

Welcome to our first newsletter of the Spring. First of all, please note that we have had to change the date of our AGM—details below. We are very sorry for any inconvenience this may cause, but our date has clashed with the forthcoming European elections, so we have had to move the date. So, our apologies and we very much hope that you will still be able to attend.

Jeff has booked us some wonderful talks to take us through the year. Don't forget, if there is something you would like to hear, or if you know someone who would be able to give us a talk, please let us know.

We hope to see you at a meeting very soon, but in the meantime, enjoy the newsletter.



Stream Close, 8.15pm.

Thursday 15th May: Society AGM.
Please note the change of date. Join us as our own Mike Webber tells us How We built a Miniature Railway - The story of Mizens Railway at Knaphill. **Please note the earlier start time of 7.30pm, St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close.**

Thursday 19th June: Join us for an evening of 'Members' short talks' with topics as diverse as Ebenezer Mears and Byfleet's British Restaurant. If you have a topic you would like to share with us do let us know. **St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.**

Thursday 17th July: Martin Cutler will show us his collection of British war time medals and tell us all about "Valiant Wings 1914-18". **St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.**

Thursday 11th September: Join us as former Rowley Bristow Consultant, Robin Hollingsworth, tells us all about 'The Rowley Bristow Hospital'. **St Mary's Day Centre,**

Thursday 9th October: Eileen Perryer tells us all about 'Marc Brunel - the first tunnel under the Thames'. **St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.**

Thursday 13th November: 'November 1914 and the British Churches come to terms with the war'. Join us as Revd Dr Peter Howson, Byfleet's Methodist minister, tells us of his researches into chaplains during WWI. **St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.**

Thursday 11th December: Christmas Social. Nibbles and drinks, together with Mike Webber's annual collection of new photographs that the Society has come by. **St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.**

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

For the Record...

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

In February we enjoyed a very informative talk by Andrew Halstead on Bugs that Bite Back, an interesting look at some of the insect species that share our countryside, but that can cause problems.

Andrew divided his talk into three areas—bugs that bite, itchy bugs and bugs that sting. He proposed that the most dangerous insect in the world was the mosquito, spreading serious diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, dengue fever and West Nile virus which kill far more people than better known predators. The females, who are the ones which bite, secrete saliva into the wound to stop blood coagulating, and it is this that passes on the germs. They breed in still, small packets of water and so can take advantage of many small pools where there are no predators, thus aiding their spread.

The Black or Blandford Fly is so called because of particularly bad outbreaks in Blandford Forum in the 60s and 70s. It lays its eggs in wet mud, and when the water rises the larvae develop in the water. It prefers running or moving water and the Environmental Agency has tried to biologically control them by adding a bacterium to the water where it lives. There is even Blandford Fly ale named in its honour.

Andrew showed rather a horrifying picture of the mouth parts of a Horse Fly, which are rather like knife blades, and show why the bite is so painful. And a picture of the Scottish Midge, which thrives in upland areas and can surround walkers in great clouds. These are a problem as they can spread animal diseases such as Blue Tongue and Schmallenberg. The Sheep Tick is a growing problem, and will drink from anything with warm blood, so including mammals and birds. They crawl up vegetation and wait for something suitable to come by, and if you are unlucky enough to pick one up, it is very difficult to remove until it is ready to drop off you. But they can carry Lyme disease, so if you have been bitten and see a red area surrounded by a red halo, go to the doctor. Lyme disease must be treated quickly.

Andrew then progressed to the bugs that make you itch, such as the scabies mite, that tunnels into your skin, and bed bugs which are on the rise and very difficult to eradicate. And many of us with children will sadly be familiar with the head louse. The eggs stick onto the shaft of the hair and are very hard to remove. They will gain resistance to the shampoos etc, so the best way to deal with them is by combing. And pet owners will also be aware of the flea. The human flea is not very common, but cat and dog fleas will also bite humans. The larva feeds on detritus and then becomes the pupa. This can remain dormant fully formed for months until the necessary animal host comes along. The flea is infamous for spreading the bubonic plague.

And then there are the ones that sting. Honey bees have a barbed sting that, sadly for the bee, pulls some of its innards out with it, including a poison sac. This sac is muscular, and will pulsate to push the poison into whoever is being stung. Grabbing the sting will only squeeze more poison in, so it is best to try to scrape it off. The wasp sting is not barbed, and they can sting you multiple times. They are painful, but are generally not a problem, unless you are allergic, in which case your reaction can be severe and need an epi-pen.

Andrew finished by showing us a picture of the frankly terrifying Asian Hornet. It has not arrived in this country yet, but will do soon, having been introduced into France from China, and now appearing on the Channel coast. They overwinter as fertilized females, so can enter the country by hibernating in goods to be imported. They build huge nests, and will be a major problem for beekeepers, as they feed almost exclusively on honey bees.

We very much enjoyed Andrew's close up view of some of our insect neighbours and their fascinating life cycles.



Our March talk was entitled “Basingstoke Canal—Heroes and Villains”, and Roger Cansdale took us on a tour of the canal’s long and eventful history. It began with Francis Egerton, 3rd Duke of Bridgewater, who having suffered in love, decided to dedicate himself to business. Inspired by Pierre Paul Riquet’s Canal du Midi, he built a canal which both drained his coal mine and transported the coal from Manchester to market. This halved coal’s price and began the great canal mania.

The idea for the Basingstoke canal was to take agricultural produce from Hampshire to London, returning with coal and timber. William Jessop was appointed to design the canal, and he made two decisions which still affect the canal today. He decided to rely on spring water rather than a reservoir (the canal still suffers from lack of water), and he didn’t supervise his contractors, leading to building problems still requiring attention today. An Act of Parliament was passed in 1778, entitling the company to buy land and extract water, but actual building was delayed for 20 years.

Two problems quickly became apparent. Firstly the money ran out, and more had to be raised. Secondly the Tilney family objected to the canal passing through their land, so that canal had to tunnel through Greywell Hill. The objection was later withdrawn, but by that time the tunnelling was done.

The canal finally opened in 1794 consisting of 29 locks, with bridges and cuttings. Within six weeks there was a landslide just west of the tunnel due to the cutting being too steep. This closed the canal for 9 months and within two years it was on the verge of bankruptcy. The company was saved by Dr Robert Bland, a society gynaecologist who organised a bond issue to raise funds, although none of the investors ever saw any return for their money.

Sadly, there was simply not enough traffic to generate income. Then in 1839 the London to Basingstoke railway was built, and the canal used to carry materials, creating a brief period where the canal actually made money (the other time being the building of the Aldershot army camp in the 19th century).

But in 1869 the company went bankrupt and put the canal up for sale. It was bought by William St Aubyn, a very shady character who operated under an assumed name, the real William Aubyn having died when he was aged one. He sold the canal in 1875 to John Alley Jones and Charles Dommies. Sadly a roof fall in the tunnel led to a court case in 1875-77, and poor John Alley Jones was found guilty of fraud and sentenced to five years hard labour. The next owner from 1876-7, Fred Dimsdale, was convicted of a £300,000 fraud and sentenced to penal servitude for life. The canal was put up for sale in 1883, but no-one wanted it. Eventually the bond holders bought it and formed the Surrey and Hampshire Canal Company. But this went bust again three years later.

However, the canal was proving very popular as a recreation facility, and its next owner, Sir Fred Seager Hunt formed the Woking, Aldershot and Basingstoke Canal Navigation Company in 1895. The Nateley Brickworks was established from 1897-1908, but the clay used was not of very good quality, and the canal itself was for sale again in 1904. Unfortunately the buyer, Mr Carter, was introduced to Horatio Bottomley, who made his living selling duplicate shares in bad companies. He sold thousands of canal shares—and was sent to prison in 1922.

In 1910 the last boat left Basingstoke, but in 1913 Eric Harmsworth took the “Basingstoke” with five tons of sand from one end of the canal to the other to avoid the canal being shut down due to lack of use. When he got to Old Basing he found that the canal had run out of water! The canal staggered on until 1923, when Carter sold the canal to Eric Harmsworth, who sold off the bits that he was not using. The Terminal Basin is now a shopping centre, and the tunnel was blocked by a roof fall in the 1930s and remains blocked today. Eric died in 1947 and the canal was bought at auction by Tom Rolt, who formed the Inland Waterways Association. But the canal was in severe disrepair. Jim Woolgar wrote to the local press about forming the Basingstoke Canal Restoration Society which led to the birth of the Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society in 1966. Four years of campaigning and several problems, including a breach at the back of Farnborough airfield the day before the air show, led to the two councils buying the canal, a process that was finally completed in 1980. A huge restoration project then started. The breach by the airfield was mended using an old aircraft fuselage, which is still there! Volunteers and people on the Youth Training Scheme were used, and there was bridge building, dredging and bulldozing to be done, as well as fund-raising.

By 1978, one and a half miles of canal were cleared and a boat trip was held to celebrate. Finally in 1991 the canal was opened by the Duke of Kent. The canal is owned jointly by Surrey County Council and Hampshire County Council and is funded by them and by contributions. It is managed by the Joint Management Committee and operated by the Basingstoke Canal Authority. The Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society are its guardians.

The canal still suffers from lack of water and needs to continually raise money for maintenance. The locks have to be kept shut to preserve water, and although water is pumped up the canal from the Wey, a better water supply is still needed. The canal also still needs lots of labour, and a volunteer day takes place every week throughout the year. For the future, there is an idea to join up with the Kennet and Avon canal, but this is still being worked on. We wish the canal all the best for the future.



We are always pleased to welcome Iain Wakeford to Byfleet, and for our April talk Iain told us about **The Necropolis Company's influence on Wider Woking?**

Woking was originally the small town of Old Woking. However, it was not on a main road, and although it had a market charter, the larger markets of Chertsey, Guildford and Kingston were nearby, so the town never really grew. Some pockets of industry grew up at the end of the 18th century, with the Nursery at Knaphill and the Paper Mill at Old Woking. The village of St Johns grew up around the church of St John the Baptist from the 1840s. Then in 1838 the railway came to Woking. The station was built on the south side of the railway as most of the trade came from that direction. The Railway Hotel was built in 1840, but the rest of Woking Common could not be enclosed without an Act of Parliament.

However, in the 1850s, the Necropolis Company had a reason to enclose the common land. London's graveyards had become full to capacity, and bodies were being buried near to water supplies, leading to terrible outbreaks of cholera. It was suggested that the new railway lines could be used to bring bodies far away from habitation, leading the Necropolis Company to buy 2,600 acres at Woking to provide a cemetery. They would start with 400 acres at Brookwood and spread out as necessary. However, as soon as they were granted the land, they went back to Parliament to get permission to sell off the surplus, leading to suspicion that the Necropolis Company were simply a building company in disguise.

John Rastrick, a railway engineer and surveyor, bought the strip next to Woking Station, and the rest was divided up. The land to the south is uphill with nice views; to the north the land is low lying. So the south was sold as plots for larger houses, and the north for commercial properties and smaller, cheaper houses. It was a planning condition that the company had to provide land for a church and a school, which were put between the canal and the railway, as they knew they would not be able to sell that area for larger housing. These ideas caused Woking to take on the shape it has today.

Three drinking places were built before there were any places of worship. The first church was a Wesleyan chapel in Church Street. Then a tin church was built in 1877 which turned into Christ Church by 1887. The town gradually developed. In High Street the buildings were originally houses with front gardens, but these gradually turned into shops as shop fronts were added onto the garden spaces. Yates pub was then Gloster's Corn Exchange. Henry Gloster used to hire a band to play on Saturdays to encourage people to come into the town. Gloster also saw the potential in Woking and bought plots from the Necropolis Company for later development. As well as the Corn Exchange, he had properties further up Chertsey Road. S C Knight, a draper, also had multiple properties, owning a furniture shop in High Street and shops in Goldsworth Road.

The Railway Hotel opened in 1838 and was extended in 1888. The Albion Hotel had been built before the station arrived, which meant that the railway could not build the station entrance on the town side of the railway. In 1897 the Albion was rebuilt, but the railway was not interested in buying the land because they had themselves only redeveloped the station ten years' previously. So Woking still has the main station entrance on the "wrong" side.

Mount Herman was mostly farmland, until the Necropolis Company showed that there was money to be made from houses as well as farming, and farm plots began to be sold as well. The area below Hill View Road was sold to the Council to be made into a park. This piece of land was low lying and near the Hoe Stream, so could not be sold for expensive houses. The company then advertised the land in Hill View Road as having a lovely view of a park! This plan backfired for a while, as the council used the land for a rubbish dump, but the park was eventually laid out.

Many Woking institutions were built in Necropolis land. St Peter's Convalescent Home, the Royal Dramatic College in the 1860s, which later became the Oriental Institute, and the Mosque, which was built in the grounds of the Oriental Institute and was the first purpose built Mosque in the country. The London and South Western Railway built an orphanage, and the Woking Invalid Convict Prison opened in 1869, where the prisoners made bricks. A female prison was later opened within the grounds. In the 1860s the Second Surrey County Pauper Lunatic Asylum (later Brookwood Hospital) opened. All these institutions encouraged further development, as they needed housing and other services for their staff.

Woking also has the first crematorium in the country, but this was not associated with the Necropolis Company. When the company started, all bodies had to be buried. It was not illegal, it was just that no-one had done it, until the first cremation in Britain took place at Woking in 1885. The crematorium was probably built where it was because it was near Brookwood, but did not belong to the Necropolis Company.

A Necropolis Company still exists, but it is not connected with Brookwood Cemetery. Interestingly, the Necropolis Company still retains mining rights. So when Woking wanted to build the Peacocks Centre, although they owned the land, they did not own what was underneath it. Therefore when they had to dig down, they had to pay extra to the Necropolis Company.

We thanked Iain for giving us a fascinating look into how Woking was shaped by the activities of the Necropolis Company.



SOCIETY SNIPPETS

From our Archive

In April we held another Open Day at Byfleet Fire Station and were pleased to have more people than ever through the doors.

People toured the inside of the building and enjoyed a number of pictures and objects that have been collected, including the photograph below which Jim Allen found at Chertsey Museum and obtained a copy for our archive.

They were also able to enjoy a cup of tea or coffee and a chat while there, and to sample the lovely cakes all made by Janet Temple (better than anything on the Bake Off!).

All in all it was a very successful day. It is planned to open the fire station again in

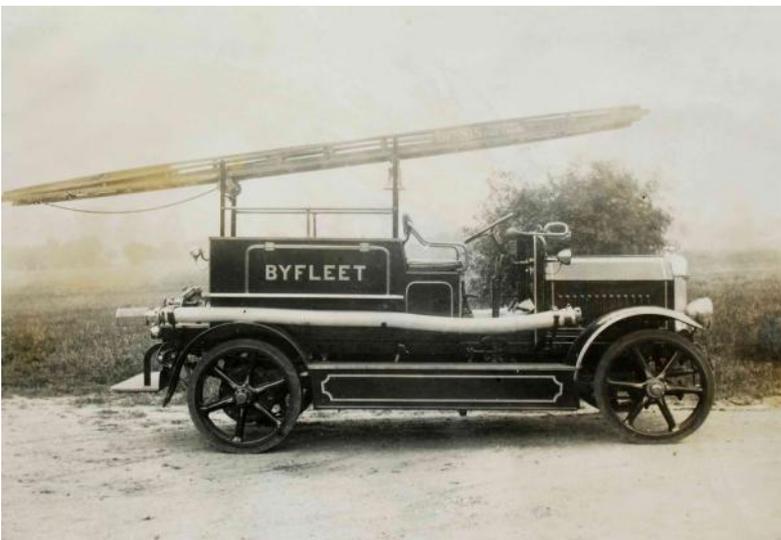
August and September for the Heritage Open Weekend—keep an eye out for details nearer the time.



The next project is to mend and paint the doors and other woodwork, and we are raising the necessary money to get this done.

If anyone recognises an ancestor in the photo, or has any other memories or information about the fire brigade, we would love to hear from you.

We have also obtained a copy of this photo of the Dennis Fire Engine which belonged to the Byfleet Fire Brigade in 1923. This was found at the Surrey History Centre. Thanks to Jeff Sechiari for getting a copy for our archive.



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SOCIETY NEWS
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Parish Day 2014 will be held at Byfleet Recreation Ground on Saturday 19th July.

The Heritage Society will be there, and we hope you can come along and see us there.

If anyone is able to help out on the stand, even if only for half an hour, we would be delighted to have you aboard. Please let us know at a meeting, or give

Tessa a ring on 01932 351559



Thank you.

Due to clashing with the European elections, we are afraid we have had to change the date of our AGM.

This will now be on **Thursday 15th May** at St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, Byfleet, starting at 7.30pm. We are sorry for the late change, and hope that you can still come along.

At the AGM you will be able to pay your subscriptions for the coming year, and we do hope that you decide to renew. Members who have joined since January this year will not have to renew until next year.

If you are unable to get to the AGM, a subs reminder will go out with the next newsletter in July.

Hope to see you there. Thank you.

Remember—if you would like to help us save on postage costs, you can now opt to have your newsletters and other Society notices sent via email. If you would like to give this a try, please drop an email to Tessa at Tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk and she will add you to the mailing list. Thanks.

With the World Cup looming, how about this lovely picture of St Mary's School football team from 1933-4?

We know that the young man holding the ball is Tom Hughes who lived in Oyster Lane, and used to make pocket money by charging motor racing fans a penny to park their bicycles in his front garden while they enjoyed the events at Brooklands.

If you recognise any other faces, please let us know, either via Byfleet Library or just drop us a line.

