

# INKERMAN BARRACKS & THE WOKING DETENTION PRISON

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**E**aster, this year, is early (almost the earliest it can be in a year), but one hundred years ago Easter fell on the third weekend of April, and in Dublin what a weekend that turned out to be!



**L**ast year in these articles I told the story of Brian Dillon and John Lynch, two Irish Fenians (the 19<sup>th</sup> century equivalent of the IRA), who were imprisoned in the Woking Invalid Convict Prison in the 1860's – Lynch actually dying at Woking and being buried at Brookwood Cemetery. They made the name Woking Prison well-known throughout Ireland, a fame that was to be repeated after the Easter Uprising of 1916 when over forty Irish prisoners were transferred to the Woking Detention Barracks from Dublin.

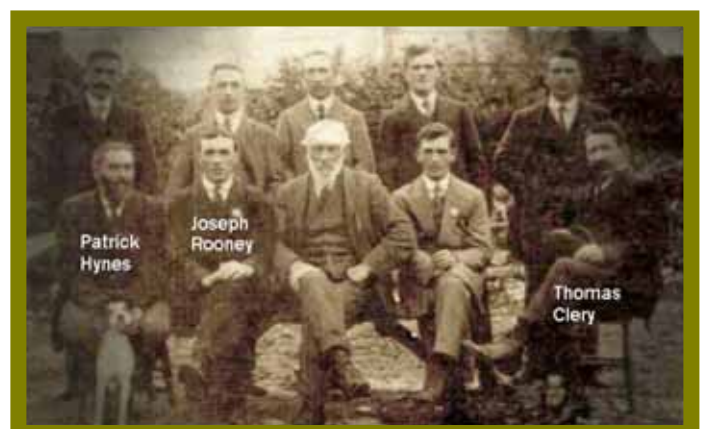
A year after Lynch died at Woking the Female Prison was erected at Woking, on the opposite side of what would later be renamed 'Raglan Road'. But neither it nor the original Invalid Prison lasted all that long. In 1889 the male prison closed and the buildings were transferred to the War Department to be turned into Inkerman Barracks, followed in 1895 by the female prison. It was the former female prison that by 1916 was to become the Woking Detention Barracks.

I don't want to waste too much space here going into the background (or even the foreground) of the Easter Uprising - I am sure there will more about it elsewhere this Spring - but I am willing to bet that few (if any) will bother to mention Woking's role in its aftermath!

It appears that the British authorities determined to make examples of as many people as possible (and to make a hash of events as usual), decided to round up as many men as they could and place them in detention – even if they had nothing to do with the uprising. Indeed, out of forty prisoners that were transferred to Woking on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1916, only two (John Kenny and Michael Murphy) appear to have been present at the Central Post Office in Dublin. Three men at least (Patrick Hynes, Joseph Rooney and Thomas Clery) were in Galway – members of the Irish Volunteers. Most of those kept at Woking were listed as 'farmers', but there was also plasterers, carpenters, electricians, coach-builders and clerks.

Thousands of troops must have marched through the entrance where once prisoners such as the Fenian's Dillon and Lynch would have walked.

One man, James Cullen, later recalled how he was sent from Dublin to Woking. 'With a party of other prisoners, I was put on a cattle boat at the North Wall and taken to Holyhead. From there we were brought to the Woking Detention Barrack' He was later transferred to another camp in Wales before finally being released in August 1916, whilst others were apparently transferred from Woking to Reading, such as Arthur Griffith the founder of Sinn Fein and later President of the Irish Free State.





In September 1914, soon after the start of the War, King George V and Queen Mary, accompanied by Queen Alexandra and Princess Mary, visited St Johns and inspected up to 5,000 troops on St Johns Lye.



Meanwhile the rest of the barracks site at Inkerman was to play its part in preparing troops for the Great War in Europe.

One of the first units stationed at Inkerman was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the West Surrey Regiment (The Queen's - hence Queens Road in Knaphill), with later regiments from Sussex and Warwick

also quartered there, as commemorated in Sussex Road and Warwick Lane. The East Surrey's were here in 1898, the Royal Northern Reserves in 1900 and the Royal Berkshire Regiment in 1902 (to name just a few), but during the 1914-18 conflict numerous units of 'Lord Kitchener's Army' passed through these gates— many never to return.

Unfortunately none of the main barrack buildings have survived either, although the married officers' quarters (and other former prison officer's homes) have survived – the only reminders of what had once been another of Woking's internationally renowned buildings.

Only the houses, originally built for officers of the prisons, have survived.





# MR MILLS' MOTOR-BUS SERVICE

With hundreds of troops at Inkerman Barracks wanting to get to Woking on leave, it should be no surprise that one enterprising local businessman capitalised on the situation and started running buses from Knaphill and St Johns to the town.

The first to run a motorised bus service in this area was Frank William Mills, a motor engineer and maverick bus operator who throughout his career appears to have tested the 'powers that be' to the limit. He actually started out in 1911 on a route from Knaphill to Woking via St Johns, but was notorious for publishing timetables that he had almost no intention of keeping to. He was ably assisted by his daughter, Milly (pictured right) who in an interview with the *Daily Mirror* in 1913 (when she would have been fifteen) stated that she 'thoroughly enjoyed her job' working as a conductress, taking the money from the passengers. The fare was only 2d (1p) from St Johns to Woking, but as the only motor bus operator at that time, it wasn't long before the fare had doubled!

As the war dragged on Mr Mills found that most licensed drivers had been called up for service, leaving Milly (who was now also driving) and Frank and whoever he could get his hands on (including on at least one occasion 'a man in military uniform') to drive the three buses that he then had. He was in trouble too for overcrowding. In July 1916 it was reported that



up to a dozen soldiers had rode on the roof of the small bus with six more inside than the vehicle was licensed to carry – but what could poor Milly do to stop them! It was also claimed that his buses were being driven too fast and that the timetables were being ignored, so that they could operate non-stop to carry as many soldiers as possible between the barracks and the station and back. But the service was so popular there was little the council could do.

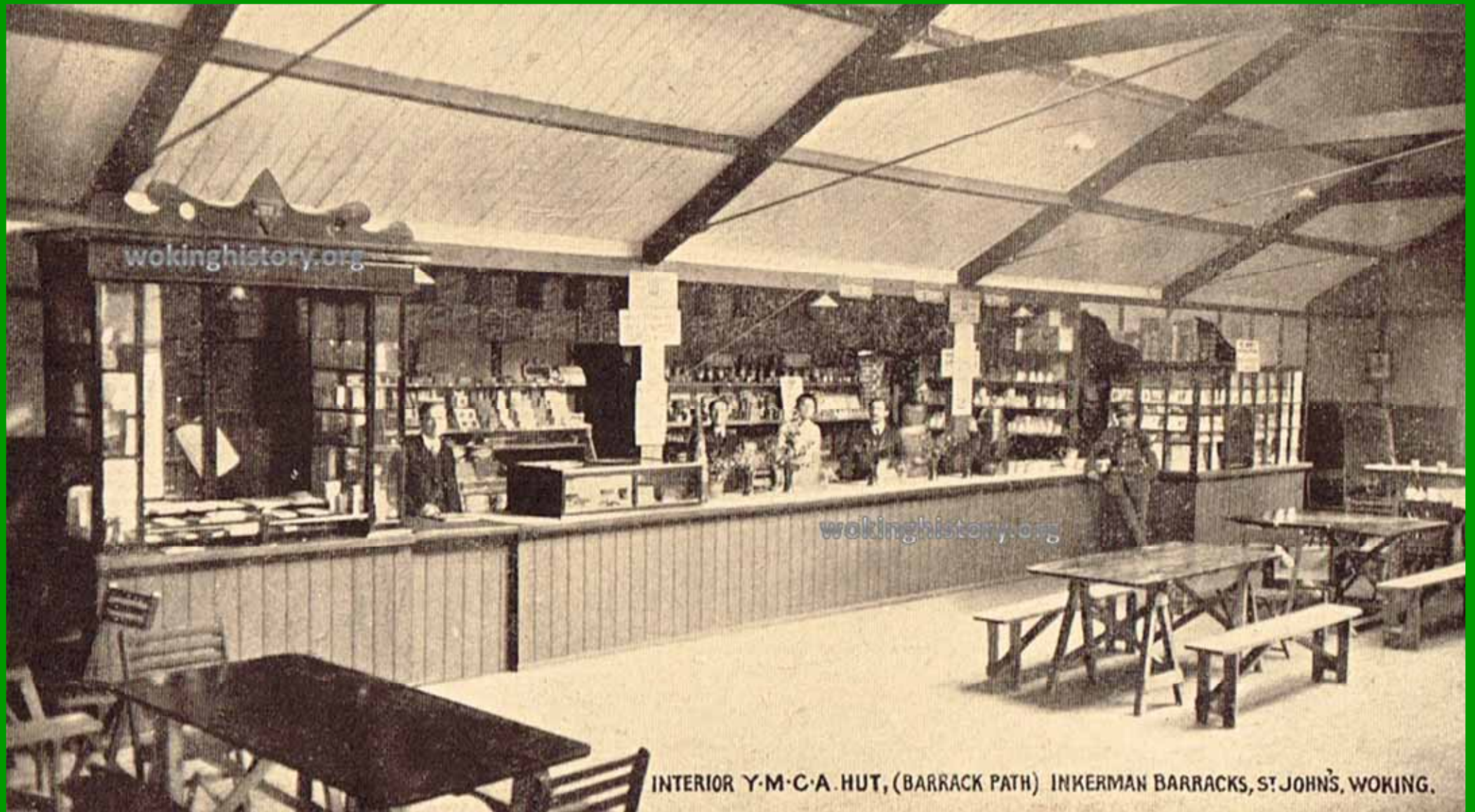
It wasn't until the end of the war, when other motor bus operators entered the scene such as R Bullman & Son and F W Renshaw (a butcher in St John's), that the council could start to get tough with Mr Mills. He carried on for a time as a motor mechanic in St John's (with a garage in Hermitage Road - below), but with timetables now imposed he left the buses to his new rivals (and the Highways Committee on Woking Council no doubt gave a huge sigh of relief).





# INKERMAN'S Y.M.C.A HUT

OFFICIALLY OPENED IN AUGUST 1916 BY PRINCESS VICTORIA LOUISE SOPHIA AUGUSTA AMELIA HELENA OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN-SONDERBURG-AGUSTENBURG.



INTERIOR Y·M·C·A. HUT, (BARRACK PATH) INKERMEN BARRACKS, ST JOHN'S, WOKING.

During the First World War the YMCA established a recreation hut at Inkerman Barracks where no doubt troops who couldn't afford Mr Mills' fares to get into Woking, could be entertained and relax whilst not on duty. It was officially opened in August 1916 by Princess Victoria Louise Sophia Augusta Amelia Helena of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg (the daughter of

Princes Christian). Fortunately by 1916 King George V had changed the name of the British royal family to the 'House of Windsor' and relinquished on behalf of himself and all other royals here their German surnames and titles. It is probably just as well, because if they had to put her original name and title on a plaque it would have run along the entire length of the room!

If the interior of the building looks familiar, it might be because after the Second World War it was moved to St John's Lye where it became the village's first 'Memorial Hall' – but I guess that story will have to wait until next year in this 'Chronological History' to be told.

The Demolition of the Memorial Hall at St John's in July 2013.

