

For the Record...

Did you miss a meeting? Find out how it went.



Members are probably aware of the Mizens Miniature Railway at Knaphill, and after the AGM Mike Webber told us about its origins. The 150th anniversary of the railway coming to Woking in 1988 gave one group the idea of creating a miniature railway, using land at Mizens Farm on the north side of town. The railway was set up, and the first rides were three times around the farm pond. In 1998 permission was granted to extend towards the road, but before this could happen the farm went bust, and its future use became the subject of an enquiry. Finally McLaren received permission to build their high tech Formula 1 site there, and in May 1999 the railway had to move on.

All the equipment was packed into containers and parked near Sainsburys supermarket in Brookwood. McLaren made a donation towards the relocation and also offered assistance in finding another site, but this was not easy. A site suggested by Woking Council had too many ups and downs to be suitable for trains, and a site in Brooklands Museum was entry requirements would become too complicated. The railway ran temporarily at Squires Garden Centre in Horsell at Christmas 1999 and 2000, which Mike thins is the only time the railway ran in the snow, although it did make a bit of a mess of the garden centre's front lawns.

However, at the end of 1999 the railway received a phone call from someone who had the option of buying a piece of land at Knaphill at Botany Barns garden centre, which could provide the solution. The chairman went to inspect it, and it was decided to go ahead. The land was covered with a lot of trees, which had been planted in the 1970s to sell for timber, but this had not happened, so space would need to be cleared for both the railway and the public. Ron Dennis of McLaren came in September 2000 to cut the first sod for rebuilding—and then the work really started!

A new entrance was planned from Barrs Lane, with a hard car park and overflow car park on the grass. A lot of garden centre equipment had to be cleared and one building taken down. More than 250 twenty tonne lorry loads of hardcore, crushed concrete, clinker and road planings arrived, along with 30,000 bricks and 31 loads of ready mixed concrete. 10,000 tonnes of earth were moved to make a cutting and an embankment.

All the spreading of clinker was done by volunteers, and a 4ft embankment was built along the stream. The main soil on the site is Bagshot sand, which is very fine grained and holds water, which led to drainage problems, and a membrane had to be laid over the top of the embankment with the trackbed on top. The winter of 2000 saw the building of the cutting. The weather was very wet, and Mike said that it was most fortunate that their dumper truck and digger only got bogged down one at a time, so one was always able to pull the other out!

At first the trains ran with a locomotive on each end, and passengers were invited to get off and turn round for the return journey. The ticket office and shop were under gazebos. The containers that had been parked at Brookwood were lifted into place by 150ft cranes, and one 40ft container was used to make lengths of track, but now serves as a carriage shed.

The north loop was started at Easter 2001, and as it was announced in the local paper that the railway would be running all the way around the site by June, the team worked extremely hard to ensure that this happened. In July 2001 the first foundation stone was laid on the station building and work on the south loop started. Humphrey Malins MP officially opened the railway on May 25 2002.

Three steam engines were running and the Mayor of Woking, Mahala Gosling, was allowed to ride side saddle, as she had arrived in a skirt, although this is not normally allowed.

Work continued and a signal box was added and a pond which attracts a variety of wildlife to the site. The railway hosts birthday parties and various special events, and Santa arrives at Christmas for the children. We thanked Mike for his talk, and details of events can be checked at mizensrailway.co.uk



In June we tried something a little different and had an evening of short talks from members on a variety of topics. Tessa Westlake kicked off the evening by reading out accounts sent in by David Barrett and Alan Griffiths of the Byfleet British Restaurant which had been located at the Village Hall. These were set up throughout the country to provide hot meals in times of shortage during and after the war. The restaurant was in the main hall, with school dinners being served in the smaller hall. You purchased your ticket at a window in the entrance foyer and joined a queue along the right hand side wall of the hall. A main meal and a sweet cost 1/6d, with tea extra. Alan remembers, during the school holidays, buying a ticket for his mother and saving her a place in the queue, so that she could come straight in to eat, making the most of her short lunch break as a postlady. The school dinners stuck in both minds, with Alan remembering roast potatoes with nothing inside and very soggy greens. David Barrett mentions rissoles and steam puddings, and having to sit until you finished your plateful (or found someone to eat it for you). The Restaurant was still being mentioned in the local press in Summer 1955, when the price of the meals went up, but we are uncertain when it closed, so if anyone remembers, please let us know.

Yvonne Heard and Dick Alder came next to tell us about the creation of a community reflective space at St Mary's Church. St Mary's has a large churchyard, with an old copse to the side which had become overgrown and in need of attention. In 2012 Surrey Wildlife Trust began an initiative to make churchyards more friendly for wildlife, so Yvonne, who had become the Churchyard Coordinator, got in touch with the Trust's Frances Halstead to find out more. A consultation evening was held in February 2013, and a grant of £3000 was obtained from Surrey County Council to open up the copse and plant wild flowers.

The copse was suggested by W G Tarrant, well known local builder, who wrote to the Rector in 1937. He proposed planting a holly hedge, conifers and other flowering trees and shrubs to provide a screen between the church and the "new estate" (houses in Church Road). He himself would provide 12 each of conifers, forest trees and bushes, and parishioners would provide the rest. However, after planting, no-one really looked after the area, and some of the trees chosen later proved to be unsuitable in the long term.

So work began. Kevin Watts brought his digger and approximately 20 people gave a day to clear the area. A tree surgeon removed dead and damaged trees and branches, and thinned out the rest. Arran Taylor offered his chipper, creating material for the pathway, and as much material as possible was recycled. Frances Halstead designed the pathway and also recommended and helped to source the wild flowers. Lots of volunteers offered their help, including the Brownies, and a group of stalwarts calling themselves "The Wild Bunch". Three oaks, 2 American red oaks, 2 cedars and 2 limes remain. Stinking Iris was the only flower left after the clear out, but on leaving the ground was left for a while 75 native plants and 15 garden plants came up on their own. The shrubs will later need to be thinned out, and the plants will all be left to find their own levels as they grow in. Wildlife is already moving in—of the seven birdboxes built by Dr Stephen Bewsey, three were occupied immediately, and a moth trapping evening found over 30 different species. It is hoped that the copse can extend the life of the church beyond its physical walls and provide a calm, spiritual place in the grounds.

Jim Allen then took the floor to outline the life of Ebenezer Mears, owner of the coal and coke merchant and demolition company remembered by many members. Ebenezer was born in Byfleet in 1856. He left school aged 11, and having decided to become a police officer, he attended the City of London College and joined the City of London Police Force at the age of 18. He became a successful athlete, breaking several police records for walking. He was also one of the force's champion boxers. He married Mary Anne Truelove in 1881 and they had two sons and three daughters. In the early 1880s, while in duty, Ebenezer found a bomb placed in Playhouse Yard at the rear of "The Times" office. He kicked over the explosives, dissipating the force of the explosion which followed. His police career was a great success, and he rose to Superintendent with the rank of Chief Constable of the City Corporation Markets at the age of 31 and with only 11 years' experience. He retired from the force in 1908, aged 52, returning to Ivy Cottage in Chertsey Road, and founding his demolition and haulage company. He also devoted himself to the community, becoming chairman of the Parish Council, Justice of the Peace, and an overseer of the Parish, as well as Trustee of the Village Hall and vice president of the Village Club, and a variety of other public offices. Sadly a serious operation curtailed his local activities, and he died on 15th October 1929. He is buried in St Mary's churchyard.

The evening was rounded off by an update on the Brooklands Banking by Julian Temple, who is working with English Heritage to produce a Conservation Management Plan to ensure that tenants along the banking can be made to keep the weeds and growth on the concrete to a minimum.

Jim Allen showed a short extract from "Harry Hill—the Movie", parts of which had been shot in Mowbray Avenue last year, causing much excitement around the village. The evening had provided a range of topics covering a wide time scale, and it was hoped to have another members' evening again soon.

The recent remodelling in St Mary's churchyard has revealed an interesting grave, noticed by Julian Temple as he sheltered from the rain recently.

It seems that poor Gerald was the first aviation fatality at Brooklands, being killed in an accident involving a Bristol Boxkite on 1st August 1911.

Andy Wilson gave us more information from Flight Magazine of the 5th August of the same year. He says, "Gerald was flying an updated version of the Bristol Boxkite, called the Bristol Type T. It was still a single-seat aircraft; on the day of the crash Napier was flying the aircraft, carrying a passenger – Mr W Laurie..." Flight magazine reports ".... When banking for a spiral descent, a sharp gust of wind caught the machine and, heading right over before the pilot could recover, she side-slipped to the ground. Unfortunately, the engine broke away by the impact, and struck Mr Napier, injuring him fatally. His passenger was thrown clear of the debris, and thus escaped with severe shock"



A sad story behind one of the many names in St Mary's churchyard.



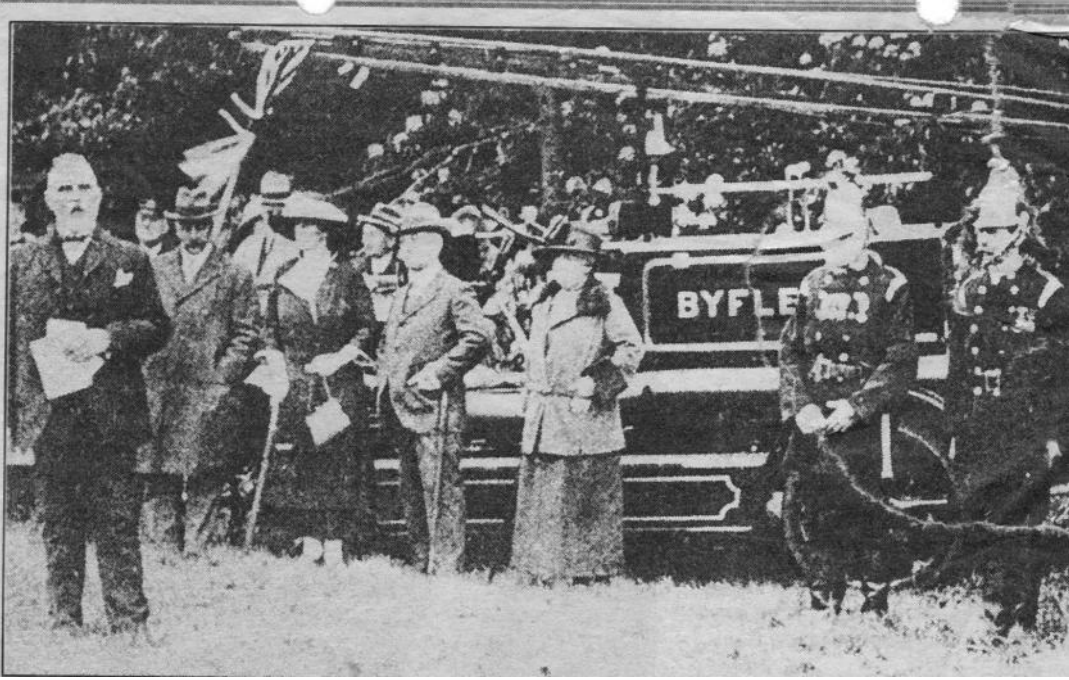
Few things epitomise an English summer better than a cricket match, and Byfleet has a fine tradition. Byfleet Cricket Club was founded in 1876, and there were several annual fixtures such as the one in this photo. This was between the Top Hats (the gentry) and the Leather Aprons (the workforce).

We are not sure of the date of this photo, but the umpire on the left in the long white coat is George Carpenter, who was Head Gardener for the Stoops at West Hall.

SUBS REMINDER! Subscriptions for 2014-15 became due at the AGM in May, and very many thanks to those of you who have already paid. If yours are due you should find a renewal form with this newsletter, but if you are unsure where you stand, please give Avreil, our Treasurer, a ring on 01932 344476.. If you joined after the end of January 2014, your subscription will not be due until next year. Subs can be either sent to Avreil at the address on the form, or dropped in at Byfleet Library or at a meeting.

We do hope you decide to renew and thank you to everyone for your continued support.

From our Archive



Ebenezer Mears & Son
CHERTSEY ROAD, BYFLEET.
Merchants and Contractors.

HEAD OFFICE : Phone: Byfleet 17.
COAL OFFICE : Phone: Byfleet 440.

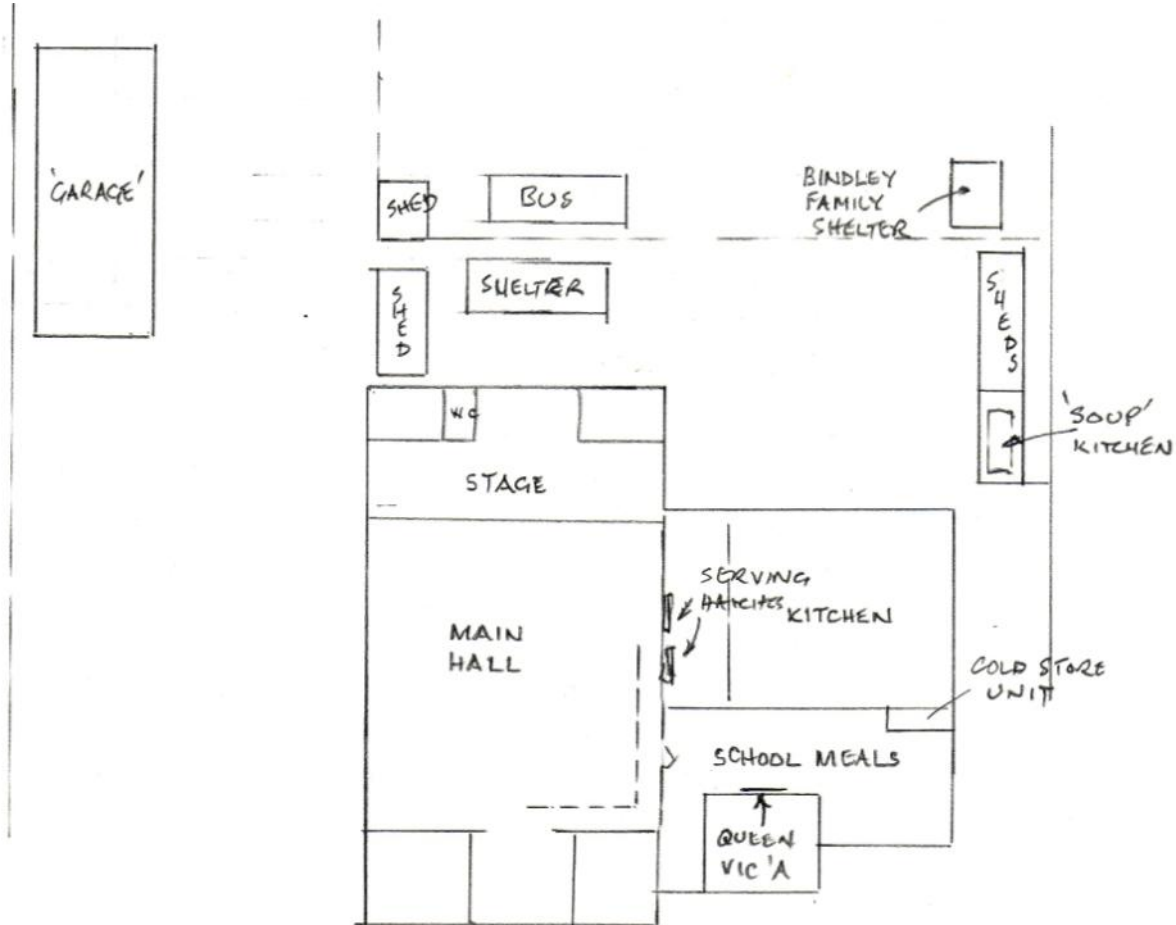


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Following on from our Members' Evening, here is a picture of Ebenezer Mears from our archive. Mr Mears (on the left) is inaugurating a new fire engine at Byfleet in June 1923. Lined up behind him are Mr and Mrs Leonard Stevens and Mr and Mrs F C Stoop. To the right is an advert from 1937 for his coal and coke business.

Below is a plan of Byfleet Village Hall drawn by David Barrett, showing the layout when the British Restaurant was in service, and when school meals were served in the small hall. Also shown is the position of the portrait of Queen Victoria which David remembered keeping a stern eye on the children as they ate their dinners (in which rissoles and steamed puddings were regular offerings). If anyone has any memories of either Ebenezer Mears or the British Restaurant (or school dinners!), please let us know.



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SOCIETY NEWS
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There will be several events in Byfleet to mark the centenary of the beginning of the First World War.

There will be a short service at St Mary's Church at 6.30pm on Sunday 3rd August. Then on Monday 4th August there will be a short service at Byfleet War Memorial at 9pm. Everyone is very welcome to attend both events.



In the week preceding, there will also be an exhibition of World War 1 books and memorabilia in the Heritage Room and the main area of Byfleet Community Library from 26th July to 3rd August.

Byfleet Parish Day is here again. This year's event (the 149th) will be held on Saturday 19th July on Byfleet Recreation Ground. The Heritage Society will be there and there will be the usual array of things to do and displays to see.

The fun starts at 12.30pm so do come by and say hello.

And if anyone is able to give up half an hour or so to help man the stand, that would be lovely. Please give Tessa a ring on 01932 351559 or an email on Tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk. Thank you.



Adrian Stoop at The Lightbox

If you are in Woking, and have time to drop into The Lightbox, you might like to go and see the small, temporary display relating to Adrian Stoop, who is featuring as the current Local Hero in the Woking's Story section of the museum.

Adrian Stoop, son of F C Stoop of West Hall, came to be known as 'The Father of British Rugby'. He was born in 1883 and played for the Harlequins and England. The Harlequins' ground is named the Stoop in his honour.

We plan to open Byfleet Fire Station again on **Sunday August 10th** to coincide with the cycle racing, from half an hour before the first race with final closure at 3pm, and for the **Heritage Open Weekend on Saturday September 13th** from 10am until 4pm. Do come along and have a look inside this Byfleet landmark.

