



Byfleet Heritage Society.

**Issue 19**

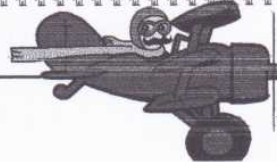
**Newsletter**

**June 2002**

*As an alternative to the football, or frantic jubilee celebrations, here is the latest issue of the newsletter!! Another AGM has come and gone, so subscriptions are now due. Forms are enclosed for those of you who did not renew at the AGM. We hope you decide to join us for another year.*

*There's not much room here, but could I please make a plea for some volunteers to man our stand at Parish Day on 6th July? We found ourselves a bit short on Village Day, so really would appreciate your help to make sure one or two people don't get landed. We only ask for half an hour or so of your afternoon, just to look after the stand—we might even get a pitch near the beer tent! Please consider helping us out. Enjoy the newsletter, and see you at Parish Day!*

**FORTHCOMING EVENTS  
2002**



**Sunday 23rd JUNE**

**A SUMMER WALK ON WISLEY COMMON.**  
Meet at 2pm at the Blue Gates Hole bridge, Mill Lane. We will then walk to the Park Barn Farm bridge (over the M25) to meet Heath Ranger Dave Boddy at 3pm. Either meet at 2pm, or join up with us at 3pm to explore our local landscape.

**Saturday 27th JULY**

**VISIT TO SURREY HISTORY CENTRE**  
2pm, Surrey History Centre, Goldsworth Road, Woking  
See behind the scenes on a special tour.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Numbers restricted to 12 only.

**SEE BOTTOM OF PAGE FOR DETAILS.**

**Thursday 26th SEPTEMBER: Jan Mihell**  
"Evacuees in Woking". Come and hear about war-time Woking and surrounding area.  
**Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm.**

**OCTOBER:** To be announced

**Thursday 21st NOVEMBER**

**Alan Crocker on The Powder Mills of Surrey.**  
Celebrate Guy Fawkes Night (a bit late!) and come and find out about a surprising aspect of Surrey's industrial past.

**Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm**

**DECEMBER:** More of David Chapman's photos of Byfleet in the 1970s with Mike Webber.  
At **Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm**, date to be arranged.

**Visit to  
Surrey History Centre**

If you wish to join the special tour to see what goes on at the History Centre, please note that places are limited to 12 ONLY. This is a very interesting look behind the scenes and well worth a visit.

Please ring Tessa Westlake on 351559 to book your place(s).

**FIRST COME FIRST SERVED!!**

**Events Organiser job.**

No-one came forward to help us out at the AGM, so I am sorry to say that this job is still vacant, despite many appeals.

We are only asking for an hour or so of your time every month—you don't have to come to committee meetings, or even the talks!

Please consider helping us out—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 21<sup>st</sup> March, Anne McCormack spoke to members of Byfleet Heritage Society about *Kingston Museum*. The museum was refurbished in the early 1990s and the site was split, with the Local History Library moving to a new site a couple of miles away. The museum's collections are gradually being catalogued and introduced onto the internet by the Museum's website.

The museum is housed in a Grade 2 listed building, listed to stop a relief road going through the site. In 1903 Andrew Carnegie donated money to open a library in Kingston. When he came to open it, residents expressed a wish to have a museum to go with it. Carnegie duly contributed and a museum was built in 1904.

There are some fine stained glass windows in the museum, which nearly weren't there at all. They were originally made for the Town Hall (then in what is now called the Market House). It was proposed to put them in the new Guild Hall, but the architect refused outright. The museum was then asked if it wanted them, and the curator refused on the grounds that it would make the rooms too dark. However, when the curator went away on holiday, the windows were fitted anyway, and there they remain!

The Eadweard Muybridge gallery contains the famous zoopractoscope. Muybridge had been born Edward Muggeridge, but changed his name to the more exotic version. His invention involved putting a series of photographs taken very closely together on a disc. When this disc was revolved, the pictures blurred into one, giving the illusion of movement. Through this instrument he was the first person to prove that a horse has all four legs off the ground when trotting. A row of trip wires was set up, each one connected to a camera. As the horse trotted through, the cameras were set off, giving a succession of images. Muybridge had a colourful existence. While in America he murdered his wife's lover, but was acquitted due to it being a crime of passion. He was lucky, as his case was the last time this happened!

During the refurbishment some interesting discoveries were made. Silent film from 1914 was found in the attic featuring the Mayor of Kingston's call to arms during the First World War. Luckily the attic had been cold, as the film was nitrate film and warm conditions could have caused it to ignite!

The Local History Library contains 32 royal charters granted to Kingston, including one from Queen Mary I who allowed Kingston to hold a fair as a reward for the citizens deliberately breaking Kingston Bridge to prevent Sir Thomas Wyatt's rebels from crossing the river. Charles I's charter of 1628 gave Kingston the right to hold a market, with no other markets allowed within 7 miles. The archive also holds maps, rate books, title deeds, manorial records, some going back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. There are also 100 oral history tapes done in the 1980s. It is hoped to do another batch of recordings soon recording the history of the ethnic minorities in the Borough.

The Society thanked Anne for an interesting look at the work and collections of Kingston Museum, and many members would be making their way there soon.



**Parish Day!!!** The Society are having a stand this year at Parish Day—Byfleet's own annual summer event (Saturday 6th July).

We ended up a bit down on volunteers at Jubilee Village Day and this time we would like to spread the load a bit more. Unfortunately I can't be there (off to Silverstone to cheer on our local Maclarens!), so we are already one down.

Nothing complicated involved—just sit in the sun (???) and look friendly. So if you could spare half an hour (and the bigger the number of volunteers, the less time everyone has to do) please ring Tecca Westlake on 251559. Thank you



The golden days of motor racing and Parry Thomas' land speed record was the subject of a recent talk to Byfleet Heritage Society from Gordon Knowles of the Surrey Industrial History Group. Thomas' record stood at 171.09mph, one more step along the way to the current record of 763.035mph held by Andy Green's Thrust, built at Farnborough. All the other record holders have associations with our own Brooklands.

John Godfrey Parry Thomas was born the son of a vicar in 1885 in Wrexham. It's possible that his mother had some money of her own, and it was she who sponsored her son in his early motoring activities. In 1907 he set up his own business, developing electronic transmission systems for early motor vehicles. It took until 1914 to prove it would be practical, but unfortunately it was too expensive to produce!

At the outbreak of the First World War he became a Government adviser on aero engine development, and in 1917 he designed an advanced aero engine at Leyland. After the war in 1920 he joined up with Reid Railton to design the Leyland 8 luxury car, built to compete with Rolls Royce and Napier. It was exhibited at the 1920 Motor Show at Olympia and had several innovative features, such as the oil tank which fed the gear box by gravity and a rear spring activated lubrication system – all for £2,500. The price fell in 1921 to £1,875, with the option of a five seater model for £2,700. Only 14 were built, with several being sold to Indian Maharajahs. Railton himself went out to India especially to train the mechanics.

Somehow Thomas managed to persuade Leyland to let him race the standard model at Brooklands in 1922. Leyland agreed, as they thought it would impress potential buyers, but Thomas was under strict instructions not to exceed 90mph, nor to alter the car. Thomas agreed, then took the car to Brooklands, where the car was totally stripped and converted for racing! He then went on to win the 1922 Essex Handicap with a maximum speed of 103mph. Flushed with success, Thomas left Leyland and moved to Brooklands full time, where he lived at The Hermitage, a bungalow in the grounds. There, with his friend Kenneth Thompson, they built a number of racing cars, and developed the Leyland Thomas, a Luxury 8 with modifications.

He first attempted the speed record at Saltburn Sands in 1923, but did not succeed in breaking the record. Then in 1924 his fellow racer Count Zborowski was killed at Monza. Thomas bought his car, equipped with a 27-litre Liberty aero engine, and during 1924-26 he reworked the car to be used for record breaking attempts. This car was named Babs, possibly after the daughter of Thomas' friend, Archie Fraser-Nash. Babs was driven both at Brooklands and on the several sand-flats favoured for speed trials. One of her features, the chain-drive to the rear wheel, was to prove fatal for Thomas.

In April 1926 Thomas set a new land speed record of 171.09mph at Pendine Sands. He then went on to race Babs at Brooklands. However, in January 1927 Thomas' friend and rival Malcolm Campbell set a new record at 179.158mph. In March Thomas made a bid to regain his record. The weather was wet and windy, and Thomas had been feeling unwell with flu. His first run was good, but not quite fast enough, and on his second run disaster struck. His car swerved and overturned and he was killed instantly, the top of his head severed by the broken chain drive. The wreck of Babs was buried in Pendine Sands, while Parry Thomas was brought home to Byfleet. His body was taken from the Hermitage, across the paddock at Brooklands to be buried in Byfleet churchyard, where his granite gravestone still stands.

During the war Pendine Sands was used as a rocket range, but there was always talk of digging up Babs and reviving her. Finally permission was granted to Owen Wyn Owen and Babs was taken away for extensive restoration, which was not complete until 1985. A new Liberty engine was found in New York, which had been used during the Prohibition to power a boat to run in alcohol. Many other companies produced new parts, and Babs was finally driven again at a Brooklands Action Day at Millbrook Test Track. A museum has been built at Pendine to house Babs, who now has one important modification – a chain guard! From February 2002 she has been on display at her own home Brooklands Museum, a welcome return for a famous lady of racing.

The Society thanked Mr Knowles for a look at one of Byfleet's famous residents who was just one in a long line of drivers pushing technology and human bravery to the limit.





At the AGM, members heard about the **local film industry** from **Michael Rowe of Elmbridge Museum**.

The moving picture had come to Britain in 1896, and by 1899 Walton was a centre for both film making and showing, one of the earliest in Britain. Cecil Hepworth, whose father was a magic lanternist, started work on early newsreels for an American, Christopher Irvine. He was later sacked—the rumour is that he was getting too good! Hepworth then decided to set up on his own. Unfortunately, a house in Thames Ditton - with the necessary electricity! - fell through. Depressed, Hepworth took a walk along the river, and found himself in Walton, where as luck would have it, he found the perfect house in Hurst Grove, near the bridge. He had to provide his own generator, but he rented it for £36 a year.

Hepworth originally intended to pursue film production rather than making feature films, but he received many requests for films and newsreels. His reel of Queen Victoria's funeral in 1901 proved so popular that his technician ended up working for 8 days with just 11 hours sleep to keep up with demand for prints, which were exported all over the world. In the early days, the actors in Hepworth's films were often his family, friends and neighbours. They also helped out with the production, scene painting and other aspects of film making.

When Hepworth made the feature film "Rescued by Rover", it proved so successful that it effectively financed the studio. The story, where the faithful family dog rescues a baby from a kidnapper, went to so many prints that the original became worn out, and the film had to be shot again. This success led to other more sophisticated films, some shot in Walton and others on location. "Tansy" in 1913 starred Alma Taylor, listed at the time as the number one film star, with Charlie Chaplin at number 3. "Coming through the Rye" was Hepworth's last film in 1923. His films were as popular as ever, but Hepworth was no businessman, and the firm went into receivership in 1924.

The studios then became Nettlefold Productions. Its head, Clifford Spain, had spent his life in the industry. He always included local extras in his feature films, and shot plenty of crowd scenes when filming local events. He figured that the people featured in the film would then all be guaranteed to come and see themselves on screen.

Spain was also instrumental in setting up local cinemas, and even predicted what the cinema would be like in the year 2000. Many of his predictions were correct, although some were a little ambitious, such as each cinema having a landing strip on the top for customer aircraft! However, he could not predict the coming of television.

The studios moved into production of television series and B movies, although big stars still came to work there, such as Bette Davis. The popular television series of Robin Hood starring Richard Greene was produced there and filmed locally.

The studios were demolished in 1960-61 and the area heavily redeveloped. New Zealand Avenue and Hepworth Way, named after Cecil Hepworth, now cover the area, with the Walton Playhouse the only piece of the studios still standing.

So next time you pass through Walton, remember the advances that were made in British film making in the early 20th century, right on our own doorstep.





## Notes and Queries

Is there something about Byfleet that's always made you wonder? Or something about Byfleet's past that you can't quite remember? Or perhaps there is something we haven't got quite right, which you could put straight for us. If you have such a query, or if you can shed light on the questions in this edition, please either drop a note into the library, or contact Tessa Westlake at 8 Brewery Lane (01932 351559) or on e mail [tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk](mailto:tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk). Thank you!

## Queries

Following on from our Air Raid Shelter theme last issue, John Beattie rang from Byfleet Village Hall.

He has heard that a garage behind the Village Hall was originally a public air raid shelter.

Can anyone confirm this, or shed any light on the matter?



Following the death of the Queen Mother earlier this year, we would like to make a display board to commemorate any connections the Queen Mum and Princess Diana had with Byfleet.

Does anyone have any photos or press cuttings of royal visits, such as to open the Clock House and the Day Centre? Or did you actually get to meet royalty? If you have anything we might borrow to copy, please contact us at the above address. Many thanks.

### Does anyone remember **The Watney Lot**?

Mrs Bright found an article about them in a local magazine. Her father, Bert Cooper, used to work for Gordon Watney, who ran the South Lodge motor works in Weybridge and who also raced cars at Brooklands.

When war broke out in 1914, he encouraged his workforce to join up and use their mechanical skills in a unit supplying the front line troops with food and supplies. The unit was one of the first in the British army to be fully equipped with lorries instead of horses. These lorries were adapted from London buses, which found the terrain tough going.

In 1915 the company was shipped to Egypt, where they became the first motorised unit to cross the desert between Alexandria and Cairo. Parts of the company saw action at Gallipoli where four men were lost on the first day. In October the rest of the group moved to Salonika in northern Greece.

Conditions were tough and the men suffered air raids from Zeppelin airships, shelling, broken down vehicles and malaria. On top of all this, the winter was particularly bitter, and reports were made of men being brought back to base unconscious and frozen into their driving position.

The Watney Lot returned home in 1919, and continued to have reunions up until 1968.

**If anyone remembers these brave volunteers, please write in and let us know more.**



## Some Answers

In answer to the query about the origin of the Sanway Laundry, we had a call from Howard Cook's daughter. Mr Cook says that the original laundry, as I'm sure older residents remember, was situated down Sanway Close (opposite where the Sanway Stores are now).

Mr Cook also said that Jeff Sechiari was also right in supposing that the woodland past Park Barn Farm is artificial. It was planted by the Foxwarren estate, where Mr Cook's father was head gardener. Clearmount Cottage also belonged to the estate, and was where the nightwatchman lived. There was another cottage opposite, which did not belong to the estate, but Mr Cook could not remember who lived there. Perhaps someone else out there can.

### SOCIETY NEWS

*Thank you!!* Members might remember Mr Robinson, former headmaster of St Mary's who sadly died recently. His family have given the Society two oil paintings done by the Byfleet Art Group. One is of the old Stream Cottages and the other of Foxlake Farm. We are very grateful to the family for thinking of us at such a sad time, and hope to display the pictures soon.

In the Queen's Golden Jubilee Year—a memory from the Byfleet Review (January 1948) of the Duke of Edinburgh and (the then) Princess Elizabeth's honeymoon train passing our way.

#### From the Letters Page:

Crowminster  
21 Hollies Avenue  
West Byfleet

Dear Sir,

With reference to your short note on page 6 of December's "Review" on the Honeymoon train, it would appear that the majority of would-be sightseers defeated their ends in approaching too close to a rapidly moving object, with the result that their field of vision was severely restricted.

From the bottom of my garden, 50-75 yards from the down through line, I not only had an excellent view of the train in question, but was also favoured by a sight of the Royal couple (*the Duke of Edinburgh and the then Princess Elizabeth*) sitting at a table in one of the illuminated Pullman coaches.

Yours faithfully  
J. Franklin