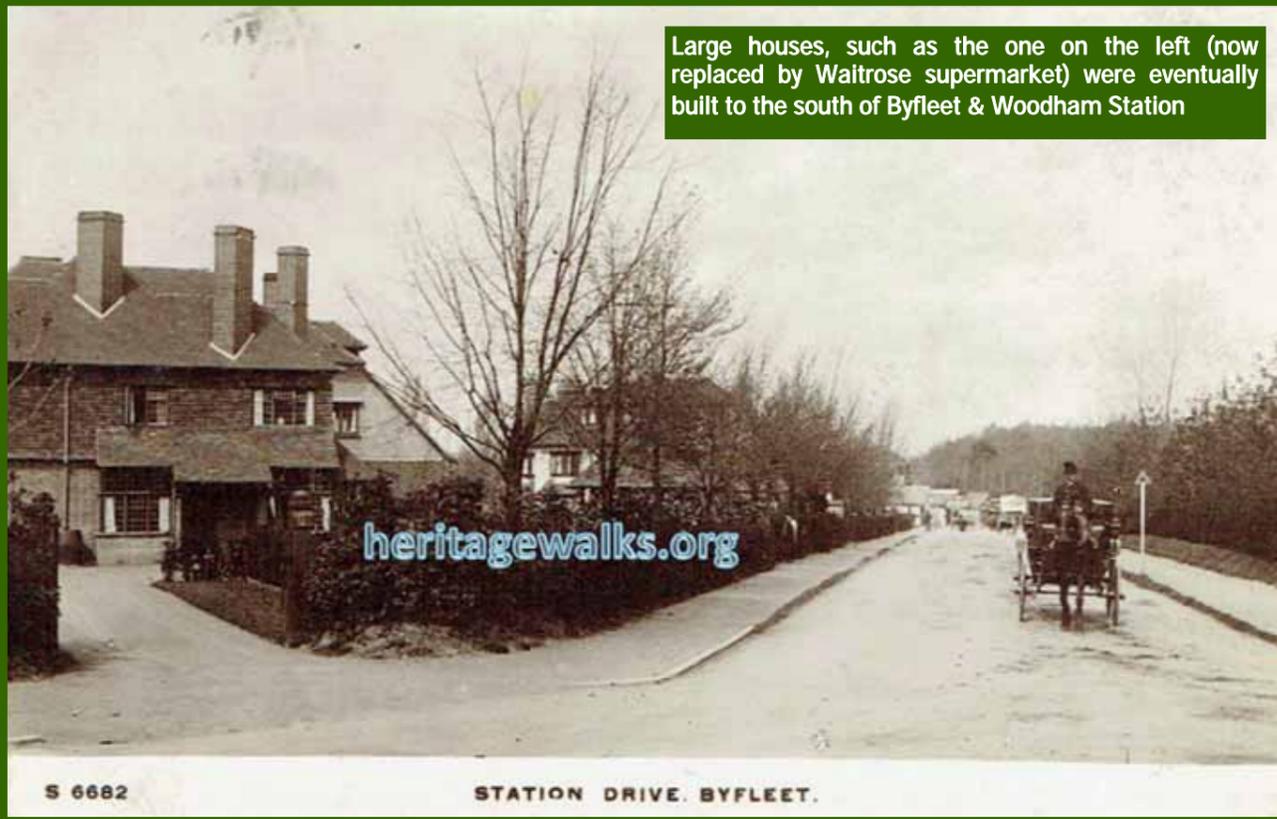
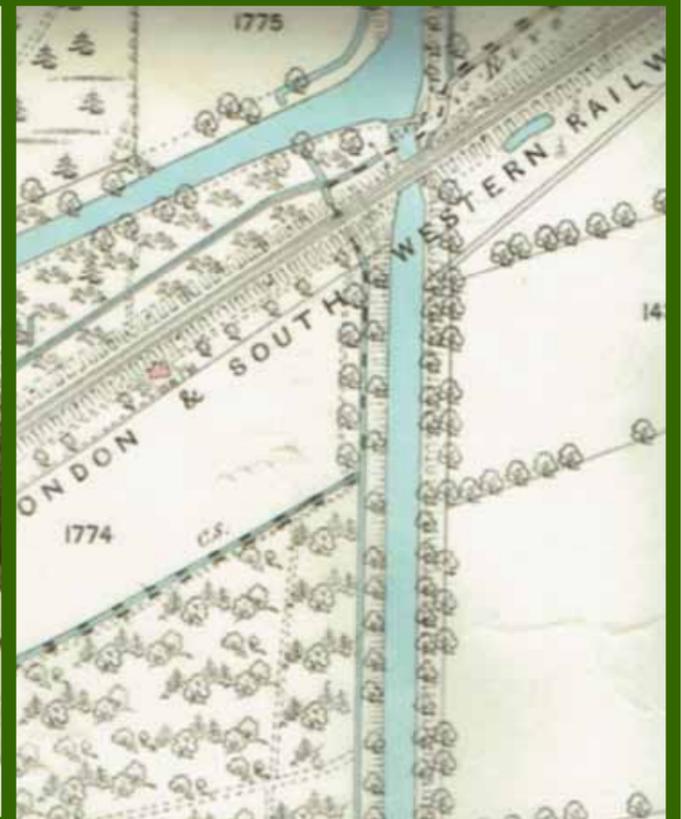


# THE DEVELOPMENT OF BYFLEET COMMON AFTER THE OPENING OF THE STATION IN 1887

Iain Wakeford 2015



Large houses, such as the one on the left (now replaced by Waitrose supermarket) were eventually built to the south of Byfleet & Woodham Station



In 1887 the London & South Western Railway agreed to build a new station to serve the growing village of Byfleet, but instead of building it where the line crossed Oyster Lane (where the Byfleet & New Haw Station was built in the 1920's), they decided to build it on the former Byfleet Common, over a mile to the west at what was then called Byfleet Corner.

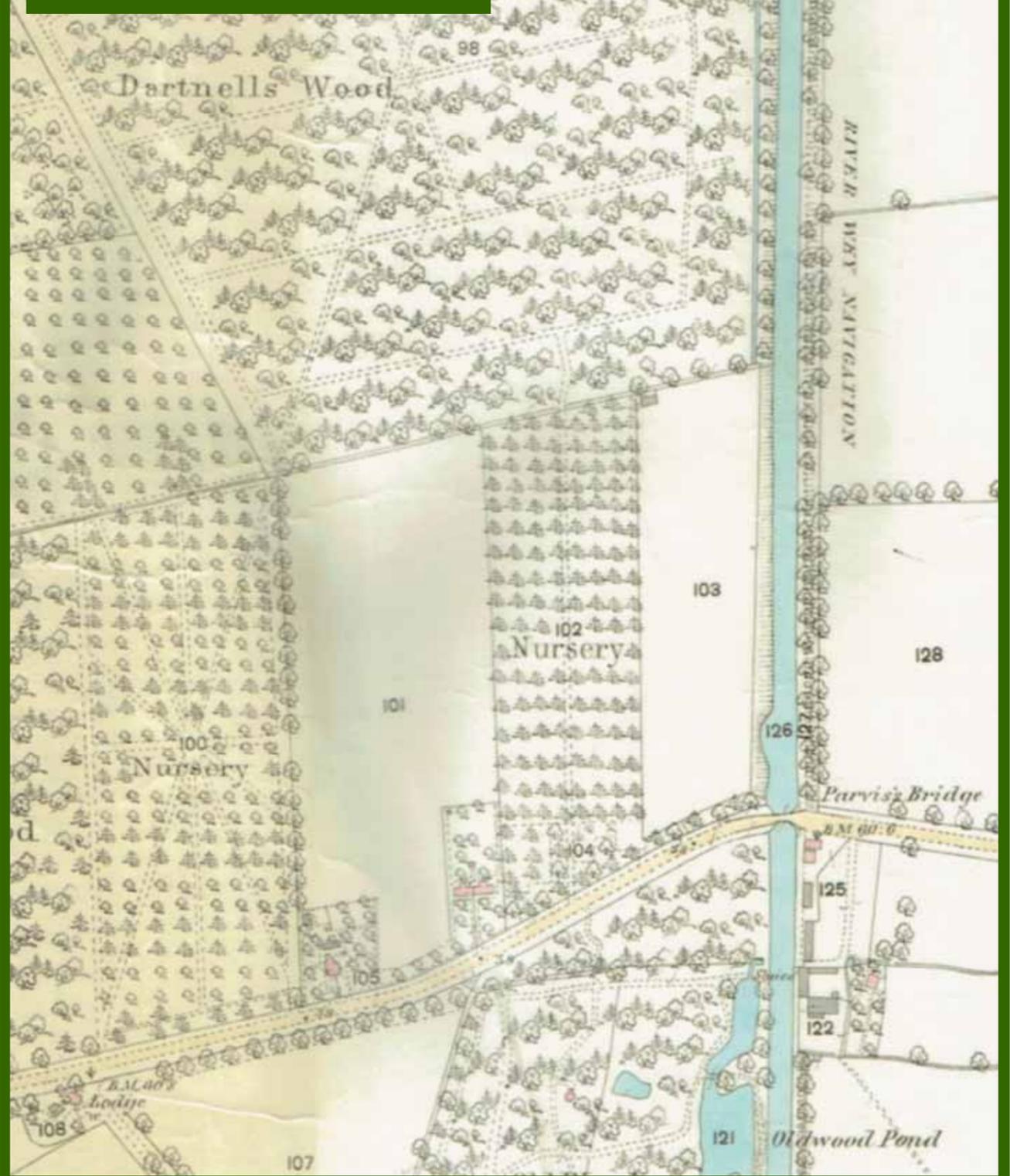
Some development had already taken place in the area with the building of Broadoaks, Highfield, Rosemount and to the west Sheerwater Court, but 1884 saw the first land sales in what became known as Dartnell Park – an area of former heathland enclosed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (with the Enclosure of Byfleet Manor) which by the 1870's had already become thickly wooded. There were several phases of development, but with the opening of the station the sale of 1887 probably attracted the most attention with forty-three plots up to 3½ acres in extent and none less than an acre and a half in size.

The land, according to the Estate Agent's blurb, 'is adorned with Majestic Timber', giving 'richness and beauty' to any new home, with the site 'possessing so many advantages that it is probably without equal in the country' – 'the dry healthy soil and air, varied drives and walks amidst some of the most beautiful pine and sylvan scenery fulfil all the requirements of a country gentleman, or those whose vocation call them to town'.

Unfortunately with plenty of similar undeveloped land nearby it was some time before all the Dartnell Park Estate was developed and other sites close to the station remained empty for some years after it opened.

The railway company actually looked at three sites for their new station – where the railway was crossed by the bridge at Sheerwater Road; by the arch over Camphill Road at what was then called Scotland; and half way between the two where a footpath from the Pyrford Road crossed the railway and canal by Lock 3.

Byfleet Common was enclosed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the area of Dartnell Park thickly wooded and used as nursery grounds by the late 1880's.





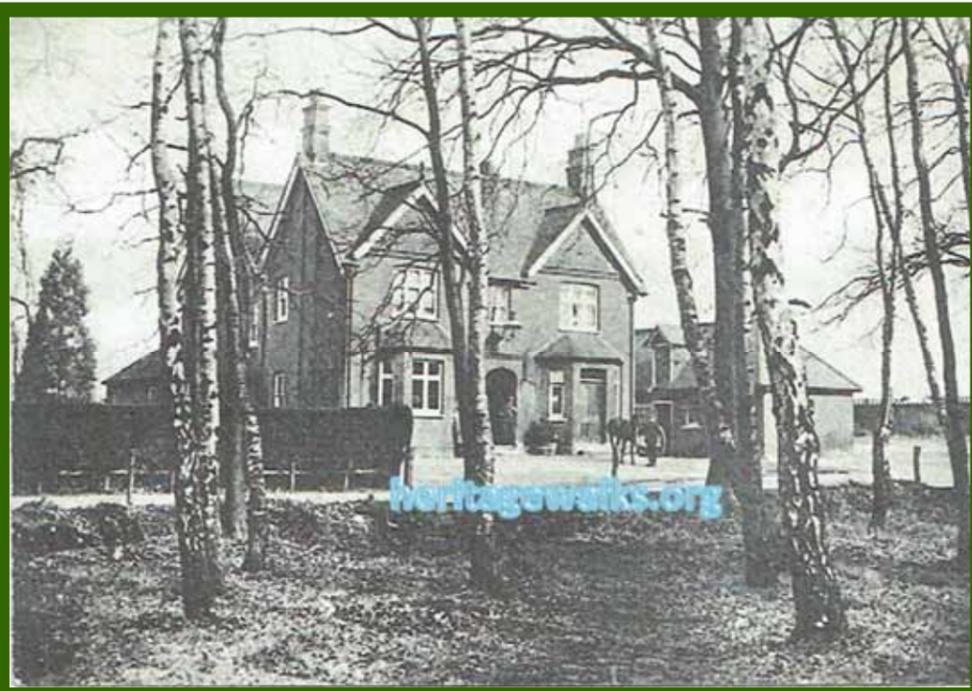
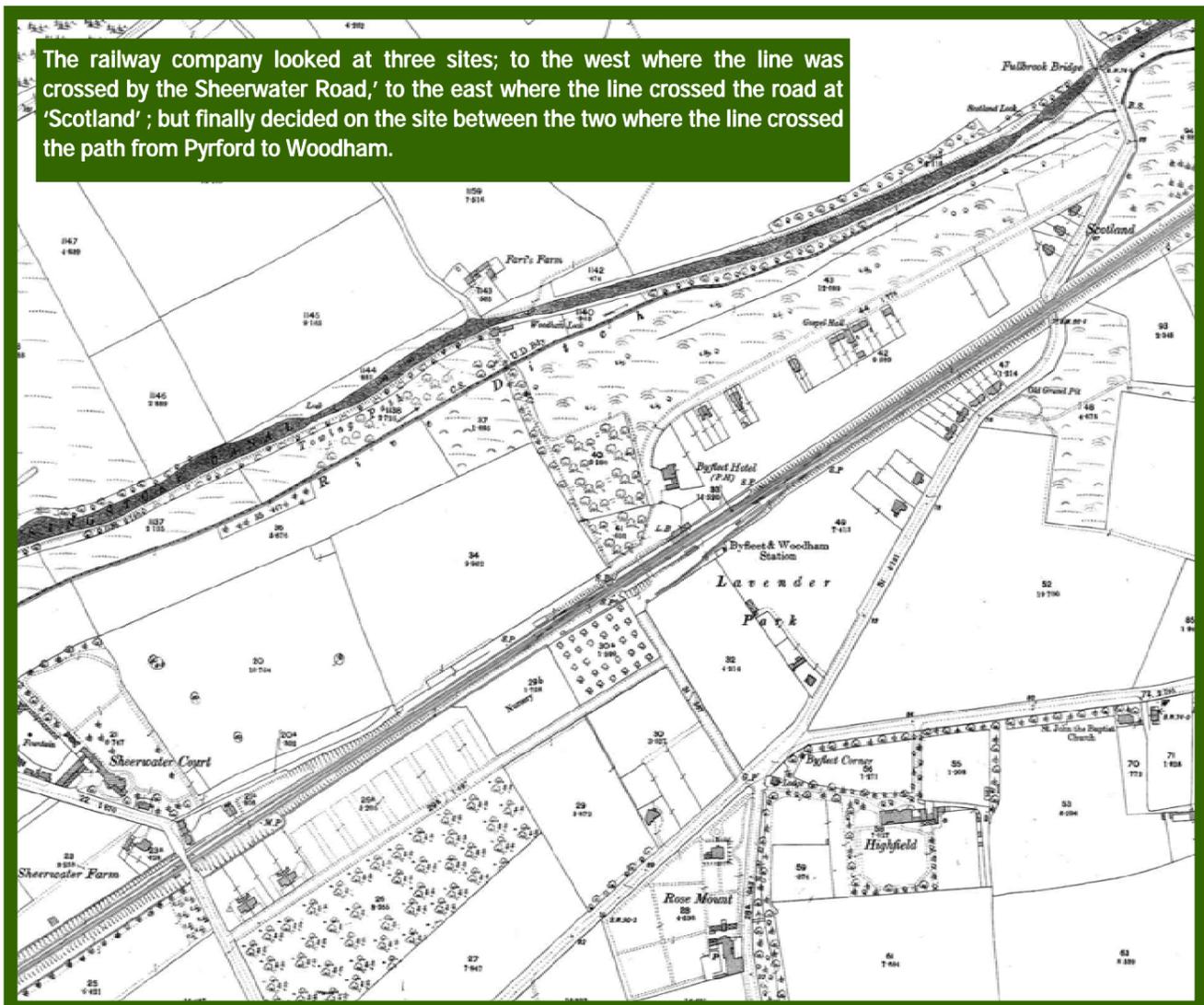
In 1887 the licence of the Sun Inn in Pyrford Road was transferred to a new hotel by the station – known variously as the Byfleet Hotel or Station Hotel and more recently as The Claremont and now the Catherine of Aragon.

It was at the latter site that the station was actually built and opened in December 1887 as Byfleet and Woodham Station.

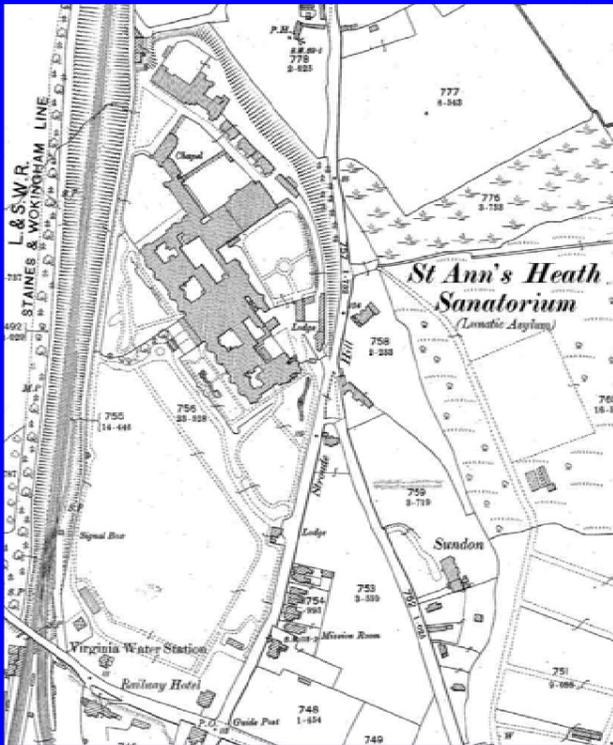
As I said above, the opening of the station, didn't lead to the immediate whole-scale development of the former heathland, although the Byfleet Hotel (or Station Hotel as it was sometimes called) was very quickly erected to serve the first thirty commuters.

It was apparently built by the landlord of the Sun Inn, an old establishment that had stood on the Pyrford Road (where the entrance to The Oaks is now). Having seen what had happened at Woking with the opening of the Albion Hotel and the development of shops around it, he possibly assumed that the commercial centre of the new village of West Byfleet (as it would eventually come to be named) would be to the north. Indeed to start with he was probably right, as the size of plots in Station Road were obviously smaller than those in the new road parallel to the railway to the south (later called Madeira Road).

Eventually large houses would be built on Lavender Park, although ultimately of course that was all to change as in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the commercial development of West Byfleet 'flipped' from the north to the south – but that is a story for future articles.



# THOMAS HOLLOWAY'S SANATORIUM FOR THE MIDDLE CLASSES



How would you spend £250,000? I suspect that today it would be all too easy, but in the mid 1880's a quarter of a million pounds was worth a lot lot more - although one gentleman called Thomas Holloway (who was actually a multi-millionaire) had no trouble finding projects worthy of such funding.

Thomas Holloway was born in Devon in 1800 (the son of a baker) who after living in France and trying to become a merchant in London hit upon the idea of selling what we would now call 'quack medicines' to the unsuspecting Victorian public. He was not the only one – the period saw a plethora of such pills and potions – but Thomas was different as he believed in the advantages of advertising.

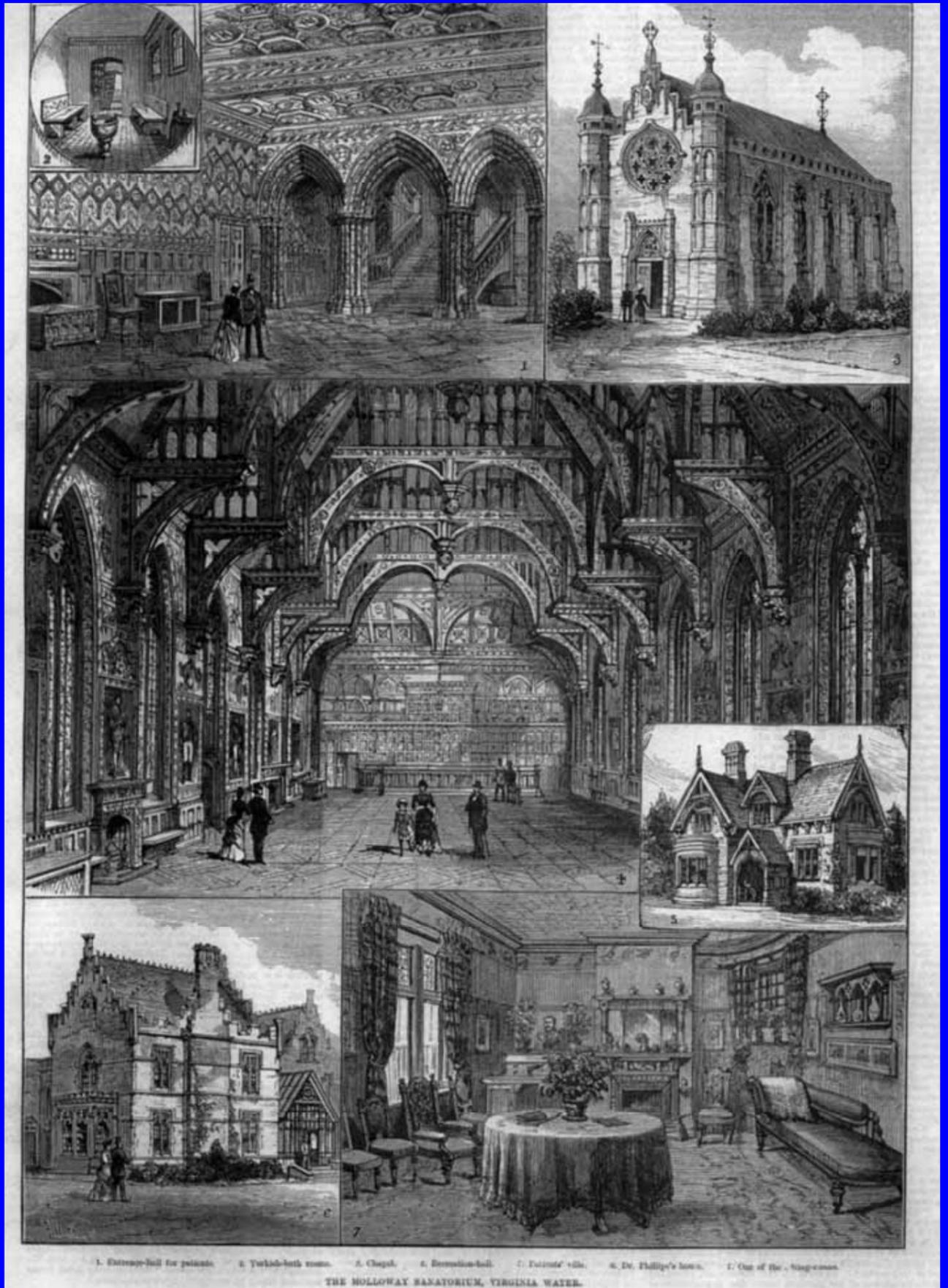
His first advertisement for his cure-all appeared in 1837 and by 1842 he was spending over £5,000 per annum on advertisements all over the world. It paid off as almost every English-speaking country (and others) came to rely on his invaluable pills for everything from Asthma to 'Weakness from whatever cause, etc'.

Another difference between Holloway's Pills and some of his rivals was that although there was probably nothing in them that could actually do you any good, there was little that would do you any harm either!

The result was that by the 1860's and 70's Holloway and his wife, Jane (who were childless) were looking for something to spend their fortune on. After a lot of thought and consultation Holloway launched a competition in September 1871 for designs for a Sanatorium to be built on his land near Virginia Water Station for 'the insane of the middle class' - in contrast to the many 'pauper lunatic asylums' (such as at Brookwood) that were being built at this time.

The winner was William Henry Crossland whose design was apparently based on the Cloth Hall at Ypres.

Unfortunately Jane died in 1875 and even Thomas didn't live to see it completed, dying on Boxing Day 1883 eighteen months before it was officially opened by the Prince & Princess of Wales.



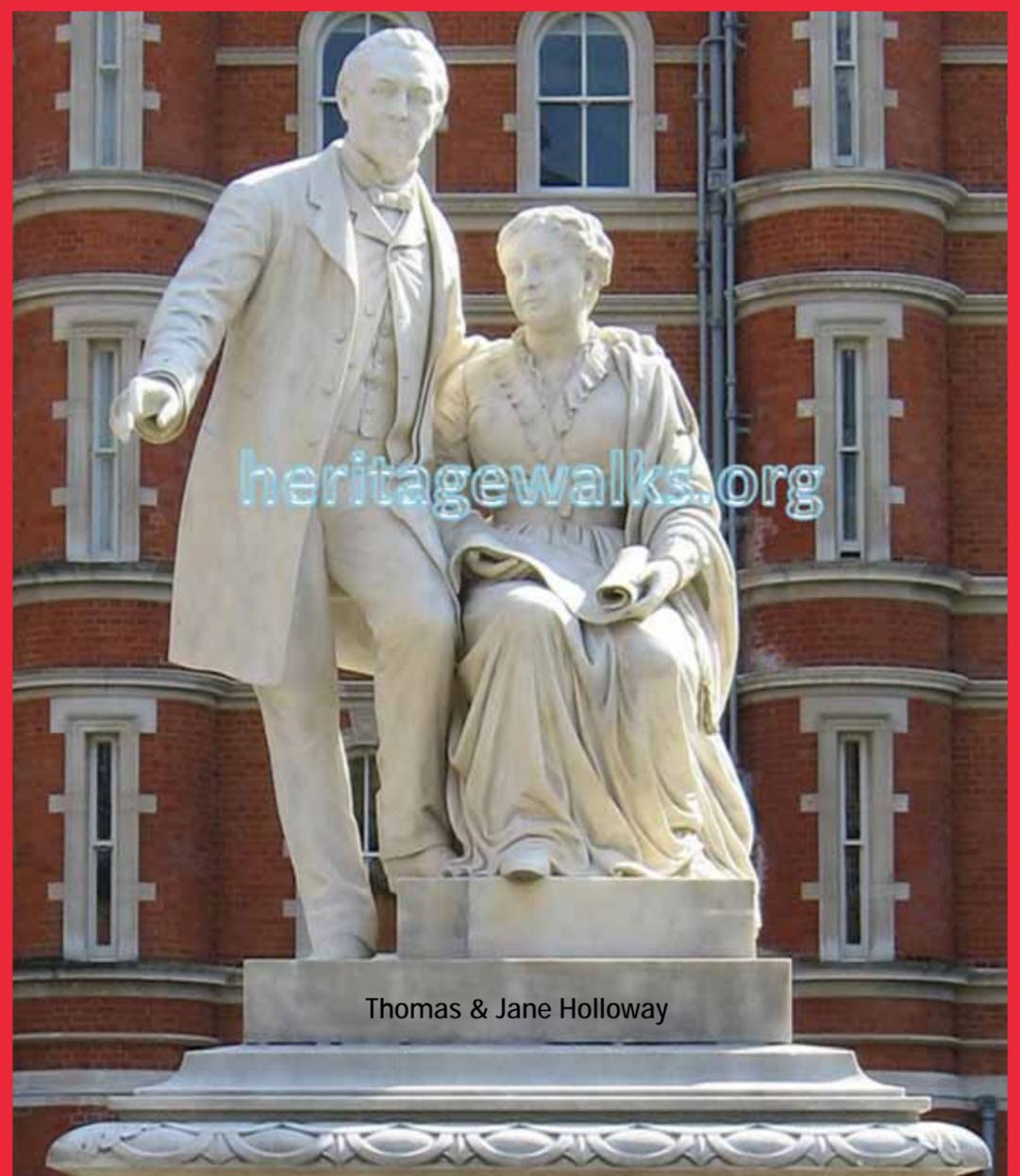
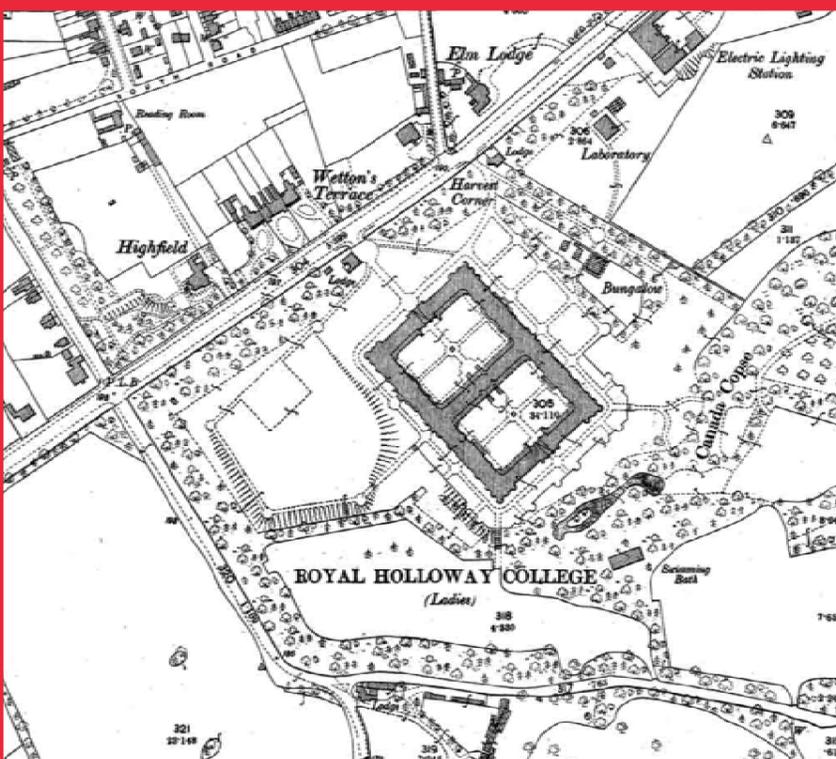
# 1887 - THE OPENING OF THE HOLLOWAY COLLEGE FOR WOMEN



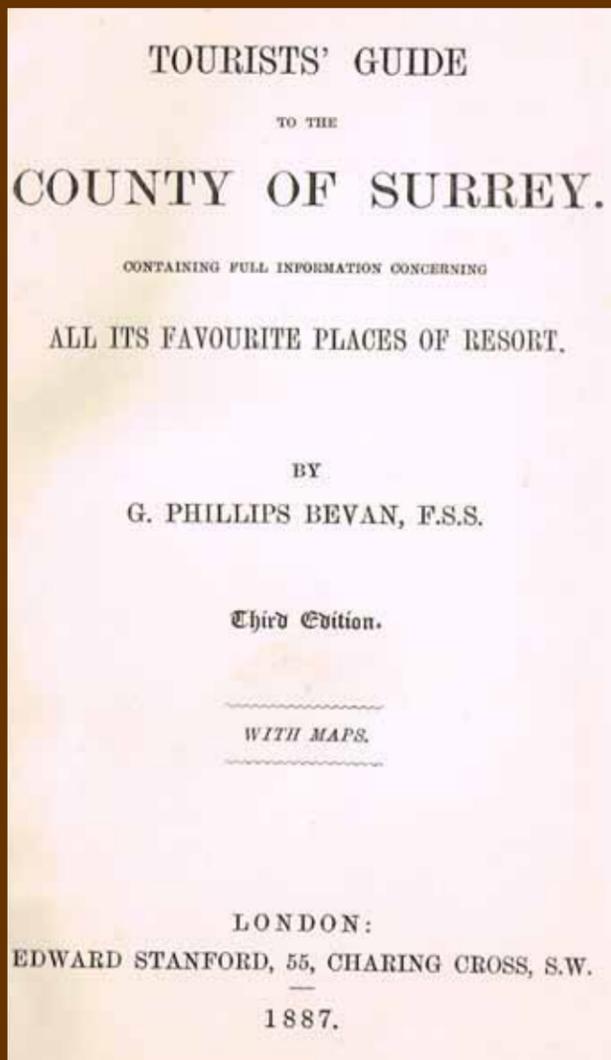
In 1879 Thomas Holloway decided to endow another institution at Egham Hill inspired by his wife Jane – the Royal Holloway College for Women. William Crossland was again the architect this time taking the Chateau de Chambord in the Loire Valley as his inspiration.

Whilst the nearby Sanatorium is said to have cost a quarter of a million pounds, the spending on the Collage was about twice that, although to be fair that also included a large collection of artwork, most of which can still be found in the gallery of what is now known as The Royal Holloway & Bedford College of the University of London.

Unfortunately, like the Sanatorium, Thomas never got to see this work completed and it was left to Queen Victoria to perform the opening ceremony in 1886 with the first twenty-eight female students arriving in October 1887.



# STANFORD'S TWO-SHILLING GUIDE TO SURREY—1887



As well as collecting anything to do with the history of the Woking area, I also collect any books and maps I can find on Surrey in general, and one little guidebook I picked up recently was G. Phillips Bevan's 'Stanford's 'Two Shilling Tourist Guide to the County of Surrey', published in 1887.

The book has three main sections – Excursions by Rail, River and Road - offering the Victorian traveller suggestions of pleasant walks from stations within the county; things to see on the numerous steamboats trips along the Thames; and walks along quiet country roads, such as the old turnpike road from Kingston to Guildford (known to us as the A3)!

As one reviewer notes, 'Mr Bevan performs his task in a complete and business-like style' and 'wastes no words' on his information. He doesn't mix his words either when it comes to describing what he does and does not like of the area.

On Woking Station he notes 'the heath though a bare, treeless expanse, is not devoid of a picturesqueness of its own, which added to the fine air, has attracted of late years a considerable residential population, which was some little time ago much exercised by a proposal to introduce the cremation system into the neighbourhood. Time, however, has shown that the panic was groundless, and the crematorium holds its place. The government establishments in the vicinity of Woking Heath give rise to a great deal of traffic, and it is a good centre from whence to explore the peculiar common district of this part of Surrey'.

I doubt that many could argue with most of the above, as although it is hardly gushing about the beauty of the town it is not exactly

damming either, although how 'peculiar' the common district is I am not sure.

Having said that other places in the area come off with much more praise – Addlestone for instance is described as 'a pleasant and pretty village' whilst Byfleet is 'an old-world village' with Pyrford (throughout written as Pirford) 'worthy the attention of the sketcher'.

Of excursions from Woking Station he recommends going to Woking Village, Newark Priory, Pirford, Byfleet, and Weybridge, or to Guildford through Woking and Send (passing Sutton Place which in those days appears to have been able to be visited). A third suggestion is to go north to Chertsey via Otterhsaw where Ottershaw Park is 'remarkable for the questionable architectural taste of Mr Crawshay, a former owner, who built the kitchen so as to resemble a church'.

Another walk heading north takes the walker through Horsell to Sunningdale Station. On route Mr Bevan comments on the 'wide and

rather dreary heath' at Chobham where 'except for the fact that an archbishop of York, Nicholas Heath (died 1579), who resigned his see from conscientious motives, was buried here, the church has little to detain the tourist'. He does, however, find the 'firs and Spanish chestnuts' of Chobham Place 'well worthy of notice', but then notes the rest of the 'rather more than two mile of uninteresting country to Sunningdale Station'. Hardly encouraging!

From Brookwood Station travellers are recommended to visit 'Messrs Waterer's extensive gardens at Knap Hill, famous for its American plants and rhododendra, for which this soil is particularly suitable', but travelling west towards the next station at Farnborough, the country 'now becomes rather sterile and bare, looking over Bisley Common and the marked outline of Chobham Ridges' although he adds 'it has nevertheless a characteristic scenery of its own, which makes a pleasant contrast with the more fertile portions of Surrey'.

