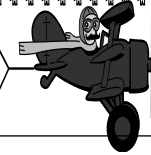


Welcome to issue 74 of our newsletter, which we hope you enjoy. Another year has passed, and our AGM will be held in May. A letter with details of this should accompany this newsletter. There is an extra letter regarding the new Data Protection regulations. It is important that we receive your response, and more details are below.

Our AGM this year will be followed by an evening of reminiscences about schooldays. Please feel free to join in and also to bring any photos or mementoes of "the happiest days of your life", whether they were in Byfleet or elsewhere.

We look forward to seeing you then and if, in the meantime, you need to contact us, you can now find contact details on the back page of the newsletter.

FORTHCOMING  
EVENTS 2018



All talks are held at St Mary's Centre for the Community, Stream Close, Byfleet and will begin at 8.15pm.

**Thursday 17th May:** *Please note change of date.* AGM. This year we revert to our usual meeting time. After the business of the AGM, join us for an evening of members' reminiscences, **"Remembering Schooldays."**

**Thursday 21st June:** Come and hear **Bob Fuller** speak about **The Victoria Cross**.

**Thursday 19th July:** 'Byfleet Then and Now' by **Chris Glasow**.

**Thursday 23rd August** *The BHS goes boating.* As usual there is no meeting in August, but our annual EVENING BOAT TRIP will take place along the Wey Navigation canal. Further details to be announced.

**Thursday 20th September:** **David Taylor** on 'Reformers, Pre-Raphaelites and the Bloomsbury Group'

**Thursday 18th October:** *Please note change of date.* Join us for another of our popular evenings of "Members' short talks". Full details to follow. If you have a topic that you would like to share please contact us

**Thursday 15th November:** *Please note change of date.* **Rev Nick Aiken** will speak about "Pyrford."

**Thursday 20th December:** Our annual Christmas meeting, at which **Mike Webber** will show a collection of photographs and other items of interest that the Society has acquired during the year. Don't forget, we are always pleased to see your photographs and to take scans for our archive.

**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.**

Along with this newsletter you will have received notification of our AGM in May, and a membership renewal form. There is also a letter explaining the new General Data Protection Regulation.

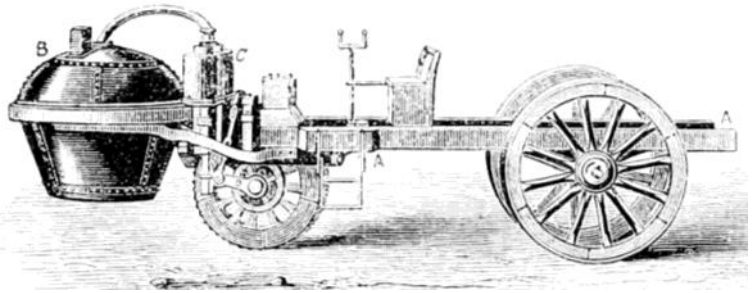
Please make sure you return the form at the bottom of this letter, as the new regulation means we cannot communicate with you if we do not have your express permission to do so.

Details on how to return the form are included on the letter, and we look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

## For the Record...

February's meeting welcomed **Anthony Saunders** for his talk entitled "Carriages without horses shall go – the early days of motoring." The title comes from one of Mother Shipton's predictions, which seemed to foresee the age of the car.

The first steam wagon was invented by the French inventor Nicolas-Joseph Cugnot. He placed a steam engine on a wagon in order to carry guns, but thus invented the first motorised vehicle, which moved at 3mph. Richard Trevithick developed this idea, creating a motorised stage coach in 1803, although passengers complained because the seats were placed so high that you needed a ladder to access them. A great leap forward came with Karl Benz's



vehicle, built using the latest internal combustion engine technology in 1885-6. However, there was little interest as no-one believed that the horse could be beaten for travel. However, Mrs Benz took the car and drove 50 miles to visit friends and another 50 miles to return home, which demonstrated its reliability. The car was exhibited at the big Expo in Paris, but although it was largely overlooked, Emile Roget, saw the potential in Benz's machine. He was granted sole agency rights for Benz vehicles and engines in France in 1888—the first motor car agency.

Gradually motoring started to take off. This led to the production of car fashion! As the cars were open topped, the discerning driver needed protection from the elements, leading Aquascutum, Dunhill and Gamage to produce their own lines in motoring clothing. Gamage even produced their own car, and one still takes part in the London to Brighton Vintage Car Rally.

England tried to follow France's lead, but motoring was hampered by the government. The Red Flag Act limited any motorised vehicle to 4mph and ordered that a man with a red flag should walk in front of it. This was in effect until 1896, although cars could by then go much faster. Despite this, English drivers were catching the motoring bug. John Dennis was caught speeding in Guildford High Street in 1899 in a French car, and John Knight of Farnham designed his own car—and was also caught speeding at a grand speed of 12mph.

It wasn't long before motor racing began. This was allowed on public roads in all European countries except Great Britain, and featured such races as the Parish to Bordeaux and the Paris to Madrid. There were many problems to overcome for the intrepid drivers, as the cars had no windscreens, roofs or mudguards and the roads were mostly unsurfaced. It was customary for drivers to take along a mechanic, and it was for this reason that many early racers were two seaters.

In 1896 the Red Flag Act was repealed and the speed limit raised from 4mph to 12mph. To celebrate this a group of motorists held a celebratory run from London to Brighton, which is still held today.

Anthony explained where our custom of driving on the left came from. This was carried over from the days when men on horseback wore swords. Riding on the left made it easier to draw and use a sword if needed. Originally all countries rode on the left. But after the French Revolution in 1789, when everything from the old regime had to go, it was decreed that everyone should ride on the right. However, many French cars still had their steering wheels on the right until the 1920s. No-one is sure why, but one theory is so that the chauffeur would be nearest to the pavement and ready to open the door for his passenger.



Who has not exclaimed "Gordon Bennet!" and wondered where the expression came from. James Gordon-Bennett was the Editor of the New York Herald, a newspaper owned by his father. He was a larger than life character, and gained a reputation for printing mad, outrageous stories in the late 1800s. Due to this, if anyone saw something happening that was over the top, they would say, "That's a Gordon-Bennett story," which became shortened to the exclamation. Around 1900, he upset his father and was banished to Paris, where he set up the New York Herald Paris office. He became involved in the motoring scene, even instigating a series of international motor races. Traditionally, the country that won the race would host it the following year. In 1902 Britain won, which caused a problem as racing on the public roads was still not permitted. The problem was circumnavigated by holding the race in Ireland instead. As an offshoot of this idea, as Ireland was the Emerald Isle, Great Britain's team colour became green, and British teams have used British Racing Green ever since. The ban on racing on public roads led to the creation of Brooklands

Track which opened in 1907 as a place where cars could race legally.

Another problem for the early motorist was where to get fuel. There were no service stations until the 1920s, and so drivers would go to the chemist or grocer and ask for a bottle of petrol. As larger quantities became needed, you could have it delivered to the door by horse and cart or, if you were in the Australian outback, by camel. People began to set up garages for petrol and servicing. H Quartermaine is in Woking's trade directory in 1908 as a plumber and maintenance man, but by 1909 had become a garage. As early cars were not so reliable, demand for garages was probably high. In fact, drivers would have been wise to learn the skills themselves to keep their cars on the road, and many models were sold with a well equipped tool kit and a car manuals which gave detailed instructions for quite major jobs.

Anthony finished with the tale of a race. Around 1930 one of the part owners of Bentley went to Europe and heard of the Blue Train, said to be the fastest transport from Cannes to Calais. He bet £100 that not only could he beat the train to Calais in his car, but he could cross the channel and be sitting in his club before the train arrived. He actually won by about 3 minutes—but the French authorities fined him for speeding on the public highway, so his winnings disappeared.

We thanked Anthony for an entertaining look at the early days of motoring.

Society members gathered in March to hear **Nick Hewitt** speak on **The Battle of Jutland** which took place from 31 May to 1st June 1916. Nick set the scene. Since the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 the British navy had been unchallenged rulers of the world's oceans. But then Kaiser Wilhelm charged Grand Admiral Turpitz to revive the German navy. Turpitz demanded 19 battleships and 50 cruisers to be built from scratch. Britain had to respond, and in 1906 1st Sea Lord Admiral "Jacky" Fisher launched HMS Dreadnought, the first all big-gun battleship, made to hunt and destroy enemy cruisers. An arms race ensued. At first Britain had the advantage as Germany was simultaneously maintaining the largest land army in Europe. But between 1905-1914 Germany increased its defence budget by 142%.



By the outbreak of war in 1914 Britain had 28 dreadnoughts and 9 battle cruisers compared to Germany's 16 dreadnoughts and 5 battle cruisers. New technology, such as torpedoes and submarines, made the standard British strategy of naval blockade unsuitable. Instead the British deployed a distant blockade, patrolling the North Sea from Scapa Flow, keeping the Germans contained. In response, the Germans aimed to whittle the British ships down until numbers were equal, and then engage and destroy the navy.

The British had the advantage of intelligence from a group of civilian code breakers known as Room 40 (the Bletchley Park of the First World War) who used captured German code books. Then the Battle of Dogger Bank in 1915 proved a learning experience for both sides, which had repercussions for Jutland. A British shell penetrated the turret of the German flagship, which was only saved by flooding the magazine, killing the men within but saving the ship. But the Germans had learnt how battle cruisers could be destroyed. The British suffered signalling problems which meant that their ships all concentrated on one German ship rather than heading off to destroy others. They also learned that their gunnery was no good, but attempts to speed up the rate of fire encouraged lethal practices such as stacking cordite charges in the ships' turrets.

After Dogger Bank, Admiral Scheer took command and changed the German strategy. He planned to goad the British by bombarding Sunderland, drawing the fleet down from Scapa Flow to where he could attack them. By 31 May 1916 250 ships were at sea, carrying 100,000 men, more than all today's European navies combined. The German Admiral Hipper's battlecruisers were sent to lure Vice Admiral Beatty's battlecruisers into the path of the main German fleet. The British found Hipper earlier than expected, but due to distance and smoke, their signals were not seen and hence no-one moved to engage the German ships. The Germans opened fire on Beatty, but the British failed to return fire for ten minutes. At 1600hrs a shell penetrated the turret of Beatty's flagship and exploded. Although mortally wounded, Major Francis Harvey ordered the magazine to be flooded, saving the ship and earning him a posthumous Victoria Cross. Shortly after, HMS Indefatigable was lost, followed by HMS Queen Mary. During this action, Commander Barry Bingham attacked the German line in the Nestor, earning him the VC. Beatty's job was now to lead the German fleet back towards Admiral Jellicoe. At 1640hrs a signal was received for the force to turn. However, when the super dreadnoughts received this order, they turned in succession rather than simultaneously, making them easy targets for heavy German fire.



Meanwhile, Rear Admiral Hood left Scapa Flow on his own initiative and engaged some of the German light cruisers, during which action Jack Cornwall, a Boy 1st Class aged only 16, earned his posthumous VC. Another VC was awarded to Commander William Loftus Jones of HMS Shark, who bravely went down with his ship. Although more British ships were lost, including HMS Invincible, the German fleet was now outgunned. Admiral Scheer turned his entire fleet (a considerable feat of seamanship) and disappeared into the mist, only to turn again back towards the British. Realising his mistake, he sailed straight towards the British to try to gain time to turn again before darkness fell.

Scheer now had two choices in his route home: the first was quick, but dangerous, whereas the second was longer but safer. The British thought, with damaged ships, Scheer would choose the safer route, but in fact he chose the quicker. During the night the navies came so close to each other that the British could see the German ships, but they did not fire, having received no command to do so. After some further losses, the remainder of the German fleet escaped, although badly damaged. The Germans arrived home first and the German press declared the battle a defeat for the British. The British Admiralty increased this impression when their press release stated they had lost more men and more ships than the Germans.

So who had won? The Battle of Jutland is accepted as a German tactical victory, but most of the British losses were insignificant; only 8 out of 77 destroyers were lost, and the British Fleet was ready for action the next day. However, the Germans lost 3 out of 6 modern light cruisers and four dreadnoughts needed serious repair in dry dock. The Germans had used their skills, but only to escape and had failed in their plan to destroy the British fleet. The British blockade continued, leading to a 50% reduction in the food supply in some German regions. A contemporary report summed it up: "The German fleet has assaulted its gaoler, but it is still in gaol."

We thanked Nick for taking us through this fascinating and significant battle.

On a beautiful Spring day, we welcomed **Dave Page**, Countryside Estates Officer for Elmbridge Borough Council, who showed us some of the natural beauty to be found around us in his talk **“The Elmbridge Commons—their Natural and Social History.”**

The Elmbridge Commons cover 560 hectares and includes 5 local reserves and 14 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest. Esher Common is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest. People use the Commons to get away from it all and enjoy the natural surroundings, although an increase in dog walkers has caused some problems. The Commons includes The Ledges at West End, Fairmile Common, Esher Common, Arbrook Common and Oxshott Heath. The whole of Elmbridge is formed of river terraces formed by deposits from the River Mole. There is also the River Rythe and the Fairmile Ditch, which are both liable to sudden flooding, which Elmbridge are working to rectify, as the flood defences put in place after 1968 are no longer adequate. One feature common to waterways in Elmbridge is an orange coating known as iron mould, caused by iron eating bacteria working on the iron being washed from the gravel and sandy soil into rivers and streams. The Commons cover a variety of habitats, from the river terrace at The Ledges, the Victorian man-made lake at West End Common and Little Heath Lake which was an formerly a clay pit for the local brickworks, meadows at Hurst Meadows, woodland at Arbrook Common and heathland at Oxshott and Fairmile Common.



Sheep's-bit

Dave showed us the array of species that could be found in such varied surroundings, some of them quite rare. The nearest site to Byfleet was Brooklands Community Park, which is home to many solitary bees and wasps, but also is the only site where Sheep's Bit can be found. There are over 3,600 species of fungi listed on the Commons, along with many butterflies, reptiles and birds. Dave's team are kept busy trying to provide a little bit of every kind of landscape to be support this variety of wildlife. His team make rails, provide access for the public by creating and maintaining steps, paths and gangways, and keep down invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam. They are trialling grazing by goats and this is already proving beneficial in opening up the landscape to allow various species to thrive. They welcome volunteers to help them in caring for the landscape, and there are volunteer task groups run on the last Wednesday of each month from 10am to 3.45pm (details on their website at [www.elmbridge.gov.uk/council/volunteering-and-work-experience](http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/council/volunteering-and-work-experience)). Dave showed us many lovely pictures of the species on our doorstep, too many to mention them all here, but here is a selection of some of the beautiful plants, animals and birds that can be seen in our neighbourhood.



The Silver-studded Blue butterfly is restricted to heathland where bell heather grows. It will only lay eggs on plants where ant pheromones are present. The ants get honeydew from the caterpillar, which they take to their nests where it pupates safely



The Great Crested Newt can be found in Little Heath Lake



The Beefsteak fungus (right), so called because not only does it look like a slab of meat, but when cut it bleeds a red juice. Above, the Wood Hedgehog.



Pine Hawkmoth caterpillars can be found among the pine trees on Esher Commons. This becomes a large moth over 3 inches long

The stonechat (right) and Lesser Redpoll (far right) are two of the many bird species who call Elmbridge Commons home.



FROM THE ARCHIVE



Two photographs from our archive. The picture on the left shows a street party in Hart Road to celebrate the end of the Second World War.

The photo below is labelled Byfleet Football Club 1953.

Do you recognise anyone? We are always trying to put names to the faces in our photos, so if you do we would love to hear from you. Details on how to contact the Society are on the back page.



Some time ago a member of the audience at one of our meetings mentioned that sledges had been made in Byfleet for Scott's expedition to the Antarctic. We could not find any record of this, but the other day I found the article reproduced below in our archive, and wonder if it was sledges for this expedition, rather than Scott's, that the audience member meant. Does anyone know more?

From The Herald, November 1935

**FUNERAL OF MR E L PITMAN. MADE SLEDGES FOR ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION**

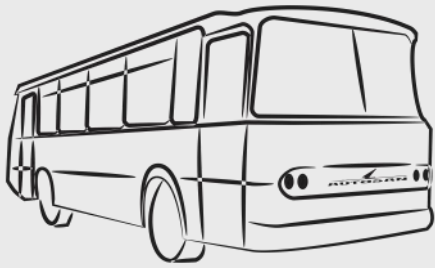
The funeral took place on Friday at St Mary's Church of Mr E L Pitman, of "Crathie," Oyster Lane, whose death occurred the previous Monday at the age of 57.

The late Mr Pitman had lived in Byfleet for about 19 years and had been employed by Messrs Vickers in various factories for 32 years. He was a specialist in wood working and some time ago he was commissioned to make ten sledges for use in Mr John Rymill's expedition in the Antarctic. Mr Pitman had also been concerned in the construction of several famous Vickers aeroplanes used in notable flights. He was a keen bowler and was Match Secretary of the Byfleet Bowling Club, being also a member of the Village Club. He is survived by a widow, to whom the sympathy of many friends has been extended.

The funeral, which was conducted at St Mary's Church on Friday by the Rector (Lt-Col the Rev F J Cheverton), was attended by a number of the staff of Vickers Aviation Ltd, including the colleagues of the deceased who went with him to Newfoundland to assemble the aeroplane with which Sir John Alcock and Sir Arthur Whitten-Brown made the first Atlantic flight."

SOCIETY NEWS,  
AND QUERIES

### Coach Trips



We have organised the following coach trips for 2018, all on Thursdays, and departing from Byfleet Village Hall:

10th May - Portsmouth, with opportunities to visit the Historic Dockyard, the Gunwharf Quays shopping centre and the Spinnaker Tower. The coach is nearly full, but there are a few tickets left at £15. Departure time 09.30.

Contact Mary McIntyre on 01932 341586.

28th June - The Royal Hospital, Chelsea, for a guided tour by one of the Chelsea Pensioners. This trip is fully booked.

13th September - A day at the seaside in Brighton. Lots to do and see, including the Pier, The Lanes, Volks Electric Railway, the Bi360 Tower, the Aquarium, and the Royal Pavilion. Tickets £16, available from Parish Day onwards.

6th December - the annual trip to see the Christmas lights in London's West End. Further details will be announced in the autumn.

To set you up for the AGM and an evening of school memories, here are a couple of photos from our archive.

The top picture is the old St Mary's school (now the Day Centre) all ready to hold a jumble sale. Does anyone have any ideas on a possible date?

The bottom photo is two teachers at Byfleet Primary in Kings Head Lane,



shortly after it opened in 1955.

With the demolition of the Manor School buildings in Magdalen Crescent about to take place, we have realised that we do not have any photos of the school in use in our archive. If you can help us rectify this, please let us know.

Thank you.

If you need to contact the Society, we can be reached in the following ways:  
Leave a note at Byfleet Library, email us at [info@byfleetheritage.org.uk](mailto:info@byfleetheritage.org.uk) or ring our Secretary, Tessa Westlake on 01932 351559

Byfleet Heritage Society, Byfleet Library, High Road, Byfleet, Surrey KT14 7QN  
Published by: Tessa Westlake, 8 Brewery Lane, Byfleet, Surrey KT14 7PQ