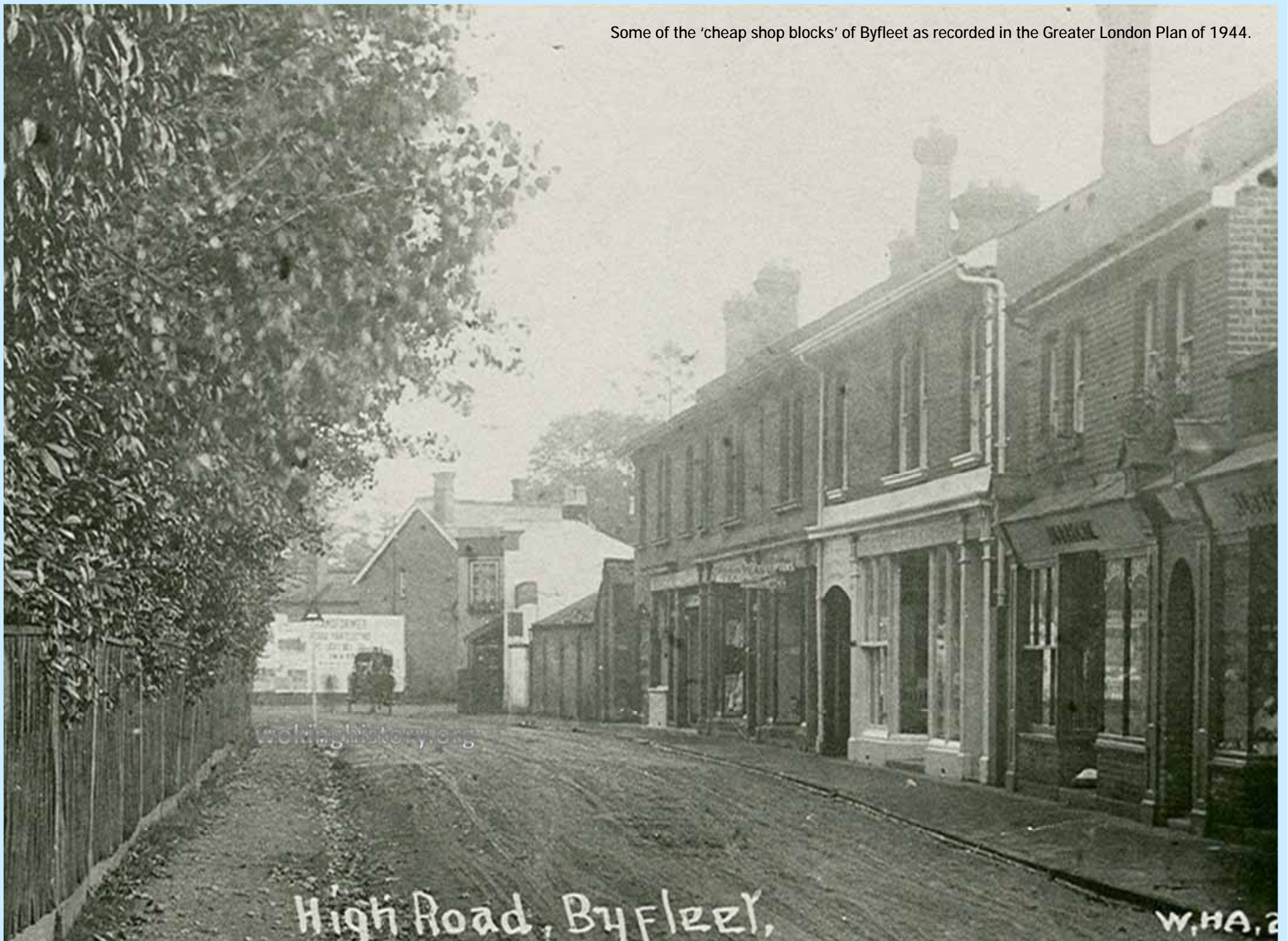


POST-WAR PERMANENT HOUSING

Iain Wakeford 2017

Some of the 'cheap shop blocks' of Byfleet as recorded in the Greater London Plan of 1944.



Last week I mentioned how the London County Council came up with a plan in 1943 to redevelop the city after the war and how in 1944 they then issued the 'Greater London Plan' looking at how their efforts to transform London would affect the towns and villages around the capital. The report doesn't pull any punches when it comes to describing our area (and how it should develop). Of Byfleet it notes that 'there is a more or less continuous belt of pre-1914 working-class development between Addlestone and Byfleet' with Byfleet itself described as 'a scattered overgrown village with no real centre and a lot of mean development and cheap shop blocks' (ouch!).

It further notes that 'no effort has been made to group the latter into any compact shopping area' and that 'it is more or less an isolated township' with 'little in common with West Byfleet (a well-to-do suburban residential area) from which it is separated by the River Wey Navigation and a belt of adjoining low-lying land which should not be built on'.

It is a little more complimentary of Woking (and West Byfleet) noting them as 'primarily expensive London dormitory areas for the

"managing director" type of resident with a good sprinkling of retired business people occupying large houses with chauffeurs' and gardeners' cottages attached', but even here

the authors cannot help but note that the shops in the town centre are 'mostly small and badly arranged in mean streets'.

More 'small and badly arranged' shops in the 'mean streets' of Woking.



The land of Grove Barrs Farm had started to be developed by Davis Estates before the war, but with the shortage of materials after the conflict it made more financial sense in the short term for builders to sell the land to council's and be employed to construct council houses instead.



The one good thing that they note (and which perhaps the modern planners should stick to) is the observation that 'existing commons and the presence of large private open spaces used as golf courses have tended to prevent compact group developments' and that 'it is most desirable that these golf courses should be preserved'!

I doubt that Woking Council were impressed at how their area was described, but to be honest they had more things to worry about and their own plans to implement. As well as building the temporary prefabricated houses recalled last week they were also looking at sites for more permanent housing and in January 1945 approved plans for eighty-two houses on just over eight acres of former nursery land at Barnaby Road in Knaphill. Sites in Victoria Road (12 houses) and Beechwood Road at Knaphill (16 flats), and the allotments at the junction of Well Lane and Bullbeggars Lane at Horsell (22 houses) were also later approved (the tender of £2,121.19s.0d from Messrs Taylor Kent Ltd for preparation work on the latter being accepted by the council in October 1946).

Not all of these planned houses could be built straight away, however, and only 26 were apparently intended to be constructed in the year 1945-46. But with labour (and materials) in short supply, the Council decided to set up a conference in October 1945 to see how things could be progressed. Thirty-one local registered builders attended with a committee of seven eventually being formed to give the council a price for the erection of those first twenty-six houses, the council committing to source and supply the raw materials required.

In May 1946 the Ministry of Health came up with another scheme to help bring forward the number of council houses that could be quickly erected, suggesting that private builders 'who were unable to undertake contracts on the usual basis' might like to make available land in their possession for council houses at agreed prices. The Engineer and Surveyor to Woking Council reported that three firms were initially interested to build homes under this scheme, with a fourth individual, Mr T Rodnick, being recorded in June 1946 as offering to allow one-hundred council houses to be built on the

'Manor House Estate' at Byfleet. A & J Simmons also proposed to erect 100 council houses at Old Woking under the scheme but in the end the council voted to limit both the above schemes to just fifty houses each, with further homes to be erected on estates owned by Smith Brothers at Pyrford (12 houses) and Davis Estates at Horsell (88 houses).

The latter was eventually to be developed as the Grove Barrs Estate pictured above.

Knaphill Houses

As a matter of interest the cost of constructing the houses at Victoria Road was recorded as being £1,324 each, compared with those later built at Well Lane in Horsell (where there were apparently a number of difficulties) which cost £1,702. The rents on the Knaphill houses were set in November 1946 at 9s.2d a week on one bedroom flats (inclusive of rates and water charges), with two bedroom flats costing 10s.8d per week, and the three bedroom houses at 18s.4d a week.