

The evenings are getting gradually longer and it feels like Spring is here, so we hope we can tempt you to give some thought to a proposed trip along the canal which we will organise if there is enough interest—see below for details. Or perhaps the spring time energy will inspire you to contribute to a BBC venture called Every Square Mile, a website dedicated to local history which invites us ordinary folk to contribute what we know—see page 5 for details on that. And if none of that is quite your style, then we hope to see you at one, more or all of our meetings in the coming year. See you soon!

FORTHCOMING
EVENTS 2008



2008

Thursday 27th MARCH: Byfleet Oral History Group. The Group will talk about their work and play snippets from some of their recordings. **Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm**

Thursday 24th APRIL: Byfleet Fire Station with Julian Temple. The past, the present and the future? **Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm**

Thursday 22nd MAY: Society AGM. Chris Glasow will give us the second part of his *History of St Mary's Church, Byfleet*. **Cawsey Room, Byfleet Village Hall, 7.30pm**

Thursday 19th JUNE: The Lightbox with curator **Rib Davis**. Rib will tell us all about Woking's brand new museum, its oral history project and the memories it has collected. **Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm.**

SUNDAY 20TH JULY: A Walk on Wisley Common with **Heath Ranger James Adler**. After our talk last year, come and see Wisley Common in the flesh! Details to follow.

Thursday 25th SEPTEMBER: To be arranged

Thursday 23rd OCTOBER: To be arranged

Thursday 20th NOVEMBER: To be arranged

Thursday 4th DECEMBER: Christmas Social. **Byfleet Heritage Centre, Byfleet Library, 8.15pm**

**Members free. Guests £2
Everyone very welcome.**

DO YOU FANCY A LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE? Well, the canal, anyway. Jeff wondered if we might take a Society outing on one of the boat trips available on either the Wey, Basingstoke or Wey and Arun Canals. Before sorting out further details, Jeff thought he would canvas opinion. So if you fancy an afternoon messing about on the river, please let us know. Please either give Jeff a ring on 01932 341084 or email him on jeff.sechiari@btinternet.com, or leave a note at Byfleet Library.



For the Record...

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

Unfortunately November's meeting underwent a bit of a change. Our scheduled speaker, Rib Davis from The Lightbox, unfortunately could not come due to illness, so Mike Webber and Jeff Sechiari stepped in at the 11th hour.

Jeff gave a quick update on the Fire Station. The Friends of Byfleet Fire Station were forming a proposal to take to Surrey County Council for the end of the year. Jeff then showed some pictures of Byfleet including some of the Fire Station.

Then Mike showed members some of the pictures that the Society was pleased to have been donated during the year.

First there were some lovely pictures of a sports day at St Mary's school in 1962, including an enthusiastic Mums' race. There was also a slide showing one of the area's connections to showbiz—off the footpath from Byfleet to Wisley Common was the castle built for filming the series Robin Hood. Members of the audience also recalled that it had been used in the filming of the series Lancelot, and the film of Ivanhoe.

Byfleet's sporting heritage was shown in pictures of a meeting of the Byfleet Broadsiders, the local cycle racing team.

Their track stood between Oyster Lane and Brooklands Track and at one time the team held the all England Golden Helmet trophy. The pictures showed the commentators including Mr Chuter, his son Jimmy who rode for the team, and a gramophone used to play music to the crowds during the intervals between races.



Going further back in time, Mike then showed pictures of the funeral of PC Choate in 1910. PC Choate had been one of three police officers killed at an

event known as the Houndsditch Murders. A group of Latvian revolutionaries tried to break into a jewellers in Houndsditch, but their efforts alerted a neighbour, who told the police. The gang killed the three hapless police officers in their efforts to escape. They went to ground in a house in Sidney Street, leading to the infamous siege, where all the gang members were killed. PC Choate is buried in St Mary's churchyard, and the photo shows a large procession making its way through the village.



A more recent photo from 1963 showed the junction

of Brewery Lane and High Road, but a lot of change was still evident. On the corner was a large hedge which fronted the old Vanners Farm house. This was demolished to make way for Vanners Parade, and a For Sale sign gave a hint as to the building's future. Across the road stood Boundys, a drapers and general store which, one member of the audience remembered, also stocked hats!



Finally Mike showed some slides of Byfleet and the area from the air that had been taken when the route of the M25 was being planned. These provoked much discussion on their location as it was surprisingly difficult to tell exactly where in the air you were without the now familiar landmark of the M25!

It was an enjoyable evening seeing and discussing aspects of Byfleet's past, and we thanked Jeff and Mike for stepping in at the last minute!

To start 2008 we welcomed **Roger Bird** who revealed a **pictorial history of a Brooklands Norton** and the racer **Bert Denly**. Bert was a Byfleet boy who went on to become one of the top two or three riders at Brooklands in the 1920s and was associated with Norton motor cycles for many years.

In 1923 the Norton team's rider, Rex Judd had left to join Douglas. One day Don O Donovan, who developed bikes for Norton, rounded a corner in Byfleet and nearly hit Bert Denly, a butcher's boy who used to ride a 1914 bike to make his deliveries. Bert took evasive action, and O Donovan was so impressed with Bert's skill that he tracked Bert down and offered him a job on the spot. However, Bert didn't take the offer seriously and failed to turn up, so O Donovan went back and persuaded him to become the Norton works driver. Another version of the story from an article in 1930 says that Bert showed his skill by avoiding a pedestrian (although he doesn't say who was on the pavement and who was on the road at the time!).



Bert Denly, Dan O Donovan and J S Holroyd at Brooklands

The photos of Bert and his team with their bikes held many details that revealed what racing was like in the old days. A picture taken during the 200 mile race showed Bert with what looked like a sofa cushion strapped to his front. This is in fact what it was – the drivers would ride lying along the top of the bike to reduce wind resistance. The track was so bumpy that extra padding was needed between the rider's chest and his bike if the driver wasn't to be rattled to bits over the distance. In another picture, Bert appeared to be wearing rather odd shoes. This was because there was a 9 stone 6 lbs weight limit. Bert was a small man, so came under the weight and had to carry lead strips on his shoes and in his cushion to bring him up to the weight.

Details on the bikes were also interesting. A picture from 1924 showed a bike with a silencer. These were brought in after residents complained about the noise from vehicles taking part in the 500 mile race. An injunction was imposed on the race in 1908, and another was threatened, which was when silencers were made compulsory. Another detail was a strange loop of wire between the forks of the bike, coming over the tyre. Bert introduced these on his bikes after debris got stuck in his tyres during a race causing him to retire. The wire was intended to catch any objects before they reached his tyres, and also helps historians to identify Bert's bikes in old photos!

In 1927 Bert Denly became the first person in the world to do over 100mph on a 500cc motorbike. He did this feat abroad, and the British press said that the attempt did not count. A prize was offered to repeat the record at Brooklands, but the challenge was not taken up until a year later. Denly held many more speed records during his career.

Other photos showed characters from the racing world such as Pat Driscoll, Bert's racing partner for many years, Nigel Spring, bike designer at Norton and later at AJS, where Bert later joined him, and Ebby White, the timekeeper at Brooklands from 1901 until 1939, who was in charge of all the handicapping of races.



One of Bert's bikes is now at Brooklands Museum, and his grandson and granddaughter were present at the Brooklands' centenary last year. One final story was from Bert's time as a delivery boy for Derisley's butchers. When he started to become a successful rider, Mr Derisley let him keep his prize money in the shop's safe. This worked well, until one day Mr Derisley realised that Bert had more money in the safe than the shop, and he quickly marched Bert around to the local bank to open an account! We thanked Roger for his wonderful portrayal of a local racing great, and the machines he rode.

At February's meeting we heard from Iain Wakeford and Ailsa Moore about the Ockenden Venture and the Woking Community Play Association's plans to feature the organisation in their next production.

The Venture was founded by Joyce Pearce with help from fellow teachers Margaret Dixon and Ruth Hicks. It was named after "Ockenden", a house in White Rose Lane with several acres which belonged to Joyce Pearce's mother, Mary, a healer and an inspiration to her daughter. In the aftermath of the World War II camps in Germany were full of displaced and destitute people. By 1951 many of these had returned home or been taken in elsewhere, but the sick, the elderly and many children mainly from Eastern Europe were still in need of help.

Joyce held a conference at Ockenden with some of her sixth form pupils and other young people, and it was decided to give some of the young people in the camps a holiday in Woking. Woking Council supported the idea, and 17 young people came over. As the young people waited to be collected on Liverpool Street station, one young boy named Hercules entertained everyone by playing the violin and caused quite a stir. Ailsa pointed out that this was just one of many incidents that would make a great scene in the play. The children were escorted home by Joyce and Margaret Dixon, but when they saw the awful conditions in the camps, they felt they could not leave the matter there. They decided to choose a child to take back to Woking for an education, but in the end 5 children came in 1952. They came with the consent of their families, and were taught at Ockenden by the three teachers. After that, more children came and the Venture was up and running.

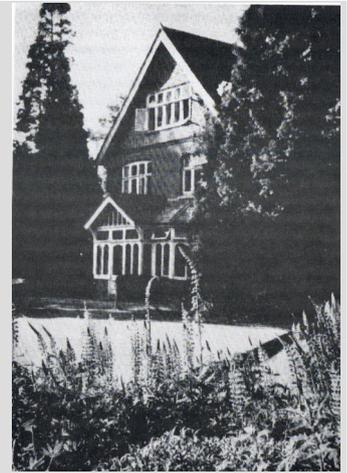
In the 1970s the Venture helped Vietnamese boat children and also set up an orphanage in Saigon. Many were abandoned by parents who could not afford to keep them, and many of them had polio. The Daily Mail had agreed to airlift 300 children to England, and the Ockenden was to take charge of them. Even though there was no equipment, all the cots, baby clothes and other paraphernalia was donated by well wishers. In fact, at one time it was difficult to find baby equipment in Woking as so much had been bought to donate to the project.

In the 1990s Bosnia became the next troubled region to be helped by the Ockenden Venture. Three children were brought over to the Royal Marsden Hospital to be treated for leukaemia. However, before they could arrive, the British Government introduced visas for Bosnian people. Phone calls to the British Embassy in Bosnia were favourably received and visas sorted out straight away—one of the many instances of people being willing to help because they felt the cause was right. In all, a great many people around the world have been helped by the Ockenden Venture, including people from Poland, the Sudan, Pakistan and Tibet. Ockenden is now at an end, and Joyce died in 1985. But before she died she set up the next stage in the life of the project, and launched "a manifesto for a strategy of hope for a world in crisis". Ailsa urged that the play must go ahead, partly because it is part of the heritage of Woking, but also because it is a story that shows that if something is right, then not only does it need to be done, but it can be done. The play will help keep the message of Ockenden going forward.

Iain Wakeford then put the story into context with some old photos from the 1950s. We saw pictures of the Ockenden Venture's charity shop in Guildford Road, and also some of the other shops such as Robinsons (Chertsey Road), Woolworths (now Wetherspoons) and R McEwan in Duke Street who sold the locally produced Kenwood Chef. Pictures such as these and other sources such as old adverts can be used to research the sorts of props and costumes that the play could use.

If you would like to get involved in this exciting project—either to tread the boards, or to help behind the scenes— please contact Anna Molesworth on 01483 832089 or annacordelia@molesworth16.freemove.co.uk

We thanked both Iain and Ailsa for telling us the story of an inspirational woman and her desire to help people all over the world.



The BBC's Every Square Mile project

Every Square Mile is a BBC project to create a 'people's history' in the area of Runnymede, Staines and Woking. It is asking us, the people who live here, to write about events, personalities, places, legends and landmarks - whatever fascinates, inspires or moves us most about the place we live. Why? Because without us, these stories will be lost forever.

You can just explore the site to find out about the local history. But there is also the opportunity to add to and expand on something someone else has written, or to add your own story with pictures if you have any. Don't worry if you feel that what you have to offer is not very interesting or not a lengthy treatise on local history. All our stories are important and will be of great interest to our descendants. Just imagine if we now had this kind of archive from the Victorian, Georgian or even Elizabethan era!

Stories already uploaded include the history of Brooklands, filming in and around Runnymede, the Ockenden Venture, the Brooklands legend of Percy Lambert and Byfleet Fire Station. However, a look at the site will tell you that the Byfleet area is still a bit lacking. The Heritage Society is going to try and upload some of the text from our display boards in an attempt to get the local ball rolling, but if you have something to add, get online and join in.

You can see what the site looks like in the photo below, and the address is www.everysquaremile.co.uk. Take a look and see what you can add.

The image shows two side-by-side screenshots of the BBC Every Square Mile website. Both screenshots display the same page for the 'Byfleet Fire Station' story. The top navigation bar includes 'EVERY SQUARE MILE', 'EXPLORE', 'CREATE', and 'MY STUFF', along with a BBC logo and a user login status 'Logged in as Jeff Sechiani / Log out'. Below the navigation, there are tabs for 'Latest Stories', 'Latest Photos', 'Top Stories', and 'Top Contributors'. The main content area features the title 'Byfleet Fire Station' and a sub-header 'Uploaded photos'. The text of the story is visible, including the creation date (15/09/2007) and the last edit date (21/02/2008). There are also buttons for 'add to this story', 'delete', and 'report this story'. The 'Uploaded photos' section shows three thumbnail images with 'Edit' and 'Delete' options. The overall layout is clean and professional, typical of a BBC website.

E H Lovesy's and Byfleet businesses

Last issue we featured an old advert for Lovesy's and wondered where the shop had been. We have now been told that it used to be where Pazar is now, opposite the Binfield Bakery.

Our question prompted Mike Webber to have a look in a 1938 Kelly's Directory, which revealed some more of the village's old businesses. Petersham Buildings, by Lloyds Bank, housed Byfleet Electric Ltd, George Garland cycle dealers, Groves newsagents, Hobbs fruiterer, Jose Bros fishmongers, White's bakers, and Miss Eleanor Mary Moore ladies outfitter and Miss Bertha White's dressmakers. Petersham House (now Lloyds Bank) was then Miss Evelyn Glide ladies hairdressers.

Further into the village, Hopfield Parade housed Lane's confectioners, Ainslee's grocers, Muirs butchers, another ladies hairdressers and Atholl's fruiterer. Commercial Parade, opposite Plough Green, had the Wandsworth & District Gas Co (now the plumbing shop), Albrecht's grocers, Howells outfitters and Dudley's fried fish bar. Oak Parade is the shops next to the Binfield Bakers, and housed Ashworths chemists, Hill's butchers and Higgins fruiterers (the second butcher and third fruiterer we have come across on our tour around the village so far).

There is a Coronation Parade listed, but Mike was unsure as to where this was. Shops there included the Knitcraft wool store, Beenham's refreshment rooms, Sessions & Evans wireless dealers and Callingham's boot makers. Can anyone identify Coronation Parade for us?

And all this was before we even touch Chertsey Road, which had a bakers, printers, wool shop, drapers, boot and shoe repairer and even a lawn mower machine makers, as well as such well known local businesses as Ebenezer Mears, Tarrant builders and Berry & Sons timber merchants and saw mill.

Kath Bright

Members will be sorry to hear that Kath Bright, widow of our founder Doug Bright, died shortly after Christmas.

She was always a great supporter of the Heritage Society and was on hand to help prepare the Heritage Room for its opening in 1996. Anyone who knew her will not be surprised to hear she was always ready with encouragement or a kind word.

I'm sure members will join us in giving their sympathies to her family Alison, Gillian, Richard and William.

Dane Court School and Oakfield Girls' School

We received the following email from Colin White and wondered if any of our members can help.

"I am a former student of Dane Court School which was located in your area. As the son of a Canadian diplomat who worked at Canada House in London, I lived with my family at Senlac on Hockering Rd in Woking from 1959 to 1961. I had the great fortune to attend this school during a couple of my very important early academic years (age 7-9 yrs.). My two oldest sisters attended the neighbouring Oakfield girls' school. I have many wonderful memories of my time in your community and my experiences with fellow students and teachers at the school. I have vivid remembrances of the headmaster, Mr. Pooley, and my primary teacher, Miss Barrow, who I shall never forget drove a magnificent old yellow and black sports car.

I understand that the old school was demolished and the land redeveloped for housing sometime after we returned to Canada. I wonder if you would be able to tell me where I can obtain more information on the history of the school and the story that unfolded after I left.

Many thanks, Colin White,
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada."

If anyone has any information, please contact Tessa Westlake on 01932 353559 or tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk, or leave a note at Byfleet Library. Many thanks.

Members might like to know that if you have internet access, there is rather a nice selection of local photos including many aerial shots at www.surreyproperty.com/photosearch.html?g=45.

If there are any members who, in these days of recycling and conservation of resources, would like to receive their newsletter by email rather than on paper, please let us know. Just drop an email to Tessa Westlake on tessa@westlakesystems.co.uk.



Following on from Mike Webber's information about the shops in Byfleet in 1938, here is an old picture from David Chapman's collection featuring a shop some members might remember.

Digby's Stores stood on the site of Digby Way (near the Blue Anchor pub). It is shown here in around 1920, with 2 proud staff and a lovely delivery van.

The house to the right of the shop is Albany Cottage. Sadly both buildings have now been knocked down and houses built on the site.