

A HEATHLAND HARVEST

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The heathlands of north-west Surrey were far from the barren wastes that many in the past claimed. The heather was used by the broom-makers or cut to thatch local houses; bracken made a bedding for animals and gorse could be cut for the bread-owns.

Apart from a few local industries (more of which in the coming weeks), most of the people locally were employed on the land, on farms or later in the nurseries. But the extensive common lands around this area provided some limited employment, probably on a part time or seasonal basis.

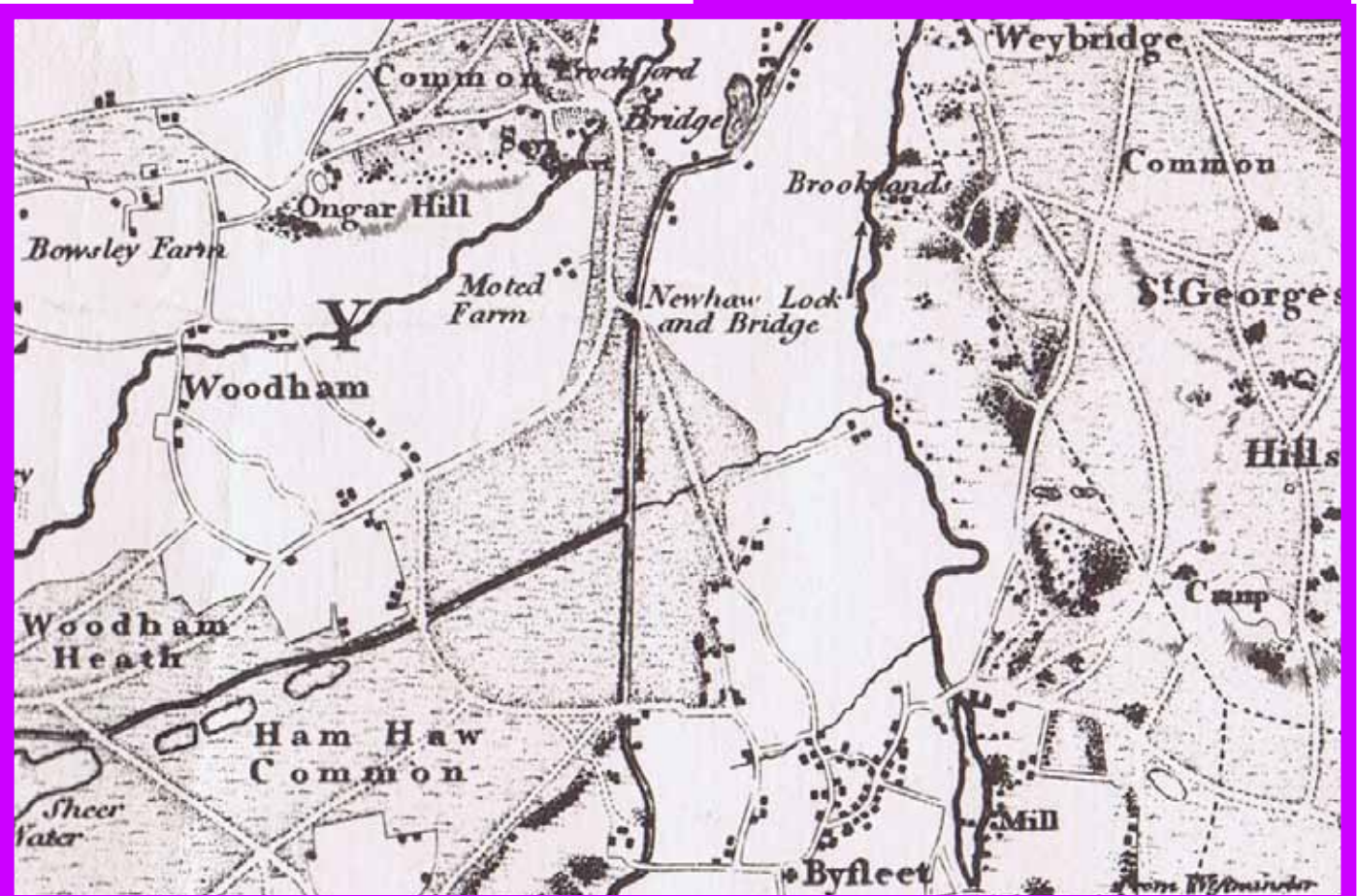
One such occupation was broom-making, which in the late 1760's in the Byfleet area at least appears to have been quite a cut-throat business – almost literally!

In the Deposition Book of Richard Wyatt, J.P. (published by the Surrey Record Society in 1978), there are several notes from the spring of 1769 about disputes between local broom-makers.

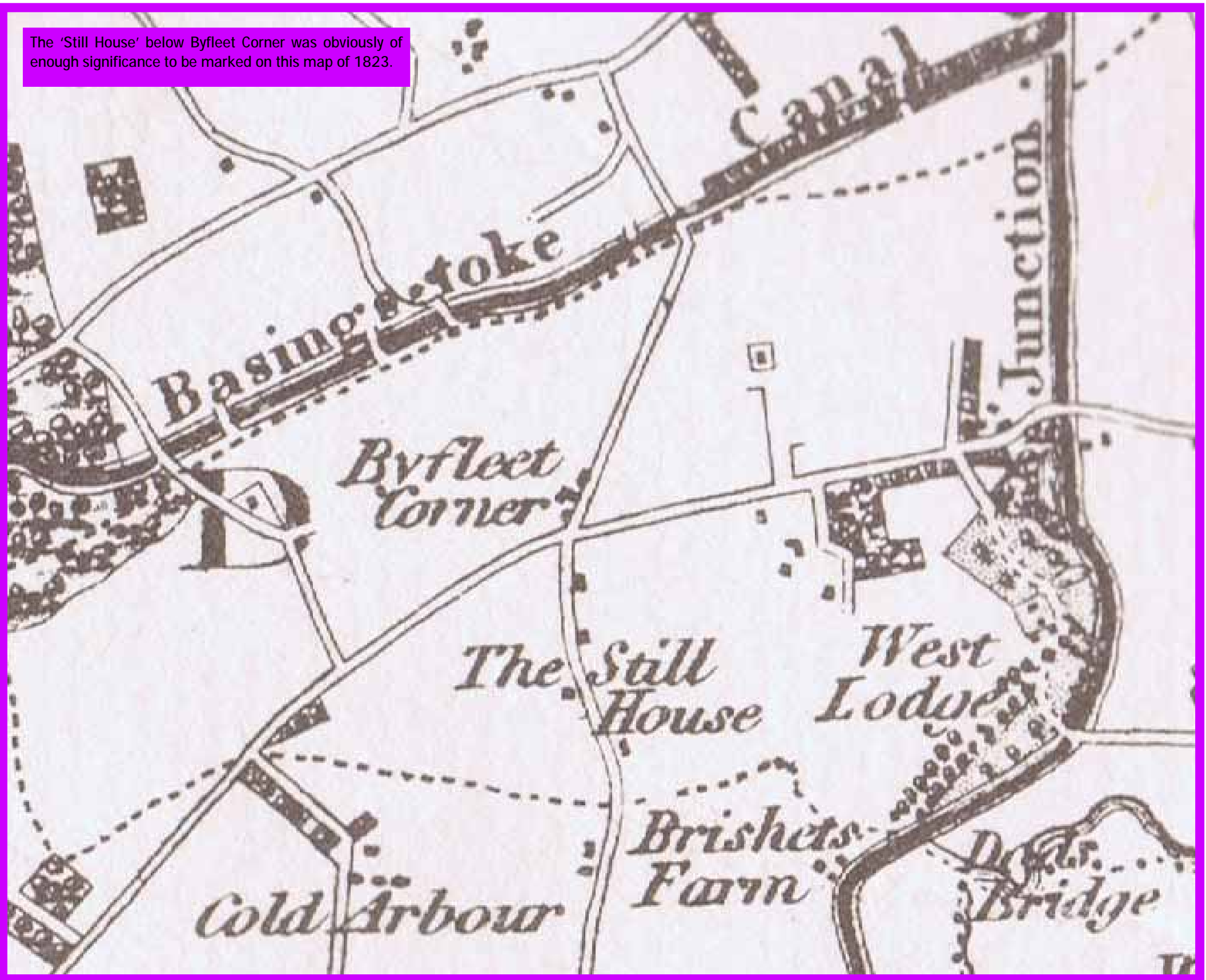
'Information of Sarah Cooper, servant of Richard Jacob, broom-maker of Weybridge, 22nd February. On the 15th she was going to Weybridge with an ass loaded with heath, the property of Joseph Ellis, Broom maker, when Thomas Woods stopped the ass and threw down the heath. She called Joseph Ellis who came up to her. Thomas Woods then seized upon him and Henry Woods assisted in assaulting him.'

Joseph Ellis likewise gave evidence that the heather was 'forcibly taken away from him as he was going on the King's highway leading from Byfleet to Weybridge' by the two broom-makers of Byfleet 'who violently beat and wounded him'.

This map by Joseph Lindley and William Crosley was surveyed between 1789 and 1790, and published in 1793. It shows Ham Haw Common and part of St George's Hill, where the common lands of the Manor of Byfleet were. What is now known as Brooklands Road was probably the 'Kings Highway' where Joseph Ellis was attacked by the two broom-makers of Byfleet.



The 'Still House' below Byfleet Corner was obviously of enough significance to be marked on this map of 1823.



The result was that Thomas Woods was ordered to pay £1.1s to Joseph Ellis, but a few weeks later Thomas Woods himself was giving evidence to the judge that on the 5th April 'Thomas Hummick, broom-maker living in Chertsey, John Southey, broom-maker of Chertsey and Thomas Young of Chertsey, forcibly took away eight bundles of heath, his property, which he had cut upon Byfleet Common. Hummick threatened that if he attempted to prevent him from taking the heath he would chop him down with a hook which he had in his hand'.

I don't know what happened on this occasion, but from later notes it is evident that Thomas Woods knew John Southey very well as in November that year he was thrown into the 'house of correction' at Chertsey after an

incident involving the two of them upon the evidence of Joseph Rayner, a inn-keeper of Chertsey.

'On Saturday 19th about a quarter before 10 o'clock at night, Thomas Woods, Thomas Collins and John Southey, broom-makers, came into his house and called for a mug of beer and bread and cheese which they refused to pay for, then quarrelled with each other and fought and broke two bowls and a stone mug. They called for more beer, which he refused to draw as it was between 11 and 12 at night. He sent for the constable about 12 o'clock. Thomas Woods threatened him that "he should be a match for him one dark night or another".

Broom-makers were obviously not to be crossed with!

A more peaceful pursuit on the commons may well have been the harvesting of sap from the pine woods hereabouts for distilling into what was known as 'essential oils' – perfumes for soaps and such-like. In the 1820's Alfred Claudius Collins started the business in Pyrford Road near a public house called 'The Sun'. Neither the distillery nor the pub now exist, although Sun Cottages (almost opposite The Oaks) commemorates the latter and the names Lavender Park Road and Rosemount Parade recall where other ingredients for the distillery were once grown.

Collins is listed in the 1840 Post Office Directory for Surrey as a 'distiller of essential oils', but by the 1870's it is noted that 'there is a rose-water and essential oil distillery in occupation of Mr. John Leyland' at what was then known as 'Byfleet Corner'.

According to the Byfleet historian, Howard Cook, Leyland lived in the house called Rosemount, 'situated between Old Woking Road and Rosemount Avenue with an entrance lodge where Barclays Bank now stands' and he goes on to say in his history of Byfleet (published in the local residents' association newsletter) that before the distillery closed 'the villagers had the use of a room above it where, for 2d. a week they could enjoy games of skittles, dominoes etc., and have a cup of tea and a bun'. That was in about 1905 with the building itself surviving until the mid 1920's before it was demolished.



The essential oil distillery is still commemorated in the road name Lavender Park Road.

LOCAL COTTAGE INDUSTRIES

WESTFIELD'S LIQUORICE FACTORY

This old cottage in Westfield – known today as Walnut Tree Cottage – dates back in part to the 17th century, with the two bays on either end being added in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is timber-framed and is a Grade II listed building, but its real interest from a local history point of view is in one of its past uses, as Woking's (and probably Surrey's) only liquorice factory!

Originally it was probably a small farm-house (its farm buildings to the west being demolished in the 1950's), and in the late 1870's was apparently occupied by William Bragg, who by 1881 was a baker and beer house keeper at what is now the Kingfield Arms. But by 1888 it is recorded as a 'Woodward & Co., liquorice manufacturers' in a local street directory and almanac.

Liquorice is not a native plant to this country but has been grown here since at least the 16th century, although where (if anywhere) in Woking it was planted is not known. To be honest little more is known of the factory other than the fact that it apparently closed in about 1893, so if anyone has any more information, I would be delighted to hear from them.



KNAPHILL'S COFFIN-MAKERS



Another local industry was the coffin-makers workshop in Robin Hood Road at Knaphill. In most places the local carpenter would no doubt have made the coffins (with the blacksmith the fittings), but with the largest cemetery at Brookwood and the first crematorium at St Johns, perhaps this

area could provide work for a more dedicated local service! No doubt the local invalid convict prison and lunatic asylum also provide trade for the coffin-maker, whose little thatched workshop can be seen here with its 'hatch' allowing the finished coffins to be easily pushed onto the awaiting cart without having

to be lifted.

Across the road a similar building housed the local wheelwright, whilst behind that, on the corner with Anchor Hill, was the blacksmiths workshop – making the lower end of Robin Hood Road quite an industrial area in the late Victorian period.