

WOKING & NORTH-WEST SURREY

THE MECCA FOR VICTORIAN LANDSCAPE ARTISTS

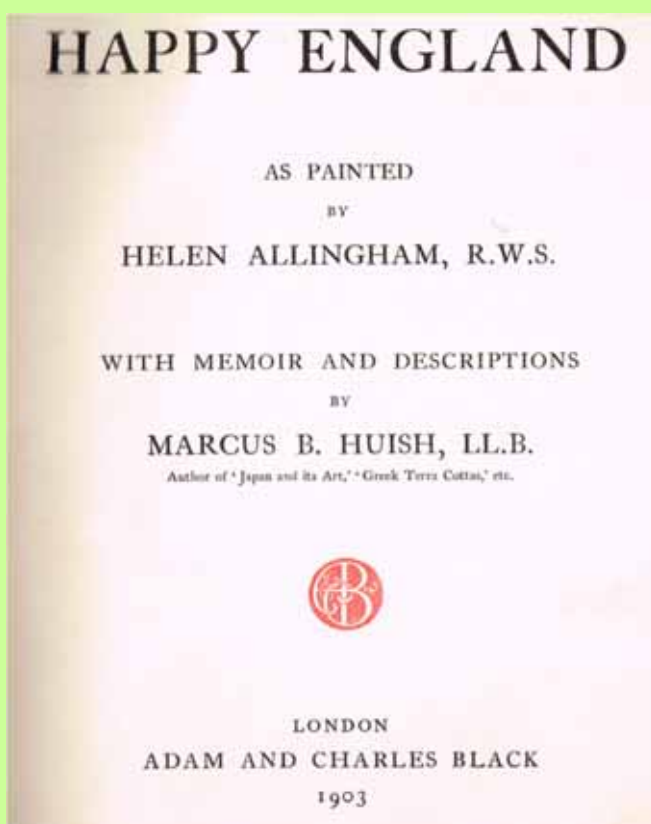
Another artist, with an albeit fleeting connection with our area, was William Eyre Walker. He is perhaps more famous for his scenes of Scotland, the Lake District, North Wales and other remote parts of the country, but it appears that the wild waste of our area once also caught his eye.

In Marcus B Huish's book 'Happy England' (1903) on the paintings of Helen Allingham (who despite painting numerous scenes in the Surrey Hills never seems to have painted in Woking) he recalls 'in a recent "One Man Exhibition" by that refined artist Mr Eyre Walker, there was a very unusual drawing entitled 'Beauty for Ashes'.'



I have copied the page here so that you can read it in full, but if anybody knows where 'Beauty for Ashes' is now (or even a copy) I would be most interested.

The illustration (above) is one of Eyre Walker's paintings of woodland, whilst the one below is the 'The Cuckoo' by Helen Allingham taken from Mr Huish's book.



35. THE CUCKOO

From the Water-colour in the possession of Mr. A. Hugh Thompson.

Painted about 1887.

In a recent "One Man Exhibition" by that refined artist Mr. Eyre Walker, there was a very unusual drawing entitled "Beauty for Ashes." The entire foreground was occupied with a luxuriant growth of purple willow loosestrife, intermixed with the silvery white balls of down from seeding nipplewort. Standing gaunt from this intermingling, luxuriant crop, were the charred stems of burnt fir trees, whilst the living mass of their fellows formed an agreeable background. The subject must have attracted many travellers on the South-Western Railway as they passed Byfleet; it did so in Mr. Walker's case to the extent that he stayed his journey and painted it.

In that case this beautiful display had, as the title to the picture hints, arisen from the ashes of a forest. A spark from a train had set fire to the wood, and had apparently destroyed every living thing in its course. But such is Nature that out of death sprang life. So it has been with the coppice here, and in the oakwood scene which preceded

it. The cutting down and clearing of the wood has brought sun, air, and rain to the soil, and as a consequence have followed the

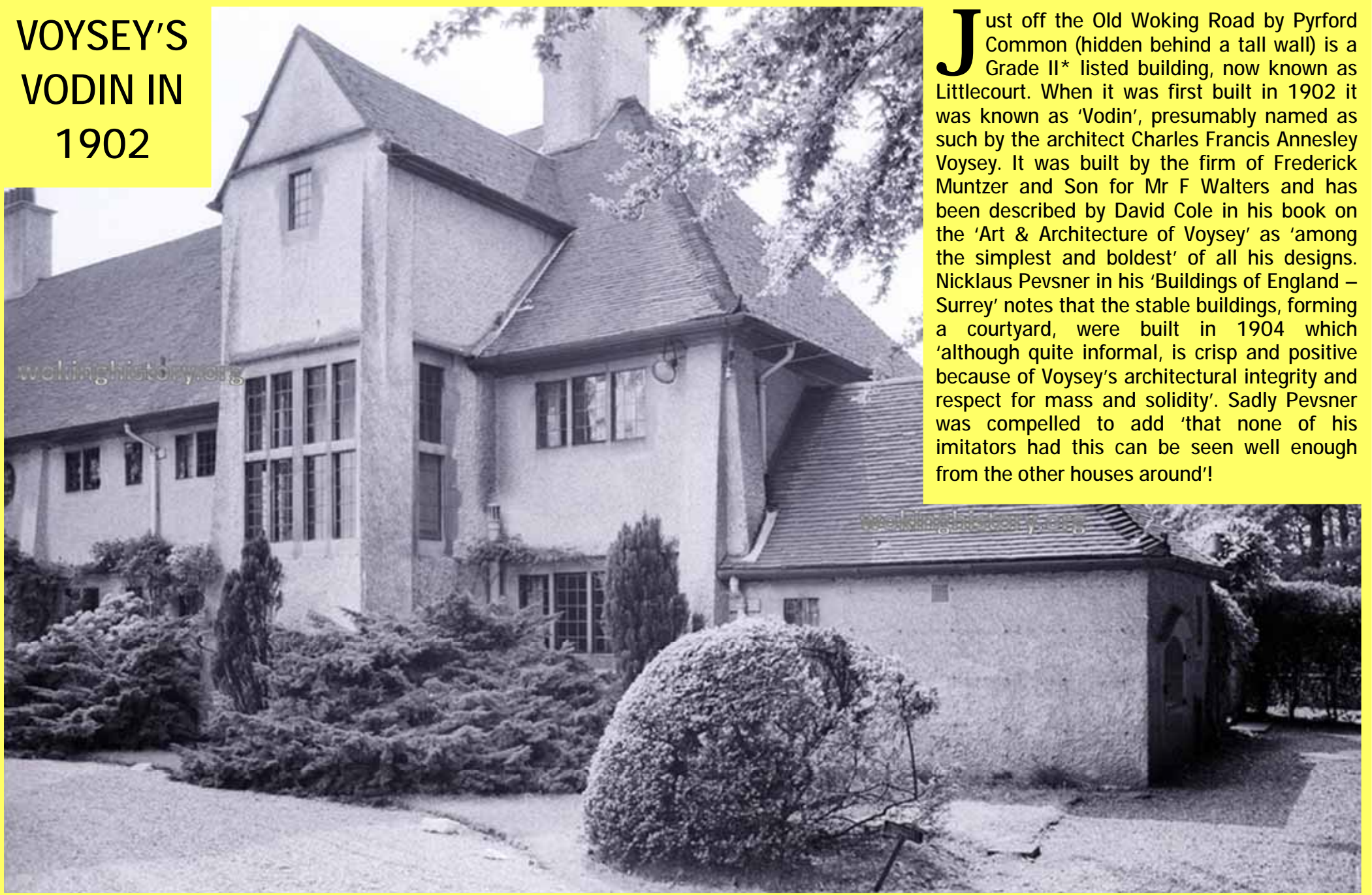
Sheets of hyacinth

That seem the heavens upbreking thro' the earth.

The drawing takes its name from the cuckoo whose note has arrested the children's attention.



VOYSEY'S VODIN IN 1902



Just off the Old Woking Road by Pyrford Common (hidden behind a tall wall) is a Grade II* listed building, now known as Littlecourt. When it was first built in 1902 it was known as 'Vodin', presumably named as such by the architect Charles Francis Annesley Voysey. It was built by the firm of Frederick Muntzer and Son for Mr F Walters and has been described by David Cole in his book on the 'Art & Architecture of Voysey' as 'among the simplest and boldest' of all his designs. Nicklaus Pevsner in his 'Buildings of England – Surrey' notes that the stable buildings, forming a courtyard, were built in 1904 which 'although quite informal, is crisp and positive because of Voysey's architectural integrity and respect for mass and solidity'. Sadly Pevsner was compelled to add 'that none of his imitators had this can be seen well enough from the other houses around'!

THE CHOBHAM FLOODS OF OCTOBER 1903

This photograph, dated the 19th October 1903, is perhaps a timely reminder that at this time of year the people of Chobham (or at least those native to the parish) should be grateful that they were born with webbed-feet!

The 'legend' of the duck-like abilities of Chobhamers is just one of a number of stories about the village where since Victoria reviewed

the troops on the common in the 1830's treacle has been mined; where the pigs sent to market were allowed to sit on the wall of what is now the garden of the White Hart to watch the band go past; and where according to Matthew Alexander in his book on *Tales of Old Surrey* a group of carol-singers once waited ages for the house-holder to acknowledge their singing - until it was discovered that they were standing in front of a local hayrick!

Quite why the poor people of Chobham were picked upon for such jibes is not known (Alexander speculated that it might be the villages former isolation that accounted for it being seen as 'backward'), but whatever the reason, it seems that the youngsters standing on the edge of the flood near the corner with Chertsey Road, were not too bothered about practicing their paddling skills.



OLD WOKING - NOT THE PLACE FOR TEA-TOTALERS



In 1880 the Church of England Temperance Society reported that 'through the kindness of William Wainwright Esq of Hoe Place, a house has been taken in Woking Village for a Coffee Room. The house, which will be called 'The Welcome' will contain reading, smoking and bagatelle rooms. Every effort will be made to get it ready before the winter sets in. We trust it may prove a blessing to the village and be well supported, especially by working men. Subscriptions towards furnishing the rooms will be thankfully received by Mr W Wainwright junior and the Rev J S Maber; and also gifts of papers, periodicals, books, etc.'

Apparently about £50 was raised fairly quickly for the furnishings and on the afternoon of Saturday 6th November 1880, 'The Welcome' was opened 'with great rejoicings'.

'The weather was favourable for the occasion and the barn, kindly lent by Mr Hilder for the purpose, was well filled in view of the public meeting which was to commence the proceedings. After the singing of a hymn, and the Vicar had prayed for God's blessing on the undertaking, short addresses were delivered by the Chairman (Mr E Bagge, Bart), the Vicar, Mr Sargeant (Secretary to the Church of England Temperance Society), Capt Campbell R.N., etc.

The Company then marched in procession, led by the Woking Band, to open the 'Welcome', when excellent coffee and other refreshments were served to the visitors. At 5 o'clock there was a public tea in Mr Hilder's barn, followed by more addresses.'

Subscriptions for the 'working men of Woking Village' was 6d a month (payable on the first of every month), with the house open from 12 noon to 2pm and from 6 to 10pm. It appears that about forty men originally took advantage of the games, papers, magazines, etc. and refreshments which were provided, but sadly there are no records as to whether anyone ever lodged at the property which we know had room for 'two single men' at a cost of 'three shillings a week'.

Unfortunately that is about all we know of 'The Welcome'. We do not know where exactly it was, nor for that matter a later successor – the St Peter's Institute & Coffee Tavern, which is recorded in the church records in 1895. It was started by a Mr Houghton at his own cost, and was described by the Vicar of St Peter's in 1896 as 'a pleasant and attractive place, with a room for reading as well as for games' at a very moderate charge, although rather ominously the Rev Oliphant noted 'the attendance has so far been discouraging, but I have every hope that as the institution becomes better known it will be more generally appreciated' although 'if during the coming winter there is not considerable improvement the Institute will probably be closed'.

For a while improvement seems to have taken place, 'under the excellent and genial management of Mr & Mrs Levy' and in 1897 the Vicar was able to report that it was 'becoming quite a favourable resort', but that optimism was obviously short-lived as the following year the Institute was 'so little used

that Mr Houghton has decided to give it up'.

The next attempt to set up a 'Young Men's Recreation Rooms' appears to have been instituted by the Vicar who in a report of 1900-02 noted that although 'not very pretentious or convenient' at least provided somewhere where 'our youths and young men should have some place to resort on winter evenings other than the public house, where they can meet for warmth and shelter, games and reading' thanks it seems to the generosity of Mr Bircham (of Beech Hill in Mayford) and Mr Booth, who also rented the 'field adjoining the churchyard for football and cricket for a year' for the benefit and pleasure of our young men'.

Again we do not know where these rooms were, but in 1903 the Vicar noted in his annual report that 'The St Peter's Institute and Recreation Club is now at Mr Gale's shop' (opposite the turning to Send), 'managed by a Committee of which Mr Booth is Chairman'.

Sadly this too seems to have quickly failed as the following year it was noted that Mr Booth was still trying to establish the Village Institute which 'should be a successful competitor with the attractions of the public houses which must ever be a snare to those who have not learned self control in the matter of strong drink'.

The youth (and men) of Old Woking in those days appear to have like their 'strong drink' too much, and instead managed to keep open the villages public houses – in those days numbering at least three. Now there is only one!