

We hope you had a good summer—perhaps you saw us at Parish Day next to a splendid fire engine from Brooklands Museum. Now that the nights are beginning to draw in, sitting in the sun on Byfleet Rec seems a long time ago. But there are still our talks to look forward to—details below, along with the dates of next year’s meetings for your diaries. Jeff is still busy booking speakers, so if there is something you would like to hear about, let him know.

Reminder slips are enclosed for those of you who have not yet renewed your subscription for 2008/9—we hope you decide to stay with us, as we are very grateful for your support. If you have already paid, thank you very much, and we hope to see you all one or more of our talks in the coming year.

FORTHCOMING
EVENTS 2008



2008

Thursday 9th OCTOBER: Jeff Sechiari on the Byfleet Inclosure Act. You may remember Jeff set up a project to transcribe the Byfleet Inclosure. Come and hear what the Act meant for Byfleet and see how Byfleet used to look. **Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm.**

Thursday 6th NOVEMBER: Haden Williams on Wisley Gardens, Past and Present. We’ve all visited Wisley’s lovely gardens—now come and hear how it all started. **Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm.**

Thursday 4th DECEMBER: Christmas Social. Come and join us for our annual Christmas gathering—have a mince pie and raise a glass. **Mike Webber** will speak about new pictures that the Society has acquired over the year, and there will be a presentation of a new picture of Byfleet Manor **Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm**

2009

Thursday 15th JANUARY: The Life of W G Tarrant by Richard Norris. Richard shares his knowledge of the life of this well known Byfleet resident. **Byfleet Heritage Centre, 8.15pm**

Thursday 12th FEBRUARY: TBC

Thursday 12th MARCH: TBC

Thursday 9th APRIL: TBC

Thursday 21st MAY: Society AGM to be held at Cawsey Room, Byfleet Village Hall. 7.30pm

Thursday 18th JUNE: TBC

Thursday 16th JULY: TBC

Thursday 10th SEPTEMBER: TBC

Thursday 8th OCTOBER: TBC

Thursday 5th NOVEMBER: TBC

Thursday 3rd DECEMBER: Christmas social.

**Members free. Guests £2
Everyone very welcome.**

For the Record...

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

June

RIB DAVIS FROM THE LIGHTBOX

June's meeting was pleased to welcome Rib Davis to tell us something about Woking's new award winning museum and art gallery, and about their oral history project.

In 1993 a group of local people decided to try and get a museum for Woking. Initially this was going to be called Woking Galleries, but this thought to imply that it would only be an art gallery and only for Woking town centre. So the name was changed to The Lightbox. The project has cost £7 million, which is actually an extremely good price for setting up a museum from scratch. Woking Council supplied half, and the rest came from sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Wellcome Foundation. The building was designed by Marks Barfield Architects, the same firm that built the London Eye. There are two main rooms and two smaller rooms, and the idea is to have changing exhibitions of both local and national interest. One room is given over to a display on Woking. As Woking really only came into being in the 19th century with the coming of the railway, it was decided not to do a chronological display, but to focus on the themes that make the area unique, such as Brookwood Cemetery, Brookwood Asylum and Hospital, the Mosque, the railway, the canal and local industry and leisure. There is also a display on local heroes which will change every three months or so.

It was decided that a good way to put these topics across would be with the help of an oral history project. In 1877 Edison invented the phonograph and recorded Florence Nightingale, but the machines involved were heavy, expensive and the recordings only lasted about 30 seconds. Now with modern technology, interviews are easy to do, and oral history has become hugely popular, so much so that there is now even a Curator of Oral History at the British Library.

Oral history allows us to see individuals in a way that history books don't. History books have tended to record the histories of governments and the ruling classes, rather than ordinary people. People do not tend to write their histories down, but are often very happy to talk, and the stories of ordinary families can be collected. Sometimes people will pass on stories that their parents and grandparents told them, extending the oral record back even further.

Of course, it isn't perfect. Oral history has been criticised for being subjective and unreliable, as it records events as people remember them. Also there is a risk that you could get a different version of the same event depending on the interviewer or interviewee. But while some facts might be slightly off, these can be checked against written records, and oral history does give a unique feel for how someone felt about events as they happened.

The Lightbox started their project by making a list of people that they wanted to interview, covering all races, classes and areas of Woking. The interviewing was done largely by volunteers, and the results were recorded to CD and then transcribed so all interviews exist in both oral and written form. The transcripts are then checked against the original sound recording, and then coded topic by topic so that they can be searched by specific names. Another team of volunteers is working on editing the sound so that excerpts can be used on the Lightbox website and in the museum.

Rib finished by playing us a selection of people's memories of the Atalanta Ballroom. Snippets included memories of local lads always having to vie with soldiers from Pirbright for local ladies' attentions, and that the evenings always started with a Paul Jones to break the ice. This was a dance of two circles, men on the outside and ladies on the inside. The circles rotated in opposite directions and when the music stopped, you partnered whoever you were opposite. One lady recalled how she got dressed up to go there, and how she danced all night, and a memory from 1965 recalled how Jerry Lee Lewis came to play there. The piano didn't work, so he used the Hammond organ that was there instead. All these memories have been captured for future reference, and the project is still working hard to collect more. So go along to the Lightbox and have a listen—or maybe join in yourself!

JULY



A view of Wisley Common

Despite some threatening looking clouds, the weather did stay fine for our walk on Wisley Common led by James Adler of the Surrey Wildlife Trust. Wisley Common, Ockham Common and Chatley Heath cover 323 hectares (with Wisley taking up 150 hectares). Although the area is quite wooded now, old maps show that there was previously a distinct lack of trees, and people remembered being able to see all the way over to Wisley village, and the area often being flooded.

Heathland has declined dramatically over the last 200 years, with 85% of Surrey's heathland now lost. Heathland was regarded as wasteland and not recognised as a special habitat until 1992.

A lot of work is needed to maintain the special heathland habitat. If left alone, the open heath would soon be colonised by birch, pine and bracken. A programme of tree removal has been taking place, which looks a bit brutal at first, but once the trees are cleared, it allows the heather to recolonise. This happens quite quickly, as there is heather seed already in the ground, which remains viable for 100 years. The heather has long been a feature of the heath—the pollen appears in soil samples dating back 3,000 years. Bracken is extremely tough and persistent, and the Trust battles with it constantly, with £20,000 being spent on spraying last year alone.

Recently you may have noticed the cows wandering the common. This is part of a project to reintroduce the old breeds that would have grazed the heath in the past, and which play a vital part in maintaining the heathland habitat. There are 18 Belted Galloways and Irish Moiled cattle on Wisley Common at the moment, which James looks after from the newly refurbished Pond Farm. The grazing is already having an effect—in the areas cleared by the cows orchids are appearing and a colony of rare grasses. The Trust is hoping to gradually build up its own herd. It was decided not to have sheep or goats, as many people walk their dogs on the common, and sheep and dogs don't usually mix well!

The heath is a very specialised habitat and boasts many rare species. The Sand Lizard, which had disappeared from the area, was reintroduced onto Ockham Common in 1992 and has increased. And as the heath is cut off from other similar habitats and the animals that live there, this results in some interesting species variations. James said that he has seen adders that are black, bright blue and fluorescent green!



James explains the wonders to be found in cow pats

James let us have a peek into the barn at Pond Farm which is being renovated as an office for the Surrey Wildlife Trust, but has retained the old beams. The farm was named after a large lake which was drained around 1750 to provide land for crops. A bank which formed the edge of the lake still exists.

Other curiosities on our walk included a view of the carnivorous Sun Dew plant, which can be made into a potent wine and a cure for warts, a bomb crater now filled with water and an ancient bowl barrow. James said elsewhere on the common was a bell barrow, one of only 250 in the country and usually indicating the burial of an important person. There was also a large mountain ash, which the Trust would like to clear, but as it is considered extremely unlucky to cut this species, the foresters would not touch it! Added to that, it stands on top of an ancient burial barrow, and has mistletoe growing on it, so no-one feels brave enough to risk touching a single leaf.

To finish, James told us of the secret life of the cow pat! In fields where the cows have been treated with worming medicines, the pats can last 3 months. On Wisley Common they last about a week. As soon as they are "laid", flies and beetles appear and lay their eggs and the grubs will use the cow pat as food. Also birds will come and remove grass and fibre for their nests, and in a short time the cow pat has been recycled back into the heathland.

Wisley Common is a beautiful place to walk, and right on our own doorsteps, so go and explore. Also the Trust has working parties and welcomes volunteers on a range of projects—details on the Surrey Wildlife Trust website www.surreywildlifetrust.co.uk.



The carnivorous Sun dew

In August the Heritage Society was kindly invited to an evening of bowls at Byfleet Bowls Club. Mike Webber reports that the Club entertained about a dozen members. "We got away with only a couple of short breaks for shelter from showers,. The members split into two groups each with an instructor, although I was a late arrival and was not allowed on the green because I had the wrong shoes. Pat and Andy Andrews, members of the Club, were helping at the jack ends. One or two members seemed to be quite capable and I suspect they had had a go before.



After the training session we were treated to refreshments in the Club House. Then we gathered together for a talk on the history of bowls by Peter Gibbs. Bowls can claim be the oldest sport in the world, there being a picture of bowls in Egypt in 3000BC. Related games were played by the Chinese as early as 5000BC and even prehistoric man is known to have rolled stones at bone "jacks". In this country a bowling green was recorded at Chichester Castle soon after 1066.

Meanwhile elsewhere on the green, despite the rain. there were two championship games of 4-3-2-1 being played where there are 10 points (4+3+2+1) available for each "end", with the winner being the first to 104." All in all, a very enjoyable evening.
Mike Webber



In September Dr Judy Hill revealed the events in Surrey of the Swing Riots. This little known event shook Surrey from 1830-32. In the 1830s agriculture in Surrey was struggling. A slump after the end of the Napoleonic Wars led to high prices and unemployment. Sheep rot and a succession of bad harvests made conditions worse, and rich people were buying up land leaving less farmland, causing bitterness. Because of these factors, Parishes began to find it difficult to supply enough poor relief, causing further hardship.

It is not certain how the Swing Riots got their name. The introduction of the threshing machine was proving unpopular, and many were smashed. Possibly the name was derived from a machine piece called the swingle. Or the person in charge of cutting the harvest was addressed as "Captain", and threatening letters were sent out to targeted landowners signed by Captain Swing.

The rioters' grievances mostly sprang from their terrible working conditions. They felt that the new threshing machines took away their winter employment, as one machine could do the work of many men. Access to common land was being lost due to enclosure, and some of the rioters demanded poor relief as a right, rather than the privilege it then was.

The crimes in Surrey amounted to 48 fires, 7 threatening letters, 5 food riots, 2 tithe meeting riots, 1 march in Dorking, 1 animal poisoning and even one shooting in Albury. Many of the incidents do not appear in parish records, as the idea that these things could be done by your own labourers seemed to break the bond that was perceived between the landowner and his workers. Byfleet had its own incident, when a fire was deliberately started on the estate of Mr Dennet. The reason is unclear, but perhaps it was because he held the office of rate assessor. No-one was ever arrested for the crime, but to set a fire in the correct field at dead of night clearly needed local knowledge.

The riots greatly unnerved the government, who offered rewards of £50 for information leading to a conviction, rising to a massive £500 if the culprit of a fire was discovered. But despite these small fortunes, no-one was caught for setting fires, even though in a small parish, someone must have known the culprits' identities. One week in November there was fire every night. These could be seen for miles, further spreading feelings of unrest and fear.

At the end of the riots, 1,976 offenders were tried in 900 courts. There were 19 executions and 505 people were to be transported to Australia. 644 were imprisoned and 800 were acquitted. But no-one was sentenced for setting fires.

After 1832 things calmed down. Farming conditions began to improve, but also Poor Relief was increased, with a new poor law introduced in 1834. Dorking helped 77 people emigrate to Canada. The creation of special constables from the village population also helped to get the people on the government's side. In some parishes, work schemes were set up to allow people to work on the land. Gradually peace was restored.

We thanked Dr Hill for revealing what a tumultuous time villagers went through in the early 1830s, and how hard conditions were for the farmers of Surrey.



BYFLEET FACES AND PLACES

THE WHITE HOUSE, BYFLEET—HOME OF THE BELISHA BEACON!

We are still hoping to get some information on The White House, at the corner of Mill Lane and Church Road, but have had a couple of snippets come through.

It was formerly known as Chelsea Cottage, and was for a number of years the home of Major Leslie Hore-Belisha, MP. He had a rather chequered career as an MP, and as Minister of Transport introduced pedestrian crossings and the Belisha Beacon. Peter Hancocks forwarded a press cutting that appeared recently in the Daily Mail:

Being Horrible to 'Horeb-Elisha'

With reference to Leslie Hore-Belisha and his famous beacons, is it true that his birth name was Horeb Elisha?

ON SEPTEMBER 7, 1893, Jacob Belisha and his wife had a son, whom they named Leslie. But Jacob Belisha died before his son's first birthday. Leslie's surname became Hore-Belisha after his mother remarried Sir Adair Hore - who was only 19 years older than his stepson - in 1912. In 1936 Leslie's mother died and was much missed by her grieving son. Following his highly innovative stint at the Ministry of Transport Hore-Belisha was appointed by Neville Chamberlain as Secretary of State for war in 1937, replacing 'Duff' Cooper, who later resigned from the Government over Chamberlain's appeasement policy. His appointment was highly controversial, partly because Cooper had been popular in the Conservative Party and with voters, and also because Hore-Belisha was Jewish. Even those who weren't strongly opposed to him took to the nick-naming him 'Horeb' or Horeb-Elisha' as a pun on his race, Horeb is mentioned in the Old-Testament as a place where the golden calf was made and to which Elijah fled.



Frank Furlow kindly got in touch about the Warwick crash that happened in the Sanway area which we mentioned in the last newsletter. He thinks that both stories relate to the one incident and remembers walking past the wrecked plane as a young boy.

The crash happened close to the end of the Second World War or even just after the end. Mr Furlow remembers that the plane came down in the fields on the other side of Sanway Road from the church. There is now a field where people walk their dogs and where the playground is now, and then another field and then a copse of trees. The aircraft crashed into the field nearest the copse and close to the road. As far as he remembers from the position of the plane, it looked like it was heading towards Wisley. There was no damage to the surrounding trees, and the plane itself was fairly intact. There was an electricity pylon nearby and Mr Furlow remembers the lines were drooping low over the road, so perhaps the plane might have clipped these. The plane was guarded by the police and the RAF during the night, and was taken away a few days later. He also said that a council road sweeper was working very close by when the plane came down virtually over his head, and it was quite a while before he could return to work.

Alan Griffiths also remembers the crash, which he thinks was shortly after the end of the Second World War. He says "It was certainly a British aircraft and it landed on the edge of the field off Rectory Lane opposite, at that time, a footpath which crossed the opposite field. Sanway Road ran along the next side of the field a short distance further on. At the time I was living in Rectory Close so I did not have far to go to reach the wreckage. My friends and I wanted to get hold of some Perspex, if we could, but we were kept off."

If anyone can add any more details, or has their own memories of the event, please let us know.

Quick Question

There is an old postcard showing a bridge going over York Road from Tarrants Yard. This was eventually demolished, but does anyone remember when?

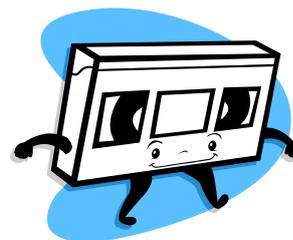
Another quick question Jeff Sechiari has been thinking about air raid shelters in the village. "We used to have one in the garden in Petersham Ave when I was a teenager and I'm sure there are still many around. I would like to compile a list of what was there and what remains, ideally with a brief description - for example was it just an Anderson shelter or more substantial, if it has gone when was it demolished, what was it used for after the War, and so on."

Can anyone help with Jeff's quest? If anyone has any photos, so much the better! If you have any information, please contact Jeff on 01932 341084. Thank you.

Byfleet Oral History Group (BOHG) have a collection of fascinating recordings of peoples' memories of Byfleet in times past. They have a set of lending copies of these tapes and are keen for people to borrow and enjoy these.

They also have a need for someone to help to transcribe these tapes. There is no pressure of time for this whatsoever and would love to hear from anyone prepared to give it a go. They have a transcription unit available.

Please call Jeff Sechiari on 01932 3410084 if you would like to borrow a tape, or if you would like to give transcribing a go. Thank you.



An appeal from the Woking Community Play Association

As members may remember from our fascinating talk on the Ockenden Venture, the Association are planning a piece of drama about it. She says "We have commissioned playwright Rib Davis to write and direct this play based on true events which will involve local people in a number of ways including performing.

While we were informing people about this project we were contacted by the Surrey History Centre who hold what is currently an un-archived cache of papers relating to Ockenden. It was decided to put in a joint application for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to archive these documents. Some of this material will form the backbone of the script, along with oral history interviews with people involved with Ockenden.

A professional archivist will be paid for by the Heritage Lottery Fund but we are also looking for a team of volunteers to help archiving. This work can be carried out on whatever basis suits the volunteer whenever it suits them. It could be done either working as part of a team or individually and will be a vital part of the project by giving future generations access to this important piece of local history and taking part in creating a piece of groundbreaking drama.

I would be most grateful if you could spread the word among your members about this and ask if anyone is interested to get in touch with me."

If you would like to help out, please contact Anna Molesworth on 01483 832089 or a.molesworth@ntlworld.com



Does anyone know any information or knowledge of local sites used in films or television?

Recently on TV we have had a repeat of the Poirot episode "After the Funeral" which included a scene at the Manor House, and also "The Incredible Theft" which included Foxwarren Park. Also "The Cornish Mystery" featured Brooklands.

Foxwarren has also featured in a Midsommer Murders programme.

We also have the Richard Green Robin Hood series from my childhood, of course, at Park Barn Farm and the woodland around.

If anyone remembers any more star studded locations, please either drop us a line or contact Jeff on 01932 341084. Thank you.