

# CHOBHAM'S LAST CHANCE AT RAILWAY MANIA

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Since the opening of the railway to Woking Common in 1838 there had been numerous schemes for branch lines to be built in the area. Some, like the branch to Guildford (later extended to Portsmouth) were quickly constructed, but many were rejected either because they were unviable or simply unworkable!

Earlier this year we looked at plans in the 1850's and 60's for branch lines that would have cut across what is now Woking Town Centre, linking Woking to Sunningdale in 1856; to West Drayton in 1862; and to Egham and Staines in 1863. The 1856 scheme was not entirely rejected as it was part of the Staines, Wokingham and Woking Junction Railway, with all but the 'Woking Junction' bit being constructed. Unfortunately for the people of Chobham it was that bit that they were looking forward to, and it is often noted that they hastily named 'Station Road' in anticipation of their new link to the outside world being built.

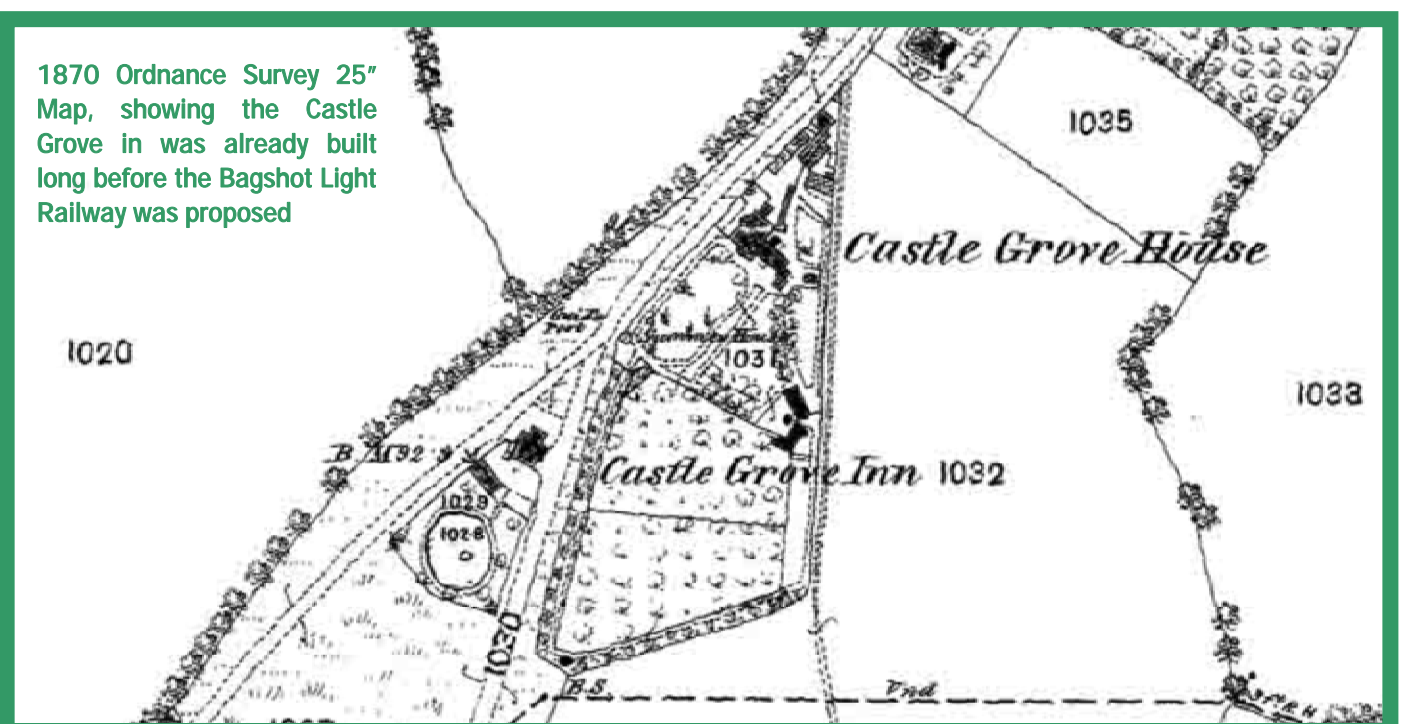
In 1902 their hopes must have been revived with the Woking & Bagshot Light Railway being proposed. Indeed some historians have suggested that the Castle Grove public house was originally built as the station for this scheme. The 'Castle Grove Inn', however, is clearly recorded on the Ordnance Survey large-scale map of 1870 – so although it may have

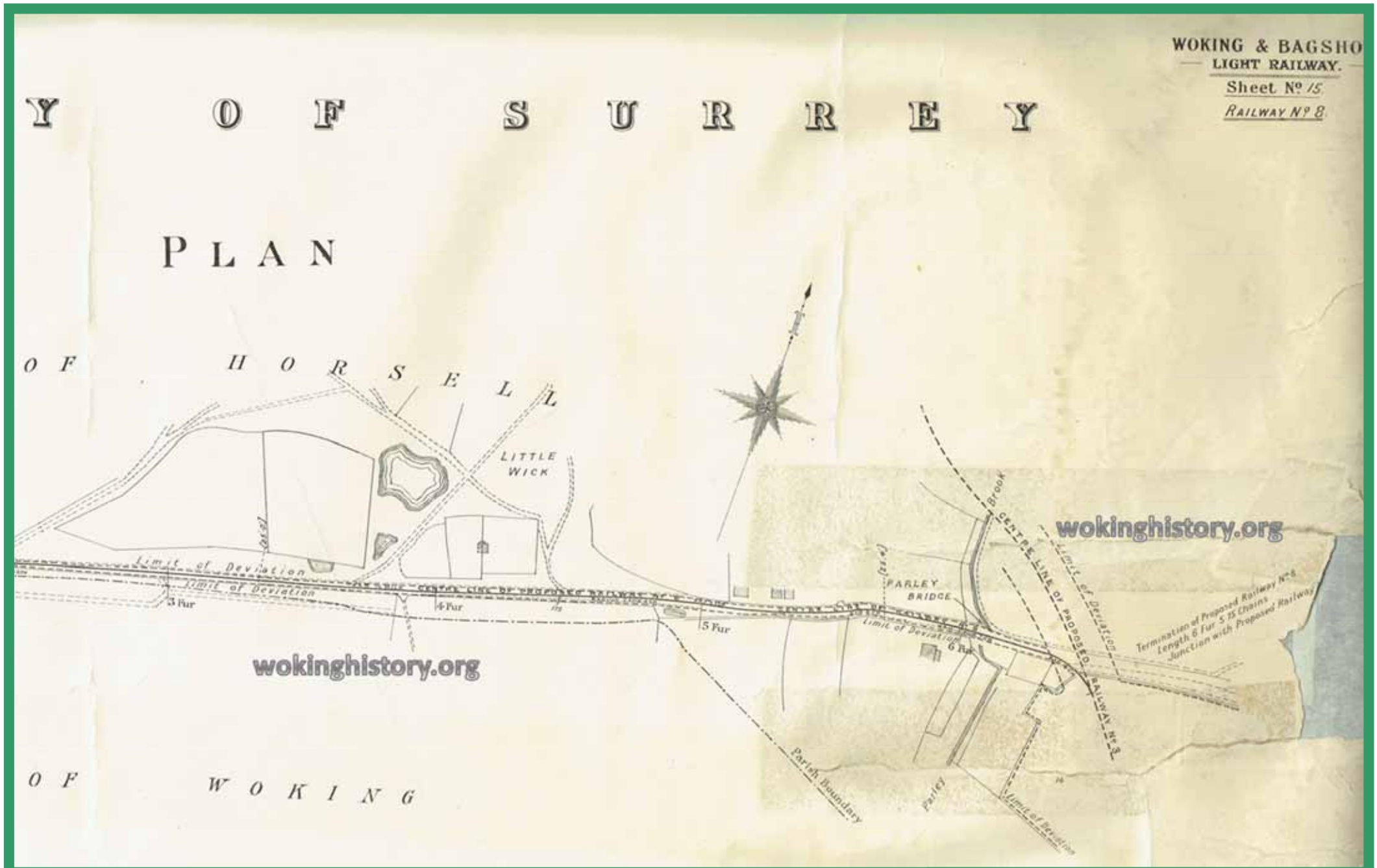
benefitted from the opening of a station nearby (and may have been rebuilt in anticipation) it was not founded as a result of the proposed line.

Bagshot, originally a small village in the parish of Windlesham, was at that time a growing urban area, even though the coach-trade along the Great South West Road (that had originally encouraged its growth) had virtually dried up. The town already had a railway station, opened in 1878 when the London & South Western Railway built its line to 'Cambridge Town' (or Camberley as it was subsequently renamed),

but the light railway to Woking would probably have given the a better service to Waterloo.

Along with the light railway, however, the scheme also included a sort of tramway system through the streets of Woking. Where the main line to Horsell Birch, Chobham and Bagshot crossed Goldsworth Road a 'branch' was to head eastwards along Goldworth Road, Commerical Road and Walton Road (to a terminus at Monument Road). How the road traffic was to cope with the trains is not certain, but there was to be another branch heading west along St Johns Road, up and over





Hermitage Hill, and along the Lower Guildford Road to the top of Anchor Hill. Here the line would split with one branch going along Knaphill High Street to a terminus at the Garibaldi Inn, whilst the other went down Anchor Hill and along Littlewick Road to rejoin the Light Railway to Bagshot at Horsell Birch (where the power station to serve the lines was to be built). Again it is hard to see how these roads could have coped with both trains and normal road traffic, but it would have been quite fun to see both Hermitage Hill and Anchor Hill transformed into Woking's equivalent of San Francisco!

In Horsell the imminent construction of the railway encouraged more growth with the 'Horsell Common Estate' being advertised in 1902 and 1904 as being close to the proposed railway 'and within 26 minutes walk of Woking Station'. The estate, which included land along the High Street and in what was then called 'Deep Lane' (now South Road), included a new road called Russell Road, although who Russell was I am afraid I have no idea.

The Light Railway was actually given the go-ahead by Parliament in 1906 and in October that year it was announced that work on the

The plans for the light railway, showing the junction with the tramway system along Littlewick Road.

twelve and a half mile system would be starting shortly, but the announcement appears to have been premature and by 1910 interest in the scheme had faded and nothing was ever started. Trams never found their way onto the streets of Woking.

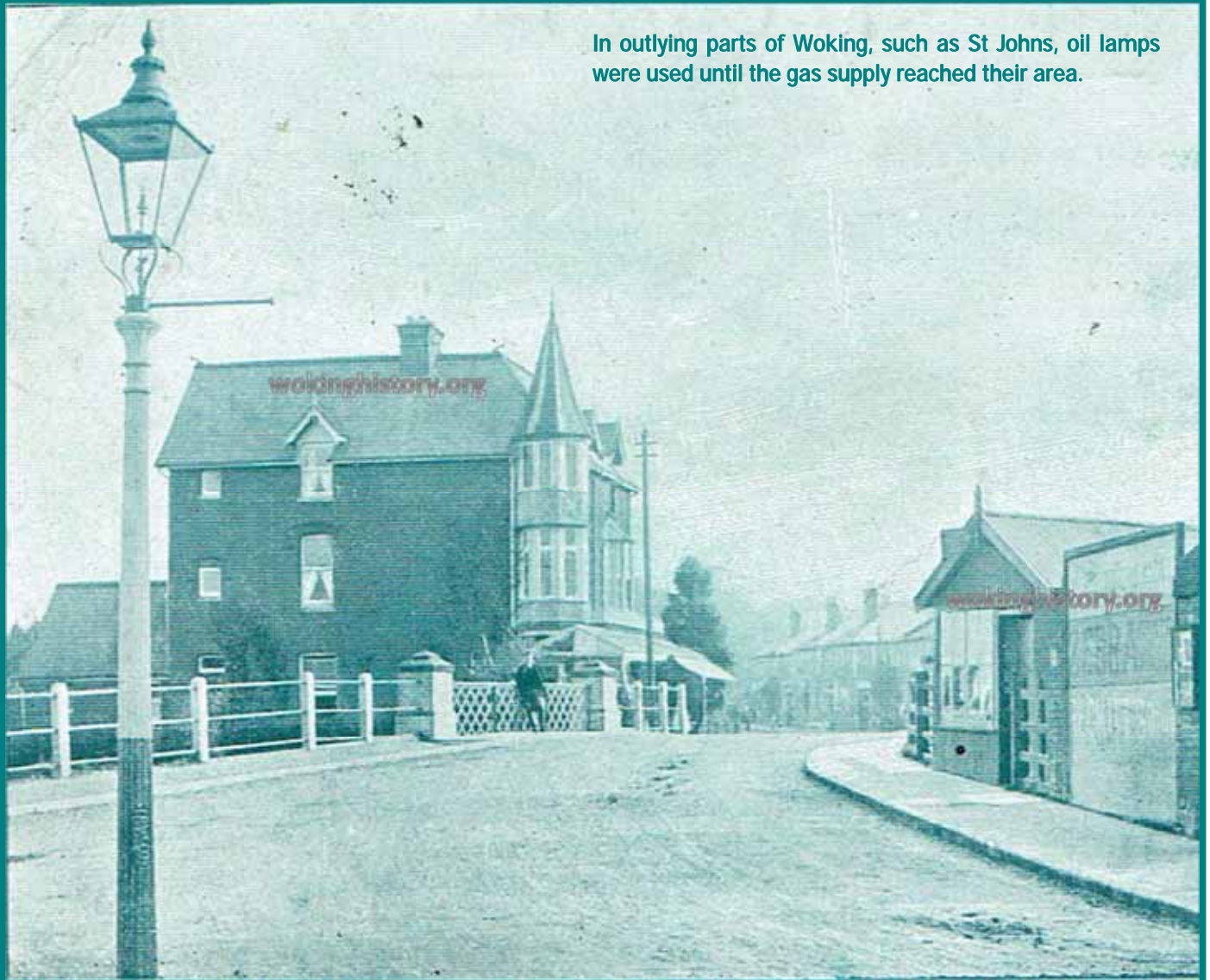
The marketing for the Horsell Common Estate (later known as Russell Road) mentioned its proximity to the proposed new light railway.



# WOKING BY GASLIGHT IN 1902

The proposed Light Railway was to have its own generator at Horsell Birch, which was perhaps just as well as the town's electricity supply was at that time not all that reliable. In 1895 Woking Council awarded the street-lighting contract to the Woking Electric Supply Company, but in November 1898 following numerous complaints about the service, the council actually contemplated compulsory purchasing the undertaking (the Victorian answer to 'Thameswey'?), before deciding in the autumn of 1900 that the gas company should light the streets of the town.

Wesco tried to challenge the decision but in the end, in August 1902, just as almost every other town in the country was converting from gas to electric street lighting, Woking was doing the reverse! To be honest it was not such a stupid idea at the time as many of the original electric lamp standards were damaged or vandalised, and by buying second-hand gas standards from Battersea, Woking was able to save quite a bit of money. It would be more than thirty years before all the street lights were converted back to electricity, but I guess that story will have to wait until sometime later next year to be told.



In outlying parts of Woking, such as St Johns, oil lamps were used until the gas supply reached their area.

## LORD PIRBRIGHT'S LEGACIES

In 1898 the newly appointed Vicar of Pirbright was evidently trying to exert his authority when as Chairman of the school governors he prevented Lord Pirbright (Henry de Worms) from holding his annual treat for the children of the village from taking place in the school. Undaunted, Lord Pirbright simply demolished a couple of empty cottages on the green and within six months had erected a new hall where in future the annual tea could take place.



In 1901 to celebrate the accession of Edward VII (rather than the death of Queen Victoria), Lord Pirbright gave the hall he had built two years earlier to the village.

Since he had been made Lord Pirbright in 1895 he had built many houses in the area, most bearing the date of their construction and the letter 'P' (for Pirbright).

Lord Pirbright was a colourful character. His paternal grandmother was a member of the Rothschild banking family, and his father 'Solomon Benedict de Worms' (who had been made a hereditary baron of the Austrian Empire by Franz Joseph I) owned numerous plantations in Ceylon. Born Jewish he married first Franziska, the eldest daughter of Baron von Todesco, but after she died, he married Sarah,

the daughter of Sir Benjamin Samuel Phillips, and converted to Christianity.

He was a Conservative M.P., representing first Greenwich (1880-85) and then Liverpool East Toxteth (1885-95) acting as Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1888-92 (following on from the Earl of Onslow). Unfortunately when he died in 1903 his title died with him as he only had four daughters and no sons.