

# THE CLOCK HOUSE AT BYFLEET - A HOME FIT FOR A QUEEN'S MOTHER?

**T**he 9th November 1967 was a red-letter day for the people of Byfleet, and in particular members of The Fellowship Trust, who welcomed Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, to the village to officially open their new elderly accommodation at the Clock House in the village.

The Royal Car was greeted by the Chairman of the Trust, John Leech, with the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, and the Chairman of Woking Council and his wife also in attendance. The daughters of the Trust's Secretary presented the Queen Mother with a bouquet of flowers, before Her Royal Highness declared the Clock House open with an inscribed silver key, which she then handed to Mr Leech 'for safekeeping'. Before taking tea with the patrons, trustees and guests, the Queen Mother was introduced (or should that be reintroduced) to Mrs Sheila Veitch, who in July 1928 had presented her with a purse, when (as the Duchess of York) she had visited the nearby St Nicholas' Home at Pyrford.

The Fellowship Trust was formed in 1937 by Byfleet resident Joseph Atkinson (who sadly died in February 1966), taking over the Clock House in 1948 as their headquarters (before buying the property from the Stock Exchange Benevolent Fund in 1964).



Having purchased the property they almost immediately drew up plans to convert the old building into flats, but in December 1965 it was announced that they had decided not to go ahead with the plans as the cost was too high. Instead they announced that they intended to sell the site and use the proceeds to buy more premises, possibly in Bognor or Worthing, where they were also hoping to move their headquarters. What happened to change their

mind, I do not know, but the following spring the Clock House conversion was back on (and the H.Q. move was off).

The new scheme was for twenty-six single and five double 'flatlets', which according to a local press report at the time were each fitted 'with a specially designed kitchen unit and electric oven that, together with their own television or radio, would be run on a 'slot meter', although the residents will also have access to a central



In 1967 the Clock House was converted into elderly accommodation by the Fellowship Trust.



lounge where they can also watch television free of charge'.

There was to be free hot water and heating

provided to the flats and 'to the baths in the building', with communal utility rooms provided and a central dining room where 'residents will be able to enjoy a midday meal at a nominal

cost'. Only residents were allowed to stay in the flats, but a 'visitor's room' was also to be provided 'for the occasional accommodation of friends or relatives'.





The report went on to note that 'the majority of the applications are from women. This is due to women living longer than men, and because children seem prepared to look after their elderly father or other male relative, but decline to give assistance to a women relative'.

Hopefully attitudes (and the accommodation), has moved on in the last fifty years! Unfortunately so had the rent – the average inclusive charge then being just forty-five shillings a week (£2.25).

At the time the Trust owned seven properties in Surrey, Sussex, Kent and Warwickshire, and were looking to add another five purpose-built



Hundred's of locals lined the streets of Byfleet to welcome Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, to the opening ceremony.



blocks of flats (at a cost of about £100,000 each) – one of which was in Rectory Lane, Byfleet.

I do not know what their distinguished guest thought of the accommodation, but the villagers of Byfleet were clearly very pleased to see her.