

Issue 47

Newsletter

June 2011

Welcome to the 47th issue of the Heritage Society newsletter. If you happened to miss Roger Clover's talk on life in Byfleet in the 1950s we have a resume of it here, covering two pages as it was all too good to cut anything out!

On the back two pages there are some queries that perhaps you can help out with, and news on this year's Parish Day. This was a great day last year, and should be as good if not even better this year, so please come along and join in the fun.

Finally, please remember that the library is still fighting for its life. There is so much more going on there than just book lending, so go along and find out more, and support your local resource.



2011

Thursday 16th June: Join Jim Allen on a **Churchyard Tour** as he explains about the project to record the memorial inscriptions and shows us some of the interesting residents. **Meet in the Church Hall car park (opposite St Mary's Church) for 8.15pm start.**

Thursday 14th July: Any past or present Scouts out there? Come along tonight to hear Tim Hookins speak about the **History of Byfleet Scout Group** which is 100 years old this year. **St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm..**

Thursday 8th September: Coins, including local finds such as The Brooklands Hoard, with Norman Clarkson & Brian Wood.. **St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm**

Thursday 6th October: Going to the Shops. A general chat about going to the local shops over the years. Bring your memories and any memorabilia. **St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm**

Thursday 17th November: Come and hear Peter Duplock from the London Bus Preservation Trust speak about the history of the former Cobham Bus Museum and their recent move to Brooklands Museum. **St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close, 8.15pm.**

Thursday 8th 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.**

JEFF SECHIARI IS WORKING HARD TO KEEP US SUPPLIED WITH INTERESTING TALKS SO WATCH THIS SPACE FOR FURTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS. IF YOU HAVE AN IDEA FOR A TALK OR A TOPIC THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO HEAR ABOUT, JEFF WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO HEAR FROM YOU.

For the Record...

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

In April Roger Clover took us on a trip down memory lane. Roger was born and grew up in Byfleet, was christened at St Mary's Church where he later sang in the choir and went to St Mary's school. He recalled the village for us in the 1950s.

Roger was born in Hart Road, which in 1953 had a slightly dubious reputation. The local shops were not keen to give credit as there had been a large number of midnight flits! Hart Road was then a cul de sac and the school had not yet been built. All the children would play in Mr Derisley's field – until he chased them off!

You could buy almost anything you wanted from the village shops. Most of the shops were along High Road which carried all the traffic. It also split the village in two. Roger remembered many a battle between the children from the "north" and those from the "south".

We began our tour at Parvis Bridge where the boathouse still looks pretty much the same. To the right of the bridge were Wakefield & Sons who made Formula 3 racing cars. After passing the cricket club and Mr Derisley's highland cattle you came to the War Memorial. Behind this, tucked away behind some trees, was the lake belonging to Lake House. This was great in winter, when boys would skate and slide - until chased away by the gardeners.

As you went Chertsey Road there was a large caravan site on the right. Then you came to the Post Office and past Walnut Tree Lane where the local Scouts were run by the Leger brothers. On the right was Britax on the old Tudor Works site. They made the Cycle Master, which was a 30cc engine fixed inside a 26" wheel. When fixed to your bike it allowed you to do speeds of up to 20mph. Britax also later made their inertia seatbelt there. Further along was the Co-op, and then the Cumberland Works, home of well known local firm Ebenezer Mears & Sons for many years.

Back at Byfleet War Memorial, there was the Scotch Cafe (now Unity Motors) - a proper greasy spoon. There was Derisley's butchers and at that time the house next door was the Rectory, as the old Rectory was being rebuilt. Next along the road was the old Church Hall, a wooden framed hut covered in corrugated iron. This served as the church youth club and an extra classroom for the school. Next came the fire station, which was still operational in the 50s with a part time crew.

Across the road stood the a garage run by racing driver Duncan Hamilton. Then came an ironmongers, the local solicitor and Lloyds Bank, one of 4 banks in the village. The others were Barclays (now a betting shop), Westminster (now a cafe) and Midland (now a plumbing shop). On the end was the Comrades' Club, which Roger said was probably the only village club his mother did not belong to.

Petersham Parade contained a bakers, Wilds newsagents and the fish and chip shop owned by Josie—owner of a huge handlebar moustache. There was stiff debate as to whether the best fish and chips were Josie's or 18's (next to the Village Hall)—the choir boys always ate at Josie's. To the right of the Village Hall was Boutell's, the undertaker but also the local decorating firm.

Along Rectory Lane was the Methodist Church. The adjoining hall was the local clinic where babies were weighed and the nit nurse plied her comb. The police station was manned by one policeman at the desk while another patrolled the village on his bike. Dr Dixon's house came next and on the site of Dunmow House stood King's Cottage, a very pretty thatched building behind a high fence with beautiful gardens. At the end of the road was the Rectory, which at that time was a large Victorian building standing further back from the road than at present.

The Village Hall stood on the corner of High Road and Rectory Lane. This has changed very little externally, but inside Roger remembered a large painting of Queen Victoria presiding over everything. For a long time the hall housed the Civic Restaurant, which Roger would speak of later. Next to the hall was Josie's rival, 18's, and then Rannie's chemists, which was always spick and span. Mr Rannie himself could be often be seen out and about hiking and cycling. Further along the line was a cake shop, a butchers and a shop called Edmunds, an odd cross between a library and a sweet shop, which seemed very curious to the ten year old Roger.

Across Hopfield Avenue was Barclays Bank, an opticians, a TV shop and Cramps gift shop. Beech House stood on the corner (where Beech Close is now). Then in the row of Victorian shops was Shortlands shoe shop, Cheshire gentleman's outfitters which provided made to measure suits, and Wosleys, a real old time grocers, with marble topped counters and the staff in starched aprons and caps.

On the other side of the road, where Plough Green is now, stood the Royston Chase Hotel. Roger knew the son of the owner, so went inside on occasion.

(cont page 3)

The place was in quite a state, with ceilings coming down and creaking floors. It would definitely not have passed a fire inspection these days.

Across from Plough Green stood Freelands, one of three garages in the village, which sold paraffin and dispensed your Green Shield Stamps. At the end of that parade was another chemist that still had the traditional two bottles in the window—one green and one red. The chemist here would sell many an odd thing to boys to use with their chemistry sets.

Across the road from the Binfield Bakers was The Log Cabin where you could buy light bulbs and fuses. Then came the Sanway Laundry with its green and white vans parked outside. Inside in a corner stood a huge electric motor which drove a belt which ran all the other appliances including an enormous pressing machine. All the bustle was accompanied by the racket from the motor and belts. Next door to that was a small gents' barbers – with one chair, doing one style! It was 4d for boys, 6d for men but no boys on Saturdays.

At the end of Brewery Lane stood Vanners Farm which Roger found a bit scary when he was a boy. It was surrounded by a high wall, where one tiny gate led to a dark, overgrown house. Further along Brewery Lane was Mr and Mrs Gillam's shop. They were both only about four feet tall, but had big personalities. Their shop was the only one in Byfleet open on a Sunday.

Byfleet had two newsagents—Chuters and Rowleys (now the Post Office). You could get paper rounds there from the age of 13, and although you were not supposed to start until 7am, Roger worked out that if he started earlier, he would have time to complete his round and get back in time to do the round of anyone who had not turned up, thus earning extra cash. You were only allowed to do the Sunday deliveries once you were 15 years old.

Across the road and set back from the street was Boundy's haberdashers, a very dark shop that sold everything for your home sewing needs. Then came Roscoe's garage where Roger reckoned you could get anything. The garage claimed to have the cheapest petrol in Surrey! Further along was Foxlake Farm. Roger says this looked like something Constable could have painted, with a thatched farm house, a big barn and fields where Parvis Road is now. The farm sold dogs, and would have a pen with puppies in next to the road to tempt customers.

Digby Way now marks the site of Digby Stores. You could get anything here from a dustbin to a plough, as well as seed, tools and brooms. Across the road was a parade of shops containing a ladies' hairdressers, a shoe repairers, and a childrenswear shop on the corner which also sold toys. Roger had appeared on the television show "Double Your Money" and won £32—which he spent in the toy shop on model railway.

On the corner opposite the Clock House was the Blue Anchor and then the last shop in Byfleet, Roger's favourite, Mr Butler's leatherwear shop. He did anything to do with leather from shoe repairs to saddles and horse equipment. But best of all, Mr Butler would sell the large rubber bands and small leather pouches necessary to make catapults!

Around the corner stood Dr Alexander's house, where the waiting room was on one level and then you were summoned up to the next level to see the doctor. Around this were several large houses which now only remain as street names—Old Orchard, Wey Barton, Weymede. Then, before you left Byfleet, Plough Bridges crossed the river, where the boys would dare each other to jump off.

Finally Roger shared some of his memories of the British Restaurant that opened during the Second World War in the Village Hall. These provided workers with a decent hot meal, and made the most of what was available with rationing. The restaurant also served as the school canteen, so every day Roger would join the crocodile of children in the playground and walk across the road for his lunch. Just through the doors was a ticket kiosk where the meal tickets were dispensed. The main hall was full of tables, with some more on the stage. Miss Stoker was in overall control, a tall, slim lady who lived in a flat at the back of the hall. Her second in command, always called Aunty Molly, was a larger lady who led the communal singing as the workers prepared the food. The washing up was a mammoth task done by Lily in a huge tin sink at the back door. There were two permanent servers, Mrs Heaton who did the main course and Mrs Markey who did the sweets. Unfortunately Mrs Markey had a permanent dew drop hanging from her nose from November to March—which didn't always miss the plate! It was plain fare—brown soup from a tin (always the same), dishes like spam or rissoles, and puddings again from a tin. For tuppence extra you could have bread and cheese. Each cook had their own responsibilities—and nothing was ever undercooked.

The timetable was the same every day. At 9am the pig van would arrive to collect the waste from the day before. The food preparation began, but everything stopped at 10.30am when the workers would gather around a large table for tea and bread and cheese. After all the meals had been served and the washing up done the place was hosed down and given a good clean. Roger would often try to get back from school in time to help with the hosing! The restaurant went on until the early 60s, after most of the other British Restaurants had closed. This was helped by the fact that Vickers canteen put its prices up, so the workers headed for the cheaper meals in Byfleet. However, soon the village wanted its hall back, there were letters to the press, and eventually the council gave in and closed the restaurant.

We all found Roger's memories fascinating and very much enjoyed our trip down memory lane.

In May Julian Temple gave our post-AGM talk on **The Industrial Archaeology of Brooklands**.

Much has been discovered about the development of the Brooklands site from a variety of sources.

Photo archives can contain a great visual record of the track's life. An aerial photo from 1939 showed the Vickers factory, the flying village, Hawkers' assembly shed and the airfield. The site was much changed during the war. Factory buildings were built out onto the track and camouflage netting was put up. After the war ended the track was never repaired. The last major review of the track was carried out in 2002. All the banking and the Campbell circuit are now protected, and any planning applications which affect it have to be sent to English Heritage for their approval.

Julian also showed pictures he had found taken by the RAF only hours after the air raid on 4th September 1940. The bombs seem to have been dropped in clusters of three, and the damage done to the hangars, factory buildings and track could be clearly seen. 88 people were killed in the raid, although the number may be higher.

After the raid, it was decided to spread out the production sites to avoid further bombing, and several hangars were built around the area. One such hangar was until recently the Cobham Bus Museum by Silvermere. Another is now the aircraft hangar at Brooklands Museum. In 2009/10 Brooklands applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund to do a feasibility study on the hangar with a view to restoring it. It is hoped to move it over until it is off the track. In carrying out the study staff uncovered the edges of the original racetrack and the entry lane from the paddock.

The track itself has had a bit of a hard time since its heyday. During the war gun placements were set into the track. The holes to set the poles which held up the camouflage netting were never properly filled in, and since racing stopped trees and weeds have taken root. In 1969 part of the track collapsed after serious flooding the previous year. The Hennibique bridge carrying the track across the Wey was held up by concrete piles driven into the river bed. Debris from the floods piled up against these, eventually causing the bridge to collapse. The bridge was then demolished. Contractors also dig up the track from time to time, especially on the Byfleet banking opposite Tescos, which they really should not do without permission from English Heritage. Some contractors are better than others! Veolia actually consulted Brooklands and English Heritage on the best mix on concrete to use to fill in their work.

Julian commented on many of Brooklands' familiar features. He showed 2 photos of the Test Hill, one as it looks now and one from about 50 or 60 years ago. It was almost unrecognisable as it was completely overgrown with none of the white railings on show today. A wooden hut had been built on the foundations of the old grandstand, but it was not known what this was for. The Brooklands memorial, which you used to see from the railway, was relocated within the museum when Mercedes Benz World was built. Julian also showed photos of the Malcolm Campbell Circuit which was added in 1937. This was designed by Malcolm Campbell himself in order to try and bring the crowds back to Brooklands and away from the new racing circuits such as Donington.

Julian had also had a chance to look around the air raid shelters across Brooklands Road in the sand pits (where David Lloyd's gym is now). 5,500 people could be accommodated within the complex built into the hill. Inside some of the original signs are still in place. Employees and their families were allowed to stay the night after the big air raid in 1940. In fact two days later the Germans made a return visit to try and bomb the Hurricane factory. Julian had found a photo of some of the unexploded bombs being detonated, which actually showed some of the houses painted on canvas which were used to try and hide the distinctive shape of the track and fool the bombers overhead.

The memories of people who used to work at Vickers or who remembered the track were also valuable. Sometimes things can be found to verify these memories. The Heritage Society had been told by several members of a Warwick plane crashing in a field at the top of Rectory Lane. Then Julian actually found a picture of it in the field, with a report of the incident. The plane was number PN773 which flew on 2nd January 1945. It did a short flip over the banking at Byfleet and hit some powerlines. Luckily the pilot managed to land it in the field rather than on anyone's house. It was badly broken up, with the tail section broken off and the cockpit only just staying attached.

Current research topics being undertaken include a wildlife survey being undertaken by the Elmbridge Natural History Society. Julian would also like to investigate the Itala Car Works which was in the original building taken over by Vickers in 1915. There is also work to be done on researching the local private houses gradually taken over by Vickers or BAe, such as West Hall and Pinewood House which became Vickers' design office. Another topic is the development of the Flying Village and listing all the damage and changes made to the racing track.

It was a fascinating glimpse of the traces and clues left to Brooklands' busy past and we thanked Julian for his interesting talk.

QUESTION AND QUERIES

We have received the following queries and wonder if any of our members can help. If you have any information or can point us in the right direction, please let us know. You can either leave a note for the Heritage Society at the library, ring Tessa on 01932 351559 or leave a note on our forum page on our website www.byfleetheritage.org.uk. Thank you.

Details of local picture framing firm.

"Our daughter who runs an artist shop/picture framing in Totnes, Devon has taken on a framing job of a painting/picture with a label stuck at the back:

H W Mead, Dealer in Antique furniture
Cabinet making, upholstery and French polishing
Picture framing

The label has a 1920/30s look about it and the question is whether local history records throw any details of when/where this firm operated."

Apparently the label gives only West Byfleet as an address. Jim has checked in the 1928 street directory but can find no reference. Does anyone out there remember H W Mead or can tell us anything more about them?

ROYSTON CHASE HOTEL



Does anyone remember a high embankment next to the Royston Chase Hotel that used to stand on Plough Green?

Apparently this used to run along the side of the road opposite the shops, in between the library and the Plough Pub. There were trees along the top and it hid the hotel from public view.

Might someone have taken a picture of it? Most of the pictures we have

in our archive have obviously been taken from inside the embankment in order to show the hotel, although the ones we have shown here might be of it. Might anyone have a better view from the street outside? Please let us know if you do.



SOCIETY SNIPPETS

BYFLEET LIBRARY

As you know, Byfleet library is still under threat. The Byfleet Library Action Group have been questioning Surrey very closely on the figures used to decide which libraries should close. They have sent a long list of the errors to the relevant staff at Surrey County Council and are awaiting their replies with interest. An official complaint has also been sent to the Information Commissioners Office about Surrey County Council's failure to respond to requests for information. Under the Freedom of Information Act Surrey should have responded within a certain time, but they failed to do so.



Keep an eye out for the latest developments in the local press and also the Byfleet Library Action Group website, www.byfleetlibrary.org.



**DON'T FORGET—THE HERITAGE SOCIETY PHOTO COMPETITION
IS ON AGAIN!**
CLOSING DATE IS 2ND SEPTEMBER 2011.
**FOR FULL DETAILS SEE NOTICES IN THE LIBRARY OR ON OUR
WEBSITE.**
GOOD LUCK!

St John's Church, West Byfleet
is celebrating its centenary and is looking for any information on or pictures of the church to help with the celebrations. If you have anything you think might be of interest, please let us know.



**Are you
the
Oldest
Scout in
the
Village?
Or do you
know
someone
who might be?**



DON'T FORGET—PARISH DAY!

This year Parish Day will be held on Saturday 16th July on Byfleet Rec. The Heritage Society will be there and we would love to have your company. If you could also find half an hour or so to help man the stand, hopefully in the sun, that would be even better. Please ring Tessa on 351559 if you can help out. Thank you

1st Byfleet Scout Group is celebrating 100 years of Scouting in the village—quite an achievement! They would be very interested in getting in touch with Byfleet Scouts from previous decades and hearing about their memories of days gone by.

If you would like to add your memories of Scouting in Byfleet to the collection, please contact:

Tim Hookins on timhookins@googlemail.com
Or let us know via the usual methods and we will pass any information on. Thank you!