



Byfleet Heritage Society.

Issue 21

Newsletter

February 2003

This newsletter is so full there is hardly any room for my usual chat, so I'll be brief! Firstly, a special thank you to Gordon Fludder, who found us a lovely screen for the Heritage Centre. Not only that—he very kindly fixed it up for us, and it was formally christened at our last meeting. Thanks for thinking of us and giving up your time. There is just room to mention that we are holding a special exhibition of the prints from Monica Ransom mentioned in the last newsletter on Saturday May 3rd—see back page for details.

**FORTHCOMING
EVENTS 2003**



2003

Thursday 13th MARCH

Ross Baker from Surrey Bat Group. Come and hear about part of our natural heritage—who they are and how they are protected.

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

Thursday 10th APRIL

Bernard Boys will take us Along the Basingstoke Canal. Explore our local beauty spot in readiness for long walks in the summer!

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

Thursday 22nd MAY

Society AGM followed by a talk by Mr Gordon Hadfield on The Rowley Bristow Hospital. Mr Hadfield will speak about his time there as a surgeon at our local hospital.

BYFLEET VILLAGE HALL, Room A, 7.30pm

Thursday 12th JUNE

Researching the History of your House with Julian Pooley from Surrey History Centre. Uncover the history of your house whether 30s semi or 16th century cottage.

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

Thursday 24th JULY

Stephen Duck, Poet and Rector of Byfleet with Ivan Duck. Come and find out about our 18th century celebrity Rector with Mr Duck, who is himself related.

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm.

Thursday 18th SEPTEMBER

A Transport Workshop with Surrey History Centre. The History Centre will guide us through how to find out about the historical development of the transport network in and around Byfleet.

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm.

Thursday 16th OCTOBER

Doug Smith on The History of the Pillar Box Just what are the origins of this everyday object that we take for granted.

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

Thursday 20th NOVEMBER:

Mike Webber continues his trip round Byfleet through David Chapman's old photographs. This time from the 1980s up to 1995

Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm

DECEMBER: To be announced

Members free. Non members £2

Extra! Extra!!

Following Prof Alan Crocker's excellent talk at our November meeting about the Gunpowder Mills of Surrey, Prof. Crocker has agreed to take members on a walk around Chilworth on **Sunday 16th March**, meeting at **The Percy Arms at 10.30am**, returning there between 12.30 and 1pm for lunch. Parking is available at the pub (but please keep towards the back so as not to frighten away potential pub customers).

If anyone wishes to go, please could they give me a ring so we can give the pub some warning about how many people are likely to descend! Please ring **Tessa** on **01932 351559**. Thanks!

For the Record...

Did you miss a meeting? Find out how it

On **January 16th** Nick Pollard showed members around Old Shepperton via old postcards and photos. The area of Shepperton has been inhabited since the earliest times, as shown by the Neolithic henge found in a nearby gravel pit about 15 years ago. Intriguingly the skeleton of a woman was found inside with the skull and torso of a wolf – a riddle that archaeologists are still trying to work out. A few early engravings exist of the village, such as the Stukely print from 1723. This claims to show Caesar's Camp, although it is unlikely that the famous Emperor ever camped there – the label tended to be given to any old, square, clearing. At Shepperton this was probably the remains of the manor's medieval enclosure.

More modern aerial views showed how floods had always played a part in Shepperton's history, with some of the worst coming in 1947. The aerial views highlighted the many local islands, including Pharaoh's Island, originally known as Dog Ait. Following the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, a house named "Sphinx" was built on the island. Other houses also followed the trend for Egyptian names, leading to the change of name. A local myth says that it was renamed after Nelson's victory at the Battle of the Nile, and while this is not actually true, Lord Nelson and both Mr and Mrs Hamilton did actually visit Shepperton to come fishing. D'Oyly Carte Island is named after the famous impresario associated with Gilbert and Sullivan. He came to Shepperton to build a country annexe for his Savoy hotel in London. However, he could not get a licence, so the house remained only a private residence, and it is likely that Gilbert and Sullivan visited there.

Members also followed the long and varied history of Walton Bridge. The original bridge was built of timber in 1750. This was replaced with brick arches in 1789, but in 1859 the central arch collapsed into the river. The next bridge was made of brick piers and iron grilles, but this was made unsafe after a near miss during an air raid in the Second World War. In the early 1950s a temporary bridge was built alongside, and the building of Walton Bridge is still an ongoing saga, with new plans and more building work.

Not surprisingly, the river has always been a large part of Shepperton life. Members saw old photos of the Shepperton regatta held on the Haliford bend of the river. An amateur punting championship was held regularly until the 1930s when unfortunately someone inadvertently dredged the course, making it too deep! Three families made their living from hiring boats or running ferries on the river, and you could often see members of these families racing to catch any available fares. The residents of Shepperton also took care of the river inhabitants – Nick showed a photo of a swan's nest which had been shored up near Harris' Boatyard to prevent it being washed away during flooding. The famous Shepperton Lock was actually built by the Corporation of London in 1812. Richard I, in a bid to raise money for his campaigns, sold the rights of the tidal Thames to the City of London, the limit of which was then Staines.

Shepperton was – and still is – well served with pubs from which to enjoy the river views. The Red Lion was first mentioned in 1722, but it is probable that a tavern stood on the site from earlier times. The Ship Hotel dates from a similar time. On the other hand the Rectory dates from 1450. The Queen Anne façade actually covers a much earlier timber framed building. However, it is unsure exactly when the church dates from. An earlier building is said to have been washed away in a flood. The new church was built without a tower, until Queen Anne commented on it to the vicar, who was also her chaplain. So he built a tower himself, but to cut costs he made it as small as possible. In fact it is so small that the staircase is on the outside.

Nick finished his talk with a picture of the famous Cowboy Wedding which took place in Shepperton in 1908. Shepperton housed the Imperial School of Colonial Instruction in a log cabin, which provided training for men who were taking up a new life in the Colonies. The pupils could often be seen racing round the village on horseback. Captain Morgan, the school principal, married a local widow, and it must have been quite an event, as the whole school and village turned out, and the occasion was marked by a series of 12 postcards! The Society thanked Nick for an interesting evening, and had enjoyed finding out so much about our near neighbours.

David Taylor came to the Heritage Centre on **February 20th** to tell us about **Cobham Houses and their inhabitants**, and gave us a fascinating talk about some of the famous – and infamous—former inhabitants of our neighbouring village.

Modern Cobham developed out of 2 or 3 separate settlements, the main ones being Street Cobham and Church Cobham. The two villages remained separate right up until the 1920s or 30s, when building development finally joined them up. Church Cobham was, like Byfleet, once owned by Chertsey Abbey and was possibly planned in the 14th century by the Abbot. Sadly David told us that the area of Cobham known as the Tilt had nothing to do with any jousting, but simply came from “tills” or ploughed land.

Cobham’s most important house was Cobham Park, now developed into luxury flats. In the 1870s it belonged to Charles Coombe, of the brewing family, and the family donated much to the village in the same way as the Stoops in Byfleet. A previous illustrious owner of the Park in the 1750s was Sir John Ligonier, Commander in Chief of the British Army. He was quite a British hero at the time, but also kept a small harem there! Edward, 2nd Lord Ligonier, who also lived at the Park, was married to Penelope, known as one of the most scandalous women of her time. She not only had an affair with the Italian author and poet Alfieri, but also carried on with a stable boy from the Park at the same time, which upset not only her husband, but Alfieri as well!

A house notable for the number of interesting inhabitants was Pyports, later renamed The Cedars. It started life as a medieval hall house, and was owned in the 18th century by John Freeland, whose daughter married into the Charrington family. Tenants of Pyports included Mrs Curry, a notable beauty, and Vernon Lushington a friend and patron of the Pre-Raphaelites, whose father had been the barrister for both Queen Caroline and Lady Byron during their controversial divorces. Virginia Wolfe was a great friend of the Lushington daughters and she later used Kitty Lushington as the model for Mrs Dalloway. Ralph Vaughan Williams was a cousin by marriage and played the organ at Kitty’s wedding.

David also explored the Fairmile area. Fairmile Farm, which later became Fairmile Court was owned by the McAlpines in the 1930s. In the early 19th century Lord Somerville, a keen agriculturalist, owned the land and often discussed farming with his good friend “Farmer” George III. The estate was split in the 1860s and one of the first houses to arise was Benfleet Hall. This was built for the Pre-Raphaelite painter Spencer Stanhope, the architect being Philip Webb, friend of William Morris. It was left empty for many years, and much of the fine Arts and Crafts tiles and stained glass decoration in the house was destroyed, although some of the glass is now in the William Morris Museum in Hammersmith.

We also saw slides of Tinmans Row, a row of industrial workers cottages unusual in south east England, Painshill Cottage, once lived in by poet Matthew Arnold, Postboys Row in Between Streets, where the men lived who took horses from town to town so travellers would always have fresh transport, and The Old Cottage, dating from the 15th century and once a Warreners Cottage. The area of the rabbit warren that the owner was paid to look after can still be traced even today.

The Society thanked David for a most interesting tour, that revealed just how many famous, artistic, scandalous and interesting people had lived just along the road from here.

Notes and Queries

Is there something about Byfleet's past that's always made you wonder? Or something that you can't quite remember? Or perhaps there is something we haven't got quite right, which you could put straight for us. If you have such a query, or if you can shed light on the questions in this edition, please either drop a note into the library, or contact Tessa Westlake at 8 Brewery Lane (01932 351559) or on e mail tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk. Thank you!

Queries

1. I've noticed on walks past St Mary's that there is what looks like the remains of an old wall or building on one side of the churchyard (next to Sanway Road, near the memorial that looks like a weeping woman). Does anyone know what this used to be?
2. Does anyone remember the filming of the Robin Hood series at Park Barn Farm? Do you have any memories or photos that you can share with us, or can anyone tell us precisely where the filming was done?

Some Answers

* *Many of you rang to say you remembered the Scotch Café—so many in fact that can't mention all here, but thank you very much for telling us about it.*

The Scotch Café used to stand where Paula Marks is now. It was possibly later renamed Central Café. Mary McIntyre thinks it might have been so called because the owners were Scottish themselves. Many of you also remembered that the building later became a record shop.

Member David Barrett also wrote the following about it.

"The Scotch Café was located in the current car radio/alarm building next to Unity Motors (ex Lucas grocers). The building has been extended forward since the café days when it had two large windows to the left a single size (metal framed) door and a large window to the right as I remember it (could be wrong!). Pale green and pink decoration comes to mind (which could have been one of the cake shops?) with a vase of flowers on the counter. Soldiers, mainly stationed in the Dartnell Park Houses using it as well as Byfleet residents."

David Barrett also kindly wrote us out the article on the following page regarding a previous query about the British Restaurant. Very many thanks to him for sharing his memories with us. If this prompts any memories of your own, we would be very glad to have them!

BYFLEET BRITISH RESTAURANT

The restaurant was located in the main hall of the village hall with school dinners in the small hall. To become a restaurant, the kitchen had to be built in what was the open area below the village club. The layout as I remember it, consisted of small tables about 900mm square, with 4 chairs to each table, in lines about 6 rows by 10 rows long. Extra tables were set out on the stage in case the hall was full.

After purchasing your meal ticket for main course, extra for sweet, (total cost 1s 6d) in the entrance foyer, one joined the queue from the hall entrance door along the right hand side wall—single file and separated from the dining area by a rope on pedestals, (no queue jumping allowed), until the serving hatches were reached. A simple choice of food, but a well balanced diet of 2 meals which was served very fast as many people had a short break. In fact a large number of production workers, on minimum lunch break time arrived by bicycle, rushed in and out as quickly as possible for a hot meal to take them through a long working day to achieve factory output targets.

Miss Booker was the Manageress and lived in the back left hand room behind the stage.

For school meals we children sat on long benches, I believe 12 to a table with rissoles and steam pudding regular offerings. You sat until you finished your plate full, (or found someone to eat it for you), that was the order of the day.

The two main items in the room consisted of a huge cold storage unit in one corner and an oil painting of Queen Victoria over the fireplace.

The tables and chairs in the main hall were of the folding type which allowed easy removal and stacking to give a clear floor for the Saturday night dance each week. French chalk was lightly sprinkled to allow easy dancing and at the end of the night the floor was swept after a half bucket of sawdust had been scattered.

The grounds housed several government vehicles in a shed (now the car park) and a grey painted bus fitted out as a control/first aid unit parked next to the air raid shelter. A hedgehog with her young made a home under the bus, so we gave them bread soaked in milk several times a week.

A soup kitchen type cooker unit was constructed in the end of a long shed (now the entrance area to the club car park) which consisted of brick sides about 2500mm long and 800mm high x 1000mm wide with a shovel width opening one end for the logs and coal and a chimney at the other end. Steel plates formed the top. I am pleased to record this was never used in anger, (or perhaps at any other time), as it was under a low asbestos roof with timber beams and this part of the shed had an open front. In fact the only thing I ever saw it used for was to store the crates of empties whilst awaiting collection from the village club.

I know this as David Bindley was a friend and his father was caretaker of the Village Hall, which allowed us a fair amount of freedom of the building and grounds.

The changing faces of the Heritage Society committee



During December two committee members got a new look. For Jim Allen, it was only temporary. He sacrificed his beard for his art in order to make an authentic pantomime dame for the Byfleet Players' panto.

For Jeff the change has been more permanent. He shaved his beard off just before Christmas to raise money for Milly's Fund, and so far reports that he is on target to raise £6,500! Jeff would like to thank all those who sponsored him.

Can you Help??

I had a call from a Mr Welch in Yorkshire who is searching for any information on the testing of the diving suit developed by Joseph Peress, particularly the man inside the suit, Jim Jarrett. We have an article in the archive saying that this suit was tested in a tank in Tarrant's yard in May 1930. Mr Welch is trying to find out whether this Jim Jarrett is the same man as his grandfather, William James Jarrett, always called Jim and known in the family as "the diver".

Does anyone remember the suit, the testing or Mr Jarrett? Mr Welch is looking for any scrap of information, memories, even gossip to aid him in his search.

If anyone has anything they can pass on, please ring Tessa Westlake on 01932 351559, or drop a note into Byfleet Library, or to 8 Brewery Lane, or if you are on-line, e mail at tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk. Very many thanks!



David Chapman has kindly given us a Napoleon Hat clock with a small brass plaque inscribed:

"Presented to Mr E Luff on the occasion of his marriage with every good wish by the staff of West Hall Byfleet April 25th 1932"

Very many thanks to him for yet another kind donation.

And can anyone tell us anything about Mr Luff? Answers, as usual to either Byfleet Library, or Tessa Westlake (8 Brewery Lane, 01932 351559).

**Added to
our archive**

SPECIAL EXHIBITION

There will be a special exhibition of prints and photos of the old Rectory which were kindly given to us by Monica Ransom, the daughter of Rev. Callendar-Wake. The exhibition will be held in the Heritage Centre on Saturday 3rd May, which is also a Friends of the Library coffee morning. Also on show will be two oil paintings of views of the village, and a number of photos from our archive.

So come along and see us then!

