

# WALTER CHARLES SLOCOCK & THE EXPANSION OF GOLDSWORTH OLD NURSERY

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The trees of Slocock's Goldsworth Old Nursery are on the left of this picture of the Triangle, at Goldsworth.

A couple of weeks ago I wrote about George Jackman at St Johns Nursery and in the past I have recalled the story of the Waterer's of Knaphill. This week I want to concentrate on Walter Charles Slocock who in 1877 bought the Goldsworth Old Nursery, founded in the 1760's by James Turner and later taken over by Robert Donald (whose son also called Robert was responsible for the original planting of Brookwood Cemetery for the London Necropolis Company).

W.C. Slocock was born in 1854 in Buckinghamshire, the son of a Wraysbury farmer called Benjamin, who was apparently a great friend of Anthony Waterer at Knaphill. When Walter left school at fifteen he went to train at Knaphill, staying there just over four years before moving to Frasers Nursery in Essex and then Charles Turner's nursery at Slough. Here he is said to have learned the 'contract system' whereby plants were bought and sold from other local nurserymen who had been contracted to raise them for the main nursery.

During these years of apprenticeship the young Slocock kept a notebook, recording not only his own work, but also the cost of different plants, how they were packed and when they should be transplanted, sown or moved. At Knaphill he had been given the task of hybridising rhododendrons from varieties selected for him

by his mentor Anthony Waterer, whilst at Frasers he worked on Azaleas – another plant that he was later to become very familiar with. After working at Turner's he spent a year in Belgium (at a nursery run by a gentleman called Louis Van Houtte) and then France, before returning to England in 1877 ready to start his own business.

At Goldsworth Robert Donald junior had built up a large land-holding employing thirty-five men and eight boys at the time of the 1861 census with over 200 acres of nursery stock, but he died just two years later and the nursery appears to have gone into decline soon after.

W.C. Slocock was already well aware of the Goldsworth Nursery and even recorded in his notebook in 1872 eighty Magnolia Grandiflora and some fruit trees bought from the nursery then run by 'G. & T. Waterer' (George and Thomas).

So when he returned in 1877 he was in a good position to take the Goldsworth Old Nursery on. With a loan of £1,550 for working capital he paid £1,750 for the stock and goodwill of the firm, leasing just twenty-four acres before later buying them on a mortgage.

According to Frederick Street in his history of Goldsworth Nursery (published in 1977) Slocock was 'an exception to many rules'. 'Most men who earn their living from the land on their own account are more concerned with nursing a nest egg against bad times' – 'he believed that the money should work for him'. 'He was never afraid to have an overdraft and his success in business enabled him to become the dictator of terms to the bank rather than a humble supplicant for favours'.

He supervised the work of the nursery, sometimes seven days a week, from eight in the morning to ten at night, his 'eye on everything' as nothing escaped him. He was quick-tempered, but also quick to forgive and forget and his personal charm (and kind heart) made him very much a 'character'. Sometimes he would sack a man for poor work or after a disagreement, and then ask the following day why the man had not turned up for work. On being told by the foreman that he had sacked the guy the day before, he would go around the man's house and take him back on without any loss of pay.

To begin with he employed just three men and two boys, including James Burchett (his foreman) and Stephen Bullen, who would ring a bell at the start of each day's work, but



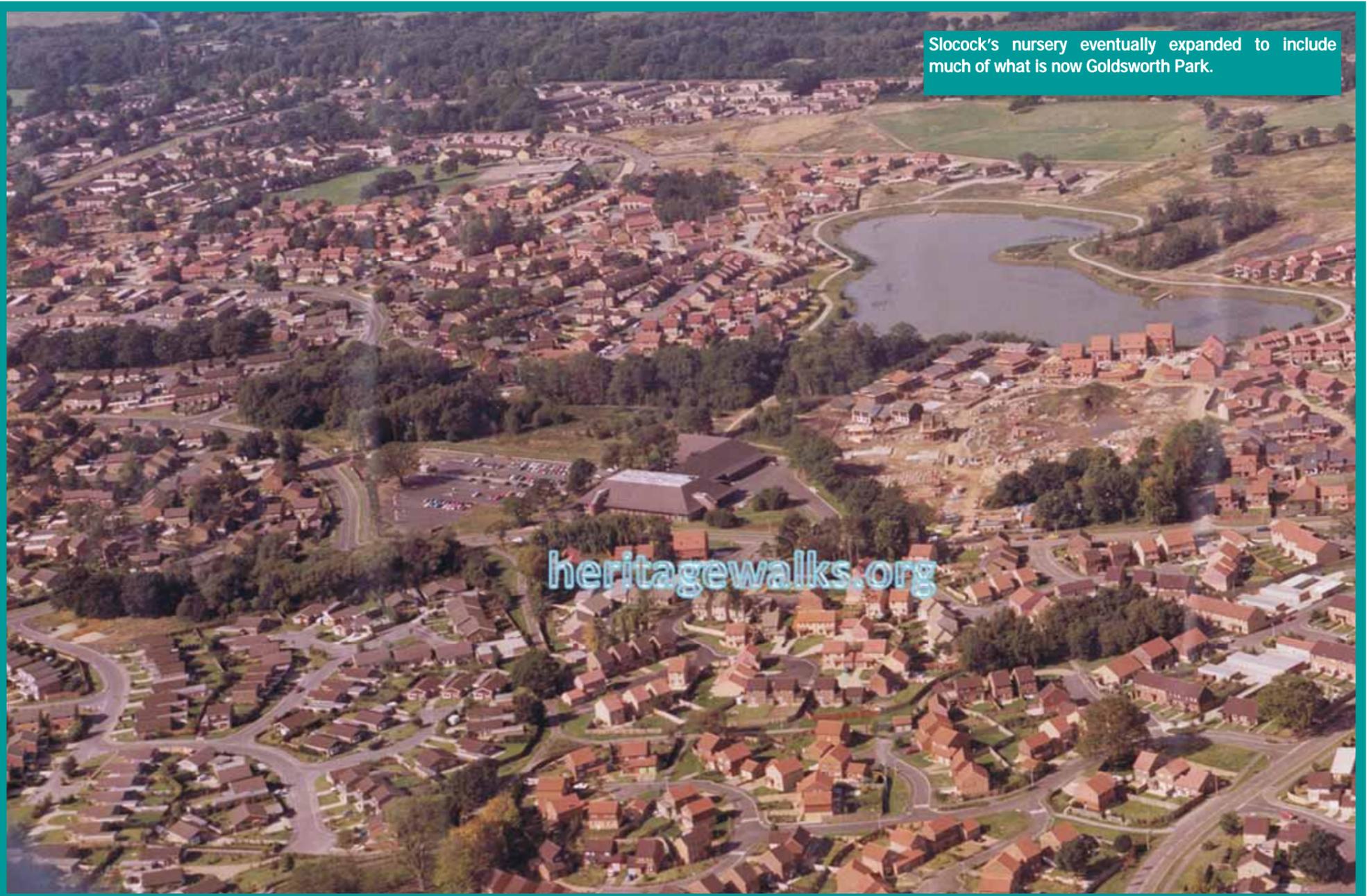
The headquarters of the nursery were at Goldsworth House, until it was demolished to make way for more houses on Goldsworth Park

gradually as the nursery expanded more and more workers were taken on.

At Harelands, across the canal from the original 'Old Nursery', the foreman was a man called

Alfred Collyer. He had a pet parrot who having heard Mr Slocock shout at his staff learned his voice, causing chaos as the bird continually bellowed instructions throughout the day.

But that was in the 'future', in 1877 Walter Charles Slocock was just starting out with no idea that in a hundred years time the houses of Goldsworth Park would be 'planted' on his land.



Slocock's nursery eventually expanded to include much of what is now Goldsworth Park.

# THE EXPANSION OF EDUCATION IN WOKING IN 1877



In April 1877 elections were held for the seven seats on the Woking School Board. The man who topped the poll was a gentleman called Ebenezer Smith. He was a colourful candidate to say the least. The previous year it is claimed he attended a meeting of the Board 'in a state of unmistakable intoxication', but he was obviously popular with the electorate, with 431 votes cast in his favour (almost 100 more than the next candidate). The following year he tried to block the co-option of the Vicar of Woking onto the Board (and oust the Chairman), but was unsuccessful on both counts.

Local Schools were very much in the news in 1877 with two rooms being added to the little church school at Byfleet and Church Street School in Old Woking enlarged, but it was Knaphill that was to see the largest change in

1877 with the building of a new mixed school to accommodate 250 children.

Interestingly Alan Crosby in his *History of Woking* (Philimore, 1982) claims that there was a school in the village in the 'early 1860's' taken over by the Woking School Board in March 1877, with a new school built by them in 1880-81, but the Kelly's Directory of 1882 notes the new building in 1877 and this is supported by Arthur Althorp's Almanac & Directory in 1888 which notes it being 'enlarged in 1884'.

The 'early 1860's' school was, I believe, opened in connection with the local Wesleyan Church (and not taken over by the School Board), who clearly built the new school in 1877 on the present site between the High Street and Trinity Road.



The original Knaphill School, built in 1877 by the Woking School Board

# THE EXPANSION OF THE WESLEYAN CHURCH AT KNAPHILL IN 1877 (& THE FOUNDING OF CHRIST CHURCH IN WOKING)

The Wesleyan movement in Knaphill has always been quite progressive. They started out by holding open air meetings outside the Anchor Hotel and the Royal Standard public house (at the bottom of Anchor Hill, behind the forge), but in 1865 they purchased a plot of land from the Necropolis Company for £20 and built their first chapel.

That was where the Broadway merges into the High Street, with the simple flint-walled chapel (above) being officially opened two years later with accommodation for 240 people.

By 1877 the congregation had obviously increased and it was decided to extend the chapel with a purpose-built Sunday School. Unfortunately neither the original chapel, nor the new extension was particularly well built, and within a few years plans were drawn up for a replacement – but that, as they say, is another story.

I mentioned a few weeks back that the Wesleyan's were the first to build a church in



The original 'tin tabernacle' (circled on the 1895 Ordnance Survey 25" map) stood behind the present church where the modern shop and halls extension are today.

It acted as the parish hall until the new hall (seen below on the right) was built in 1898.

what is now Woking Town Centre (in Chapel Street), but it was not until 1877 that the Church of England got around to doing the same. Their little 'tin tabernacle' was erected in what was then called 'Providence Street', although it wasn't long before it was renamed Church Street in recognition of its new landmark.



The original Wesleyan Methodist Church from the 1870 Ordnance Survey, 25" Map (above) and with the 1877 extension on the 1895 25" map (right).

