



Byfleet Heritage Society.

Issue 5

Newsletter

October 1997

Issuing a newsletter is a frightening reminder of how quickly the year is going. We finished the summer with a lovely visit to Coxes Lock, which is somewhere we shall be returning for family walks. An account of our visit is inside. You will also see from this front page that a further diary of events and talks has been booked. We have still had no volunteers for the post of Events Organiser, so this time round each member of the committee had to book one event for a given month. It would be much less complicated to have just one person in charge. If you would like more details, please give one of the committee a ring. We've paved the way by booking ahead, so go on! Why not take the plunge!

I hope you had a good summer and that you enjoy this issue. Now we have Halloween, Guy Fawkes Night and Christmas to look forward to! Maybe in the long winter evenings that are coming you might put pen to paper and drop us a line or write us an article. And remember, if you have any comments or queries for the newsletter, please send them to

*Tessa Westlake, 8 Brewery Lane, Byfleet, (351559).*



**MAKE A NOTE IN YOUR DIARIES AS EVENTS WILL ONLY BE ANNOUNCED IN THE NEWSLETTER. AND DON'T FORGET TO TELL YOUR FRIENDS!!**

**Wednesday OCTOBER 15th:** "Before Byfleet" - a talk by Rob Poulton, County Archaeologist about the excavations at Brooklands and Wey Manor Farm. Room A, Byfleet Village Hall, 8.15pm.

**Friday NOVEMBER 21<sup>st</sup>:** "The Early History of Woking", a talk by Iain Wakeford. Room A, Byfleet Village Hall, 8.15pm

**Sunday DECEMBER 7<sup>th</sup>:** Come along for a pre Christmas drink at the Blue Anchor, Byfleet between 12 and 2pm. (Children allowed in the non-smoking area and garden only).

**Thursday JANUARY 8<sup>th</sup>:** "Heathland Harvest", a talk by well known local author

Chris Howkins on the medicinal and edible plants of the area. Room A, Byfleet Village Hall, 8.15pm.

**MARCH:** We plan a talk on West Hall - speaker and date to be confirmed - watch this space.

**Tuesday APRIL 21<sup>st</sup>:** An update and progress report of the Woking Museum and Arts and Crafts Centre by Director Amanda Devonshire. Byfleet Heritage Centre 8pm.

**MAY: Society AGM** and talk on Bygone Byfleet illustrated by slides of old postcards by Chris Glasow. Date to be confirmed.

**Coming Soon!**

**A return visit to West Hall and also a talk on Woking Palace  
Watch This Space!**

## For the Record...

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

On *Sunday July 27<sup>th</sup>* members enjoyed a walk on *Wisley Common* guided by Surrey County Council Ranger Dave Body, who certainly knew the natural history of the area. Contrary to the general public belief, Wisley Common is not natural but a product of Neolithic man who cut down the trees to provide space for farming. The soil became exhausted and abandoned. Trees could not recolonise the area since the sandy soils had become more acidic as the nutrients had been leached away until only heather plants could survive. The area was then used for rough grazing which also prevented trees from recolonising. Dave was also able to point out two long depressions and ridges where Iron Age men may have excavated iron ore long ago.

There are areas of woodland and some oaks are over three hundred years old. The guide enthused over the amount of wildlife that the oaks supported. He explained that because the inner core of the tree rots away, leaving only the living outer layers, this makes the tree lighter and more flexible. This was how the large oaks had resisted storms such as the well remembered one in 1987.

We saw some of the rangers' and volunteers' present work. In the past ditches have been dug to lower the water table but it is now gradually being raised to return the common to its previous state. Electric fences have been installed around one area so that cattle can graze the coarser grass and let the finer grasses prosper. In the process the bracken gets trampled down. The bracken causes problems since in the early Spring it gets very dry and heath fires are serious in Surrey. The rangers are improving fire breaks and Dave showed how they reinforce the sand with heather to prevent them getting badly rutted.

Volunteers are welcomed to help with the work on the common. Parties are organised on the first Sunday in every month from the Countryside Centre in Boldermere car park (off Wisley Lake). Telephone 0181 541 9463 for more details.

By Doug Bright

On a fine, if chilly, *September* evening members gathered at *Coxes Lock*. There Lengthsman Kevin Morgan talked about the industrial and natural history of the mill, mill pond and canal. The Wey Navigation Canal was built between 1651 and 1653, with Coxes Lock itself and the mill dating from the 1700s. Kevin's title of "Lengthsman", an officer responsible for a length of canal, dates from this period. Just to the side of the lock is a small stable, now sadly vandalised, but dating from the early days of the canal where the Shire horses that towed the barges were stabled on their journey to and from London.

The mill itself has had a varied history, being a textile mill, then an iron foundry and lastly being owned by a corn merchant. The last barge left in 1969, and the mill was converted into flats about 10 years ago, but we could see from Kevin's old postcards that the exterior has changed but little. Sadly, although the mill machinery was all fully functional and even included its own dynamo for making electricity, everything was scrapped when conversion began. The water wheel has long since gone, but the mill pond which was built to feed it still exists.

This pond is now a haven for all sorts of wildlife. Chub, roach, tench and pike inhabit the waters as well as water boatmen, snails, may-fly larvae and a whole host of pondlife. We learnt how to make coffee substitute from dandelion roots and how to pick nettles without getting stung (grasp firmly from the bottom). And my two boys (5 and 2½) were distracted from throwing themselves into the canal with a fascinating selection of animal skulls and specimens taken from Kevin's large bag of tricks. Coxes Lock and mill pond are owned by the National Trust, which will preserve the area and all its rich wildlife for our grandchildren and beyond. It is a lovely area to take a walk and a peaceful haven in which to unwind. We thoroughly enjoyed our introduction to what the area has to offer.

## SOCIETY NEWS

**SITUATIONS VACANT!** Further to our appeals in the last newsletter for volunteers to join the committee, I'm afraid it has been all quiet. Perhaps it is fear of the unknown that is putting everyone off, so here are some more details of what each job entails to see if we can tempt you.



We are looking for volunteers to take on the roles of Events Organiser and Society Publicity. If you opted for the **Events Organiser**, you wouldn't have to book anything for a little while at least as the diary has already been booked up fairly well in advance. The committee also has a fund of ideas for future events from which you can choose.

**Publicity** would be mainly for events, which means organising a poster for those events (many thanks to Chris Glasow, who has kindly been providing us with those eye-catching posters you will have seen round the village). Volunteers are in place to help put these posters up in local shops etc. There is loads of scope for getting the Society name out to the public, so the post is really what you want to make of it.

Neither position would take up all of your time, and your help would be very much appreciated. As a final sweetener, how can you pass up the opportunity to spend a couple of hours a month with that loveable bunch, the Committee!!



So why not make us your good turn of the day! If you would like to help out or would like more details, please ring Tessa Westlake on 351559.

**Seen any good lock-ups lately?** We recently received the National Register of Village Lock-ups etc Survey from the Village Lock Up Association – yes, I was surprised too!



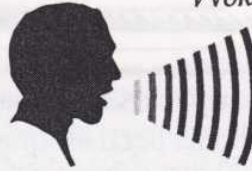
They wanted details of any village prisons, gibbets, gallows, stocks, pounds etc. Much as I would have liked to say that we had a ducking stool and a whipping post, I was able to say that Byfleet once had a lock up (known as the Roundhouse) and a pound. Howard Cook has told us that these were situated on a triangle of land at the junction of High Road and Chertsey Road (where the war memorial now stands). You can see these on the 1896 map of the

village in the Heritage Centre. Apart from their position, and the fact that the post box by Lloyds Bank was at one time known as The Pound, we know nothing else about it. Does anyone know anything more? Or if you are heading up to the Records Office, perhaps you could make a few enquiries for us. The survey had to be sent back by the 17<sup>th</sup> September, but I have said that I will let them know if we get any more information. If you can remember anything or find anything out, please ring Tessa Westlake on 351559. I'll keep you posted with any new information – I'm quite intrigued to find out how reputable (or otherwise!!) Byfleet used to be.

## Advance notice

For those of you planning to do any research on local history, here is how the relocation of records to the new Surrey History Centre in Woking might affect you. The opening is scheduled for Spring 1999. Records will start to be removed from the Surrey Records Office in June 1998. The Muniments Room in Guildford will be closed in early July 1998, followed by Ewell. While the relocation is going on the microfiche will be kept open at County Hall in Kingston.

## Calling Oral History Fans



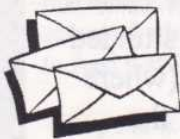
Woking Museum and Arts and Crafts Centre has applied for a grant to pay for an Oral History Course for 10 individuals. The course will cover the techniques of recording people's memories, and how to get the most out of your interviewee. As you will know from previous newsletters, recording oral history is a project that we have wanted to get off the ground for a while. No details are fixed, but the course would be in January 1998 on either Wednesday 28th or Thursday 29th for one full day, from 10am until 5pm. If you are interested, please ring Tessa Westlake on 351559 and we can forward you more details once they are confirmed.



**MEMORIES OF ST MARY'S SCHOOL.** We would like to provide display boards on St Mary's school and church to help the school children with their projects. Does anyone have any old school photos or pictures or mementoes of the school that they could lend us to copy? Old postcards, school reports, memories of the school before it became the day centre, photos of school football teams etc - all would be helpful. If you have anything, or would like to share your memories of St Mary's, or indeed any of the other local schools, please contact Tessa Westlake, 8 Brewery Lane, Byfleet 01932 351559.

## Self Guided Walk Leaflet - An Update

You may remember that the Society were contributing to Woking Borough Council's Self Guided Walk leaflet scheme. You may have been one of the members who helped us test the route in August 1996. We have now received the first draft from Woking. After some fine-tuning, we hope it will be finally finished. Howard Cook has kindly agreed that we can use his lovely pen and ink drawings of buildings in the village to illustrate the walk. So hopefully by the next newsletter we can report publication of an illustrated walk around Byfleet.



## Letters

Member Graham Vine let us know that he wrote to the Highways Agency in March to complain about the planting of shrubs on the M25 embankments between junctions 10-11. His complaint was that, despite promises that the motorway landscaping would be carried out in sympathy with the surrounding landscape, the entire planting scheme seemed to have been done using only laurel. As Mr Vine says, "laurel is not compatible with the existing landscape.... This is not urban Kensington or Chelsea but Surrey's rural fringe." Mr Vine wrote asking why compatible native species were not used, and hoping that action would be taken to put it right. Having had no reply, Mr Vine then wrote to John Prescott, Secretary of State for the Environment and Transport in August to ask for his help. This time Mr Vine was given the courtesy of a reply. It seems that, although only laurel is visible at the moment, it actually only makes up 5-10% of the total planting. The rest is a mix of hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel and maple. These deciduous trees need an evergreen species to provide cover during the winter. Holly has been chosen, but as it takes a long time to become established, laurel has been used to fill in in the meantime. Anyone with any questions about the landscaping should contact the Highways Agency landscaping specialist Mr Jonathan Rickards of W S Atkins & Co on 01372 726140.