

The Yateley Society



ANNUAL REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDING
31 DECEMBER 1999

1. INTRODUCTION

Every year seems to be a busy year for the Yateley Society, 1999 was no exception. Some activities, such as involvement with the Forest of Eversley and the churchyard memorials rescue have remained low key, others have been more alive, such is the way with a voluntary organisation with limited time available. As might be expected, 'Planning' and trying to fight the threat of more development has taken the lead as so often happens.

The Secretary of State's decision on the latest Fox Farm Inquiry went our way and was cause for rejoicing, however it seems that these development proposals never die and it is re-surfacing in the High Court.

The Local Plan has caused some consternation over some clauses and at the same time has appeared to be favourable to our views in other areas; at the end of the year the latest modifications were being awaited with some trepidation.

Two planning applications have greatly exercised the Society during the year, one being Yateley Lodge which, while the plan to turn it into a public house-cum-restaurant was rejected, will undoubtedly reappear in a new form, and the second being the scheme to turn the 'Mushroom Farm' into a Business Park of unexpectedly large dimensions. The latter, with the local opposition to it, has provided both a source of work for our Planning team and a source of new members for the Society, so not everything is black!

Historical research has continued, with ever more data being uncovered on many topics; this, when suitably verified, has been entered into the swelling History Data Base. Richard Johnston has yet again put a vast amount of time and effort into this excellent and unique project.

Most of the traditional activities of the Society, the talks, special events and conservation working parties, have continued throughout the year and are reported on.

One activity which has been most noticeable by its absence has been the organised walks. This has been due to the preoccupation of the organisers of past walks with other duties and activities. There is an ideal opportunity here for someone who likes walking (not too strenuously), and who would like to get to know other members – people like walking, but somehow fail to get round to it unless someone else decides on a route and start time – so how about it???

Active conservation on Yateley Common has continued every month throughout the year, combining manual labour with a bit of socialising. There is a tremendous amount of work waiting to be done on the Common, and every little bit we do lets the Rangers get on with something more specialised which only they can do. We have been a bit short of help from the schools this year, so man-hours are down, but the core stalwarts have done a good job, and could do with some extra help in 2000!!

1999 saw a dramatic break with tradition in the lack of a Yateley Society presence

at the May Fayre. The Executive Committee believed that the May Fayre had become little more than a glorified funfair and was no longer attracting many people interested in Society activities. It was decided that an event specific to the Yateley Society, at a more suitable venue, would be a better bet. The Yateley Industries hall was booked for July 3rd and an exhibition devoted to 'Yateley Myths and Legends', including Parson Darby, Charlie Peace, the Crystal Cup, African Kings in Yateley, and many other topics both factual and fictional was prepared by Peter and Elizabeth Tipton. This was accompanied by a demonstration of the History Data Base compiled and operated by Richard Johnston. The result was very satisfactory, many people came and showed interest, and a few joined the Society. The venue proved to be good, we attracted more business for the Yateley Industries Teashop, so they persuaded their customers to look at our exhibition, a good *quid pro quo*. A small sales stall was included, carefully avoiding competition with Yateley Industries goods, and this offset the cost of the hall. We shall try this again!

Near the end of 1999 the approach of the new Millennium (well – maybe most people are a year ahead in theory!) resulted in some requests to the Society to set up special projects. We are committed to help with the St Peter's Church Flower Festival – providing an exhibition and not making flower arrangements!, and we have been asked by Yateley Town Council to consider producing a booklet of pedestrian short-cuts in Yateley, as part of a campaign to persuade people to walk instead of drive in Yateley. This sounds attractive, but will involve a fair amount of work in 2000 – I shall be making an appeal for help!

The Society suggested to Yateley Town Council that the provision of a footpath and cycle track along Sandhurst Road would make a good YTC Millennium project, but the need for Hampshire County Council expenditure on this makes it unlikely in the near future. We also suggested that Yateley Town Council could organise a photographic survey of the town, by the inhabitants, to provide a record of Yateley in 2000 for the benefit of future generations; there is hope of this starting.

2. ADMINISTRATION

The Officers of the Society during 1999 were:

- Chairman – Tony Hocking;
- Vice Chairman – Roger Coombes;
- Honorary Secretary – Richard Johnston;
- Honorary Treasurer – Peter Tipton.

Executive Committee members were:

- Graham Brown (Membership Secretary);
- Pam Medley;
- Colin Medley;
- Philip Todd.

There were eight Executive Committee meetings (Nos. 152 to 159) during the year in the regular series for Society management. There were no special meetings this year.

3. MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Society has grown very significantly during the year, particularly so over the last six months, and we now have 134 households in good standing. In 1997 we welcomed 16 new members; in 1998 we had another 12 new members, but in 1999 we recruited another 38 members. This surge of interest was created partly by the exhibitions at Yateley Industries and later in the Library, which brought the Society's activities to the notice of more people and also by the new developments proposed for the Mushroom Farm.

We particularly welcome new members from the Darby Green area, a region where we have always been thin on the ground.

It is hoped that the new members will become active and vocal and will help the Society to move in new directions.

We are proposing to change the membership renewal dates from each member's anniversary of joining to a fixed time each year. This will simplify the process of collecting subscriptions and should remove members' confusion over when subscriptions are due.

4. PLANNING

The Society's planning activities have continued to suffer from too few people being actively involved, and it has been possible only to follow up the most important or most pressing planning issues. Nevertheless letters were submitted concerning a few planning proposals during the year.

4.1 Yateley Lodge

Peter Tipton and Richard Johnston represented The Yateley Society at the Yateley Lodge Planning Inquiry in February, where Bass sought to convert the house into a public house. The historical and archaeological evidence presented by the Society provided the basis for the Inquiry Inspector's refusal of the appeal. Unfortunately, there may be a renewed attempt to obtain planning consent for conversion.

4.2 The Mushroom Farm

The proposal to turn the Mushroom Farm into a Business Park provoked a strong reaction from residents in Darby Green, who formed an action committee to resist the over-development it represents. The Society has been helping this action group, and a number of those closely involved have now joined the Society, so there is hope that the planning group will be able to recruit some new blood. Many of the

issues at the Mushroom Farm involve the traffic problem, which has resulted in the Society progressing its land use and traffic strategy for Yateley: a change in the general planning climate is resulting as our views on the subject are beginning to be heard by local councillors and the planning authorities.

4.3 Fox Farm Inquiry

The Secretary of State gave his decision on the third Fox Farm Inquiry. Two Inspectors had held inquiries. The first Inspector, who sat in mid-1996, advised the Secretary of State to allow the appeal. After receiving the report of the first Inspector, but without making the first Inspector's report public knowledge, the Secretary of State called for a new environmental assessment. A second Inspector, who was appointed to hear evidence concerning the environmental assessment, advised the Secretary of State to dismiss the appeal. The Secretary of State agreed with the second Inspector. This means that since 1989 Hart District Council, supported by English Nature, the RSPB, and of course the Yateley Society, has won three separate inquiries, totalling four separate hearings. Yateley Town Council and Hampshire County Council supported Hart at three of these hearings.

Despite this apparently overwhelming consensus locally, regionally and nationally against building a housing estate on these fields adjacent to an Special Protection Area for Wild Birds and a National Nature Reserve, British Car Auctions have decided to challenge the Secretary of State in the High Court. If successful BCA's legal action can only quash the decision – they cannot immediately build houses. In order to be allowed to build houses BCA will have to submit a fourth planning application. This will of course be turned down by Hart, as have the previous three. So if BCA is successful in the High Court, we may be facing a fourth Public Inquiry, and a fifth hearing (six if you count the High Court hearing). If any developer of any site deserves the Society's epithet 'planning by attrition' then BCA must surely take the gold medal for Fox Farm. However before we get to yet another inquiry BCA will face the Secretary of State in the High Court. Hart District Council is appearing as a third party. This judicial review in itself will probably make legal history. Of course if BCA loses in the High Court they can still submit another planning application. It seems to be a case of who loses heart first.

4.4 Local Plan

Another long-awaited Inspector's report was the mammoth tome presented to Hart by the Inspector of the Local Plan Inquiry. The Local Plan originally included no development sites in Yateley, but a commercial site at the Mushroom Farm was slipped in as a pre-inquiry change. During the Inquiry developers submitted plans for ten sites in and abutting Yateley. If the developers get their way, except for registered common land, designated public open space, and the Yateley Lakes, practically all other privately-owned green fields would be developed. The Yateley

Society was not allowed to object to the developers' objections but we did object strongly to the Mushroom Farm and to a number of plan policies which we felt needed strengthening, including a different way of looking at the town centre.

In the event the Inspector agreed the sites put forward for development by Hart and ranked the objection sites being put forward by the developers. Most sites in Yateley were classified in the Inspector's category "not to be developed in this plan period. His comments concerning Yateley were particularly valuable in that he agreed with Hart that Yateley was not 'sustainable' in planning terms. Having recommended the Mushroom Farm for a mix of office and leisure development, the Inspector also recommended Sandhurst Lane for a similar mix of office and leisure development. Having made Yateley very slightly more sustainable, he then classified the Urnfield site between Moulsham Lane and Chandlers Lane as potential housing development by McAlpine. The next step is the publication of modifications to the Local Plan allowing local people to comment on these proposals.

4.5 Other Problem Areas

The Society continues to be concerned about and actively involved with such concerns as the Common, the Airfield, and Blackbushe Metals. As regards Blackbushe Metals, the Society is actively involved in the Hampshire County Council consultative committee which oversees its work – slow progress is being made on this difficult problem of long standing.

4.6 Outside Representations

The Society has been represented on the Yateley Commons Management Committee, the Yateley Town Centre Management Committee and the Blackbushe Metals Liaison Panel. Mike Mann continues to be a director of the Forest of Eversley Trust.

5. HISTORY

Individuals continued their research projects during the year, and the exhibition held at Yateley Industries and later at the Library provided a strong stimulus to some projects – including more progress on the mythical Parson Darby, and Charles Peace.

A booklet on The Haven, a Baptist home for unmarried mothers, has been prepared by Valerie Kerslake.

The lectures which the Society provided for the Yateley Library 25-year celebrations in the Autumn attracted over 100 people, to whom Peter Tipton lectured on Parson Darby, and Richard Johnston on the Yateley History database. This drew in a number of new members with a primary interest in local history.

The number of active history researchers has increased this year, and the level of history interest in the Society is particularly strong at the moment.

The Society continued to try to co-operate with the church authorities concerning the memorials in the churchyard rubbish tip, but there has as yet been no success in rescuing them.

Some members of the group had the opportunity to visit Yew Tree Cottage, Darby Green, which appears to be a small late-medieval cross-passage hall house, probably contemporary with the yew tree in the front garden. This house is of a type which, being small, is a rare survivor of a type of small farmhouse which must once have been common in this area.

A meeting with Mrs Edwards of the Hampshire Archives Trust resulted in the deposit on loan of some of the Yateley Society's more precious historical records at the Hampshire Record Office. Computerised copies of all the materials so deposited have been retained by the Society, so local researchers still have access to the information these records contain. Further records are expected to be deposited in due course, once satisfactory local copies are available.

During the year a substantial proportion of the Yateley Parish Records were computerised, the microfilms having been lent by Hampshire Record Office following Mrs Edwards' visit. The 1910 Land Tax records were transcribed from the Field Books held at the Public Record Office – these records provide quite detailed descriptions of Yateley's houses in the period just before the first world war.

5.2 Yateley History Project Database

During the year the database was again expanded to include a great deal more material, especially the above mentioned Parish Records and Tax records. Other material includes the 1941 MAF Farm survey, and a number of further pictures and other records were added.

An update of the database (version 3.5A) was completed during the year and released in the Autumn. In addition to the extra material, there were minor improvements to the viewing programs, and extra features were incorporated for displaying pictures interspersed between an explanation about the database. This auto display feature was developed for use at exhibitions, and was used for the first time when the database was exhibited as a 'hands-on' experience at Yateley Library in the Autumn. About fifteen members of the Society now have copies of some version of the database.

6. CONSERVATION

6.1 Background

The year of 1999 has been subdued in volunteer terms, with our core group of stalwarts being supported only by a late influx of enthusiastic students. The overall volunteer hours have therefore been lower than the previous year, a cyclic and predictable warning signal to the decision makers at Hampshire County Council

who might be tempted to include ephemeral volunteer labour in manpower planning projections. Nevertheless, some positive results have been achieved this year.

The long-awaited Yateley Common Management Plan completed its journey through committee, consultation, and amendments processes and the five-year rolling-programme was accepted and launched. Through the efforts of Tony Davis and his team, an opportunity has now been created to consolidate the recent gains, expand the grazing programme, and obviate the need for large scale tree felling in future. This may then convert the anti-felling lobby into active supporters of the active heathland restoration and management undertaken in recent years.

6.2 Activities Undertaken

Conservation activities focused mainly on Yateley Common during this year, with Birch, Pine and some Gorse removal the main tasks during January, March, April, May, July, August, September, October, November and December. Work on the Castle Bottom NNR (National Nature Reserve) was conducted during February and June, involving Birch and Pine removal on one occasion, and a Bracken pull on the other.

6.3 Awards for Hours Contributed

The year saw a handful of certificates earned by students (some still to be awarded) and the hours worked by the core group of volunteers pushed up to very high personal totals.

6.4 Liaison with the Forest of Eversley

One departure from the normal heathland maintenance was a visit to Eversley, in support of the Forest of Eversley Trust, in order to maintain a hedge of about 650 trees which had been planted in 1998 by the same team. The loss rate had been a mere 1%, a testament to the skill and application of the group which was heavily dominated by the Yateley Society members.

As usual, our sincere thanks goes to all the people who turned out to support this worthwhile activity on our local, rare heathland. Furthermore, we extend a warm welcome to anyone who enjoys a little light exercise and fresh air – come and join our friendly little group for an hour or so, or more – we appreciate any help, whatever can be spared. No experience needed!

7. YATELEY SOCIETY WEBSITE

The Society website to publicise the Society is being maintained on the Hampshire County Council webserver. This provides information about the Society in general, and about its publications, provides notice of meetings, and a local history site has been established within it. It may be found at <http://hants.org.uk/yateley/> The site continues to attract modest interest, most recently from a lady in Canada who used to live at Yateley Hall.

During the year, The Society started to develop a members email list, which is being used to remind members of meetings and to convey urgent information.

8. PUBLICATIONS SUB-COMMITTEE

If you glance at last year's report you may be forgiven for wondering whether you have missed the release of new postcards promised for 1999. The simple answer is that you haven't. It had been our intention to launch a series of eight new cards at our July exhibition held at Yateley Industries, but a combination of problems prevented this. The series was to consist of five contemporary views of Yateley, including Darby Green Pond, and three 'old' scenes dating from the turn of the century. The selection of photographs was a long process, and then it was found that there were technical difficulties in reproducing from old negatives stored in the database. This led to a rethinking of what we are aiming at, with a detailed evaluation of which cards have been most popular in terms of sales: the general conclusion being that 'old' views are less popular than contemporary ones. This was surprising as recipients have particularly praised the view of Gadd's Stores.

We have found a printer who is able to produce cards in smaller runs whilst keeping the unit price reasonably low. This will enable us to introduce more cards without the problem of holding stocks which would take a couple of decades to shift at present sales rates. Our photographers, to whom I convey grateful thanks for the huge amount of time which they have spent out and about around Yateley, have been asked to capture well-known, attractive Yateley scenes with a human element, in other words, people doing things! So far we have a lovely shot of two boys fishing at the pond on the Green, and we want to record the ever-popular Yateley Morris men in a well-known location.

The trouble is knowing what other people like, and what they use postcards for. This is where the membership can help; the next *Newsletter* will contain an article on postcards.

There has been no response to last year's appeal for old films of family and community events in Yateley. It would be of great benefit to both the owners and the Society if those old films were transferred to video before the film decomposes and the old-style projectors break down beyond repair.

As also reported under History, Valerie Kerslake has prepared a booklet on The Haven, a Baptist home for unmarried mothers in Vigo Lane some years ago.

9. NEWSLETTERS AND PROGRAMME

9.1 Newsletters

Two *Newsletters*, numbers 71 and 72, were published in 1999, plus four *Stop Press* issues, numbers 40 to 43.

Following requests from several members, accounts of talks given to the Society formed a large proportion of the topics covered. Other subjects included an

archaeological dig on Yateley Common, natural history notes, some historical articles and the regular 'Commoners' Corner' and 'Chairman's Chat'.

The Stop Presses were, as was always intended, used to publicise special events and to give programme updates.

9.2 Programme

The year's programme included a mixture of talks and special events.

The talks continued the historical slant established in 1998, and again included some areas outside Yateley itself in order to gain a wider picture. Conservation and old buildings were allowed to get a foot in the door for variety.

Conservation Working Parties met on Yateley Common on the last Sunday of every month, apart from December when the meeting was delayed for a week because of the proximity of Christmas to the usual last Sunday.

9.2 i) 1999 Talks:

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| March 18 | The History of Yateley Industries for the Disabled by Simon Lovell-Smith, Yateley Industries' Business Manager. |
| April 15 | Conservation on the Defence Estate by Victoria Crossland from the Defence Estates Office. |
| May 20 | The History of Blackbushe in the War by Steve Purchase, author of a forthcoming book about Blackbushe. |
| June 17 | The Work of the Hampshire Archives Trust by Caroline Edwards of the Hampshire Archives Trust. |
| September 18 | Archaeology in Hampshire by David Hopkins, County Archaeologist. |
| October 21 | The Vyne – the House and Recent Developments by Margaret Drury, a local National Trust speaker. |
| November 18 | 'Caught in Time' – a photographic history of western Surrey Heath by Sharron Cross, curator of Surrey Heath museum. |
| December 16 | Yateley Lodge – a Survey of a Threatened Building by Richard Johnston, Yateley Society Secretary and historian. |

9.2.ii) 1999 Walks:

No walks took place in 1999. Would someone like to lead some in 2000?

9.2.iii) 1999 Special Events:

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| February 18 | Annual General Meeting. |
| July 3 | Yateley Society Exhibition (at Yateley Industries) 'Yateley Myths and Legends'. |

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| July 10th | Summer Social. |
| October 20th | Yateley Library Anniversary. |

Examination of this report and of last year's report will reveal that there was no Christmas Social for 1998, principally due to too many commitments for the usual organisers. A Christmas Social for 1999, to be held in January 2000 and in the form of a dinner has been planned.

The exhibition on July 3rd, held at Yateley Industries, took the place of the traditional appearance at the Yateley May Fayre as a publicity vehicle for the Society. This proved successful; some new members joined and considerable interest was shown. It has been suggested that this be repeated, but at a time when the weather is less favourable for people to be interested in outdoor pursuits.

The Summer Social, which followed the custom of a buffet meal and a quiz, was hosted this year by Stephanie and Ron Pattenden and organised by Stephanie Pattenden and Mary Hocking, to all of whom we offer our profound thanks. The culinary contributions from those who attended were well up to the usual superb standard and we are most grateful.

The Yateley Library Anniversary was marked by an evening of talks on the story of the Yateley Society and some of the 'Yateley Myths and Legends'. This proved popular with both the library staff and with the public. The 'Myths and Legends' exhibition was on display in the library for the end of September and all of October.

Anthony J F Hocking
Chairman, The Yateley Society

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