

For the Record...

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



April's meeting dealt with matters of government, as we welcomed George Cubie to tell us about his long career at the Houses of Parliament.

George began at Westminster in 1966 and worked as part of the Clerks Department until 2005. The Clerks are on hand to advise Members on the rules and practices of the House. The House of Commons was a very changeable place. One of the tasks given to junior clerks was to tick off names entering the Division Lobby. George stuck out his arm to ask one Member his name as he passed through and was told in a rather steely voice, "Heath. Edward." The Clerks are completely impartial and whereas the Civil Service works for the Government of the day, the Clerks work for everyone.

The Palace of Westminster forms part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and there are many dilemmas on how to both preserve it while using it from day to day and accommodating visitors. With modern technology, you are now able to take a virtual tour of Westminster Hall, although George strongly recommends a visit in the flesh. Beyond this historic hall is St Stephen's Hall, which stands on the site of a chapel where the House of Commons used to sit from the 1540s. The Members then sat in the choir stalls, leading to the arrangement of the seating today.

Towards the House of Commons chamber is the Members' Lobby, which can become very busy at times. A broken archway from bombing in 1945 has been left as a memorial. Through this arch is the Commons chamber, which always strikes people as smaller than expected. When full it can become extremely noisy, but during dramatic moments you can hear a pin drop.

During his long career George has seen many changes. When he started there in 1966 there was a large number of members with wartime experience. Many others had worked down the mines or done similar jobs before entering politics. For many MPs now politics has been their only career. There has been a huge shift in the balance between men and women; in 1966 there were 26 female MPs; after the last election there are 145. And there are now 28 black and Asian MPs.

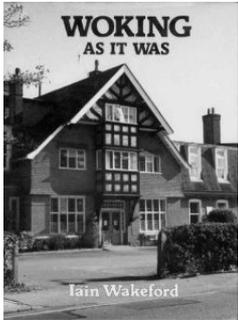
Party discipline has also changed. Back in the 1950s you could easily go a couple of parliaments without a single back bench revolt, whereas now revolt is in the air with almost every issue. Speeches now tend to be less exuberant and shorter than in 1966. Time limits are now applied at the Speaker's discretion. Parliament is less reported in the newspapers than it was, but this is compensated by the "gavel to gavel" coverage on the BBC Parliament channel. This has also led to a difference in attendance in the chamber, as many MPs are present within the Houses of Parliament, but tend to work in their offices while keeping an eye on proceedings via the television.

Some things have not changed, such as the role of the Speaker. He has considerable discretion within the Chamber. He (or she!) decides who will speak and selects amendments for discussion. One of his key roles is to allow urgent questions (much to the annoyance of ministers) and also, while the Speaker does not usually vote, he holds the casting vote if needed. The Speaker also has administrative responsibility for running the actual building of the Palace of Westminster, employing permanent staff and dealing with Freedom of Information requests.

The big theatrical moment of the week is Prime Minister's Questions, which is a great opportunity for short, topical discussion. Rules on the notice required for questions have changed, and topicality is now king. Tony Blair changed Questions from twice to once a week, as so much time was taken up by briefing, but this change has impacted on the Parliamentary week—it is now difficult to schedule serious business for a Thursday. The Speaker has absolute discretion on whether to allow urgent questions, and this is a very good way of ensuring that the debate remains topical.

George revealed much more about life in the Houses of Parliament that there is not room here to relate, but he did mention that the Parliamentary handbook of procedures says that "good temper and moderation are the characteristics of Parliamentary language". He left us to ponder that, as we thanked him for an interesting view of life in Parliament from the inside.





After the business of our AGM in May, we welcomed back long time Society supporter Iain Wakeford to share with us the trials and tribulations he encountered when setting up his own website.

Iain's guided walks around the local area are well known and enjoyed, and he has also published quite a few books over the years. But with the onset of computer technology, he found that more and more people would ask him if he had a website. This he has finally produced, although he found it much harder work than he was expecting.

The result is **www.heritagewalks.org**

His aims were threefold. Firstly Iain wanted to advertise his Heritage Walks which take place once a month on a Sunday afternoon. Secondly he could advertise and sell his local history publications, and Iain could make available on line booklets that would prove too costly to print. Thirdly he could make some of his vast archive available on line and publish the notes and illustrations that make up his column in the Woking Informer each week.

If you go to Iain's site you will see four buttons up on the left hand side of the screen. The Diary button, as you might expect, takes you to details of the Heritage Walks for the year and any upcoming special events, such as the H G Wells walk, and the Boxing Day walk to Woking Palace.

The Books button shows what publications are available. In the "old days" Iain had all the information for his walks arranged on index cards. Then he went hi-tech and put the information onto a tablet. Once the walks were on the tablet, it was easy to turn them into online booklets, and these are available from the website to buy, print out and take with you.

Also available to buy are six booklets on Woking villages and copies of the Woking History Journal (now otherwise unavailable). Iain has also included a second hand books page where local history enthusiasts can pick up second hand copies of books by other authors, Surrey Archaeological Society volumes etc. Any money from sale of books goes towards maintaining the website.

Iain has divided the Archive section into several sections for easier access. These are Deeds, Magazines, Programmes, Guides, Council and Others. Iain has listed a range of the items that he holds, and those highlighted in blue are available to view. Those in black are items he has, but has not yet scanned and uploaded. A cut off date was necessary, so although he is still collecting items, he has decided to put nothing more recent than 2000 onto the site.

There is a wealth of items here for the local history enthusiast. There are estate agents' brochures for properties all over Woking, including Weymede and Clock House in Byfleet, while the Magazine section contains a selection of parish magazines, local community newsletters and magazines, and some special supplements from the local press, such as the Woking News and Mail Peace Celebrations in 1919. There are programmes from Byfleet Parish Days, the Manor Infants' School Wild West Bonanza in 1974 (anyone remember that?), and a Ritz Cinema programme from 1937. The Guides and Directories section features such gems as a 1905 Homeland Handbook for Woking, the Woking Chamber of Trade Guide from 1930 and a guide to the Garden of Remembrance at St John's Crematorium. Iain has obviously spent a lot of time and effort putting many street directories on line, including several Kelly's Directories and some Woking Street Directories. The earliest one is Arthur Althorp's Woking Almanac and Directory from 1888. Hours of fun here for everyone!

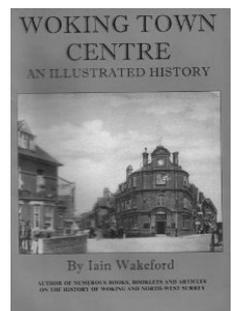
The Council section contains some minutes of Council meetings, and Iain has plans to add some from the war years. There are also such treasures as the plans for the Sewage Works houses in Carter Lane, Old Woking and the North West Surrey Regional Planning Scheme from 1928.

The "Other" section presents a wonderful assortment of items, including the Midwife's Register for 1914-1926, local invoices, and the St Nicholas' Home (later the Rowley Bristow) annual report.

As Iain wanted to keep the website as simple as possible, there is not yet any search facility or a forum, but he is always pleased to receive feedback and suggestions at the email address on the site.

As for the future, Iain is going to let us be his guide. Are there any documents listed that people feel should be scanned as a priority? Are there any items of research that people particularly wish to see? Would we like to see any other of his walks or booklets published on line? Or do any of us have any documents that Iain could scan and make available on his on line archive? If so, go along to the website and let him know!

Everyone was very pleased to hear about Iain's website, which makes so many interesting articles available to browse in the comfort of our own homes, and I think more than a few of us will be glued to our screens in the very near future.





In June we took a break from the Day Centre and travelled up the road to West Byfleet, where Rev Alan Elkins kindly gave us a tour of St John's in its centenary year.

In 1871 the Rector of Byfleet, Rev N J Spicer, decided that a Chapel of Ease should be established at Byfleet Corner. The Industrial School had just moved into the area from Wandsworth, and it was felt that the distance to Byfleet church would be too great for people to travel to church.

The first church was the "Tin Tabernacle", which was erected on the left hand side of the entrance to Broadoaks. This was opened on 22nd September 1872 and served the area until the present church was built. It is still in use today,

over on Bisley Rifle Range.

On 25th April 1900 the first meeting of a church Building Committee was held, and a plot of about 1 acre acquired at Byfleet Corner. In 1901 the Committee appointed Mr W D Caroe as architect, who duly submitted plans for a church for 350-400 people at a cost of £6,057. Fundraising began and subscriptions were collected, but by May 1903 the project was abandoned. Unfortunately the Parish had to spend £3,000 on getting the local school up to scratch and it was felt that the parish could not support both projects. The Building Committee did not resume until 1906, and even then nothing much was done until 1908, when the Bishop of Winchester held an enquiry and decided that a church should be built for 600 people.

So on 19th August 1909 an agreement was signed between Mr W G Tarrant, Mr Frederick Cornelius Stoop, Mrs Mary Emma Ruston and Mrs Marguerita Lubbock that the building should begin and the church completed by 30th April 1911. After much fundraising the foundation stone was laid on 15th June 1910 by Mrs Stoop. This can be seen on the outside East wall, and the mallet and trowel used were presented to the church by the Stoop family in 1937.

However, by 24th June 1912 there was still a debt of £3,000 outstanding. If a building is not free from debt it cannot be consecrated, so the Bishop of Winchester performed a dedication, with a consecration to follow. The local people set about raising the outstanding money, and a Dutch Village and Fair was planned to take place in the grounds of West Hall on 13th and 14th June 1913. Sadly Mrs Money, the Rector's wife, died on the eve of the fair, and the event was almost called off. However, it was decided that Mrs Money would have wanted nothing more than for the event to take place, so it was held and raised £2,073 9s 4d. This was £500 short, but this was soon made up by local benefactors. The debt-free St John's was duly consecrated by the Bishop of Guildford on 11th October 1913.

Rev Elkins pointed out many interesting features of the church's construction. There is no graveyard, but part of St Mary's churchyard in Byfleet is set aside for West Byfleet burials, and an amount given for its upkeep.

The windows are all plain glass, except for those in the Memorial chapel, and if you look at the west end windows the top sections make the outline of the Holy Dove with wings outstretched. The carvings on the tops of the pillars that line the nave are different on three sides, and the carved bosses on top of the pillars are engraved with SM on the left hand side (for Mary the Mother of God) and the Lamb of God on the right hand side (for her son). Some of these pillars are actually hollow, and it is thought that this was to help project the sound of the vicar's voice around the church. The roof is a very fine barrel roof, like an upturned boat, with no cross beams, giving the church a lofty, open feel.

The font was the gift of Mr Stoop and is made up of 4 large blocks of Hopton Wood stone. It weighs 2.5 tons and cost £63 with £5 extra for an inscription around the top. The altar in a small chapel in the South Transept is of interest. This was originally a pew in the Tin Tabernacle, converted into an altar table after the Second World War.

The Memorial Chapel has the only stained glass in the church, designed by Messrs Morris & Co of Merton Abbey, and depict themes of Remembrance. Two memorial tablets are inscribed into the wall to commemorate the local men who fell in both World Wars. Next to the chapel are the clergy stalls and choir seats. These are dedicated to the memory of George Barron and Charlotte Holroyd and feature carvings of the Green Man, a pagan symbol but often found in old churches. At the East end of the church is a beautiful wooden carved reredos, donated by Mr and Mrs C Spearman Armstrong in memory of their son, 2nd Lt Guy Spearman Armstrong who was killed at Loos in 1915.

We ended our tour with a trip up to the bell tower, for those who felt like some exercise. This was a bit of a climb, but worth the effort as we emerged into a loft space in the steeple with the bell hanging over our heads. The steeple was last reshingled in 1969 with 5,000 Canadian Red Cedar tiles.

It was lovely to have such a detailed look at one of our best known local landmarks, and we thanked Rev Elkins for an interesting evening.

SOCIETY SNIPPETS

CAN ANYONE HELP?

Andy Andrews is writing a history of Byfleet Bowls Club and has come across references to the Byfleet Rovers.

Does anyone remember the Rovers? Or were you perhaps even a member, or know someone who was?

If you have any ideas, please give Andy a ring on 01932 345640
Thank you.

PARISH DAY

Once again it's time to celebrate on Byfleet Recreation Ground—come rain or shine!

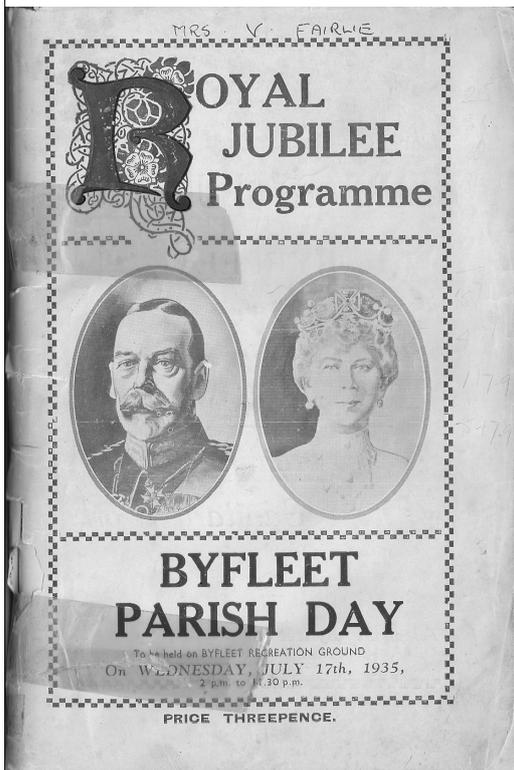
This year Parish Day will be held on Saturday 21st July. The Heritage Society will be there to join in the fun, and if you can spare half an hour or an hour to help man the stand we would love to hear from you. Please give Tessa a ring on 01932 351559 if you would like to help out. Thank you.

Members may be interested to know about the formation of the **Oatlands Heritage Group**, complete with new web site at www.oatlands-heritage.org. Oatlands and Byfleet are closely linked through the Duke of York. The Yorks were the last royal owners of Oatlands, but also of Byfleet Manor, but this connection ended when the Manor had to be sold to pay off gambling debts!

This story, scans of some rather lovely postcards and photos of the area, a fascinating collection of little known facts and more are all at the website, so why not go over and have a look at our near neighbour.

In this Diamond Jubilee year, here is a selection of Parish Day programmes from other years in which there has been royal celebration.

George V's Silver Jubilee 1935



Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II
1953

Queen Elizabeth II's Silver
Jubilee 1977

