



Byfleet Heritage Society.

Issue 20

Newsletter

October 2002

Autumn has arrived already, but we can still remember the summer in this newsletter with Dick Alder's account of our walk on Wisley Common. Thanks to him for writing this up for us and hope you enjoy it and the rest of the newsletter.

On another topic, I did hear that someone seemed to have the impression of the Heritage Society as newcomers to the village attempting to tell residents what they already knew. This worried me slightly, as we are not by any means setting ourselves up as any sort of authority on the history of Byfleet. Our aim is to share what we have found out about Byfleet's long and interesting history and present some of the items and knowledge which people have been good enough to share with us. The room was originally set up by Doug Bright, who had been inspired by the work done by L R Stevens and Howard Cook, all life-long or extremely long term Byfleet residents. We hope we are continuing their tradition of wanting to share Byfleet's fascinating story with those who may not realise it exists rather than "teaching granny to suck eggs".

Naturally we are delighted to hear if someone has enjoyed the Heritage Centre, but we are equally pleased to hear if we have got something wrong and are very willing to stand corrected. The displays only come about due to residents of Byfleet sharing their memories and knowledge with us, and we are very grateful to those who have helped us in this way.

This brings me neatly on to mention that I am planning some new displays for the Centre which I hope to complete in the couple of months in between Open University courses (it's called being a glutton for punishment!). Any ideas, pictures or information all very welcome!

FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2002



Thursday 17th OCTOBER: John York on An Heraldic Journey, discussing and enjoying the world of heraldry.
Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

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

Thursday 12th DECEMBER: More of David Chapman's photos of Byfleet with Mike Webber.
At Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm.

2003

Thursday 16th JANUARY,
Nick Pollard shows slides of old Shepperton. Find out how Shepperton used to look
Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

Thursday 20th FEBRUARY
David Taylor, Cobham Houses and their Inhabitants. Come and hear about some of Cobham's interesting residents and their homes.
Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm.

Thursday 13th MARCH
Ross Baker from Surrey Bat Group. Come and hear about part of our natural heritage—who they are and how they are protected.
Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

APRIL To be announced

Thursday 22nd MAY
Society AGM followed by a talk by Mr Gordon Hadfield on The Rowley Bristow Hospital. Mr Hadfield speaks about his time there as a surgeon at our local hospital.
BYFLEET VILLAGE HALL, Room A, 7.30pm

Members free. Non members £2
Everyone very welcome.

For the Record...

Did you miss a meeting? Find out how it

On **Sunday 23rd June** the Society took a short afternoon walk onto Wisley Common, via Mill Lane and the Manor footbridge.

Wisley Common has long been an adopted part of Byfleet peoples' lives, perhaps as a substitute for our own common, which we lost nearly 200 years ago. It may not be as familiar to as great a proportion of the village population as it was when some us were younger, which is a pity, because it isn't very far away and we are still most welcome there.

We made a rendezvous with Dave Boddy, the ranger responsible for its management, at the bridge over the M25. He was resplendent in his new uniform of Surrey Wildlife Trust Countryside Services, an organisation set up this year when Surrey County Council transferred the management of its large countryside estate to this new venture. It combines the skills and resources of the Surrey Wildlife Trust with those of the old Surrey direct labour force.

We embarked on a short circular tour of the area between the motorway and Pond Farm, just to get a sense of what is being done to manage the Wisley section (i.e. north of the A3). The primary task has been to preserve and extend the area of heather. This heather landscape has been here for some 5,000 years. Dave illustrated this by pointing out that the low dome between where we stood and Pond Farm is actually an ancient bell barrow or burial mound, which for most of the time would have stood out as a skyline feature, but now hides under a layer of scrub.

The heather landscape has developed a complex and now rare wildlife set-up, which includes some notables such as the nightjar and woodlark amongst the birds, as well as six British reptiles and the meat-eating Sundew plant. We did see the sundew, and our keen photographers went in hot pursuit of a rather small adder.

Extending heather areas involves the removal of all the square blocks of conifers planted in less sensitive times of the mid-20th century (but not the fine specimen Scots Pines of a previous era, although their seedlings can get out of control. Also much of the bracken and birch scrub, which takes over the heather as soon as cutting or grazing stops, has had to be removed constantly. Some has been allowed to continue its natural progression, which is to make way for young oak wood.

Where conifers have been felled, it is best to scrape the soil bare in order to promote fresh heather growth. It makes a bit of a mess for a while, but when the heather comes back, flowers and is alive with bees, it will all seem worthwhile.

Keeping down bracken and birch etc is best by grazing animals, as throughout the long history of the common until very recently. To this end, cattle have been reintroduced hopefully now with the right breeds, notably Belted Galloways. The numbers required are so few for the size of the grazing area that they are scarcely noticed, and very little trouble.

Track and path maintenance has been a problem, especially whilst heavy tree removal works were in progress, but using surplus cut timber to create virtual causeways under the mud has proved useful. It avoids the need to introduce gravel or tarmac onto the common.

Security is always a problem these days, but another new initiative has shown early success. This scheme in collaboration with Surrey Police, uses volunteers amongst selected regular horseriders. They do not intervene, but are able to use their mobile phones to call up the emergency services or the ranger on rapid response.

Volunteers are also to be seen from October to April doing various tidying up jobs such as scrub clearance, coppicing etc. Anyone is welcome to join in. There's usually a warm bonfire and tea brewing (Lovely! Call Dave on 07968 832503 or Dick Alder 01932 400966)

We skirted the old Pond Farm pond, which almost dried out in the 1990s but is now full again attracting many types of dragonfly. Another pond has been created over towards Wisley Gardens, and is also attracting the dragonflies etc.

Back at the motorway bridge we left Dave to carry on the good work and wandered back to the Manor Bridge, and a welcome cup of tea provided by Ann Sechiari.

Very many thanks to Dick Alder for writing up this article.



On Saturday **27th July** members enjoyed a tour behind the scenes at the Surrey History Centre in Woking. The new building was needed as the sites at Kingston and Guildford were becoming too small, and it was felt better to site all the archive in one building. Surrey had a budget of £3million, which was proving rather small for everything they wished to do. However, just at the time the plans were being discussed the Lottery started, and the centre was lucky enough to gain funding through this source.

The tour started in the Reception area where the specially commissioned tapestries above the desk were explained. Starting on the left, the tapestries represented both the development of communication and historic Surrey buildings and events. To complement the tapestries there were also two glass panels on either side of the door, etched with old maps and historic references, with several lenses let into the panel through which you could see the outside world going by—but upside down!

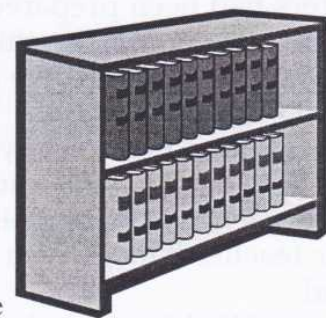
Many people's image of an archive was of a dark room full of dusty old books and piles of papers. But the History Centre is anything but! There are three parts to the building. The front forms the public space, the back holds the offices and processing areas, and in the middle, buffered from temperature changes by being away from any outside walls, are the storage spaces.

Many of the documents that come to the Centre are dirty, damp, torn and even burnt and sooty. We saw into the receiving rooms, where everything that enters the Centre is kept. This avoids spreading any insects or mould among papers already there. From there, the papers move to special rooms where they are dusted and cleaned. To remove any bugs, books are wrapped in cling film and placed in a freezer. They are allowed to thaw out, and then refrozen in case any bugs have been missed or larvae hatched in the meantime. Ventilation units are also used to get rid of any mould. Then documents are passed to the packing section, where individual boxes or wrappers are made for each set. All paper and cardboard is acid free to make sure papers are preserved for the longest time possible.

Any damaged or weakened items are sent upstairs to special preservation units. A huge lightbox fills one wall, where documents and even large maps can be examined, the light showing up any weak patches or tears. Patches can be specially made to fit any holes and fixed into place. There is some debate as to how much should be restoration and how much preservation, and the Centre does not try to replace missing pieces, but just to consolidate the document so what is left can safely be used for research. It is amazing how much old documents can take, with some really dirty ones actually being washed under the tap—very carefully of course! One thing that is extremely difficult to deal with is parchment that has been damaged by fire and wet. This causes the items to shrink, but although small, they mostly remain legible.

The strong rooms contain all the documents, books, newspapers, maps, photos and other items that the centre holds. If you wish to look at something, you put in a request on one of the computers in the main reading room, and then someone will retrieve it from its place on the vast shelving units. The temperature is kept constantly cool, and in fact it was rather chilly in there, although a welcome break from the summer heat outside.

We all enjoyed our look behind the scenes and all vowed to be back to make use of such a valuable resource. And staff at the Centre asked us to remind members that documents don't have to be ancient to be historically interesting, and if you think you have something that you might like to donate to the Centre, please give them a ring and someone will be pleased to advise you.



On **26th September** Jan Mihell spoke to the Society about Wartime Evacuees in Woking. The talk was entitled "Oh, it's only Woking!" and Jan explained why. One batch of evacuees, with their one case each, their gasmasks and their names on a label tied to their coats were loaded onto the train with no idea where they would end up. When the train slowed down, they eagerly looked around to see where they had ended up—was it Devon or Cornwall, perhaps the seaside! Then one girl caught sight of the station sign and declared "Oh, it's only Woking!"



Before war was even declared, an evacuation plan had been drawn up to remove children from areas considered at most danger from air raids. London County Council schools were all evacuated, with no schooling available for any children who remained. Woking was just inside the area for reception of evacuees. Once war was declared, children were told to come to school with their luggage just in case, and four days later the signal came. Children from schools in Fulham, Chelsea, Putney, Wandsworth and Southfields were taken to the District Line which was cleared of other passengers. They were taken to Wimbledon, where they then caught the train to Woking. 12,000 houses had been surveyed to find billets and there were 400 helpers to make sure the children and teachers all got to their proper places. On arrival children were given a bag of provisions for the first 48 hours to ease the burden on the rations of the households taking the children in. In one case the bags contained apples from the school orchard.

Not everyone flocked to take in the evacuees. In Horsell, a Joan Nibs from Ashburnham School remembers a Miss Fields took the situation in hand by marching through the village knocking on doors. As she seemed quite a formidable character, everyone was soon settled in! Others were only too keen to help - Mrs Lumley in Woking who took in 25 evacuees in total, up to 7 at once.

6,000 evacuees ended up in Woking, and with 101 different schools in the area naturally there were some problems. Some of the children were very short of clothing and head lice made an appearance. There were accusations of some children robbing allotments and with so many children packed into the area there was some unruly behaviour or siblings were sometimes split up. By Christmas, as there had been no bombing, one third of the children had gone back home. Despite the lack of bombing, schools in Woking could not open until air raid shelters had been prepared for the children. Building did not finish until October—no doubt the children were delighted!

With so many people in one area, facilities had to be shared or schools housed in other accommodation. Village halls in Horsell, Byfleet and Knaphill became classrooms as did West Byfleet Scout Hut and some empty houses were also taken over. Pupils also had to adapt, with one lady remembering having to change from taking science to taking history as there was no scientific equipment available. Their teacher had to learn the syllabus first, but always managed to keep one step ahead.

In 1940 12 more school parties arrived, mostly from the South Coast, with some more from London including some private evacuees sent to stay with relatives. During the worst of the bombing mothers were actively discouraged from taking their children back to London, but by 1944 many regularly went home for weekends, and by the summer of 1945 most had gone home. However, some lingered, with Woking's first post war carnival queen being an evacuee! 2 evacuees were still at West Byfleet Primary and went on to West Byfleet Secondary in 1951.

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. Thank you!

Queries

1. Jeff Sechiari wondered does anyone remember inside the Sanway Laundry? Can anyone sketch/describe it? Or does anyone remember the insides of any other old buildings in Byfleet?
2. A question that often catches me out on school visits is why is Oyster Lane so named? Does anyone know?
3. Dick Alder remembers his father saying "A barrel of Byfleet and a pint of oysters was heaven" - has anyone else heard this? Doe anyone know where this

Some Answers

- * Several of you have confirmed that the building outside the Village Hall was indeed an air raid shelter—thanks for contacting us.
- * We have also heard some more about the Civic Restaurant, although people seem unsure of when it closed, so if you can remember, let us know. One member remembers the lovely smell that used to come from the Village Hall during the morning as the dinners were being cooked.
- * Members have also told us about some of the air raids and some of the lucky escapes that happened. One member remembers visiting her aunt in the cottages by the golf course on Byfleet Road. One afternoon the air raid siren went off. Her aunt never usually bothered to go into her shelter, but as she had the children visiting, she decided she had better do it. After a frantic last-minute search for the family dog, they all got to the shelter—just as a bomb fell, hitting the house.

**SOCIETY
NEWS**

Events Organiser job.

We are very pleased to announce that Elaine Doe has agreed to take on the job of booking our speakers, and I'm sure we would all like to thank her very much indeed. Our monthly talks are a vital part of our Society, and as Elaine has three children of her own, we are even more grateful that she has agreed to give us her time.



If you know of any speakers, or have any ideas, please let us know!

Don't Forget!!

"Byfleet, A Village of England" is still available and would make an ideal Christmas present! Copies can be bought from Byfleet Library, Yeomans Stationers and Kellys Newsagents in Byfleet, and Corbetts Bookshop in West Byfleet, £9.95 each.



We were very pleased during the summer to meet Monica Ransom, daughter of former Byfleet rector the Rev Callendar-Wake. She had seen the piece about the Oral History Group's award in Saga magazine and had contacted Paddy Holroyde to say she had some pictures and prints of Byfleet Rectory. She had had copies made, and has very generously given these to the Society. There are several old prints of the church and Rectory, not just the building before the present one, but of the building before that. We hope to be able to present these in an exhibition at the Heritage Centre soon—watch out for details.

Very many thanks indeed to Mrs Ransom for her generosity.

**And
Finally**

A little story from our archives to bring a little early Christmas spirit! (Incidentally—does anyone remember the Scotch Café and where it was?)

Byfleet Review January 1948

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

Free beer from a barrel on the counter was the Christmas present offered to customers of the Scotch Café, Byfleet by proprietor Roy Mitzen.

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