

# THE LONDON & SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY SERVANTS' ORPHANAGE COMES TO WOKING

Iain Wakeford 2015



In 1884, in Clapham, a group of railwaymen from the London & South Western Railway, supported by the local Vicar, Canon Allen Edwards, decided to set up a committee to form an orphanage for the children of workers whom had died whilst on service for the company. The London & South Western Railway Company were anxious that it was made clear that the initiative was from their workforce (and that they were not liable for any debts), so the rather long-winded 'London & South Western Railway Servants' Orphanage' was formed.

Through the usual concerts and fetes, church parades and bazaars, they gradually raised funds, but they also organised rail excursions and collections at railway stations, with dogs later being used to help collect money from the travelling public. The orphanage also benefitted from the sale of the '*South Western Gazette*' whose proprietor promised half the profits to the institution in 1891.

The first orphanage, a girls home, opened in a house in Clapham in March 1886, with the house next door added in 1891 and a third house (for boys) purchased in 1895. More accommodation at Clapham followed in 1899, but early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was clear that the sites at Clapham were too cramped, and in September 1901 a special Board Meeting

discussed the possibility of purchasing the former Oriental Institute at Maybury for £15,000. In the end they decided it would cost too much to convert and so they decided to build a new home 'in the country' at Cove, near Farnborough.

Four acres were bought for £774.14s.4d by the Board of Managers, and plans drawn up by the architect Mr Trevena, but before work could commence in 1904 some of the Trustees of the Orphanage expressed their opposition to the scheme and the Board was forced to climb down and abandon the plans (despite the fact that a large amount of money had been specifically raised for the new site).



'Liddle' was one of the dogs that later collected money for the orphanage - now in the National Railway Museum in York

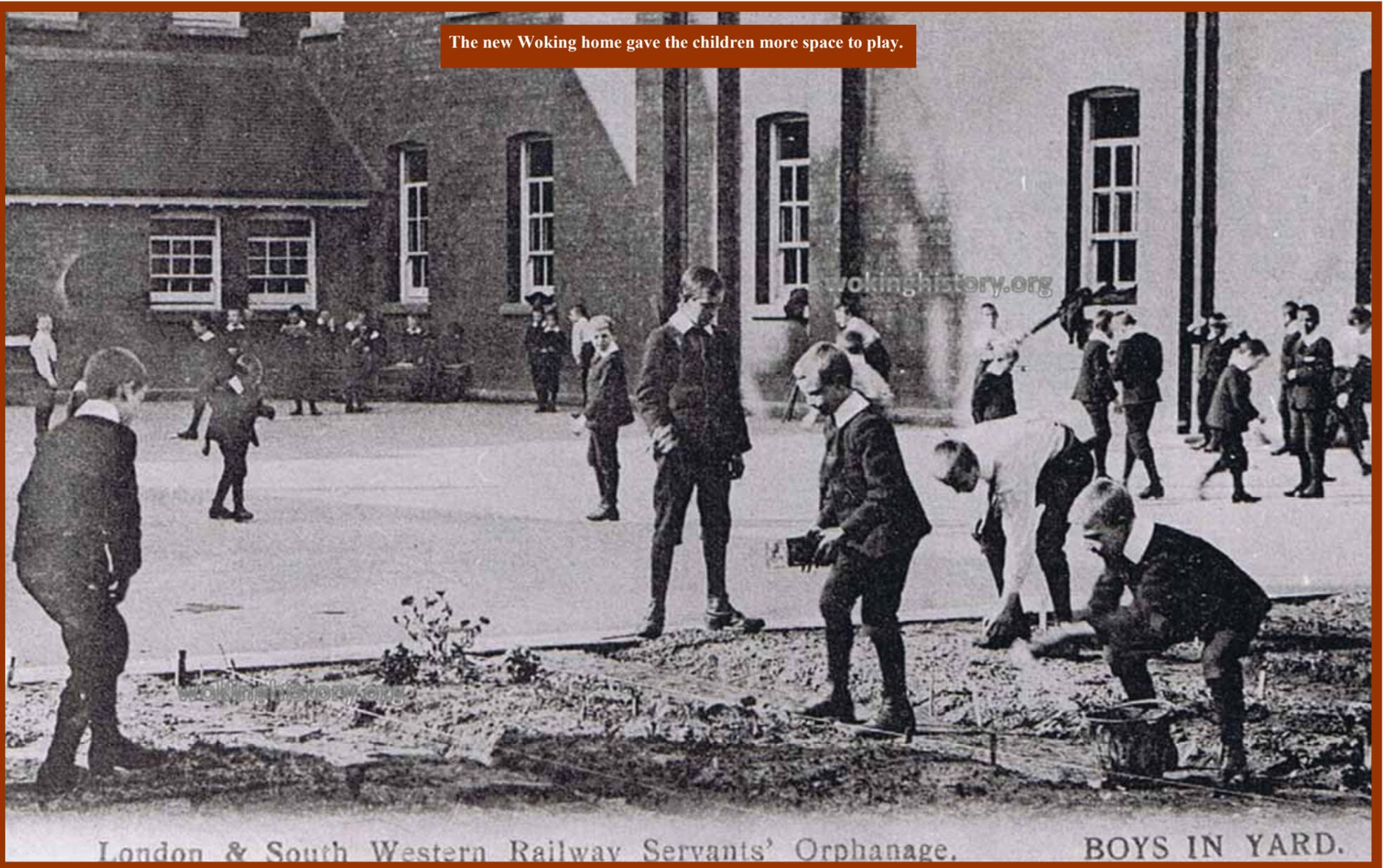
The main orphanage building survived until the late 1980's when it was demolished to make way for a housing estate, although other buildings in the grounds by then were being used as the 'Woking Homes'.

Following the death of George Rastrick in 1905 (mentioned in last week's article) the London & South Western Railway Company had bought his old home, Woking Lodge, and in July 1906 the Assistant General Manger, Mr Vickery, reported on his inspection of the house and its suitability, with certain alterations, for it to be turned into a new orphanage (the railway company retaining the site and simply renting it, at a low price, to the home).

Unfortunately that idea soon fell through, but the 'impasse' over a new site for the orphanage was soon found when it was suggested that the site between Woking Lodge and the old Oriental Institute could be bought (at £400 per acre) from the London Necropolis Company and Mr Trevena's plans could be revived.

The seven and a bit acres cost a lot more than the four acres at Cove (which wasn't sold until 1916), and the building apparently cost £19,219 to construct, but £1,700 was raised towards those costs when the Duchess of Albany laid the foundation stone for the new home on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1907.

The new Woking home gave the children more space to play.



The Duchess, Woking's 'default' Royal at that time (who by now was probably quite a professional at laying stones and cutting ribbons), returned just over twenty months later to perform the official opening.

More money was raised at that event too, but the cost of construction had left little to pay for

the furnishings. According to one history of the home - 'when the Orphanage moved to Woking in 1909 there was barely sufficient money to provide beds and the simplest furniture. In fact, the furnishing of the children's recreation rooms was largely contrived from packing cases and cretonne the result reflecting great

credit to the ingenuity of Miss Core, the Matron, and other members of staff.'

Nevertheless the new home was a vast improvement with accommodation for at least 150 children, with a fully stocked library and room for playing fields where recreation and future fundraising events could take place!



It was quite some time before a purpose-built gymnasium was added to the home, but in the meantime the boys practiced on the field beside the mosque.

# BROOKWOOD'S WORKING MEN'S CLUB

In Brookwood the Working Men's Club stated at the turn of the last century when a few men of the village got together in a tea room in a tin building behind the 'Orchard Stores'. From there the club moved to a room

above the shop before a meeting, held in 1907 at the Brookwood Hotel' decided that a purpose-built club house should be constructed. Work began in 1908 with the official opening taking place the following year.

In 1913 a new 'main hall' was added, which in the 1960s (when women were first admitted) was divided to create a 'modern lounge bar, carpeted throughout, with low slung lounge seats' – but that is another story.

## ST. SAVIOUR'S CHURCH

In 1897 the vicar of St. John's purchased land in Brookwood for a small iron chapel. It was a typical corrugated iron building, painted green, but with the luxury of wood panelling on the inside to make it seem more homely.

This humble structure was extended in 1906 when a small room and vestry was added at the back, but it was not long before it became obvious that a new church needed to be built and work started on raising money for a brick-built church with parishioners sponsoring a brick at 6d a time.

The architect for the new church, J.H. Barr, designed what is described by Iain Nairn in his 'Buildings of England – Surrey' as 'a neat church of 1909 with Lutyenesque details'.

The new church was built on the site of the old tin one, which had been put onto rollers and moved to the back of the site where it served for many years as a church hall (until the present one was erected in the 1960s).

