

# SOME LOCAL FARMS & THE GREAT AGRICULTURAL DEPRESSION IN 1876

Iain Wakeford 2015

**I**t is all too easy to peer into the past with the benefit of hindsight and forget about contemporary hopes and fears for the future. That is why this year I wanted to gradually chronicle the history of Woking one year at a time, so that we can actually start to look into our past, rather than just peep back at it with rose-tinted glasses.



**I**t was inevitable, with the opening of the station on Woking Common in the late 1830's, that the new town of Woking would be built – only in 1838 it wasn't so obvious and as we have seen it was many years before what you would properly call a town developed.

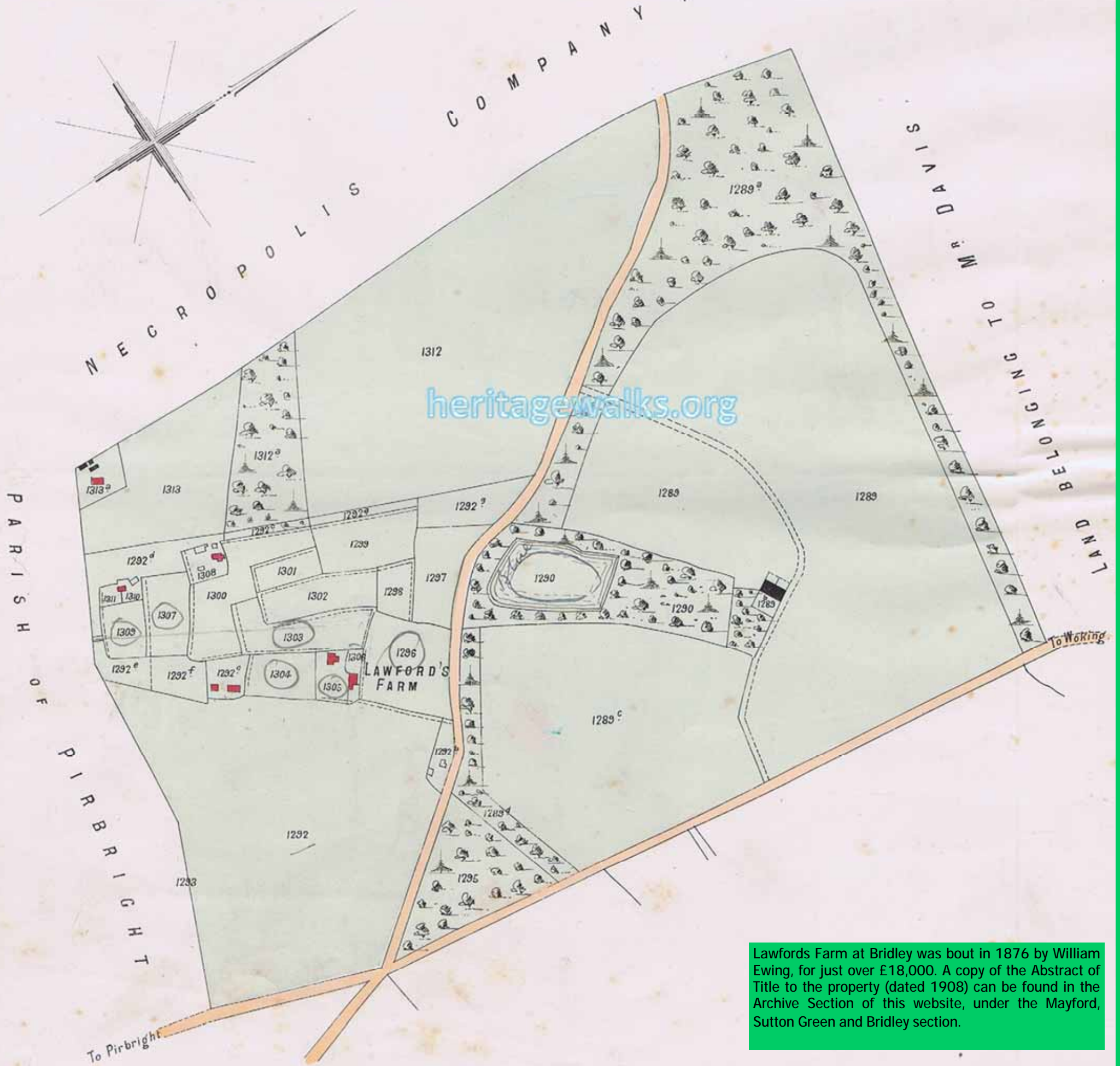
The purchase of the common in the early 1850's by the London Necropolis & National Mausoleum Company is now seen as a major event in the history of Woking, but whilst now their subsequent land sales are seen as the start of a new era, in 1852 the potential to cover all of Woking Common with graves, could have been seen by some to be the end of any chance of progress.

The loss of common rights by the local tenant farmers must have been a blow as traditionally they had the right to graze their cattle and sheep on the sandy heath that were suddenly now off-limits. Farming methods obviously had to change with many small farms now unable to support, on their own land alone, the number of animals that they used to.

As we have seen in recent articles some local farmers on the edge of the heath had turned their fields into nurseries even before the railway came along (let alone the Necropolis), but now perhaps even more poor agricultural land was being turned over to growing trees and shrubs, rather than wheat and barley.

By 1876 there was another incentive as well. Poor weather in recent years had caused a number of bad harvests. In the past, in normal circumstances, this would simply have meant an increase in the price of the grain (the law of supply and demand), but by the early 1870's imports from the Grain Belt of America, meant that prices at market were artificially low and remained so. The mixed farming community around Woking may not have been quite so badly affected as other parts of the country by this, but the bad weather of the 1870's had caused disease in animals too, so the Great Agricultural Depression (as it came to be known), undoubtedly hit some local farmers very hard.

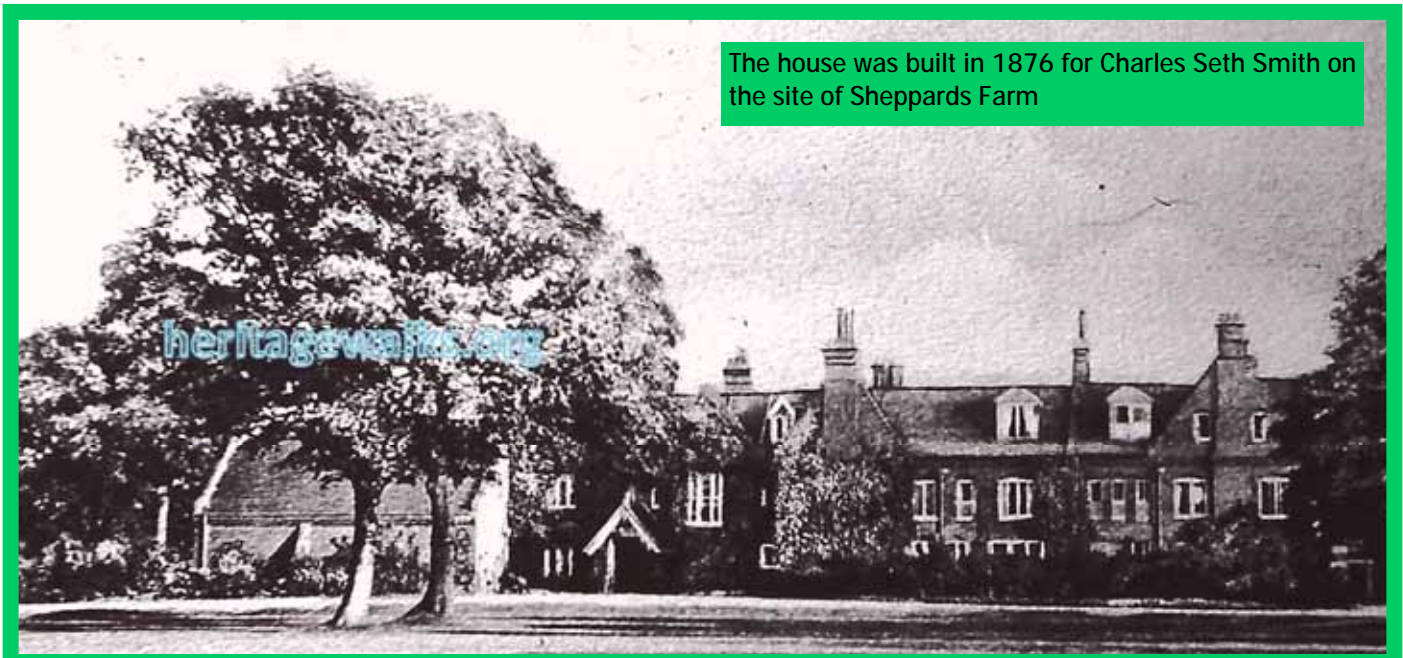
Extract from Plan on Conveyance of the 4<sup>th</sup> Feb<sup>y</sup> 1876,  
 from the Hon: Edw<sup>d</sup> Chandos Leigh & ors to William Ewing Esq:



Lawfords Farm at Bridley was bought in 1876 by William Ewing, for just over £18,000. A copy of the Abstract of Title to the property (dated 1908) can be found in the Archive Section of this website, under the Mayford, Sutton Green and Bridley section.

It is against this background that people such as William Ewing (a Major in the Queens Own Royal Tower Hamlets Militia) bought just over 305 acres of land at Lawfords Farm in the Manor of Bridley for just over £18,000 in 1876, and in the same year Charles Seth Smith, a Barrister of the Inner Temple, took over Sheppard's Farm at West Byfleet and replaced it with a large mansion called 'Broadoaks' (see separate article).

Numerous other farms in north-west Surrey were also bought about this time by Richard Brettall, a wealthy solicitor from Chertsey who also had interests in mining operations in Worcestershire and Shropshire. He wasn't a farmer, but seems to have bought the land



The house was built in 1876 for Charles Seth Smith on the site of Sheppard's Farm



Kettlewell is now known as Horsell Grange.

when it was at its lowest value and then sometimes rented it back to the families, some of whom may have worked the same land for generations.

In 1876 he acquired Cheapside and Kettlewell Farms in Horsell (see sales brochures below), where later the houses of Horsell Rise and Woodham Road were built. But that would be a long time in the future. In 1876, if Brettall was thinking of the farm as an investment then I hope it was as a long-term one, because as farms (with the Great Depression continuing into the 80's and early 90's), I doubt whether the poor sandy soil would have made him much of a profit!

We will eventually come to the development of Cheapside and Kettlewell (and other farms around the fringes of Woking) over the coming weeks and months, but in 1876 who knew what the future would bring for the poor agricultural labourers and farmers of the Woking area?

**HORSELL, SURREY,**  
NEAR THE VILLAGE.

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**DESIRABLE SMALL FREEHOLD FARM.**

*Particulars & Conditions of Sale with Plan of*  
A VERY COMPACT

**FREEHOLD FARM**  
OF ABOUT 15½ ACRES.  
KNOWN AS

**CHEAPSIDE FARM,**  
WITH FARM HOUSE, 3 COTTAGES, & FARM BUILDINGS,  
SITUATE IN THE

**PARISH OF HORSELL,**  
In the County of Surrey, close to the Village and within easy distance of  
Woking Station S.W.R.

**FOR SALE BY AUCTION BY**

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MESSRS.

**HEWETT AND LEE**

*At the Mart, Tokenhouse Yard, City,*  
**ON MONDAY, JULY 3rd, 1876,**  
*At 2 o'clock, under instructions from Mr. John Widdes.*

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May be Viewed by permission of the Tenant, and Particulars and Conditions of Sale, with Plan, may be obtained of Messrs. HOCKLEY AND RUSSELL, Solicitors, Guildford; at the Auction Mart, Tokenhouse Yard, City; and of

MESSRS. HEWETT & LEE,  
Auctioneers and Estate Agents,  
Puttenham and Worplesdon,  
Guildford, Surrey.

**PARTICULARS.**

**LOT 1.**  
*Colored Pink on Plan.*

**THE FREEHOLD PLEASURE FARM,**  
KNOWN AS "KETTLEWELL,"

Situate in the Parish of Horsell in the County of Surrey and comprising

**58a. 3r. 18p.,**  
*More or less of RICH ARABLE and PASTURE LAND,*  
As shown by the following Schedule of Lands.

No. on Plan.	Description.	Cultivation.	Area.		
			A.	R.	P.
Part 430	Cottage and Garden .....		0	1	17
433	Well Field .....	Arable.	7	2	10
Part 434	Cart House Field .....	do.	5	2	13
461	Lower Shipley .....	do.	4	0	34
465	House Buildings, &c.....		1	1	13
466	Great Shipley .....	Arable.	11	3	5
468	Cow Stall Field .....	do.	21	0	3
474	Coppice Field.....	Pasture.	6	2	3
Part 474	Recent Enclosure .....	do.	0	2	0
Acres			58	3	18

*NOTE.—Part No. 474 is a recent Grant of the Manor of Pyrford, and is Copyhold of that Manor, and is subject to a yearly rent of 1s., Heriot certain 1s., and Fine on admission £1 10s.*

**TOGETHER WITH "KETTLEWELL HOUSE,"**

A substantially built Residence of superior elevation and South-Western aspect situate on a Hill commanding views of the surrounding beautiful country and containing 8 Bedrooms, 2 Dressing Rooms, Boxroom and W.C. On the ground floor a large Entrance Hall 19ft. by 14ft. 3in. opening into the Drawing and Dining Rooms, Kitchen 17ft. 6in. by 17ft. 3in. large back Kitchen, Larder, and Dairy, Wine Cellar, good underground Cellars and detached commodious Outbuildings, Pleasure Garden and large Kitchen Garden. Near to the Residence is

*A Newly-built Bailiff's Cottage, and an extensive range of Farm Buildings,*

A considerable portion of which have been recently erected, comprising Large Barn, Cow Stalls, 2 long Bullock Sheds, Chaise House, 3-stall Nag Stable, excellent stabling for 8 Cart Horses with loft, chaff bins and hay store, Granary, Turfhouse, &c

On the Estate is also a Double-Tenement Cottage.

The Land has for a great number of years been farmed by the present owner and his ancestors, is in the very best state of cultivation, and is in hand, possession may therefore be had on completion of the Purchase. The situation overlooking the whole neighbourhood leaves nothing to be desired, and is within half-a-mile of Woking Station. The locality has during the last few years become of considerable importance and is now rapidly increasing in value.

**N.B.—A right to a Pew in Horsell Church is attached to this Estate.**

*The Purchaser will be required to take to, and pay for at a valuation to be made in the usual manner, the Straw at Market value, Manures, and acts of Husbandry, &c., mentioned in the 3rd Condition of Sale.*

Land Tax redeemed. Tithe free.

# HENRY GLOSTER & THE EXPANSION OF WOKING'S SHOPPING CENTRE IN 1875

Compare this picture to the more modern view and you can see that the shops of Chertsey Road and The Broadway had not then been built – the buildings in the background being by the railway.



Closer to Woking Station, of course, the Necropolis Company were trying to sell the former common land of Woking for development, but their sales for housing were still painfully slow with plenty of un-developed former farm land around stations closer to the capital.

Despite this, and the start of what would become known as the Great Agricultural Depression, an enterprising gentleman called

Henry Gloster moved from Penge to Woking to set up a new business – the West Surrey Stores and Corn Exchange.

As we saw a few weeks ago Woking's shopping centre at this time consisted of just a few shops in converted houses in the High Street, so Mr Gloster was taking a big risk opening his store on the corner of Chobham Road and Commercial Road (which was then almost anything but commercial).

In later years this would be virtually the hub of Woking's main shopping centre of Chertsey Road, Commercial Road and Chobham Road, but in 1875 his success was not guaranteed, so on Saturday mornings he hired a band to play in the road outside to attract customers to his new shop. We know now that Henry Gloster and his family went on to many other developments in the town (more of which in later articles), but as I say Henry could not be so assured.



Gloster's shop is now part of Yates, which also occupies the shop on the corner with Commercial Road, once Hart's butchers (in 1875), and in more recent years a dry cleaners.

# ST EDWARD THE CONFESSOR, CATHOLIC CHURCH

Whilst most of the Woking area was slowly progressing in the late Victorian age, there was one part that seemed to be permanently stuck in the Medieval – Sutton Green. The great Tudor manor house of Sutton Place maintained its feudal hold over the village, with its owners (the Weston's and Webbe Weston's) owning most of the land and letting it to tenant farmers.

Since the reformation they had been persecuted as Catholic's, with a secret chapel in the great house and hidden holes in Vine Cottage where their private priests were said to have escaped the authorities.

The Parliamentary Returns of 1767 had found 25 Catholics in Woking, living in eight households, including one 'lady of good estate' who had resided in the town for fifty years. That was clearly Melior Mary Weston, but who her thirty year old 'Romish Priest' was we do not know.

Melior Mary Weston sadly died (unmarried and without any children) on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 1782, leaving the estate to a distant cousin called John Webbe, who added Weston to his name in order to comply to the terms of the will.

Catholic worship finally became legal in 1791 and most of the private country-house chapels were closed and their missions moved to nearby towns, but for some reason that didn't happen at Sutton – possibly because Guildford had a number of exiled priests from the French Revolution holding Mass in a chapel in the town, and most of the Woking Catholic's presumably were concentrated at Sutton.

The 1820 Laity's Directory lists four congregations in rural Surrey at Weybridge, Richmond, Carshalton and Sutton Place, but soon other missions were begun and chapels opened so that by the time of the Religious Census of March 1851 there were seven chapels in Surrey (Croydon, Norwood, East Sheen, Richmond, Surbiton, Sutton Place and Weybridge).

The Chapel at Sutton Place apparently had 120 free sittings with room for fifty standing, but on the morning of the survey (20<sup>th</sup> March) only sixty had attended Mass with a further twenty-four coming in the afternoon.

A description of the chapel about this time notes that the 'whole interior of this side (the east side of the house) is in a dilapidated state' with 'the mullioned windows in the chapel – closely shaded by the interweaving tendrils and foliage of ivy'.

The chapel was in such a state that at times Mass had to be given at Vine Cottage where a schoolroom had been set up, teaching by the end of the 1850's more than sixty local boys and girls.

By now the estate had passed to Thomas Monington Webbe-Weston, who in 1857 set about restoring the chapel in the long gallery, with the Bishop of Southwark in about 1860 approving the boundaries of the new parish stretching from Farnborough in the west, via Woking Station to Leatherhead, Dorking, Chilworth and Stoke Park, and back to Farnborough via Henley between Pirbright and Ash.

But by the early 1870's the situation for



Catholics had changed and the Sutton estate had changed hands too, being left by Thomas Monington Webbe Weston to a cousin, Captain Francis Henry Salvin.

When his sister, Elizabeth Mary, died in December 1874 she left money for a new church to be built, and the architect Charles Alban Buckler was chosen to design the new

building (dedicated to St Edward the Confessor) to be built in the grounds of Vine Cottage near where Salvin's sister was buried.

The foundation stone was laid by the Bishop of Southwark on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 1875, who returned on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 1876 for its official opening – the work being carried out at a cost of just £2,000 by local builder, James Harris.