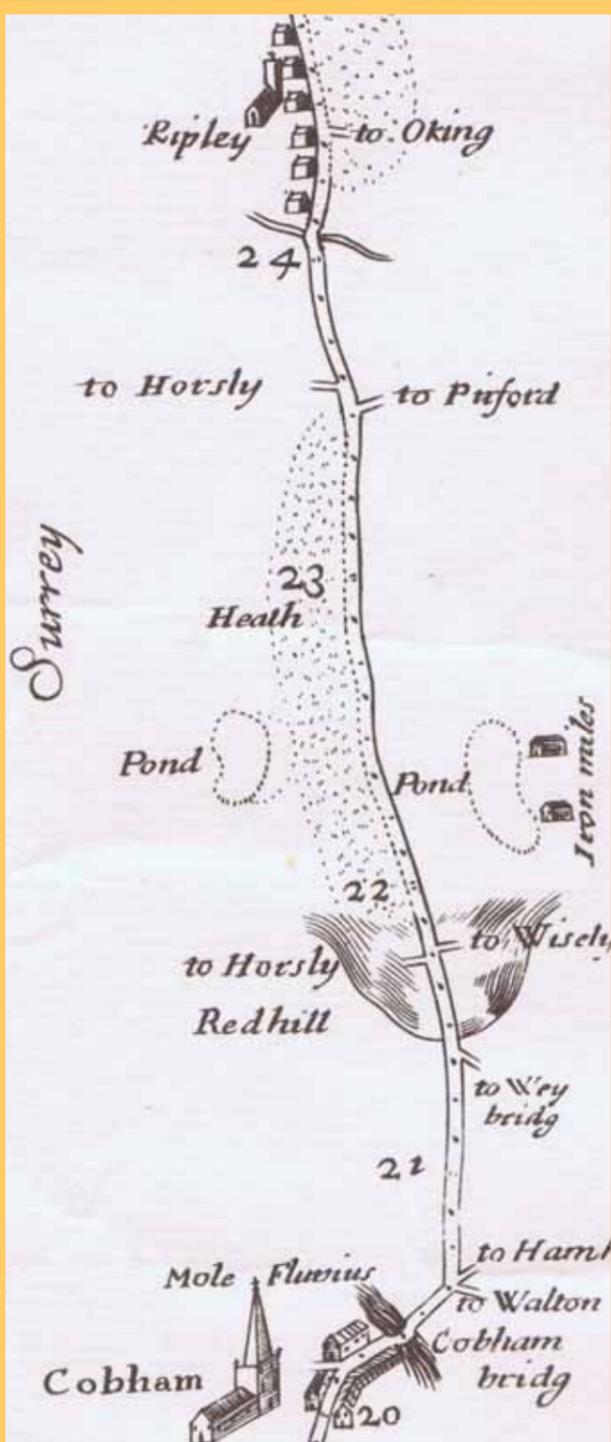


WOKING - THE TOWN THAT 'TIS VERY LITTLE HEARD OF IN ENGLAND'

Iain Wakeford 2014

A couple of weeks ago we looked at the 'commoners rights' to take certain items such as heather and gorse from the local heaths to be used for the benefit of the tenants and farmers of the area, but there was also a sort of collective right of the parish to remove sand and gravel for the repair of local roads.



Numerous sand and gravel pits can be found all over the local commons, and part of the reason for the preservation of Pyrford Common from the enclosures of the early 19th century was so that the practice could continue there.

Before the local highways boards were set up in the late 19th century (and a parish rate taken to pay for the upkeep of local roads), each parishioner had to carry out a certain number of days work a year on such communal work – or at least pay for someone else to do the work for them. In 1535 William Hiller of Horsell left instructions in his will for his wife to 'hire a man to mend the road at Knaphill for a day', and we are fortunate from other wills about this time to get the actual name of roads recorded for the first time, such as Long Lane at Goldsworth, in the will of William Atwatter of Woking in 1554/5.

Saunders Lane at Mayford is likewise recorded in the will of William Sherratt a yeoman farmer of the Crastock area of Woking in December 1638, with Robert Purse of Woking (described as being 'sick and weak') also mentioning 'a messuage near Saunders Lane, Woking' in his will proved in March 1662.

The main road to Portsmouth ran south and east of the wet Wey Valley and Woking.

The main Great West Road went to the north via Egham and Bagshot, so that in the early 18th Daniel Defoe found that Woking was 'little heard of in England'.

In 1668 Parley Lane (presumably now part of Littlewick Road) is mentioned in a couple of Horsell wills (Christopher Davey's and Thomas Hone's), but another Horsell will from a couple of years later records a lane that I have not been able to identify – 'Dorleigh Lane' – so if anyone can positively identify its location, please let me know.

All of the above are obviously local roads maintained by and for the benefit of the local people, but there was also the local 'main roads' that needed maintaining as well. As was noted last week, the Assize Records record problems with maintenance of bridges and the highways themselves also feature. In 1667 James Gyles a yeoman farmer found himself in trouble for allowing a length of ditch 'lying by the highway in Horfar Lane leading from Guildford to Woking to remain full of mud' so that the water overflowed. Unfortunately we do not know exactly where 'Horfar Lane' was, but it is possibly an earlier name for what is now Westfield Road, or maybe Vicarage Road at Kingfield.

Gyles was not the only one in trouble at that time as at the same Quarter Sessions James

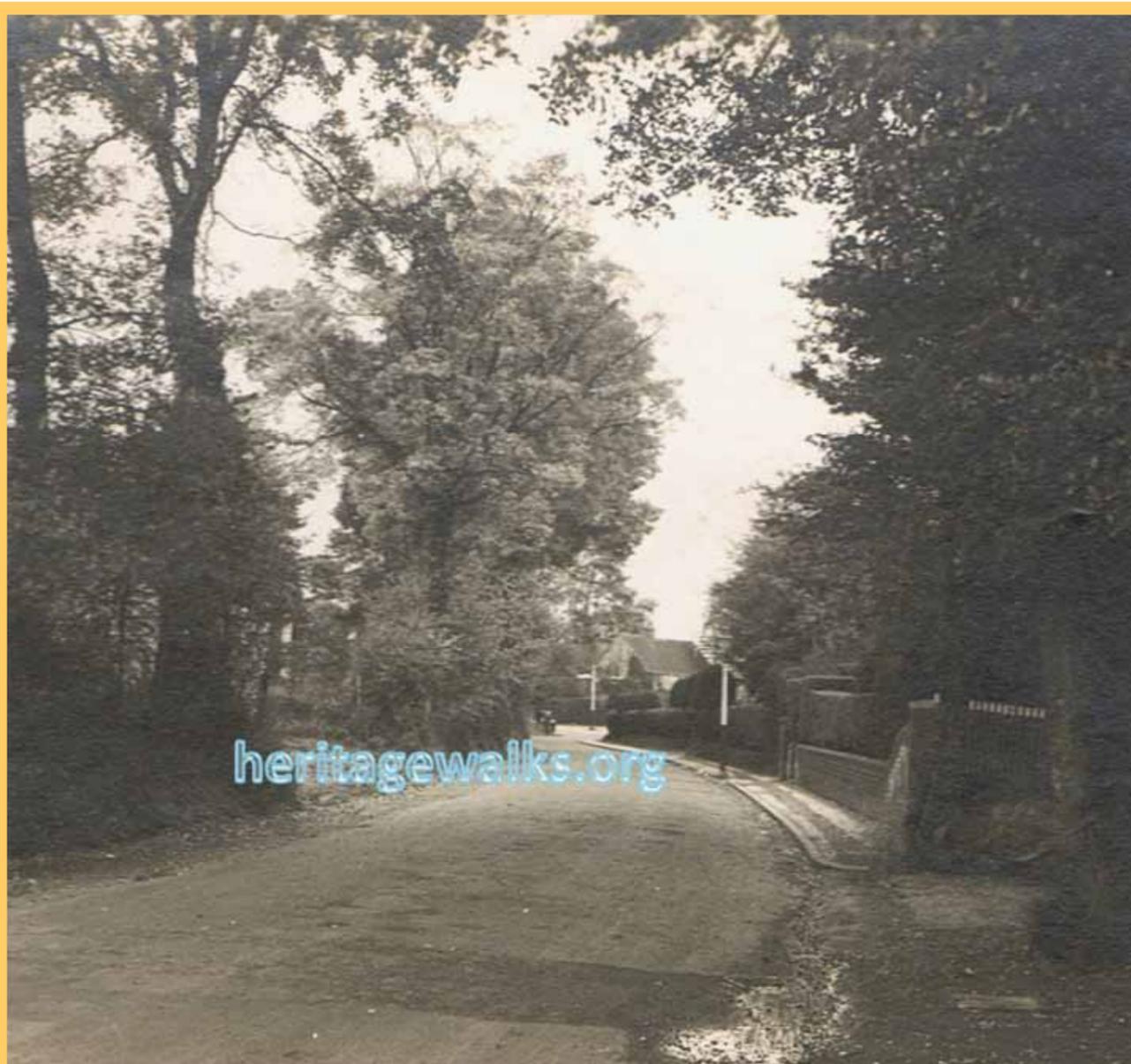
Collier, the miller at Woking, was also found to have 'allowed the water in the Mill Platts in front of his dwelling to overflow on to the highway leading to the Parish Church there'.

The flooding of these roads would have been an inconvenience to local people, but at least they didn't hinder any major highway. The Portsmouth Road avoided Woking and the wet Wey Valley to the south and east, whilst the Great West Road went north across the notorious Bagshot Heath towards Exeter and all points west.

In the 1720's the political pamphleteer and journalist Daniel Foe (or Defoe as most people know him), rode throughout the country and in a letter that later formed part of his book '*A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain*' he noted that 'I went away south to Woking, a private country market-town, so out of all road, or thorough-fare, as we call it, that 'tis very little heard of in England.'

Ironically perhaps the great book is itself now 'very little heard of', with his novels *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* being better known, but most Surrey historians seem to remember the above quote and take great joy in noting Woking's lack of transport connections in the past, if not today.

Not that the locals would have minded too much at the time – at least they didn't have to worry about the problems caused by stage-coaches thundering through the parish, making deep ruts in the road and attracting the attention of highwaymen, although incidence of the latter were not unknown.



It was not until the 19th century that the Vicarage was built in Vicarage Road, Kingfield. Was this Horfar Lane in the late 17th century?

THOMAS MUNDAY—HIGHWAYMAN OF WOKING?

Whilst the roads across Woking Common were not major highways like the Portsmouth Road through Ripley or the Great West Road at Bagshot it

was not unheard of for highwaymen and others to apprehend travellers in the Woking area.

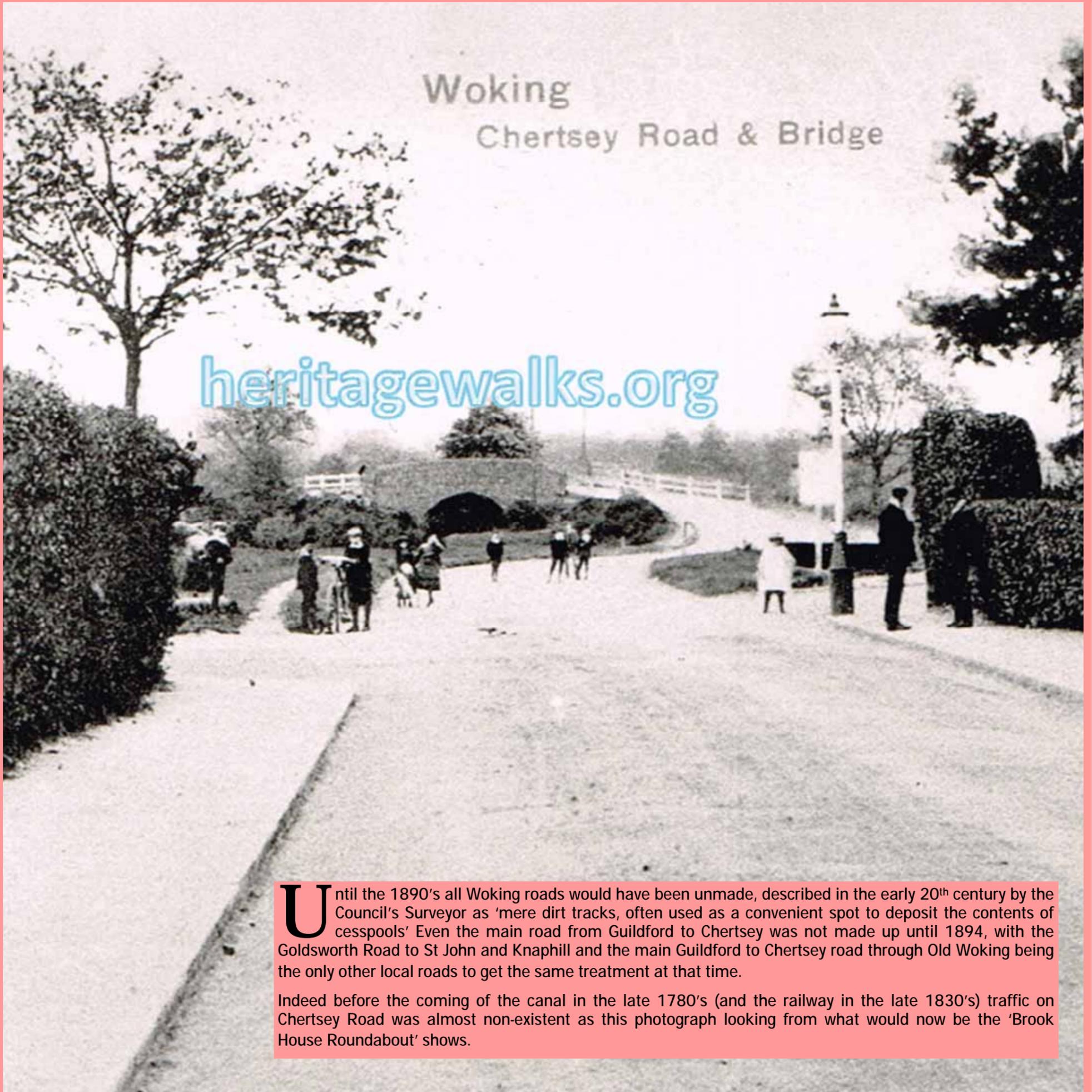
On the 17th April 1600 Thomas Munday committed not one but two highway robberies

in Woking stealing a grey gelding (worth £4) and £1 in cash from an Arthur Marwoode and another grey gelding (valued at 50s), a sword (5s) and a gold ring (5s) from William Arundell. At the assizes in Southwark in July 1600 he is described as a tailor of Woking, but that may not necessarily have been the case. Just because the assize records say that a person was 'of somewhere', doesn't necessarily mean that they were residing (or even born) in that place. Sometimes if it was not known or unclear where they were from, the court recorded them as being from the place that the crime took place or even where they had been captured, held or imprisoned. It should not be assumed that people didn't travel about much in Elizabethan England – they did. The roads might have been poor (like Oriental Road, pictured here in the late 19th century) but the poor could and did walk anywhere and it is not uncommon to find the equivalent of 'motorway thieves' taking a trip out into the country to commit their crimes.

Thomas Munday was found guilty of Highway Robbery at the Assizes in Southwark in July 1600, and was 'remanded after judgement', but did he somehow escape prison and turn up two years later as 'Thomas Mondaye' as yeoman of Southwark who together with a Richard Wood was found guilty of Highway Robbery when on the 9th February 1602 they assaulted John Hill in the highway at Byfleet and stole from him a purse valued at ½d containing £3.5s in money, nine shillings not in the purse and a dagger worth 2s6d. On this occasion at least, he didn't escape the hangman's noose.



THE COMMON PROBLEM OF ROADS ACROSS WOKING COMMON



Until the 1890's all Woking roads would have been unmade, described in the early 20th century by the Council's Surveyor as 'mere dirt tracks, often used as a convenient spot to deposit the contents of cesspools' Even the main road from Guildford to Chertsey was not made up until 1894, with the Goldsworth Road to St John and Knaphill and the main Guildford to Chertsey road through Old Woking being the only other local roads to get the same treatment at that time.

Indeed before the coming of the canal in the late 1780's (and the railway in the late 1830's) traffic on Chertsey Road was almost non-existent as this photograph looking from what would now be the 'Brook House Roundabout' shows.



Chertsey Road looking across Horsell Common