

BYFLEET - BY THE WEY (NOT IN THE WAY)

Iain Wakeford 2017



The name 'Byfleet' goes back to at least the 10th century when the word 'fleet' was the term for a river or stream (hence the Fleet river in London where Fleet Street is today) - Byfleet is literally 'by the river'. Of course sometimes parts of the village have not been 'by it', but 'in it', as this picture of Rectory Lane from 1946 or 1947 shows.

Unfortunately at that time, despite flood defence work on the Wey Valley in the 1930's, the village was flooded several times. There are numerous pictures of the Wey Valley around Sutton Green and Old Woking under water in November 1946, but judging from the leaves on the trees in this picture it seems unlikely to be that event.

The floods of November 1946 were followed by the cold winter of 1946-7, which went down in the record books as one of the coldest, with snow on the ground from January 1947 until early March. When the snow turned to rain in the middle part of March and as the thaw set in many places again experienced flooding, with the Thames Valley coming off worse perhaps than the Wey Valley.

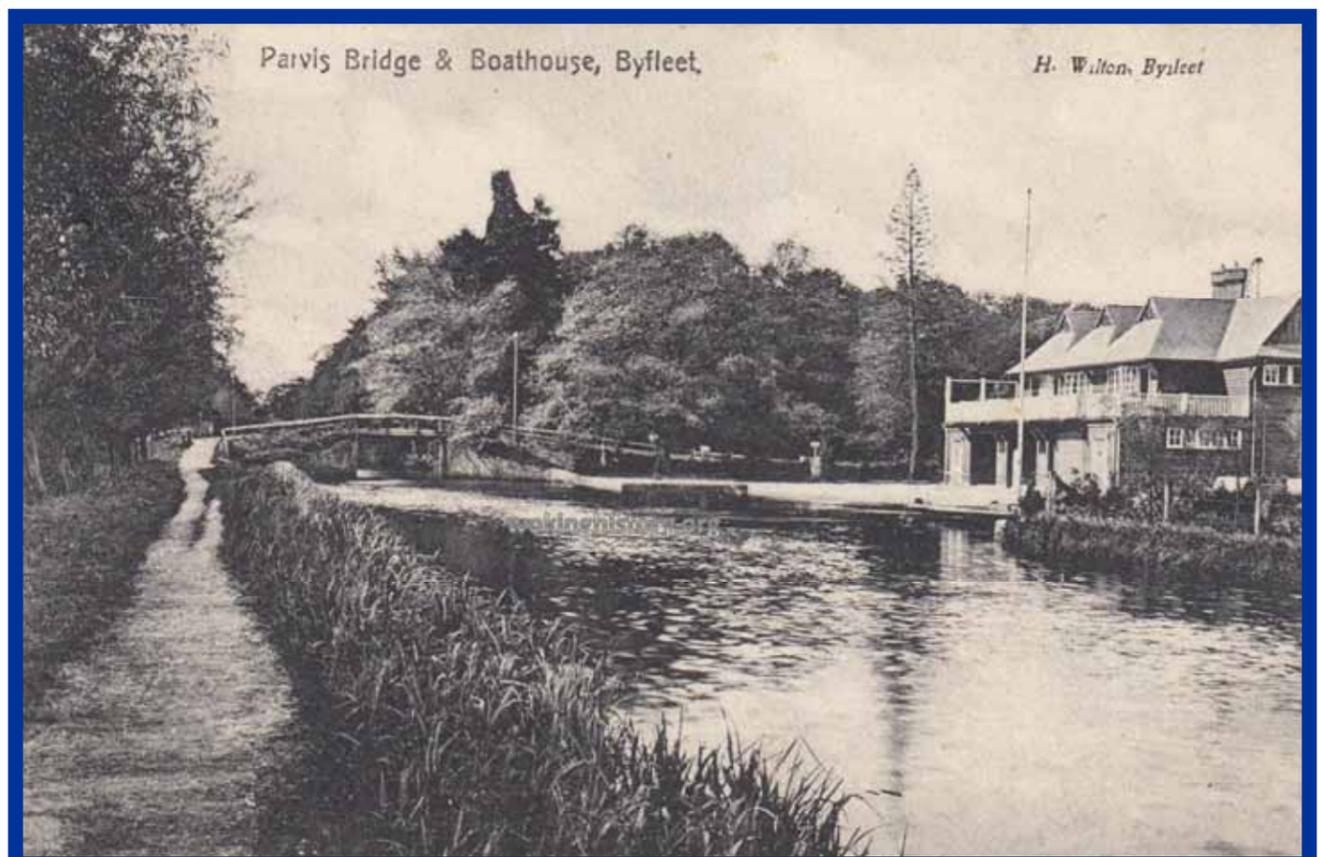
If the winter was a record-breaking one, the summer of 1947 seems to have been one of records too. At the time it was the third warmest since records began (now relegated to sixth with warmer times in 1976, 1983 and 1995), but as is often the case with periods of warm weather, early July 1947 was merely the 'calm before the storm'. On the 16th July a sudden downpour caused chaos with between

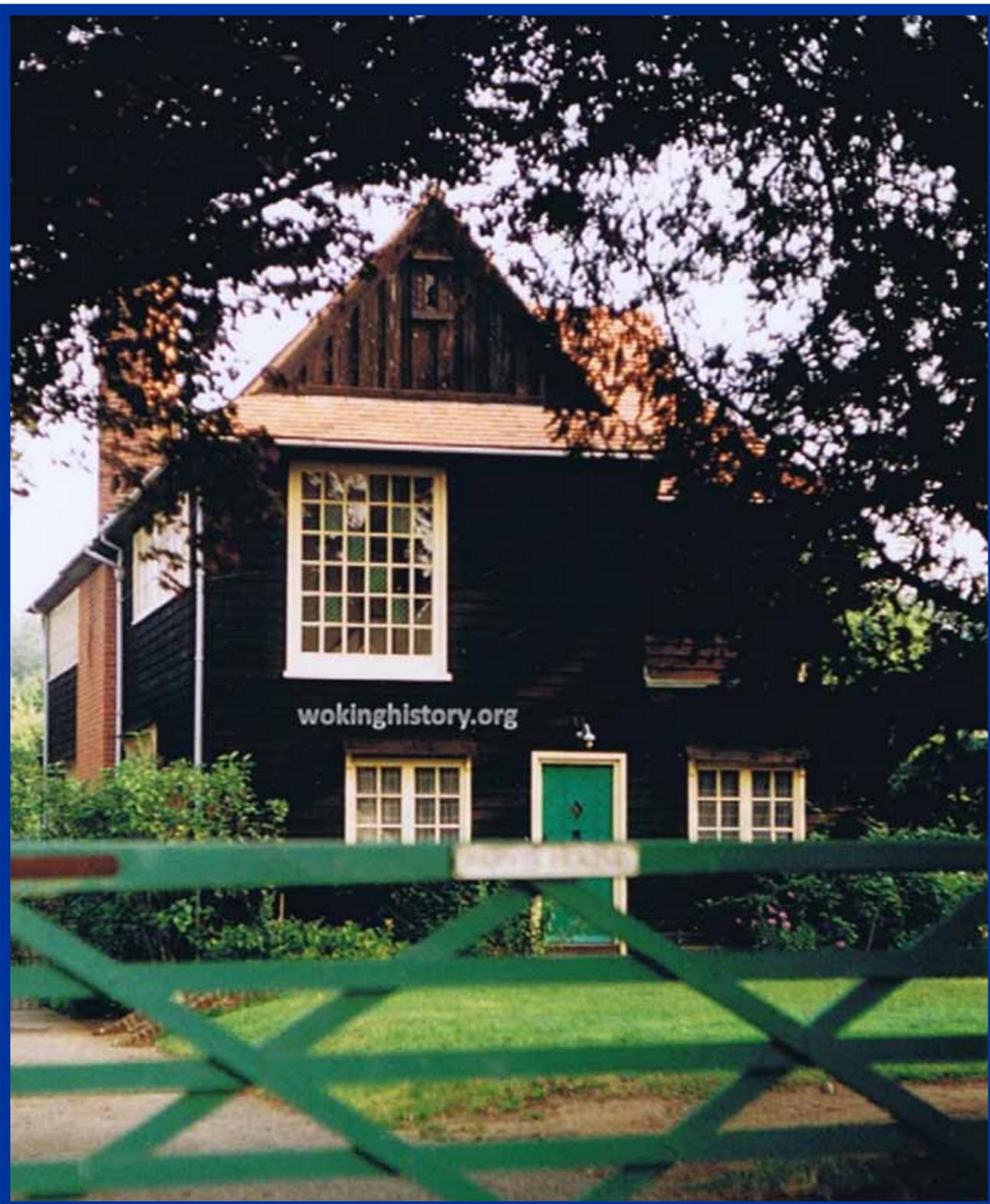
four or five inches of rain falling on Byfleet and Wisley in a matter of hours. Indeed I have seen one report that claims that at Wisley over 100mm of rain fell in just 75 minutes!

I think this picture must be of that event, with the children of Rectory Lane in shorts and summer dresses, running out into the street to paddle (whilst no doubt their parents mopped up the mess indoors). Apparently between the 5th August and 6th September it hardly rained at all and by October that year many places in this country were experiencing a drought – but that is the British weather for you!

1947 was also an important year for the boathouses on the Wey Navigation by Parvis Bridge in Byfleet. In March 1947 there were plans to turn the original boathouse on the Dartnell Park side of the Navigation into 'living accommodation for two families' (at a cost of £750), whilst the future of the public boathouse on the opposite bank was also in doubt.

The old boathouse had been built in the late 1880's or 90's for the exclusive use of the residents of the newly developed Dartnell Park Estate. Here they could store their own boats or hire punts to enjoy the tranquil waters of the





Wey Navigation. It was built by Mr F C Stoop of West Hall (whose wife was apparently the heiress of the Dartnell Park estate) and comprised of clubhouse facilities on the first floor with a balcony overlooking the Navigation, accessed by stairs on either side from the boat deck beneath.

The venture was so popular that early in the 20th century Mr Stoop decided that a second boathouse was required to store the punts for hire, and by arrangement with Mr H F Locking he acquired the land opposite for what became known as the Byfleet Boat House (completed about 1911-12).

After the First World War Mr Stoop started a boat club here for the less well-off villagers of Byfleet. It was run by trustees, including two parish councillors, the vicar, Mr Stoop and two of his nominees, but when he died in 1933 Mr Stoop left the boat house on the Byfleet side to the Parish Council, along with a number of old boats and punts no longer required by the Dartnell Club members.

With the abolition of Byfleet Parish Council the property passed to Woking Urban District Council who allowed a succession of tenants to run the property (with limited success) until 1949, when they took over the upkeep themselves.

Sadly the old Dartnell Park boathouse, bought in 1946 by Councillor Henry Cawsey (after whom Cawsey Way in Woking was named), has not survived having been demolished in the late 1990's, but at least the Byfleet Boat Club survives where still the villagers of Byfleet (and others) can hire boats to while away the time on the now not so tranquil waters of the Wey.