

# BYFLEET'S SHOPS NOT SO BRIGHT

Iain Wakeford 2019



In 1970 Woking Council finally accepted responsibility for the forecourt outside the shops at 'Byfleet Green' to provide a new car park for the village.

Last week we looked at the new shops at Knaphill that was helping to revitalise the village, but at Byfleet the equally well spread-out village centre was not faring so well.

The late 60's and early 70's should have been a boom time for Byfleet with new homes, new schools and a new library being built – but as far as local traders were concerned it seems that the future was not quite so bright.

The shops beside the new £20,000 library had been quickly snapped up, but elsewhere in the village few were benefitting from the newly created 'Village Green', and in February 1970 a couple of traders told a local reporter that they were considering selling up (assuming they could find somebody willing to buy that is).

'One shopkeeper said that his takings were over £1,000 down last year while his overheads showed a substantial increase. He attributed

the decline to the absence of passing traffic and the fact that no large store is available in Byfleet'.

The problem then (if not now) was that many of the newcomers to the village had cars and preferred to drive to places such as Guildford, or Kingston to do their shopping (Woking also being shunned it seems).

In an attempt to give the village a 'facelift' the local Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford Chamber of Trade organised a public meeting in May to look at proposals by a local architect to brighten-up the village. The plan would involve 'taking a very close look at the shops, houses and pathways in High Road, Byfleet, and suggesting ways of giving an overall design to the village. It would involve colour schemes, maybe reconstructing frontages, looking at the flow of traffic and all aspects of village appearance. Similar schemes have been implemented under the auspices of the Civic Trust in other parts of the country, the most notable being in Norwich, which now had whole streets free of traffic'.

Unfortunately 'streets free of traffic' was precisely what the traders were moaning about, and the thought that many of the cosmetic changes would have to be paid for by the cash-strapped traders, did not go down too well. Byfleet was clearly not Norwich and few appear to have attended the meeting.



The by-passing of the village took away passing trade.



Another problem facing traders at that time was the introduction of decimalisation, which was due to be fully implemented by February 1971, with the new 10p and 5p coins being introduced in April 1968 (to 'acclimatise' the public) - replacing the old two shilling and one shilling pieces.

I was just five years old in 1968, but I can still convert old pennies into modern pence (unlike

my wife who is only 2½ years my junior) - even at that early age I was no doubt worried that my hard-earned pocket-money was somehow being devalued by the Government!

For those unfamiliar with £sd, there were twelve old pennies to a shilling and twenty shillings to one pound sterling - that after February 1971 would be made up of just 100 new pence!

It took ages for some people to come to terms with the new system - the remnants of which still remain in our education system to this day. I had to learn my twelve times tables in the 1960's to cope with old pennies and the number of inches to a yard - but my grandchildren are still having to know that  $3 \times 12 = 36$  - even if in daily life all they really need to know is that  $100\text{cm} = 1\text{ metre}$  (and 100 pence makes £1).

Within a few years Digby's Stores would close and new houses built on the site.



# BYFLEET'S LIBRARY

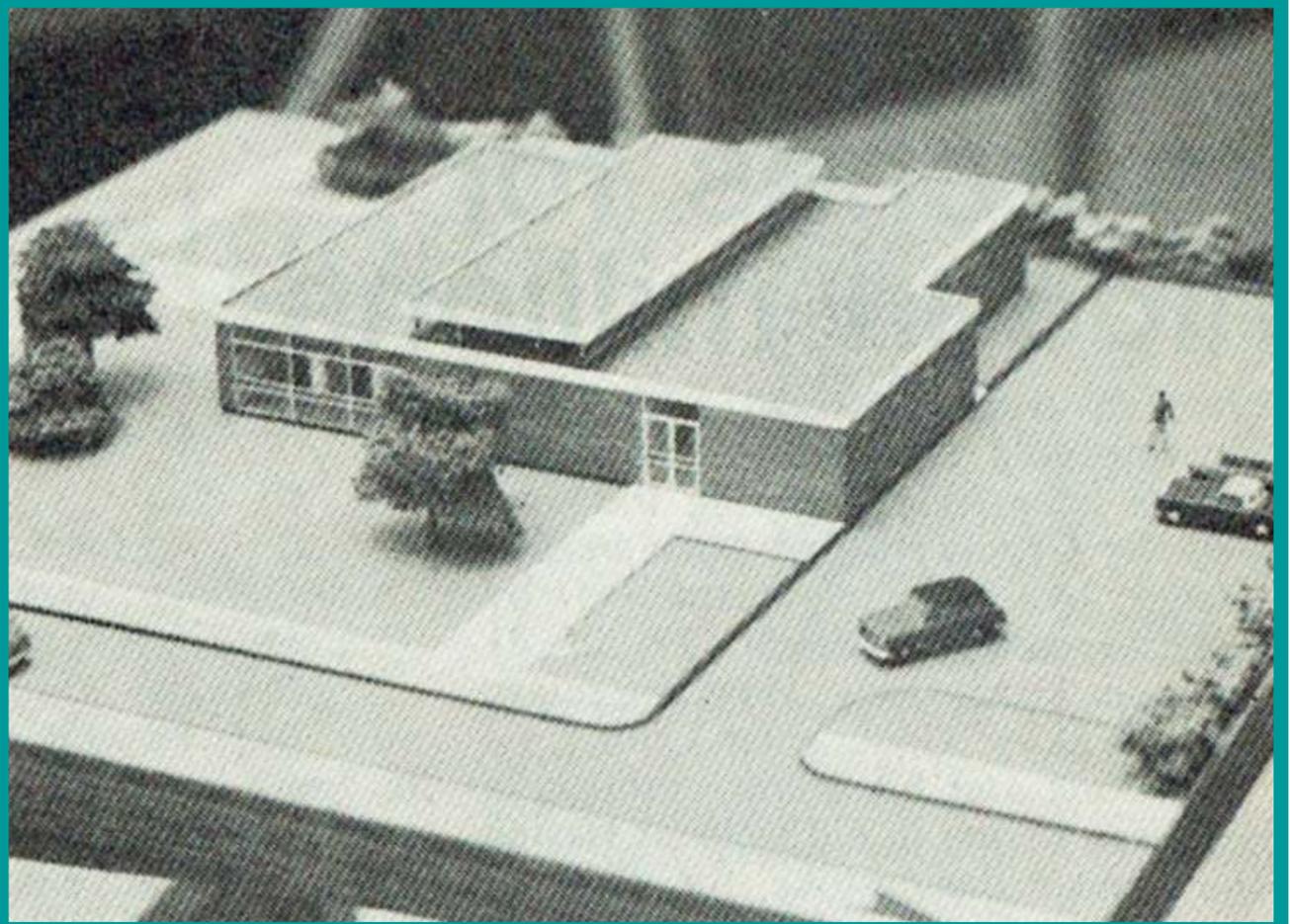
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**B**yfleet's library, originally housed on a part-time basis in the Village Hall, moved to its new premises further up the High Road on the 9th July 1969. The £20,000 building stocked 9,500 books, including 2,300 for children with reference works for young and old, as well as periodicals and even music scores. New books would be added ('depending on the amount of money available'), with about a fifth of the stock due to be changed every year (as a result of the exchange process with other libraries in the county).

There was a charge of one shilling (5p) to reserve books in the 'classified section' of the new library, which included 'books for study and information, including most biographies and travel and some fiction of literary standing'.

'Requests for reservations are dealt with in strict rotation and there is naturally a delay when there is a waiting list for a book'. 'Technical, advanced and more specialised works required for serious study, may be borrowed from other libraries on behalf of individual readers'

Books in the 'token section' (mainly popular fiction), cannot normally be reserve.



Opening hours were Tuesday to Saturday - 10am to 5pm (with an hour for lunch between 1-2pm), with late night opening between 6-8pm on Thursday evenings.

A model of the proposed £20,000 new library shows the car park at the rear of the premises.

There was parking also nearby on what is now known as 'Byfleet Green', in front of the new 'Royston Place' parade of shops.

