

THE CONTINUING STORY OF WOKING'S 'FARM' ESTATES

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Last week we looked at the Coronation celebrations in the town, noting that little money was spent on a permanent reminder of the event, but in a way Woking did permanently mark the Coronation of the Queen, with a whole road named after her at the Elmbridge Estate and numerous 'royal' names being given to the Maybury development (names with ancient connections to the once Royal Manor of Woking).

It should be noted, however, that Princess Road at Maybury was actually named after the Princess of Wales (not the public house, but Alexandra, wife of the future Edward VII) who came to Woking in 1860 for the opening of the Royal Dramatic College (where the Lion Retail Park is today).

As I mentioned a few weeks ago both the Maybury and Elmbridge Estates were built in two stages, with both sets of 'extensions' being complete before work even started on the council's third large 'farm estate' at Barnsbury.

Building on 'green field' sites (as modern developers demonstrate) is far easier than redeveloping old urban areas, but even so

Negotiations over the purchase of Barnsbury Farm were slow, making the Barnsbury Estate the last of the town's 'Farm Estates' to be built.

Cutting reeds on Barnsbury Farm in the early part of the 20th century.





Woking did not find everything plain sailing and in September 1951 it was reported that 'it was now apparent that the target figure of 190 houses to be built during 1951 would not be met' (the actual number being 142).

The council were clearly frustrated at the slow rate of completion by the numerous little local firms that had been awarded the building contracts and when the Government asked the council in May 1952 to place sixty houses 'at the disposal of skilled key workers employed at a local factory on defence projects of the highest importance', the council used the request to try to speed up their own building

programme. They would be happy to provide sixty houses for the Ministry if they in turn would help 'secure the services of a large outside contractor who would bring his organisation and the necessary labour into the District to augment the present housing programme being carried out by local builders'!

Whether the man from the Ministry was involved (or if the sixty houses for 'defence workers' were provided), I do not know, but when it came to awarding the contract for the construction of the new Barnsbury Estate the council chose the tender of Taylor Wimpey Co Ltd for the 301 houses and 78 flats (at a price of £548,233.5s.0d.). Indeed at least one local

Most of the properties on the Barnsbury Estate were built by Taylor Wimpey, with local firms not even invited to tender for the scheme.

building firm – the previously favoured A & J Simmons – wrote to the council complaining that they hadn't even been invited to submit a tender!

The council originally only wanted to buy part of Egley Farm (as well as the whole of Barnsbury Farm), but negotiations dragged on and in the end the council agreed to purchase all of Egley - as the owner pointed out that what would have been left 'would not leave land sufficient for their needs'.

The front facade of Egley Farm probably dated from the 18th century





The initial plan was not to use all of the land of Egley Farm (nor demolish the farmhouse itself), but it soon became clear that what would have been left would not be viable, so the council eventually acquired the whole landholding.

Egley Farm had been owned by Gustav Friedrich Wermig, a market gardener originally from Germany, but who took up British Citizenship in 1882 and was elected as Woking Council's first Chairman in 1895.

The council considered using some of the extra land 'for controlled tipping purposes', with the remainder 'suitable for development at a later date', but it should also be noted that not all the land the council bought could be developed as some was low lying and liable to floods.

Ultimately not all the land was to be used for council housing. In April 1952 the Clerk to the Council noted a report from the Minister of Housing and Local Government regarding the provision of land for 'self build housing schemes'. The London and National Self Building Housing Association were invited to hold a meeting in the council chamber to inform local self-build groups and the council committed to providing private house building licences for seventy-two self-build homes.

The portion of the Barnsbury Estate fronting Egley Road was chosen as a site for such houses – 'shielding' the view of the more densely populated council estate from those entering the town from the south; a similar situation being adopted at Maybury where houses off of East Hill were also privately built (W Deakin & Co declaring an interest in 'six to eight plots' in March 1953).

There was even consideration given in October 1952 for part of the Egley Road frontage to be used as a site for a new licensed premises, although in the end that clearly never materialised.



Mr Gustav Wermig of Egley Farm