

NEW SHOPS HELP COMMERCIAL ROAD LIVE UP TO IT'S NAME - EVERY LITTLE HELPS

Iain Wakeford 2017



Last week I mentioned the demolition of the old Corn Exchange in Chertsey Road and its replacement with two shops, as well as the building of five new shops in Commercial Road (which when built included an off licence, a travel agents, a clothes shop, the District Bank and a Wimpy Bar). But they were not the only small scale developments in the town centre at that time, with Commercial Road at last becoming a bit more commercial, and other schemes adding to the shopping facilities of the town.

Pearl Assurance House, facing Sparrow Park on the corner of the High Street and Commercial Road, was one of the last 'conventional' brick-built structures in the town centre, erected (along with the Liverpool Victoria building on the corner of Percy Street and Goldsworth Road) in the 1950's.

Next door to the Pearl Assurance building permission was given in July 1960 for the more modern-looking No.2 Commercial Road, but from there until No. 22 (next door to Erskine's Motor Showrooms on the corner with Chapel Street – now the Halifax), there were no other buildings at that time. Gradually, over the next two or three years, all that would change as the shops and offices in this section of the road were constructed.

Chapel Street, of course, got its name from the original Wesleyan Chapel built there in 1874 – the first place of worship in what was then often described as the 'wild-west' new town of Woking. That little building was later added to in 1884 by a much larger chapel (facing Commercial Road), with a third building, the Manse, later being built across Commercial Road. By the 1960's the Manse was the Atalanta Ballroom, the 1884 chapel Woking's main Public Library and the original little chapel at the back the children's section.

Before the Second World War the buildings between the Atalanta and Church Path had been demolished and replaced by a car park, but between the Library and Church Path the old buildings remained, including the original 'Morris House' (the showrooms of Haslemere Motors Ltd), and the Sports House – now Mann & Co Estate Agents.

Last year in this column I featured the demolition of the old Gaumont Cinema (the fleapit) in Chertsey Road, where in the early 1960's Barjack Properties Ltd built five new shops, which initially included a butcher's, a baker's and a TV Rental firm, as well as one of Woking's first foreign food outlets – the Tong Do Chinese Restaurant.

Built in the late 1950's Pearl Assurance House (facing Sparrow Park) was one of the first post war developments that helped Commercial Road live up to its name.

Morris House, named after the cars and vans originally sold on the site by Haslemere Motors.

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At the other end of Commercial Road the new Tesco self-service supermarket (later the site of the Rat & Parrot public house and soon to be demolished to make way for new apartments) brought modern shopping to Woking in 1961.

Just around the corner, in what was then Commercial Road, Robertson Brothers proposed in January 1960 to demolish their old furniture stores and replace it with a 'supermarket on the ground floor and stores on the second floor'.

The following month another planning application by Tesco Stores Ltd was submitted for numbers 57-59 Commercial Road (next door to Robertson's at 61-63), but in the end Tesco's application appears to have been

dropped and on the 22nd June 1961 (at 9am sharp) the doors opened to Woking's first Tesco self-service supermarket at number 63 Commercial Road (with Gerrards greengrocers next door at the smaller number 61).

It might seem strange to readers now, but up until then the main place to buy groceries in the town – Sainsbury's in the High Street – still had counters at which you queued to be served items, but now the housewives of Woking could wander around the shop picking up cans of beans and bully beef accompanied by the sound of 'canned' music and the 'bing-bong' announcements telling them what bargains they could wheel away in their trolleys (with the trolleys hopefully remaining in store, rather

than being wheeled home and then into the depths of the Basingstoke Canal).

Progress had come to the shoppers of Woking, but that was just the start, as early in 1960 Woking Council also announced the plans for their proposed 'pedestrian shopping centre' to the north of Commercial Road – although like modern redevelopments it would not be some time before that idea came anywhere near fruition.

For those (like my wife) who claim to be too young to remember £.s.d., one shilling (often written as 1/-) was worth a modern 5p, with twelve pence to a shilling (so that your 1/6 jar of Hartley's Jam would now cost you 7½p - if we still had 'ha'pennies' - the old ½d now being worth less than ¼p). Decimalisation is so much simpler!

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OF YET ANOTHER

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9 a.m.

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with each packet of 2/7 CUT TO

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SAVE 1/-

<p>HARTLEY'S STRAWBERRY JAM</p> <p>1/9½ CUT TO 1/6 Jar</p> <p style="text-align: center;">save 3½d</p> <hr/> <p>AUSTRALIAN SLICED PEACHES</p> <p>2/6 CUT TO 2/- Family Size Tin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Save 6d.</p> <hr/> <p>KELLOGGS CORN FLAKES</p> <p>1/6½ CUT TO 1/3 Family Size</p> <p style="text-align: center;">save 3½d.</p>	<p>PAN YAN PICKLE</p> <p>1/10 CUT TO 1/3 Jar</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SAVE 7d.</p> <hr/> <p>GOLDEN RING CORNED BEEF</p> <p>3/6 CUT TO 2/9 Tin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SAVE 9d.</p> <hr/> <p>ST. MARTIN'S ORANGE MARMALADE</p> <p>1/4½ CUT TO 10½d. Jar</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SAVE 6d.</p> <hr/> <p>CROSSE & BLACKWELL'S SALAD CREAM</p> <p>2/1 CUT TO 1/8 lge. bot.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SAVE 5d.</p> <hr/> <p>GOLDEN RING SELF-RAISING FLOUR</p> <p>1/10 CUT TO 1/2 3lb bag</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SAVE 8d.</p> <hr/> <p>BAKED BEANS in Tomato</p> <p>1/1 CUT TO 7½d. lge. tin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SAVE 5½d.</p>
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<p>KRAFT FRUIT SALAD</p> <p>2/- CUT TO 1/6 tin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SAVE 6d.</p> <hr/> <p>GOLDEN RING DAIRY CREAM</p> <p>1/1 CUT TO 8½d. tin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SAVE 4½d.</p> <hr/> <p>FINEST QUALITY STRAWBERRIES</p> <p>2/- CUT TO 1/6 tin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SAVE 6d.</p> <hr/> <p>GOLDEN RING EVAPORATED MILK</p> <p>1/4 CUT TO 11½d. tin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SAVE 4½d.</p>	<p>SUNFRESH ORANGE or LEMON SQUASH</p> <p>3/3 CUT TO 2/- Bottle</p> <p style="text-align: center;">save 1/3</p> <hr/> <p>SMEDLEY'S RASPBERRIES in RICH SYRUP</p> <p>2/10½ CUT TO 1/7½ large tin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">save 1/3</p>
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