



# The Yateley Society



*Annual Report*  
**1997**

## THE YATELEY SOCIETY

## Annual Report 1997

This Report covers activities during the year ended 31 December 1997

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**W**E WERE VERY sad to lose the services of Dr David Lister as Chairman near the end of the year because of the pressure of other duties. One consequence is that this Annual Report has been compiled by the Vice Chairman, with the assistance of the Secretary and other members with specific responsibilities. We wish David well for the future and trust that life will soon improve for him.

What has happened in the Society in 1997? Inevitably most activities have been much as before, which is consoling in that it shows that the Society remains as healthy and active as ever, even if the duties are often carried out by the same familiar group of people (there are still some founder members on the Executive Committee).

Perhaps the most important item in 1997 was the very necessary revision of the Yateley Society Constitution, reported under 'Administration', which was initiated by changes in charity regulations.

During 1997 the Society continued to make its presence felt in the planning field; although there have been no real highlights, there has nevertheless been much work done and much preparation for future battles. The current concern is the Hart District Plan, while the Fox Farm Inquiry continues to hang over us.

It was hoped that one potentially very important project would get under way this year: the refurbishment of the old St Barnabus or 'Tin' Church for public use. However, this was stopped in its tracks by the disastrous fire which effectively destroyed the building, even before the means of acquiring it had been worked out.

The traditional activities of the Society, the talks, walks and conservation working parties, have continued throughout the year and are briefly reported on. Many of the people taking part or attending as audiences were the regulars, but there has also been an encouraging number of new faces.

One facet of the Society activities possibly unknown to many members is the provision of talks and walks for outside organisations, a good means of spreading knowledge of Yateley. (See '5. External Activities'.)

The social side of life and the May Fayre have generally followed the usual pattern. Our grateful thanks are due to all the people who spent much time and effort in organising and running the events and who donated items for sale at the

May Fayre; and finally we thank those members who came to our stall to spend money!

On behalf of the Chairman I would like to thank all members of the Executive Committee for their support during 1997, and also all those other members who helped organise and run the Society activities.

## 2. ADMINISTRATION

### The Officers of the Society during 1997 were:

<i>Chairman</i>	Dr David Lister
<i>Vice Chairman</i>	Tony Hocking
<i>Honorary Secretary</i>	Richard Johnston
<i>Honorary Treasurer</i>	Peter Tipton

### Executive Committee members were:

Irene Draper; Norma Dowling; Graham Brown (Membership Secretary); Philip Todd; David Ashworth.

Six Executive Committee meetings took place during the year in the regular series for Society management. There was one additional meeting to collate and discuss amendments to the Society Constitution.

The Society's Constitution was revised to make it conform with current charity law, to bring its objectives up to date, and to improve its administrative provisions. Conformation with the recently revised charity laws and regulations was mandatory. The revisions were the subject of prolonged discussion by the Executive Committee and periods of discussion with the membership in general. We are now in the happy state of being up to date with all mandatory requirements, and the new Constitution has been approved by both the Charity Commissioners and the Civic Trust. Prior to the approval by the external bodies, the revisions were agreed by the Society membership at a Special General Meeting.

## 3. MEMBERSHIP

**O**UR MEMBERSHIP REMAINS at approximately the same level from year to year, though we tend to attract more new members when there are serious local issues that raise concerns. In the last year membership has declined with fewer new members than usual. At the end of 1997 there are 220 individual and two corporate members.

During the year we lost nine memberships through families retiring, moving away or failing to renew subscriptions. On the other hand we have welcomed several new members.

Subscriptions fall due on the anniversary of the joining date, so they are spread throughout the year. However, because the Society started in a January and because the May Fayre attracts new members, most renewals are between January and May. The heaviest month is May, the number being about the same as the total for the rest of the year.

Several founder members are still with us, though sadly the years have taken their toll. There are still 48 loyal members who joined in 1982 and 91 who joined before 1990. The development of the Society can be tracked approximately by the membership numbers. The next member will be number 531, and the first member in 1990 was number 354. So we should expect to recruit about 25 new members per year.

## 4. CONSERVATION

**T**HE YEAR STARTED with the Group supporting Tony Davis and his team as they conducted major felling activities on Yateley Common, in particular, areas bordering Cricket Hill Lane and North of the Ely Hotel. The neglect of previous decades had allowed a significant degree succession from open heath to secondary woodland to occur. As expected, restoration of the heathland to its previous, more open aspect remains a serious perceptual problem with many locals; this probably stems from the belief that trees are always beneficial and beautiful, and should be planted not cut down. This is combined with a lack of appreciation for the rarity of lowland heath and all its dependant species.

Sessions of dragging, burning and clearing up after the contractors' felling operations were conducted from January to May, with three extra sessions in April. One large area of heather was cleared of invading Birch scrub in February, but was reduced to a blackened scar by an arsonist a few weeks later (three separate fires were lit almost simultaneously). Other activities included bracken removal work at Castle Bottom, and a session at the Gravel Pit pond to remove an illegally introduced Antipodean pond weed. Left unchecked this weed has the capacity to choke out the British pond life! Birch scrub removal at the West end, and The Flats, continued for the rest of the year.

Six certificates were awarded during the year, and trophies were presented to two of our most dedicated volunteers, Christian and Bob Seymour, to recognise outstanding long term support and commitment. This year we feel that we have been supported particularly well by Frank Rose, another long term volunteer of several years and a cornerstone of the Group (although not a Yateley Society member). Frank was very ill for several months, but nevertheless summoned his strength to join the work parties. An inspiration to the rest of us, we wish him a full recovery in the New Year. This year has been particularly rewarding for the organisers of the group because we have seen new levels of enthusiasm and effort

from our latest crop of young volunteers. This has contributed to a new all-time high for the annual total hours worked, and consequently, a greater conservation impact.

Many thanks to all the 51 volunteers who have turned out, month after month to make this a record year for the Conservation Group.

The last session of the year was attended well, and in keeping with previous years hot mulled wine & baked potatoes were enjoyed by the troops, followed by Mary Hocking's delicious, hot mince pies.

## 5. EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES

**M**EMBERS OF THE Society have given some six talks to other organisations, including schools. Examples were: Fleet & Crookham History Society, The Thursday Club, Yateley School (Non-Academic Stream). This activity is useful in that it spreads information about Yateley and its surroundings, may occasionally lead to a new member for the Society and provides an opportunity for selling Society publications to a new audience.

In June two groups of children from Potley Hill School were guided through some of Yateley's 19th century history by Valerie Kerslake, assisted by Richard Johnston, Norma Dowling and Elizabeth Tipton. Using part of Valerie's **Today and Yesterday**, the first tour began at Forge Court – where traffic noise and manoeuvring cars were hazards – wended its way along Vicarage Road, and ended on the Green. The second group began inside the village school (Yateley Village Hall), and walked the footpath trodden so often by past Yateley school children, between the school and St Peter's church, ending again on the Green. On each occasion about 30 children, a dozen mothers, and two teachers enjoyed a novel outdoor history class.

## 6. HISTORY

**I**NDIVIDUALS CONTINUED THEIR research projects during the year. A particularly major undertaking was the complete re-survey of the churchyard and internal church memorials undertaken by Richard Johnston between April and June.

This updated surveys previously undertaken under Jean McIlwaine's supervision, adding extra information about each grave, correcting any errors and adding the not inconsiderable number of new memorials. Some important memorials have been removed to the rubbish tip, and the Society hopes to recover these in the near future.

Some further information and pictures were received from the Stilwell family, and Richard Johnston spent an interesting day with some of its members when they

visited Yateley during the summer. By a fortuitous meeting during the course of carrying out the grave survey, contact was also re-established with the Gordon family who owned Hillfield/Yateley Place after the Stilwells.

## 7. YATELEY HISTORY LIBRARY

**I**T HAS BEEN remarkably quiet in the History Library. In theory it should be a simple matter to put each book onto the library database; however, very few enquiries have been received, and only a handful of people actually borrow the books (and they usually know exactly which item they need). In consequence there is little motivation to complete the database and progress has been slow.

We have bought two new books:

### *Heathland Harvest - The Uses of Heathland Plants through the Ages*

Written and published by Chris Howkins, local researcher into plants and their uses from the Ice Age to the present; illustrated with delightful line drawings. Chris tells us that a harvest could be taken from the heathland, somewhere, in every month of the year. It was this use of our lowland heathland to provide building materials, food, drink, medicine, bedding, fuel, grazing and craft materials that preserved it. Now, unless we take the trouble to restore it, Birch, Scots Pine and Oak will take over and this rare habitat with its associated flora and fauna will be lost.

### *Flying through Fire, Fido - The Fogbuster of World War Two* by Geoffrey Williams

FIDO or Fog Investigation and Dispersal Operation was a wartime invention that allowed our returning bombers to land in comparative safety even in fog. The fog was burned off by lines of burners fuelled by petroleum. This account of the development, installation and operational use of FIDO is supported by one hundred unique aerial photos, airfield plans and detailed technical drawings. There is a chapter on Blackbushe airfield.

On a similar subject Michael Holroyd has handed over photocopies of three articles on Blackbushe airport:

### *The Forgotten Airfields* by Trevor Harvey. From *Hampshire Magazine*, July 1985.

### *A History of Blackbushe - 1. The Military Phase* by Trevor Harvey. *Air-Britain Digest*, November-December 1986.

### *Action Stations 9 - Military Airfields of the Central South and South East.* by Chris Ashworth.

Jean McIlwaine has given us a copy of *Fleet the Town of my Youth* by Arthur Jeffrey Edwards.

## 8. YATELEY HISTORY PROJECT DATABASE

**D**URING THE YEAR the database was expanded to include a great deal more material, especially to now include all the large number of pictures and other graphic material that has been scanned into computer. Another large improvement to the coverage of the database is that quite a lot of material was added to the database which relates to the church – most of it courtesy of Jean McIlwaine who is the church archivist. The above-mentioned re-survey of the churchyard is also included. Material like this is not readily available – indeed some of it is not otherwise available – and the further advantage of the computer form is the ease with which the data can be searched for items of interest. The whole database is now available to members (only) on CD-ROM and some five members are now users of the upgraded database. About ten members of the Society in total have copies of some version of the database.

## 9. PLANNING

**T**HE SOCIETY'S PLANNING activities have – fortunately – been relatively low profile during the year. Letters were submitted concerning a number of planning proposals during the year, and the Society continues to be concerned about and actively involved with such matters as the Common, the Airfield, and Blackbushe Metals.

The Fox Farm Inquiry held in mid-summer 1996 has still not been determined by the secretary of State for the Environment. Early in 1997 it was decided that ADT Auctions should provide the Inquiry with an Environmental Statement as required by legislation since 1988. The Society has been calling for this since the Appeal was announced. However, an Environmental Statement is normally provided **before** the Inquiry commences; but we can pride ourselves that at least it is now being provided. As this is being written, the Environmental Statement has been produced and the Society has sent its representations to the Secretary of State. The Inquiry is likely to reopen sometime in 1998.

The Society made about 20 detailed objections to the deposited Hart Local Plan in July 1996. The Local Plan Inquiry started in September 1997, to last for about one year. So far the Society has only been heard at one session when we objected to a policy which would allow noisy motorised sports in the Blackwater Valley to the west of Chandlers Lane. We also objected to a policy to permit motor sports anywhere in the District without adequate controls.

## 10. NEWSLETTERS AND PROGRAMME

### 10.1 NEWSLETTERS

Four *Newsletters*, numbers 64 to 67, were published in 1997, plus three *Stop Press* issues, numbers 33 to 35.

The printing of the *Newsletter* was organised by Graham Brown as he was able to obtain very favourable rates. The *1996 Annual Report*, published in early 1997, utilised the *Newsletter* format and processes.

Articles which appeared covered a mixture of mainly History and Natural History topics, and most issues included a 'Commoners' Corner' provided by Peter Tipton. The occasional 'Letter to the Editor' added extra life; members are encouraged to provide more!

### 10.2 PROGRAMME

The year's programme included the traditional mixture of talks and walks, several special events and participation in the annual Yateley May Fair.

Recognising that many more speakers now require payment, and that room hire costs more, the Executive Committee introduced a £1 visitors' charge for talks, and encouraged members to donate a similar sum. This has proved valuable in offsetting the programme costs, and has not appeared to reduce the number of people attending the talks. The venues used have been Yateley Centre D.1.6. for smaller and more informal meetings, the Yateley WI Hall for larger meetings and Yateley Centre C.1.4 as a fallback. It had been suggested that one venue might be more attractive than others, but no significant variation in attendance has been noticeable.

The walks programme was more extensive and more varied than for many years; our grateful thanks to the leaders. The start of two series of walks 'Exploring the Blackwater River' and 'Member's Favourite Walks' met with a very varied response but we trust that they will continue.

Conservation Working Parties met on Yateley Common on the last Sunday of every month.

### 10.3 1997 TALKS

Over half the talks contributed to the theme of exploring varied aspects of heathland.

January 30 **Visions of Australia** by Tony Hocking

- March 20 **A Year of Surprises Round Fleet Pond** by Bernard Potter
- April 24 **Light Among the Trees** by Peter Beale
- May 22 **Insects** by Arthur Jollands.
- June 26 **Heathland Birds** by Patrick Crowley
- July 24 **Air Pollution, Acid Rain & Heathland** by Dr Helen Ap Simon
- Sept 18 **Reptiles and Amphibians** by Paul Edgar
- Oct 23 **Opportunities Arising from Mineral Extraction** by Ron Foster
- Nov 27 **Yateley Lost and Found** by Geoff Hoare
- Dec 11 **Members' Talks Evening**  
 Ken Crick (**Dragonflies**)  
 Richard Johnston (**His Society Activities**)  
 Peter & Elizabeth Tipton (**Old Buildings and their Conservation in Canada**)  
 Tony Hocking (**Conservation**)

#### 10.4 1997 WALKS

- Feb 9 **Finchampstead Church to California**, led by Christine Hecksher
- Mar 16 **Natural History on Yateley Common**, led by Chris Hall
- Apr 19 **Rowhill** (Source of Blackwater River), led by Irene Draper
- Jun 1 **Bramshill to Farley Hill**, led by Irene Draper
- July 13 **Butterfly Walk - Yateley Common**, led by Dr Robert Guest
- Sept 21 **Brewing Walk - Hartley Wintney**, led by Elizabeth Tipton
- Nov 2 **Autumn Woods - Simons Wood**, led by Irene Draper

#### 10.5 SPECIAL EVENTS

##### **Special General Meeting - February 20**

The SGM was held to acquaint members with the latest version of the proposed changes to the Yateley Society Constitution aimed at bringing the Constitution into line with current activities and the tidying up of loose ends, and to obtain their approval.

##### **May Fair - May 5**

The Society provided the usual Exhibition and Sales Stall. The exhibition dealt with the history of 'Inns, Ale and Brewhouses in Yateley'. The research and exhibit preparation were carried out by Peter and Elizabeth Tipton; the results proved popular and probably attracted a greater variety of people into the marquee than in other years.

The Sales Stall yet again brought in more money than anticipated; thanks to the generosity of members who provided goods for sale, and to the organisers and sales staff led by Stephanie Pattenden and Mary Hocking.

##### **Summer Social - July 5**

The Social followed the pattern of recent years in being an occasion for social chat, a brain teasing game and a substantial buffet. Attendance was similar to 1996 and those who came appeared to enjoy themselves. Valerie and David Kerslake were once more our hosts, for which we are very grateful, and this year we were able to enjoy the setting of their delightful garden without a downpour!

##### **Publications Meeting - September 25**

A meeting was held to discuss the future of the Society publications. Many good ideas were put forth in terms of subject matter, formats and possible branches into modern media such as video. One aim not achieved was the finding of a 'Publications Manager' for the Society.

There was no Christmas Social during 1997, this being held over until January 1998.

Anthony J F Hocking  
*Vice-Chairman, the Yateley Society*

##### **Report Contributors:**

Richard Johnston, Norma Dowling, Elizabeth Tipton, Mike Mann, Graham Brown, Tony Hocking.



**The Yateley Society**  
Registered with the Civic Trust  
Registered Charity No 282397

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