

LIGHTING THE STREETS (SO YOU COULD SEE THE MUD)

Iain Wakeford 2015



Last week we looked at the formation of the Woking Local Board in 1893 and its successor the Woking Urban District Council who took over in 1895 and continued the work of gradually improving the area after years of neglect by the authorities based in Guildford - who it seems had done everything they could to try to stifle their new and increasingly important neighbour to the north.

The question of a sewage system for the town was proving a problem (and it would be a few more years before it could be successfully settled), but at least some progress was being made to the roads and street lighting.

Peter Macdonald, who collected the rates for the new authority, recalled several years later that there were only four made-up roads when the council was formed, 'the rest of the roads were simply tracks or partly formed roads where the mud was the most conspicuous element'.

Under the Private Street Works Act of 1892 the council started to make a difference, with the footpath along Walton Road being made up in the autumn of 1894.

'Walton Road, Church Street and adjacent streets were quagmires pure and simple' recalled Mr Macdonald. 'There was a tremendous dip in the centre of Church Street (between Percy Street and Bath Road), in which

water collected, and children in going to Maybury School had to cling to the wire fence at the side in order to get from one end of the street to the other'.

In Walton Road an old resident remarked that his horse 'trode in and out of the mud like a Christian', carefully putting its hooves down as far as they would go before just as carefully lifting them up again 'and thus cautiously proceeded on his journey'.

As the rate-collector, MacDonald was probably in a better position than any to appreciate what the ratepayers of Woking thought of the work - or rather the cost of the work! The rates in 1894 in the Station Ward were one shilling (5p) in the pound, but within a short while rose to 2s6d to cover the cost of new works. Needless-to-say a number of ratepayers were not happy, and told their rate-collector so. One person objected strongly to paying extra for street lighting saying 'if people wanted to go out in the dark they should take a lantern as he did'.

Before the Local Board was formed there were a few oil lamps on various street corners (and some shops and private residences provided lights outside their properties), but the first concerted plan to light the streets of the town came in November 1893 when the 'Sanitary & Lighting Committee' asked the Woking Electric Supply Co and the local gas company to provide

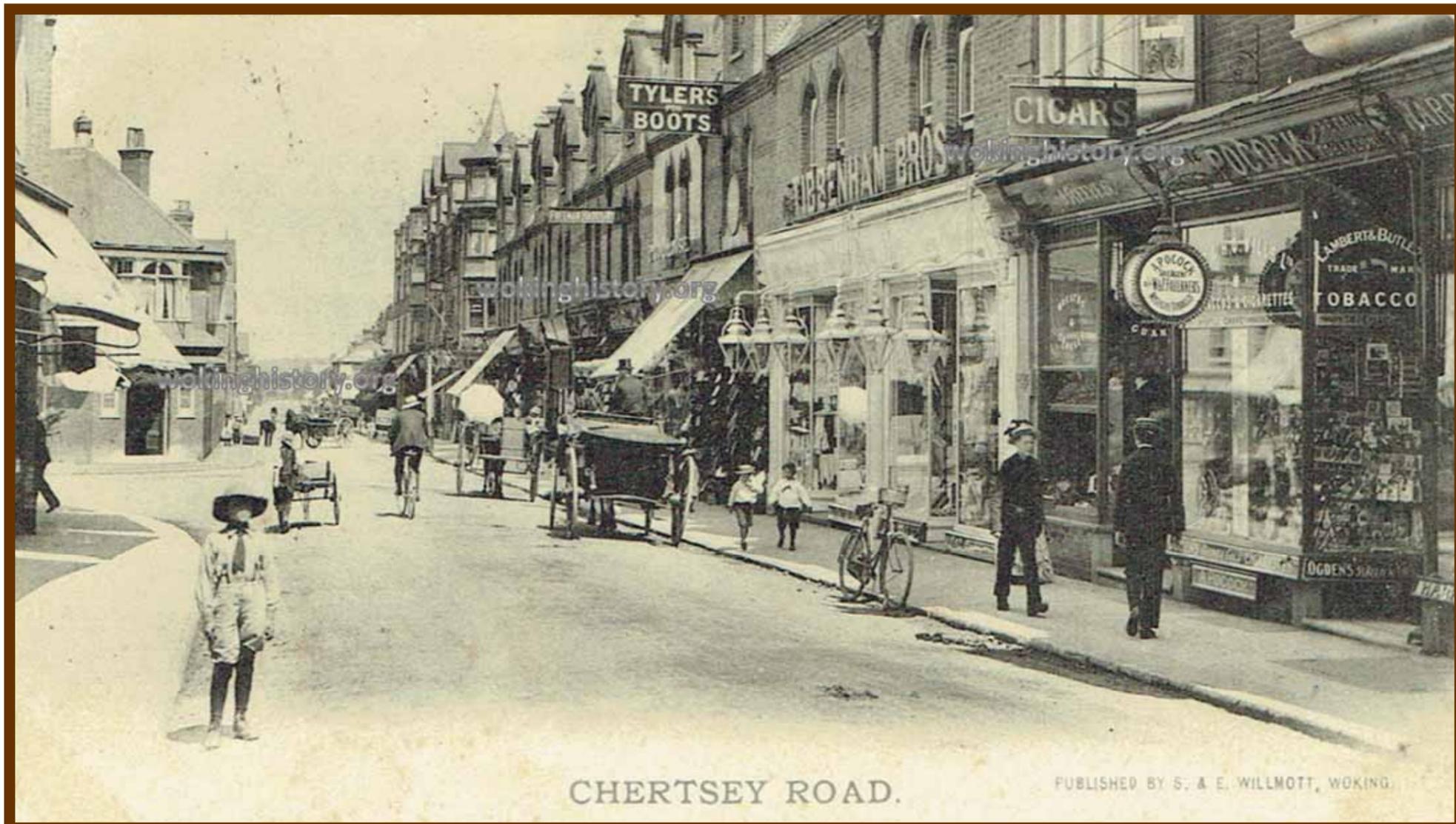
The only made-up roads before 1894 were the main road from Woking to Knaphill via St Johns, and the roads from Chertsey to Guildford via the town centre or Maybury Hill.

quotes to erect, maintain and light one-hundred street lamps.

In July the following year, after tests had shown that the electric company could provide brighter and cheaper lighting, a seven year contract was awarded at a rate of £310.16s. per annum for what turned out to be 111 street lights, plus an initial payment of £513.15s for their installation.

It obviously took a while to erect all the lamps as it was not until the 28th January 1895 before the first electric street lights could be lit, and as the contract was only for lighting during the winter (and then only from sunset to midnight), it must have been quite difficult to judge initially whether the scheme was a success or not.

By the following October, however, when the lights were due to be turned back on, it was discovered that twenty-one of the lamps were not working (either through vandalism or bad upkeep) and the service was so unreliable (and the financial stability of WESCO so bad), that when it came to awarding a lighting contract for St Johns and Woking Village the council decided to go with a local firm to supply and



CHERTSEY ROAD.

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maintain oil lamps, even though the electricity company was willing to extend their mains to those areas so that they could provide street lighting.

Worse still from WESCO's point of view was that in December 1895, just before a council meeting that was due to discuss the cost of

Before the council paid for street lights, some local shops, such as Tibbenham Brother's in Chertsey Road, helped light the streets outside their premises.

street lighting (and whether gas lights should be used instead of electric), the entire power supply failed, plunging the streets once more into darkness!

One local writer recorded in a novel based partially on Woking 'the noise of business from the gasworks' adding ironically that 'all the street lamps were alight'. We shall look at that writer and his novel next week, but I am sure he was well aware that it was seldom the case that 'all the street lamps were alight'!

Pipes being laid under Courtney Road show that some progress was being made in the mid 1890's.



ST PAUL'S CHURCH, MAYBURY



In the early 1840's the population of Woking was gradually increasing and it was decided to build a Chapel of Ease in the western part of St Peter's parish dedicated to St John the Baptist. By the late 1860's the area around Woking Station was expanding so fast that another Chapel of Ease (this time called Christ Church) was erected to cope, and in 1884 it (along with the original chapel at St John's) was split from Old Woking's parish with the formation of the new parish of St John's.

By 1893 St John's parish itself was divided as the new Christ Church Parish was formed and in 1894 another Chapel of Ease was begun in the south east of its district – this time dedicated to St Paul.

There has been some suggestion that the building of the church was part of a plan by Dr Leitner at the Oriental Institute (opposite the church) to provide places of worship for all the major religions on his site (see right), but although he may have supported the

foundation of St Paul's the land was actually acquired by the trustees of Christ Church in 1894 from the Necropolis Company at a cost of £290.00.

The foundation stone was laid by Lord Middleton, the President of the National Protestant Union, 'in the pouring rain' on the 30th October 1894, with the funds for its construction mainly coming from the Vicar of Christ Church and his family, the Rev William Hamilton (although £1,000 was apparently donated by the Rev Francis Paynter, the Rector of Stoke-Next-Guildford).

The original design, by Ewan Christian, was for a much larger church with aisles on either side of the Nave, but in the end they were not built. Instead the arches that would have separated the Nave from the Aisles were filled in with brick, that apparently could still be removed if the church ever wanted to increase its size to cater for the six-hundred strong congregation that was originally envisaged.

Sadly Mr Christian died before the work was finished, but his firm continued to supervise the work which was carried out by the experienced local church builder, Richard James Harris.

Work evidently proceeded at a rapid pace with the new Bishop of Winchester, the Rev R T Davidson, performing the consecration of the building on the 28th November 1895.

According to the history of the church (written by Marion Field to celebrate the 50th anniversary of it becoming a parish in 1958), the consecration service took place at 'half past eleven' and 'only eight people attended the service'!

According to the Woking Muslim Council website from old records it has been found that the foundations were also laid for a Hindu temple, but unfortunately, due to the untimely death of Dr Leitner in March 1899, the plots earmarked for the Hindu temple and the synagogue were sold by his heirs to James Walker & Co. The church was built on the proposed land with the efforts of, and through donations collected by Mr William Hamilton – it is presently called St Paul's Church'.

I have not been able to view those records, but as I say the land upon which St Paul's was built was bought from the Necropolis Company, so whether Dr Leitner had any plans for St Paul's to be part of his 'complex' I do not know.

Looking through my 1905 edition of 'Black's Guide to Surrey' (p42), however, I did come across the following.

'Just short of Woking Junction a remarkable red building is passed on the left, an institution for Indian students, with a mosque at one end balanced by a Hindoo temple at the other'. It is the only reference I have been able to find so far about the temple actually being built.

It would be over a quarter of a century later that James Walker's bought any land at Maybury, but if Leitner had succeeded in building not just the Mosque (and possibly the Temple), but also a Synagogue, then the history of the Maybury area could have been significantly different!

Of course a Buddhist Temple has been established in the borough (in the old Brookwood Hospital Chapel), although sadly a synagogue is still missing.



LAND SALES AROUND WOKING IN 1894-5



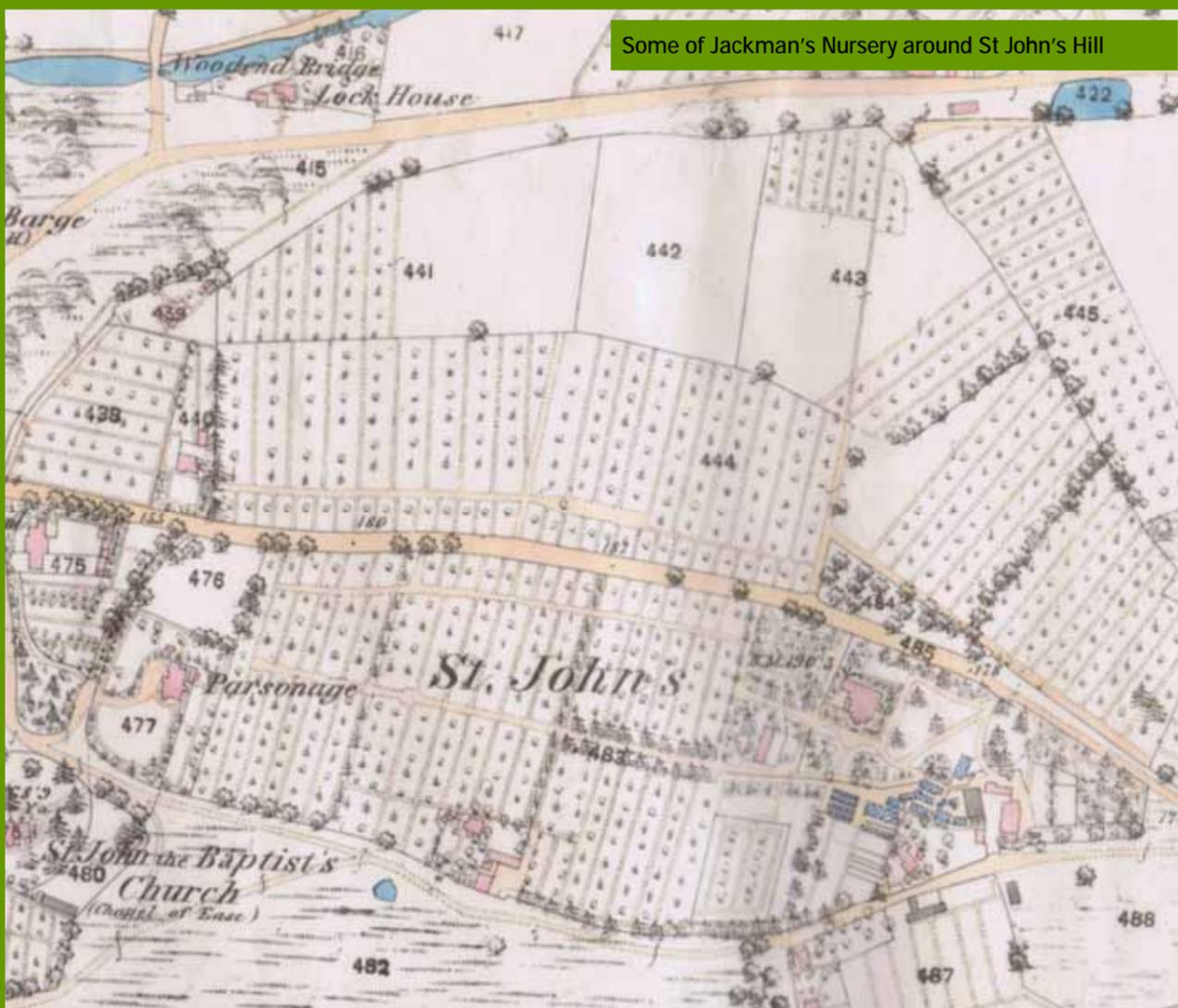
The mid 1890's saw a boom in building, not just in Woking but in the surrounding villages as well. At Sutton Green in 1894 part of Frog Lane Farm was put up for sale with what became 'Pyle Hill' eventually being developed as a high-class residential estate on the land. The previous year the Jackman Family had sold off some of their nursery land at St John's Hill for housing, and in Horsell the

Cobbett family has likewise cashed in on the development of Woking with the sale of a small portion of their land by the canal at The Grove and Chobham Road.

That was in 1895, the same year that the owners of Oaks Farm in Goldsworth Road decided to sell a portion of their estate that had been cut-off from their main landholding by the

building of the branch-line to Guildford. It was marketed as the 'York Estate', with the estate agents cheerfully pointing out that the land was 'adjoining the favourite Mount Hermon' – although failing to note that whereas Mount Hermon Road enjoyed views to the south across the Hoe Valley, York Road's view to the north was of the railway and goods yard!

Many other plots were sold at this time as a number of sales brochures and deeds on the archive part of this website show.



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