

THE INCONVENIENCE OF A CLOSED CONVENIENCE

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By the 1960's Pitcher's bakery had been replaced by Elsie's gowns.



A couple of weeks ago I mentioned the opening in 1961 of the new Tesco self-service supermarket in Commercial Road, and noted that the site was later used by Perring's Home Furnishings and later still the Rat & Parrot pub (see page 3). This apparently confused some people as they believed the pub, which closed in 2009, was in Chertsey Road rather than Commercial Road. Indeed the property is now number 46 Chertsey Road, but when it was built in 1961 it was 61-63 Commercial Road, the street then continuing on through what is now the Big Apple to a junction with Chertsey Road, Duke Street and Walton Road (itself truncated in the 1980's when the Dukes Court development was made).

What is now The Big Apple was built in the late 1970's as another self-service supermarket – the Fine Fare Superstore (later taken over by Gateway, who in turn were taken over by Asda) – although that story will have to wait for another day.

Back in the 1960's, there were still a number of shops where now the games machines stand, such as Brevitt shoes, Robert Warren outfitters and the Belfast Linen Warehouse. In Chertsey Road too were lock-up shops such as Baxter's

the butchers, Parslow's the bakers, and Lee & Sons the greengrocers, with Elsie's ladies fashions then on the corner (where once Pitcher's bakery used to be).

In early 1962, however, it was not the shops, but the public toilets at the junction that were hitting the headlines.

Since before the First World War public conveniences had been provided under this busy junction as well as at the other end of town near to Victoria Arch (more or less where the bus stops are today at the end of the High Street). They were neatly tiled and no doubt quite grand in their day. You didn't have to spend a penny to go to the toilet, but you did apparently have to pay that amount if you wanted to wash your hands afterwards, with soap and a towel to dry them on costing an extra 2d by 1962.

At the toilets in Chertsey Road (that were later condemned to be demolished) there were no washing facilities at all, whilst at Byfleet, Horsell, Knaphill and West Byfleet 'wash basins with cold water were provided in the ladies compartments only' – presumably on the assumption that such facilities in the gent's would go largely unused anyway.

Many on the Health Committee of Woking Council were clearly unhappy with such a poor state of affairs at the time. A report in January 1962 suggested that 'the best method of providing hot water in conveniences would be to install units capable of supplying instantaneous hot water to two or three wash basins', but at a cost of about £100 per unit, Woking Council decided that 'no action should be taken' until vandalism in toilets throughout the Woking area had been tackled.

That, of course, was a perennial problem, not just in Woking but in other local authority areas as well. In Chobham the quaintly named Gay Gardens (at the junction of the High Street and Bagshot Road), for some reason gained a special reputation, not dispelled until many years later when the solidly built conveniences were finally closed and the building eventually turned into the village's wonderful little museum.

Back in Woking in 1962, however, the Health Committee did in the end decide to upgrade all the remaining public toilets in the district at a cost of £1,000, with annual expenditure on the upkeep of them estimated to cost about another £2,500 per annum.



In 1962 the underground toilets at the junction were closed due to vandalism.

From then on the gentlemen of Woking had the luxury of hot and cold running water – the Sixties really were a time of change.

The main use of the toilets seems to have been as a cycle rack!





Originally built in 1961 for Tesco & Gerrards greengrocers as 61-63 Commercial Road, the building was re-numbered as 46 Chertsey Road when what is now The Big Apple (originally Fine Fare Superstore) was built. Current plans show the building redeveloped with a twelve storey block of 68 apartments.

