

# An abundance of local authors

Bedford Park's reputation for creative and artistic talent continues today. Four more authors currently living in the area are featured below.

## Laurence Rees

Laurence Rees is a former Head of BBC TV History Programmes and has written seven books focussed primarily on the Second World War. Many of them, including *The Nazis: A Warning from History*, *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the "Final Solution"*, *World War II Behind Closed Doors* and *The Dark Charisma of Adolph Hitler* were also documentary TV series, which he wrote and produced.



His book *The Holocaust: A New History* published in 2017 was a Sunday Times bestseller, described by the Daily Telegraph as "the finest single volume account of the Holocaust ever written" and by the Mail on Sunday as "ground-breaking."

For several years he was a visiting senior fellow in the International History Department at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He holds honorary doctorates from the University of Sheffield and the Open University. His

many awards include a British Book Award, a BAFTA, a George Foster Peabody Award, a Broadcasting Press Guild Award, a Grierson Award, a Broadcast Award, two International Documentary Awards and two Emmys.

In 2010 he founded the website WW2History.com to provide an accessible and authoritative multimedia history of World War II for the web.

His latest book, *Hitler and Stalin*, published in October this year, examines the two tyrants during the Second World War, showing that despite being bitter opponents they were, to a large extent, two sides of the same coin. The book is the culmination of 30 years' work and uses previously unpublished eye-witness testimony from soldiers, civilians and those who knew both men personally.

"I've lived with my wife and children in Bedford Park for 28 years — the time has passed so quickly, and we all love it. I do think Bedford Park in general — and Woodstock Road, where we live, in particular — is one of the most attractive places in the world. Not just architecturally, but because of the wonderful trees as well. We're so lucky to be here. It's like a village in the city."

## Elias Assad

Elias Assad was born in Syria at a time when the country was still relatively peaceful. He attended the American college of Aleppo where he studied English Literature and was particularly fascinated by the "foggy London" of Charles Dickens. He says he was not disappointed when he arrived in late December 1970 to a London with fog everywhere! He became interested in the Antique trade and started his business specialising in Islamic manuscripts, inspired by his affection for the Syriac manuscripts at his family home.

Published in 2015, *Pearls from Heaven* is a book about Elias's collection of manuscripts, started by his father and supplemented over time by him. The manuscripts are written in Syriac, an offshoot of Aramaic, the language spoken during the lifetime of Jesus. Since then, generations of Syrians have preserved their Christian faith and continued using the Aramaic language. Elias hopes that the book will serve as a reminder that Syriac scholars were the first to translate the Greek sciences into Syriac and in the 8<sup>th</sup> century from Syriac to Arabic, thus making this wealth of ancient knowledge available for European scholars to render it into Latin in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.



In 2017 Elias was invited to display a small selection of his manuscripts at a Christian Aid event at St. Michael and All Angels, called "Who is your Neighbour?" This also provided the opportunity for members of the recently established Syriac church in Acton to be welcomed

and meet their Bedford Park neighbours. Elias is currently working on a thorough revision of *Pearls from Heaven* to include the manuscripts left out of the original publication.

"After a brief spell in Ealing I moved to Bedford Park and have lived here ever since, at first in various rented rooms until my wife and I got married. We finally settled in a house in the pleasant and friendly Blandford Road. I am much indebted to the Bedford Park folk who did not allow me to feel an outsider when I first arrived, even though there was no formal welcoming ceremony!"

## Oliver Soden

Writer and broadcaster Oliver Soden is the author of critically-acclaimed *Michael Tippett: The Biography*. His latest book *Jeffrey: The Poet's Cat*, a biography of 18th-century poet Christopher Smart's feline companion, was published in October this year. He is currently working on a biography of Noël Coward.

His biography of Tippett was chosen as "Book of the Year" by the *Spectator* and *Times Literary Supplement*, as one of "2019's Best Classical Music" selections for the *Observer*, won a Somerset Maugham Award, the Royal Philharmonic Society Prize for Storytelling, and is on the longlist for the Historical Writers' Association Non-Fiction Crown. It was a BBC Radio 4 *Book of the Week*, read by Oliver with Sir Derek Jacobi playing Tippett.



Oliver's essays and reviews have appeared in a wide variety of publications, including the *Guardian*, *Spectator*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *Literary Review*, *Gramophone*, *The Art Newspaper* and *BBC Music Magazine*.

He has appeared as a guest on a wide range of BBC radio programmes and he serves as a trustee of the Michael Tippett Musical Foundation.

Oliver has worked as assistant producer for a number of award-winning television documentaries, including *George III: The Genius of the Mad King* and *Janet Baker: In Her Own Words* and is part of the team behind BBC Radio 3's long-running programme *Private Passions*.

"We moved to our flat on the edge of Bedford Park late in 2018, just as I was editing my biography of Michael Tippett. I remember the drive from our previous home in Greenwich, with two cats and the 758-page manuscript on my lap. According to the 1911 census our flat was first purchased by a single woman in her thirties who earned her living as a photographer, and the flat beneath us was owned by a couple who both illustrated children's books. So, I like to think that there's an artistic spirit in the red brickwork."

## Gilbert Thompson

Gilbert Thompson, MD, DSc, FRCP qualified at St. Thomas's Hospital Medical School, London, and after military service joined the Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith Hospital, where he spent most of his career except for periods doing research abroad. He led the Medical Research Council Lipoprotein Team at Hammersmith, where he was Honorary Consultant Physician in charge of the Lipid Clinic until his retirement in 1998.

Gilbert is a Past Chairman of the British Atherosclerosis Society and the British Hyperlipidaemia Association (now HEART UK) and is the author of several books, chapters and numerous peer-reviewed papers on the role of cholesterol in heart disease. He is Emeritus Professor in Clinical Lipidology at Imperial College London.

His published books include *Hammersmith Marathon*, *The Cholesterol Controversy*, *Nobel Prizes that changed Medicine*, *Pioneers of Medicine without a Nobel Prize*, *A life spent serving the Raj in Bengal, 1860-1892*, *Time spent Fishing* and most recently



*Medicine my vocation, Fishing my recreation: memoirs of a physician and fly fisherman*. This book recounts the author's experiences as a post-war medical student, army doctor in Ghana, and medical research worker in London and North America. It also describes his leisure time activities including running in the London and New York marathons, and his fly fishing

expeditions all over the world. The narrative covers the period from the Second World War to the present day, during which there have been dramatic changes in medical practice and social attitudes.

"I've lived in Bedford Park since 1977 together with my late wife (Sheila) and our four children; two are doctors, one of whom lives locally. Sheila was a volunteer at Kew and was awarded an MBE for her work there. We both became so fond of Bedford Park that when the time came to downsize we simply moved from one side of the road to the other."

More information can be found on the "Chiswick Writers' Trail" and the "Timeline of Writers and Books," which lists around 425 writers who have written a book and lived in Chiswick W4, or written books about the area: [chiswickbookfestival.net](http://chiswickbookfestival.net).