

For the Record...

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

For Midsummer we welcomed **James Adler, Heath Ranger** on Ockham and Wisley Common. James explained about the special nature of heathland and its precarious position as the most threatened habitat in the world, even more so than the tropical rainforest. In fact, all the heathland left in the UK would fit into the Isle of Wight.

Heath is a special mixture of heathers and trees containing a range of environments, from dry to wet, quaking bog and mire. It is not an entirely natural feature. The land was cleared after the last ice age (11,000 years ago) first by grazing animals such as moose and deer, then by human activity. Man used many of the plants and trees on the heath, such as birch, preventing the heath becoming overgrown.

There is a range of unique flora and fauna present on the heathland. Heath spotted orchid and Harts Tongue Fern have been found there, along with the Round Leaved Sundew (Britain's only native carnivorous plant). Wisley and Ockham Common also houses the only colony of Bog Hair Grass in Surrey. Plants attract insects, such as the Emerald Damsel Fly and butterflies like the Small Skipper. Boldermere is home to the dazzling Mint Leaf Beetle, which is a beautiful shiny green colour. Although it looks like something out of Ancient Egypt, it is in fact native to Surrey. Heathland also supports about 400 species of spider, more than any other habitat. Also all six native species of snake and lizard live on the heathland—the sand lizard, common lizard, slow worm, grass snake, smooth snake and the poisonous adder. James explained the adder's laid back hunting style. It will bite small mammals, injecting a poison that relaxes the muscles of the bladder. As the bitten animal crawls away, it will leave a trail of urine. The adder will have a rest until the poison has done its work and then simply follow the trail of urine to its next meal. Finally, James mentioned the birds who live on the common. Boldermere supports Common Terns, who use the tern raft to nest on and have produced 11 young in three years. The Dartford Warbler has made an amazing comeback. From 11 pairs left in the country in 1962/3 there are now more than 3,000. You can hear the beautiful song of the Wood Lark, and at dusk on warm summer evenings you might be lucky enough to hear the strange call of the Nightjar. This comes all the way from South Africa to nest on the heath. It builds on the ground, but is so well camouflaged that you can almost be standing on the nest before the bird will move and give away its position. The call is a strange churring sound, sounding more like something mechanical than a bird. It is hoped that some heathland species can be persuaded to return to Wisley, such as the Marsh gentian, the Heath Tiger Beetle (which, size for size, runs faster than a cheetah) and the Raft Spider, which can catch and kill sticklebacks.

James' job is to help protect and regenerate the heathland, which has reduced alarmingly during the 20th century due to development and road building. The aim is to bring back the open spaces of the heath, and so many trees are being removed. Some Scots Pines are being taken down, and the wood sold on, although some trunks will be left to encourage fungi. Bracken is also an enemy, and any money made from felling trees will probably be spent on bracken clearing, especially since the recent mild winters mean that the bracken does not get thinned out by frosts. Once the trees and bracken are cleared, the heathers can come back, especially as the seed can lie dormant for 80—100 years. The Rangers are trying to produce modern ways to replace vanished traditional practices. For instance, heather turfs would have been stripped to provide roofing and heating fuel. Now the turfs are stripped and sent to line golf bunkers. Traditional grazing practices are also being brought back, using old British breeds which thrive on the coarse heathland diet. The areas opened up by the grazing give other heathland species valuable space to live.

James' talk was beautifully illustrated by his own slides of the plants and flowers he has found on the heath, and we all resolved to go and see this special habitat on our doorsteps for ourselves.

In **September** we decided to try something a little different and asked some of our members speak about their particular interests.

First of all, Julian Temple, with support from Mike Webber and Jeff Sechiari, gave an update on Byfleet Fire Station. Julian gave an outline of the Fire Station history. Sir John Whittaker Ellis formed the brigade in 1871 at his home, Petersham Place (now Lloyds Bank). He was later a Lord Mayor of London, Baronet of Byfleet in 1882, and MP for Mid Surrey and Kingston in 1884. A brick plaque above the door of the fire station says it was built in 1885, and Julian believes it may be one of the earliest purpose built fire stations in Surrey. There are 9 others, but all appear to be of a later date, the nearest one being a wooden one in Shere (now public toilets!) which was built in 1886. Julian believes that this and the rarity of 1880s fire stations outside London make a good case for its preservation. Byfleet Fire Station is in very original condition and has not been touched much structurally since its closure in the 1960s. In fact an expert on indoor fixtures and fittings has said that the door latches are of an earlier period than the building! The left hand side was added later and housed the pump and uniforms, with the office at the back and the engine in the right hand section. The Fire Station is now being used by Woking Adventure Group. The sale of the site by Surrey County Council prompted the forming of the Friends of Byfleet Fire Station to try and ensure the building is not demolished. A petition and website have been set up and leaflets distributed urging people to write to Surrey to protest. A photo call to advertise the campaign drew more than 120 people. Talks with Surrey have gone well and now the Friends are drawing up proposals with interested groups such as the Scouts and the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service to not only save the building but to ensure it carries out a useful role in the community. There is a lot of work ahead, but the Friends remain optimistic. For the latest news visit the website (www.byfleetfirebrigade.com) or keep an eye on the local press who are supporting the campaign.

Next Dick Alder spoke of the changing conditions which have affected the flora and fauna of Byfleet over the years. From one thousand years ago until relatively recently Byfleet was largely agricultural. A huge number of the trees that we now consider native, such as the Horse Chestnut, were not imported until the 1600s. The Inclosure Act of the early 1800s, when the land was parcelled up into square fields, brought further change and recent development has meant that back gardens and available space for wildlife are getting steadily smaller.



Some species have declined over the years. Hares, partridges, red squirrels, snipe, cuckoos and privet hawk moths are no longer seen regularly in Byfleet. However, some species have increased, such as goldfinches, red admiral butterflies, foxes, badgers, and the humming bird hawkmoth. Gardeners will agree that the evening primrose, alkanet and Himalayan balsam have definitely increased. And there are also new arrivals, such as collared doves, the noisy ring necked parakeet and the harlequin ladybird. Dick has a keen interest in fungi, and showed us a specimen of the deadly Death Cap, which is found under oak trees. He also showed the brilliantly named Warty Cavalier, one of about 40 different varieties to be found growing on the piles of wood chippings in Murrays Lane. This variety has only been known in Great Britain since 2001.

Finally Mary McIntyre showed two fine framed examples of the calendars that used to be produced by Derisleys Butchers. The calendars dated from 1908 and 1910 and had been found in a cupboard during the building work at the old butchers shop. They had some very early telephone numbers on, which led Mary to recount how at the time of the Blue Anchor murder in 1924, the village was inundated with the press who were all trying to get the gruesome details of the case. The only telephone in the village at that time belonged to Mary's grandmother. The press therefore all had to queue up at her door to use the phone to put through their copy to their newspaper offices. And yes, as I am sure you are hoping – she did charge them!



In **October Ian Franklin** returned to speak to us about **Kew Palace**, its history and the huge restoration project that took place before it reopened to the public last year.

There were originally several buildings at the location.

The Dutch House, or Kew Palace still stands. There was also Richmond Lodge which was originally a gamekeeper's lodge, seized from the Ormonds by George I and given to George II.

The White House, which stood opposite the Dutch House, was acquired by George II's son Frederick. Father and son could not stand each other, so you wonder how they got on as such near neighbours. The next king George III decided to build himself a bigger, castellated palace and demolished the White House in 1802. The new palace was built using the best of technology, but George III's madness terminated the project. It was never finished and was finally demolished in 1828. It had been so well built that it had to be dynamited to get it down. Its site is now a riverside car park for Kew Gardens.

The Dutch House was built in 1631 by Dutch merchant Samuel Fortrey, but still retains a Tudor cellar from an earlier building on the site. The house was acquired by Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, as an annexe to the White House for their growing family. The elder daughters lived here for many years, probably often quite lonely as they were away from court. Their rooms on the second floor are among those on view today. King George III was kept at Kew during his attacks of "insanity". His doctors wanted to treat him at the White House, but at the onset of his third attack he was at the Dutch House and refused to come out. His doctors told him they were very keen to see a picture of Van Dyck by Nagari, which hung in the Dutch House. So the poor King let them in, upon which his doctors unceremoniously bundled him over to the White House. That painting still hangs in the Palace today. The annexe that King George stayed in while he was suffering was later demolished by Queen Victoria, who naturally did not want to be reminded that madness possibly ran in the family.

The palace was open until 1996, when roof repairs became necessary, and the displays needed revamping. This provided the opportunity for some real research into the fabric of the building and its history. Paintwork was laboriously scraped back to see what colours had been used in the original decoration. Under 21 layers in the library a beautiful black and white portrait of a lady was found above the fireplace. This was part of the primary decoration of the house, so was it a portrait of Catherine Fortrey, the original lady of the house? Also up in the attic painted on the wall was found a trompe l'oeil balustrade, giving vital clues as to the appearance of the original staircase.

Every inch of the building was gone over in detail. Behind one of the gutter fittings outside, traces of a limewash were found, indicating that the Palace had once been covered in a reddish pink. Inside, once later wood panelling was removed, many traces of a bright green flock wallpaper were found all over the house. Both of these have now been restored. Painstaking research into the furniture and carpets that would have been in the house was made, and items to match made up, to give an accurate picture of how the house would have appeared. Items belonging to the family are now on display, such as George III's ceramic flute and his architectural drawings, the harpsichord played by his daughters, the chair in which his wife Queen Charlotte died and a wax mask made from a mould taken by Madame Tussaud herself. A more sombre item is a waistcoat worn by the King during one of his attacks of porphyria, which still retains traces of royal vomit! At times, the structure of the building has been left on display, so the original framework and the wattle and daub walls can be seen beneath the later panelling in some places. Ian showed a slide of somewhere we would be unlikely to visit—the palace attic. The roof beams showed how much alteration had taken place, but on one beam were strange markings which are said to be a witch mark, a charm to prevent evil spirits entering the building. It was to be hoped that poor George III gained some comfort from this. Finally Ian reminded us that Kew still retained royal connections, as the Queen had held her 80th birthday party there and Prince Charles had lent portraits of King George and Queen Charlotte for display.

We thanked Ian for his glimpse behind the scenes of the restoration and left inspired to visit when the Palace reopens after the winter.



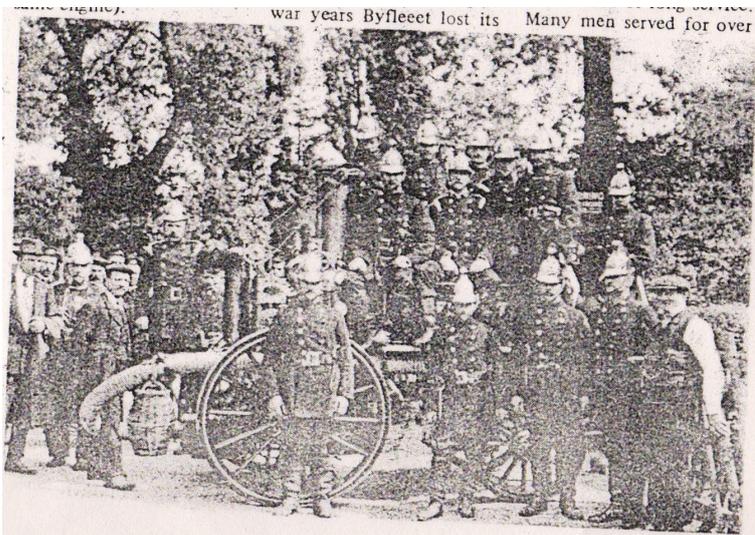
BYFLEET FIRE STATION

Members will be aware of the threat to Byfleet Fire Station and should also have seen the leaflets and campaign news in the local press, orchestrated by the Friends of Byfleet Fire Station. The Friends object to any plans there may be to demolish or drastically alter the building and wish to see its return to the community for the benefit of



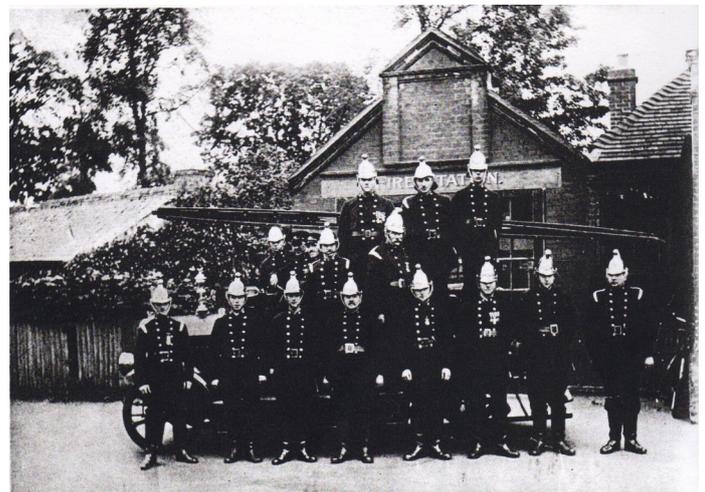
residents. Efforts are being made to find a way that the Fire Station can continue to be a part of Byfleet life while still paying its own way. Surrey County Council have agreed to some time to let the Friends prepare a proposal and interest has been shown in the site by groups such as Byfleet Scout Group and the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, who provide training and education in fire safety.

Members can still help by showing their support. If you haven't already, please write to Mr N Skellett, Leader of Surrey County Council, County Hall, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2DN, or sign the petitions available at Byfleet Library or Byfleet Post Office. For more information or the latest news, please see the Friends'



Byfleet Fire Brigade probably taken about 1912. The firemen pose in front of their Monarch steamer fire engine, bought by public subscription in 1908. It would be pulled to the fire by two horses. The Monarch was eventually sold for £10 to be used by a sandpit in Virginia Water to pump water.

Byfleet Fire Brigade in front of Byfleet Fire Station in about 1932. The Monarch Steamer has now been updated to a Dennis motor engine. This engine was transferred to Woking Fire Station in 1933 arousing strong local feeling. Councillor H S Cawsey fought and won an election over its return. The engine was restored with much ceremony in 1938.



Who do you think you are?

If you—like me—have been inspired by the TV programme where stars trace their roots on the BBC, you can now have a go too.

A Family History Group now meets at Byfleet Library at 7.30 on the first Wednesday of each month. You can use the computers, consult books and magazines on family history and swap hints and seek advice from fellow researchers. Come and have a go—who knows what you may find out. It is huge fun, but be warned! It soon gets very addictive!!



At his talk about the natural history in Byfleet, Dick Alder mentioned that he had kept records of his

observations over the years, allowing him to build up a picture of how things had changed. He wondered if any of our members had done something similar. If all these records could be combined, they would give a great picture of how Byfleet's flora and fauna had developed.

If you have any records of your nature observations, please let us know.

The Woking Community Play Association are putting together their next venture, *The Ockenden Story*. In 1951 the Festival of Britain inspired Joyce Pearce to do something to help displaced young people in camps in Europe after the Second World War. Thus began the idea of bringing some of them to Woking for a holiday. Woking Council, the Guides, the Rotarians, Sue Ryder and the people of Woking worked together to bring the idea to reality. It is a story that has made an impact on lives throughout the world. Anna Molesworth of the Association says, "It's a story of how ordinary people make a difference, a story that needs to be told and a story that we intend to bring to the stage."

This is an ambitious project that needs an enthusiastic team. The project was launched at the end of September and they hope to perform the play in 2009-10. Both actors and behind the scenes help are needed, so if you would like to become part of a lively and dedicated team, or would like more information, please contact Anna Molesworth on 01483 832 089 or email annacordelia@molesworth16.freemove.co.uk

THANK YOU

Thanks to Peter Chinery for donating a set of BAe overalls to the Society, along with a fascinating pair of clogs, as worn in some of the Vickers engineering shops in the past. Peter, of course, previously kindly donated the much loved model aircraft that we have on display in the Heritage Room.

This advert comes from the Parish magazine of June 1937.

It seems to have sold a great deal besides tobacco!

Does anyone remember the shop and where it was on High Road?

E. H. LOVESY,
The Old Log Cabin Tobacco Shop.
For everything Wireless, Overhauls and Repairs.
Accumulators Charged.
Electric Lamps, Bells and Fittings, Wiring.
Gramophones and Records. Expert Repairs on the Premises.
Fishing Tackle. Cameras and Photographic Materials.
Developing and Printing.
HIGH ROAD - BYFLEET.