

UNFORFILLED DREAMS

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Last week I outlined how the long awaited Marks and Spencer's store failed to be part of Woking's new shopping centre in the early 1970's (maintaining my mother's continual habit of dragging me to Guildford to exchange the items she had exchanged the week before). But the non-opening of M&S was not the only unrequited element of Woking's new 'Promised Land'.

Back in June 1966 the Woking Civic Society held a meeting where the Council's Engineer and Surveyor (Mr David Ward) outlined a 'bold £20 million plan to bring Woking into the 1980's'. It included 'ticket offices and restaurant perched over the railway line above Woking Station; multi-tier car parks and office blocks; an underground service road for Commercial Road shops; and a landscaped civic area'.

Mr Ward, who had worked on Coventry's post-war re-development, recognised that some of the ideas would take some time to come to fruition, but added 'we want to get this scheme

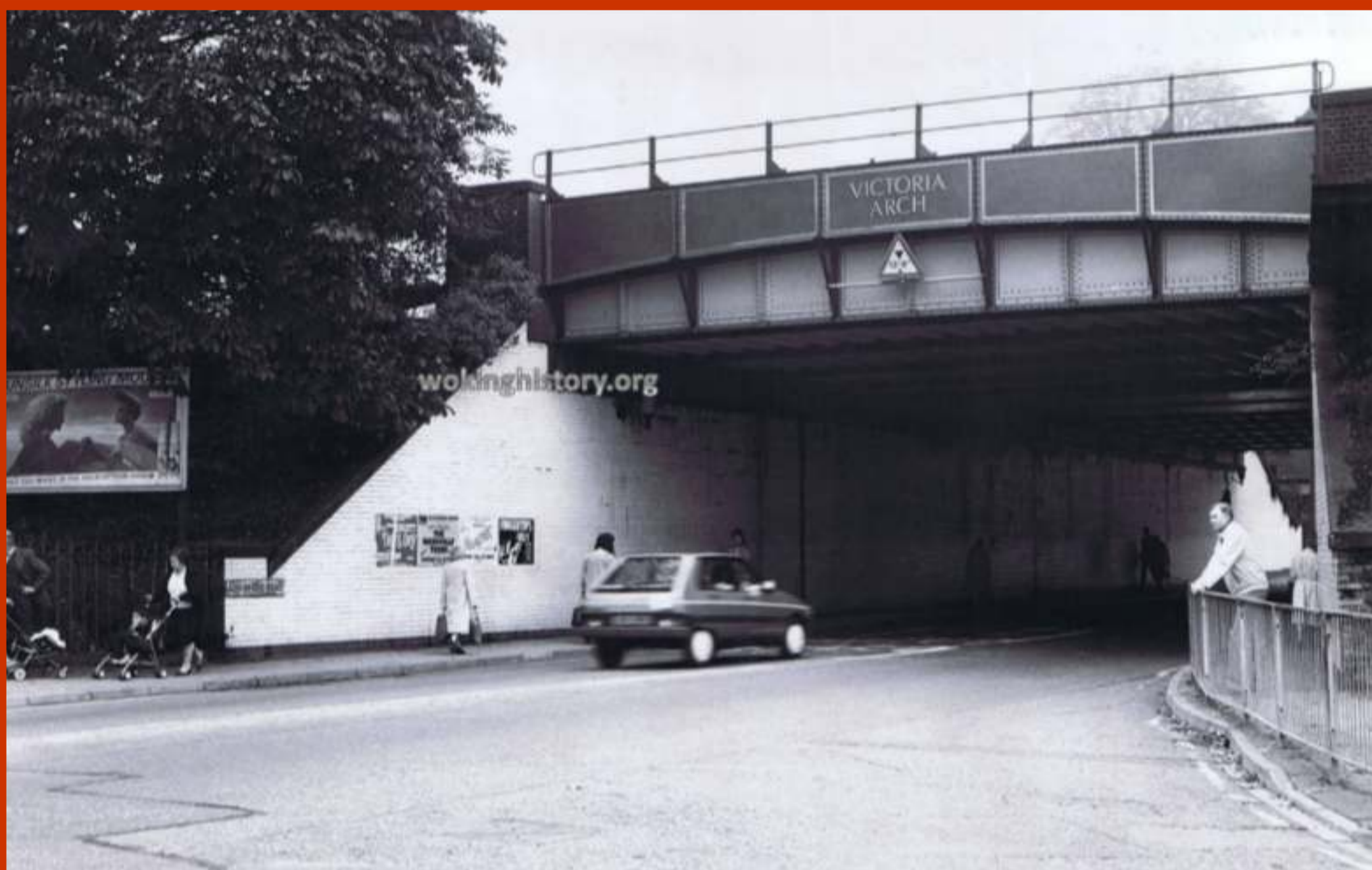
off the ground as quickly as possible'.

One improvement predicted in June 1966 to go ahead 'very soon' was the construction of new 'pedestrian subways' under the railway, which would 'ease the almost continual traffic hold-up under Victoria Arch'.

Woking Station c1966, with the construction of Albion House visible in the background.

Plans submitted in October 1968 envisaged a new road across the railway, with roof-top parking and better bus-rail facilities.





One improvement predicted to 'go ahead soon' were pedestrian subways under the railway at Victoria Arch

Just over fifty years later it seems that the idea might get off the ground (or should I say under it) with Government funding promised to help widen the arch and Guildford Road. But it seems the redevelopment of the station may take a bit longer, despite the fact that in October 1968 British Rail had apparently submitted a plan to Woking Council for the 'redevelopment of Woking Railway Station, incorporating a possible new road across the railway' as well as 'roof-top parking, office development and better bus-rail facilities'!

Meanwhile in February 1969 Surrey County Council announced that its first priority for Woking's new town centre 'is a new £350,000 police station and £164,000 magistrates court' – a spokesman for the council quoted as saying that 'these are expected to be on the building list for 1971-72'.

In the end, of course, neither was built in the new town centre – although the magistrates' court (now coroners' court) was later built in the grounds of the old Boys' Grammar School when it became the new police headquarters in the 1990's.

Now even the police station is set to close, to be possibly turned into apartments (or, I fear, demolished to make way for more high-rise flats) – adding to those already in the area or planned.

Hopefully the views expressed by one columnist in the local press of the early 1970's will not come to pass – 'now, looking forward, one can visualise that it would take little to go wrong with the whole project to make Woking into a backwater, with little to recommend it to traders, hard pressed ratepayers and residents, other than its commuter service'.

Work on the new police station and courts in the town centre was due to start in 1971-72 – but like much of Woking at that time, delays meant that not everything turned out exactly as originally planned.

