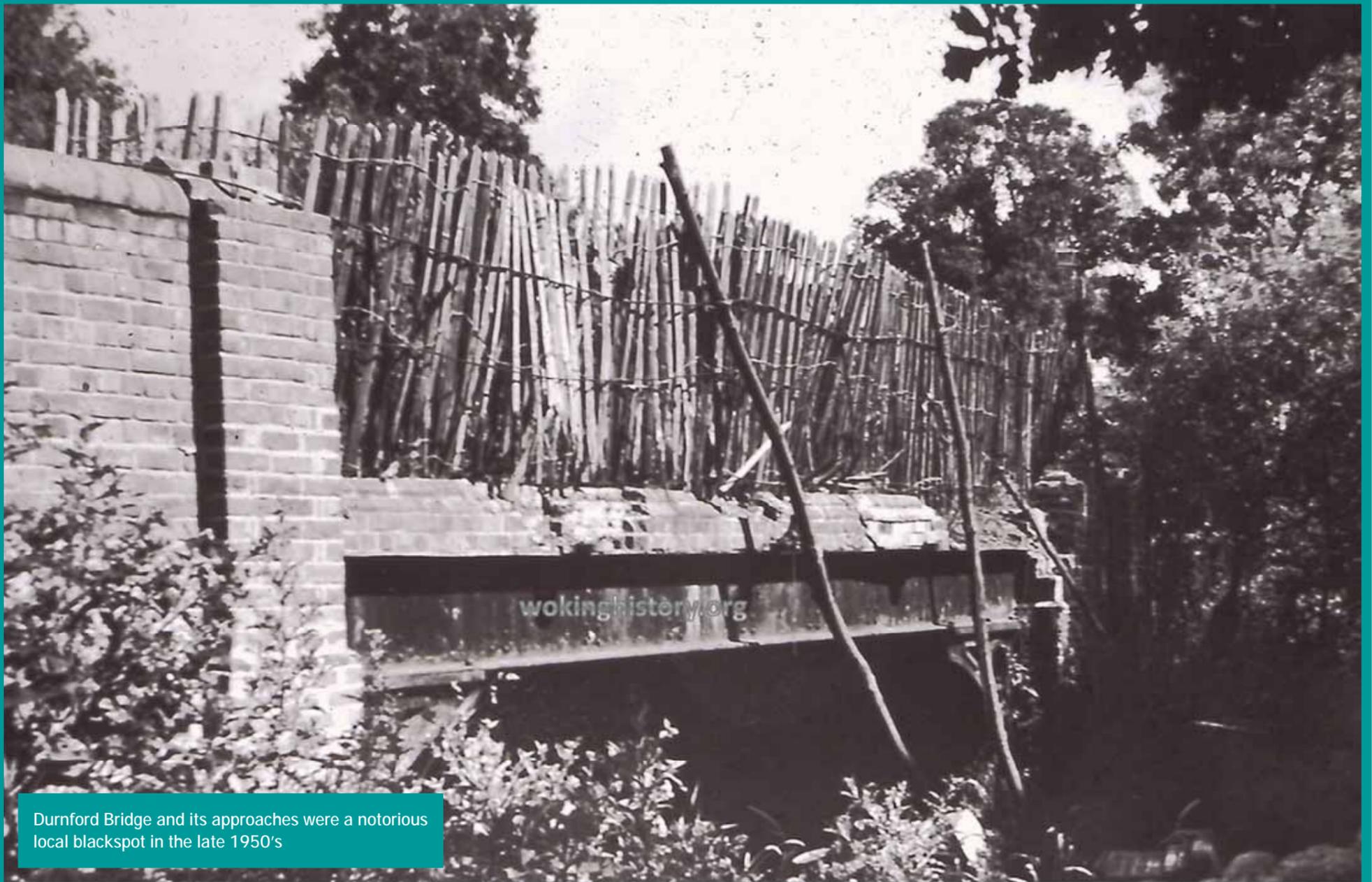


BAD BENDS & BROKEN BRIDGES

Iain Wakeford 2017

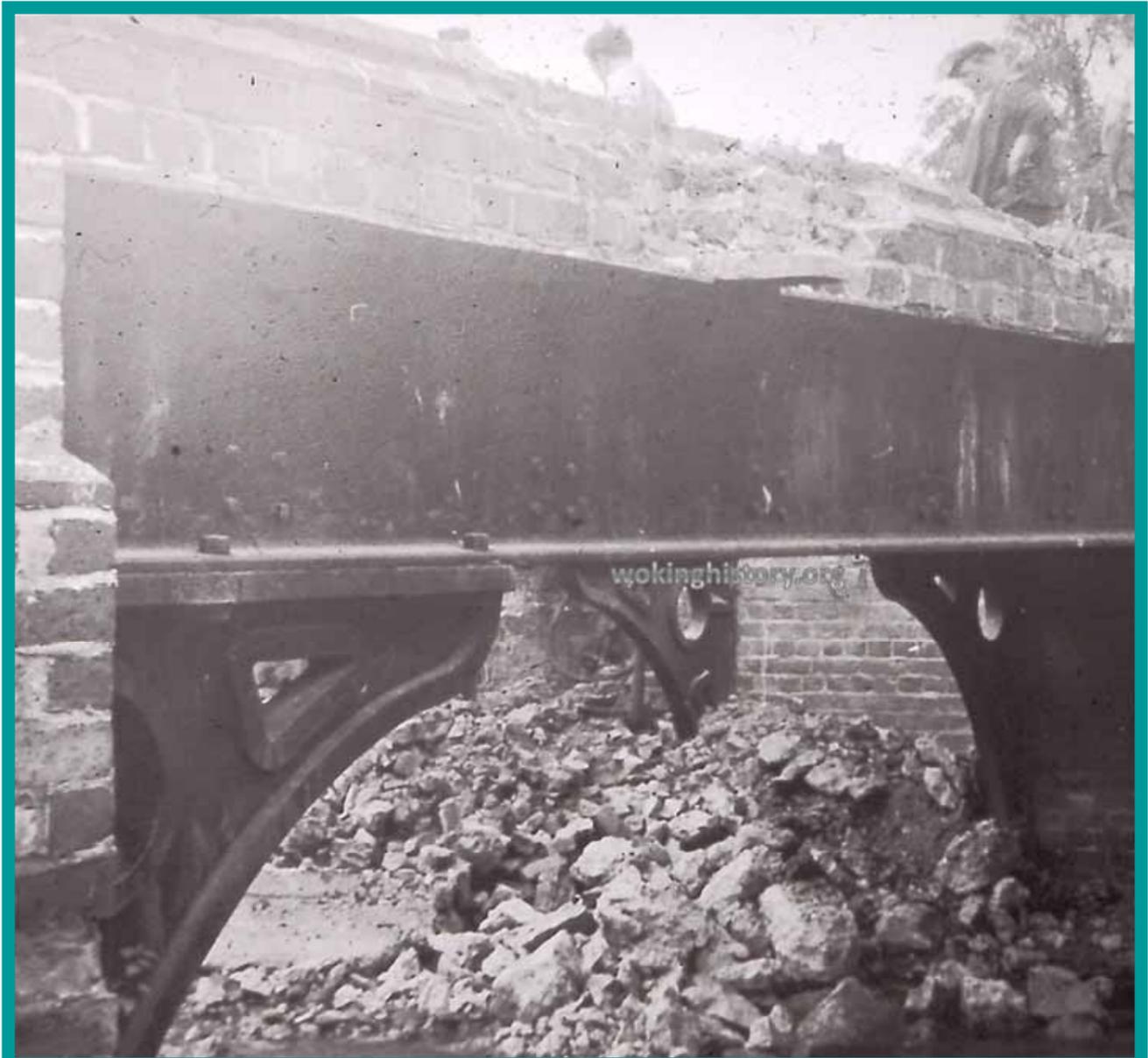


Durnford Bridge and its approaches were a notorious local blackspot in the late 1950's

With Woking's M.P., Harold Watkinson, Minister for Transport, the late 1950's was a time when the local authority appear to have tried to sort out some of our problem roads. From the provision of traffic signals at Brookwood Crossroads to the widening of the bridge over the railway at Wych Hill, correspondence between council officials and the 'Men at the Ministry' seems to have been constant.

Plans for a Byfleet by-pass and a roundabout at the Six Crossroads in Woking were also muted at this time – although with budgets still tight it would not be until the early 1960's before those schemes came to fruition.

One local black-spot appears to have been Durnford (or Dunford) Bridge between Ottershaw and Horsell. Nowadays traffic passes over the River Bourne (the boundary between Woking and Runnymede Boroughs) without many noticing there is a stream there at all (except when the traffic is at a standstill due to road-works), but in the mid 1950's the sharp bends and narrow bridge at the site was a serious hazard. In March 1956 a scheme was approved by both Woking and Chertsey Urban District Councils (and Surrey County Council) so that by the end of 1957 work was well underway on the reconstruction of the bridge and the straightening of the road. Work







The bottleneck at Oyster Lane was first 'solved' by installing traffic signals in 1958

obviously progressed at some speed (current contractors on local road works please note), so that the new bridge was in use months before its official opening on the 10th October 1958.

According to a contemporary report in the local press there were at that time forty-two miles of classified roads in the Urban District of Woking, and sixty-six of unclassified ones, with Woking Council budgeting to spend £100,000 on highways (including lighting and car parks) during 1957-58.

Part of that expenditure was on the Oyster Lane arch under the railway at what was then still called 'West Weybridge Station' (now Byfleet & New Haw). Originally built in 1838, the arch had

been extended when the number of railway lines was doubled in the late 1880's, but not widened, and by the early 20th century was already becoming a hazard for pedestrians as well as motorists.

Woking Council's solution was simple – to provide footpaths under the bridge – but the effect of that was to reduce the width of the road even more and did nothing to prevent accidents when drivers from both sides of the railway decided to go through the tunnel at once. The local resident's association called for traffic signals to be installed, which in 1957 the council agreed to do, but the Ministry of Transport insisted on a trial first, so it was not

until 1958 that permanent signals could be provided.

Before the Second World War £655 was apparently spent on every mile of classified road in the Woking area, but in the early 1950's (despite labour and material costs increasing) the expenditure had declined to just £390 a mile by 1951-52!

As one local newspaper pointed out in 1957 'the roads of this country have joined the weather as a national topic. One national newspaper even refers to them as the "highways of hazard". A few years ago it was surfaces that gave rise to so much concern. Today the emphasis is on narrow highways, lack of roundabouts, bottlenecks, and the absence of ring roads and by-passes'.

I am tempted to suggest that history must be repeating itself with 'surfaces' once again causing concern, but with the Secretary of State for Transport representing Epsom and Ewell, the Environment Secretary in Surrey Heath and the Chancellor at Runnymede, surely nowadays there can be no excuse for Surrey's roads not to be some of the best in the country!

