

THE WOKING CIVIC SOCIETY

Iain Wakeford 2018



Over the years I have been lent or given hundreds if not thousands of photographs of the Woking area to copy and use in my various books and publications. Many are old postcards, most of which can only be roughly dated (a postmark showing that they cannot be any later than that date), but when it comes to more modern times, the number of postcards are few and far between, and actual photographs predominate. Dating those can sometimes be inferred from vehicles or fashions - or physical changes in the town - but occasionally a more accurate date can be found when the photographs have been published in the local press.

The illustrations here were part of a series taken by the Woking Civic Society in mid April 1967. They were to show what they believed to be some of Woking's 'roadside eyesores', and were originally published together with drawings showing how they thought the town could be 'brightened up'.

Road junctions in Chertsey Road and Commercial Road were highlighted for change, but it was the car parks in Bath Road, off the Broadway and in Commercial Road that particularly took their eye.

Now part of the site occupied by the shops of Wolsey Place, the co-joined car parks at Bath Road and Commercial Road were a 'blot' on Woking's landscape.

Above, the Car Park off The Broadway, where they thought that the masses of signs and ugly background could be improved with imaginative planting of trees.

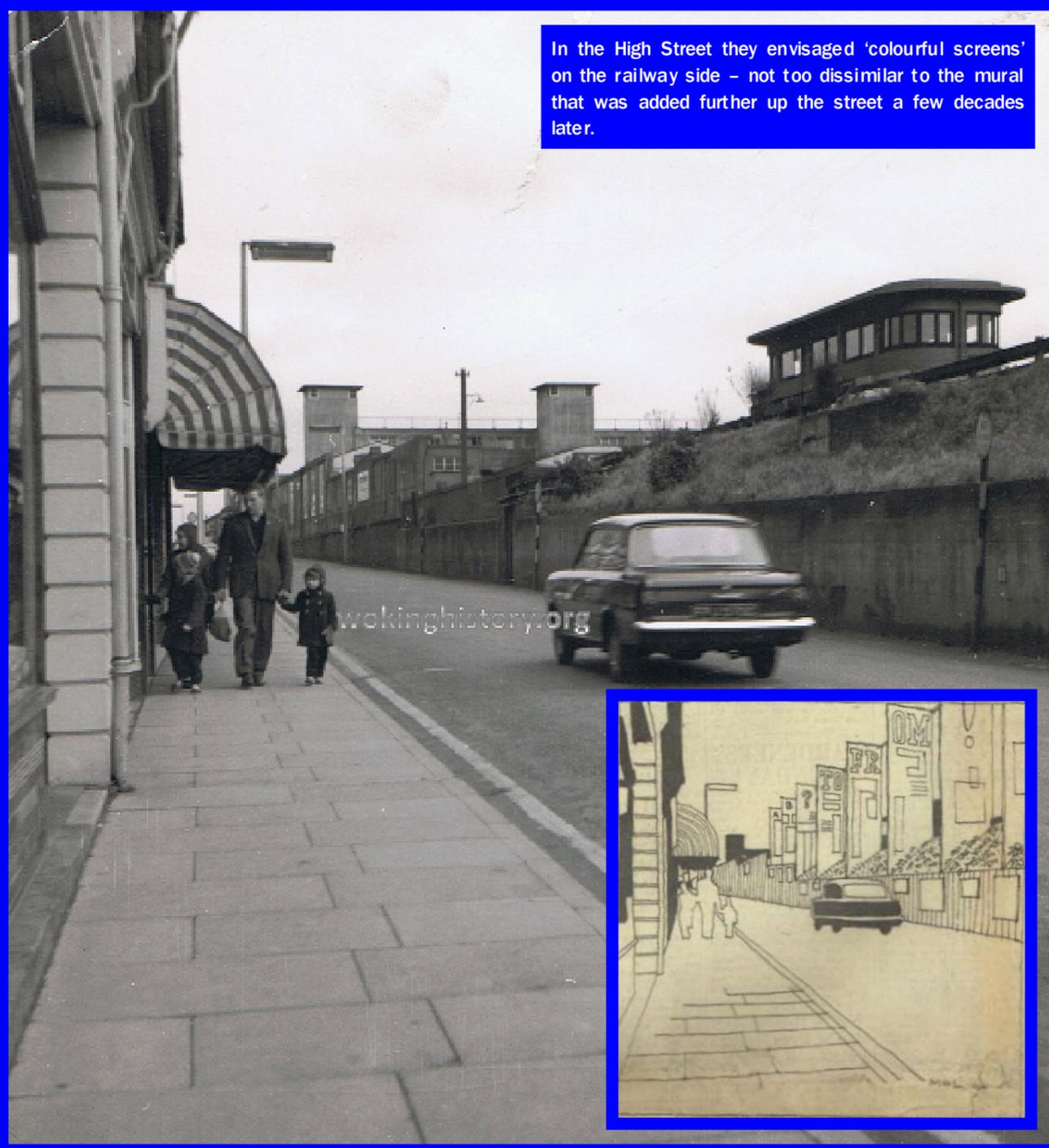


The junction of Commercial Road with the High Street, Percy Street and Goldsworth Road, was one area where the Civic Society thought decorative paving and more imaginative planting would improve the view.



They wanted to rid them of the 'clutter of posts and notice boards', noting that signs should be grouped and unsightly backgrounds should be screened and more trees planted. But in the High Street, along the railway embankment, they proposed to add more colour to the street scene with the erection of 'decorative screens, either in colours as pure decoration, or for advertising purposes'.

They were clearly ahead of their time as it was a few decades before the murals (both decorative and to a certain extent advertising nearby businesses), were erected - and their



In the High Street they envisaged 'colourful screens' on the railway side - not too dissimilar to the mural that was added further up the street a few decades later.



plans for new paving at the end of the High Street near Victoria Arch has only recently been achieved.

The late 1960's were a time of great change in Woking (with many more changes to come in the decade to follow), but the members of the Woking Civic Society were not Nimby's (or whatever the term was in those days) - they recognised that change had to come.

Their aim was to 'stimulate public interest in and care for the environment and character of the areas of the town and its surroundings'.

'We appreciate the difficulty the urban council is in over its town centre redevelopment scheme', said their secretary, Mrs Pamela Wells, 'but there is no reason why we should put up with eyesores. We must make the most of what we have got at present'.

I am not certain how long the Society lasted - but perhaps a group with similar aims and intentions is again required in the town, although whether they will be any more successful in persuading the present 'powers that be' to do anything constructive, is perhaps debatable.

Very few (if any) of the Society's 1967 ideas appear to have been acted upon at the time, with the council going merrily on its own way, ignoring the views of others as clearly only they knew what was best for the town.

It wouldn't be like that now, would it!