

# THE SHATTERED VILLAGE OF BYFLEET

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The architectural writer, broadcaster and critic, Ian Nairn, once famously described Byfleet as 'a shattered village', noting in the Surrey edition of the Penguin Series on the 'Buildings of England' (published in 1962) that 'a few old houses remain' and adding 'this century's contribution is beneath contempt'. I wouldn't like to hazard a guess at which particular 20<sup>th</sup> century contributions he was thinking about, but sadly as the 1960's wore on, he would have found that even some of the old houses he had noted no longer remained, as Foxlake Farm and Vanners Farm disappeared from the High Road.

The 1950's (like the 1930's) had seen numerous little closes and cul-de-sac developed on some of the fields around the village, but in



One of the 'few old houses' in Byfleet that the writer Ian Nairn could have observed before 1962 was Foxlake Farm, but within a few years it had been demolished.



1946 London County Council published its revolutionary 'Greater London Plan' with most of the undeveloped land around Byfleet (and indeed West Byfleet and Pyrford), included in the new 'Green Belt' designed to halt the urban sprawl around the capital.

The plan for the Green Belt was later adopted by Surrey County Council, but the trouble was that back in the late 1920's the North West Surrey Structure Plan had highlighted much the same area as suitable for housing, and indeed just before the war permission had been granted for the Manor Farm Estate to be built on the fields between Byfleet church and the Manor House. The County Council could revoke that permission, but it would have to compensate the owners of the land, and at an estimated £100,000 it was thought that to defend the Green Belt here was too expensive.

The local resident's association (set up in 1928 partially as a response to the North-West Surrey Plan) was well aware that more housing was required in the area, but they opposed the Manor Farm development. This led some to suggest that they were what would later be termed 'Nimby's', but as the former Secretary of the Association, Howard Cook, pointed out in his 'Short history of the Byfleet, West Byfleet & Pyrford Resident's Association' (published in 2003) - "The committee could foresee that, should the development be allowed, it would be difficult to imagine any situation where green belt status would be preserved if compensation were involved. They were apprehensive of the fate of open spaces in the vicinity if the zoning were not maintained (with justification as will be seen later) and knew that if they did not oppose the scheme at the Public Inquiry and acquiesced in the rape they could never again fight to uphold Green Belt. Thus, it never was a question of opposing expansion as such or having an unwelcoming attitude to newcomers. In the end, financial expediency won the day.'

There was other infilling too within the village





The building of the Manor Farm Estate by Wait & Co (who as we saw a couple of weeks ago were also busy building the Hermitage Estate in St Johns) meant the 'fastening' of the Green Belt had started to loosen almost as soon as it had been made.

centre, where as we saw a few months ago the Royston Chase Hotel had been demolished and replaced by forty-eight maisonettes and seven shops by H B Kingston Ltd.

Kingston's, it seems, were at that time mounting a 'take-over bid' for the village, as they also planned to build fifty-five dwellings on the grounds of Foxlake Farm, with another eighty-seven behind the Clock House - ironically both sites that at one time had been eyed by Woking Council as possible plots for new council houses (the former in 1956 and the latter in 1957).

But it was the development of the 'green belt' sites to the south of the village that was the big story at this time in Byfleet. 1960 saw plans submitted by the Suval Construction Co, for twenty-four houses on three acres of land at Sanway, with A H Moreshead seeking permission for seventy-two properties (on just seven acres of land) which, it was claimed, would 'round-off' the early post-war development of the Council's St Mary's Estate. Along with Wait & Co's Manor Farm Estate, thirty-seven acres of land had been taken out of the Green Belt almost as soon as it had been declared part of it. Nevertheless the public enquiry had saved some of Manor Farm from development, where a further 416 houses (and 15 shops) had at one time been planned, and the inspector forced the Sanway Road scheme to reserve land for the site of a new school.



Vanners Farm was likewise demolished in the early 1960's as the old houses of the village became fewer still.

These photographs, and the ones of Foxlake Farm, are from the collection of Mr G Smith of Chobham, whom I would like to thank for copying and sending them to me.

