

HORSELL COMMON NEW TOWN

Iain Wakeford 2016

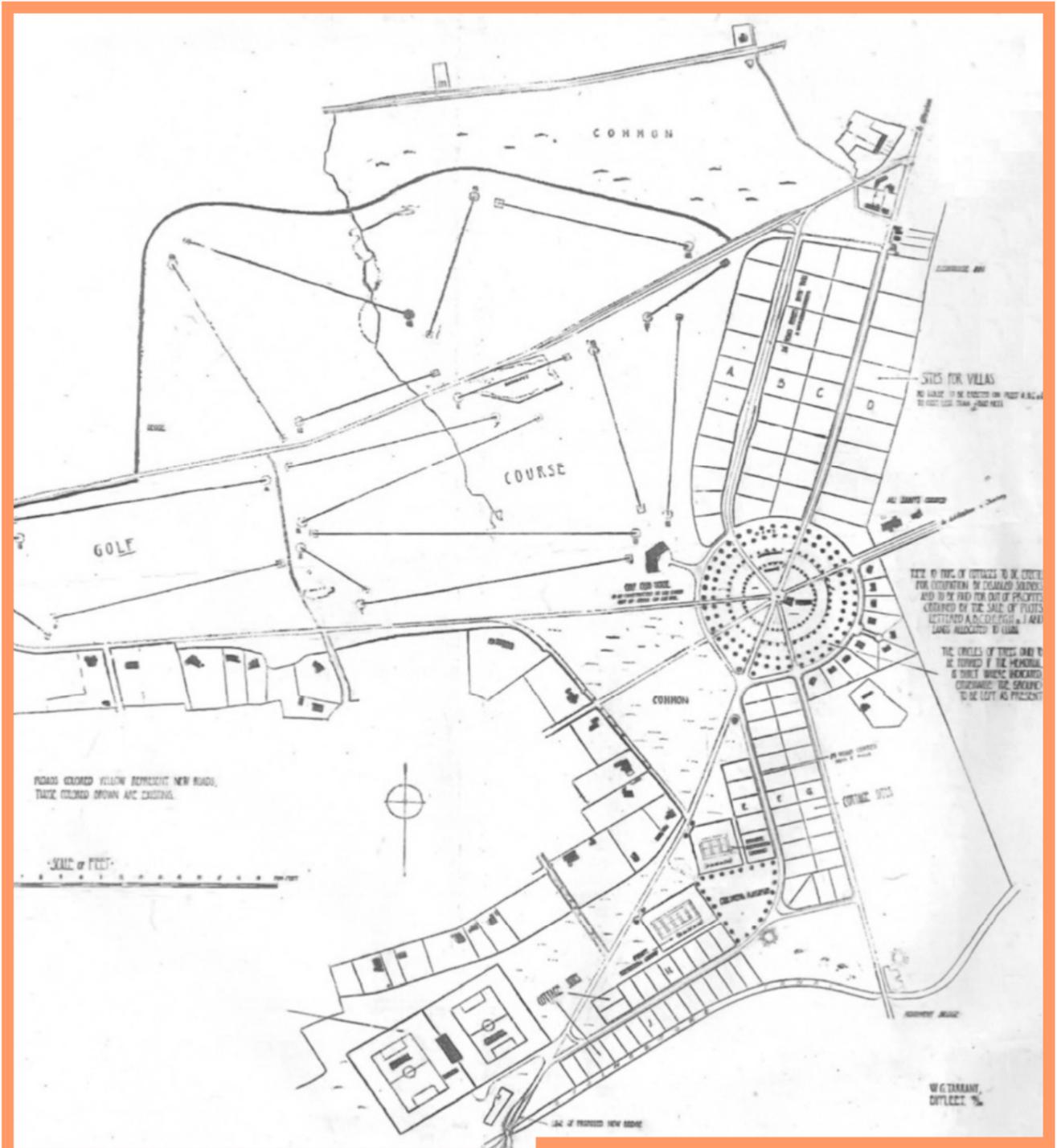
In 1921 the General Purposes Committee of the Woking Unemployment Committee recommended to Woking Urban District Council that they should support a proposal by Mr W G Tarrant, the famous Byfleet builder, to provide unemployment relief for local ex-servicemen who had found themselves unable to find work after the Great War.

I hope that nobody gets any ideas now, but Mr Tarrant apparently had great support for his plan to develop most of Horsell Common with a golf course (to the north of Shores Road), two football pitches (near Chertsey Road Bridge), and tennis courts and a playground between Monument Road and Chertsey Road!

In order to pay for the scheme he came up with the remarkably modern sounding idea of building 160 new 'villas' on the common (although nowadays it would probably be several storey high apartments) - some of which were to be reserved for 'badly disabled ex-service men'.

The ex-servicemen cottages were to be near the six crossroads where in fact a seventh road (to the north, across the common and then east towards Anthonys) was to accommodate the new villas overlooking the golf course at the sandpits.

Frank Derry, who was to go on to be another great benefactor of the area, thought 'Woking has been very unwise not to welcome Mr Tarrant's schemes in the past' and he 'approved of his scheme most emphatically'. Mr Ely of Woking Gas Works thought 'it is a grand scheme' and would be 'the making of the town and ought to be supported', whilst Mr W R Skeet (who admitted he hadn't gone into the idea in detail) nevertheless thought 'if it is practicable it obviously would be very valuable to the town from a business point of view'.



Mr Tarrant's plan was that the sports facilities (including the eighteen hole golf course) would be run by the Council - 'the revenue produced would be more than sufficient for their maintenance'. In all about 235 acres of the

The plan showing the new 'seven crossroads' with its houses and villas, and the golf course to the north of Shores Road.



common could be developed 'in such a way as to open out their beauties without interfering with the open spaces in front of the existing houses'. The 'dense undergrowth of trees which is blocking the healthy breezes and beautiful distant scenery' would be removed and at the same time local people would be employed 'on roadmaking schemes that would be economically sound'.

Unfortunately for Mr Tarrant (although probably not for the rest of Woking) he had not accounted for the inter-war 'Nimby's' who called a meeting attended by hundreds of Horsell residents. They 'voted unanimously to oppose any proposal to interfere with their common'. Apparently the Parish Hall was too small to accommodate everyone and after the meeting Mr Tarrant is said to have 'expressed regret that he had ever taken the trouble to

Had Tarrant's plans for the 'seven crossroads' materialised in the 1920's houses and villas would form the background to this 1960's view instead of the trees of Horsell Common.

Not all of Horsell Common would have been developed as the areas of Horsell Birch and around Littlewick Road were not part of the scheme.



Medhurst Series 5.

"HOW COMMONS ARE DISFIGURED"
G.P.O. Trunk Line across Horsell Common, Surrey.

bring it forward'.

The scheme fell on deaf ears and Horsell Common was preserved (dense undergrowth and all) for future generations to enjoy,

although in the 1980's another scheme to use part of the common between the Six Crossroads and the canal for industry was proposed – and equally rebuffed.

It would be highly unlikely that anybody would come up with such a plan for Horsell Common today – although other parts of the green belt around the area might not be quite so lucky!

"The Bleak House," Horsell, Woking.

E. Bennett, Proprietor.



The Bleak House (now the Sands at Bleak House) would have seen its clientele of local farmers and labourer's transformed with the construction of Tarrant's villas along Chertsey Road and across the common.

UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF WORK ON ROAD WIDENING

Despite his set-back for a scheme on Horsell Common, Mr Tarrant's idea that the unemployed should be found work on road making schemes was not dropped and in the early 1920's the council embarked on a number of ideas for road widening, such as at Triggs Lane, which was widened from 15ft to 30ft, and The Triangle at Goldsworth where part of Slocock's nursery was used to cut off the bend.

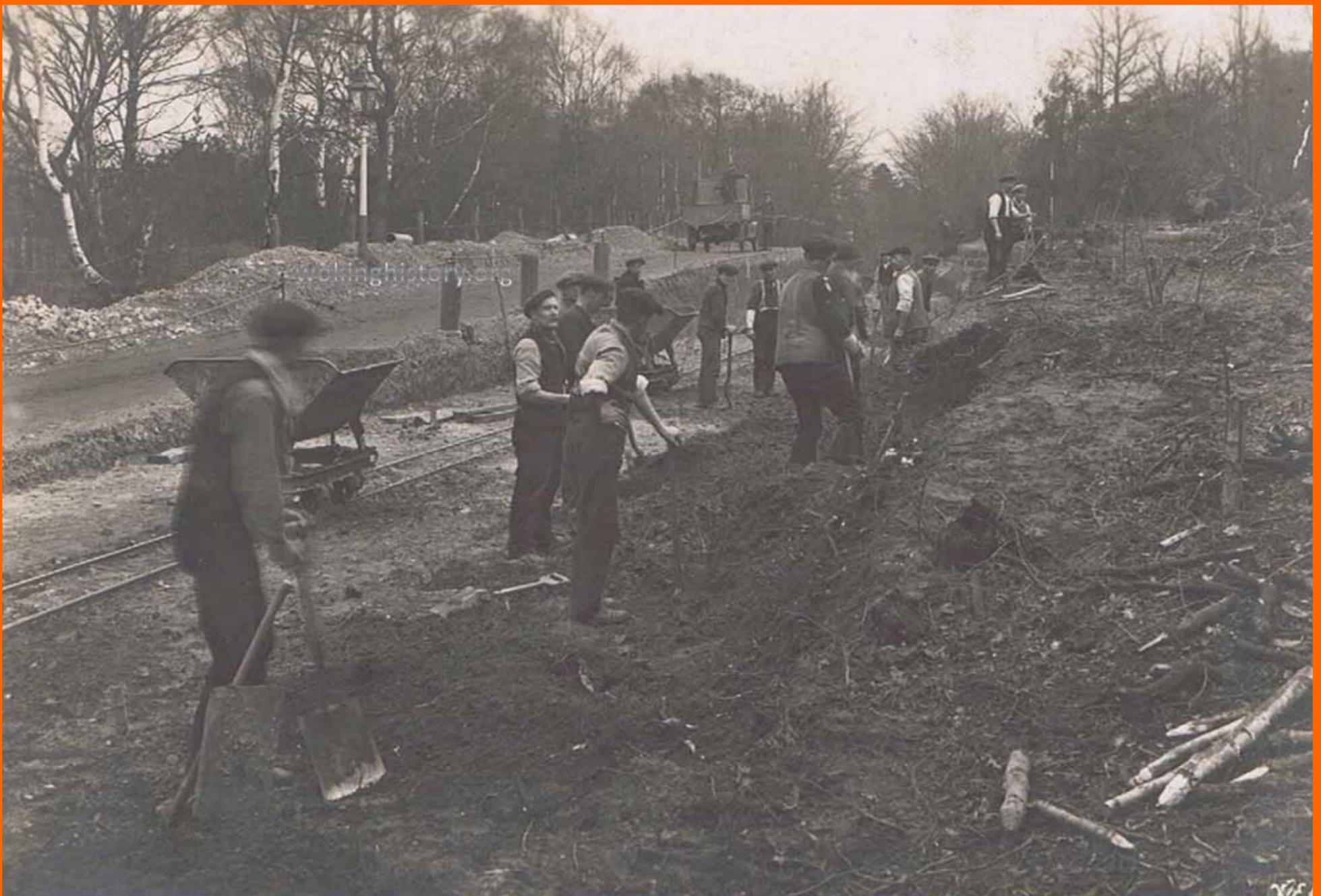
The schemes were backed by money from the government which covered up to sixty percent of the wages bill of those unemployed men taken on, on the condition that three-quarters



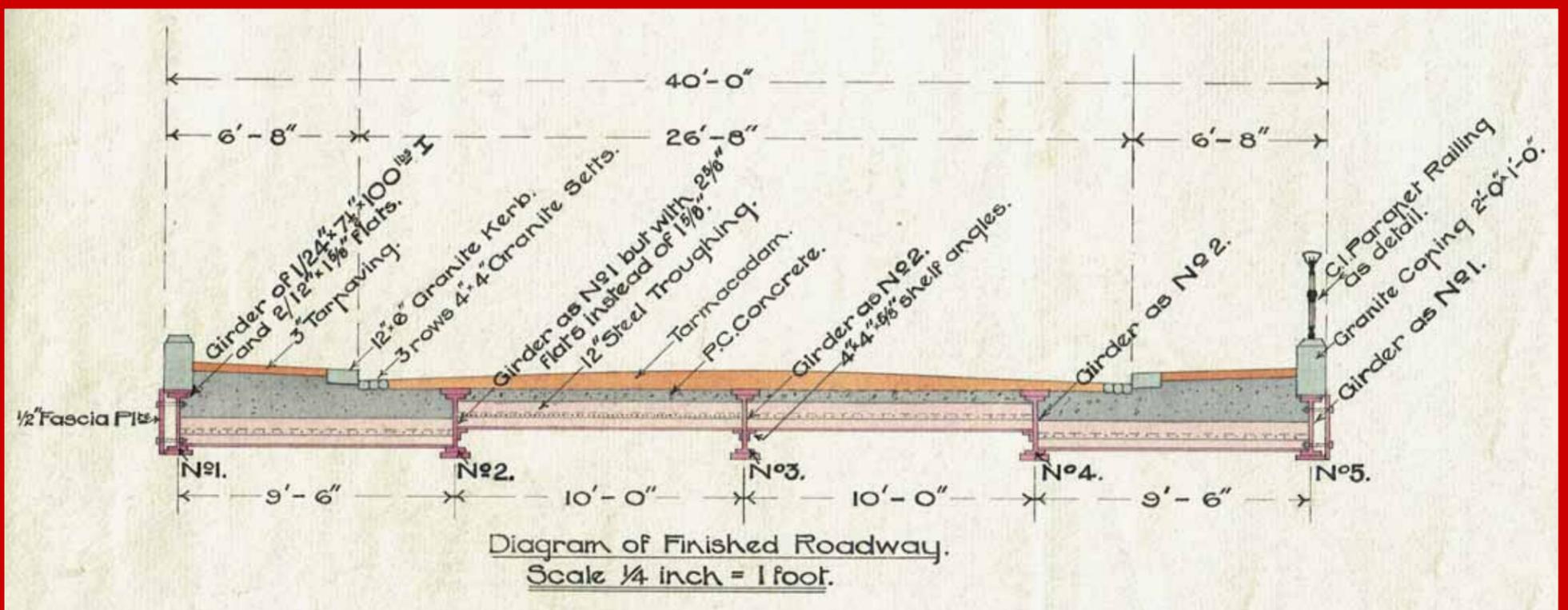
The Triangle at Goldsworth before (left) and during widening (above)

of those were 'ex-servicemen engaged through the Labour Exchange'.

At Hermitage Hill (below) in St Johns the gradient of the hill was reduced on the Knaphill side, where even today the large embankment of St Hugh of Lincoln's Primary School playing fields can be seen as you ascend the hill from the Lower Guildford Road (just past Queenswood Road).

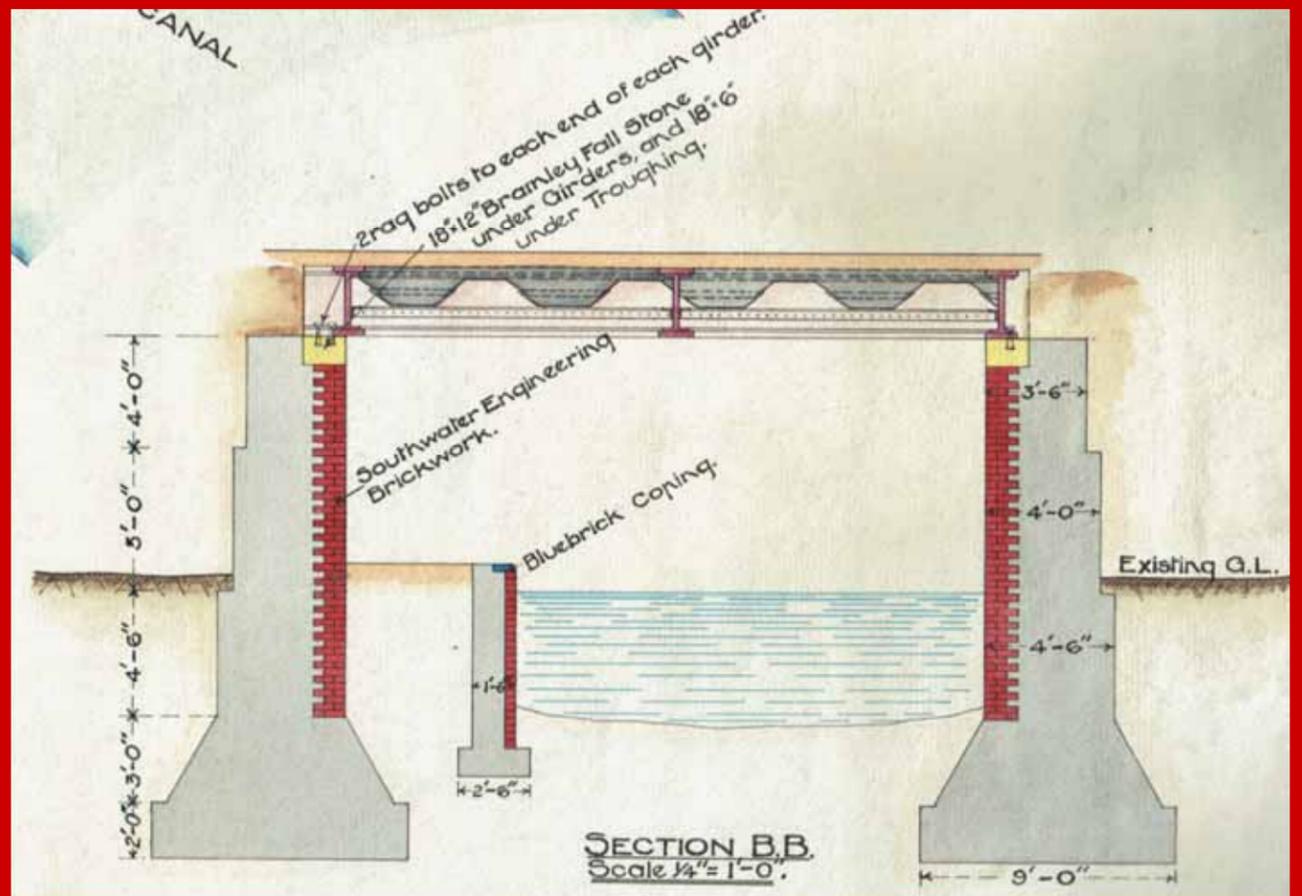


THE REBUILDING OF CHERTSEY ROAD BRIDGE



Another feat of engineering in Woking in the early 1920's was the construction of the new Chertsey Road Bridge over the Basingstoke Canal. The original brick arch, built in the 1780's for horse drawn traffic, had by the early 20th century become totally inadequate. In the 18th century when the number of carriages on the road was minimal it was easier to construct the bridge at right angles to the canal, even though the road crossed at an oblique angle. It didn't matter that the road had to be diverted into two sweeping arcs in order for carts to cross – they were not travelling at enough speed for it to matter. But in the early days of motoring, with cars now travelling at speeds of up to 20mph, some motorists found it hard to control their vehicles on the tight bends as they ascended the bridge, and a number apparently ended up crashing through the brick parapets.

In 1906-7 the council replaced the old broken arch with a 'temporary' wooden bridge and then took the canal owners to court to try to get them to repair all the bridges in Woking. Although they eventually won their case, with the canal company (if not the canal) in liquidation, they never recovered their costs and eventually they were forced to carry out the repairs themselves.



It was not until 14th November 1923 that the bridge was formally opened by Sir Henry

Maybury, Director General of the Roads Department of the Ministry of Transport.

