

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

A happy, safe and healthy New Year to all our members!

As you will be aware, we are now able to continue with our monthly schedule of talks (a full list of which appears in this newsletter) and 'drop-in' mornings. We have been fortunate in re-booking all the speakers that we had to postpone over the past 18 months due to the Covid lockdown, and I hope that you will find this year's programme interesting.

Until further notice, pre-booking is essential for all our talks, either by emailing info@ByfleetHeritage.org.uk or leaving a message on 01932 342659. If you receive no response, this means that you are booked in; only those who cannot be accommodated will be contacted. We do ask that anyone who books a place, but then is unable to attend, should please let us know, as some meetings approach our maximum attendance limit, with a waiting list.

Don't forget our monthly 'drop-in' mornings between 10.30am and 12.30pm on the first Saturdays of the coming months, presenting an opportunity to look at items not normally on display, and to buy our books.

2021 was our 25th anniversary year, and one of our aims which was not thwarted by the pandemic was the publication of Leonard R Stevens' book, 'Byfleet: A Village of England'. This is the second edition, revised and corrected from the previous version which has been long out of print. The colourful cover was designed by Chris Glasow, and the major work on the contents was carried out by Tessa Westlake, to both of whom I express my grateful thanks. We received copies from the printer just before our December meeting, and sales have been very encouraging. Copies may be obtained from Byfleet Community Library, price £7.

On the subject of sales, I am pleased to report that we completely sold out our 2022 calendars.

As for future outings, this year's boat trip along the Wey Navigation canal will take place on Thursday 26th May, leaving Parvis Wharf at 2.30pm. We hope to announce some coach trips soon.

Finally, we have had to postpone our special 25th anniversary event at St Mary's Centre for the Community on 31st January 2022, as our very special guest is unable to attend. We hope to reschedule this.

Jim Allen

FORTHCOMING
EVENTS 2022



All talks are held at St Mary's Centre for the Community, Stream Close, Byfleet and will begin at 8.15pm. Members free, Guests £2. Everyone very welcome,.

Thursday 17th February:

Julian Pooley from the Surrey History Centre will speak about "Preserving the past for the future."

Thursday 17th March:

Martin Sumpton will give a talk on "Lancelot 'Capability Brown' - from Wimbledon Park to Blenheim."

Thursday 21st April:

"Brooklands—Grand House to Grand Prix" by Anthony Saunders.

Thursday 19th May:

***Society AGM** followed by some short talks from members.*

Thursday 16th June:

"Behind the Scenes at Hampton Court" with Ian Franklin

Thursday 21st July:

Dr Judy Hill will reveal the "Misdoings & misdemeanours below stairs in Victorian Britain."

August: No meeting.

Thursday 15th September:

Dr Simon Brown will give a talk on "The development of the film industry in Walton-on-Thames."

Thursday 20th October:

We welcome David Taylor to speak about "Foxwarren."

Thursday 17th November:

A talk on "The Wey Navigation Canals" with David Rose.

Thursday 15th December:

Our now traditional review of the items received for our archive over the year with Mike Webber.

A couple of extra dates:

26th May: Boat trip leaving from Parvis Wharf at 2.30pm and travelling towards Weybridge. Tickets and more details available from 17th March.

16th July: Byfleet Parish Day, Byfleet Recreation Ground

For the Record...

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

Our **November** meeting took a slightly different format, as members gathered to share memories and stories about **Vickers/British Aerospace** and its long connection with Byfleet.

The factory was well known to the villagers. Jim Allen remembered going there on a school trip and being overwhelmed by the size of the hangars. Another member remembered going there for a job interview, but was intimidated by the having to walk through the gallery with the drawing office below. She was offered the job, but was too scared to take it and have to walk through such a large space full of men. However, during the war, when women took the place of called-up factory workers, the tables were turned, and any man who had to walk through the factory was catcalled and whistled at.



Vickers provided an enormous amount of employment for the local area. Many started as apprentices and went on to have long careers there. There were a variety of apprenticeships available such as craft, engineering and technician. Mike Webber was a student apprentice and spent his first year moving from department to department to learn what was done in each. He also attended classes at Brooklands College and later Southampton University, where he spent two terms at university and the other term and holidays back at the factory.



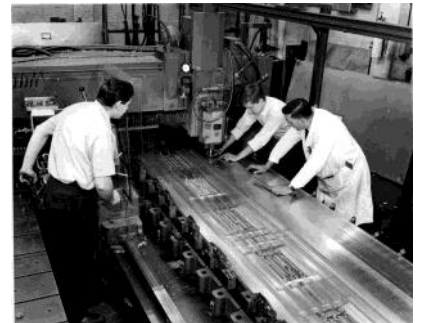
Brian Davies originally worked at the Vulcan Foundry on diesel trains, but the company was later sold to the English Electric group. Brian then applied for a transfer to Weybridge, as Vickers was a part of the same group, and he completed an apprenticeship there between 1963-1967.

Jackie Brown's apprenticeship led to a very long career of over 60 years at Vickers and later BAC as a maintenance electrician. He spent his first year on rotation around the different departments and attended night school at Brooklands College and Guildford Technical College to gain his City and Guilds qualification. He carried out electrical

maintenance on the whole factory, developing his knowledge of different technologies as the plant developed with the times.

Sons often followed their fathers into the company. Terry Maynard's father worked in the electrical plating department and got Terry a job as a shop-boy with the tinsmiths.

People remembered the huge air-raid that had targeted the factory in September 1940. Terry Maynard's mother, working at the factory as a capstan operator, missed the bombing by a couple of days, having left to have a baby. Alan Fairlie lived near Byfleet and New Haw station and the planes came in over his house. His father, who was in Woking on firewatching duty, was sent home to check on the family. Alan had heard that one of the bombs fell into the woods off Byfleet Road, and as it never exploded, it is possibly still there! Another war-time



story was from Mary Polley who



remembers Sir Barnes Wallis coming to her house to ask her father to print some photos for him. These turned out to be reconnaissance photos to decide where to drop the bouncing bomb, which was obviously top secret information at the time. Sir Barnes Wallis arrived at tea time, and her mother asked if he would like to stay. She said that she had already eaten, but actually gave her tea to Sir Barnes Wallis instead.

But the war could provide fun for children too. Mick Polley remembered the camouflage netting that was spread over the track to hide it from above which provided the local children with the world's largest trampoline, nicknamed "bouncy". The Vickers police, who used to ride along the track underneath to chase the children off, could be seen coming for miles, and so

never succeeded. Then there was the time that a Warwick crashed in the village near the church; the children were outraged that the area was cordoned off so securely that they were prevented from bagging any souvenirs.

The product of the factory made its presence felt in the village. Viscounts used to take off over the village to be fitted out at Wisley, and the traffic would be stopped as the planes came so low. The runway was extended through the banking in 1951 to accommodate the Valiant, and deflectors were built to prevent the VC10 potentially blowing the main-line London to Portsmouth trains off the tracks. Checks were made with the signal box on the railway each time to make sure the planes took off between trains.

There were many other stories shared during the evening, so many that we could have carried on for many hours, and it was lovely to hear everyone's memories.



Stained glass of St Birinus in Dorchester Abbey.

In December we welcomed **Tony Paice** to tell us about **The Bishops of Winchester**. Although Winchester today looks like a typical 18th century county town, in 871 King Alfred the Great made the town his capital. The town also has a famous cathedral, and today the see of Winchester ranks as the fifth diocese in the country after Canterbury, York, London, and Durham. Of the three waves of Christian conversion that arrived in England, the final one sent from Rome was led by Birinus, a missionary Bishop. He became the first Bishop of Winchester and was later canonised.

The Winchester Bishops worked closely with the Kings of Wessex, with each relying on the other for their advance. The Bishops earned the gratitude of their royal masters for their service and were rewarded with gifts of land, eventually making Winchester the richest Diocese in Europe. Their education made them the most respected councillors in the kingdom, leading to more endowments. By the end of the 7th century the Bishop had a Minster in Winchester which became a centre of culture and scholarship – the Bayeux Tapestry was completed by Saxon craftspeople trained in centres such as Winchester.

As the kingdom of Wessex consolidated, the secular and ecclesiastical courts worked together, and the kingdom would not have survived the Norse invasions of the 9th and 10th centuries without this collaboration. The parochial administrative structures set up and used by the Bishops of Winchester were used to enable recruitment of an army strong enough to defeat the Danes.

Facts on some of the earlier Bishops are wrapped in legend (although their accounts were written centuries later and included many miraculous tales rather than hard facts). Several Bishops became saints such as St Agilbert (650), St Aethelwold (963) and the famous St Swithun (852). It is difficult to sort fact from fiction in the accounts of the early Bishops. Many documents were destroyed in the Norse invasions, and the Normans censored what was left. The sources which remain are biased or not contemporaneous. The Venerable Bede is the only author to write about the conversion of Wessex, but he lived far away in the North and sourced his information from the monks in Canterbury. On the other hand, it must be remembered that former writers had access to many documents in their libraries that have since disappeared, either destroyed at the time of the Norman Conquest or the Civil War.

However, information can be traced through all the deeds, inheritance documents and grants to do with the vast properties accumulated by the diocese. By 1066 the Bishop of Winchester held lands in Hampshire, Surrey, and Dorset among others. However, those lands were still ultimately under the King's control and the Bishops had to swear fealty to the King like the secular nobles. This meant that sometimes, on a Bishop's death, Kings would leave bishoprics vacant in order to collect the revenues. However, Winchester was less vulnerable to this practice as it was in such a strategic position. Some of the Bishops were virtual vice-regents in times of political stress. The Winchester Bishops also managed to neatly avoid involvement in the troubled period between church and crown during the reign of Henry II.

Although based in Winchester, our local area held some importance for the Bishops and the Wessex Kings. King Egbert used Kingston as a Royal centre and, less respectably, the Bishops managed the brothels in the Bankside area of London (the girls there were nicknamed "Winchester Geese"). The Bishops also ran the Clink prison which stood near their London palace in Southwark. One Bishop, Henry de Blois (brother of King Stephen) rebuilt and renovated many churches in the local area such as St Nicholas, Pyrford, and Wisley. Bishop Godfrey Lucy (1189) installed and improved the sluices at Newark Priory.

After the Reformation the power of the Bishops declined slightly although they were always close to the court. They supported the Glorious Revolution and later the Hanoverians, as they were anxious about their position if the Stuarts returned. In the 18th century the Bishops became associated with the Reformist Whigs.

Tony's in depth study ends at this point, although he is still working on the histories of the further 20 Bishops to bring his work up to the present day. We hope he can return to update us on the fascinating history of this ancient and important office.



Winchester Cathedral



We were delighted to welcome back our old friend, **Iain Wakeford**, for our first meeting of 2022 to give us **A Brief History of West Byfleet**. Iain showed through a series of early maps that the West Byfleet area, labelled as Byfleet Corner or Byfleet Common, was largely undeveloped and sparsely inhabited until the building of the railway station in 1887. By the end of the 17th century, the Wey Navigation Canal had appeared, and by the early 18th century we could see the County Ponds (at Sheerwater) and a few cottages in the New Haw/Woodham area. By Roques Map of 1768 some familiar landmarks and road networks were starting to appear. The Rive Ditch flowed from Horsell Common through Sheerwater and can still be seen today between the canal and the railway. The water's distinctive orange colour is

due to iron in the soil. Similarly, Fullbrook, probably originally "foul brook" is so named because of this orange colouring. Camphill Road could now be seen, possibly named after a camp for labourers on the Basingstoke Canal. Some say that it was a camp for railway workers, but the name predates the railway by some years. Scotland Bridge was probably named after Robert Fitzpatrick Escot of Ongar House, who owned land in the area.

An important event which changed the lie of the land was the 1811 Inclosure Act which divided the common land between various local landowners and other organisations. The Lord of the Manor of Byfleet and the church gained most, some pieces were sold off, and some land was retained for the poor. The Inclosure led to development of some former common land but, despite the railway's arrival in 1838, there was no nearby station and so little incentive to build. However, there were several large houses in the area. West Hall had been there since the late 18th century, Charles Edward Seth Smith replaced Shephard's Farm with Broadoaks in 1876, and there was Sheerwater Court and Dartnell Park. Dartnell Park was sold in the late 19th century and divided into plots for development, a move possibly prompted by talk of installing a new station at West Byfleet.

There was also industry in the area. An 1823 map marks The Still House in Pyrford Road, and census returns and Post Office Directories of the 1840s and 50s show a Sarah Collins there as a distiller of essential oils. The new development at the Sheer House site will be named Botanical Place in commemoration of this, and the streets Lavender Park Road and Rosemount Parade are named after the flowers grown for their oils. These would have been used in soaps, perhaps at Mr Sowerbutt's sapoline (liquid soap) factory in Woking. By 1871 the distillery had been taken over by John Leyland, who not only ran the factory, but also took charge of the newly opened Surrey Industrial School "for destitute boys not convicted of crime." This had moved from Wandsworth, grew to a substantial size, and must have been a major West Byfleet employer. Iain believes that Providence Place in Pyrford Road was once teachers' accommodation. In 1887 the school moved to Mayford, and it must have affected West Byfleet to lose suddenly lose that quantity of people. An 1891 directory still lists John Newland as running the essential oil distillery even though the school had moved, but it seems that part of the large complex of buildings was renamed Byfleet Hall and taken over by other institutions. There was briefly a women's missionary school there, but by the 1891 census the hall was now used by the Byfleet Hall High School for Girls. Iain believes the buildings stood along Pyrford Road opposite Pendennis Close.

Going back to the railway, three sites were considered for a station: Camphill Road, Sheerwater Road, and the present site, which was chosen as the most level ground. It was opened in 1887 as Byfleet & Woodham, but renamed West Byfleet in May 1914. Byfleet did not have a station until West Weybridge (later Byfleet & New Haw) opened in 1927. With the opening of the station, Henry Hill, publican of The Sun beer house in Pyrford Road saw an opportunity. He built the Station Hotel and transferred his licence to West Byfleet. He assumed the town of West Byfleet would develop on the canal side of the railway, but didn't get that bit quite right.



The other side of the railway was originally sold as plots for large houses, such as Sheer House which later became a hotel. The Station Estate followed in 1898 and Birchwood Road, an early experiment in social housing headed up by Mr F C Stoop of West Hall, was opened in 1911. Renowned local builder, WG Tarrant, built the shops in Station Approach. By 1899 the shops at Byfleet Corner were built, and by 1905 there were plans for 46 shops on Rosemount Parade.

The First World War brought changes to West Byfleet as it did everywhere. The large house Blytheswood became a military hospital in 1915, with Bleakdown (now West Byfleet) Golf Course being ploughed up for crops in 1916. The opening of West Byfleet Recreation Ground in 1912, donated by Mr Stoop and Mr Charrington of Broadoaks, was delayed and this was also ploughed up in 1914. The Rec did not finally open until 1921.

St John's church was originally a tin building in the Broadoaks grounds. In 1900 a new church for 350-400 people was planned, which was finally opened in 1912. The old tin church became the village hall before being moved to Bisley Camp. The Roman Catholic church was set up by Belgian refugees in 1917 and the site for a new church purchased in 1935, although the foundation stone was not laid until 1955.

The Sheer House Hotel and John o Gaunt were acquired by Woking Borough Council in the 1960s and a brand new development of offices, shops with car-parking was opened in 1964. This had a huge impact on other local shopping areas, with people coming from Woking and other areas for the new shops and more convenient parking. As we know, this is now all gone, and the next chapter of West Byfleet's development is about to begin.

We thanked Iain for his trip through West Byfleet's past and another of his enjoyable talks.



FROM OUR ARCHIVE



Sadly there were a couple of inaccuracies in our caption for this photo of Mr Derisley’s Highland Cattle in Mill Lane published in our last issue.

The gentleman with the dog is in fact George Simpson, and the wearer of the hat in the foreground is Mr Derisley, the owner of the cattle.

Apologies for the incorrect information and we have now updated our catalogue to show the correct names.

Many thanks to Mary McIntyre for the corrections.

We received some extra information about the photograph of the cricket club in the last issue from Alan Fairlie. Byfleet Recreation Ground was used by the Hawks Hockey team and Byfleet Village Cricket Club. There was also Byfleet Cricket Club which played on the cricket field near Parvis Bridge. That team did not contain many Byfleet players and was nicknamed the “Toffs” or “Gents” by the locals. Philip More, who went on to become Sir Philip and Secretary to the Queen played for BCC and he came to West Byfleet Youth Club once or twice to run an evening where he stood in as a judge in a mock trial.

BVCC and BCC would play once a year on the gentlemen’s ground. At the Recreation Ground the BVCC cricket square used to be not far from the fence near the bowling green. The bowling club house had a clock and there was a prize of one shilling for the batsman if he could hit it. The cricket pavilion was near the far corner near the canal with an equipment shed by what was then the swings and slides near the rec entrance and the bowls pavilion.

Thanks to Alan for this information and if anyone else has any memories we would love to hear from you.



Two pictures from our archive. On the left is High Road in 1961 looking from the direction of the Post Office towards Brewery Lane. Roscoe’s garage is on the right—you can see the name Noel Roscoe in a sign on top of the roof. Opposite, behind the line of trees, would have been Vanners Farm House, now Vanners Parade. On the left is W A Chuter’s newsagent and tobacconist. This building is still there, and towards the end of last summer, the shop had its front signage renewed, uncovering the old Chuter’s shop sign which can be seen in the photo on the right. Comparing the photos, I think that the sign in the picture on the right looks older in style, which would mean that it is possibly sitting underneath the smart signage in the picture on the left. What does anyone else think?

