THE CLAPHAM SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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'Our built environment for the benefit of all'

Planning for the Common's Trees of the Future

In our September newsletter (Issue 487) we heard how London's trees are facing hotter summers, longer periods of drought, more intense rainfall and increasing pressure from pests and diseases. Research suggests that many of the tree species commonly planted in London today may struggle with these conditions later this century. This does not mean that our existing trees are about to disappear

A new report from Wild Clapham and the Friends of Clapham Common suggests a way forward: we need to protect the healthy mature trees that have established deep roots, while trialling new trees chosen from a wider range of species and, in some cases, from warmer and drier parts of Britain and Europe. The aim would be to discover which trees can provide lasting shade, wildlife habitat and landscape value while coping with future conditions.

The report proposes a gradual and evidence-led approach rather than replacing familiar trees wholesale. Clapham Common could become an important testing ground, with a particularly interesting suggestion of converting one of the redundant bowling greens at Clapham South into a small nursery for growing and testing trees before they are planted elsewhere. This would give Lambeth greater control over the supply and origins of its future trees.



Silver Birch - a species that may struggle with a changing climate

The proposal is not simply about Clapham Common. The report suggests that the Common could become a demonstration site for a wider Lambeth programme, with carefully monitored planting taking place in parks, estates, streets and other open spaces across the borough.

Lambeth has already demonstrated its commitment to expanding its urban forest. Its original target of planting 5,000 new trees by 2026 has been substantially exceeded, with more than 12,000 trees planted across the borough over three winters. The next challenge is to ensure that the trees planted today are able to thrive in the warmer, drier climate we expect in the decades ahead.

There is still much to investigate, and no single tree will provide all the answers. But the report offers an encouraging prospect: protect the magnificent trees we have, while learning now which trees can help keep Lambeth green for generations to come.

Michael Barry & Gareth James

AGM Review: A Clearer Focus for the Society and a Shared Vision with Clapham BID

At our AGM on 19 October, Alison Macnair reported on a busy year of work to protect and improve Clapham. Members approved the Annual Report and accounts, and the officers and Committee were re-elected. The report covered planning and development, Clean Up Clapham, local history, improvements to public spaces and the Gateway to Clapham bridge competition. Alison's report received a generally encouraging response, with one member describing it as "deeply impressive" and welcoming the Society's leadership and direction.

The AGM also provided an opportunity to explain the Society's renewed focus. As an independent, volunteer-led civic organisation, our purpose is to protect Clapham's character, improve its environment and celebrate its history. Going forward, we will concentrate on four priorities: promoting good planning and development; making practical improvements to streets and public spaces; bringing local history and heritage to life; and communicating more effectively about what we do and why it matters.

Our guest speaker, Jeremy Keates, gave an equally illuminating account of **This is Clapham**, the local Business Improvement District (BID). Alongside promoting businesses and organising community events, the BID supports street cleaning and planting, wardens and a weekend Safe Haven, and improvements such as the pedestrianisation of Voltaire Road. Its work on street safety and ambitions for Clapham North were particularly interesting.

The Society and BID have complementary roles: the BID represents businesses, while we bring a residents' perspective. Our growing partnership focuses particularly on the High Street and surrounding streets and public spaces, exemplified by our joint Gateway to Clapham bridge competition. We also remain actively involved in Clapham Common through other established partnerships.

Clapham High Street Station: Unlocking Its Potential



Clapham High Street could become one of South London's most useful transport hubs. Yet, despite its central location and existing rail connections, the station remains an underused asset, held back by unreliable services and the loss of a direct link to Victoria. With new trains on the horizon, there may be an opportunity to change that.

Opened in 1862, Clapham High Street station once connected Victoria in the west with Crystal Palace in the east. The route later became part of the South London Line, linking Victoria and London Bridge. By the late 20th century, however, the station had fallen into decline. Reduced from four platforms to two, unstaffed and heavily vandalised, it was voted Britain's Worst Railway Station in 1989.

Its fortunes improved when the station joined the London Overground network in 2012, later becoming part of the Windrush line. Today, passengers benefit from modern, air-conditioned trains serving destinations including Canada Water and Dalston Junction. But two significant problems remain: reliability and connectivity.

Weekend closures and weekday cancellations have frustrated regular passengers for years, with signalling work and staffing difficulties contributing to disruption. Meanwhile, the loss of direct trains to Victoria means passengers must change at Clapham Junction, an inconvenient interchange that can involve a long walk across the station. Simply increasing the frequency of trains to one destination does not necessarily meet the needs of passengers travelling to many different parts of London.

A direct route to Victoria could offer a practical solution. Trains between Victoria and Dartford already pass through Clapham High Street but do not stop. The obstacle is that the trains are too long for the existing five-carriage platforms, and their doors cannot currently be operated selectively.

New Southeastern trains expected around 2029–30 could change this. If they include selective door opening, they could potentially stop at Clapham High Street without extending the platforms or building new infrastructure. Existing morning peak trains towards Victoria are also understood to have spare capacity. This could provide a relatively low-cost way to restore a valuable connection, although formal confirmation from Southeastern is still needed.

In the longer term, reopening the two platforms closed in the 1930s could create further opportunities. This option would allow the train from Victoria to Dartford to stop at Clapham High Street connecting local passengers with destinations such as Herne Hill, West Dulwich, Bromley South, and Lewisham, potentially turning the station into a genuine South London interchange combining orbital and central London connections.

There is a growing need for alternatives to the Northern line, where overcrowding at Clapham Common and Clapham North can already disrupt journeys. New residential developments on the former Lambeth Hospital site and in Voltaire Road will add further pressure to local transport.

Realising this potential will require a coordinated effort from local residents, elected representatives, Transport for London, Network Rail and Southeastern. The opportunity is worth pursuing: rather than accepting Clapham High Street as a minor station with limited connections, we could make better use of railway infrastructure that already exists.

A restored Victoria service would be a practical first step towards making Clapham High Street a more reliable, connected and valuable part of London's transport network.

Nick Biskinis

Clapham High Street Telephone Boxes

The sorry state of Clapham High Street's telephone boxes has been a longstanding concern, highlighted by the Society as far back as 2021 (Newsletter Issue 441). Many have fallen into disrepair, with graffiti and reports of boxes being used as toilets or for drug taking. Recent attempts to replace them have met with setbacks. Lambeth refused proposals for new BT Street Hubs outside 33 and 44 Clapham High Street, and appeals against both decisions were dismissed in July. The hubs would have offered free calls, Wi-Fi and device charging, but also featured large illuminated advertising screens, raising concerns about visual clutter and their impact on the Conservation Area.



Possible replacement communications kiosks

There may now be another way forward. Local councillors Patrick O'Donnell and Linda Bray have been involved in efforts to resolve the problem. Councillor O'Donnell has informed us that telecommunications companies and Lambeth planning officers are preparing to discuss replacing more than a dozen existing telephone boxes with as few as three modern kiosks equipped with defibrillators. The aim is to reduce street clutter and antisocial behaviour while retaining some public telephone access.

The councillors also hope to secure the planting of trees where redundant telephone boxes are removed. No formal plans have yet been submitted, but we hope to be able to report further progress in the not too distant future.

John Haworth

The South London Hospital for Women (SLHW) - *Motto "Et Dato Gaudetis": In Giving You Rejoice*

In 1911 Maud Chadburn and Eleanor Davies-Colley, surgeons at the New Hospital for Women in Central London, sought to build a second hospital on similar lines as the New Hospital could not cope with rising demand.

They decided on South London and looked for a large house to rebuild. They found two, with a garden, on the south side of Clapham Common. In 1912, they launched a public appeal. Fundraising was helped by a disgruntled male writing to The Times saying the demand for a women's hospital run by women was artificial and simply a result of women pushing themselves into medicine. Anonymous donors gave £53,000 for a building and a £40,000 endowment.

As soon as the houses were purchased, the hospital was set up with a small capacity. The SLHW outpatient department became operational in 1913 in Newington Causeway. Eventually the hospital was officially opened by Queen Mary in 1916. It had 80 beds and admitted women and children (males less than 7 years old). It was called an Adam-less Eden, as only the gardener and engineer were male!

After the Great War a new frontage by Sir Edwin Cooper was added, which can still be seen (much restored). Outpatients were moved to the Clapham site and more building increased the number of beds.

During the Second World War a Special Act of Parliament decreed that men be admitted and SLHW became a casualty hospital. Pioneering surgeon Dr Margaret Louden did wonderful work on crush injuries, saving many of lives, later working with Sir James Martin on the ejector seat. Sadly, her work was never published.

In 1948 SLHW joined the NHS and its maternity wing was finally officially opened in Nightingale Lane by the then Queen (the late Queen Mother). HM was a great supporter of the hospital, and had already opened a new wing in 1928. Most years she sent a donation and a birthday cake!



Many readers will remember the hospital and may have been patients there. But times change, the local area changed, as did attitudes to women-only spaces. Despite much local opposition, from health professionals as well as the public, the hospital closed in 1984.

The SLHW site was sold, and the proceeds divided between the University of London and the Health Authority. The University of London founded five Maud Chadburn scholarships for medical graduates who work part-time. Eleanor Davies-Colley, the first woman to qualify with an FRCS, was recognised with a lecture theatre at the Royal College of Surgeons, which was sadly demolished in recent refurbishment.

You can read more about the SLHW and get an insight into the atmosphere of life in Clapham in World War 2 in Julie Anderson's "The Clapham Trilogy".

Gillian Robinson

Coming and Going

After 15 years on Abbeville Road, Bistro Union, the neighbourhood restaurant opened by Adam Byatt in 2011, has closed. Its remaining Chef Series evenings for 2026 will move to Upstairs at Trinity. Greggs, at 166 Clapham High Street, has also closed after reportedly being served notice by the building's owner. We don't know who the new tenant will be, but Greggs says it's looking for another site in Clapham, so the sausage roll drought may yet be temporary.

And, for anyone still concerned that Clapham may be dangerously under-supplied with sourdough, relief is at hand. Blackbird Bakery is rumoured to be opening its eleventh bakery in the old NatWest building on Clapham High Street. We are, of course, still awaiting the arrival of Gail's in the old TSB building too. It's reassuring to know that, despite the demise of banks on the high street, there will still be plenty of dough.

The changing seasons bring another swap on Clapham Common. The children's waterplay area has closed for the winter, while **The Cabin Sauna** has returned beside it, with its outdoor sauna and cold plunges joined this year by a yurt offering yoga. So the seasonal focus on this corner of the Common has shifted rather neatly from keeping children cool to keeping adults hot. The Cabin is open daily from 8.30am to 9pm.



Finally, historic gunmaker John Rigby & Co. has completed its move to the Grade II-listed former ballet school at 42 Clapham Manor Street. The three-and-a-half-year conversion has created new gunmaking workshops, an engraving studio, academy, museum and showroom, while retaining and restoring the historic building. We are pleased to see such a substantial and sensitive renovation bringing the building back into active use, although its new use has prompted differing views.

What's on in Clapham - November 2026

Note: Anything on this page that is underlined is clickable

Fireworks and Festive Celebrations

November begins with fireworks. St Paul's Church holds its **53rd Annual Bonfire Party** on 7 November, with gates opening at 5.30pm and fireworks at 7pm. **Battersea Park Fireworks** returns on 7 and 8 November. Advance booking is advised.



Clapham Lights returns to The Polygon on Friday 27 November, 4–9pm. Presented by Omnibus Theatre and sponsored by This is Clapham, the free celebration features a winter market, live jazz, rides and carol singing, with a flying troll switching on the Christmas tree lights. Children can make decorations at Omnibus from 3.30–5pm before joining a glowing procession to the tree.

Christmas Fairs

The **Friends of Royal Trinity Hospice Christmas Fair** returns to St Luke's Church, with a preview evening on 16 November, 6–9pm, followed by the main fair on 17 November, 8am–3.30pm. Expect gifts, jewellery, food and decorations, with proceeds supporting the hospice. **The Church of the Holy Spirit** holds its Christmas Fair on Saturday 28 November.

Music and Arts

At **Omnibus Theatre**, Intermission Youth presents **Julius Caesar Remixed** (11 November–5 December), a contemporary reworking of Shakespeare's tragedy set among rival London school pupils. **St Peter's Church** holds an **Armistice Day Requiem** on Wednesday 11 November at 7.30pm, featuring music by Gabriel Fauré. **St Luke's Music Society** presents **Sir Willard White** on 7 November, and **Handel's Messiah** on 28 November. **St Paul's Opera** presents **A Christmas Carousel** on 27 November, with musical theatre favourites and festive classics. **The Arts Society Clapham Common** explores **The Glamour Years: Jewellery and Fashion from 1929 to 1959** at Clapham Picturehouse on 18 November (11am).

For Families and Good Causes

The **Dukes Festival of Stories** comes to Eaton House the Manor on 21 November, featuring children's authors, illustrators, puppets, storytelling, draw-alongs and book signings. The **Ickle Pickles Pub Quiz** at The Avalon on 12 November will raise funds for babies born prematurely or with complications.

Climate and Environment

As world leaders meet at COP31, Omnibus Theatre hosts a free screening of **The People's Emergency Briefing** on Wednesday 11 November, 7.45–9.30pm. Organised by Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP, the film brings together leading UK experts to explain how the climate emergency affects health, food, security and the economy.

Regular Events

Venn Street Market runs on Saturdays, and **Clapham Model Yacht Club** sails on Long Pond on Sundays. **Omnibus** also continues its free live music every Sunday. The **Friends of Clapham Common** holds its monthly litter pick on 7 November, meeting at the Bandstand at 11am, equipment provided.

To become a member of The Clapham Society, please visit our website:

www.claphamsociety.com/join

Dates for Your Diary

November

7	Friends of Clapham Common litter pick, Bandstand 11am
7	St Paul's Bonfire Party, fireworks 7pm
7	Sir Willard White, St. Luke's, 7:30pm
7 & 8	Battersea Park Fireworks
11-30	Julius Caesar Remixed, Omnibus (continues until 5 December)
11	Armistice Day Requiem, St. Peter's, 7:30pm
11	The People's Emergency Briefing, Omnibus, 7.45pm
12	Ickle Pickles Pub Quiz, The Avalon
16	Society Talk: Bill Linskey - Local Music Hall, Omnibus, 7:30pm
16 & 17	Trinity Hospice Christmas Fair, St Luke's, Ramsden Road
18	Arts Society: The Glamour Years, Clapham Picturehouse, 11am
21	Dukes Festival of Stories, Eaton House the Manor
27	Clapham Lights, The Polygon, 4–9pm
27	St Paul's Opera: A Christmas Carousel, 7.30pm
28	Church of the Holy Spirit Xmas Fair
28	Handel's Messiah, St Luke's, 7.30pm

Looking Ahead

10 Dec	Royal Trinity Hospice Light Up a Life, from 6pm

Organised by, or linked to the Clapham Society

Clapham Society Talks

Our next talk, on 16 November at 7.30pm at Omnibus Theatre, is by **Bill Linskey on the history of local music halls**, including the Empress Theatre near Brixton Road. Talks then return on Monday 18 January, when **Dr Nicola Stacey**, Director of the Heritage of London Trust, discusses its work, including the recent restoration of Slatehook in Lambeth.

Looking Ahead

Royal Trinity Hospice holds its annual **Light Up a Life** remembrance celebration on 10 December. The hospice garden opens at 6pm, with the Christmas tree lit at 6.30pm. A candlelit procession then makes its way to Holy Trinity Church for a service at 7pm. The event is free and everyone is welcome.