

Byfleet Heritage Society.

Issue 23

Newsletter

November 2003

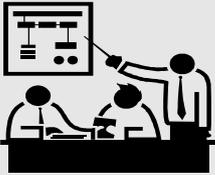
As another year rolls on, it's already time for another newsletter. And as the count down to Christmas begins (already!), may I remind readers that the book "Byfleet, A Village of England" makes a great present for Byfleetians old and new—over 1,000 years of history for under £10! We are down to our last few copies, and are not anticipating printing more, so now is the time to secure your copy. See the item on the page 5 for details.

It's our time of year for rounding up any outstanding subs, so if (like me—oops!) you haven't yet got around to sending us that cheque, you should find a reminder form enclosed. We very much hope you will continue with us. If I have enclosed a form and you have already paid, then please accept my apologies, and thank you for your continued support.

Finally, and most importantly, may I please ask members to consider the article below, in which we ask for your help. Very many thanks for your time.

We would be very grateful if you would take a few minutes to consider the following.

**The Committee** is sorely depleted in numbers at the moment, with the last 2 meetings being attended by only 2 or 3 committee members due to work and family commitments. This is making it difficult to organise not just the running of the Society, but also means that the same few people are getting stuck with a lot of work, rather than the ideal situation of many hands making light work. For me personally, as Secretary and keeper of our archive, the huge increase in popularity of family history means that I have received increasing numbers of queries. While I am only too happy to look into these and pass on any information we have, it is becoming very time consuming. I am beginning to feel the strain rather, and other areas of the Society, such as publicity, or new displays, are missing out.



Besides, the committee could do with some new blood with maybe some new ideas. We meet every 6 weeks or so for about an hour, and the Society could really improve if ten people left the table with one job each, instead of two people leaving with 5, 4 of which don't get done due to lack of time. We realise that people have many calls upon their time, and there never seems to be enough of the stuff. But if you could consider giving just a small piece of your time every six weeks or so, we would be very grateful. With almost 100 members on our list, if just one in 10 of our members volunteered, the committee would almost double at a stroke!

Help needed

**Christmas Fayre, Byfleet Village Hall, Saturday 29th November, 11am-4pm.**

The Society has booked a table at this event, which promises to be lots of fun and to get everyone into the Christmas spirit nice and early. However, to avoid one or two people having to man the stand all day (as has unfortunately happened in the past), could any of our good members help us out, for half an hour or an hour on the Saturday? There will be an interesting mix of stalls, Santa's grotto, and I notice that tea and mince pies will be on sale to sustain any brave volunteers. It sounds like it is not to be missed, so if you are popping along anyway, why not linger for a bit longer and take a turn on our stall?



Help needed

Finally, if you are still uncertain about the committee, and aren't free to help out on the 29th November, but still wish you could help us out, perhaps this is for you! Those of you who come to our talks will know that we like to finish off the evening with a cup of tea or coffee, a biscuit and a chat. The ladies who provided this valuable service, Pat, Janet and Margaret, have retired from office, and our Treasurer Avreil has bravely been filling the gap on her own. We feel we really need to form a roster of volunteers to take on making the refreshments—if as few as 6 people volunteered, that would only mean turning out for duty twice a year—only once if 12 people came forward. Once we had a list, "shifts" could even be arranged to coincide with the talks you were most interested in and would probably have been attending anyway.

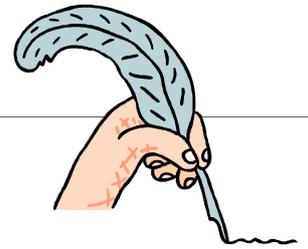
If you feel you could help out with any of the above, or would like to discuss anything further, please give Tessa Westlake a ring on 01932 351559 or e-mail [tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk](mailto:tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk). Even the very minimum of your time would help to make a real difference to us. Many thanks.



Help needed

## For the Record...

Did you miss a meeting? Find out how it



**The Mystery of the Stephen Duck Pedigree** was presented to members in **July** by **Ivan Duck**. Stephen Duck made his name as a poet in the 18th century. He was also Rector of Byfleet from 1752-6. While researching his family history, Ivan Duck found that he himself had family connections to the poet, and set about finding out more about his life and work, using materials ranging from 18th century letters and journals to the internet.

It is generally thought that Stephen Duck was born in Chalfont St Peter in Wiltshire in 1705. He went to school until he was 14, and then worked on his father's rented farm and on other farms as a thresher. Denied further education, he nevertheless carried on reading himself, and by around 1725 was writing poetry. His reputation as a poet grew, and soon the local clergy were encouraging him, and copies of his poem "The Thresher's Labour" were shown to Joseph Spence, Professor of Poetry at Oxford University. Spence asked Duck to visit him and they became lifelong friends. Duck's fame spread, until his poems were even being read to Queen Caroline, who was a keen patroness of the arts. She summoned him to see her at Kew in 1730, and while he was waiting to see the Queen, news came that Duck's wife had died in childbirth. This news was kept from him by his friends until he had seen the Queen, who gave him an income and a house in Richmond.

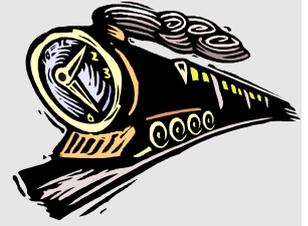
Duck got on well at court, becoming Court poet and a Yeoman of the Guard. In 1733 he married Sarah Big, the Queen's housekeeper, and 2 years later became Keeper of the Queen's Library at Kew. After giving him 5 children, Sarah died in 1741, and Duck later married for a third time to Elizabeth Nevison. As his new wife had connections with the church, Duck decided to study for the priesthood, becoming a preacher at St Anne's church in 1750. Then in 1752, his good friend Spence, helped Duck obtain the living of Byfleet. Spence had been given a house in the village by a former pupil (Old Lodge, which used to stand opposite the Clock House), and no doubt took the opportunity of having his old friend nearby. Duck was described as a "useful preacher" and seems to have been happy in Byfleet, writing a poem in 1755, "Caesar's Camp, or St George's Hill". But in 1756, returning from a visit to Wiltshire to see his family, he fell into the River Kennett and drowned. His body was recovered at Sonning, and he is buried in the church there. Many articles say that Duck took his own life, but Ivan Duck has found no contemporary evidence of this, and the fact that he was buried in consecrated ground seems to indicate that his death was not thought to be suicide at the time. He left behind 4 daughters and a son, but none of his children ever married, and so the direct line of descent died out.

Last year, on a visit to Stephen Duck's home village, Ivan was invited to attend an annual feast in memory of their famous former resident. This has been held yearly since 1735 for married men who work the land. The attendees are called "Duckmen" and the feast is financed from money from "Duck's Acre" given for the feast in 1735 by Lord Palmerston. The churchbell tolls at 7pm and Duckmen and guests gather for a meal at The Charlton Cat. After the meal, a Stephen Duck poem is read and everyone toasts Lord Palmerston and Rev Stephen Duck from an ancient goblet. If the ale is not downed in one, a fine must be paid.

The "mystery" that Ivan referred to in the title of his talk refers to the fact that not only can no record of Stephen's baptism be found, but neither can Ivan trace Stephen's father's baptism or marriage, nor his grandfather's, as shown in a pedigree attributed to Rev K W Puddy. Ivan has traced people who had a hand in producing the pedigree, but can't find out where the originators got their information. He is still searching, determined to get to the bottom of the problem!

Stephen Duck was unusual in many ways. He was a poor farmer, who ended up at Court. He went to school until he was 14, which was unusual for one of his class in those days. And finally, there is the mystery of his baptism, compounded by missing records for his parents and grandparents. We thanked Ivan for sharing his research with us, and giving us an insight into the life of our former poet Rector.

In September the Society decided to try something a little different. Maggie Vaughan-Lewis from the Surrey History Centre kindly came to run a workshop into how to go about researching a topic such as the development of the local transport system. Have you ever wondered why the landscape is like it is, why the railways, roads and waterways have ended up where they are? These were the sorts of questions that Maggie was hoping to help us with.



An obvious starting point would be maps. Very early maps may not be as accurate as the later Ordnance Survey ones, but can still be a very good guide to the relative size of towns and the routes between them, and which were the important roads and which were the lesser ones. Tithe maps give a snapshot of a parish at a given point in time, and record the owners and uses of the land. Similarly Enclosure maps show the lands being enclosed, the plots that these were divided into and any speculative developments such as any new roads that had to be built once the boundaries changed. Changes such as these can provide valuable clues as to why things are as they are today.

A search on the Surrey History Centre website can throw up a variety of sources that can be used to research the development of a transport system. For instance, a search using the words Byfleet + Plan throws up such items as sales particulars of land in Sheerwater, the sale of Oatlands in 1822 and a River Wey bridge plan from 1896. Byfleet + Railway gives a list including the Edward Ryde diaries. Mr Ryde was a railway surveyor who lived in Woking, and his diaries give fascinating detail of the development of the railways around Surrey. A diary might not be thought of as a source in tracing the development of transport features, and this was an lesson to us to keep an open mind during research, as information can turn up in many guises!

Research into the road system can be taken back quite a few centuries by consulting the Manorial records, but Maggie gave us a word of warning about the handwriting on these ancient documents—we could see from her examples that it isn't really what we in the 21st century are used to! Later Parish Records give all sorts of information such as who paid the highway rates, and record any repairs to roads or bridges made in the parish, including what was done, who did it, who paid for it and even where the building materials came from.

The Parish records give a picture of the day to day running of the local roads, but the Quarter Sessions give details of the broader picture, covering plans of proposed public undertakings such as canals, railways, gas and electricity undertakings as well as plans for roads and bridges. But again a word of warning—what is shown in the plan is not always what was actually built.

The secret to a good starting point is to find out which particular body is looking after the particular feature whose development you wish to trace. For instance, the old Turnpike roads, which declined once the railways became established, were regularly inspected, and the Inspectors left detailed reports. The traffic on the roads was also logged, giving you a picture of the types of vehicles and their cargoes.



Maggie only had time in this one session to begin to guide us on this fascinating subject, which we hope to return to in further events.



The subject of our October meeting was **The History of the Pillar Box** by **Doug Smith** of the Walton and Weybridge History Society. Mr Smith's interest in the subject was first aroused when he noticed a traditional red British pillar box in Lisbon while on holiday. He noticed the maker's name, A Handiside, Derby and London, and on his return home noticed that his own local Weybridge pillar box was by the same manufacturer. This led him to read up on the subject, finally joining the Letter Box Study Group and doing a survey for them of around 250 boxes in Weybridge, Addlestone and Byfleet.

The postal service has developed since Roman times, when runners were "posted" along the road like relay runners to take state messages. People were later replaced with horses, and eventually a system of mail coaches, which could arrive at an inn and be ready to go again with fresh horses within minutes. From the time of Charles I, the royal mail system was made available to the public for a fee. You would hand your letter in at the post office and the recipient pay on collection at the other end. But only the well off could take advantage of this system, as the fees were high.

In 1840 Sir Rowland Hill introduced the penny post, making the postal system more accessible. In larger cities, letter carriers would deliver letters to your home, although at this time the doors did not have letter boxes. In 1849 to speed up delivery time, the Post Master General encouraged people to install them so that the postman did not have to wait for someone to answer the door. Then in 1852 trials of public post boxes, as used in Belgium and France, were carried out in the Channel Islands. Boxes for the mainland followed in 1853 with Carlisle being the first place to have them. The oldest post box still in use is in Barnes Cross near Sherbourne in Dorset and has the status of a listed building.

At first there was no standardisation of design. Boxes were shaped like classical columns or rectangular, and anything up to 8ft tall. The Department of Art and Design in South Kensington, set up after the Great Exhibition, were asked to design one, but originally forgot the slot for the letters, which had to be put in afterwards in the top! Finally the cylindrical design we all recognise was settled upon, and there have been few changes in this basic design ever since.

At first there were no markings on these boxes, leading them to be called "anonymous boxes" by enthusiasts. But from 1887 the royal cypher has appeared on the doors, with Victoria's being on the earliest boxes. Even though Edward VIII was never crowned, 110 post boxes were made with his cypher on them. The nearest one to us is in Hollies Avenue, West Byfleet, with others in Weybridge and Esher. When Edward abdicated, unused boxes with his cypher had the doors replaced with George V doors, until the new cypher for George VI was approved. Incidentally, post boxes in Scotland do not have Elizabeth II's cypher on, as historically Elizabeth I was only Queen of England, and not Scotland..

While we are all familiar with the round pillar box, Mr Smith showed us the great variety in boxes, from the tiny lamp-post boxes to the rectangular wall boxes, right up to the huge double boxes with one side for Home and the other for post for Abroad. In the 1930s there were even special blue boxes specifically for air mail letters, with blue vans to match. These have now gone, but many of the blue boxes were repainted and recycled, and if you find a box with a lopsided collection time plate, chances are that it was originally one of these.

We thanked Mr Smith for a fascinating look at something we take so much for granted, yet has such a long history behind it.



## *Still Searching!*

*As the interest in family history takes off, we have been receiving quite a few queries from people trying to trace their Byfleet ancestors.*

*We had a letter from a Mr Choate who was interested in any information on his great uncle, PC Walter Choate, who was killed in 1910 in the "Houndsditch Murders" in London. An attempted robbery on a jeweller's shop in Houndsditch by Latvian anarchists resulted in a shoot-out in which 3 policemen, including PC Choate, were killed. He is buried in St Mary's churchyard.*

*As he was supporting his invalid sister, she was granted a pension of 5s a week. The police report states that she was living with a brother, Thomas, at Juniper Cottage, Byfleet, and it was from this house that PC Choate's funeral procession set off.*

*Does anyone know or remember where Juniper Cottage might have been, and if it still exists? I think it may have been in the Kings Head Lane area, but would be very interested in hearing from anyone who can either confirm or correct this.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*We are also still searching for any information on Jim Jarrett, the diver who tested the Tritonia diving suit in Tarrant's Yard in 1930.*

*If something comes to light or to mind about either of the above, please contact Tessa Westlake (01932 351559 or [tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk](mailto:tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk)) or leave a note at Byfleet Library. Many thanks*

## **Remember!! Christmas is coming!**

"Byfleet—A Village of England" traces Byfleet's long and varied history from prehistoric times to the 20th century. Our reprint of L R Stevens' book has proved very popular, and we are now down to our last few copies. It makes a great present—at Christmas or any time of year, and at £9.95 it won't break the bank.

The book is available from Byfleet Library, Yeoman's Stationers, or by contacting any committee member.

So don't miss out! Buy yours today!



# SOCIETY NEWS



## 2003

### Thursday 20th NOVEMBER:

*Mike Webber* continues his trip round Byfleet through David Chapman's old photographs. This time from the 1980s up to 1995

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

**Thursday DECEMBER 4th: When St Mary's School moved house.** Come for our annual Christmas get-together and also to view film of the day St Mary's School moved from the old school (now the Day Centre) to the new building in Hart Road.

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

**Members free. Non members £2**

## Events for 2004

Looking ahead to next year, and following on from the interesting evening we had with Maggie Vaughan-Lewis of the Surrey History Centre, we are exploring the possibility of having a follow up session actually at the History Centre in Woking, probably on a Saturday. This will mean that Maggie will be able to demonstrate the process of tracing the development of a transport system with actual documents from the archive.

But to see if this would be worthwhile, we first need to gauge interest in the idea. Could you please let Tessa Westlake or any committee member know if you would be interested in a place on such a workshop, via the usual number/e mail, a note left at Byfleet library or even at one of our talks.

More details will follow if there is enough interest to follow this up. Many thanks.



## Thank you

to member Mr Alfred Smith, who very kindly donated a lovely print of a 17th century portrait of Queen Anne of Denmark.

As those of you who have read L R Stevens' book will know (and for those of you who haven't, see page 5!), Queen Anne built herself a "noble house of brick" where Byfleet Manor House now stands, although the poor lady died in 1619, before she could enjoy the finished article.

We plan to hang the print in the heritage centre very soon, alongside an artist's impression of what her palace may have looked like, so look out for that.

Once again, we thank Mr Smith very much for thinking of us.