

EDUCTAION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

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In 1944 the Education Act (another piece of legislation preparing for peace in the depths of war) the government introduced what was to become the 'eleven plus' exam, creating Secondary Technical Schools and the Secondary Modern Schools, alongside the Grammar School system. Woking already had both the 'Secondary School & Technical Institute' for Boys (which then became the Boys' Grammar School') and the Girls Grammar School in Park Road, with other schools in the area also accepting pupils up to the age of fourteen such as at Goldsworth, Monument Hill, Kingfield, Knaphill and the Central School in West Byfleet (the last three of which were extended in 1946-7 with the addition of prefabricated huts to provide extra accommodation on account of the raising of the school leaving age to fifteen).

The new Act also brought in changes to create 'Primary Schools' with the old 'Board School' in Board School Road being officially renamed the 'Maybury Primary School' (even though at that time most people thought of 'Maybury' as being the 'posh' bit of town on the other side of the railway-line). Other local schools were also re-arranged to separate the infants from the juniors.

Up until 1947 Woking had its own Educational Committee, but then the County Council took over control of all local schools. Whilst some

may have thought that the County would be quite 'conservative' in their thinking, in reality they turned out to be quite radical, setting up the first ever local authority controlled 'boarding school' at nearby Ottershaw Park.

The large house had been a private school before the war but in 1939 had closed and the house used as offices. The County Council purchased the site in 1945 and by 1948 it was ready to take in the first twelve to eighteen-year-olds based not on their parents' ability to pay,

Reform of local education after the war resulted in the establishment of the Woking Boys Grammar School in Station Approach (and the Girls Grammar School in Park Road).

but on whether such an education was considered to be beneficial to the child. It obviously cost a lot of money to run, but initially at least appears to have been quite a success.

On the outskirts of Woking the County Council set up the first County Boarding School at Ottershaw and the Farm Institute at Merrist Wood in Worplesdon.





Meanwhile, at Worplesdon, the Council were also setting up the 'Surrey Farm Institute' at Merrist Wood, a house that in 1939 they had bought to turn into a new 'Lunatic Asylum' (much to the dismay of the local residents). The new agricultural college was part of another Government initiative that encouraged every county to train the new generation of farmers and farm labourers. Surrey obviously had a firm idea of how such students should behave, with a strict 'no guests' in the rooms policy, a curfew at 9.30pm (lights out by ten), breakfast at 8am (after milking) and formal dress for evening meals (presumably believing that is how all good farmers behaved)!

To start with there was just a herd of thirty cows and fifty ewes, with pigs being introduced in 1947 and poultry by 1949, but again the

venture proved to be work quite well.

Meanwhile, back in Woking, a number of other large houses were being converted into private schools. Mr R F Wood, who had been given permission in January 1946 to turn Old Oaks, Poplar Grove, Westfield into a preparatory school and kindergarten, expanded the following year into Ridge End in Hook Hill Lane with planned accommodation of up to 200 mixed day and boarding pupils; Mr G.J. Bidwell was given permission in September 1946 to turn 'Potters Croft' in Woodham Rise at Horsell into the Halstead Preparatory School for Girls - moving there in 1947 from Kent (after a brief spell during the war in the relative safety of Wiltshire); and at Pyrford Miss Ena Churchill was given permission in 1947 to turn a couple of large houses backing onto the West Byfleet Golf Club into the Langsmead Boarding School. Apparently at the latter on Sunday mornings the children would be 'frogmarched' to St

Private schools also opened in Woking, such as Langsmead School in Pyrford, a boarding school opened by Miss Ena Churchill in 1947.

John's Church in West Byfleet, where later the 'Langsmead Room' was paid for by the children collecting a 'mile of threepenny bits' to help fund it.

Sadly not every former pupil has fond memories of the place, with at least one recalling appalling abuse being inflicted on a classmate at the school in the 1950's (which at the time appears to have been covered up by the authorities).

The school finally closed in the 1970's with the school buildings being demolished and replaced by fourteen four-bedroom houses, although the house on Blackdown Road where Miss Churchill lived has apparently survived.