

We are already a month into 2010, but we'd like to wish all our members a happy new year. We hope you can join us at our monthly meetings throughout the year, and if you are interested in our planned trip to Loseley Park, please see the details below.

We also announce the relaunch of our Society website, put together by Jeff Sechiari. Many thanks to him, and if you have any suggestions or would like us to include a feature on there, please let us know.

So hopefully spring isn't too far away, but in the meantime, enjoy the newsletter and we hope to see you at one of our meetings soon.

FORTHCOMING
EVENTS 2010



2010

All meetings begin at 8.15pm

Thursday 14th January: Communications & Community – Along the Wey with Iain Wakeford.
A look at how, when and why the villages of the lower Wey Valley developed and their relationship to each other. **St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close**

Thursday 11th February: Joseph Spence - the Grand Tour and the five fine Surrey Gardens.
Bill Tomlins will tell us something about Byfleet's famous poet.

St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close

Thursday 11th March: Elmbridge Museum.
Rachel Perkins tells us something about the Museum and its collections.

St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close

Thursday 8th April: The story of Woking Palace and the recent archaeological digs that have taken place there under the direction of our speaker, Richard Savage

St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close

Thursday 20th May: To be confirmed
St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close

Thursday 17th June: Society AGM. Speaker to be confirmed

St Mary's Day Centre, Stream Close

Thursday 22nd July, 6pm: Visit to Loseley Park.
See below for details

Thursday 9th September: To be confirmed

Thursday 7th October: Local Agriculture. Well known local vet, Carl Boyde, will talk about local agriculture, including a look at the Chertsey Ploughing Match.

Thursday 4th November: To be confirmed

Thursday 2nd December: Christmas Social.
Nibbles and drinks. Speaker to be confirmed.

Members free. Guests £2 Everyone very welcome.

TRIP TO LOSELEY PARK

Our trip to Loseley Park has been confirmed for Thursday 22nd July at 6pm. As this will be a private visit, there will be an extra cost for this event, which will be £8 per person.

We propose to leave from the car park at Byfleet Village Hall at about 5pm, and if you need transport, please let us know.

We have had quite a lot of interest in this trip, so if you put your name down at one of our meetings, please let us know if you can still come along. If you have not yet put your name down, please ring and if the trip is already full, we will put you on a waiting list in case someone drops out.

Please ring Tessa Westlake on 01932 351559 as soon as possible to secure your place. Thank you!

For the Record...

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

In **October** we moved into St Mary's Day Centre to welcome back old Society friend **Iain Wakeford** who took us back to **Byfleet in the 60s and 70s** using adverts and articles from the News and Mail.

He traced some of the shops through time, such as the Scotch Cafe, which later became the Melody Cafe. The hairdressers Michel of Paris became the sophisticated sounding La Vogue d'Elegance in 1970, before reverting to the more basic title of The Hair Place in 1972. Candy Corner was fondly remembered, as was the Invicta toy shop, and Catten's hairdressers (which was previously Galloways) was revealed by one member of the audience as purveyors of a fine pudding basin haircut. Cox & Gill Travel on High Road offered an 8 day trip for only 27 guineas, and announced that appointments at home could be arranged—quite a service! A fine picture of Mr Rannie in his chemist's shop brought back memories, and West Electrics at 150 High Road demanded in their December advert in 1966 "Surely she's worth a new TV set for Christmas!"

Industry was plainly thriving. There were adverts for Charles Austen Pumps, SSI Engineering Ltd, Humex Greenhouse Equipment and the Byfleet Machine and Tool Company Ltd. Over in Oyster Lane Webslight Ltd were thought worthy of a whole newspaper article, which said the company was a major supplier of road signs for the Ministry of Transport.

Iain had also selected some lovely local news items. There were concerns about buses almost colliding with buildings and pedestrians at the corner next to the Plough pub. This was long before the mini roundabout that is there now. A roundabout was also suggested for the Chertsey Road junction by the Residents' Association. Before that, the area was dubbed "Danger Junction" by the paper in 1973. Sadly, articles on vandalism at Byfleet Boat Club and concerns over the state of the outside of the Village Hall in 1968 showed that some problems never seemed to go away, but there was also much that was good. Byfleet Youth Club was thriving in 1969 and were given a dance demonstration (long before anyone thought of Strictly Come Dancing), and the opening of the new St Mary's school building was featured in 1968, followed by the Manor school in 1970. The library was opened in 1969, costing £20,000. By 1970, however, reports were in the paper of a mysterious smell in the library. There was much discussion as to the cause. Gas was suggested, but in the end it was decided that the smell came from decaying birch trees which had been left under the building. The paper reported the closure of the Sanway Laundry in 1967 after 50 years' service to the village, and also mentioned the periodic flooding in Brewery Lane, leading the road to be nicknamed Brewery River, a problem that still arises in heavy rain even now.

And in 1967 Byfleet saw royalty come to visit, when the Queen Mother came to the Clock House which was opened as part of the Fellowship Housing Trust on the 8th November.

It was fascinating to see how the village had changed over time, and how many shops and services the village used to have. The pictures and articles brought back many memories to long term residents of the village, and provided a lovely snapshot of what the village was like for those who had not been there at the time. We thanked Iain for once again treating us to an interesting and informative evening.

The Sanway Laundry 1968



The site of Byfleet Library 1968



Society chairman **Jim Allen** did the honours for our **November** meeting, taking a look at **Entertainment in Byfleet** from 1878 until 1993. And it seems that Byfleet has a fine tradition of amateur dramatics which Jim has traced via the local newspaper archives.

The first group was the Byfleet Minstrels who met in the schoolroom at St Mary's school. Admission was a hefty 12 old pence, and Jim has found reference to their performance of A Privy Council in 1908.

The next dramatic incarnation was the Byfleet Musical and Entertainment Society which was active in the 1920s. They largely performed Gilbert and Sullivan operettas in the Village Hall. As an alternative, the Junior Imperial League (Byfleet Branch), which formed in 1927, gave displays of physical training.

The West Surrey Players were set up to benefit charities. They gave many performances, including The last of Mrs Cheney in 1928 and Interference in 1929. 1930 was a bumper year, with productions of Hay Fever, Tons of Money and a concert for Parish Day on July 16th, starring well known local characters such as Mr Stollery and Ronald Summers.

The following year they outdid themselves with Brighter Byfleet, a review. This was a big production, with a 50 page programme, a large cast and an orchestra. A special bus service was run for performances—one shilling return from Woking, leaving from the Albion Hotel, or sixpence from West Byfleet Corner. Bus tickets could be booked at Eltons in West Byfleet. The production even made the front page of the Daily Mirror, no less on Tuesday 1st December 1931.

The Second World War did not diminish the entertainment on offer. Films were shown at Byfleet Village Hall on Monday nights for an entrance fee of sixpence. There had been a plan to build Byfleet its own cinema, which would have stood opposite the entrance to Mowbray Avenue where there are now maisonettes, but at the outbreak of war the plan was shelved, unfortunately never to be revived. The Queries Variety Company gave performances for the troops at the Village Hall and at Brooklands. At one performance, in aid of the Pyrford and Byfleet Hospital Supply Service Depot, the Western Brothers performed. Jim wondered if this had been an appearance by the popular music hall duo, one of whom ended up running the tobacco kiosk at Weybridge Station.

We all remember Buster Merryfield as Uncle Albert in Only Fools and Horses, but Jim revealed that he had founded an amateur dramatic group in Byfleet in 1964 called The Characters. His productions of John Osborne's The Entertainer, The World-My Canvas by Ruth Dixon and A View from the Bridge by Arthur Miller won Best Play at the Woking Drama Festival in 1966, 1968 and 1969 respectively. He also won the Best Actor trophy for his roles in The Entertainer and The World-My Canvas. The group did not perform much in Byfleet, which Buster referred to as "a cemetery with lights"! Unfortunately he made losses on all his productions, and to try and turn things around he attempted to run a night club. Films, bunny girls and a Miss Byfleet were provided, and on this occasion the venue was crammed!

Of course, we could not have a review of entertainment in Byfleet without mention of The Byfleet Players. This had originally been a women's group associated with St Mary's Church. Their first production was a one act play, The White Sheep of the Family, at the old St Mary's Church Hall by the war memorial. Their first production at the Village Hall was entitled A Lady Misaid by Kenneth Horne. In 1959 the group performed The Touch of Fear, written by Dorothy and Campbell Christie. The couple lived in West Byfleet, and had written several plays for the West End. In the same year, the Players won the Runners Up cup at the first Woking Drama Festival. This cup was later rescued in the nick of time from being given away at a jumble sale—a sale being held by the Byfleet Players! The Byfleet Players have been regular entrants at the Drama Festival, sometimes entering two or three plays, and Jim himself has won the Best Actor award.

Another regular contribution by the Players has been the annual pantomime. Their first Christmas production was in 1970, when Alice's Adventures In Wonderland was adapted by Cleo Camila, but their first official pantomime was Babes in the Wood in 1971. Jim's first go at writing a pantomime was in 1973 when the Players produced Jack and the Beanstalk. He had cut his teeth as a producer two years earlier with The Incident, where he learnt the valuable tip of simulating rain by pouring peas onto a drum.

Byfleet Players by no means played it safe, and presented some quite controversial productions for the times. Billy Liar, The Killing of Sister George and A Day in the Death of Joe Egg were all produced. The company also showed their versatility with a review, Byfleet Illuminations, described as "Byfleet's own end of the pier show". Roland Lee was the musical director for this. He played the organ at Pyrford Church, but had also won a BAFTA award for his film music. Other well known names connected with the players are Jackie Pearce, who acted in Hammer Horror films and last

appeared in the film White Mischief, and a young Peter Davidson, who left the players to attend drama school and went on to play Dr Who, among many other roles. Many of the Sue Robinson dancers, who feature in many Players' productions, now perform all over the world.

The Players' biggest production was Oliver in 1987, but Jim revealed that their production of The Importance of Being Earnest in 1990 attracted the attention of The Guardian newspaper who ran a 4 page article in their Saturday magazine, complete with photos.

We thanked Jim for a wonderful view of how many different companies have kept Byfleet entertained over the years, a fine tradition that is still alive and well today thanks to The Byfleet Players.



116. Byfleet. The Village Hall.

We were pleased to start the new year with an interesting look at **Communication and Community—Along the Wey** with **Iain Wakeford**. Iain has always loved old maps, and been fascinated by the question of how the modern landscape has come to look like it does.

Once you start to think, a local map can become a fascinating detective story, stretching far back into time. You also have to think carefully. For instance, Iain pointed out that there is evidence of Neolithic and Bronze age occupation on Horsell and Wisley Commons, Brooklands, Wey Manor Farm in New Haw and on St George's Hill. But is it



significant that those sites of settlement are not main centres now? Or is it that towns did grow up from other settlements, but any evidence has either been lost or is now deeply covered over?

It is quite a game of detective work, and you have to piece together the story from different sources. For instance, in 758 documents mention a monastery to St Peter in the Woking area. St Peter's church in Old Woking is an ancient church, although its oldest parts date from the 12th century. But Roman tiles have been used in the construction of the tower, and there is some ironwork, now moved to an internal door, which is believed to be Saxon. Is it possible that the church stands on a much older site belonging to the monastery, and the settlement of Old Woking grew up around it? The remains of another monastic settlement can be seen at Newark Priory. Some people have said that the name means "new work" implying that there was perhaps an old work, which was the monastery at Old Woking. But, Iain pointed out, Newark dates from 1289, 300 years after St Peter's declined. Where would the monks have gone in the meantime? Iain thinks it more likely that, if an "old work" existed, it might have been at Ripley. The chancel in the church there is older than the village itself. Was the church a wayside chapel used by the original monks? And might Newark Lane have grown up from the two settlements' need to communicate?

The Domesday Book of 1086 gives us our first proper glimpse of local villages and their populations. It also lists all the churches existing at that time. Iain has noticed that very many of these churches stand at the boundary of their parish, rather than at the centre. Does this mean that the village centres have moved in the meantime? If so, why? Many local churches, such as Wisley, Pyrford and Byfleet, stand next to or near to the river. This might be because the River Wey was an important means of communication at that time, and also communities needed fresh water supplies.

Bridges and fords were important in dictating where a road formed. The road from Pyrford takes the route it does in order to cross the river at a fordable point, and Plough Bridge at Byfleet was originally a ford.

The activities of local landowners could affect the landscape too. Drivers into Old Woking from Byfleet will know very well that at the end of Old Woking Road there is a very sharp right hand turn into Old Woking High Street. This happened when Woking Palace Park was created, and the public road had to divert around the new park boundary. At Byfleet Manor, Norden's map of 1607 shows that the park was on both sides of the River Wey, perhaps creating the need for the Manor bridge.

A new method of communication opened in 1653 with the Wey Navigation Canal, but as could be seen from the many claims against it that were made by local landowners, it wasn't welcomed with open arms by everyone. John Sayle claimed in 1671 that the Navigation people had promised to build him a bridge, as the canal cut through his land. He claimed that this had not been done, and he had to travel one and a half miles to find the nearest bridge. Iain wondered if the canal builders had built the canal along the route of the original road between Byfleet and Pyrford, with the old road becoming the tow path, and Dodds Bridge built to maintain the link. Also Parvis Bridge appears to be a corruption of Parishes Bridge. This bridge would have been vital to the people of Byfleet, as it was the only way out over the canal to the common land. Therefore the parish probably took the decision to maintain it themselves, rather than rely on the Navigation people.

Iain finished by taking a look maps through the ages. His earliest map, 1594, showed what clearly became the A3, but also another road from Newark, to Byfleet and across to Weybridge for which there seems to be no modern equivalent. By 1690, the road had changed, and again by 1724, when it no longer went to Newark, but along what is now the Old Woking Road. By the 1729 map, the roads were beginning to appear much as they do today.

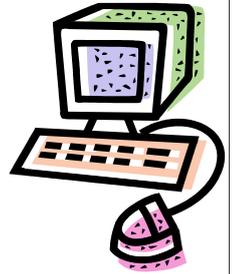
We could have pondered the possibilities all night, and we hope to have Iain return so we can discuss the matter further, once we have all gone and pondered our maps and formed our own questions about our landscape.

FAMILY HISTORY ENQUIRY

Christine Kellogg rang us to see if anyone had heard of a Stanley Elliott, who she believes lived in Byfleet at some time. He would be about 80 years old by now, and joined the Navy in about 1953. If you have any information, please contact Christine on christinekellogg@sbcglobal.net. Or give Tessa a ring on 01932 351559 and she can pass the information on. Many thanks.

HERITAGE SOCIETY WEBSITE

As you may have seen at our recent meeting, Jeff has been working on reviving our Society website. If you are able to get to a computer, come on over to www.byfleetheritage.org.uk, where you will find information on the history of Byfleet, the Society diary for the coming year, and links to other web sites that might be of interest.



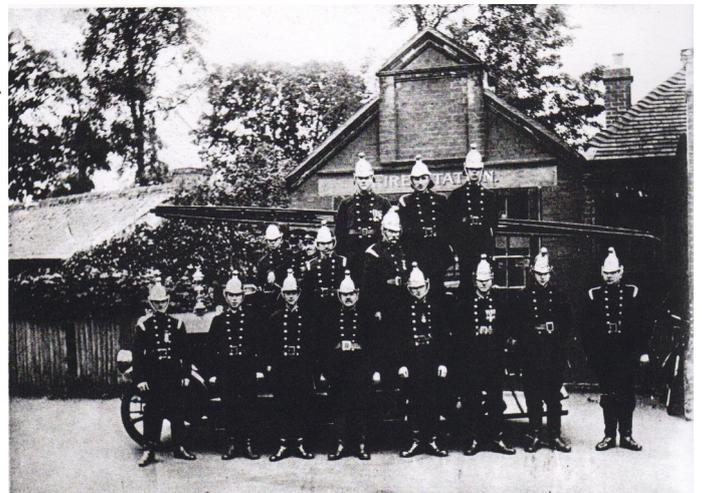
But we would also like the web site to be interactive, so we would like to get a forum going, where people can discuss their memories of Byfleet, ask any questions that have been bothering them, or can perhaps share any interesting facts or research they have come across. We are also building pages on some of Byfleet's famous residents, Byfleet places and a list of references to Byfleet in other books, so if you have anything to add, please let us know.

So why not have a look and see what you think. And if you have any suggestions for things you would like to see on there, please let us know.

Also don't forget the new Byfleet Community website at www.byfleetkt14.net. This website contains pages where you can discuss local issues with others, leave reviews of local shops and restaurants, see what events are on, or even find a property. The more people that join in, the better the website will get, so why not join in the discussion.

Fire Station update

The end of 2009 saw further work at the Fire Station – this time by professional contractors on behalf of The Friends of Byfleet Fire Station. The building has now had a Type 3 Asbestos Survey, carried out by Constructive Evaluation Ltd from Chichester. This identified limited amounts in the rubble-filled basement area. Unfortunately this will need removing at some future date by a specialist contractor before access can be restored to that area of the building. It was also noted that some of the guttering has been repaired in the past using products containing some asbestos, so this will need to be noted when these gutters are repaired or replaced.



Once the extent of asbestos had been confirmed, other contractors were able to proceed in December with the other surveys required. We have since received a detailed report on the building from Guildford-based chartered building surveyors CMI Associates and will soon also be sent a set of measured drawings and a conservation report from Andrew Norris Surveying (based in Albury). Once this information is available, we will be in a far better position to consider potential future uses for this historic building.

Meanwhile, when the car park for the new flats next door (Ellis Court) was being laid, the remains of a small brick wall behind the fire station were briefly revealed. One suggestion has been that this was part of an air raid shelter and it is hoped we can identify what it might have been from maps and other records.

Julian C Temple

From our archive

Here is an article from our archive, one of several written by Bill Polley, who some of you may remember. It recounts the sad fate of P C Choate, who was one of three policemen killed in what became known as The Houndsditch Murders. The three went to investigate a robbery at a jeweller at 119 Houndsditch. The gang, in an effort to escape capture, killed three policemen and severely injured two more. The gang hid out at 100 Sidney Street, so 200 officers surrounded the house, and the Siege of Sidney Street began. Six hours into the siege, a fire began in the building. The police stood outside, waiting for the men inside to flee, but they never did. The remains of two members of the gang were later found inside, but the ringleader, the infamous Peter the Painter, was never found. Here is how Mr Polley tells the story.

This is the true history of the Sidney Street siege 1911.

In Byfleet at this time, there was a family named Choate. There was Tom Choate, Sam Choate and a brother who was in the police force, a sister kept house for them.

The night of the Sidney Street siege Office Choate was on duty, it was Monday night and Office Choate and other police officers arrested some of the rioters, a pair of brass knuckle dusters were taken from them, these I now have in my possession, they are terrible tools which can kill. Police Officer Choate was on duty the following Wednesday night, but sorry to say it was his last night on the streets as the rioters shot and killed him. Police Officer Choate was brought to Byfleet and laid to rest in God's home, at St Mary's churchyard.

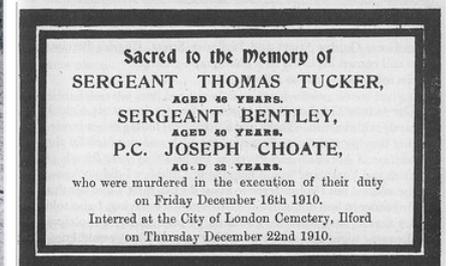
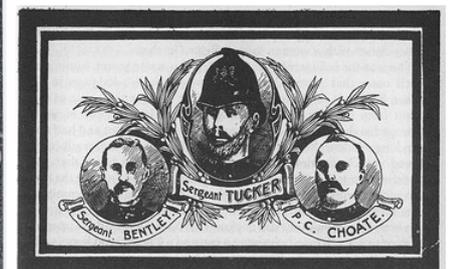
Well the day of the funeral our school was closed, I was only seven years old, my pals and I thought we would go to the funeral. When we got there the churchyard was lined with police force and all its officers had come to pay their respects to a very brave man. About three weeks after the funeral my dear father, who at the time was the village chimney sweep, he had carried on after my grandfather who was the chimney sweep for most of the 18th century, and when he swept the chimney in those days it would cost 8d now it costs £12.00.

Well, on coming back to the Choate brother he called my dad back and said to him "Frank" for that was his name, would he take home and keep in a safe place these knuckle dusters, they wanted them kept so that they would not get into the wrong hands. Well my dad said yes he would. Well I'm sad to say my father passed away in 1939, I went home one day to see my mother, and she said would I take these knuckledusters home and keep the promise my dad had made to the Choate brothers, I said of course I would.

This is a little history of Byfleet, I can tell you a great deal more, for I have lived and enjoyed life in dear old Byfleet for 81 years.

I am yours truly,

William James Polley



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