

# PRIZE FIGHTS, ROUGH MUSIC & PARISH DAY LOCAL 'ENTERTAINMENT' IN THE MID 1860's

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The Castle Ramwick Inn at Heathside was a popular meeting place until the mid 1860's for illegal prize fights



In 1855 the Necropolis Company got an Act of Parliament to sell its 'surplus land' of the former Woking Common, but the Act gave them only ten years to do so. By the mid 1860's it was clear that sales were not going as well as expected, so a new Act allowing another five years of sales was sought and obtained in 1864.

As we saw last week, the Royal Dramatic College at Maybury was officially opened in 1865 and the Woking Invalid Convict Prison at Knaphill (mentioned two weeks ago) was hitting the headlines too in this period (especially in Ireland with the death of the Fenian John Lynch), but otherwise the mid 1860's seem to have been a relatively quiet time in Woking's history.

Having said that things were probably not all that quiet on Woking Common in the 1850's and 60's when the illegal prize fights were taking place. Apparently the Heathside area was a popular meeting place for these fights that could go on for hours and were only stopped when one of the fighters' sponsors threw his hat into the ring. It is said the equipment was stored in a room at Ramwick Cottage (in Park Road), an old 17<sup>th</sup> century house that at the time was known as the Castle Ramwick Inn.

The last fight at Woking was thought to have

taken place in the mid 1860's by which time the area was presumably becoming too populated for the fighters and their supporters to go un-noticed by the authorities.

Things were evidently far from quite at this time in Byfleet too, where according to Leonard Stevens in his book 'Byfleet A Village in England' there was quite a disturbance in the streets on the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> September 1864.

Apparently a number of locals were engaged in a practice known locally as 'Rough Music' with

'the banging of tin cans, pails and anything else which would make a din' outside the house of an unpopular neighbour who had possibly committed some misdemeanour.

According to local newspapers at the time 'Rough Music' was a frequent occurrence in Byfleet with the rocks as well as abuse being hurled at the home of the person the local vigilantes had decided to target. On this particular occasion the local constable, P.C. Howard, came across the disturbance about eight o'clock and asked the 'musicians' to stop. Most of them did, but one, Allen Woolgar,



Byfleet High Road

In Byfleet neighbourly disputes at this time resulted in the practice of 'Rough Music'



carried on and when the policeman asked him to 'go away' he apparently 'became very violent and threatened to strike the constable on the head with a piece of iron which he had in his hand'. Luckily P.C. Howard caught his wrist and arrested Woolgar before any harm could be done - as witnessed by an Anthony Patlin (or Pantling) who confirmed that Woolgar 'had been drinking'.

I don't know what relationship Pantling had to the disturbance (it might have been directed at him), but from the 1871 census it is clear that he lived relatively close to Woolgar who was then a twenty-five year old agricultural labourer

living with his parents in 'Byfleet Street' - seven doors away from the fifty-nine year old brewery labourer, father and grandfather! All I do know is that in 1864 the then eighteen year old Woolgar was fined 'five shillings costs and eighteen shillings or twenty-eight days imprisonment', but whether he paid the fine or went to jail I cannot say.

It was at this time that Byfleet church was being 'restored' with a new transept and vestry added in 1864 and the choir extended two years later, but I wonder whether it really was the work on the church, or an attempt to heal local rifts in the community (as evidence

above), that prompted the founding of Byfleet's Parish Day in 1865!

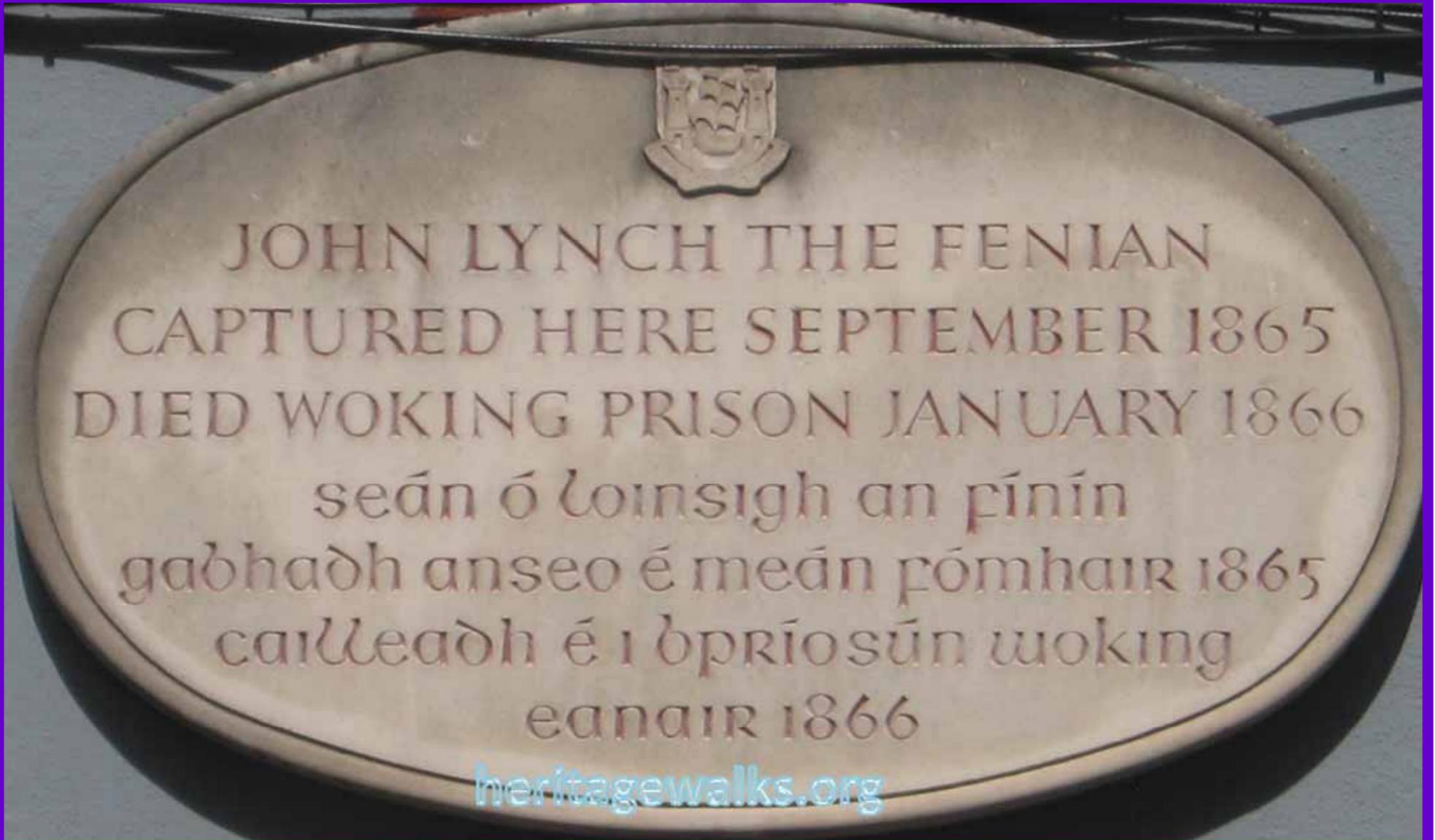
The day has been celebrated on and off ever since, but the first event was quite different from today's village fair with the whole parish invited by Mr Murray of West Hall to a 'lunch on the lawn' on the 1<sup>st</sup> June that year, the day that the church was officially re-opened.

Was P.C. Howard, Woolgar, and Pantling there to join in the festivities? I don't know, but as the above seems to have been the last incidence of 'Rough Music' in the area, I would like to think that a bout of good neighbourliness had managed to break out in Byfleet.



The re-opening of Byfleet Church prompted the establishment of the local Parish Day – a chance for the local community to gather under quieter circumstances.

## WOKING PRISON - INFAMOUS IN IRELAND



In the 1860's unrest in Ireland led to a number of fenians (the Victorian equivalent to the IRA) being imprisoned at Woking Invalid Convict Prison.

Amongst them were John Lynch and Brian Dillon who had both been arrested in Cork in September 1865 (on some rather flimsy evidence) for treason and sentenced to ten years in prison. They went first to Mountjoy Jail in Dublin before being transferred to

Pentonville and then onto Woking on account of their ill health – Lynch suffering from tuberculosis, Dillon being partially disabled as a result of an accident in childhood.

Their imprisonment at Woking caused quite a stir locally with the military being brought in to protect the prison from any possible fenian attack. Unfortunately Lynch didn't live long at Woking, dying on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1866 (not January as this plaque in Cork states), with Dillon being released from prison in 1870 and

returning to a heroes welcome in his home country.

John Lynch's was buried in an unmarked grave in Brookwood (although a plaque has subsequently been erected in the area by the National Grave Association of Ireland), whilst Dillon survived only two years after his return to Cork, dying as a result of his general ill health worsened, some say, by his treatment at Woking.

When Brookwood Cemetery was first opened the only way for visitors to get to it from London was by the Necropolis train into the cemetery. But what if you wanted to visit a grave after the funeral took place – the Necropolis train only carried the coffins and the mourners, other visitors would have to get a 'normal' train to Woking and then walk.

The Necropolis Company persuaded the London & South Western Railway to open a station on the main line at Necropolis Junction and on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1864 Brookwood Station was opened.

Of course whether the Necropolis was really interested in helping people visit the graves in their cemetery is debatable – perhaps the real reason for wanting the new station was to help encourage development of their land to the west of Woking.

Along with the building of the station and station-master's house, the Brookwood Hotel was erected and it would not be long before shops and houses would follow on the narrow strip of common land between the railway and the canal.

The building of Brookwood had begun.

## THE BUILDING OF BROOKWOOD BEGINS

