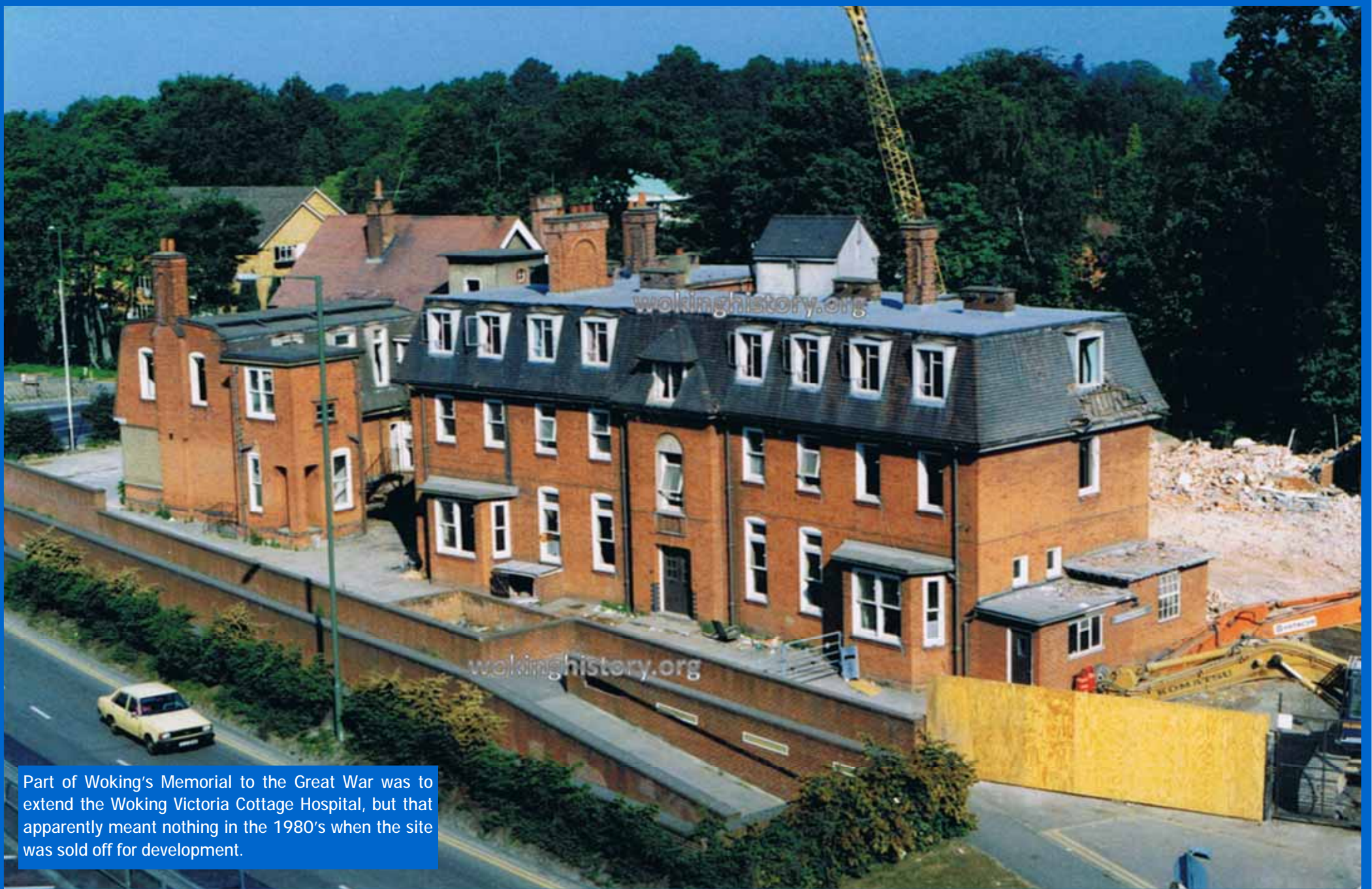


WOKING'S WAR MEMORIAL

Iain Wakeford 2016



Part of Woking's Memorial to the Great War was to extend the Woking Victoria Cottage Hospital, but that apparently meant nothing in the 1980's when the site was sold off for development.

When the war came to an end a meeting of thanksgiving was held in the old Palace Theatre in Duke Street, but very quickly thoughts turned from giving thanks to giving money for the erection of a memorial to those who had died.

On the 23rd January 1919 another meeting was called for the residents of Woking Urban District 'to consider the most suitable form of memorial to the memory and honour of those from amongst us who have fallen, and those other who fought for us, in this Great War'.

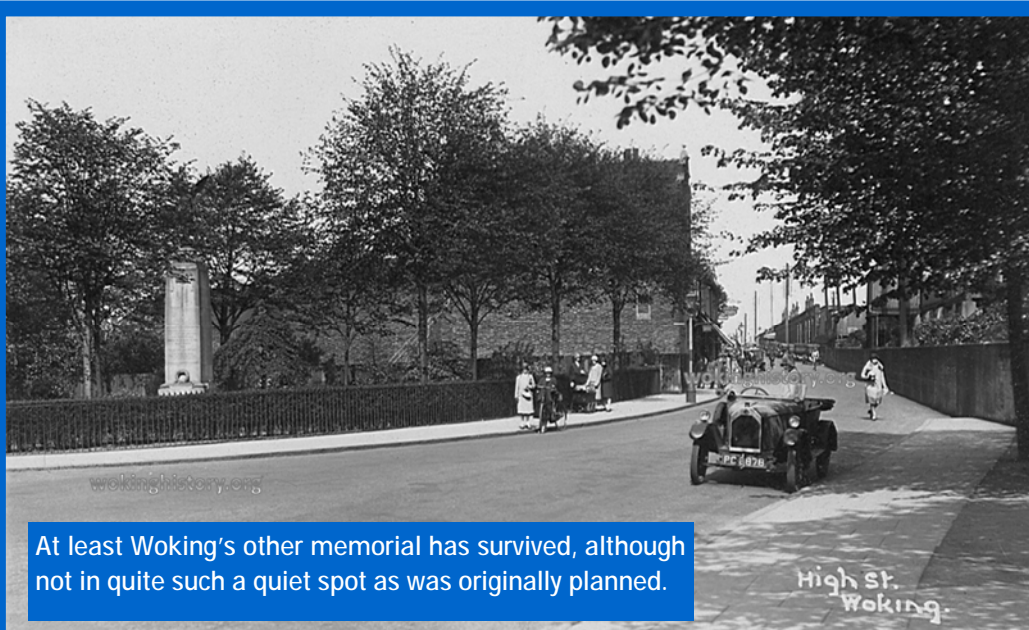
A committee was set up to organise the public

appeal and a target was set of £35,000 to pay not just for the war memorial, but also to pay for a new hospital for the town. The final design for the memorial was submitted to a competition judged by Sir Edwin Lutyens, by the celebrated sculptor Francis William Doyle-Jones, but unfortunately the target of £35,000 was never met and so the designs for the new hospital had to wait.

It was not until 1922 that the memorial was erected with a zinc canister placed underneath containing the records of the committee and a copy of the trust deed conveying the rest of the funds for the addition of a 'memorial ward' to

the hospital trustees. That box was dug up in 1975 when the War Memorial was moved from 'Sparrow Park' (at the junction of the High Street and Commercial Road) to what was then called 'Town Square', although whether that box has followed the memorial on its subsequent travels about that precinct I do not know.

The Memorial was to commemorate all those from Woking, although individual villages, businesses and other organisations also chose to erect memorials to their war dead, meaning that some are commemorated on two or even three memorials.



At least Woking's other memorial has survived, although not in quite such a quiet spot as was originally planned.



Pyrford, not then part of Woking UDC, also considered building a hospital. Within a few days of the signing of the Armistice a meeting was held in the iron room behind the Board School, with another meeting on the 9th December attended by up to sixty local residents.

It appears that things may have got quite heated with some feeling that a cottage hospital would meet 'an urgent need', whilst others proposed building a new village hall and club in memory 'of the great victory and of the heroic deeds of those who returned' as well as 'those who will never return and whose memory it is desired to perpetuate'.

In the end the idea of the hall won through, but the villagers also committed to erect memorial crosses at both Pyrford and Wisley churches, with a buildings sub-committee meeting for the first time on the 28th February 1919 at the home of Mr W Poate.

Mrs Hamilton agreed that she would ask her husband, the vicar, to use his 'good offices' with the Countess of Lovelace in order to secure a suitable site for the hall - and this he did. It was also decided that a hall suitable of accommodating about 200 people should be built, with a kitchen and separate club rooms for men and women – all at an estimated cost of between £2,000 and £2,500.

It must have been a shock, therefore, when the cheapest bid to construct the design submitted by the architect, E H Bullock, came in at £6,250 for a 'complete hall', or £4,900 for a part hall and club.

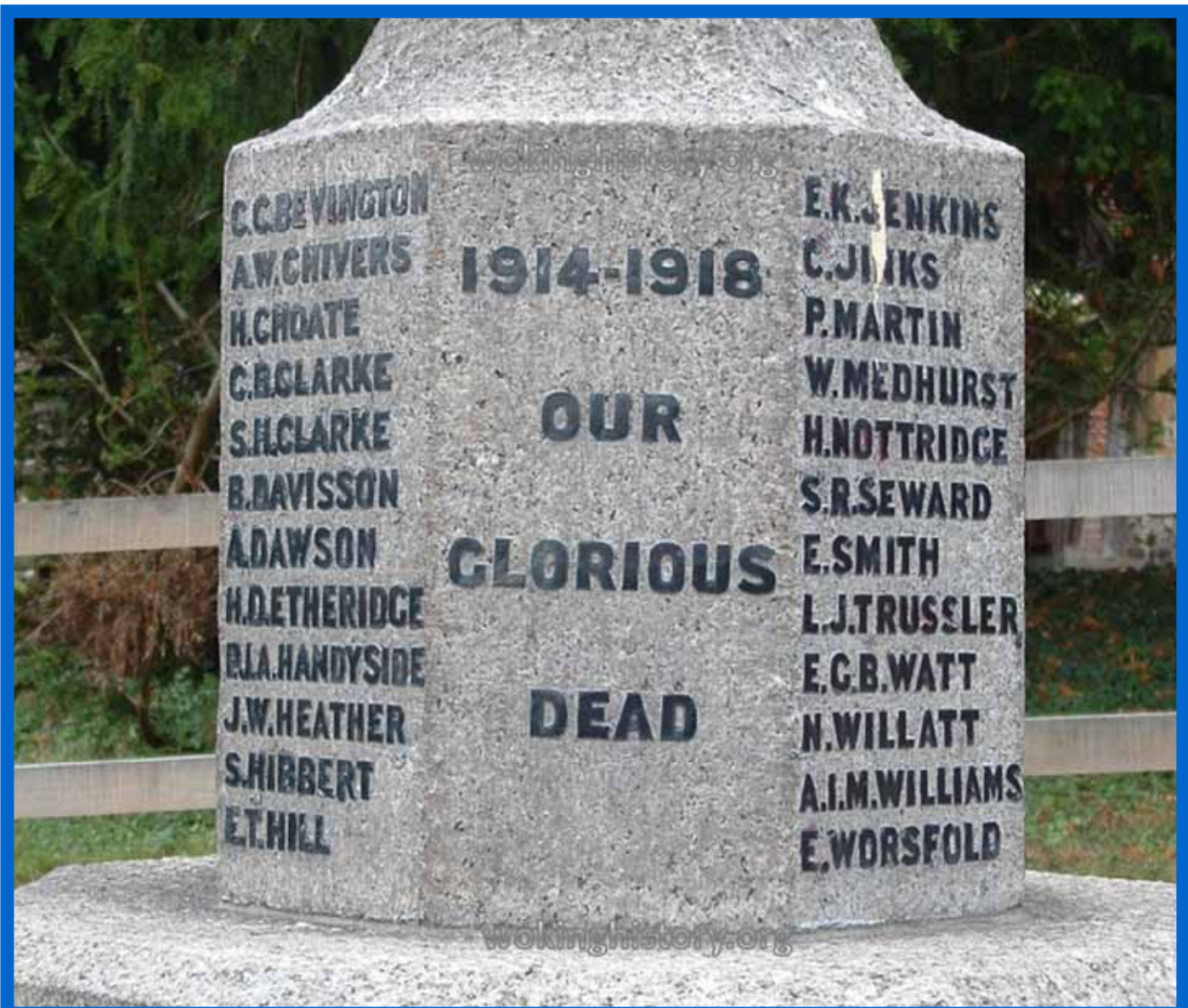
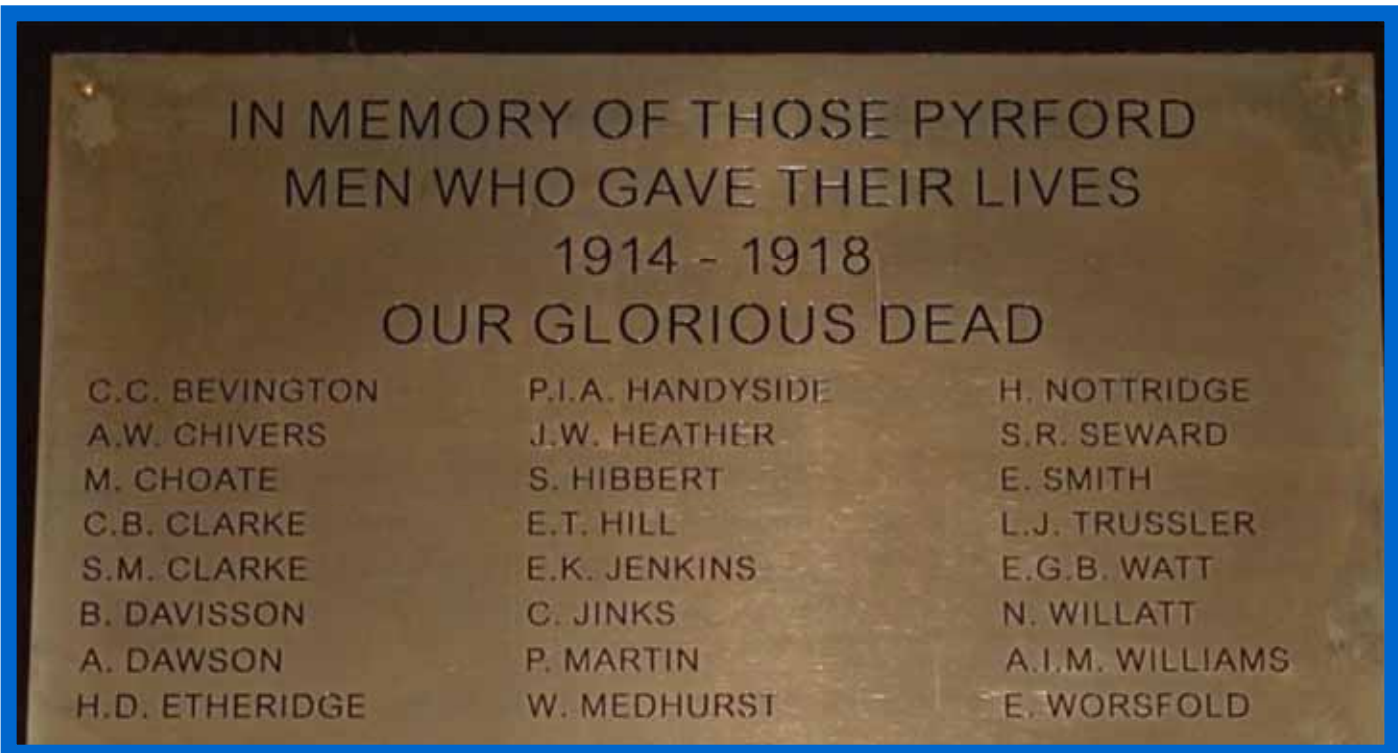
W G Tarrant, the builder, was then asked to come up with a plan 'for a bare hall' which 'on no account' should cost more than £2,500, but this appears to have caused some upset and over the next few months there were clashes over various designs and their cost.

It was not until the 6th November 1920 that the 'main committee' met and accepted a plan for a hall 60ft x 28ft costing £1,400 with a 'brick frontal annex' for an additional £1,000, although by the time the sub-committee placed the order for the hall, on the 24th June 1921, they insisted on paying 5% less on account of the 'drop in prices'!

Work must have gone ahead quite rapidly as the hall was officially opened on the 24th October that year - one of the first memorials to be erected in our area.

Before the opening more money was spent on fitting out the hall with 157 chairs (costing £30), 6 collapsible tables (£4.10s), 4 coal buckets (17 shillings), and a book case and a cupboard (£10), being the main items of expenditure.

By then the Rev Hamilton had used his influence once more to secure the land next to the hall for use by the local cricket team, although it was not until 1923 that the ground was properly levelled, with 'ghostly toiling in the moonlight' being noted by the vicar, with those 'dodging the roller duty' being suitably chastised!

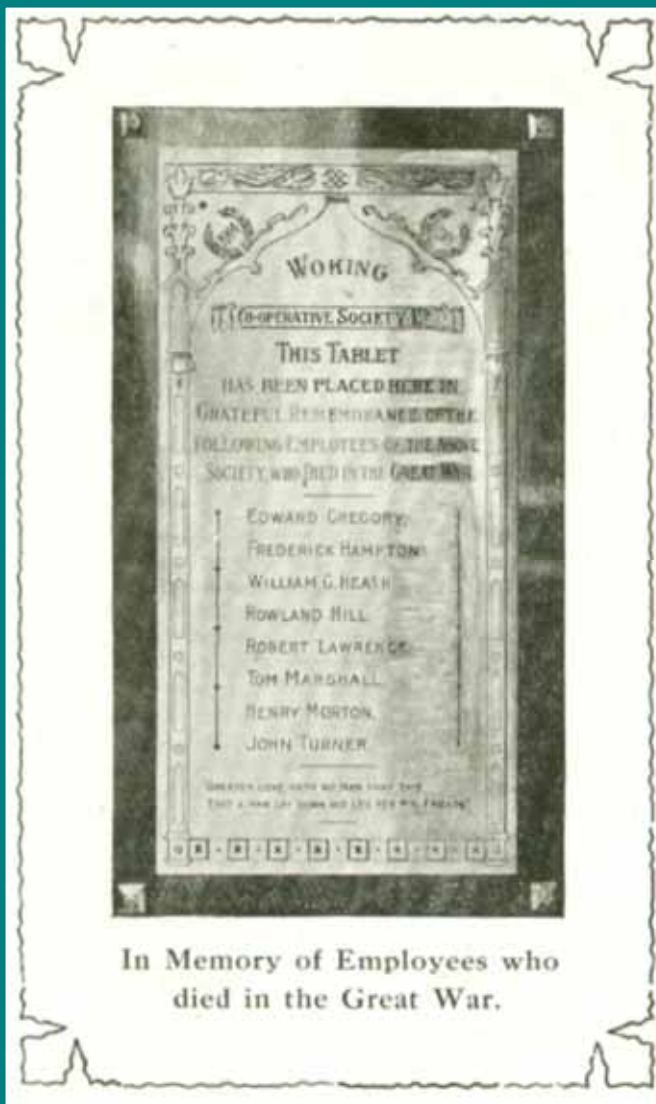


The names of the twenty-four 'Glorious Dead' of 1914-18 are recorded on both the plaque at the Memorial Hall and on the cross outside St Nicholas' Church.

Pyrford chose to build a village hall rather than a hospital – in hindsight probably the right decision.



THE MEN OF THE WOKING CO-OP HELP WIN THE WAR



Sadly the Victoria Cottage Hospital is not the only local war memorial to have been lost in the last hundred years as it appears that nobody knows what happened to the memorial erected by the Woking Co-operative Society to members of staff who gave the ultimate sacrifice during the Great War. It appears that the last time it was seen was in their department store on the corner of Church Street and Percy Street (Victoria Way) just before it was demolished.

A couple of months ago I wrote about the Co-operative Society opening shops as far away as Surbiton, building their 'Garden Suburb' Estate in Horsell, and extending their town centre branch in Church Street (where Toys R Us is today).

Whilst all that was going on the Society had bought, in April 1912, a small plot of land next to the railway arch in Maybury. At that time the former Oriental Institute buildings opposite were yet to be occupied by the Martinsyde's Aircraft works, and with the outbreak of war no building work could be carried out. But when peace came about in 1919 plans were drawn up for what would become the 5th branch of the Woking Co-operative Society, opened in March 1920.

It was joined just a few months later by their 6th branch in an old army hut that was erected on land in Church Lane at Pirbright 'within sight of Lord Pirbright's Memorial Hall', where a 'departmental store' was opened supplying boots, outfitting, a drapery and 'general supplies' as well as groceries and provisions.

The Pirbright store has long since disappeared, but the old Maybury shop still survives (just)!



GEORGE CRADDOCK'S SUPREME SACRIFICE

In 1926 Unwin Brothers at Old Woking (where Gresham Mill is today) published a book recording a hundred years of 'The Gresham Press'. In it there is a poignant section on the company during and immediately after the First World War.

'During the Great War (1914-1918) one hundred and twenty-seven of the staff, including Mr. N. G. Unwin, youngest son of the late Mr. George Unwin, served in this terrible and prolonged struggle. We are thankful to say that of this number only five of the London staff and one from Woking were called upon to make the supreme sacrifice. In December 1919 the Company held a big "Welcome Home" at Woking to celebrate the end of the war and the safe return of so many of their men. The whole staff, together with their wives and sweethearts, were entertained to a high tea in the Public Hall at Woking, and this was followed by a concert'.

The one 'Woking' man to die was in fact George Frederick Craddock, a resident of Tannery Lane in Send, who was born in Womersh. He died, aged 35, on the 9th October 1917 in Belgium whilst serving as a Private in the Machine Gun Corps, although he had previously been with the Royal West Surrey (Queens) Regiment. He left a wife and at least two children.



THE MISSING MEMORIAL OF MONUMENT HILL SCHOOL

Not all Memorials were carved in stone. On the 27th November 1919, at Monument Hill School, a 'watercolour' work by fourteen year old pupil, Brian Holloway, was unveiled in a ceremony by the local Vicar as a memorial to the 'Master and old boys of the school who died on active

service during the war'.

The memorial was apparently hung in the hall of the old school (which had been built in 1907) with the eighteen names – Sidney Moulding (assistant master); and old boys G Annetts, A A Bailey, L Coppard, F Francis, G

Hampton, H Horne, E Locke, A Lawrence, G Millard, L Neal, G Ormond, J Pallett, W Lenton, E Stubbington, W Taylor, L Vincent, and H Wheeler.

Again what happened to the memorial after the old junior school finally closed in 1982 I do not know.