



Byfleet Heritage Society.

Issue 17

Newsletter

December 2001

Apologies for the lateness of this edition of the newsletter, but I was holding off until we knew that the book, **"Byfleet, A Village of England"** was up and running. As members will know, thanks to Jeff Sechiari (who had the idea in the first place), the permission of the Stevens family, a loan from Byfleet Parish Council, a generous donation from Sir Cliff Richard's charitable trust and the committee's time, the book is now available. More apologies from me for not putting the price onto the notes I sent round—anyone who thought they were going mad when they couldn't see it—don't worry, it was me! The book will sell for **£9.95**, which is less than a tanner for over 1,000 of history—a bargain!

The book is now available from **Yeomans stationers** and **Kelly's Newsagents** (opposite the Blue Anchor). If you didn't make it to the launch on 8th December, reserved copies can still be collected from the library—just ask the staff when you drop in.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS



Thursday 13th DECEMBER:
Christmas Social.

Come and join us all for a mince pie! Bring along any old pictures or memorabilia to share.

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

2002

Thursday 24th JANUARY

The Byfleet Log Boat

M. Alexander from Guildford Museum will speak about the log boat discovered in the River Wey in 1906, and the recent work carried out on it.

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet, 8.15pm

Thursday 21st FEBRUARY

David Chapman's Byfleet photos

Mike Webber will show some of David Chapman's photos of Byfleet in the 60s and 70s.

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

Thursday 21st MARCH

Speaker to be confirmed

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm.

Thursday 18th APRIL

Gordon Knowles "Parry Thomas and the Land Speed Record"

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

Thursday 23rd MAY

Society AGM—speaker to be confirmed

Byfleet Village Hall, Room A, 7.30pm

Thursday 20th JUNE

Speaker to be confirmed

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

Saturday 27th JULY

Visit to Surrey History Centre

2pm, Surrey History Centre, Goldsworth Road, Woking

Numbers will be restricted to 12 only. We will take names nearer the time

Help still wanted

As you can see by the number of speakers still to be confirmed for next year, we are still in need of help in organising our events. Due to being busy with the book republishing and other commitments, organising next year's events was left until rather late, as no-one was free enough to take it on.

We have a list of contacts for events, and we add to it all the time. What we need is for someone to allocate a couple of names each to everyone on the committee to try for each month of the year. The committee members can then go and book the speakers. You would not need to serve on the committee if you didn't want, and it should be no more than a once a year job.

Please consider helping us out—ring Tessa Westlake on 01932 351559 if you can help, or would like any more details. Very many thanks.

For the Record...

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



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FROM THIS YEAR'S AGM. This was the first AGM without Doug. His sad death last August came as a shock to us all, and he was full of life and ideas right to the end. A small commemorative board and a plaque will be put up to him in the Heritage Centre. Mrs Bright has generously given the Society a donation in Doug's memory, which we plan to spend on a projector stand and screen for use at the meetings. The Heritage Society and Centre are the results of Doug's constant attempts to improve Byfleet for the residents, and we hope that we can carry on in the way he would have wanted. The village has also recently lost "Mrs Byfleet", Elsie

Stranks, who supported Doug in his attempts to start the Society, and we send our sympathy to her husband, Alf.

The topic most under discussion over the year and currently is the plan to relocate the library. We have met with Linda Piercy and Rose Wilson of Surrey County Council Community Services, and many of you will have seen the plans on display at the library. It has been explained that the move to a smaller building will be more in keeping with the user numbers at Byfleet, and that the building has functioned well as a library in Epsom for some time. We appreciate this, but feel that this does not take into account the numbers of people now using the library who do not go to borrow a book. In the time that has elapsed since it was decided to move the library, the staff have worked extremely hard to turn the library into more of a community space, used by, among others, the baby clinic, computer club, and scrabble and whist clubs. We hope to meet again soon with Rose Wilson from Surrey to discuss how our displays might fit into the new building. We have been told that the library has every intention of taking the heritage society with it, and we will continue to work with Surrey to see what can be achieved, but at the same time we have let them know of our reservations, as I'm sure some of you have already done too. In the meantime, keep watching for more developments, and continue to support our library.

I'd like to thank our two new committee members, Roy Elderkin and Beryl Marlow, for volunteering to help us out. I'd also like to thank the longer serving committee members too for sticking with us! Also many thanks to those of you who aren't on the committee but who help out behind the scenes, like Pat, Janet and Margaret who keep us supplied with refreshments every meeting, and Mike Webber who is always willing to lend a hand when he can, and those of you who have lent us photos or material to copy and add to our archive. Thank you all very much indeed.

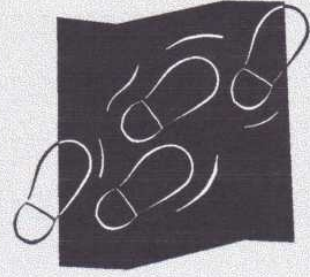
We have continued to hold monthly meetings with a variety of speakers, which we hope you enjoy. In November we held a Vickers evening to collect memories and photos of the famous aircraft factory, which was very well attended and we reaped a harvest of photos, memorabilia and even four model aeroplanes from the Chinnery family, which have been mounted in the Heritage Centre by Roy and make a welcome addition to our displays. Thanks to all of you who lent your precious photos for copying.

On the subject of displays, plans are underway to revamp the display cabinet to make a representation of Evans the cobblers, which used to be in Chertsey Road. This was the inspiration of Paddy Holroyde, who heard of the shop through one of her oral history interviews, and we hope to unveil our efforts soon.

For the future, you will have heard of our plans to republish the book "Byfleet, A Village of England", and many thanks to those of you who returned the request form sent out a while ago. We are in the process of gaining funds to allow us to take the project forward. Thanks to Jeff Sechiari for looking into the idea, and also for producing the Society's journal, which we have all read and enjoyed. The next issue should be available very soon.

And so another year has come and gone. Thanks for all your support, and we hope to continue to grow in the future. To finish I'd like to offer the Society's congratulations to the Byfleet Oral History Group which, led by Paddy Holroyde has recently won a national award, a NOJO (Not Old, Just Older) for the use of technology in their project. We hope to work with the Group to provide tapes containing extracts from people's memories for visitors to the Heritage Centre to listen to as they view the displays, really bringing history to life. Congratulations to them, and here's to the future, whatever it may hold.

On a warm evening on *June 26th*, members joined Iain Wakeford for one of his Heritage Walks to Byfleet and Wisley Churches. The walk commenced at The Anchor at Pyrford Lock. The present building dates from 1934, but the original bar was in the kitchen of the lock keeper's cottage. Also on the site were stables and rooms for the bargemen. Walking towards Byfleet on the towpath, Iain told us of the Wey Navigation Canal. In the 1650s Sir Richard Weston originally had the idea to build the canal to irrigate his own land, but soon realised that it could be used for navigation. Although the canal was quickly built, the family never profited from it. First of all Sir Richard's partner, Pitson, seems to have been less than honest, and there were many law suits against the canal for not being built properly. John Sale of Pyrford's land was cut in two by the canal, and he had to make a 1½ mile detour to cross a bridge. He sued for £180 for 18 years' worth of damages, plus £10 per annum for future detouring for good measure. Dodds Bridge, where Mr Sale had to cross, follows the original path from Pyrford to Byfleet, and you can still walk between the two today along the towpath.



Murrays Bridge was built in 1761, and has been known locally as Wests Bridge, or Stoops Bridge, after the various owners of West Hall where the bridge goes. A lot of the stonework in the bridges near Weybridge actually comes from the demolished Oatlands Palace.

Murrays Lane leads to Byfleet Church, which is mentioned in the Domesday Book, although the present building dates from c.1310, with Victorian additions. By walking through the churchyard and to the end of Sanway Road, the way to Wisley is found. As we passed the sewage works, we thought of the Iron Age village that formerly stood here, remains of which were found at the beginning of the 20th century.

The footpath, nicknamed Muddy Lane, as it never seems to be dry, leads to Wisley, which means "damp, marshy meadow". It is mentioned in the Domesday Book, containing 4 villagers, 4 smallholders and 2 slaves. A mill and church are mentioned, and enough woodland to feed 6 pigs. Church Farm was owned by Robert Derisley, brother of Lloyd. They started a meat round in Wisley and Byfleet, and in 1894 opened a butchers shop in Byfleet, which still stands by the War Memorial.

The present Wisley Church dates from the mid 12th century, and during renovations the original Saxon foundations were discovered. It's original dedication has been lost in the mists of time.

A pleasant walk following the public footpaths across the golf course brought us back to our starting point for some well earned refreshment. We thanked Iain for an interesting tour around some of our local sights, and for uncovering some of the history on our doorstep.

Subscriptions

Thanks to those of you who renewed their subs after the AGM, and for those of you who added donations to your subscriptions. Your support is very much appreciated.

For anyone whose renewal form got lost in the hurly burly of everyday life, another one is enclosed. We hope you decide to renew. Thank you

On 19th July Maggie Vaughan-Lewis of *Surrey History Centre* spoke about the Centre's work. Many people's image of an archive was of a dark room full of dusty old books and piles of papers. But the History Centre is anything but! Surrey were lucky enough to get a brand new building in Goldsworth Road (although Maggie did warn about the speed-bumps in the car park, which were a little on the mean side!). A new building was needed as the sites at Kingston and Guildford were no longer suitable. But the £3million budget for the new place was proving to be on the tight side. However, just at the time the plans were being discussed the Lottery started, and the centre was lucky enough to gain funding through this source.

There are three parts to the building. The front forms the public space, the back holds the offices and processing areas, and in the middle, buffered from temperature changes by being away from any outside walls, are the storage spaces. In the Reception area you can register to use the reading rooms, using your Surrey library card or a CARN (County Archive Research Network), or temporary day tickets can be issued. There is a bookstall, and also lockers for holding coats and bags which are not allowed in the reading room for security and also to avoid clutter. A refreshment room is provided for eating a packed lunch if you are making a day of it, and on the left hand side is are rooms holding temporary exhibitions and for lectures, courses and seminars. On the right of the reception area are computers where the public can access the centre's databases and also the internet in general.

The Reading Room has microfiches and film readers, to allow you to study the Parish Registers that are held here on microfiche. If it all seems a bit daunting, there are helpers on hand to help you get started and advise on the best way to go about your research. The room is north facing, so no strong sunlight gets onto the documents – or the readers! Also available are the Surrey film and video archive, and the Byfleet Oral History Group tapes. The centre can transfer your old film onto video and also check any old film for nitrate content, as this can be a fire hazard. If you donate your old film to the archive, you get a copy of it on video for free.

Many of the documents that come to the Centre are dirty, damp, torn and even burnt and sooty, but the Centre can probably conserve most things, and it doesn't have to be beautiful or old for inclusion or to be of interest. Items can be frozen to get rid of any bugs, or put into ventilation units. Every item is thoroughly cleaned before going to the strong rooms. One thing that is extremely difficult to deal with is parchment that has been damaged by fire and wet. This causes the items to shrink, but although small, they mostly remain legible.

Thanks to the internet a lot of research can be done in the comfort of your own home before taking a trip to the Centre. There is the Archive Index Database, which is regularly updated as items are added to the Centre's archives. A reference number and brief description of the item is given, and 15 pages of items on Byfleet and 11 pages for Pyrford were found. The Collection Catalogue is an itemised description of documents held at the Centre. Fifty percent of items are on the list, which is being updated all the time.

All kinds of documents are held for public viewing at the Centre – diaries, quarter session records, business and family letters and papers, or parish registers. These all help in piecing together our local past. So if you have any papers or records that you no longer want to store, don't forget that the Surrey History Centre might very well be interested. After all, they rely on the public now to provide the records of the future.



Remember

The book **“Byfleet, A Village of England”** has been reprinted by the Society, and was launched at Byfleet Library on Saturday 8th December. The book is available from Yeomans stationers and Kellys Newsagents. Reserved copies can still be collected from Byfleet Library, or ring Tessa Westlake to arrange delivery. **Only £9.95!!!**

Makes the perfect Christmas present for the history enthusiast who has everything!!

The rain held off on 23rd September for members to enjoy a walk to Wisley Common with Heath Ranger Dave Boddy. Members met by the Manor Bridge for a gentle walk along the Wey, where Himalayan and Orange Balsams were in flower. We also found a large variety of fungi among the long grass and leaf mould in the woods—something my 6 year old son, William, greatly enjoyed.

We met Dave Boddy at the bridge over the M25, and soon left the traffic noise behind to walk down through the woods to Wisley Common. The Surrey Heath is actually a man made landscape, where trees have been cleared to create farmland thousands of years ago. The land has since been kept clear by grazing, and use of the heathland plants for firewood and things such as fencing and broom making. Now that these activities are no longer so widespread, the heath is maintained by clearing any encroaching trees, although parts of the heath are grazed by rare breeds.

The heath is a very specialised landscape with its own flora and fauna. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and rare birds such as nightjars, wood larks and Dartford warblers are being encouraged to return. On our walk we saw a Common Lizard sheltering on the heath, and Dave showed us a patch of sundew, the carnivorous plant—another thing William found fascinating!

All in all it was a very interesting and relaxing afternoon. We are very lucky to have such a green and open space on our own doorsteps, and one with such a unique selection of wildlife. Dave runs working parties to maintain the heath on the first Sunday in the month during the winter, meeting at the Wren's Nest car park. For further details please ring Dave on 01932 862161.

Byfleet Heritage Society was given a taste of the area's Royal heritage when Michael Rose of Elmbridge Museum spoke to members about Oatlands Palace. The palace, long since disappeared, was built by Henry VIII from 1537-1545 on the site of a manor house belonging to the Reid family, and it is rumoured that he intended to marry his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves there. More of Henry's wives are associated with the palace. Jane Seymour, wife number 3, may have stayed there, and Catherine Parr, number 6, spent part of her honeymoon there. Her predecessor, Catherine Howard, was actually married at Oatlands in 1540, and by a bizarre twist of fate, the warrant for her execution was signed there two years later.

From existing contemporary sketches and descriptions, we can see that Oatlands was similar in style to the more famous Hampton Court Palace, and was actually 1.2 acres larger. It was just one of sixty-five royal residences and although Oatlands was one of the larger properties, tents still had to be set up outside the building to house the 600-1,000 people that travelled with the King on his progresses.

The facilities at Oatlands were varied and luxurious. There was a winch to lift Henry VIII onto his horse, and a viewing tower for the ladies to watch Henry at the hunt once he was mounted. The palace had at one time been moated, and this was later built over and incorporated into the drainage system. However, with up to 1,000 people living in the palace, the system found it hard to cope, and there is a theory that the reason the court moved about so much was to let the drains recover. However, to make up for the bad drains, Oatlands had running hot water – a real luxury!

Later monarchs also used Oatlands. Elizabeth I expanded the kitchens, and used to practice firing her cross-bow in the grounds. It is said that the tree she used for target practice still exists. James I gave the house to his wife Anne of Denmark, who also owned and rebuilt Byfleet Manor. She built a gatehouse designed by Inigo Jones in 1616, and grew mulberry trees in the grounds to try and breed silkworms. The ill-fated Charles I and Prince Rupert of the Rhine stayed at Oatlands during the Civil War, and there is a brass in Walton Church to a cavalier captain and his men who died during a skirmish at Kingston. Charles also stopped briefly at Oatlands after his escape from Hampton Court Palace. Sadly, after escaping the clutches of Oliver Cromwell, Charles decided to make for the Isle of Wight, but the keeper of Carisbrook Castle recaptured him and the rest, as they say, is history. Oliver Cromwell decided that there were too many royal residences for the country to support, and Oatlands was one of those condemned to demolition in 1650-52. The building materials were sold to pay the troops, and some of the bricks from the palace were used to build the locks on the Wey Navigation Canal which was being built at the time.

So not much remains of Oatlands Palace. An archway stands near Old Palace Road and there are several walls in the area in Tudor brick. These are possibly part of the original building, but could have been rebuilt using the old bricks. It has been suggested that Weybridge High Street follows the path it does because it used to lead to the gates of Oatlands and into the palace. There have also been persistent rumours about secret tunnels leading from the palace to Newark Priory or Hampton Court. Unfortunately they are nothing more exciting than some of the palace drains, some of which are 6 feet high, and so can be easily confused with the more romantic alternative.

Excavations have been carried out at various times from 1968-1984, and much about the layout of the original building was discovered. Results from the digs have not yet been published as the finds are still being researched. Members thanked Mr Rose for this most interesting look back into the past when Kings and Queens were some of our local residents.

SOCIETY NEWS

Hello and Goodbye!

Hello to Jim Allen, who although he has been on the committee since the Society started, has now taken over as chairman of the Society. Members will be very sorry to hear that Paddy Holroyde will be moving away from Byfleet very soon. Paddy did some sterling work for us as Events Organiser, a post she only gave up to start the Byfleet Oral History Group. The Group got off to a flying start, recording far in excess of their target number of interviews, and winning a national award for use of technology in their first year.

We'll all miss Paddy's company, enthusiasm and ideas, such as the representation of Evans the Cobblers in the Heritage Centre, and I'm sure you will join me in wishing her and Ray all the very best in their new home.

Wartime memories.

Does anyone know anything about air-raid shelters in the area? We know about the large one that used to stand opposite Vickers (where the Health Club is now). Any memories of any public shelters, or private ones in people's homes or gardens would be much appreciated.

Please leave a note at the library, or ring Jeff Sechiari on 01932 341084. Many thanks.

From the Byfleet Review, January 1948

LABEL IT

A number of local residents want some form of notice at the Village Hall. At present the only notice board relates to the Civic Restaurant, and residents feel that the building should be clearly labelled Village Hall.

(Incidentally, if anyone out there remembers the Civic Restaurant, or used to work or eat regularly there, we would love to hear about it. Please ring Tessa Westlake on 351559, or leave a note at the library).

A Very Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year
to all our members!!

**Don't forget!! Please consider helping out with our "Events"
- see front page! Thanks!**

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