## THE HIGH COST OF LAND IN THE EARLY 20th CENTURY lain Wakeford 2015

arlier this year I described how George Rastrick had been blamed for Woking being built 'back to front' when he refused to sell his land to allow the new town to develop to the south of the station. He was an eccentric gentleman, ill at ease with his fellow townsfolk and was an easy scapegoat for the local authority and the Necropolis Company anxious to shift the blame for the town being badly built on the poorly drained land to the north of the railway.

It was the Necropolis Company that had sold George's father, John Urpeth Rastrick, the land immediately to the south and east of the station, and it was their desire to make as much money from their land sales in the 1850's that resulted in the town being squashed between the canal and the railway.

The well-drained land to the south commanded good views across the Wey Valley, so could be sold off in large expensive plots encouraging large expensive houses to be built. But the land to the north was not so popular, so cheaper smaller plots encouraged low-class and commercial development to take place.

George Rastrick had bought one plot of land to the north of the railway, on the corner of Chertsey Road and Maybury Road, but the story goes that he had been tricked into selling it only to see it immediately sold-on at vast profit and Ashby's Bank built on the site. He then vowed



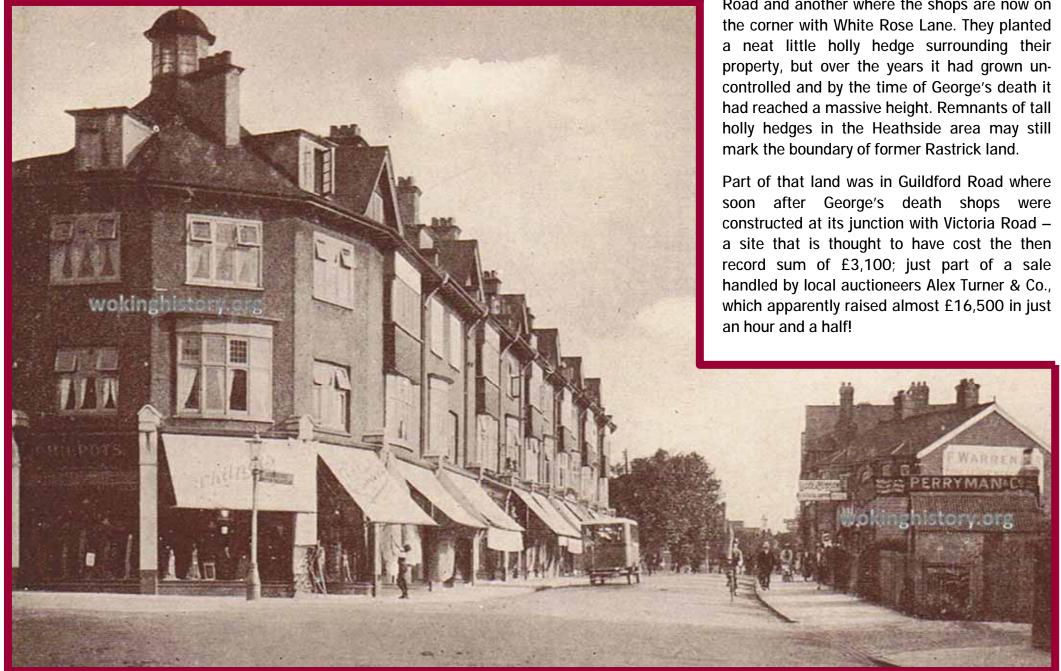
The plot Mr Rastrick sold leading to his vow never to sell again was eventually developed with Ashby's, later Barclay's Bank.

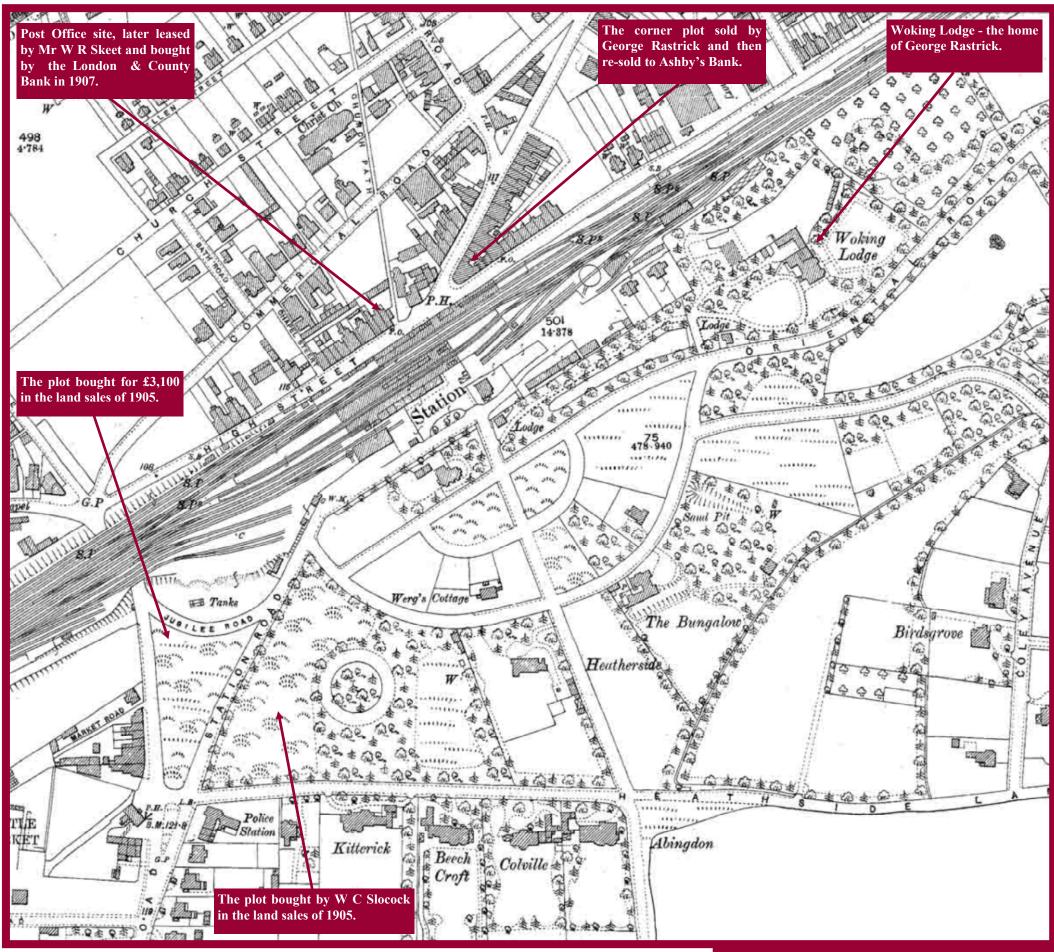
The shops of Guildford Road were built on a plot sold after George Rastrick's death for £3,100.

never to sell any more land for the rest of his life, dying in 1905 having lived up to that promise.

The Rastrick's, built Woking Lodge, more or less where Oriental Close and the commuter car park are now. There was a lodge on Oriental Road and another where the shops are now on the corner with White Rose Lane. They planted a neat little holly hedge surrounding their property, but over the years it had grown uncontrolled and by the time of George's death it mark the boundary of former Rastrick land.

soon after George's death shops were constructed at its junction with Victoria Road a site that is thought to have cost the then record sum of £3,100; just part of a sale





Walter Charles Slocock paid £3,000 for the site where later the Boys Grammar School (now Woking Police Station and Coroner's Court) was built, but altogether Rastrick's property was valued at over £87,000, left in his will to his widow Beatrice.

Meanwhile to the north of the railway the land on the corner of the High Street and Church Path was also soon up for sale and destined to (where part of Crown House is today) and eventually joined forces with a Mr Jeffes to form a family business that was to last almost a hundred years in the town. Ordnance Survey 25" Map of 1896.

A year after building their new bank in Woking, the London & County Bank merged with the Westminster Bank – eventually becoming the National Westminster Bank.



break the 1905 record.

The small corner plot had originally been developed in 1865 by the Post Office, where mail that had previously been carried by stagecoach to Ripley was then brought by train to Woking Station to be sorted. In 1891 the shop had been taken over by a young iron-monger called W. R Skeet. With much of Woking at that time a building site, he quickly built up his business, but when the lease on his property came up for sale in 1907 he was unable to match the buying power of the London & County Bank, who apparently out-bid him, paying £3,300 for the lucrative corner plot.

Undaunted, Mr Skeet promptly bought a site on the corner of Chobham Road and Church Street



## THE 1907 STORM

The shop on the corner of Boundary Road and Omega Road had to be rebuilt after it was hit by lightening on the evening of 30<sup>th</sup> June 1907. Fortunately nobody appears to have been hurt, but the event appears to have caused quite a storm (if you will pardon the pun), with this postcard being sold and another showing a large tree on St John's Lye that had been shattered to splinters by another lightning bolt the same night.

## WOKING'S FIRST ROUND F.A. CUP DEFEAT OF 1908

**B** ack in June I noted how Woking F.C. were formed in 1888, playing their first matches in Horsell rather than Woking. But in fact a match was played between a side from Woking and one from Chertsey the year before - a game Woking won 6-2 or 6-1 depending on which newspaper report you read. The early history of the club is fascinating (and is covered in far more detail on my website www.wokingheritage.org) but progress was quite slow and it was some time before the town could really find much to cheer about.

The club faced many ups and downs (just like today), but one of their first major 'ups' came in 1908 when on the 11<sup>th</sup> January they played Bolton Wanderer's (at the time in the top division of English football) in the first round proper of the F A Cup. The game was played at the Lancastrian club, but this postcard of the match is still very much part of our history. Unfortunately, Woking lost 5-0, but I suspect the few Woking fans that made the long journey north still enjoyed themselves, and the club certainly gained from the experience.

