

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE (BUT NOT THE SORT TO DRINK)!

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In 1890 the Red House in Woking was letting their waste flow into the street.

In 1889 the London & South Western Railway was fined for allowing 'manure water' to drip through the railway arch at Woking onto the road below, whilst in 1890 the proprietor of the Red House Hotel was likewise fined £2 for apparently, letting 'waste and filth' from his premises flow into the street. The railway company had been in trouble before when six years earlier their employees had 'emptied the contents of cesspools into a ditch and allowed it to flow into the highway' at Goldsworth. No doubt it was incidents like these that the Surveyor of Woking Urban District Council recalled several years later, that prior to the mid 1890's Woking's un-made roads were 'often used as a convenient spot to deposit the contents of cesspits'!

In Byfleet things were not much better as there the waste from the Plough Inn and adjacent brewery were said to be contaminating the little stream that then ran beside the High Road.

The stream (after which Stream Close is named) was normally 'flushed' by an overflow from the Wey Navigation, but Chertsey Rural Sanitary Authority (which covered Byfleet at that time) found in May 1890 that the 'sink and urinal waste' from the Plough, 'slops and privy drains' and 'offensive matter from the brewery' were also being fed into the stream which then flowed into Foxlake pond before flowing into the River Wey downstream from Byfleet Mill.

Meanwhile in Horsell the same report found that the Rive Ditch on Horsell Moor – for centuries the boundary between Woking and Horsell and which once served the great Sheerwater Lake before flowing (as it still does) beside the canal at West Byfleet - was being used for the drainage of houses in Woking 'the occupiers of which appear to use it as a common sewer'.

Woking, of course, was not in the same sanitary authority as Horsell and Byfleet, but was covered by the Guildford Rural Sanitary Authority which, it seemed, cared little for the inhabitants of Woking let alone Horsell. The authority, which met in Guildford, probably had little desire to encourage the growth of their new rival to the north, and appear to have done everything they could to ignore the pleas of local residents in Woking for better conditions.

As far back as 1875 the local Vestry had called for a sewage works for the town and a special Parochial Committee was formed with representatives from the Guildford RSA who recommended that for sewerage purposes Woking should be divided into three areas, Knaphill, Woking Station and Woking Village. The idea was that ratepayers outside those areas, who would not benefit from sewerage schemes, would not have to pay. But as they made no attempt to come up with a plan for a sewage works the Local Government Board had no option by to refuse to sanction the plan.

It took Guildford fifteen years to come up with a plan for Woking, and even then it was for a totally inadequate works to be built beside the Hoe Stream by Elmbridges. It was apparently designed by a Mr K.R. Lailey, and was to use 15½ acres of land more or less where the car park for the Leisure Centre and Pools are today – it is clear it would never have worked.



The 1870 Ordnance Survey 25" Map of Byfleet shows the numerous watercourses and ditches that drained the area—most of which acted as open sewers.



The stream that ran beside the High Road at Byfleet was contaminated by water from the Plough Inn and Brewery

It may have been able to serve Knaphill and Woking Station, but any sewerage from Woking Village would have had to have been pumped up to the works, so very quickly the idea was dropped, although not before the hapless Guildford authority proposed another equally unsuitable site of the opposite bank of the Hoe Stream, in what was then known as 'Tinker's Lane' (close to where the Leisure Centre is today).

Coincidentally (or perhaps not) the site appears to have been the same one that in 1881 George Smallpiece of Kingfield House, as a Director of the Woking Gas & Water Company, had proposed to build the town's gasworks. They didn't go ahead with their plan either, of course, and it was later left to a new Gas Company (in 1891) to build a Gas Works in the town – but that is another story.

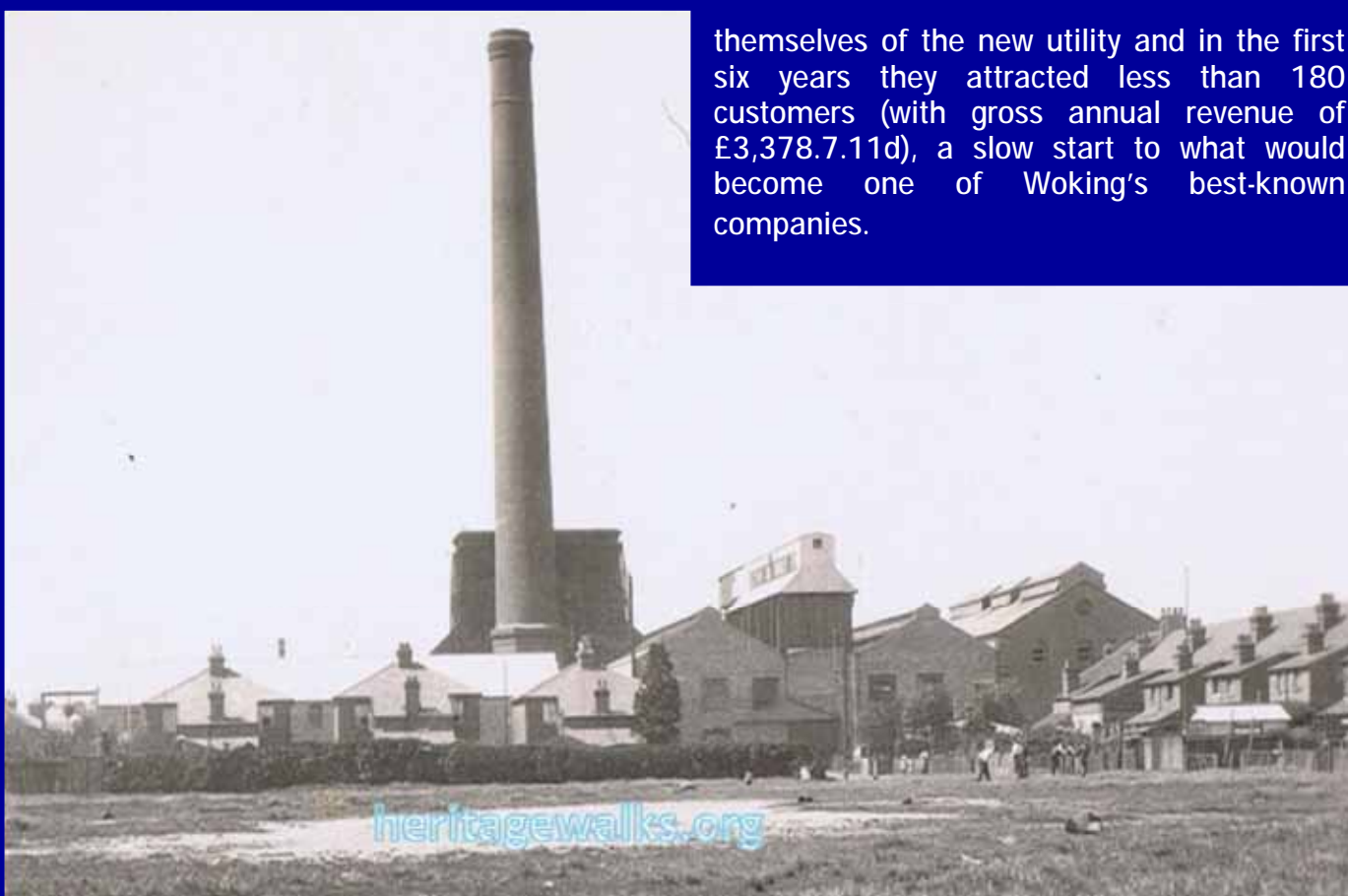


The Flood Relief Scheme at Hoe Bridge would have been very different if the sewage works had been built there in 1890.

WOKING ELECTRIC SUPPLY COMPANY (WESCO)

Although the various gas companies formed to serve Woking were dithering, the Woking Electric Surrey Company (WESCO) were forging ahead with their plans to supply the town. They were formed in 1889 and in 1890 received parliamentary approval to provide electricity for domestic use and public lighting. The new power station capable of producing 2,000 eight-candle-power lamps (20 KW) was built and operated by two gentlemen from Westminster called A.G New and A.J. Mayne. It was constructed on the corner of North Road and Board School Road and by November 1890 their mains had been laid through the town to the Goldsworth Arms in the west and to the top of Constitution Hill to the south.

To begin with uptake of their service was quite slow. Most of the output was for domestic lighting so the company took the decision to close down the power station during daylight hours. This was probably a grave mistake as it discouraged commercial undertakings to avail



themselves of the new utility and in the first six years they attracted less than 180 customers (with gross annual revenue of £3,378.7.11d), a slow start to what would become one of Woking's best-known companies.

GUILDFORD RURAL HIGHWAY'S BOARD

Whilst the Guildford Rural Sanitary Authority were proving inept at serving the new town of Woking, their sister organisation, the Guildford Rural Highways Board was also busy taking the ratepayers' money from Woking and doing very little with it.

In 1869 the forty-five miles of parish roads in Woking were to be kept in order with the use of four scrapers, three rakes, three

wheelbarrows and a pump, which by 1890 was obviously useless as in that year Church Street and Percy Street appear to have been constantly flooded by 'a natural course of surface water'.

Granted the Highways Board had tried to improve matters by adopting a few of the main roads in the area and making them up –

buying a steam roller from Aveling & Porter in 1887 and adding a second machine in 1890 – but to many residents the action must have seemed like a case of 'too little to late'.

It was clear to most people in the new town at least that local government was failing them, and calls for an authority of our own were starting to be made.

