cinemas – the Majestic, still standing at 146, opened in 1914 although the last film to screen there was in 1960.

One interesting survival from the 20th century is the 1930s Art Deco façade of a former Marks & Spencer store, still incongruously visible above McDonald's (130-134). Therein lies the secret to exploring the past: look up above the shopfronts for survivals from an earlier age. *Alyson Wilson*

Next month: North Side towards Battersea Rise

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

Audley Nightingale Place events

The first of three Audley Villages events is in November and one needs an RSVP before the month is out, on **26 November**. Hopefully your Newsletter has arrived early enough that you can attend. Diaries out!

• **Saturday 29 November, 11am to 3pm. Christmas Fair.** Bring your family and friends to enjoy festive stalls with treats, crafts and gifts.

• **Wednesday 3 December, 12-3pm. Autumn Budget Review – What it Means for Your Wealth.** SOLLA-accredited, independent financial advisor Arnie Vashisht will break down the Budget's key announcements and explore how revisions to inheritance tax, gifting rules, stamp duty reforms, and capital gains thresholds could affect your investments, estate planning and property transactions. Limited seating. **RSVP by 26 November** by emailing the address below.

• **Tuesday 16 December, from 11am. Coffee, Cake... and Carollers!**

Pop in for our weekly coffee morning and enjoy a warm cuppa, freshly baked cakes, and carollers to serenade you with the joyful spirit of Christmas.



For more information on Audley Nightingale Place events and to confirm your attendance, email nightingalesales@audleyvillages.co.uk. **Audley Nightingale Place, 3 Nightingale Lane, Clapham SW4 9AH**, is footsteps from Clapham South Underground Station.



Kudos to Bandstand Beds

What an absolute pleasure to have successfully nominated, with supporting letters from **Anna Long** (Ace of Clubs) and Councillor **Ben Curtis**, the volunteer-led Bandstand Beds Association (BBA) for The King's Award for Voluntary Service. This award is the equivalent of an MBE and is presented for life. Very many congratulations to **David Dandridge**, the volunteers and the board of trustees.

Bandstand Beds is a community garden on Clapham Common that focuses on food growing, sustainability and community building. The project features a garden, a polytunnel, a kitchen in a converted shipping container, and composting facilities, providing opportunities for local residents to learn horticultural skills, meet others, and grow their own food.

The garden is open to all, with activities and workshops designed to be inclusive for different ages and abilities, and produce is shared through events such as lunches and picnics.

To volunteer you can sign up to help with watering, weeding, sowing, and other gardening tasks through the Good to Grow Network or bandstandbeds.org.uk. To join the BBA for access to the growing spaces, workshops and community events, take a look at the membership page.

Visit on Saturday mornings to buy freshly harvested produce in exchange for a donation. *Alison Inglis-Jones*

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

Chair, Jake Johnson
Vice Chair, Alison Macnair
Secretary, Gillian White
Treasurer, Simon Eagles
Membership Secretary, Jennifer Everett
Planning, John Haworth

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Previous Newsletters and details of our meetings, activities and publications can be all found at claphamsociety.com.
For more information about our sponsor, **Audley Villages**, please telephone 020 3510 5059 or visit audleyvillages.co.uk.

