

Byfleet Parish Day - History



ST. MARY'S CHURCH, BYFLEET.

St Mary's Church c1900

On June 1st 1865, to commemorate substantial alterations and improvements to St Mary's Church, a dedication festival was held. The whole Parish was entertained to lunch on the lawns of West Hall which was then occupied by Mr R Murray. It continued on it's true anniversary until 1885 and was called the Dedication Festival or occasionally the Parish Festival. It was quite separate from the flower show which was held every year in the grounds of Petersham Place.

The earliest written record of the event is in a Parish magazine of 1879 which invited parishioners to assemble at the church and afterwards at the Rectory.

Tickets were distributed at the church service. From 1885 onwards it was held in various days in July and the words Parish Day first appeared. It consisted of early Communion at 7.30, Evensong at 3.00 and then a procession from the church to the rectory fields. Tea was provided for the over 60's and school children, after tea school prizes were distributed.

In 1888 Parish Day became more of a festival and included a flower show, sports, dancing a fair and a band. The school prizes were distributed the morning before. In 1890 there were fireworks as well and it was held in Pipers Hill meadow, in 1892 there was an addition of a cycle race through West Hall and in following years a bicycle procession in fancy dress.

From 1899 it was held in the new recreation ground and in 1902 combined with Coronation Day. There was a free dinner attended by 564 and a free tea for 1,202 parishioners.

In 1909 and 1910 it was held in Bone's field in Chertsey Road

and for the first time a fee was charged of 6d for all except school children and the over 60's.

There are very few records after this date until after the Second World War when it was re-instated.

The two World Wars stopped Parish Day and a revival after the Second World War was in doubt for two reasons firstly life had in changed Britain and Byfleet and it was though there was no longer any need for free tea and dinners some felt that Parish Day would not be what it was and should not be revived. The other was financial as the reserve from 1939 was only £150 but with the help of fundraising jumble sales Parish Day was restarted on July 16th 1952.

The areas major employer was Vickers Ltd (later BAC) based on the east side of Brooklands and they became involved and later events included a junior fishing competition, a cycle race, Dog show, Horticultural Show and a bowls match between Byfleet and West Byfleet. The Vickers support was strong for many years until the factory closed, indeed former Managing Director, the aviation pioneer Sir George Edwards was a West Byfleet resident and held Byfleet Parish Day dear and encouraged the company to participate. On one occasion a member of his publicity



West Hall.

Byfleet.

West Hall: Site of the first 'Parish Day' c1900

staff was hauled over the coals for not supplying an adequate model aircraft display. Sir George was not impressed by the excuse that he and the department had been flat out preparing for the forth coming Farnborough Air Show. 'Byfleet is far more important,' he said.

He invited personalities to open the day and the opening ceremony has been carried out by many distinguished people including Sir Barnes Wallis, Douglas Bader, Robin Knox-Johnson and Cliff Michelmore. This task is now ably carried out by the Mayor of Woking supported by the Parish Day Queen and her attendants.

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High Road, Byfleet c1910

Southern Series, 243

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If anybody knows the person or year then Byfleet Heritage Society would love to know.

Prior to 1980 the event was held on a Wednesday and the children were given a day off school so that they could participate in the races. The day was changed to a Saturday so that fathers could join in. It was held alternatively at Byfleet and West Byfleet Recreation Grounds with free buses laid on. In recent years it has reverted to Byfleet village.

In 2010 the day was in danger of not going ahead, the Parish Day Committee had dwindled in numbers and more and more work was being placed in the hands of fewer and fewer hard working people. Notices were placed around the village requesting help to keep the day going and a new committee was formed from a broad spectrum of residents who came forward and some existing members. A sharp learning curve meant that there were some anxious committee members on the day but 2010 turned out, with the help of some good weather, to be a great success.

We hope you will attend this year, 'Community Spirit' is a much used phrase these days but in Byfleet it certainly seems to be back in vogue. Fantastic support from local businesses at a time when many are feeling the pinch, we have lost count of the donations and have been staggered what they have done for Byfleet. Wonderful attendances at last year's event, at the Christmas Fayre in the Village Hall, the switching on of the Christmas Lights on the Village Green and the Village Hall. The Royal Wedding tea party in which 300 children, and their parents attended, all were impeccably behaved. It seems that if you do bother to provide things for Byfleet residents and businesses and you let them know then the support is there. On another page of this magazine there is a list of people who have supported us again this year and details of where monies raised were distributed in Byfleet, it is our aim to support Byfleet!



Possibly from BAC.

If you would like to help, even for an hour, at next years Parish Day then you can find contact details elsewhere in this site. The contacts apply if you have any memories or old programmes and memorabilia that you would like to share.



Grahame Osborn
Friends of Byfleet Parish Day Committee

Sources:

- Byfleet A Village of England by Leonard R Stevens.
- From Bouncing bombs to Concord the authorised biography of Sir George Edwards OM by Robert Gardner.
- A Brief History of Parish Day by Howard Cook.
- Parish Day programme articles by Hazel Stone.