

The Clapham Society Newsletter

With many thanks to
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Issue 485 April 2026

Putting our stakes in the ground

Most locals agree that Clapham Common is the jewel in the Clapham crown. It receives around 2 million visitors a year and everyone has their own reason to love it. But when did it evolve, and what has shaped it to become the common it is today?

Currently there are several public notices on the Common highlighting its history. There is one by the Pear Tree Café (*below*) about the Bandstand, for example. We're excited right now that the Clapham Society has been given the opportunity to tell a few



more stories. The notices would be sited around the outer circumference of the Bandstand area and, taken together, would present a concise history of Clapham Common from earliest accounts to the present day.

Each lectern would include two images, in line with existing signage, key interesting facts, plus a QR code to our website where fascinating local history articles, news of Clapham Society events and our Newsletter can be found. The lecterns will be made of sturdy black powdered steel to resist rust and graffiti, thus enabling them to remain in good condition for several decades to come. Not only will the lecterns be a permanent gift to the many users of Clapham Common, they will also be an effective way to let members – and hopefully future members – see how much the Clapham Society is doing to keep Clapham the vibrant and interesting place it is.

If this project sounds worthwhile to you, we'll need your help to make it happen. The cost of the design, build and installation is around £14,000. For every pound you donate, the Clapham Society will match it. Between us we have a chance to help visitors to the Common have a better sense of the heritage of one of London's great open spaces, while providing a legacy for generations to come. To see what the lecterns will look like and donate (select 'History Lecterns' when asked), visit claphamsociety.com/clapham-common-history-appeal and click on the link in the story to see a lectern; or scan the QR code (*right*). Thank you in advance for your support. *Michael Barry*

Common history walk

Spaces are still available for the History of Clapham Common walk led by **Tom Jansz** on **Sunday 12 April**. It's one of our most popular walks so don't miss out. Meet at the Bandstand at 2.30pm. Free, but book first by emailing tom.jansz@hotmail.co.uk.

River Wandle walk

John Sheridan of the Wandle Industrial Museum (*Page 2*) has kindly offered to lead a members' walk on **Thursday 23 April**. Meet at Earlsfield Station, **10.30am**. Find details of the walk on our website. To secure your space (25 max), email events@claphamsociety.com. There's a suggested £5 donation to the museum.

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 clapham-society.com/events. Our next three appear below and further 2026 dates for your diary (all Mondays) are: 21 September, 19 October (AGM) and 16 November.

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.

18 May

Gasworks is a 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.

15 June

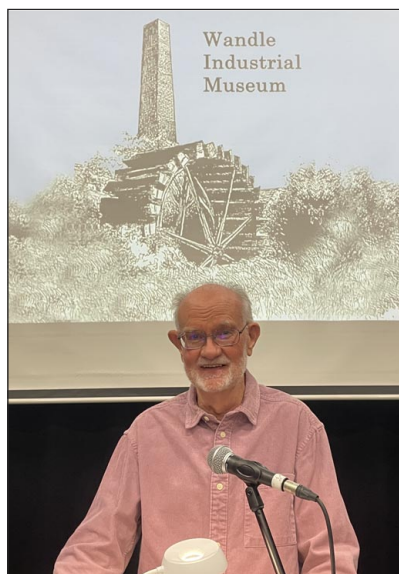
Lavender – Mitcham and beyond is a bit of a potpourri of lavender: its history; its medicinal uses; its cultivation, harvesting, distillation and distribution. Lavender was an important industry in Mitcham. We shall learn about that and about some of the successful growers and their families. The reasons for the industry's decline and then revival will follow, with a round-up of lavender today concluding the talk. Lavender was not grown locally only in Mitcham. We shall discover how Lavender Hill in Battersea got its name! The speaker, **Alison Cousins**, is Co-Chair of the John Innes Society in Merton Park and (Honorary) Archivist at the Wandle Industrial Museum.



The mills of the River Wandle

The River Wandle, just 12 miles from its Croydon and Carshalton source to its mouth on the Thames, has for such a modest length the most extraordinary history. The capacity audience at our February meeting was enthralled to learn that, from Roman times, the banks of this fast-flowing chalk stream were once alive with industry, each dependent on the crushing forces of its water-powered millstones.

Mick Taylor (*below*) of the Wandle Industrial Museum told us that approximately 65 different industries harnessed the power of



this small but energetic river. Its fall of 38m from source to mouth makes it fast flowing and suitable for driving waterwheels.

The beautiful textiles of William Morris and Liberty were printed in a Wandle mill, as many members know, but until this talk how many appreciated the sheer scale of the mills' activities over the centuries? Wool was fullled, pounded, scoured and stretched to make dense cloth; tobacco was milled to make snuff; wheat was cracked to make

flour; saltpetre, sulphur and charcoal were ground into gunpowder; animal skins were stretched and hammered into vellum parchment and, later, wood and rags were rolled into fine-quality paper.

Many Wandle industries were nationally and internationally recognised. There were the fashionable 19th-century fabric makers of course. In the 17th century, Josiah Dewye supplied gunpowder to the Navy in the Anglo Dutch wars, and blew up houses during the Great Fire of London to create fire breaks. Charles Atlas was said to have used rubber chest expanders beaten into shape by Wandle mills. The green leather of the House of Commons benches was dyed and smoothed at a Wandle mill.

No reference to the Wandle Valley is complete without mention of brewing and the fine beers of Wandsworth. This industry, too, grew up around the river, whose waters and mills were used to mill malt. The Watney family brewery and Young's both began here.

Not surprisingly, there was fierce competition for the waters of this river, described in 1805 as the 'hardest worked river for its size in the world'. Mill ponds were created for times of drought or over-use. Some of these ponds survive to this day near the source of the Wandle in Beddington Park and at Waddon.

So, spare a thought as you head south from Clapham and perhaps drive over a Wandle bridge, for the labour, noise and bustle that this small, overlooked Thames tributary once witnessed. See for yourself some of the mill buildings and the museum (wandle.org) that tells yet more of its remarkable story. **Lucilla Poston**
Why not join our walk along the Wandle on 23 April? See Page one.

New members

A warm welcome this month to Jill Chisholm, Helen Glaister, Jan Greenaway, and Edward and Jane Russell-Walling.

AI comes to Audley Nightingale Place

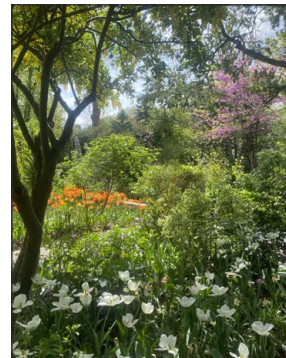
If you are downsizing and would like to picture yourself in a new home, explore the possibilities with this interactive design tool. Cleverly built by AI (and Audley humans), it lets you design a room in your preferred style and COAT Paints colour scheme. It will also add furniture, and you can download your favourite designs. For details contact nightingalesales@audleyvillages.co.uk or visit audleyvillages.co.uk/bespoke.

Open Garden days at 51 The Chase

Charles Rutherford, past Chairman of the Society of Garden Designers, and **Rupert Tyler**, Chairman of the National Garden Scheme (NGS) and Garden Museum, are opening their garden at **51 The Chase, SW4 0NP**, on **Tuesday 14 April, 5.30-8pm**, and **Sunday 19 April, 11am-5pm**. On the Sunday, from 2pm, the Secret Saxophone Quartet will be playing.

Charles and Rupert generously give their time in many NGS gardens. They have created their garden over 40 years. It is spectacular in spring when 2,500 tulips bloom among camellias, irises and tree peonies, and there is a scented front garden. Roses, brugmansia, hibiscus and dahlias appear later in the season.

The garden is in *The Good Gardens Guide, London Garden Book A-Z* and has featured on *Gardeners' World*.



Royal Trinity Hospice Open Garden day

On **Sunday 19 April**, the gardens at Trinity will be open to the public to explore as part of the NGS Open Garden weekend (just a few footsteps away from The Chase garden, *above*).

The award-winning gardens play an important therapeutic role in the life of the hospice, which is delighted to welcome visitors again this year. Trinity's gardens are home to a wide variety of planting, including more than 30 shrubs, 35 herbaceous plants, 25 varieties of shrub roses and 47 cultivars of hellebore. There are also herbaceous geraniums, fruit trees and three specimen magnolias.

Tickets are available at ngs.org.uk, or you can turn up at Royal Trinity Hospice at **30 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0RN**, on the day and buy a ticket at the garden gate.

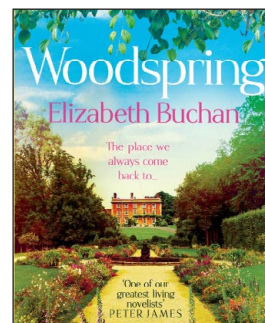


Riveting read from renowned local author

'If the outlook hadn't been potentially so disastrous, it would've been the best of times' ran a memorable line in the opening pages of Clapham Book Festival trustee **Elizabeth Buchan's** latest novel, *Woodspring* (Corvus, £17.99). The time was the eve of the Second World War and the place was Inverailort in the Highlands. Our hero, Harry Dane, is undergoing gruelling training as a Commando before receiving orders, having just dispatched, Lucy, his wife from a loveless marriage, and baby daughter, Nell, to safety in America.

The book is divided, effectively, into three parts and although the characters vary depending on time and location, the glue that holds them together is the house of the book's title and the family who have owned it for generations. Buchan's writing is beautiful and compelling, and her parallel constructs so clever: chance encounters on trains, loss and parental separation being just three of the leitmotifs. Within each section, all impeccably well-researched, we get a vivid sense of history and Zeitgeist.

The crime writer Peter James deems Buchan 'one of our greatest living novelists'. I would agree. Each novel she writes is better than the last. What marks this one out is her masterful modulation of voice, depending on whose story is being told. A facility with intrigue shows potential in crime writing too! **RE**
Published on 2 April and available in good bookshops and on Kindle.



Omnibus Theatre

Set in a stunning 18-foot dress, *The Other Mozart* is the forgotten story of Amadeus's genius sister, Nannerl, who performed with her brother to equal acclaim. This multi-award-winning production from the Little Matchstick Factory ushers you into a world of opulence and delight obscured by restriction and prejudice. Inspired by the Mozart family's funny and heart-breaking letters,



Nannerl Mozart finally tells her story. **Nathan Davis** and **Phyllis Chen** (NY's Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival) bring Nannerl's musical imagination to life with original music for clavichords, music boxes, bells, teacups and fluttering fans. Its London debut here follows a five-star success at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

14-18 April. Omnibus Theatre, 1 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0QW, omnibus-clapham.org/other-mozart. Find tickets and details about the current programme at omnibus-clapham.org.

Clapham Chamber Concerts

The next programme celebrates the duo partnership between CCC Artistic Director and BBC Symphony Orchestra clarinettist **Jonathan Parkin** and acclaimed pianist **Sebastian Stanley**. It opens with Busoni's *Concertino*, followed by Schubert's beloved *Arpeggione Sonata*. *Fantasy-Sonata* by John Ireland, considered one of the finest 20th-century works for clarinet and piano, is at the heart of the second half, which then takes a lighter turn with Richard Rodney Bennett's *Ballad in Memory of Shirley Horn*, before the fireworks begin with Simon Milton's *Carmen Fantasie*.

Friday 24 April, 7pm. St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, SW4 0DZ. Book in advance via Eventbrite at claphamchamberconcerts.org.uk. Universal credit and other benefits, pay what you can at the door.

St Luke's Music Society

SLMS welcomes back the **Budapest Café Orchestra** with its unique take on Eastern European folk music and Budapest café life. Past BCO appearances have always sold out but a few tickets still remain for what is sure to be an enormously entertaining evening. Supported by long-term sponsors Gregsons Solicitors.

Saturday 25 April, 7.30pm. St Luke's Church, 94 Ramsden Road, SW12 8RQ. For tickets, visit slms.org.uk.

Still time to catch... But be quick!

The **South West London Choral Society** presents **Bach's St John Passion** – the powerful and visceral retelling of Christ's final days in one of the composer's finest choral masterpieces. Written 300 years ago, Bach's work still connects as deeply now as it did then, with music full of dramatic tension, heartbreaking beauty and calm reflection. It will be performed in its entirety with the Otranto Chamber Orchestra (**Martin Everett**, conductor; **Andrew Laing**, leader; **Benedict Lewis-Smith**, organ), and sung in English with a distinguished line-up of soloists: **Andrew Henley**, Evangelist; **Neil Bellingham**, Christus; **Emma Brain-Gabbott**, soprano; **Rebekah Jones**, alto; **Matthew Pochin**, tenor; and **William Townend**, bass.

Saturday 28 March, 7.30pm. St Anne's Church, St Ann's Hill, SW18 2RS. Tickets £12.50 in advance from choir members or at swlcs.org.uk/latesttickets (booking fee), £15 on the door; 18-25s and full-time students half price, under-18s free. Trains: Wandsworth Town. Buses: 28, 37, 39, 44, 87, 156, 170, 220, 270, 337, 485.

Jonathan Wadman

'Clean Up Clapham' school art competition

The Clapham Society has among its aims: to promote civic pride in Clapham and educate public opinion. With these aims in mind, the Society has decided it's high time to tackle the issue of litter and waste strewn in its streets and on Clapham Common. The 'Clean Up Clapham' competition, just launched, is open to children of all local primary or junior schools to paint or design a poster about why it's important to keep Clapham clean and green.

School children, aged 5-12, are invited to enter and submit a poster design on A3 paper, using their creativity to send a clear environmental message. Judges will choose one piece of artwork from each year group and the winning artists will receive prizes generously donated by the Clapham Picturehouse.

The competition intends to show that art can inspire people to care for the environment and that children's voices can be powerful. Macaulay School has already committed to the project and Bonneville is showing interest. All local schools are welcome to enter. For further information, email SaimoChahal@gmail.com. **SC**

Clapham Common Arts Society

In 1913, the American Impressionist **Mary Cassatt** (1844-1926) was declared 'the painter of mothers and children', a title that would redefine her once-provocative career as sentimental. Since then, the art of this quite radical feminist has been repeatedly miscast as maudlin. In this talk, **Sarah Jaffray** uses research that reclaims



Five O'Clock Tea, (1880),
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

the artist's rebelliousness and looks at the lives of the women and children she painted rather than what nostalgia imagines them to be.

Wednesday 15 April, 11am (doors open at 10.30am). **Clapham Picturehouse, 76 Venn Street, SW4 0AT.** Visitor (non-member) tickets £10 or email claphamcommon@theartssociety.org for free entry to this and future events.

The Wandsworth Historian

The latest issue is filled with gems: Henry Routhwaite, LCC Chief Mechanical Engineer and paddle-steamer designer; a local researcher's touching story of ancestors in the Wandsworth Workhouse; 1940s radio satirist (and collaborator with Joyce Grenfell) Stephen Potter; pioneer garden designer Fanny Wilkinson. This beautifully produced magazine, published by the Wandsworth Historical Society, costs £3 plus £3 p&p. To buy a copy, please email 020neil119@gmail.com. For details about the WHS, visit wandsworthhistory.org.uk.

Clapham Common Film Club

April's screening at the Clapham Common Film Club is **Raine Allen Miller's** 2003 *Rye Lane*. Two young people, both reeling from nasty break-ups, connect over the course of an eventful day in Brixton and Peckham, to help each other deal with their exes and restore their faith in romance. *Rye Lane* blends the warmth and charm of a formulaic love story with street-smart grit.

Sunday 19 April, 7.30pm. Omnibus Theatre (address top left). New members and guests are welcome. There will be an opportunity to join in the discussion after the film. For further information and membership details, please email ccfilmrb@gmail.com. Our full programme is available at omnibus-clapham.org/film-club. **Roger Booker**



Gateway to Clapham bridge competition



The international competition to generate design concepts reimagining the railway bridge over Clapham High Street, announced in Issue 478 of this Newsletter, has reached its second stage.

The existing bridge is a purely functional piece of infrastructure, making a limited contribution to the public realm. The design brief, therefore, challenged participants to propose bold yet buildable ideas that would introduce vibrancy, recognise heritage, improve safety and instil local pride. Initiated by the Society and jointly sponsored by This is Clapham Business Improvement District (BID), the competition attracted 23 entries. The selection panel, representing a wide range of interested parties, then shortlisted them down to four teams, who have each been awarded an honorarium of £1,200.

The four **shortlisted entries** (*above, clockwise from top left*) are from: GS Architecture; Peerada Liew Studio with Nuraddin Kazimov; Makower Architects in collaboration with Common Works, Velocity, Light Follows Behaviour and Aspect Studios; and Polysmiths. These

schemes will be exhibited shortly in the windows of the former Jeannette Fashions, 20-22 Clapham High Street, and online where the public can vote for their favourite. Details of the voting procedure will be available to Society members once the process goes live. It is hoped that the final winning scheme can be announced in April, following selection by the judging panel. That scheme will then be used as the basis for seeking the necessary funding and planning consent to move the project forward. **John Haworth**

Planning report

- Plans have recently been published to redevelop the vacant **Clapham Business Centre site off Voltaire Road** by Clapham High Street Station for use as a 'neighbourhood family club'. OurHouse will deliver numerous sessions for babies and young children. In parallel, parents will be offered gym and swimming pool facilities together with a creche, family dining and other social spaces. The club will occupy the full site, preserving most of the existing heritage buildings on it. Minor demolition or new building work is required. Furthermore, the project will forestall the prospect of alternative unattractive developments that have been promoted for the site. The proposals have been welcomed by the Society.
- An objection has again been raised against amended proposals for redevelopment at the foot of **Lambourn Road** at Wandsworth Road.
- Objections continue to be raised regularly against ungainly roof extensions, inappropriate pavement crossovers/front garden parking and unsightly UPVC window replacements.
- Looking ahead, This is Clapham BID has received approval from TfL to promote a scheme to engage an artist-led team to enliven the **deep shelter drum adjacent to the High Street at Clapham Park Road**. The Society will be involved in the development of these proposals. **John Haworth**

Clapham street names: Crescent Lane

Crescent Lane, formerly Brixton Lane, was a path between Clapham Common and Brixton. To the south, the Thornton estate fronted the Common, extending back to what is now Abbeville Road. The sole reminder of its elaborate garden is the Orangery, currently in a sorry state and awaiting repair. Robert Thornton's guests at the Orangery included Queen Charlotte and the princesses Augusta and Elizabeth, who attended a breakfast party in 1808.

In 1851, the largest house and its grounds were purchased for use as a convent and school by the Belgian Sisters of Notre Dame. In 1939, these were evacuated and used by the Free French Forces. The site was demolished in 1948 and replaced by the Notre Dame Estate. The eight-storey buildings facing the Common received a Ministry of Housing Medal in 1952. On the other side, behind 30-31 Clapham Common South Side, stood an evangelical chapel with a nursing home above. The baptismal plunge pool survived until the 1990s, then the property was converted and renamed Crescent Works (*above right*), and since 1992 it has been home to the design firm Johnson Banks.

In the late 19th century, St Mary's Primary School was built as a charitable free school by the privately run Notre Dame Convent. It was originally called St Anne's and a sculpture over the entrance depicts the Virgin Mary, her daughter, being taught by her. Land north of

Brixton Lane was purchased by Frances Child, who built Crescent Grove (NL 476) at the far end of which he built a mansion for himself, Grove Lodge, with extensive garden.



This was sold in the 1930s and two trade unions offices were built by L A Culliford. Both were converted to residential use at the turn of the last century. The larger of the two, now Metropolitan Crescent, was owned by the Union of Post Office Workers; and 177 Abbeville Road, on Crescent Lane and Abbeville, was headquarters of UCATT. Henry Twining Court, a sheltered housing development, was constructed in the 1980s between these buildings. Its name was suggested by the Clapham Society, after a member of the famous tea family who had lived in Grove Lodge in the 1850s.

Crescent Lane continues across Abbeville as a narrow leafy road of Victorian residential terraces. **Members of the Local History group**

Next month: We are taking a break from street names and the May article will focus on St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove.

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
Membership Secretary, Jennifer Everett
Planning, John Haworth

chair@claphamsociety.com
vicechair@claphamsociety.com
secretary@claphamsociety.com
treasurer@claphamsociety.com
membership@claphamsociety.com
planning@claphamsociety.com

Talks and Events, Jill Sheridan events@claphamsociety.com
Common and Open Spaces, Michael Barry michaelbarry@claphamsociety.com
Local History and Publications, Alyson Wilson history@claphamsociety.com
Social Media, Alison Inglis-Jones socialmedia@claphamsociety.com
Newsletter Editor, Ruth Eastman newsletter@claphamsociety.com

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