

# WOKING'S WAR HORSES

Iain Wakeford 2016

Michael Morpurgo's book and play and film 'War Horse' may have been based on the story of an animal from Devon, but during the Great War cavalrymen could just as easily have found themselves astride a Woking War Horse rather than one from the West Country.

In 1909 the War Office were looking to recruit horses for a possible future conflict, and appointed James Hutchinson Driver to buy the animals on their behalf. Mr Hutchinson Driver was something of an expert on horses. He had been Master of the Ripley & Knaphill Harriers, one of the oldest hunting packs in the county, but in 1903 he apparently founded his own pack which was to take over the Harriers country when they closed in 1911. Some say that he was also a Master of the Horsell Beagles, but the history of that club (written in 1959 by J O Lawson) which later merged with the West Surrey Beagles, doesn't mention him. The fact that it was the Horsell *Foot* Beagles (i.e. just hounds, no horses) could explain a lack of interest in that particular pack, although he was interested in virtually every other aspect of Horsell life (and especially sport), so I wouldn't rule out involvement in the pack!

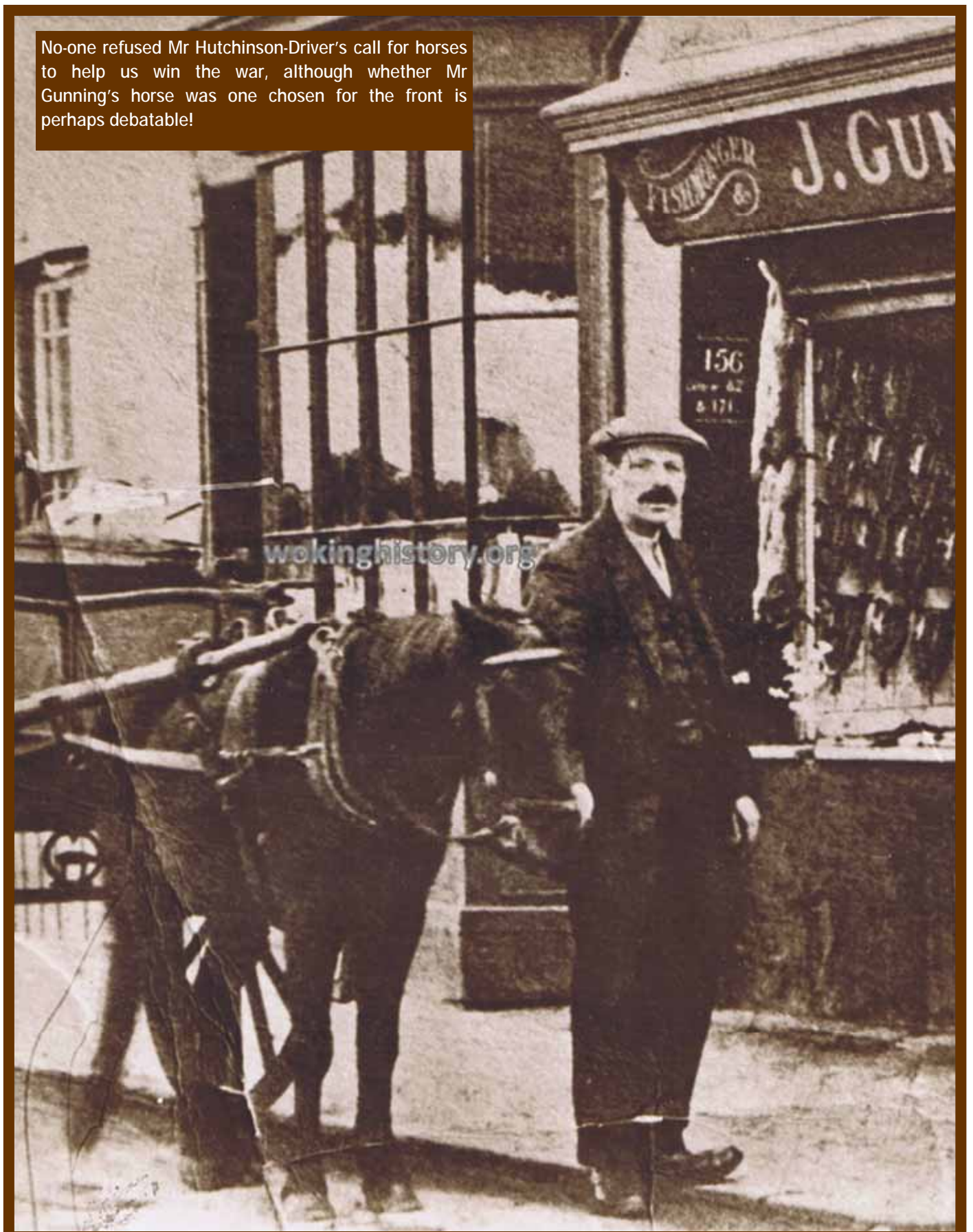
He had moved to Woodham Road in Horsell in 1898, and was apparently a member of the New Zealand Golf Club, but it was in local politics for which he was probably best known. He was Chairman of Horsell Parish Council when they voted in 1907 to break away from Chertsey Rural District and join Woking UDC, and from 1908 he served as councillor for the Horsell South Ward.

If you have viewed the item about the Sanitary Committee's foundation stone, you may have noticed that by 1911 he was Chairman of Woking Council (and would remain so until 1913). He was also an overseer of the poor and in 1911, was chairman of the local Coronation Celebrations Committee, so he was obviously a very busy and well-known local character.

The War Offices horses were to be trained for battle and when the Great War began Mr Hutchinson Driver was busy trying to gather more equine recruits for the front. Within a few days he had bought from local farmers and tradesmen seventy horses, which once passed as fit by the Army's Veterinary Officer were taken to Pirbright, where the village green acted as a temporary chorale before they went off to Aldershot or possibly Inkerman Barracks at Knaphill. He even donated some of his own best horses and later noted that 'no-one refused him' their animals, possibly because he was careful not to take more horses than any farmer or tradesmen could spare.



The Horsell Foot Beagles in 1907 - probably pictured in Cheapside, Horsell.



No-one refused Mr Hutchinson-Driver's call for horses to help us win the war, although whether Mr Gunning's horse was one chosen for the front is perhaps debatable!



Later in the war, when conscription was introduced, he was to serve on the tribunal hearing requests for exemptions and appears to have used the same criteria. Some local traders

and farmers were spared enrolment, just as their four-legged beasts had been, if they could show that there would be nobody left to carry on their business or if their work at home was

just as vital to the war effort as it would be at the front.

Lined up for a carnival, the dairymen of Knaphill also sacrificed their trade for the war effort.



## THE PRINCESS CHRISTIAN HOMES & LORD ROBERT'S WORKSHOPS AT STAFFORD LAKE

**T**he Princess Christian Homes at Stafford Lake, on the border of Bisley and Knaphill, were established in 1900 on land donated by Lord Pirbright to cater for Soldiers injured during the Boar War. They were apparently constructed as a gift by the 'British Building Trades' for the 'Incorporated Soldiers and Sailors Help Society' with originally four buildings each housing wards for up to six men, a few single rooms, a kitchen and toilet etc. By 1909 workshops had been added so that despite their disabilities, each man was able to do at least some work, either needlework, basketry or even clock repairs.

Princess Christian (born Princess Helena, the third daughter of Queen Victoria) was a patron of many good causes. She was President of the Royal British Nurses' Association, a founder member of the Red Cross, and founding President of the Royal School of Needlework (as well as a keen supporter of women's rights).

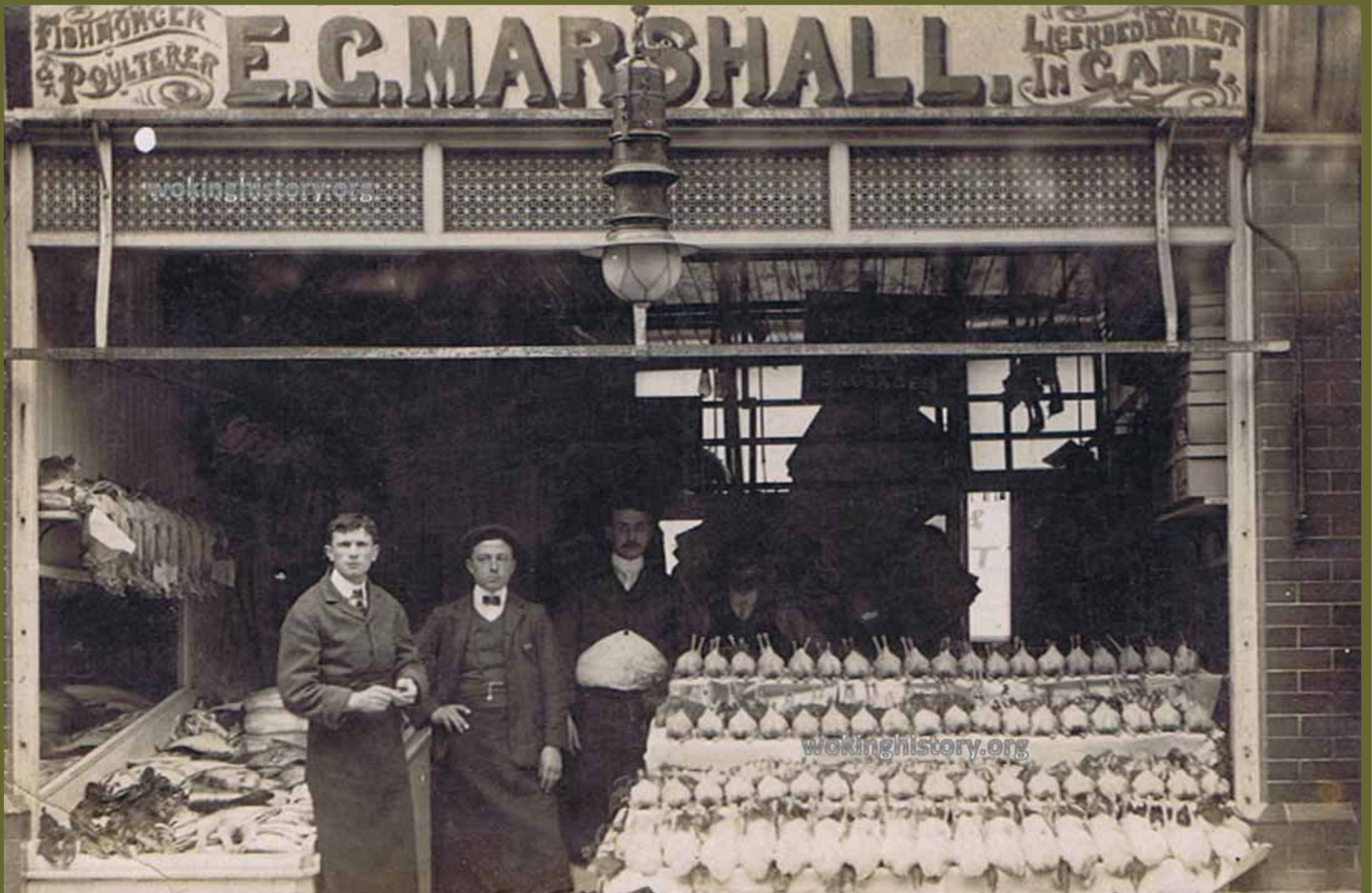
It appears that the death of her son, Prince Christian Victor of Schleswig-Holstein, during the Boar War prompted her founding the homes, which were supported amongst others by Gerald Balfour (who lived at Hook Heath) and by Lord Roberts. They proposed as a memorial endowing beds at the Princess Christian Homes and set up a fund to raise £600 per bed.

When Lord Roberts died in November 1914, soon after visiting troops in France, another charity was set up in his honour to provide workshops for disabled servicemen, with the Lord Roberts Workshops at Stafford Lake continuing until long after the Second World War.





# THE WORK OF THE WOKING TRIBUNAL



Eleven of Mr Marshall's staff signed up in the first few months of the war, whilst others were later conscripted for service.

At the start of the war many men aged thirty-eight or under volunteered for the front (expecting to be home by Christmas), but as the war dragged on the age limit was extended to forty (May 1915), with Lord Derby introducing a points system in October 1915 to encourage more 'volunteers' to register for future call up rather than opt for compulsory conscription. An 'A1' man was fit to fight on the front line, but those in the 'B' category were probably only fit for garrison or labouring overseas, whilst even 'C' class men could still help the war effort at home.

One 'B1' gentleman was Thomas George Heath of 24 Walton Road who was a slaughterman for Mr E G Marshall, the butcher of Chertsey Road. By September 1916 eleven members of Mr Marshalls staff had signed up, and as Mr Heath was almost forty-one he appealed to the Woking Tribunal on the grounds that if he was not exempted from war service he 'did not know how he would get his slaughtering done'.

Mr J Adams of the Court Creamery also applied for his dairy foreman, John P Slann (aged 32 of Walton Road), but he was not quite so lucky and the applicant was considered as 'A1' material. Mr Pyle, the manager of the dairy, appeared before the tribunal to plead Slann's case, as in addition to delivering and collecting churns from the station he 'had occasionally to drive out to the farms to fetch the milk as the farmers being short-handed were sometimes unable to send it'.

That didn't wash with the tribunal who asked why women could not do the work. They were obviously not impressed with his reply that 'one woman he had had recently put a note through the door saying she could not go to work next day because her mother had taken ill, and another one said her husband objected to her driving in the fog'.

Not even a 'C1' class man escaped that particular meeting of the tribunal, as Bert Kates (36 of Queens Road, Knaphill) , a motor driver and baker for Mr E H Pickard, and also a member of the Knaphill Volunteer Fire Brigade, had his application dismissed!

Charles Corbett's case was also dismissed despite an appeal by his employers, Messrs J & E Cook, laundry proprietors of Horsell Moor. They argued that Corbett, aged 36, who lived at Rose Cottage, Horsell Moor, was vital to their operation as he was the 'engine and boilerman in the laundry upon whom the employment of 27 women' depended.

Mr Cook said he had tried to replace him, 'but the three applications he received were from men who knew nothing about electric motors'.

Walter Slocock of Goldsworth Nursery also appealed on behalf of three of his staff, stating that '94 of his employees had joined the colours'. The three men were William Peacock,

aged 36, of 4 Drowley's Cottages, Abbey Road, Horsell, who was a nursery hand; Harry L Gunner, aged 32, of 6 Holyoak Crescent, Horsell, a budder and grafter; and John Gale, aged 32, of South Road, Horsell, a foreman.

Peacock was at present ill, Gunner was in 'Class C1' and in the case of Gale 'the military representative assented for three months'.

The records of the many tribunal cases reported in the local press during the war make fascinating reading, and can be a vital piece of evidence for genealogists searching for family members who do not appear in any military records.

