

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

We appear to be getting back to some state of normality. Pre-booking is no longer required for attendance at our monthly meetings, and we are resuming our programme of outings. As you will see elsewhere in this newsletter, we have a boat trip on 26th May and coach trips on 7th July and 24th September.

Prior to the Covid lockdown, we used to organise a coach trip to see the Christmas lights in the West End of London. We might organise another this December, but need to know, without commitment, whether you would be interested in this outing. Please let Tessa or me know your thoughts.

Our AGM approaches, and with two members having stood down this year, we really do need some new committee members. Please give this some thought, and nominate either yourself or another member to serve. Committee meetings take place on a Monday evening approximately every six weeks in the Heritage Room.

We are pleased to see that Byfleet Parish Day is resuming this year, on Saturday, 16th July. We will have a stand as usual, and welcome offers of help to erect our gazebo and the displays during the morning. Even if you cannot help in this way, please visit us during the afternoon for a chat.

As we go to press, we have received the long-awaited news about our Fire Station. Surrey County Council has agreed to fund the repairs to the building, with a view, upon completion, to granting a lease to the Byfleet Fire Station Trust. The intention of the Trust is to establish a community hub, in which events can be organised and displays exhibited. The building renovation is likely to take up to two years, so we must remain patient for a little longer!

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.

Thursday 19th May:

Society AGM after which **Martin Sumpton** will give a talk on "Lancelot 'Capability Brown' - from Wimbledon Park to Blenheim."

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 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

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

For the Record...

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



Our February talk by **Julian Pooley** covered “**Preserving the Past for the Future—the work of Surrey Heritage.**” Julian oversees the public services and public engagement provided by Surrey History Centre where he is based. His teams cover a wide range of skills from the Finds Liaison Officer (who helps identify small finds from gardens and metal detectorists) to archaeologists, archivists and conservators. Their website, Exploring Surrey’s Past, has a database of finds and sites, links to Surrey’s forty-three museums, and a host of information on Surrey’s history and landscape; you can also leave comments and questions. Julian firmly believes that archives have a central role to play in people’s lives, and visitors to the History

Centre in Goldsworth Road include genealogists, local historians, and scholars from a wide range of disciplines.

The History Centre was purpose built providing secure storage, conservation laboratories, and processing areas. There are two large strongrooms with a smaller room at a different temperature and humidity for storing photographs. There are six miles of shelves holding records from the mid-12th century to newspapers from last week, as well as ordnance survey, tithe, and estate maps. This huge variety of records all have one thing in common—they are all unique.

At the heart of the collection are the records from Surrey County Council, established in 1889. Before that, the business of government is recorded in records such as the Quarter Sessions, where Justices of the Peace would meet four times a year to check the condition of highways and bridges, and to hear petty crime cases. The documents of trials and punishments go back to the 17th century and are a rich resource for family and social historians. 54,000 people from 20,000 cases from session rolls between 1780-1820 have been indexed by volunteers, allowing us to hear the voices of ordinary people who would otherwise be lost to time, such as the witness statement of Sarah, the wife of Ezra Hancock of Byfleet who reported that her husband kicked her and swore at her.

The Quarter Sessions records are augmented by others from other organisations such as Parish Registers. The earliest registers in Surrey date from 1538, but those from St Mary’s in Byfleet start in 1698. With certificates for births, marriages and deaths only introduced in 1837, these registers provide a vital resource for family historians. They can also contain comments and local stories that would have been unrecorded in an age before newspapers, such as the sad tale of a couple drowned in Stoke Lock in 1748—she had fallen in and he jumped in to rescue her.

Collections from estates can contain maps and information from when the estates were surveyed or sold. The records from Loseley are particularly interesting as the same family has been in residence since the 16th century. Members of the family held high office, so the papers contain letters signed by monarchs, including the Queen of Nine Days, Lady Jane Grey.

There are also records from institutions such as Brookwood Hospital. When this Victorian mental institution finally closed in 1990, Surrey History Centre saved huge quantities of records, some of which had been stored in dreadful conditions. These are now preserved and available to researchers. Again, they tell the stories of ordinary people such as Rosetta Ransom, who ran an orphanage in Byfleet, and was admitted to Brookwood in 1892 suffering from “religious excitement”.

Julian pointed out that archives were not just dry and dusty records, but could be beautiful objects in their own right. However, not everything arrives in perfect condition, and can be suffering the effects of damp, heat, or insects. But the History Centre’s conservation lab is on hand. Julian showed a 17th century account book which had taken two years to restore. Every page had been washed with tap water, carefully dried, and then all the fragments pieced together like a giant jigsaw. The completed pages were then backed with Japanese tissue and rebound, and the book can now be handled safely.

Visiting the research room at the History Centre is completely free. Many of the most popular records are available on microfilm or have been transcribed and indexed. Many are also available on Ancestry or Find My Past (which are free to access at the History Centre or Surrey libraries). To prepare for your visit you can first search the on-line catalogue and also access over 40,000 images on their website.

Julian and his team are bringing Surrey’s records to a global audience, and we left Julian’s talk inspired to explore the huge amount of information available.



In **March** we were pleased to welcome **Anthony Saunders**, a long-time volunteer at Brooklands Museum, to speak about **“Brooklands – Grand House to Grand Prix.”**

In the early 1900s motor racing, using public roads, was just starting to take off. Early car manufacturers very quickly saw the marketing value in racing but, while it was supported in Europe, England forbade any form of racing on public roads. UK manufacturers felt disadvantaged, so a group of enthusiasts, including Hugh and Ethel Locke King, determined to solve the problem. The couple lived at Brooklands House (now part of Brooklands College) and were not only motoring enthusiasts, but

wealthy landowners as well.

The Locke Kings decided that if racing on the roads was forbidden, they would build a track on their own land. Colonel Holden, a military engineer, was asked to design the track, large sections of which would be banked to allow the cars to go faster. The track (which was 2.75 in length) was completed in 9 months by up to 1600 navvies, using very little mechanisation. A small railway with its own private siding off the main line carried cement, ballast, and heavy machinery around the site. At first, no-one was sure how events should be organised, as motor racing on a track had never been done before. It was decided to use horse racing as a template. Cars were “shod” with tyres, kept in the paddock, and weighed for handicap. Drivers originally wore racing colours, but these were hard to distinguish at speed, so numbers were used. Drivers also began to adopt national colours for their cars – Britain chose racing green, France was blue, Italy red, Germany white, and America black.

Sadly the stress of such a huge project took its toll on Hugh Locke King, but Ethel was able to step in and save the project. The track opened in June 1907 and quickly became popular with high society and the general public alike. Two tunnels led under the track for access, one for cars and one for spectators, and paths were built from Weybridge station for those coming by train. Early racing health and safety measures were almost non-existent. Anthony can confirm that driving on the banking is pretty scary, and at one time lines were drawn around the track to guide drivers as to the correct speed needed to stay on the banking. If you went over the top, it was a sheer drop on the other side and there were inevitably injuries and even deaths. Percy Lambert, the first man to achieve 100mph in a motor car, was one such fatality. His figure is said to appear at the track on the spot where he was killed, and aircraft factory workers reported the sound of car engines on the shop floor.

Brooklands soon attracted other vehicles such as motorbikes, bicycles and aeroplanes. Early planes were not very reliable, and it was said that Weybridge Sewage Farm provided a soft place for a crash landing for more than one poor aviator. Plane and car manufacturers began to set up businesses in the surrounding area. The Vickers Vimy used by Alcock and Brown to complete the first flight across the Atlantic was built at Brooklands, with Bleriot setting up at Addlestone, and Martinsyde at Lion Retail Park, among others.

Hugh Locke King’s dream to hold a Grand Prix race at Brooklands was finally achieved in 1926, although sadly it came a few months after his death. Brooklands also became associated with land speed record attempts. John Cobb achieved many records both at home and abroad in a Reid Railton built at Thomson and Taylor’s workshop at Brooklands. However, by the 1930s, banked tracks were becoming obsolete. Malcolm Campbell redesigned part of Brooklands track to take this into account, creating a flat section in the middle of the track. During the Second World War, racing was suspended and aircraft manufacture took over the area. It was said that a Wellington bomber could be assembled at Brooklands by 50 women in 30 hours; the completed planes were then pushed over the river to the airfield for take off.

Sadly the track never reopened. It had been badly damaged by bombing, but also racing had now outgrown banked tracks. The concrete gradually deteriorated and became overgrown, and maintenance and restoration is proving an on-going headache. Mercedes Benz have commissioned research into the original formulation of the concrete, but the necessary work will cost a huge amount. Brooklands Museum, which opened in 1991, has undertaken to preserve sections of the track and its buildings. The Members Banking stretch has been cleared by their volunteers and is used for car rides in August and half term holidays. Brooklands is an active museum. All the exhibits have a connection to the track, and engines are regularly run. Enthusiasts can also try their vehicle up the infamous Test Hill (which has a gradient of 1:3 at the top). The fully restored hangar now shows how aircraft were manufactured, and you can visit Concorde and try the flight simulator. Anthony hoped that Hugh and Ethel would approve and be pleased to see at least some of their work preserved, and that the spirit of Brooklands lives on.



“The History of Walton Bridge or A Tale of Six Bridges” was the subject of April’s talk by Nick Pollard, the chairman of the Sunbury and Shepperton History Society. As many people will remember, until fairly recently Walton Bridge was a narrow and often congested bridge. It was supposed to be a temporary structure, but had been in place for over 50 years. Originally the river was crossed by a ford on or near the site of Cowey Stakes. The name comes from a row of wooden stakes discovered in the river, said to be part of British defences against the Romans, but more probably part of an ancient fishing weir. There was also a ferry from the 15th to the mid-18th century. The first bridge was built in 1750 at the expense of Samuel Dicker of Mount Felix. He was the MP for Plymouth and also owned a plantation in Jamaica, and he thought it ridiculous to have to ride to Kingston or Chertsey to cross the river. An Act of Parliament was brought in 1747 allowing the bridge to be built and tolls to be charged. Mr Dicker also had to pay compensation to the disgruntled ferry owner. The Thames barge-masters also complained that the bridge would congest the waterway and so the minimum height of the arches was set at 18 feet. The new bridge, designed by William Etheridge, had a middle arch with a span of 130ft, which for some time was the largest in the country. It became a well known landmark and was painted by Canaletto twice. The middle span was made of a timber lattice construction known as a mathematical bridge, and designed so that each timber could be removed without disturbing the others.



The first Walton bridge by Canaletto, 1754

However, by 1788, this bridge was in a state of disrepair and the timbers starting to rot, so the second bridge was built by Michael Dicker Sanders. He raised the tolls by sixpence to fund the work. He chose a brick and stone structure by James Paine, who had also designed Chertsey and Kew bridges. However, he could not build such a large central span in brick, so a central pier was added. Despite the increase in tolls, Dicker Sanders went bankrupt in 1796, and in 1816 the bridge was sold at auction. The sales particulars offered the stone and brick bridge, a brick built toll house and the right to collect tolls which could be let out at £400pa. Not only this—as the bridge spanned Surrey and Middlesex, the owner would be able to vote in both counties. This bridge lasted until 1859 when the central section collapsed. The new owner was not keen on footing the bill for rebuilding and so the bridge remained ruined for a few years, although this pleased the ferryman who was now back in business.

But this state of affairs could not last, and a new third bridge was built in 1864 by Thomas Newman Allen. The old brick abutments were kept, but the central spans replaced with an iron lattice construction. A brick viaduct was also constructed to cross the marshy ground at Cowey Sale on the south side of the river. In 1869 the “Kew and Other Bridges Act” was passed, allowing the government to use income from coal and wine duties to buy bridges and make them toll free. Naturally the owners and toll collectors applied for compensation, although not always completely successfully; Mr Allen applied for £29,510 but only received £7,000. There was also some dispute between Surrey and Middlesex as to who would be responsible for the bridge’s repairs. It was decided that Middlesex would repair the span over the river, and Surrey would take responsibility for the viaduct, and the county boundaries were redrawn to reflect this decision. This third bridge was photographed by Emile Zola, who at the time was in exile and living at Oatlands Chase.

This third bridge had been damaged by bombing in 1940 and so it was relegated to use by cyclists and pedestrians in 1953. A new fourth bridge for motor traffic, designed by Archibald Hamilton, was constructed alongside the third bridge. Nick said that this has often been referred to as a Bailey bridge, but is in fact a Callender-Hamilton bridge, made from pre-constructed, standardised components. Although intended to be temporary, this fourth bridge was in use by traffic for over 50 years.

Eventually the old third bridge needed to be taken down, and was finally demolished in 1985. A new pedestrian walkway was built next to the fourth bridge. However, the fourth bridge was now quite corroded, and its weight limits were gradually decreased over the years. Therefore a new fifth bridge was built in 1999 on the site of the original bridge for vehicles, and the fourth bridge now became used by cyclists and pedestrians.

However, this arrangement did not work well, and the fifth bridge had to be resurfaced several times, causing terrible traffic congestion. Therefore plans were made to build a sixth bridge in 1992. A large, dual carriageway bridge was proposed, but residents protested at its size. Therefore in 2003 the public were consulted on a number of different designs, and a tied arch bridge chosen. This had the advantage of needing no arches in the river, so the waterway was kept clear. The new bridge was built slightly upstream so that the old bridges could be kept in use while the new bridge was under construction. Building began in 2012 and a completion ceremony was held on 11th July 2013, with the bridge officially opening for traffic on 22nd July. And the first person to drive their car across the new bridge was Nick Poulton!



It was fascinating to hear the story of the development of Walton’s many bridges, and we thanked Nick for an interesting talk.

SOCIETY NEWS AND QUERIES



Annual boat trip: We have organised our annual boat trip along the Wey Navigation canal. For the first time, this will be an afternoon trip, leaving Parvis Wharf at **2.30 pm** on

Thursday 26th May, heading for Weybridge. Tickets are £16 each, available at our monthly meetings and 'drop-ins'. Alternatively, phone 01932 342659 (answering machine) and leave your contact details.

Coach trips: We are pleased to be able to resume our programme of coach trips. The first is to **Eastbourne on Thursday, 7th July**, leaving Byfleet at **9.30am**. Tickets at £17 will be on sale from 27th May, available as above.

The next coach trip will be to the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire on Saturday 24th September. Further details to be announced, but expressions of interest in our third outing to the fascinating Arboretum can be made at any time.



Woking History Society has organised a special talk to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, in association with Woking Borough Council's 'Celebrate Woking' programme. David Rose, the well-known local historian, will present 'Seventy years of Woking's history', at 8pm on Monday 13th June at Screen 5, the Nova Cinema, in the Peacocks Centre, Woking. Non-members of the Woking History Society may book through the following website: <https://www.novacinema.com/movie/70-years-of-woking-history>. Tickets are £5.



With celebrations for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee coming up, here is a look back to the fun that was had in 1977 for her Silver Jubilee.



Here are two photos of a street party in Wey Barton on 7th June, 1977.

Does anyone recognise any of the partygoers, or have any photos of their own celebrations for past jubilees?

NEWSLETTERS VIA EMAIL

Just a reminder that if you would like to receive your newsletters and other Society news by email, do let us know. Just drop an email to info@byfleetheritage.org.uk to be added to our emailing list.

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 or ring our Secretary, Tessa Westlake on 01932 351559