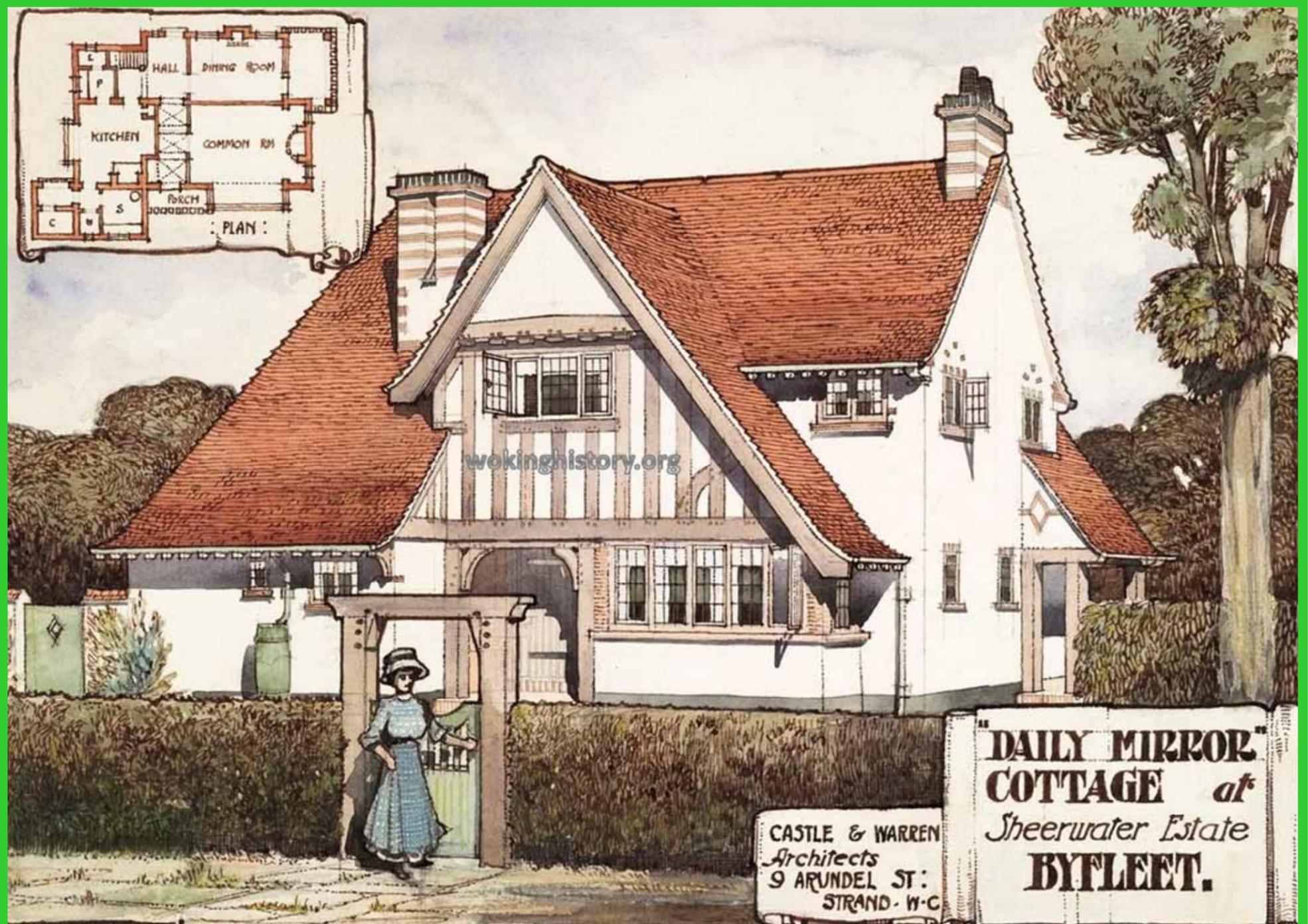


THE 'SYLVIAN ARCADY' OF THE SHEERWATER ESTATE

Iain Wakeford 2017



I have noted before in these columns the story of the Sheerwater Lake (or should I say lakes) that in the 17th century were described as being "about 110 acres in extent with a perimeter of two miles", the fish from which were supplied to market in London. I have noted too the planting of pine-trees in the early 19th century to try to (unsuccessfully) drain the land; and last year I wrote about the construction of the 'first' Sheerwater Estate – what is now Woodlands and Hollies Avenues.

That estate was developed in the 1930's on what had once been the nine-hole Sheerwater Golf Course - the only golf club (so far) to have been redeveloped with housing in this area! But I should have noted there was in fact an even earlier 'Sheerwater Estate', as before the First World War what is now Old Avenue was sometimes marketed with that name.

In the late 1920's the North West Surrey Structure Plan had earmarked part of the Sheerwater Valley for industry, but the damp nature of the land appears to have put developers off – although Sorbo Rubber Products had build their new factory on part of the land close to the Woking border.

After the Second World War a private developer had attempted to get planning permission to build houses on more of the Sheerwater Valley, with the result that in July 1947 there was a public enquiry held by the Ministry of Town & Country Planning. This appears to have led to interest from the London County Council who within a year were proposing to compulsory purchase the whole site (including the bed of the former lake) for one of their 'out of county' estates.

Woking Council did not necessarily oppose the plan, realising that the development by London could have local benefits, such as the introduction of industry, which up until then the government were reluctant to allow in this area.

There were delays, however, in the granting of compulsory purchase powers, but by 29th June 1949 the plans were approved and work could commence – although in the early stages progress was slow as pumps had to be employed day and night to try to drain part of the land.

At the time Sheerwater was the smallest of the London County Council Estates at just 230

The first 'Sheerwater Estate' was actually the development of Old Avenue in the early 20th century.

The second 'Sheerwater' was the development of Woodlands and Hollies Avenues on the former Sheerwater Golf Club site.

YOUR HOME IN NATURE'S OWN SETTING
SUPERB HOUSES from **£650**
REPAYMENTS 17/10 PER WEEK

Right in the heart of the country, yet within easy reach of town and shopping.

These soundly constructed houses are Freehold with no road charges or legal fees, in fact no extras whatsoever

SPACE FOR GARAGE.
TWO MINUTES FROM STATION

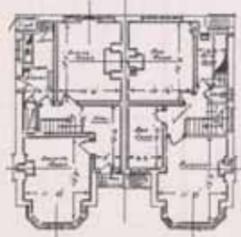


SHEERWATER ESTATE
WEST BYFLEET
(Two Minutes from Station)

E. THOMAS & Co.
Sheerwater Estate
WEST BYFLEET
Phone: BYFLEET 645.

Please forward one of your illustrated Booklets

Name _____
Address _____





The present shops and houses of Albert Drive and the 'avenues' and 'walks' off of it are the third Sheerwater Estate, although some, like the buildings of Devonshire Avenue (below) face being demolished to make way for a new 21st century estate.

acres, but as the Daily Star was later to note it ranked as 'the prettiest of all LCC estates', and they described the whole estate as 'a show place'!

Nowadays the 'powers-that-be' at Woking Council may not agree, but when it was built Sheerwater was described as 'a sylvan arcady which might have come out of a romantic film'!

Having said that, for the initial residents, life was far from idyllic, with the mud or dust of the construction (depending on the time of year) ruining new carpets or washing on the line, and on 'hostility' from some locals who were upset that 'newcomers' to the area were getting housing whilst 'locals' had to wait.

For the children on the new estate times were tough too. To start with there were no schools, with the first being opened in February 1953 – and even then it was just the youngest children being temporarily accommodated in the future kitchen and dining hall of the school, until all the classrooms could be completed.

The Daily Star reported in November 1953 that 'until shops open next spring the nearest shopping centre is a mile's walk or bus ride away'. And from other contemporary reports it seems there was little planning for social facilities either, with one local magazine reporting as late as March 1956 that apart from the church hall and community centre there no provision to cater for social clubs on the estate.

Eventually, of course, everything came good and Sheerwater became an established part of the borough, although for how much longer the 'pretty' tree-lined streets of the old estate will survive is debatable.

