

LEATHERHEAD & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY  
Registered Charity No 802409

<b>Chairman</b>	<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Secretary</b>
Mrs L Heath	CVM Latham	Miss J Fuller
5 St John's Avenue	1 The Knoll	21 Kingston Hse Gdns
Leatherhead KT22 7HT	Lea'hd KT22 8XH	Leatherhead KT22 7HL
Lea 372603	Lea 372055	Lea 386348

NEWSLETTER 3/94

AUGUST 1994

**CONGRATULATIONS -**

to our Treasurer, Chris Latham, who in July was elected and took office for the coming year, as Master of the Worshipful Company of Cutlers.

**MIKE GALE AND JIM MIDDLEMAS**

Sadly June saw the passing of Mike Gale - on the 9th - and Jim Middlemas - on the 21st - both from cancer which they had fought for several years.

Mike Gale was a Life Member of the Friends of the Museum as well as being a member of the Society. He will best be remembered for his two "Bygone Ashtead" evenings which formed part of the Mole Valley Festivals of 1990 and 1992. His passion in life was to raise funds for research into Debra, a rare and tragic disease from which his own tiny grandson suffered.

Jim Middlemas was a great enthusiast for this Society and for the Museum, having been a member of the Executive Committee for several years, and later Chairman of the Friends of the Museum, from which post he resigned only at the "Friends" AGM on 6 June this year. One of his great delights was music; he was a member of the Dorking and Leith Hill Choir and of the choir of Leatherhead Parish Church.

Both of them will be greatly missed, not least for their cheerfulness, and our sincere sympathy goes to their families.

**MEMBERSHIP**

Our membership is now:

Hon Members	12	
Ordinary Members	154	
Husband & Wife	142	(71 couples)
Juniors	<u>1</u>	
TOTAL	309	

For various reasons, including the regrettable but essential increase in subscription, we lost a higher proportion of members than usual at the end of 1993. But we are very

pleased to welcome all our new members - another five, all from Ashtead, have joined us since the last Newsletter:

Clements, Mr & Mrs F  
May, Mr & Mrs M C  
Thomas, Miss Emma - a student working on the St Giles Church project

**FROM THE RECORDS SECRETARY -**

1. Chris Hobbs, of the Planning Department of Mole Valley DC, has passed to the Society copies of parts of Ordnance Survey Maps in the 1:2500 series, covering Ashtead 1895, 1896, 1914, and Leatherhead 1895, 1896 (2) and 1937. Our thanks to Mr Hobbs.

2. The Society is most grateful to one of its members, John Clark, for extracting information from a collection of Marriage Licences of Leatherhead from 1849 - 1947, with Index. There are 36 in all, mostly from Canterbury, and some from Guildford and Winchester. The Licences themselves were obtained by Linda Heath. A valuable record with Accession Number LW391.

**ST GILES' CHURCH, ASHTEAD**

As many members know, St Giles Church in Ashtead has been completely re-roofed, and this has provided a unique opportunity to study the whole structure of the building from above. A small team, led by Howard Davies, has been working extensively on the project, under the auspices of this Society.

It has proved to be both time-consuming and hard work, but much evidence has come to light as a result of the investigations. It is hoped to be able to date two very large transverse timber beams by the process of dendrochronology - a method of dating by boring into the wood - a method pioneered during the 1950's by the late Captain Lowther, a former Archaeology Secretary of our Society.

It will take time for all the research material to be analysed and interpreted, but in due course there will be an exhibition of photographs, drawings and diagrams showing all the various stages of the research. Like all research, it costs money, and the Society will be spending quite a considerable amount on the project, but the Committee agree that this is the type of work which the Society should be prepared to undertake and to fund.

Great credit is due to Howard Davies for seizing the initiative to undertake this investigation - it is a chance not likely to occur again in any of our present members' lifetimes!

**VENTHAMS, COACHBUILDERS, OF LEATHERHEAD** - From David Bruce  
In 1835 Charles Ventham, having been apprenticed to the celebrated coachbuilder, Jones of Southampton, started up his own business in Bridge Street, Leatherhead.

His reputation for good design and workmanship spread, and his two sons Edward and Charles carried on the good work. The coming of the railways seriously affected the demand for the stage-coach type of vehicle, although the local gentry still demanded carriages of quality for their own use. However, around 1880 there occurred a revival of stage-coaching as a fun activity. Many wealthy men financed the building of stage coaches and organised regular routes, usually between a large town and a beauty spot about twenty miles away. One such ran between Piccadilly and Burford Bridge Hotel. Two coaches were ordered from Venthams, one for the outward journey and a fresh clean coach for the return to London.

About this time Venthams bought the business of Dorking coachbuilder Israel Walker. (His great grandson became a leading member of the Dorking Museum.)

The advent of the motorcar gave new life to coachbuilders. Venthams fitted coachwork to the chassis of such cars as "the Dennis" made in Guildford.

In 1929, the Road-manager of the famous Bertram Mills Circus, stopped at Venthams to get petrol (the old petrol pump is in the garden of Leatherhead Museum) and saw a stage-coach being broken up. He expressed his sorrow at such a sad end to a fine vehicle, and was told that there was another coach out the back awaiting the same fate. Bertram Mills expressed his interest in purchasing the remaining coach for the famous circus - but whether he finally bought it is not known.

Venthams finally closed down about 1936, but it is good to know that a few Ventham coaches are still in use in film sets, rallies etc.

A more detailed account of this noteworthy participant in Leatherhead history will be appearing in the Society's 1994 "Proceedings".

#### **PROGRAMME**

European Heritage Days - Saturday & Sunday, 10-11 September  
These two days will be celebrated in Leatherhead as European Heritage Days. There will be various events on both days,

making us more aware of the history and heritage of our surroundings.

On Saturday, 10th, there will be a guided tour round part of Sweech House, Gravel Hill at 10am, and of Thorncroft Manor, Dorking Road, at 11am.

In the afternoon at 3pm, Jack Stuttard will lead a tour round part of St John's School and grounds. It is hoped to provide a cup of tea in the Library at the end of the visit.

Please arrive in good time for these events, as they are bound to be popular and a "first come first served" system will have to operate.

The Parish Church and the Methodist Church will be open from 10.30am to 4pm, the Museum from 10am to 4pm. The Institute will be open from 9.30am to 5pm: refreshments will be available there and an exhibition on view. Surrey Wildlife Trust will lead two Guided Nature Trails leaving the Institute at 10am and 2pm and it is hoped to arrange tours of the Thorndike Theatre. There will also be various entertainments in the town centre throughout the day.

On Sunday, 11 September, members of this Society will lead guided walks round the town at half hour intervals from 10am to 12noon, and 2pm to 4pm. The walks will start and finish at the Institute, where refreshments will be available. The Museum will be open from 10am to 4pm and the Parish Church from 2pm to 4pm.

#### The Mole Valley Festival Talks

As members already know, the Society is presenting three lectures in the Mole Valley Festival, on 30 September and 7 and 21 October. Tickets are available from the Secretary (0372-386348) at £2 each for members until one calendar month before each lecture, then at £2-50, the price to the public. Booking forms were enclosed with the May 1994 Newsletter.

To remind you of the subjects, the two Leatherhead lectures are:

30 September - "Old Surrey Murders" by John Janaway from the Local History Studies Group at Guildford.

21 October - Also our annual Dallaway Lecture - "The Tudor Palaces of Surrey" by Dr Simon Thurley, Curator of the Historic Royal Palaces.

The lecture on 7 October at the Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall will not now be on Ashtead Pottery by Joy Hallam, as

unfortunately she is ill: we wish her a speedy return to health.

We have been very lucky in that Bob Warnock, who is the Corporation of London's Community Woodland Officer for Ashtead Common, has very kindly agreed to step in and talk on "The Management and Wildlife of Ashtead Common". Arrangements are the same - Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall at 7.30pm for 8pm on Friday, 7 October. We hope to follow up this talk with a guided walk on the Common in the Spring.

There is an Ashtead Common Day on Saturday, 17 September 1994, at 11am to 5pm, the theme of which is "Woodland Pasture". Details will be widely advertised, but it will start from the usual place just across the level crossing at Ashtead station.

If anyone who had booked to hear Joy Hallam prefers not to come to the alternative lecture, a refund will of course be made to you if you return your tickets to the Secretary.

#### Winter Lectures

The rest of the lectures for the year are part of our ordinary programme at the Dixon Hall, 7.30pm for 8pm - coffee before the meeting on 18 November, and in the interval on 16 December.

#### Friday, 18 November - "The Origins of Ordnance Survey"

A talk by Stephen Randall, a former member of the Ordnance Survey, Egham.

Friday, 16 December - "Christmas Miscellany" organised by Gordon Knowles. Our annual evening of members' own presentations, which must be short but as serious or as frivolous as you like, and with or without illustrations. Please get in touch with Gordon Knowles - 7 Squirrels Green, Bookham KT23 3LE: Bookham 458396 if you have an item to contribute.

Eileen Smith will need mince pies to serve with the coffee in the interval. Please let her know at the November meeting if you can bring some.

#### THE FRIENDS OF THE LEATHERHEAD MUSEUM

The Friends of the Museum have been busy raising money to pay for the things needed at the Museum. Thanks to Linda Heath for giving at her home, a "Soiree Musicale" which raised £150; and to all those who helped with the Coffee Morning on Thursday, 28 July which raised £133 - the first time a fund-raising event had been held in the Museum. It was very

successful and gave Hampton Cottage a feeling of being a "home" again.

Many more "Friends" are needed, particularly if they are able to help in some practical way such as stewarding the Museum. The subscription to the Friends is £1 minimum a year, payable each 1 January, or £20 minimum for Life Membership. The Secretary of the Society, Joyce Fuller, is also the Membership Secretary for the Friends, so please contact her if you would like to join. The more "Friends" we have, the more improvement we can make in the Museum and its collections.

#### HELP WANTED

Peter Tarplee is preparing a guide to the Industrial History of Mole Valley District for Surrey Industrial History Group. He is having difficulty in obtaining complete details of the activities at the two Bookham factories - the Old Atlas Works in Little Bookham Street, and the works opposite the station on the Merrylands Hotel site. If anyone has information about these sites, or worked at either, Peter would be pleased to hear from them at Donard, East Street, Bookham KT23 4QX, telephone 0372-452301.

#### OH! DEAR

In BC60, Cicero, the renowned Roman philosopher, said

"On no account acquire your slaves from Britain. They are so unaccountably stupid and incapable of bettering themselves that they have no place in any civilised household."

(Many thanks to Egham-by-Runnymede Historical Society for letting us quote this item from their April Newsletter.)