

THE GROWTH OF WOKING IN THE 19th CENTURY

Iain Wakeford 2015



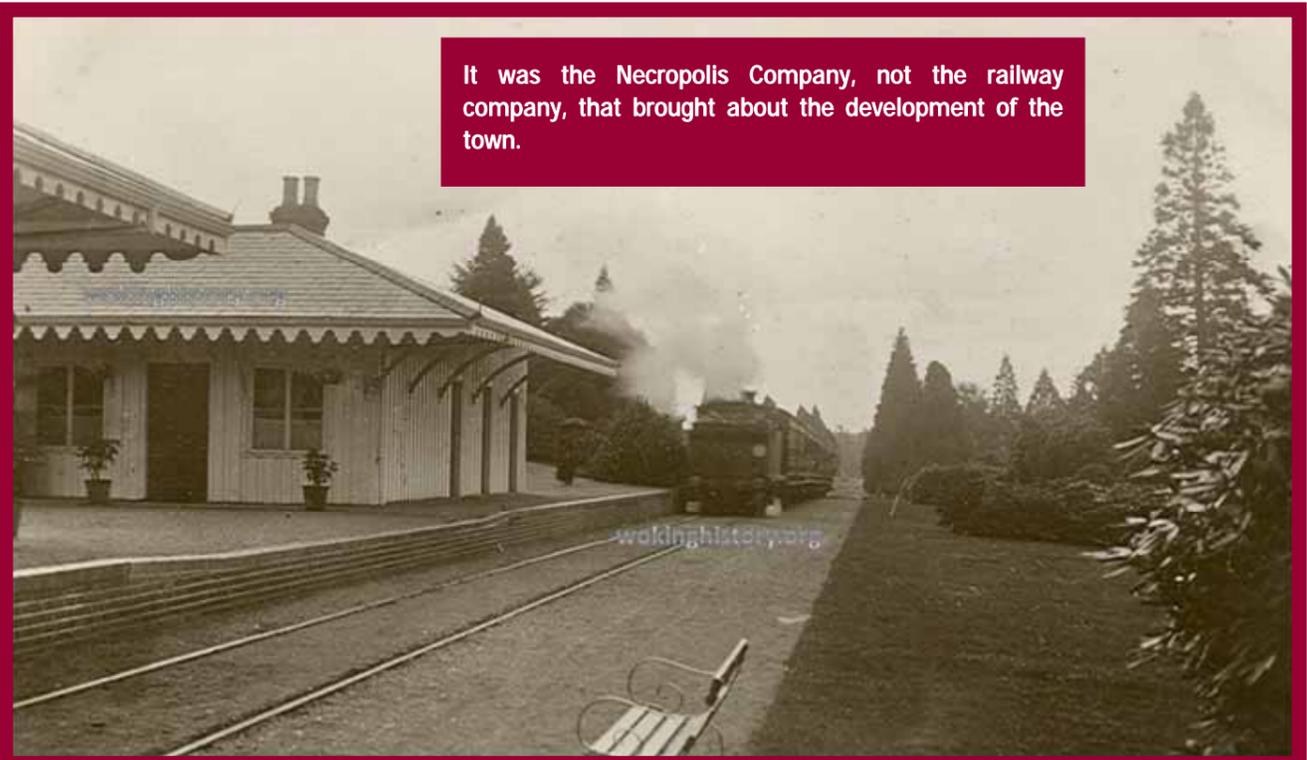
Without the opening of Woking Station on the common in 1838, the new town of Woking would not have developed.

For the past nine months or more our look at the history of Woking has been able to view developments in the area's past on a year-by-year basis – some events being so momentous that the story of a year has had to be spread over more than one week. Last week we reached the end of the 19th century, so it seems as good a time as any to look back over that century to see how much Woking had changed – especially during the long reign of Queen Victoria.

In the census of 1801 the population of the parish of Woking was 1,340 – by 1901 it had increased to 16,244. In 1801 Woking was largely an agricultural area, but by 1901 just 570 men worked on local farms or nurseries. Not surprisingly perhaps work in the construction industry was one of the main employers by 1901, with transport, and in particular the railway, also showing large numbers of workers by the end of the century.

Obviously it was the building of the railway in the 1830's that started to stimulate growth, but it was the purchase of Woking Common by the Necropolis Company in the 1850's (and their eventual sale of land for development) that more than anything encouraged the new town of Woking to grow.

Again this growth can be demonstrated in the census figures which showed that between



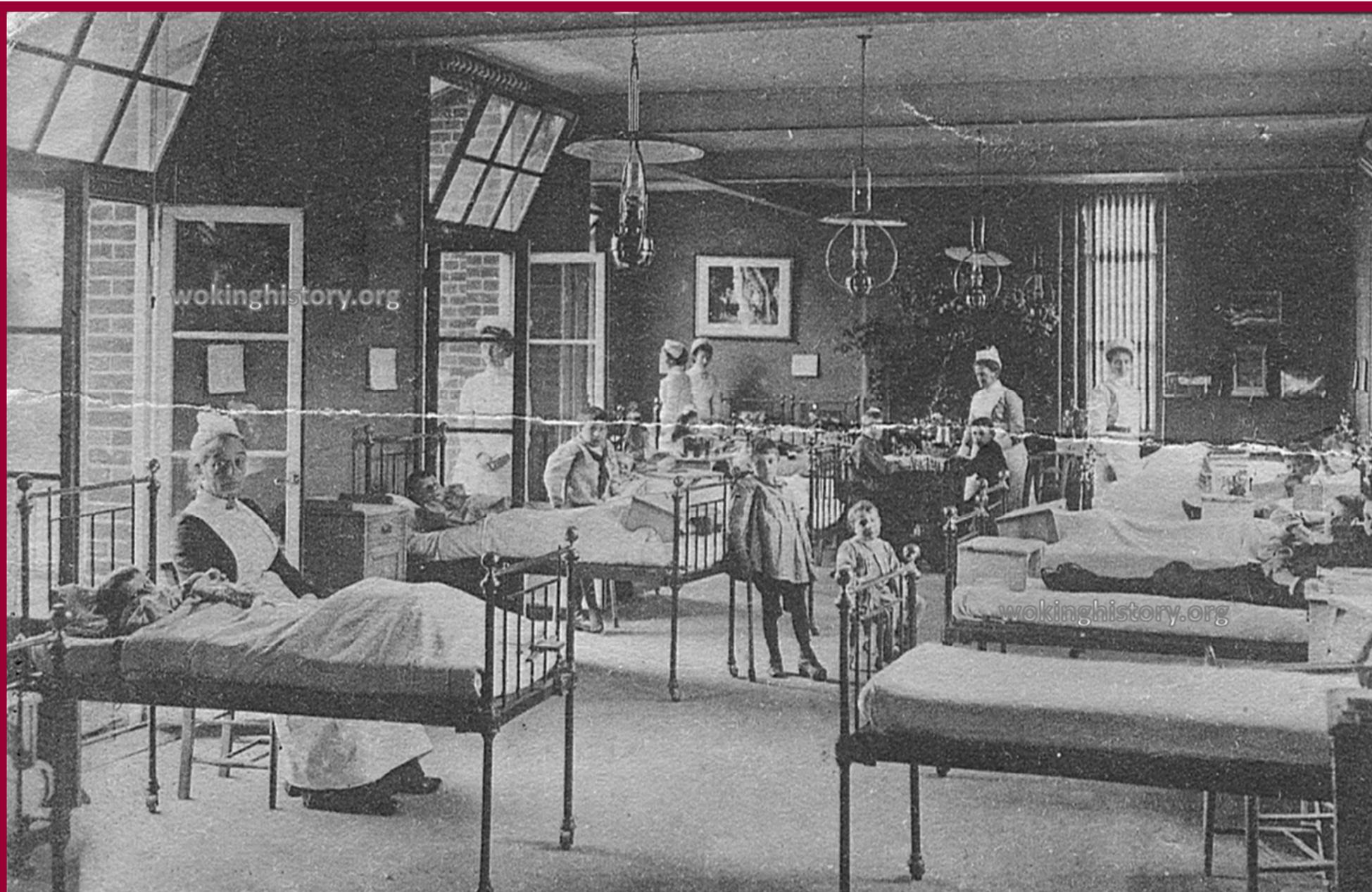
It was the Necropolis Company, not the railway company, that brought about the development of the town.

1841 and 1851 the population of Woking had increased by 14.3%. Between 1851 and 1861, when the Necropolis had tentatively started to sell land, the increase was already 34.6%, but in the next decade Woking's population increased by a staggering 72.5%, as more and more former common land and fields were sold off for housing.

Part of the increase in population was the result of the various institutions that were opening up during this period – notably the second Surrey

County Pauper Lunatic Asylum (begun in 1864) and the Woking Invalid Convict Prison (started 1859). In 1867 they were joined by the Woking Female Prison, and by the end of the 80's the Surrey Industrial School at Mayford.

The Industrial School's transfer to Byfleet in 1871 (from Wandsworth) and then to Mayford, accounts for the strange fluctuation in the growth figures for Byfleet in the late 19th century. Between 1841 and 1851 the increase was just over 2% with about 12% being the



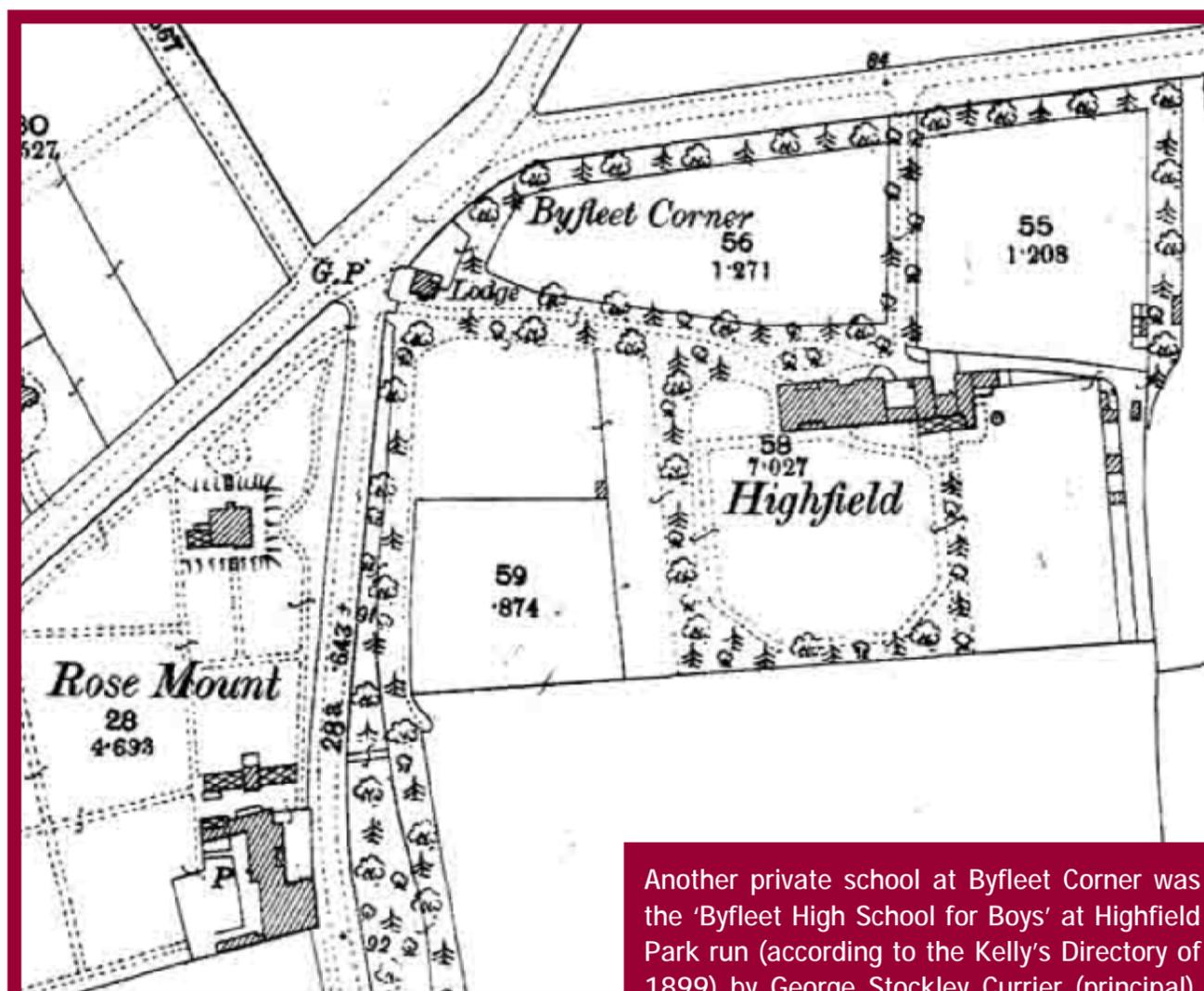
Institutions in Victorian times – such as the Waif's & Strays Society's Home at West Byfleet – vastly added to the population of this area.

natural growth in the area in the following decade – but between 1871 and 1881 (when the Industrial School accounted for almost 250 of the of the 346 increase) Byfleet's population increased by 37.8%, dropping to almost 10% the following decade as the Boys School closed and was only replaced by the 'Byfleet Hall High School for Girls' (which in 1891 had just over forty staff and pupils listed in the census).

It is possible that the Girls' High School was housed in the former Industrial School buildings, but I suspect that Highfield was more likely 'Byfleet Hall' as by 1893 the Waif's & Stray's Society were occupying the old Industrial School buildings in Pyrford Road with their 'Receiving Home for Boys' (which in 1901 had nine children and staff listed in the census) and the 'St Nicholas Home for Girls' (that had sixty-four staff and girls in the census of 1901).

Industrial Schools and other Institutions appear to have played a major role in the development of not just Woking, but other neighbouring villages in the late Victorian Period. In the last few months I have written about the development of the St Mary's Homes at Addlestone, the Meath Schools at Ottershaw, the Gordon's School at West End in Chobham and the Shaftesbury Homes at Bisley – and recently about the St Peter's Convent and Convalescent Home at Maybury.

The military too, with Aldershot not far away, also played its part with the War Department taking over West End Common in 1879, opening the Guards' camp at Pirbright in 1892,



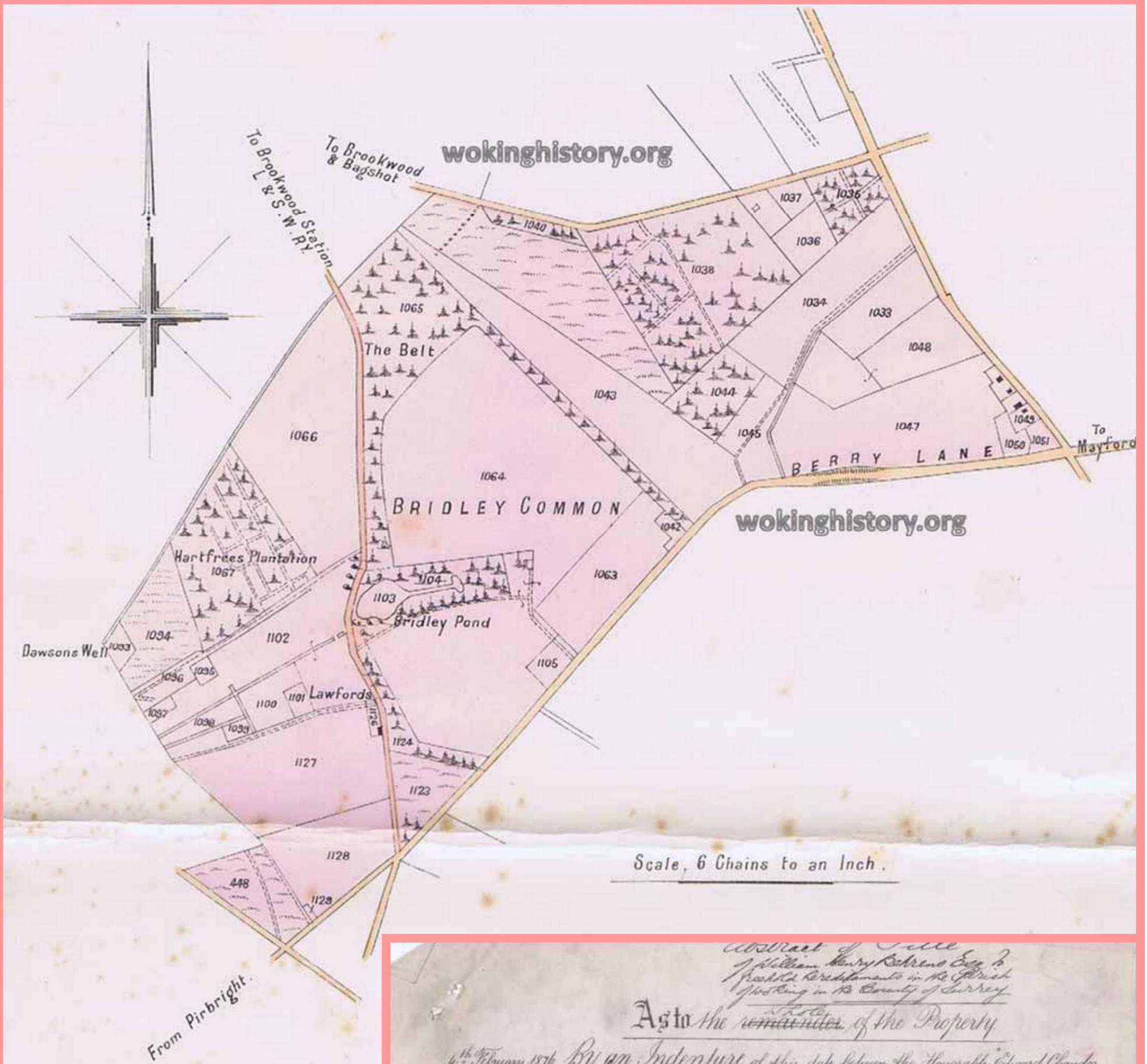
and converting the prisons at Woking into Inkerman Barracks by the end of the 19th century.

With the increase in population came increased pressure on local resources and services, which in turn brought pressure on the authorities to recognise the growing new town of Woking and eventually grant it administrative powers of its own. And so our story continues, into the 20th century.

Another private school at Byfleet Corner was the 'Byfleet High School for Boys' at Highfield Park run (according to the Kelly's Directory of 1899) by George Stockley Currier (principal), but with Charles Passmore as the head by the 1901 census. I suspect, but I don't know for certain, that this took over from the Byfleet Hall High School for Girls, but if anybody has any more information, I would be most grateful.

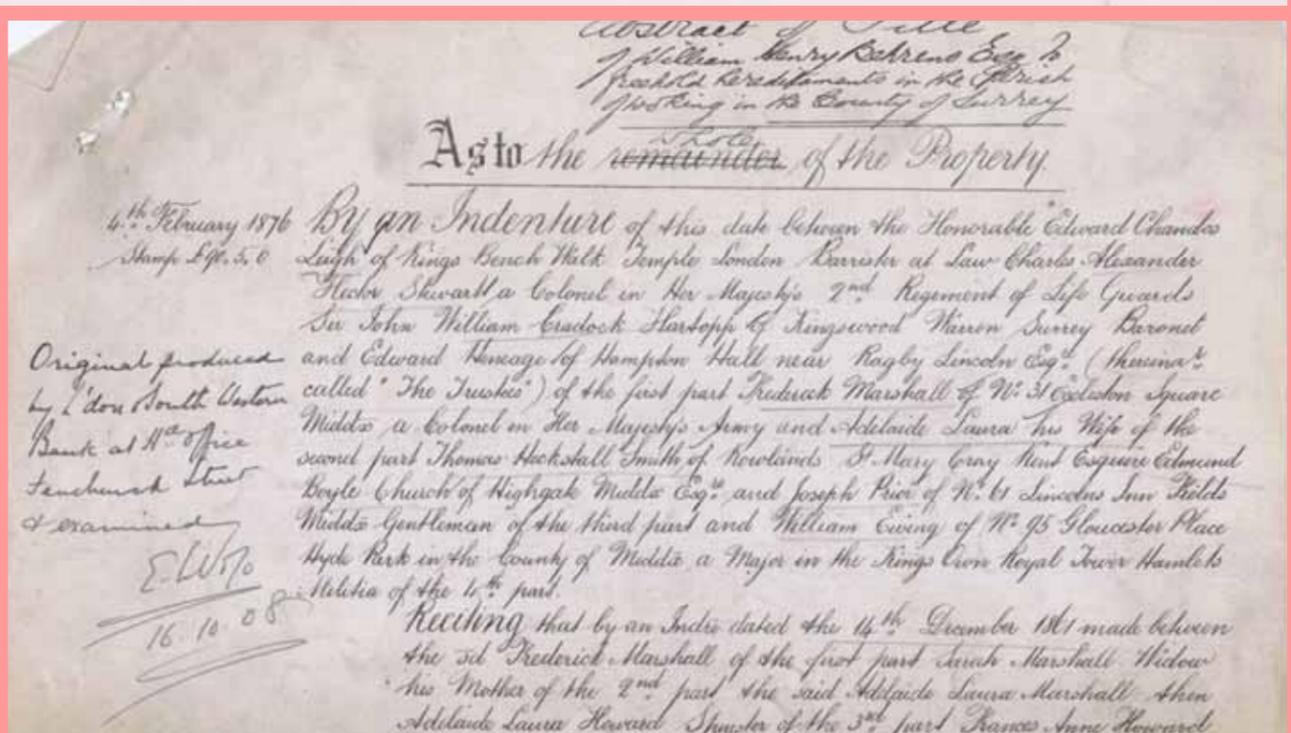
The 1901 census lists just seven pupils, but with Mr & Mrs Passmore, two tutors and five other servants, I am not certain that the school was really that successful (from a financial point of view at least).

SURELY ONE GOOD DEED DESERVES ANOTHER?



This website (in the 'Archive' section) has a number of deeds and documents relating to properties in this area. Some have been given to me by solicitor's firms who rather than just dump their old files decided to 'recycle' them in my direction, but a number of others have simply been loaned to me for copying by interested owners.

Some of the sales documents are extremely interesting such as the one shown here for the 'Bridley Estate' – which includes several plans of the area before the houses of 'Worplesdon Hill' and the Worplesdon Golf Course were developed. In the past Worplesdon was one of the largest parishes in the Surrey (if not the South-East), with Burpham, Jacobs Well, Pitch Place, Perry Hill, Wood Street and even as far as Wyke being part of the parish, but Bridley (and indeed Prey Heath where Worplesdon Station opened in 1883) were never part of the



parish, so how or why the name became associated with them is a mystery.

Some of the older deeds and documents can be a little hard to read with their copperplate handwriting and 'legal speak', but all have some interest and contain little nuggets of

information that when combined with other documents can reveal a much bigger picture. Indeed some can be the vital piece of the jigsaw, so if you have any old deeds or documents that I could copy for my online archive, please contact me at info@heritagewalks.org.

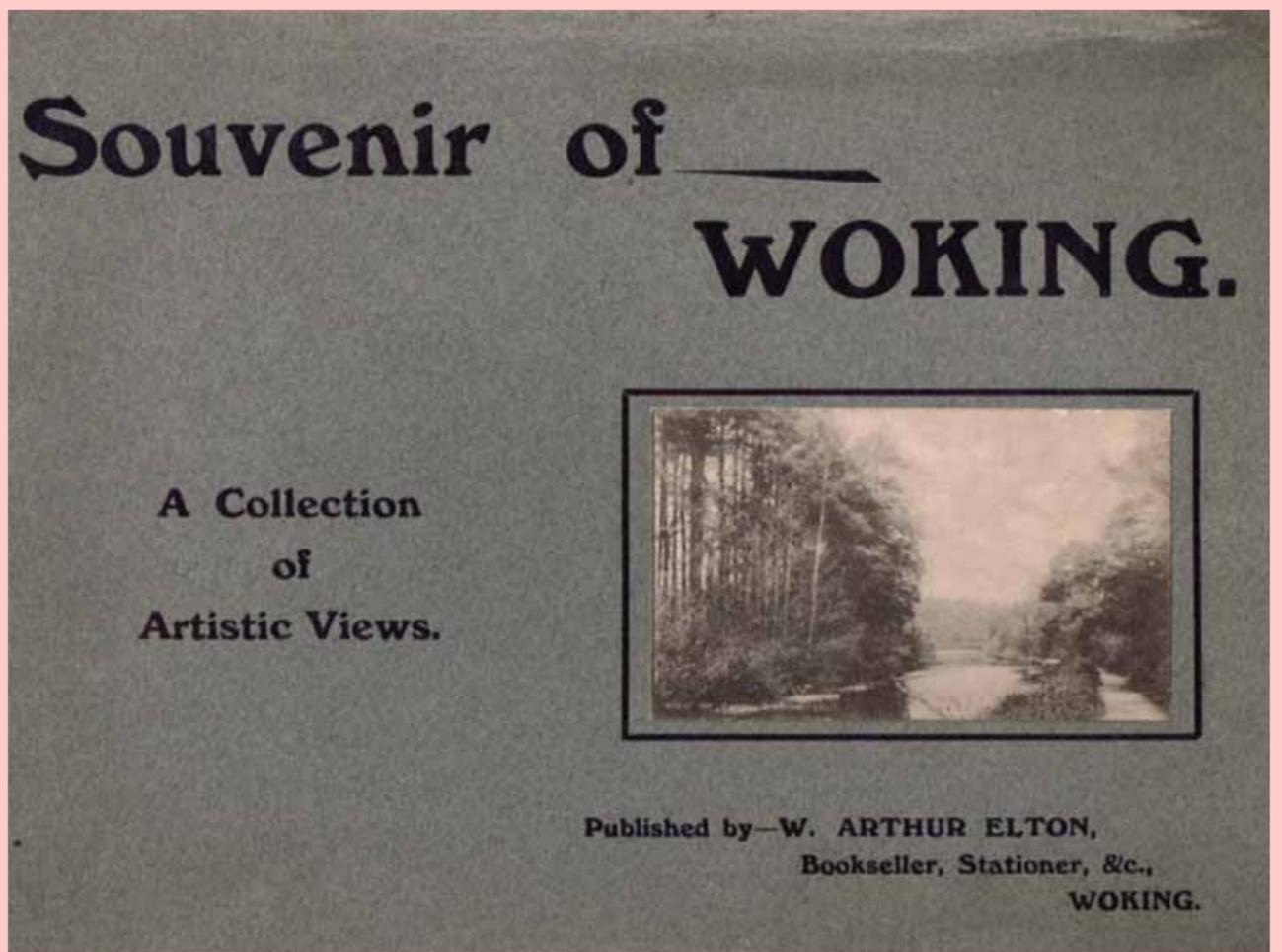
W.A. ELTON OPENS IN WOKING

In West Byfleet there is a small shop in Rosemount Parade selling office products known as 'Eltons' – possibly now the oldest established independent business in the area.

It is no longer owned or run by the Elton family, and was not originally established on that site, but the business has been selling stationery and other office equipment since 1901 when Mr W A Elton first opened his shop in Chertsey Road, Woking.

In those days the firm also had a lending library as well as selling books, maps and postcards. In 1983 I was lucky enough to be invited by Mr Elton's son (who had retired to Devon) to copy his extensive collection of glass-plate negatives and original photographs for my first book '*Bygone Woking*'. Most of the old pictures were turned into postcards, but some (like the one illustrated below) were never reproduced and it is possible that the copy I made all those years ago is now the only one.

If anybody else has old pictures or postcards of Woking from the past I would love to be given the chance to copy them, and add them to my collection of over 8,000 old photographs of Woking and district.



Please email me at info@heritagewalks.org or write to Iain Wakeford, c/o Tavak Ltd, 5 White Cottage Farm, Country Business Centre, Lucas Green Road, West End, Woking, GU24 9LZ.

