

A very happy 2015 to all our members, and we hope the year will be a wonderful one. Jeff has put together a programme of interesting talks, so we hope to see many of you at St Mary's Centre for the Community for those.

If you are unable to get to our evening talks, don't forget you can drop in to see us at Byfleet Library on the first Saturday morning of the month between 10.30 and 12.30 at the Heritage Centre, where we bring out items from our archive for people to see. We look forward to meeting you.

FORTHCOMING  
EVENTS 2015



**Thursday 12th February:** Andy Fielder tells us all about **Windsor Great Park**. *St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.*

**Thursday 12th March:** Join us to hear Dr Matthew Smith tell us all about **Magna Carta**. *St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.*

**Thursday 16th April:** Martin Cutler returns to give us a talk entitled "**The Sky Belongs to Them—The RAF and the Second World War**". *St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.*

**Thursday 21st May: Society AGM**, after which Jeff Sechiari will give a talk about the information to be gleaned from **The Electoral Roll for Byfleet**. *Please note earlier start time of 7.30pm, St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close*

**Thursday 25th June:** A discussion evening dedicated to **The history of the Sanway Area**. Come and find out about Sanway, or add your own memories. *St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.*

**Thursday 23rd July:** Join us for a relaxed and entertaining evening as our very own Jim Allen hosts

another of his celebrated **Quiz Nights**, testing your local history knowledge. *St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.*

**Thursday 10th September:** Join us as John Clarke tells us all about "**The History of Brookwood Cemetery**". *St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.*

**Thursday 8th October: An Evening of short talks by members.** Our own members take the floor this evening to give short talks about their particular interests. *St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.*

**Thursday 12th November:** Martin Cutler returns to continue his talk about the **Second World War**. *St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.*

**Thursday 10th December: Christmas Social.** Nibbles and drinks, together with Mike Webber's annual **Collection of new Photographs** that the Society has come by throughout the year. *St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.*

**Members free, Guests £2  
Everyone very welcome!**

**Don't forget**—if you have a topic or an idea for a talk, please let us know.

## *For the Record...*

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

In October **Eileen Perryer** gave us a talk on **Marc Brunel and the first tunnel under the Thames**. Marc was born in Normandy in 1769, the second son of minor aristocracy. Although it was traditional for second sons to enter the church, Marc showed no desire to become a priest, instead becoming a naval cadet, travelling to America. He returned to France during the Revolution, where he met an English girl, Sophie Kingdom. However, Marc became known as a royalist sympathiser, and had to return to America. There he submitted a design for the Capitol building in Washington, and became Chief Engineer of New York at the age of 22. He also created an improved design for blocks for sailing ships, making them on a specially designed machine rather than hand carving. In 1799, on returning to France, he found that Sophie had returned to England, so he followed her there. He took his block design with him, patenting the idea and selling it to the Royal Navy, who sadly did not pay him for another nine years. He married Sophie and had three children, the youngest of which was Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who later worked with his father.

While living in Portsmouth, Marc noticed soldiers returning from the Peninsular War in badly worn out boots. He invented a new boot and employed some ex-servicemen to make them. This came to the notice of the Duke of Wellington himself, who approved of the scheme and gave Marc the contract, but unfortunately the factory later burnt down. The Battle of Waterloo then put an end to the war, which meant that the demand for army boots disappeared, and Marc was poor again and even served a term in debtors' prison. Wellington persuaded the government to pay Marc's debts, which they gladly did; Marc had been asked by the Czar of Russia to help build a bridge in St Petersburg, and the government did not want to lose an engineer of such talent.

Marc spent his time in prison designing improved Thames crossings. The bridges could not cope with the amount of cargo being transported, so Marc considered building a tunnel underneath. He planned to sink two shafts on either side of the river and to tunnel between them. A site between Wapping and Rotherhithe was chosen, as the river was relatively narrow, with space to build on either side. Parliament at first decided they did not want a French man to have the contract, and hired a tin miner from Cornwall; however, he decided the job was too much for him, and Wellington persuaded the government that Marc was their man.

Work progressed well; Marc had designed a tunnelling shield, a framework of three tiers containing four men each. The men dug at the face, moving the spoil behind them where it was taken away and the brick layer built behind them as they dug. Brunel had been inspired by looking at the shipworm that bored through ship's timbers. The work was not without problems. The water that seeped into the tunnel was toxic and there was no proper ventilation. There was one large breakthrough of water in the first year, but luckily no-one was killed. Isambard went down in a waterproof canvas diving suit and found that dredging of the river had damaged the tunnel, and after that time the tunnel was protected by grids of steel rods.

A banquet was held in the double tunnel, with the workmen in one tunnel and the great and the good in the other one. Twelve bottles of burgundy were laid down to drink when the tunnel was done, but it took so long to complete that the wine disappeared. In 1827 there was another, more serious leak and several people were killed. In fact, Isambard was lucky to escape with his life and his father sent him to Bristol to recuperate. By 1828 the tunnel was clear again, and Marc began to charge people to come and walk along the tunnel to raise funds. Due to various arguments and disagreements between shareholders and directors, it was seven years before work began on the tunnel again. The machinery had rusted and become unworkable, but the delay had given Marc the chance to design a better shield.

At one time Queen Victoria and Prince Albert arrived unannounced and walked from Rotherhithe to Wapping. Marc was knighted, but his tunnel became a tourist attraction rather than the cargo passage intended. The tunnel was eventually sold to what became the Underground railway system. It is still there today and if you take the Overground to Wapping you can see the brickwork, and you will notice that the tunnels aren't quite as large as usual and the platforms slightly narrower. The shaft and engine house can still be seen on the Rotherhithe side, and now house a very good Brunel Museum.

Marc prospered in the end and lived to the ripe old age of 80 and is buried at Kensal Green Cemetery. We thanked Eileen for telling us about the man whose engineering ideas are still used in building the Channel Tunnel and Crossrail.

For our nearest meeting to Armistice Day we were pleased to welcome Rev. Peter Howson, who gave his talk **'November 1914 and the British Churches come to terms with the war'**.

Rev Howson reminded members of the service held at St Mary's in August to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, and cast our thoughts back to how the people and churches in Byfleet had reacted in 1914. The Church Times editorial of 7th August called it a conflict of "unexampled greatness" and sympathies were divided. Since July, the church had proposed that there should be no British involvement, believing that war would be a catastrophe. The Catholic community in London had held a requiem Mass after the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand, and the Jewish community were adamant that the British should neither go to war nor sign a treaty with Russia. The Presbyterians considered Germany, the home of Martin Luther, as a spiritual home, so were ambivalent about British involvement and the form it should take.

Other events also heightened the mood of uncertainty, with industrial disputes and trouble in Ireland. The Archbishop of Canterbury had been corresponding with Dr Ernest von Dryander, Chief Court Chaplain to the Kaiser about involvement with the 400th anniversary of the Reformation; but the turn of events meant that the Archbishop had to tactfully decline. A conference for friendship between churches was to be held at Lake Constance, but as this was due to begin on 4th August, this never took place.

By the actual outbreak of war, most church groups were behind the government in their decision to go to war. Some non-conformist groups remained opposed to war, but volunteered to serve in other ways; for instance the Quakers formed the Ambulance service to provide medical care. The Rev William E Orchard preached against the war from his chapel in Mayfair, continuing to do so throughout the conflict, and many men in uniform would go to hear him.



Rev. Benjamin O'Rorke

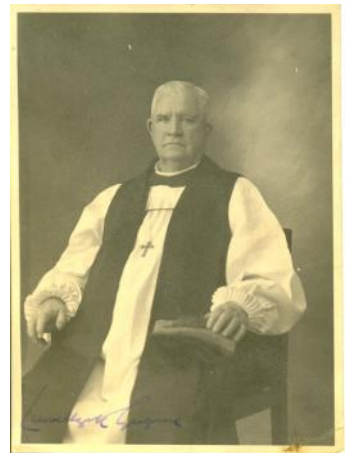
The churches provided support to the army via army chaplains, and 55 chaplains were mobilised. One of this number was Rev Benjamin O'Rorke. He had served in the Boer War, and in 1914 went to France with 4 Field Ambulance supporting the Guards Brigade. He was caught up in the retreat from Mons where approximately 160 men were wounded. The wounded were gathered in a barn and left to become prisoners of war. It was suggested that medical cover should be left with them, and Rev O'Rorke volunteered to stay. But, although the Geneva Convention ruled that medical staff would be exchanged, he became a prisoner of war until July 1915. On finally being offered the chance of exchange, Rev O'Rorke refused, wishing to stay with the prisoners, but he was sent home anyway, and wrote a book about his experiences, "In the Hands of the Enemy". He returned to France before being posted as staff chaplain to the Deputy Chaplain General, Bishop Llewellyn Gwynne.

Rev O'Rorke started a diary on 1st January 1918, which he kept until June 1918, and this gives an amazing insight into life as a chaplain behind the lines, and also about his concerns on what the state of Britain would be after the war. He organised a series of conferences about how to improve the state of society, as

many felt that things had to be better after the war, or all the horror would have been for nothing. He was also interested in setting up schemes to help troubled servicemen to cope with what they had seen. However, on 21st March 1918 the Germans launched their huge attack on the Western Front, and his schemes were put to one side. Rev O'Rorke debated whether it would be right to ask for a posting back to England while the war was still on, but on 1st July 1918 he was sent back to Falmouth. Sadly he died on Christmas Day 1918, a victim of the flu epidemic which killed so many, both servicemen and civilians.

We thanked Rev Howson for his most interesting insight into an aspect of army service that may not often be at the forefront of our minds, and for making our November meeting particularly apt.

Bishop Llewellyn Gwynne



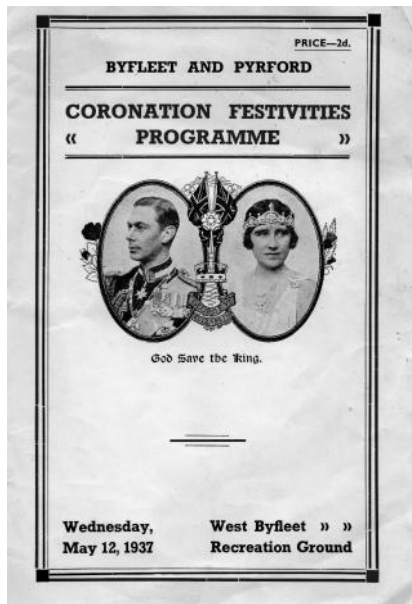
We were grateful to Mike Webber for once again giving us a display of some of the items the Society has been lucky enough to have been given or loaned throughout the year. Mike showed an array of postcards and pictures; there are too many to show here, but here are some of the highlights. Thanks again to Mike for his (now traditional) review of the year, and to everyone who has lent or donated items for our archive. Your generosity is always



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A group of nurses and patients from the Bleakdown military hospital in 1916. Bleakdown is listed as having been at Bleakdown Golf Club, Sheerwater Road, now West Byfleet Golf Club. Another war time hospital, Blytheswood, was at Elmstead Road.

Below: The Stoops held a Dutch Fair in the grounds of West Hall to raise funds for the building of St John's church



Above left: the programme for the Byfleet and Pyrford Coronation Festivities in 1937.

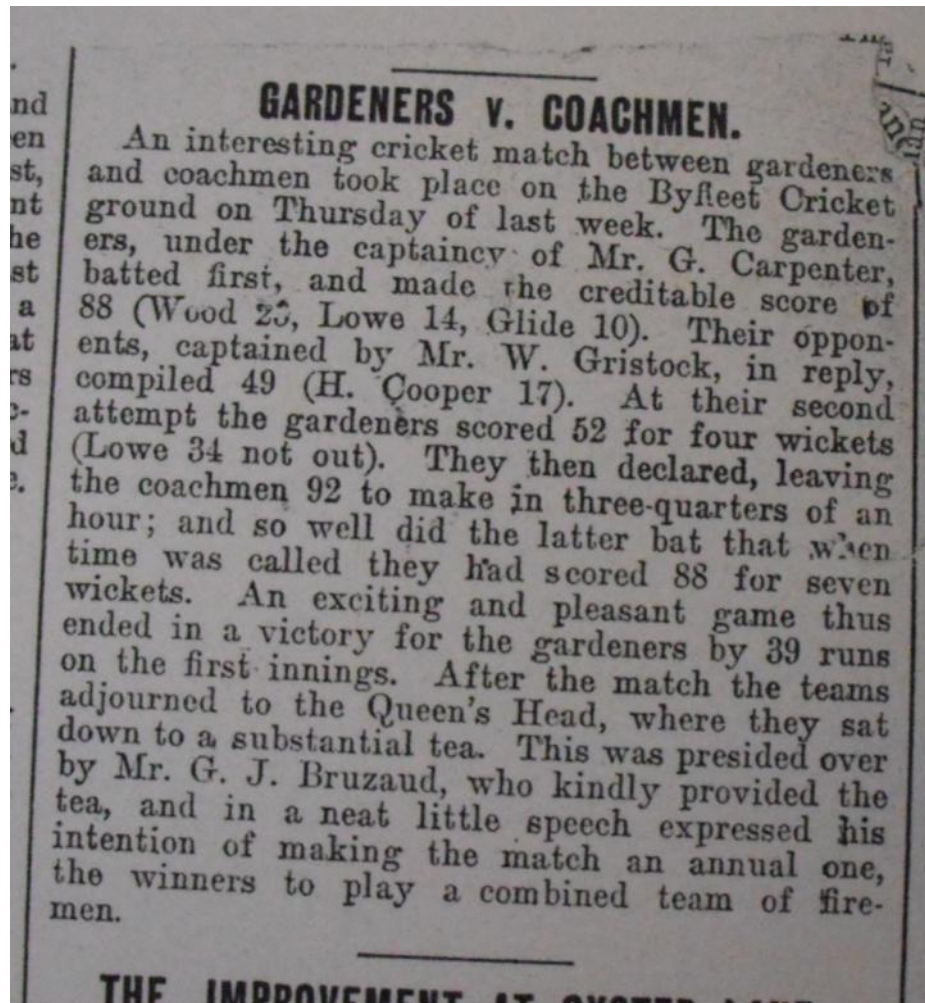


Left: St Mary's Primary School Football Team 1953. Thanks to Mike Gathercole for this picture. All but two of the team have been named, so if you can name the other two we would love to hear from you. They are: Back row: Ken Monk, Unknown, Gordon Grenham, Ian Painter, John Frost and Alan Moorhouse.

Front row: Stuart Morgan, Arthur Ashton, John Bragg, Mike Gathercole himself, Unknown (although it was thought at the meeting that this may be Colin Smith).

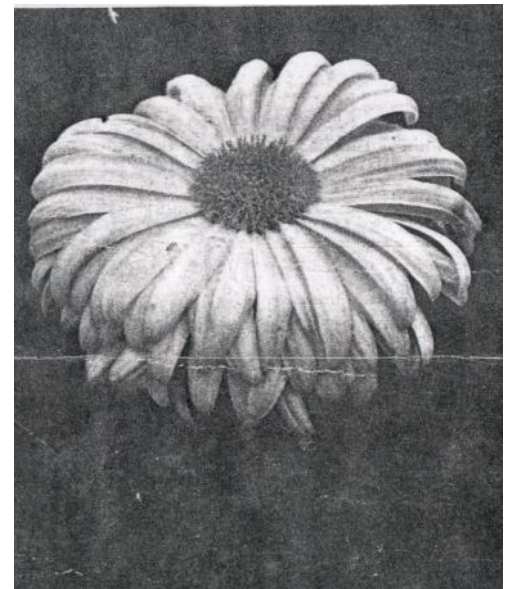
Unfortunately this newspaper cutting, about a cricket match between the gardeners and coachmen is undated. Mr George Carpenter (captain of the gardeners) was Head Gardener at West Hall for many years, developing at least five varieties of apple there between 1902 and 1932.

If anyone has any more information, or an idea of the date, or if the proposed match with the firemen ever took place, we would love to hear from you.



The West Hall gardening staff. Mr George Carpenter is the gentleman seated in the middle of the second row with the flat cap, tie and waistcoat.

Mr Carpenter also created this variety of chrysanthemum, Norman, named after Norman "Spud" Boorer, whose father was one of Mr Carpenter's workers.



SOCIETY NEWS

**Help for Heroes**

Members might like to know that, as a result of sales of Jim Allen's book, "Byfleet and the Great War", the Society has been able to send a donation of £150 to Help for Heroes. The charity has sent a note of thanks, saying "Please pass on our thanks and best wishes to all at Byfleet Heritage Society."



The website featuring a map of St Mary's churchyard map will be launched on **Sunday 29th March** at St Mary's Church Hall at 6pm. Everyone is welcome.

Come along and see how the work in recording the graves has been turned into a map that you can explore on-line.



Back in 2007 we had a query from someone who had traced their ancestors, Edward and Isaac Oakley (a blacksmith and a broom maker), to an address in the Chertsey Road area called Rudlands Rookery in 1851. We have now had another query, from a descendant of Henry and Eliza Dawes, who were living in the same area.

Looking at the order the census was taken in, it would seem that this area was between Wintersells Farm and Frenchs Farm (which was where the old Britax works was). Jeff Sechiari looked further at the census and found a group of homes listed under one occupier, William Rudland. Has anyone heard of Rudlands Rookery in Byfleet, or know where more exactly it might have been?

If anyone has any information, please either give us a ring on 01932 351559, or drop a note in at Byfleet Library. Thank you.



At our January meeting, we were the first group to use the new sound system at St Mary's Centre for the Community. This system is a great improvement, and we hope that members will appreciate the difference so that all our guest speakers will be audible throughout the room.

We are hoping to erect a blue plaque in memory of Frederick Cornelius Stoop and Agnes Macfarlane Stoop in the summer at Byfleet Village Hall, by kind



permission of the trustees. The Stoops were such benefactors of the village, being responsible for the cricket ground, the village Boat House, and the building of the Village Hall, among many other acts of kindness, that it was felt that they should be commemorated within the village. Members will be advised when the unveiling date is confirmed.

