

# The Clapham Society Newsletter

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Issue 484 March 2026

## Van Gogh and poetry

On Monday 19 January, we were entertained by **Michael Glover** who gave a wide-ranging talk drawing on Van Gogh's love of poetry. Michael is a poet, art critic and editor living in Clapham. He has encountered Vincent van Gogh over many years and in surprising ways.

For Michael, Vincent keeps 'turning up' in chance encounters. Recently, Michael collaborated with the curator of the National Gallery's 2024/25 exhibition *Van Gogh: Poets and Lovers*, contributing a major essay to the catalogue.



Alison Inglis-Jones

Vincent was a difficult personality, awkward and argumentative, ever unsmiling. But his self-portraits reveal a total honesty. He had a love of working men and women, exemplified by his time as a pastor among the mineworkers of the Belgian Borinage coalfields. He saw himself as a 'modern' searching out into the future of art.

It was in 1880 that Van Gogh (1853-1890) decided to dedicate the rest of his life to painting, painstakingly developing his unique style of representing reality. Eight years later, he travelled to Arles in the South of France in the hope of establishing a 'Colony of the South' of like-minded artists. Gauguin was the

only artist to join him in what would become an explosive relationship. He did meet other artists there, including a fellow Belgian, Eugène Boch, whom he imagined as a poet. Vincent was so fascinated by Boch that he painted his portrait and titled it *The Poet*.

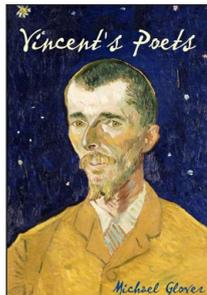
In his many letters to his very supportive brother, Theo, Vincent often quoted poetry, drawing on his reading of Walt Whitman, Keats (especially his 'Ode to Autumn'), Christina Rossetti, even the Bible. He had read the Carlyle translation of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* while living in Stockwell and developed a strong affinity for the Florentine poet.

Vincent's two years in Arles saw a great flowering of his art, when he created many of his most audacious and famous paintings, before his decline into mental illness and eventual suicide.

Michael Glover showed us slides of Vincent's sunflower paintings and a self-portrait as a peasant, as well as his portrait of Boch which Michael chose as the cover illustration of his recent collection, *Vincent's Poets*. He read two poems from the book, both inspired by Vincent's sunflowers.

Many thanks to Michael for revealing a whole new aspect of Van Gogh's life, and the poetry he loved and inspired. **John Taylor**

'*Vincent's Poets*' (**right**) is available at good bookshops or online from Amazon, Waterstones or 1889 Books, its publisher.



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 Q&As. The Café Bar is open from 6.30pm, and after the talk for further mingling. Find out more about our talks at [claphamsociety.com/events](http://claphamsociety.com/events). Our next three appear below and further 2026 dates for your diary (all Mondays) are: 15 June, 21 September, 19 October (AGM) and 16 November.

## 16 March

**Knee deep in tahini: 15 years of writing with Yotam Ottolenghi with some rhyming recipes.** Clapham resident **Tara Wigley** (Newsletter 461) will talk about how she got into the world of food – from the Ballymaloe Cookery School in Ireland to, six months later, working in Ottolenghi's home kitchen. Tara will tell us about being Yotam's writing collaborator and how she juggles this with her passion for fun rhymes about food. She'll be peppering her talk with rhyming recipes from her 'solo' books and demonstrate a quick recipe she loves – no cooking, just food processing.

## 20 April

**Tim Clement-Jones** (The Lord Clement-Jones, Newsletter 468) will present an exclusive talk on the rapidly evolving landscape of **artificial intelligence**, drawing on his extensive and influential work in the field. With his unparalleled insight into the policy, ethics and future direction of AI, this is an evening not to be missed. More details closer to the time.

## 18 May

**Gasworks** is a leading non-profit arts organisation based in Lambeth. Working at the intersection of UK and international contemporary art, it has supported more than 700 artists from over 100 countries since its founding in 1994. Join speaker **Rosa Tyhurst**, Curator at Gasworks, to learn more about the institution's history and programme.

## Subscription reminder

**Annual subscriptions are due on 1 April** if you pay by standing order or bank transfer. Please check that your standing order is set up for the correct amount. Current annual rates for membership are: Individual £20; Household £30; Business £50. If you receive your Newsletter by post, please add £15 to your payment to cover the costs. It is possible to receive the Newsletter by email at no extra cost. You can find full details at [claphamsociety.com/join](http://claphamsociety.com/join). If you have a query about your payment, please email me at [membership@claphamsociety.com](mailto:membership@claphamsociety.com). **Jennifer Everett**

## Newsletter distribution volunteer

The Newsletter is published ten times a year and we have a friendly team of about 22 volunteers who deliver the printed edition to members within the Clapham catchment area. Helping out with this key task is a great way to meet other members – and crucial in getting the Newsletter out. If you think you can help, we have good systems in place and would be pleased to hear from you and tell you more. Email Alison Macnair at [vicechair@claphamsociety.com](mailto:vicechair@claphamsociety.com).

## New members

A warm welcome this month to three new members: Lily Corbett Gale, Andrew Gibson and Sarah Parr.

## Music and lunch at Audley Nightingale Place

The team at Audley Nightingale Place invite you to an afternoon of music with the **Dogoda Quintet** on **Friday 3 April, 12.30 to 2.30pm**. Formed at the Royal Academy of Music, this woodwind ensemble will perform chamber music spanning the classical, Romantic and 20th-century repertoires to contemporary works.

After the performance, you are invited to join the Audley team for a **complimentary two-course lunch in their restaurant, No3**, along with the opportunity to meet existing Audley owners and hear first-hand about the lifestyle they now enjoy.

To confirm your attendance, no later than **Friday 27 March**, please email [nightingalesales@audleyvillages.co.uk](mailto:nightingalesales@audleyvillages.co.uk) or telephone 020 3510 5059. Alternatively, contact Nightingale Place to arrange a private tour at a time that is convenient to you. **Audley Nightingale Place is at 3 Nightingale Lane, SW4 9AH.**



## Clapham Common Arts Society

Leading Pre-Raphaelite artist **Edward Burne-Jones** was for decades consumed by his 'Briar Rose' series of four paintings (*The Rose Bower*, *above*), one of the greatest achievements of Victorian art. They tell the story of Sleeping Beauty in a mystical dream-world that intertwines medieval romance, decorative craftsmanship and natural beauty. Their exhibition in 1890 caused a sensation; artists, royalty and people in their thousands flocked to see them.

In this lecture **Dr Amy Lim** will look at these exquisite paintings in depth and recount their creation, exhibition and the magnificent setting that Burne-Jones designed for them at Buscot Park in Oxfordshire, where they still hang today.

**Wednesday 18 March, 11am** (doors open at 10.30am). **Clapham Picturehouse, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT**. Visitor (non-member) tickets £10 or contact the Arts Society by emailing [claphamcommon@theartsociety.org](mailto:claphamcommon@theartsociety.org) for free entry to this and future Clapham Common Arts Society events.

## Railway bridge competition

All the shortlisted teams have now sent in their final submissions for the competition. Jake Johnson is in the process of arranging next steps and will message the jury shortly.

## St Paul's Opera news

St Paul's Opera goes from strength to strength. On **Friday 13 March**, it's the **David Butt Philip and Friends Gala**, always a treat for Clapham audiences. This is the evening when the international British tenor, **David Butt Philip**, and friends from opera houses all over the world perform their favourite repertoire. The patron of St Paul's Opera will be back in our midst, this time, fresh from his debut at La Scala. Friends, only recently announced, are **Ellie Laugharne**, soprano; **Naimh O'Sullivan**, mezzo-soprano; and **Liam James Karai**, bass-baritone.

Members who went to David's masterclass in January will have seen him work his musical magic on emerging opera talent, one of whom, tenor **Edvard Adde** (*right*), proved special indeed to both the maestro and the audience. All four participants latched on to David's every word and, being musically bright and receptive, raised their game in a trice. It struck me, while watching, that DBP could be a future conductor, so in tune is he with the vocal and performing art.



In other SPO news they have just received five (!) **Offices** (Off West End Theatre Awards) nominations. Anyone who saw *L'elisir d'amore* last summer will know it was a phenomenal production but it's exciting the critics thought so too. The categories are... Performance: Fiona Hymns & Martins Smaukstelis; Production: St Paul's Opera; Staging: Eloise Lally; Sound & Music: Adrian Salinero; Industry & Inclusion: Tricia Ninian, St Paul's Opera. Congratulations, all. We shall keep our fingers crossed for you.

And toi toi toi to David Butt Philip and Friends on 13 March. The event is a fund-raiser for SPO's summer festival offering, Verdi's *La traviata*. Tickets (concert £45, concert and after party £75) are available at [stpaulsopera.org/dbp-friends-gala](http://stpaulsopera.org/dbp-friends-gala). **13 March, St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ. Ruth Eastman**

## St Luke's Music Society

Following their evocative portrayal of Rachmaninoff, **Lucy Parham** and **Alex Jennings** return to St Luke's Music Society accompanied by **Patricia Hodge**, with 'Nocturne', a portrait in words and music of the romantic life of **Frédéric Chopin**. Scripted from his letters and diaries, it follows the composer's often turbulent relationship with the literary figure George Sand in Majorca, his fragile health and his death in poverty in Paris.

**Saturday 7 March, 7.30pm. St Luke's Church, 94 Ramsden Road, SW12 8RQ.** Tickets are still available from [slms.org.uk](http://slms.org.uk).



## Royal Trinity Hospice raffle

The Trinity Raffle is back, and it's bigger and better than ever. Thanks to the generosity of local supporters last year the raffle raised enough to fund a specialist nurse for three months. This year, they're aiming to fund a specialist nurse for a year. Every £1 ticket gives you the chance to win prizes of up to £1,000, while helping Trinity continue its vital work, supporting patients and families in our community when they need it most.

Enter at [www.royaltrinityhospice.london/raffle26](http://www.royaltrinityhospice.london/raffle26), or pop into the Hospice to purchase in person. Spread the word, and good luck.



## Omnibus Theatre: this month's highlights

• **The Comfort Woman, 1-7 March. Presented by Gaia House Productions.** Young Minja's innocence is shattered when she is deceived and kidnapped by the Japanese Army during World War



II. This powerful portrayal of one woman's resilience sheds light on a dark chapter of history that demands remembrance and recognition. [omnibus-clapham.org/thecomfortwoman](http://omnibus-clapham.org/thecomfortwoman).

• **Slippery, 17 March to 11 April. Presented by Salt Lick Productions.** The world premiere of a Tony Craze play about ghosts, sex and spaghetti. Written by Louis Emmitt-Stern and directed by Offies winner Matthew Iliffe. [omnibus-clapham.org/slippery](http://omnibus-clapham.org/slippery).

**Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW.** Tickets and further details about other performances this month at [omnibus-clapham.org](http://omnibus-clapham.org).

## Studio Voltaire

• **Aki Sasamoto, Grilled Diagrams. Until 19 April.** For the artist's first institutional solo exhibition in the UK, Aki Sasamoto (b. 1980, Kanagawa, Japan) presents Grilled Diagrams, a major new sculptural installation and series of performances reflecting on the transformative process of cooking.

• **Shamica Ruddock, The River Between. Until 12 April.** Shamica Ruddock presents a new work in progress, *Knock Down Pork Knocker*.

**Studio Voltaire, 1A Nelsons Row, SW4 7JR.** Open Wednesday to Sunday, 11 am to 6 pm. Free. Visit [studiovoltaire.org/whats-on](http://studiovoltaire.org/whats-on).

## Lambeth and Croydon Foodbank

We're pleased to announce that two community fundraisers are coming up for Lambeth & Croydon Foodbank. The organisation supports a significant number of households living in and around Clapham who are facing food insecurity.

The first event is a **£5 comedy night on 28 February, 7.30pm, at Oasis Auditorium, Oasis Centre Waterloo, 1 Kennington Road, SE1 7QP**, in partnership with Armpit Comedy. Pay on the door.

Then on **14 March, The Mayor's Big Quiz at Lambeth Assembly Hall** will be raising funds for the Foodbank and Age UK Lambeth. Hosted by the comedian **Jake Bhardwaj** and his team, the quiz features music, comedy, surprise guests, raffle prizes, food, and a free drink on arrival. More details and QR code on the flyer (*right*).

**THE MAYOR'S BIG QUIZ OF THE YEAR!**

HOSTED BY JAKE BHARDWAJ, THE NOT ANOTHER QUIZ NIGHT TEAM AND "CELEBRITY" GUESTS. EXPECT MUSIC, COMEDY AND CHAOS.

RAISING FUNDS FOR LAMBETH & CROYDON FOODBANK & AGE UK LAMBETH, PRESENTED BY THE MAYOR OF LAMBETH.

**14 MARCH | 7PM**  
LAMBETH ASSEMBLY HALL, BRIXTON

**TICKETS**

- £35 - Tickets include food and a drink on arrival.
- Group tickets available, teams of up to 5 people.

Come solo, and we'll group you, or bring your crew!

How to buy: Scan the QR code, visit Age UK Lambeth's website or visit Age UK Lambeth's office on Acra Lane.

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## Local history walk

On **Sunday 12 April Tom Jansz** will lead a walk on 'The history of Clapham Common'. Meet at the Bandstand at **2.30pm**. Free, but book by emailing [tom.jansz@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:tom.jansz@hotmail.co.uk). **Gillian Robinson**

*Clapham Common takes centre stage in this issue. Not just because of the fascinating local history walk, above, recommended if you've never been (we're giving you ample notice so you won't miss out) but also an open meeting, even... read on. Alison Inglis-Jones reports.*

## Open meeting at CCMAC

There was a chance to shape the future of Clapham Common at the Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee (CCMAC) Annual Open Meeting at Omnibus Theatre in early February. CCMAC, as you probably know, is a group of stakeholders with oversight of the Common. With community representatives and representatives from local charities (The Clapham Society, Friends of Clapham Common, Wild Clapham and Clapham BID – Business Improvement District) it looks at issues affecting the Common and works with Lambeth Council officers to address these.

It was a pleasure to hear about the amazing work that has been done on Clapham Common this year by all of the groups above. A massive shout-out, too, to Best of Clapham for its support in publicising initiatives taking place in the area.

Key issues were addressed, chief among them ecology, events, biodiversity, litter, cafés and paths. Residents had the chance to question Lambeth officers, as well as representatives of the stakeholder groups mentioned.

The Clapham Society was represented by Michael Barry (Common and Open Spaces) outlining the work done by volunteers and organised by himself of litter picking and daffodil bulb planting.



Michael Barry

## Blast from the past

On the morning of Monday 9 February, Best of Clapham alerted local residents, parks officers and councillors to a large police operation on Clapham Common.

A hand grenade from World War II, spotted at low tide on the banks of the Thames, had been transported to the events site on the Common for a controlled explosion.

Authorities confirmed that the Common was the safest place in the area to dispose of the device, and users of the Common were asked to stay away. The grenade was safely detonated with the police in full control of the situation.



Still from a video by Lara Mifsud-Bonici

## Clapham street names: The Polygon

The word 'polygon' is derived from the Greek, meaning many angles. The Polygon in Clapham Old Town is a strangely shaped island of buildings, some of which, replacing earlier buildings on



Lambeth Archives

the site, date from 1792. On one side, at 33 The Pavement, stood The Lodge, Clapham's Fire Station between 1869 and 1902; on another was a public convenience, demolished around 2017.

Old Town was Clapham's shopping centre until it shifted to the High Street. The 1870 Post Office Directory lists the occupants of the Polygon as E Durham, a bottle merchant; S Pearse, a grocer and cheesemonger; a chimney sweep; confectioner; coffee rooms; news

vendor; and fishmonger. J Cottis, boot, shoe and Lancashire clog maker, established in 1854, occupied number 12. Numbers 1, 17 and 18 survive from the 1790s. The corner shop at number 1, a grocer until the 1980s and Grade 2 listed, is, today, Buddy's Deli. Above its 19th-century shopfront (seen, *left*, in 1951) are two blocked windows and seven large oilmen's jars dating from c.1840. These advertised that it was a shop selling oils, not just olive and other vegetable oils, but also animal – the latter for lamps; the former for paints, cooking, soaps and varnishes. Round the corner at number 2 is the Rose & Crown (*just seen*), a public house with decorative tiling established in 1870.

Wartime bombing left number 15 and the Polygon's southeast corner in ruins. The site became an Esso garage and second-hand car dealership until 2001, with Guy Payne Chauffeur-Driven Car Hire next door. It was demolished and rebuilt as shops and flats. The western side (facing Holy Trinity Church) was rebuilt as a residential property in the 1950s, and number 4, now the Michelin-starred Trinity (founded in 2006), was converted to a restaurant in 1996.

After consultation in 2012 and with funding from TfL and Lambeth Council, the centre of Old Town became less dominated by buses and the Polygon became a larger island. Described as an 'urban piazza' when complete, the redesign was spearheaded by Clapham architects Marks Barfield (interview with Julia Barfield, Clapham Society Vice President, in Newsletter 474), with landscaping by Diana Bell (NL 425). Somewhat bleak in winter, in good weather The Polygon is a popular meeting place. Its curved seating, at 23m end to end, is the widest bench in London. *Marietta Crichton Stuart*  
**Next month: Crescent Lane**

## Football festival on the Common this summer

It looks likely that there will be a football event to screen FIFA World Cup games on Clapham Common this summer. It will be the largest event of its kind in London and the largest on the Common for many years.

Provisionally called Football Fest, it will be run by Fan Parks International, who have created similar events in Oslo and Copenhagen. Their application is subject to Lambeth Council's events guidelines pertaining to, among other issues, noise, security, waste management and repair resulting from any environmental damage. If it goes ahead, the festival will be restricted to the designated events site on Clapham Common (outlined in red on map, *above right*).

It is expected to take up about 75% of that site, with 800 metres of fencing in place from 4 June to 24 July (the World Cup runs from 11 June to 19 July). Football matches will be screened on 34 days with an average daily crowd of 6,000 people; maximum capacity is 25,000. The final number will depend on how well the England team and those of other countries do in the tournament. No games will be shown after 11pm.

While the event is certain to cause inconvenience, it is also true that the festival will generate the single-largest amount of revenue Lambeth Council and by extension Lambeth Council taxpayers will have seen for many decades. Twenty per cent will go directly into the Parks Investment Levy (PIL). Clapham Common has received significantly less PIL revenue since 2019 and Lambeth Council has



recently frozen any capital expenditure for Parks. This event will ultimately help fund the upgrade of many of the paths on the Common, which CCMAC acknowledges are in urgent need of repair.

The Clapham Society recognises that not all events suit everyone all of the time. We are mindful that in 2023 the Secretary of State ruled that large events were permissible on Clapham Common if they didn't exceed 10% of the total Common. On balance, we believe Football Fest is likely to bring as much enjoyment to people on the Common as it might detract from others.

However, we do have a concern about the amount of plastic waste that may be produced. I have written to the organisers on behalf of The Clapham Society to seek clarification on this issue, expressing a clear view that single-use plastic cups should be avoided. Fan Parks seem willing to engage in a dialogue and we will update you with any more news through our usual channels. *Michael Barry*

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

Vice Chair, Alison Macnair  
Secretary, Gillian White  
Treasurer, Simon Eagles

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