

The Clapham Society Newsletter



Issue 355

March 2013

Clapham Fire Station

At a crowded public meeting on 11 February, attended by Kate Hoey MP, Val Shawcross and local ward councillors, it was confirmed that despite the London Fire Authority having voted against it, Boris Johnson is determined to close our fire station along with 11 others in London. This will leave Clapham without a local station for the first time in 150 years. It seems that the Mayor is not prepared to countenance a public consultation and the risk assessment that would be part of it. Even if it were true that the added journey time from the next nearest fire station will not exceed four minutes, four minutes can make all the difference.

The closures are presented as a £40 million cost-cutting exercise which, we are told, could be covered by 1p per person on London's Council Tax. It is also true that the sale of just one prime site like ours to a developer will make millions. Once lost, no affordable sites for a possible replacement will remain.

This is an urgent community issue. The opposition to the NHS cuts in Lewisham was effective. The fire service believes that the Mayor is more likely to take notice of us than them in the first instance and is looking for community support in preference to industrial action. A Clapham march and demonstration is planned for **Saturday 16 March**. Other initiatives will be advertised through the fire station, posters and leaflets.

Unless you agree with this loss, please make your opposition known to Boris Johnson himself, and /or Clapham Old Town Ward Councillors by email to mayor@london.gov.uk, copy to cllrwellbelove@gmail.com and please include your address. Offers of help with leafleting are needed; please contact councillors or the fire station.

John Adams

January snow on the Common



photo: Bill Emmett

Our regular monthly meetings are held at Clapham Manor Primary School, Belmont Road, SW4 0BZ. The entrance to the school in Stonhouse Street, through the new building, is NOT open for our evening meetings. Use the Belmont Road entrance, cross the playground and enter the building on the right. The hall is open from 7.30 pm when coffee and tea are normally available. The talk begins promptly at 8 pm and most meetings finish by 9.30 pm. Meetings are free and non-members are very welcome.

Wednesday 20 March

The new US Embassy building in Nine Elms. Construction work on the new US Embassy will commence in 2013 for a planned 2017 completion. Lynne Platt from the Embassy will tell us why it is moving from Mayfair and how it will fit into the new neighbourhood, and the welcome regeneration of the Nine Elms area.

Wednesday 17 April

An evening dedicated to local issues, with guest speakers. Members are invited to suggest issues they would like to be discussed with our speakers. This is your opportunity to question local plans, seek explanations and air your views. Send your suggestions to the Chairman, Annabel Allott by 10 April (contact details on back page).

Thank you

After many, many years (probably in excess of 20!) Kath Derrig has retired from her newsletter delivery round. Her familiar figure cycling round the Ivey Road/Turret Grove area will be sadly missed. We are extremely grateful to her and wish her a happy retirement!

Membership subscriptions

Annual subscriptions are due on 1 April. Current rates are: Individual £6.00; Household (up to three names): £9.00; Corporate: £15.00. Members receiving the newsletter by post pay an additional £5.00 to cover the cost of postage.

Cheques should be made payable to *The Clapham Society* and sent to the Membership Secretary (address on back page). Members renewing their subscription by standing order are asked to ensure that their bank is making the correct payment. Membership will lapse if the subscription is not renewed by 30 June. Contact the Membership Secretary if you have a query about your subscription.

The Bury Hill Cabinets

A lot entitled 'The Bury Hill Cabinets' in a Bonhams sale last November caught the eye of Clapham Society member, Fred Uhde, who recognised that Bury Hill, near Dorking, was the country residence of Robert Barclay (1751-1830) who also lived at The Elms, Clapham Common North Side. This was one of the houses built on the grounds of Clapham Place (demolished in 1762) and which contained material from this mansion, including panelling and 'wainscoting in Japan'. I believe the cabinets may have been made up from panels from a screen which came from Clapham Place.

Correspondence sold with the cabinets included a letter stating: 'Originally, there must have been a very big and superlatively good 17th century Coromandel screen; Aunt Anna (née Hoare) was not quite clear whether the screen was at Bury Hill or whether it had only appeared later, when somebody had cut it up to make the two cabinets.' By reassembling the panels of the cabinets, I have now established that there were originally six panels, of which five survive more or less intact, forming a large folding screen. The backs of the panel doors of the cabinets retain in two cases the original backing of incised lacquer depicting landscape, birds and foliage. The fronts of the extant five panels show the arrival at the Qing court of an ambassadorial or noble delegation. Unfortunately the far left leaf of the screen, which would have shown the emperor (probably Kangxi: 1661-1722) receiving the delegates or guests is missing, apart from one fragment. The other five panels show the procession moving from right to left through the palace grounds and courtyards, and include a lady in a carriage, mounted musicians, fan bearers, trumpeters and servants carrying gifts. Each leaf was approximately 2 ft wide and just over 5 ft high, giving an overall width of the screen as some 12 ft. The leaves do not appear to have been bordered by strips of running decoration as on the existing cabinets.

The cabinets in their present form appear to be of 18th century date, and there has been some question whether the Coromandel lacquer work might be of the same date. However, as the Bonhams' catalogue entry for the sale makes clear, this style of lacquer-work remained in fashion in England for only a short time and was already out of date by the late 17th century. The screen's arrival at Clapham Place must be dated to Denis Gauden's time – indeed we shall see it was already there by 1688. In China such folding screens were a court luxury item often produced as birthday gifts for high-ranking officials, which may indeed have been the original source of this example.

A folding screen, almost certainly of this type, is recorded from Clapham Place and is mentioned in the Probate Inventory of Sir Denis Gauden dating to 7 July 1688. It is described as being a 'Press screen' (i.e. pressed together referring to a folding screen) and was kept in the ground floor Host's Room. The 1688 screen is not otherwise described, but is the only one of its type in Clapham Place, and I believe is highly likely to have been the screen mentioned above.

Finally it should be recorded that the two Bury Hill cabinets did not reach the reserve price at the Bonhams' furniture sale and were therefore 'bought-in'.

Michael Green

British Military Fitness

During January this year concerns rose about the apparent inability of British Military Fitness (BMF) to respect a necessary restriction imposed by Lambeth on their use of the event site. The site remains badly damaged by last year's events, in particular by 'Got to Dance', and much of it is also waterlogged. In response to a formal enquiry we were told by Lambeth Council that: 'British Military Fitness were aware that events fields should not be used for physical activity and we have reiterated this to them'. BMF have apologised.

We also raised the issue of the level of remuneration received from this group by Lambeth Council but were told that this was 'commercially sensitive'. We were referred to a pricing document which gives an outline to the process of setting fees for commercial providers. Apart from an environmental impact fee of £5,000, this gives the per class fee as £35. It would be helpful to know whether the class is defined as the entire number of participants in the session or the number of smaller classes into which the group divides. For instance, on a cold, wet Saturday morning in February the group of around 80 was divided into four groups of 20, each using different grassed areas. As there are 19 sessions per week held on Clapham Common the definition would significantly affect the income for Lambeth Council. In view of the numbers of participants involved, well over 200 in one taster session in January, a per capita levy might be more appropriate.

Anna Jefferson Smith

New on our website

We have recently added to the history articles on our website Michael Green's summary of the geophysical survey of several Clapham sites undertaken by Stratascan in summer 2011. Michael gave a brief outline in our March 2012 newsletter (No. 345) but this full, illustrated record of the investigations and conclusions can be found at www.claphamsociety.com/Articles/article9.html.

Following the unveiling of our Green Plaque on the former Odeon cinema, now Majestic Wine, we have also added some historical details and photographs of the cinema at www.claphamsociety.com/Articles/Plaque3.html. Remember that there are more local history articles, our diary of events, publications and lots more besides on our website www.claphamsociety.com.

A gallery transformed

Part of Dulwich Picture Gallery has been transformed to evoke a 17th century Sevillian church for the current exhibition about Murillo and his friend and patron, Justino de Neve. In the blacked out gallery the paintings are hung as they were originally intended to be seen: three large scale lunettes in fictive niches form the approach to the 'high altar' where an enormous Immaculate Conception from the Prado is reunited with its original ornate frame for the first time. The Gallery's own, newly cleaned and conserved, beggar boy paintings are also on display. Even if Murillo is not your favourite painter, it is well worth a visit to see the dramatic display. For full details go to www.dulwichpicturegallery.org or telephone 020 8693 5254.

The Night Time Economy

At a well-attended meeting on 5 February, chaired by Kate Hoey MP, local residents made clear their views on the problems caused by what Lambeth Council's publicity refers to as Clapham's 'vibrant night time economy'. While premises with late licences profit from this, residents pay the price in terms of early morning disturbance, anti-social behaviour and low-level vandalism. The meeting offered no solutions to the problem, but councillors and officers were left in no doubt as to the strength of feeling about this growing nuisance and the need to tackle it.

Festival Chorus

The next concert is on **Saturday 23 March** at 7.30 pm when, under their musical director, David Fawcett, the Chorus will perform a programme of eastern European choral music comprising *Vierne's Messe Solennelle*, Kodaly's *Missa Brevis* and *Otcenas* by Janacek at St Luke's Church, Thurleigh Road, SW12 8RQ. Tickets £12 (concessions £8) on the door or from St Luke's Music Society box office 07951 791619 www.slms.org.uk www.festivalchorus.co.uk.

The Lost Paintings of Evelyn De Morgan

An exhibition at the De Morgan Centre in Wandsworth (until 20 April) displays sketches, studies and photographs of a number of Evelyn De Morgan's paintings lost in a 1991 art store fire. The exhibition focuses on a small group of rarely seen studies by Evelyn De Morgan which demonstrate her working process – from loose compositional sketches, to detailed anatomical studies and pastel studies for the final work. For opening times and charges go to www.demorgan.org.uk or telephone 020 8871 1144.

Clapham Books – again

We would like to officially thank everyone who rallied round and helped us to make Christmas 2012 even more successful than the previous one. We are eternally grateful to our wonderful customers for acting positively not only for us, as a local independent business, but for books in general and our precious High Street. So, a huge 'thank you' and remember we are here throughout the year for all your bookish-needs – a bookshop is for life not just for Christmas!

However, in January we suffered a devastating blow in the form of a huge rent increase, backdated over two years. There is no way we can afford this and it is unlikely that we shall be able to remain in these premises in the long term. After years spent building up our business in Clapham we would dearly love to stay here, so we are urgently seeking premises in the area. If you have any suggestions or contacts do please let us know (email shop@claphambooks.com or telephone 020 7627 2797).

Meanwhile we have another free event coming up in March. On **Thursday 7 March** at 7 pm Courtia Newland will be reading from, signing and discussing his new novel *The Gospel According to Cane* at Clapham Books, 120 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UH.

Nikki, Ed, Marg & Roy at Clapham Books

A local National Trust property

On an icy cold January evening about 50 members and guests came to hear Vicki Marsland of the National Trust talk about the conservation of 575 Wandsworth Road, which will open to the public in March. This modest Georgian house, richly decorated with hand-carved fretwork and decorative painting, was left to the National Trust by the Kenyan-born poet, novelist and British civil servant Khadambi Asalache. Within a few years of moving into the house in the early 1980s, Khadambi Asalache had masked a damp patch on the basement wall with floorboards rescued from a skip. Then, finding the effect too stark, he embellished the panelling with fretwork. Over the ensuing twenty years he continued decorating all the spaces in the house with painting and fretwork, inspired by his Kenyan childhood and his travels to Istanbul and Europe, particularly Moorish and Ottoman architecture. Specially designed niches and shelves were filled with lustre ware, glassware and metalwork that he collected over the years. His favourite carving tool was a pad saw on a Stanley knife. The fretwork finish was left as cut and unsanded; the designs harmonious but not symmetrical, since, he maintained, there is no symmetry in nature. The work was ongoing until 2005 when he considered it finished, although he added to one ceiling shortly before he died in 2006.

It was some years before the acquisition by the National Trust was finalised and the funds raised for conservation and endowment, since the property could not be self-supporting. By 2009 the mimosa tree that Khadambi Asalache had planted in the back garden had caused subsidence cracks to appear in the rear elevation and the roof started leaking, so urgent work was needed including the removal of the tree and fastening Perspex sheets over the decorated lath and plaster ceilings to prevent them from falling down.

Vicki then took us through the painstaking conservation project which commenced in 2011. First everything was carefully photographed, numbered, put on a database and then all the objects were packed up and taken to storage off site. The floorboards, many of which have painted decoration, were taken up and temporary plywood flooring put down to give access to the voids behind the ceilings; the artificial slate roof was removed and large quantities of debris removed from the roof space before the ceilings were conserved and the roof replaced in Welsh slate. Smoke alarms were fitted and an ingenious type of sprinkler which creates a haze rather than spraying water. Repairs to the masonry also had to be made, some cement rendering removed, and chimneys and brickwork re-pointed with lime mortar where appropriate.

The kilim floor rugs which were specifically chosen by Khadambi Asalache to complement the room interiors were fragile and vulnerable to damage from footfall, so it was decided to closely copy and re-weave the originals. Painted floors were retouched and will continue to be touched up as necessary – as had been Khadambi Asalache's practice – and a temporary facsimile of the bedroom curtains has been made until the funds can be raised to conserve the originals. The house is ready for opening this spring, conserved rather than restored, in order to retain the special character and atmosphere that Khadambi Asalache had created. The record of the work done was a fascinating illustration of the skills and talents of the conservators and contractors involved.

Work still remains to be done. A wall painting in the bedroom requires attention as does the garden, but more funds are needed and these two projects will feature on the 'Gift List' for fund-raising by local National Trust groups. Volunteers have already been recruited to show visitors the house and there will be more opportunities to join the team of volunteers in future. Visits will only be by pre-booking since only six can be admitted at one time. For more details of opening and to book go to www.nationaltrust.org.uk/575-wandsworth-road.

Why Omnibus

Over 100 entries were received for the competition held to name Clapham's new arts centre. The winners were Jake Wood (9) and Archie Owen (7), both pupils at Clapham Manor School. When asked how they decided on the name the boys said: 'It's the name of the company so we just thought that the building should be called that too'. Obvious really!

TV actress and local resident, Maggie O'Neill, seen here with Jake, Archie and Omnibus Chairman, George Owen, presented cheques to the prizewinners



photo: Oleg Tolstoy

Clapham Community Project

The Clapham Community Project (CCP) was founded in 1971 by a group of local residents concerned about social issues. It began life in the house of Bernard Battley, local printer and philanthropist, and then moved into shop premises at 45 North Street, which it soon outgrew. So in 1977 the Project was offered the use of St Anne's Hall and Mission House by the building's trustees, the Rector and Churchwardens of Holy Trinity, Clapham Common. It is clear from the archives that this arrangement suited both parties well. Holy Trinity strongly supported CCP from the outset, contributing both money and manpower.

St Anne's was built in 1895, part of a comprehensive redevelopment of the area. The architect was locally born EB I'Anson, responsible also for the old library on North Side. A soup kitchen and dispensary were run from St Anne's House in its early days and the self-contained basement originally housed a working men's club. The spacious ground floor Hall, its roof crowned by a splendid lantern, has level access from Venn Street, and its own toilets and tea point.

Providing advice to the people of Clapham and surrounding areas, especially about welfare benefits, has always been a key element of CCP's work. In recent years CCP has helped secure almost half a million pounds annually for local people by assisting them in claiming their rights. Lambeth Council has funded the advice service since the beginning, with the Legal Services Commission providing additional funding more recently for more complex cases. But the present economic climate of cuts, recession and 'austerity Britain' looks bleak, and new legislation is about to withdraw some free legal aid. So demand for the Project's free advice services is likely to rise as vulnerable local people are increasingly squeezed financially and socially.

As attitudes to voluntary work have also changed over the years, there are fewer demands for facilities at St Anne's. A range of groups continue to meet there, and more would be welcomed. To address the continuing reduction in funding for CCP's advice service and retain financial independence, a decision was taken in 1999 to hire out space at for rehearsals. In addition to the undoubted convenience of the location, theatre companies are enthusiastic about their relations with CCP. Several have rehearsed community theatre productions there for local youngsters to get a taste of acting and producing performances.

You may be lucky enough never to have needed the services of Clapham Community Project, but many local people have, and are grateful for the real help and support received. We are holding an Open Day on **Saturday 20 April**, from 11 am to 3 pm. Please come and see St Anne's for yourselves!

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

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Email: annabel@allott.plus.com

Secretary **Jill Cramphorn**
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Tel: 020 7720 3343

Treasurer **David Brown**
15 Turret Grove, SW4 0ES

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Meetings and Events **Nina Murdoch**
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Membership Secretary

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Newsletter and Publications

Alyson Wilson

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Tel: 020 7622 6360

Details of meetings, activities and a full list of our publications are on our website at www.claphamsociety.com

Clapham Young Musicians' Festival

This festival in aid of 'Hope and Homes for Children' takes place at Holy Trinity Church, Clapham Common on **Saturday 2 March** from 6 pm to 8.30 pm.

Admission is £4, free for under 21s. Over 350 children will participate in a wide range of format and styles.

Endellion Sharp
Chair of the Management Committee of the Clapham Community Project
