

SHOPPING IN WOKING IN THE MID 1930'S

Iain Wakeford 2016

From small beginnings in 1870, when a row of newly built houses in the High Street were converted into shops, Woking Town Centre had developed haphazardly with Henry Gloster opening his Corn Exchange in Chobham Road in 1876 and then developing the garden of the original Albion Hotel with shops along the north side of Chertsey Road (initially known as 'The Pavement').

By the late 1880's Ashby's Bank had opened on the corner of Chertsey Road and The Broadway and shops had emerged on the corner of Commercial Road with Chobham Road (Arthur Althorp's Chemist and Gammon's Drapery Stores), but otherwise Commercial Road was almost entirely un-commercial.

By the mid 1890's shops had started to be built in Maybury Road in the section that would later be called The Broadway, and even in Goldsworth Road and Guildford Road small rows of commercial premises were being developed.

By then Chertsey Road had established itself as the town's main shopping street with premises constructed opposite The Pavement by the middle of the decade and those between Duke Street and Addison Road being built soon after the land was put up for sale by the Necropolis Company in 1892. A covenant on the site apparently restricted the use of the premises so that 'a tavern, beerhouse or shop for the sale of intoxicating liquors' could not be established in the row, but somehow that restriction must have been overcome as it seems that almost all the premises there now sell little else but alcohol.

But in the early Woking's High Street began to hit back with plans for the construction of five new shops on land that had originally been the builder's yard of W Harris & Co. One of those



In 1920 J Sainsbury opened their first Woking store at No. 19 Chertsey Road, but in 1932 they sought permission for a new store in the High Street. When that opened in 1935 Boots expanded their shop at 21 Chertsey Road to take over the original Sainsbury site.

shops was to be occupied by J Sainsbury Ltd who in September 1932 submitted plans for the erection of their new store and warehouse on the site, replacing the little shop they had originally opened in Chertsey Road in 1920.

With Sainsbury's gone, Boots the Chemist expanded their store at number 21 to also take over number 19, competing with Timothy Whites (who appear to have come to the town





Another mid 1930's building was 'The Dome' on the corner of Church Path and Commercial Road

in about 1931), themselves getting permission to alter their shop at 24 Chertsey Road in April 1936.

Another national store that were looking to expand in Woking at this time was F W Woolworth's who in April 1934 announced that they had 'secured additional premises' in Chertsey Road (next to the shop they had originally occupied since 1926) and intended to extend their shop after years of trying to get permission from the council to alter their store. The plans were finally approved in June 1934,

'subject to an undertaking being given regarding the open space at the rear of the premises'.

The building of a new Red House Hotel (now O'Neills) by the Friary, Holroyd & Healy Brewery in 1934 included the construction of three lock-up shops in Chertsey Road, and more new shops were constructed in Commercial Road in 1934 with the opening of the premises known as 'The Dome' on the corner with Church Path. This was to be the home of a local business known as the 'Sports House' who also had

premises in Chertsey Road selling not just sports equipment and toys, but also wireless sets and televisions. The new shop was, according to the owner Mr F W Cooke, 'the finest in the South of England'.

With the new Red House finally opened the old hotel on the corner with Chertsey Road was demolished and the foundation stone laid by

The new Red House Hotel was built in the grounds of the original establishment (see below).



Chertsey Road, Woking



Stanley Howard Burton for his family's distinctive new tailors store (now occupied by Ladbrooks).

Meanwhile the Woking Co-operative Society asked the council for permission to lease part of the car park in Percy Street (Victoria Way) for



a year so that a temporary shop could be built for their furnishing department, until their new premises were constructed on the corner with Church Street. The lease was later extended to eighteen months after the Co-op agreed to alter their plans for the site to allow road widening on the corner.

By the end of the 1930's Woking was at last becoming a proper shopping centre that the district could be proud of.



THE NEW POST OFFICE SORTING OFFICE OF 1935

Up until 1865 letters sent to people in Woking were delivered by Mail Coach to Ripley where they were sorted and delivered on foot to our area. After that date a sorting office was set up by Woking Station - on the corner of the High Street and Church Path (where the National Westminster Bank is today). Later the Post Office moved into Chertsey Road and then Walton Road before returning to Chertsey Road in 1894, with a new sorting office behind (with an entrance onto the Broadway).

In 1912, when the Post Office took over responsibility for telephone services, that building became Woking's Telephone Exchange, and in preparation a plot of land on the other side of the station was purchased so that a new 'letter's office' could be built in 1911.

It appears to have been a temporary 'bungalow' style building, where by 1914 something like a quarter of a million letters were sorted each year, but by the early 1930's it was clear that it was totally inadequate so was pulled down and replaced by the current building in 1935 - as can be seen from the date on the corner of the building at the junction of Oriental Road with White Rose Lane.



GEORGE V JUBILEE, MAY 1935

In May 1935 Woking, like everywhere else in this country, celebrated the Silver Jubilee of George V.

An 'old people's tea' was held on the afternoon of Saturday 4th May, and that was followed on the Sunday afternoon by a united church service on Wheatsheaf Recreation Ground. That was preceded by a parade by the numerous local churches and organisations from the Council Offices in Commercial Road, with concerts finishing off the festivities on the Sunday evening at West Byfleet, Knaphill and Woking Parks - the Guildford British Legion

playing at West Byfleet, the Chobham Ex-Service Men's at Knaphill and the band of the R.A.M.C. at Woking.

On Jubilee Day itself there was a special children's sports day at the Woking Sports Ground in Kingfield where a fun fair and Punch & Judy entertained the crowds followed by a special tea where every child was apparently presented with a Jubilee mug (I wonder how many of those have survived). The day finished off with a speech by the council chairman and the broadcast of the speeches by the King and the Prince of Wales being conveyed over loud

speakers, before a firework display lit up the sky of the town.

Wednesday 8th May was set aside for a 'Jubilee Dance' at the Atalanta Ballroom in Commercial Road (the proceeds of which were given to the Woking Victoria Hospital) and then the week concluded with special services in local churches on the 12th May (in order not to clash with the united service on the previous Sunday).

Many areas also organised their own street parties, such as the one shown here at Chobham.

