



Byfleet Heritage Society.

Issue 16

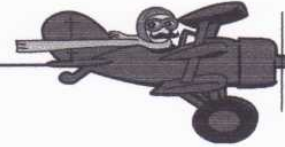
Newsletter

June 2001

Another AGM has come and gone, marking the passing of another year. It was nice to see so many of you there, and I'm only sorry I didn't seem to have more time to stay and chat with everyone. Apologies if I seemed to disappear on anyone, and for the mix up in the diary sheet and newsletter over the starting time. I'm tempted to say I was just testing everyone's powers of observation, but must come clean and admit it was my mistake! I hope everyone enjoyed the talk anyway.

It's subscription time again, and a form is enclosed for those of you who have not yet renewed. We hope you feel able to rejoin, and thanks for your continued support. For anyone who didn't make the AGM, an account appears in the next newsletter (due to lack of space in this one!). Enjoy this copy of the newsletter, anyway, and let's hope the sun keeps shining!

FORTHCOMING EVENTS



Tuesday 26th JUNE:

A walk between Byfleet and Wisley Churches.

Come and join Iain Wakeford on one of his Heritage Walks.

Meet in the Car Park, Pyrford Lock (by the Anchor Inn), 7pm.

Thursday 19th JULY: A speaker from *The Surrey History Centre* will tell us about their work
Byfleet Heritage Centre, 8.15pm

Sunday 23rd SEPTEMBER: Join us for a nature walk. We will take a gentle walk along to Wisley, taking in the flora and fauna as we go. Then we will meet up with Dave Boddy, Heathside Ranger to follow up on our talk from Sam earlier this year. Meet at 2pm, by the bridge by **Byfleet Manor House, Mill Lane.**

Thursday 25th OCTOBER:

Oatlands Palace

Michael Rose of Elmbridge Museum talks about the former local royal palace.

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

Thursday 22nd NOVEMBER:

The History of the Woking News & Mail

A talk by Editor in Chief **Christine Smith**

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

Thursday 13th DECEMBER:

Christmas Social.

Come and join us all for a mince pie! Bring along any old pictures or memorabilia to share.

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

**Members free. Non members £2
Everyone very welcome.**

**Still
Wanted!!**

**HAVE YOU GOT TIME TO HELP OUT THE SOCIETY JUST BY
MAKING A PHONE CALL ONCE A MONTH?**

That's all we need to make sure our meetings carry on smoothly.

We would like someone to make just one phone call once a month to the speaker to check their needs (directions, projector, screen etc). You needn't join the committee full time, but could become one of our behind-the-scenes "good fairies". Simple!

Please ring **Tessa Westlake** on 01932 351559 if you can help, or would like any more details.

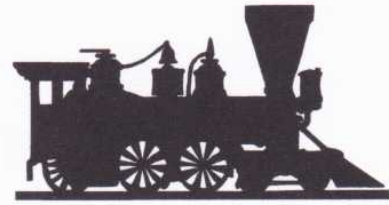
Very many thanks.

For the Record...

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

On 15th February Peter Adams, Development Director of the Dean Forest Railway, came to talk to the Society about the trials and tribulations facing a railway preservation society. And it was a fascinating tale of resourcefulness, battles with bureaucracy and damned hard work!

The railway runs between Norchard Railway Centre and Lydney Junction, with a 2.25 extension to Parkend being worked on at the moment, all set in the beautiful Forest of Dean. It was the forest coal mines that kept the forest railways going after passenger use tailed off from about 1929. But when the Railway Preservation Society began renovating the railway in 1971, they were faced with a massive task.

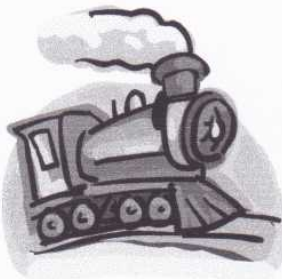


The whole track was relaid from Norchard to Lydney Junction, and many of the original stations had almost completely disappeared. However, at Parkend station the original gents' urinal was still standing. This needed work to be able to cope with the general public once again, as the drains were blocked. Having so much steam "on tap" it was decided to clear the blockage with a steam lance. With the steam injected at 120lbs pressure, the blockage took the easiest way out—through the top of the urinal building, causing assorted workers to run for cover. But it cleared the blockage!

Restoring the line has meant scouring the country for derelict engines and station buildings. Barry Scrapyard has provided the flagship engine of the Society, 55-41, and awaiting restoration at the moment is a scrapped coach with a corrugated iron roof, which had been used as a chicken shed—with original brass fittings still intact. An engine turntable has even turned up, and been gratefully accepted, as before its installation engines had to be turned around on a low-loader in the car park!

Of course, things haven't always gone according to plan. When rebuilding one station, everything was thought to be going well, until a train pulled up at the newly completed platform—which was then found to be 4 inches out! But the problem was solved with the usual resourcefulness by putting a timber apron onto the platform until extra footboards could be fitted to the coaches to make everything fit correctly.

From a 200 yard long track, the railway has grown and grown. Army bulldozers have cleared shale tips, many hundreds of sleepers have been relaid, and gas companies and county councils have been wrangled with. To keep the revenue coming in to fund these activities, the railway has hosted many events, including meetings for vintage buses, cars, traction engines and model railways. At the moment, funds are needed to "cure" Wilbert, a poor locomotive who needs a new boiler. He is named after the famous Rev Awdry, writer of the Thomas the Tank Engine stories, who is President of the Society.



The Society thanked Mr Adams for showing us how much hard work and dedication goes into rebuilding a railway.

On the 15th March, members were delighted to explore the natural history of Wisley Common from the comfort of the Heritage Centre in the company of Sam Newson, Assistant Countryside Ranger.



Since 1762 85% of heathland has been lost due to changes in agricultural practices. But in the last ten years there has been an increase of 8%, due to active management, including working the land, grazing animals and clearing invasive species.

Silver birch, pine and purple moor grass are dominant species, along with bracken, which can be a problem, suppressing the growth of other plants. The Rangers are aiming for natural heathland regeneration, which can be helped along by grazing animals. This is done using rare breeds, such as Hereford cows, Irish Mowleys and Belted Galloways. This has a two-fold effect, as these rare breeds actually need heath grazing to stay in condition, and the grazing of different animals creates different niches in the ecosystem. So both heath and animals benefit.

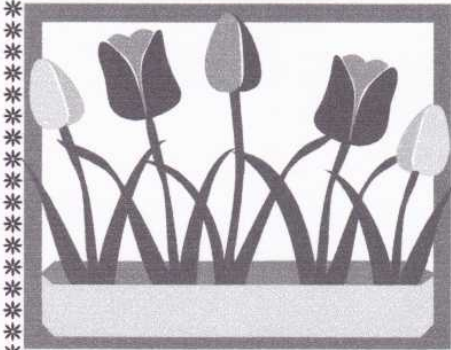
The animal grazing creates bare patches, allowing other species to gain a foothold. The rare sundew needs bare damp ground to grow. It is a carnivorous plant that has evolved to take advantage of the nutrient poor ground, but needs specific conditions to grow. Just as grazing produces one habitat, so turf cutting produces another. This used to be done by commoners for fuel, and it provided sandy bare areas. These are ideal for reptiles, including sand lizards, adders, slow worms, grass snakes, newts and common lizards. It is hoped, by creating these areas to eventually attract smooth snakes.

Tree felling and scrub clearing have to be carried out to maintain the plant diversity. If the scrub was allowed to encroach, it would crowd out the heather, of which there are three types on the heath. Once an area has been cleared, a period of waiting follows in order to see what plants will naturally re-emerge. Heather seed can remain dormant for 70 years, and it is better to let the original plants re-establish themselves before introducing a species that might actually end up unbalancing the environment.

There are a variety of habitats on the heath, each important for different species. As well as the bare damp areas, and sandy spots, there is also light woodland and heather of a variety of ages. There are also wet areas, such as Teal Pond which has a healthy population of dragonflies and damsel flies. It is hoped to attract raft spiders, and to re-establish such plants as pitcher plants, bog asphodel and southern marsh orchid.. The aim is to create enough types of habitat to provide homes for many different species.

Many uncommon species of bird use the common, such as hobbies and nightjars, as well as the more common kestrels, sparrowhawks and greater spotted woodpeckers. Wood mice, bank and field voles and yellow necked mice also occur, with badgers, foxes and deer. Badger sets have to be carefully mapped to protect them during tree felling. The silver studded blue butterfly also inhabits the heath. This butterfly is closely connected with ant colonies. The ants feed on a narcotic secretion produced by the larvae of the butterfly. Once they are addicted to this secretion the ants take the egg into their nest and look after it. This is just one example of the delicate connections between species that together make up the heathland environment.

The Society thanked Sam for her talk. She obviously loved her job, and her enthusiasm was infectious. For those interested in exploring further, work parties meet at the Wrens Nest car park on the first Sunday in the month. For more details, ring Sam or Dave Boddy on 01932 862161.



In April, members were taken on a tour of **The Gardens of South East England** by **Charles Abdy**—just the job for a rather bleak, chilly evening.

A wide range of sites was covered, ranging from the internationally famous, such as Hampton Court Palace and Chartwell, to more local gardens like Painshill Park and Brookwood Cemetery. But all had one thing in common—the beauty of their gardens.

One of the first great gardens was created at Hampton Court by Cardinal Wolsey. The site of the palace was chosen on the advice of his doctors as being the healthiest site available within twenty miles of London. However, the pleasure gardens he created are now all gone, and the present gardens were created in the reign of William and Mary in the 17th century. The maze is internationally well known.

Also connected with Henry VIII is Hever Castle in Kent. This was the former home of Anne Boleyn, Henry's infamous second wife. Henry is known to have visited Hever, but the gardens there now were created by William Waldorf Astor in 1903. As the American Ambassador to Rome, he collected Roman antiquities, which he displayed in the gardens at Hever. He also built a mock Tudor village to house staff and guests, for which the river had to be moved 100 yards.

Chartwell was bought by Winston Churchill in 1922, and his famous brick wall that he built himself still stands. In 1945 Churchill sold the house, but it was bought by his friends who presented it to the National Trust with the condition that Churchill could live there for the rest of his life.

The gardens of Sissinghurst, the home of Vita Sackville West, have influenced gardeners worldwide. A ruined Elizabethan house was turned into a series of outdoor rooms, of which the White Garden is particularly famous.

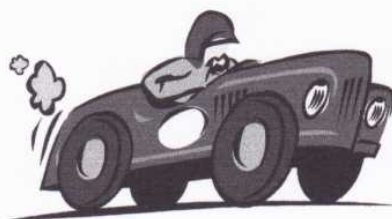
Closer to home, we visited Painshill Park, the obsession of Charles Hamilton in the 18th century. Landscape gardening was the vogue then, where you planned your garden to unfold before the visitor in picturesque scenes, with artificial buildings at strategic points. The Park even had a hermitage with a real hermit. A man was contracted to stay silent, not to trim his hair or nails, and not to leave the building. He was to be paid at the end of his seven year contract. The hermit lasted precisely three weeks, when he was discovered drinking in the local inn! The Park was sold in 1773 and the gardens neglected until the Painshill Trust took over and began restoring the gardens.

Brookwood cemetery also made an appearance. By the 1840s London's cemeteries were full to capacity, and so new burial grounds were built on the open land around London. In 1852 part of Woking Common was enclosed, and 400 acres were set aside for the cemetery, the southern part being for Anglicans, and the northern for Non-Conformists. A railway station served each section. There were strict rules for conveyance of corpses, with set fares for funerals and mourners. These mourners fares remained unchanged for 80 years, which meant they became a bit of a bargain, and strange "mourners" could be seen boarding the trains carrying their golf clubs!

We saw the beauties of many other gardens, including Nonsuch, Bramley, home of Gertrude Jeckyll, Great Dixter and Scotney Castle and ended the evening thoroughly cheered by the site of so many beautiful plants and landscapes, if a little disheartened by so much gardening excellence!

We thanked Mr Abdy very much for his talk, and I for one went home to replan my herbacious borders!





After the business of the AGM on 24th May, members settled down to hear Tony Hutchings, a volunteer at Brooklands Museum and member of the Brooklands Society, speak about the racetrack's motoring past.

Hugh Fortescue Locke-King decided that England was lagging behind the continent in its motoring policies. The speed limit had been raised to a staggering 20mph in 1903, whereas on the continent, racing regularly took place. He decided to do something about it, and so in 1905 he gave part of his Weybridge estate to build the world's first purpose built race circuit. The whole thing cost about £8 million in today's money, and amazingly was built just between the Autumn of 1906 and June 1907. In providing the race facilities, it served as a test track for the motor industry, and Britain's motor technology improved.

The track was planned at Locke-King's home, Brooklands House, now Brooklands College. There were a number of circuits that could be run, and in 1937/8 Malcolm Campbell added the Campbell circuit. While the flying village is now almost all gone, 90% of the banking round which the cars ran is still there. The Museum is at present working with English Heritage to see if more parts of the banking can be listed and therefore protected. It is hoped this year to get the Byfleet banking protected, and to make the whole thing a world heritage site by 2007—Brooklands' 100th anniversary.

The idea of banking the track to keep the speeding cars onto the track had never been tried before, and at first they were puzzled as to what to use to make the surface. Tarmac would be too liquid and would simply run down the incline. Reinforced concrete had yet to be invented, so it was decided to lay the concrete directly onto the naturally occurring sandy hillside. The Hennibique Bridge, which took the track over the River Wey, was designed by Mouchel but has sadly been demolished. This was another technological marvel, curving in two planes.

Brooklands opened in 1907, and S.F. Edge immediately put it on the map by setting a new 24 hour record there. The Brooklands Automobile Club was founded, the first to organise racing on a circuit. Many of the terms and rules were adopted from horse racing such as paddock and finishing straight. Race meetings became a great event to rival Henley and Ascot. Members of the club would watch from Members Hill and would have been able to view the whole track at once, sadly no longer possible because of encroaching trees and buildings. The hill was divided up. The top was reserved for club members, then it would cost you 10/, 5/, or 2/6 depending on how high up the hill you were. Most ordinary people could only afford the infield. Remains of one public entrance can still be seen opposite Chertsey Road, where the ticket office and foundations of steps up the banking can still be seen.

Race days were always bustling with activity. The Paddock was the place to see all the racing heroes, such as Parry Thomas. He was killed during an attempt on the land speed record at Pendine Sands, and was later buried in Byfleet churchyard. The motor bridge at the spot where you now pay to enter the museum was a favourite place to watch as the cars came so close. This spot was known as Dunlop's Delight, as the sharp corner was murder on the tyres. The safety record for both drivers and spectators was very good, although there were no safety belts or helmets, and lap scorers would be housed in a bus behind just one sand bag—little protection against a speeding car!

The Society thanked Mr Hutchings for his talk and enjoyed a trip back in time to the heyday of the working race-track, which even today in its broken up state, still retains an atmosphere of excitement and glamour.

SOCIETY NEWS

Members will have heard of the sad death of Elsie Stranks, "Mrs Byfleet". Elsie was a big-hearted lady who was always looking to help people. She helped the Society greatly, giving her support to the Heritage Centre,



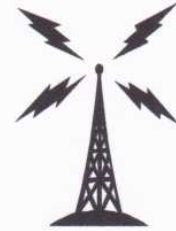
and I'm sure members will join me in sending our deepest sympathies to her husband Alf.



Jeff Sechiari has heard that Winern Glebe is so called because the developer's wife's was Winifred, and his name was Ernest. The road is named for a combination of the two. Does anyone know if this is true, or just one of those stories that gets about. If you know, either drop a note at the library, or ring Jeff on 01932 341084. Thanks

LIBRARY LATEST!

We have heard that a meeting was held between Woking Borough Council and Surrey. Woking agreed to the general use of the site for the purpose proposed, but has said that it would prefer that the building at the front (i.e. what would be the library) should be a two storey building rather than single storey, to fit in better with the other buildings in what is a conservation area. The planning application meeting is due to be held in July. We will keep you posted on any developments.



News from The Galleries!

Woking Borough Council has agreed to set aside the Westgate Centre site (between Victoria Way and the Basingstoke Canal) for a new, landmark building to be the Galleries' permanent home. This new plan will allow extra space for community activities and more exhibition space and a waterside restaurant/café. Fundraising and lottery bids are being started, and it is planned to open the new centre in 2006.



Just a quick reminder:

The Heritage Centre is open during library hours, which are:

Tuesday 10-1, 2-6

Friday 10-1, 2-5

Saturday 9.30-4.30

Why not pop by and have a browse, or check out the library facilities.

Don't forget!! If you have time for one phone call a month, please consider helping out with our "Events" - see front page! Thanks!