

WOKING'S OLD COUNCIL OFFICES REPLACED BY NEW POST OFFICE

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Before 1865 anybody wanting to send a letter in Woking would have had to go to the nearest 'post town' of Ripley on the stage-coach route from London to Portsmouth. After that date a new Post Office opened in Woking right outside the station on the corner of what would later be known as the High Street and Church Path (where the NatWest Bank is today).

In the 1880's the office moved into Chertsey Road (almost opposite the junction with Walton Road), and later still into Walton Road itself, before a more permanent (and prominent) building was erected near the top of Chertsey Road in 1895 where the Post Office remained until just after the Second World War.

Before the war, in July 1939, Woking Council had agreed to sell their old offices in Commercial Road to the Ministry of Works, but with the intervention of hostilities (and I don't just mean between Britain and Germany) the sale was delayed. The Ministry of Works, Woking Council and Surrey County Council (who by then had responsibility for the Fire Brigade and so also had a say in part of the site), could not agree, so in 1947 as a 'temporary measure' the Post Office moved to the other end of Commercial Road, into what had once been the Rendezvous Restaurant (number 46 Commercial Road).

Problems with the Ministry of Works continued on the other side of the railway too, where in 1945 they planned to build an 'automatic telephone exchange' on the site of White Rose Grange. Unfortunately Woking Council had had their eye on that site for a commuter car park, but eventually reached agreement for the eastern part of the site to be used as a temporary car park, whilst plans for the new telephone exchange were drawn up for the western end. That is until the Ministry announced, following the construction of the exchange building, that the land set aside for the car park was now needed for a new Post Office Sorting Office (due to commence construction in 1962).



The old Council had agreed to sell their old offices in Commercial Road to the Ministry of Works before the Second World War, but negotiations broke down and the Post Office was forced to move into temporary accommodation at the other end of Commercial Road.



Meanwhile, in Commercial Road, it seems that some local councillors were still sentimental about their old offices and in May 1954 enquired about acquiring the old clock on the front of the building 'for erection on some other site in the Town area'. Having been informed by the Ministry of Works that they could have it for

The public buildings of Commercial Way with the Grand Theatre on the left, followed by the Council Offices, the Conservative Club and the Trinity Methodist Church.

£50, they seemed to have gone off the idea and instead 'expressed the hope that it might be possible to incorporate it in the new building' – sentimentality comes at a price, and in Woking it seems that even then the bar was set quite low!

In 1960 the former Council Offices were replaced by the new ultra-modern Post Office.

In the end everyone seemed to come to their senses. The new Post Office in Commercial Road was built and opened in April 1960 (Mr Higgins, the Chairman of the Council, being the first person to officially buy a Premium Bond there), and with the postponement of the new sorting office the council got their temporary car park (until the 1970's when the present Telephone Exchange was built on that part of the site).





The Post Office (sporting a new roof-top 'water-garden') just before it was demolished

The local press enthused about the ultra-modern new public Post Office with its 'precast terrazzo tiles in silver grey with bright yellow panels' and 'one wall glazed almost to full height' with 'flush type lighting fittings in the ceiling and wall brackets over the writing desks'. They noted too the 'illuminated notices indicating the nature of the service available' helpfully adding (for the benefit of their not so modern readers), that 'when not lit there is no service' – a sign that perhaps we are all too familiar with now.

Sadly the old council clock was not retained in the new modern Post Office – the site of which (for those new to the area) is once again a building site – part of the Victoria Square development.

Perhaps the 'bright yellow tiles' of the Post Office are being recycled into the design of the new hotel in the Victoria Square development. The M&S sign on the right of this artists impression would be roughly where the Post Office used to be.

