

WOKING'S PARKS & RECREATION GROUNDS

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In the early 20th century the developer of Hillview Road and Constitution Hill cunningly persuaded Woking Council to acquire the low lying fields overlooked by his estate to be developed as a recreation ground. Whether he was quite so happy when part of the land was used as a municipal dump is not known, but by 1920 the refuse had sufficiently raised the land above the flood-plain for it to be landscaped as a 'job creation scheme' with about fifty local labourers digging ponds, and planting rhododendrons and other flowers in what would soon be officially known as 'Woking Park'. The Council meanwhile bought an extra four acres upstream from the Clerk to the Council (for £400) and developed a new dump there.

Meanwhile in Horsell, the council were busy extending the Wheatsheaf Recreation Ground – also as part of an unemployment relief scheme.

Since the mid 1860's part of Horsell Common, opposite the Wheatsheaf, had been used as an informal recreation ground with athletic meetings apparently attracting up to 1,200 people. A cricket pitch was soon also laid out and later Woking Football Club played some of their first games on the ground (even though at that time Horsell was not formally part of Woking). The Wheatsheaf pub no doubt did quite well out of the spectators who came to

view the various events, and provided changing facilities for the competitors.

The Council were not the only ones at that time proposing to improve the health and fitness of local residents, as in 1921 over one hundred Horsell residents helped to form the 'Horsell

In 1920 Woking Park was extended to cover part of a former dump.

Sports Ground Association' – each subscribing at least £10 to be issued with a 'Founder's Certificate and Rules'.



The ponds by the Hoe Stream were created in 1920 as an Unemployment Relief Scheme.



The Wheatsheaf Recreation Ground was enlarged in the early 1920's by Woking Council.

The object of the Association was 'for the purpose of acquiring suitable ground in Horsell and of providing thereon facilities for sports and games and the erection of a social club'. On the 18th May 1921 James Horace Stedman (formerly of The Shrubberies, then of The Croft, Church Hill) conveyed land at Horsell Moor to the trustees of the Association for £1,400. It had once been part of Old Malt Farm and before the war had grown hops for Stedman's Brewery (some of the plants still surviving in the hedgerow).

Amongst the original trustees of the Association were Alfred Brown, who lived at Horsell Grange, James Leslie Sweet (of Woodham Grange) and George Frederick Cotton, who lived in Waldens Park Road. The founder members included local organisations such as Horsell Cricket Club, who were then playing their matches on the field behind the Red Lion, but also clubs that would not directly benefit from the new sport ground, like the Horsell Cottage Gardeners Association and the Horsell Horticultural Society.

The Cricket Club, and the village's Football Club, were each granted three year tenancies of the ground – the footballers paying £16 per annum, whilst the cricket team paid just £10. Later a pavilion was built and in 1924 tennis courts added, with a putting green also being created by 1928.

But Horsell was not the only village with sporting ambitions in the early 1920's. Before the war the owners of West Hall and Broadoaks in West Byfleet (Messrs Stoop and Charrington) had offered to lease twelve acres of Poor Law Land in the village for use as a recreation ground. The Parish Council undertook to

maintain the ground once laid out, but the Charity Commissioners were not happy for the land to be rented on a yearly basis and asked if the 'capitalised sum for twenty-one years' (£630) could be paid, which fortunately the two gentlemen agreed to do.

The land was levelled ready to be sown with grass seed, but with the outbreak of the war it was agreed that vegetables should be grown instead (with the profit from the sale also going to the Byfleet United Charities). The following year a local farmer was allowed to use the land, but when in 1918 the Parish Council asked him to pay rent on the land he declared that he was not willing to do so unless he had a proper three-year lease!

So it was not until 1921 that the land became available for use as a Recreation Ground, with Mr Charrington at Broadoaks generously contributing £13 for the cost of the swings, whilst the Parish Council paid for the notice board (£5.15s.!) The council also employed the groundsman, who was paid £13.1s.6d. a month, with one week holiday a year and three days off in lieu of Bank Holidays – how times have changed!

The villagers of Horsell clubbed together to develop their own sports ground at Horsell Moor.



WOKING'S COUNCIL HOUSING



Whilst the proposed recreation ground in West Byfleet was used to grow crops for the war effort, in Old Woking turnips and potatoes were apparently being grown on six and a half acres of land that had been bought by Woking Council for housing.

The Housing of the Working Classes Act had allowed the building of 'council houses' as far back as 1890, but it took until July 1911 before Woking got around to forming a Housing Committee! They apparently looked at sixteen sites throughout the district before deciding on a site in Horsell where they hoped

to build about sixty homes similar to the 'garden suburb' scheme that the Woking Co-operative Society eventually constructed at Holyoak Crescent. Negotiations on the land dragged on, however, so the committee finally turned its attention to the land in Old Woking north of the High Street that they could more easily purchase (at a cost of £538) from the Clerk of the Council, Robert Mossop (who seems to have done rather well out of selling land to his employers)!

An outline scheme was agreed, but before work could start the Great War came along, and it soon became clear that more sites

would be required to build 'homes fit for heroes'. As well as the original St Peters Road/Corrie Road site, the site at Horsell (Kirby Road) was also finally secured along with nineteen and a half acres of land at Westfield and eight and a half acres bought from the Necropolis Company in The Broadway at Knaphill. In all some two-hundred houses were to be built, forty each at Horsell and Knaphill, seventy-eight at Westfield Road and forty-two at Old Woking.

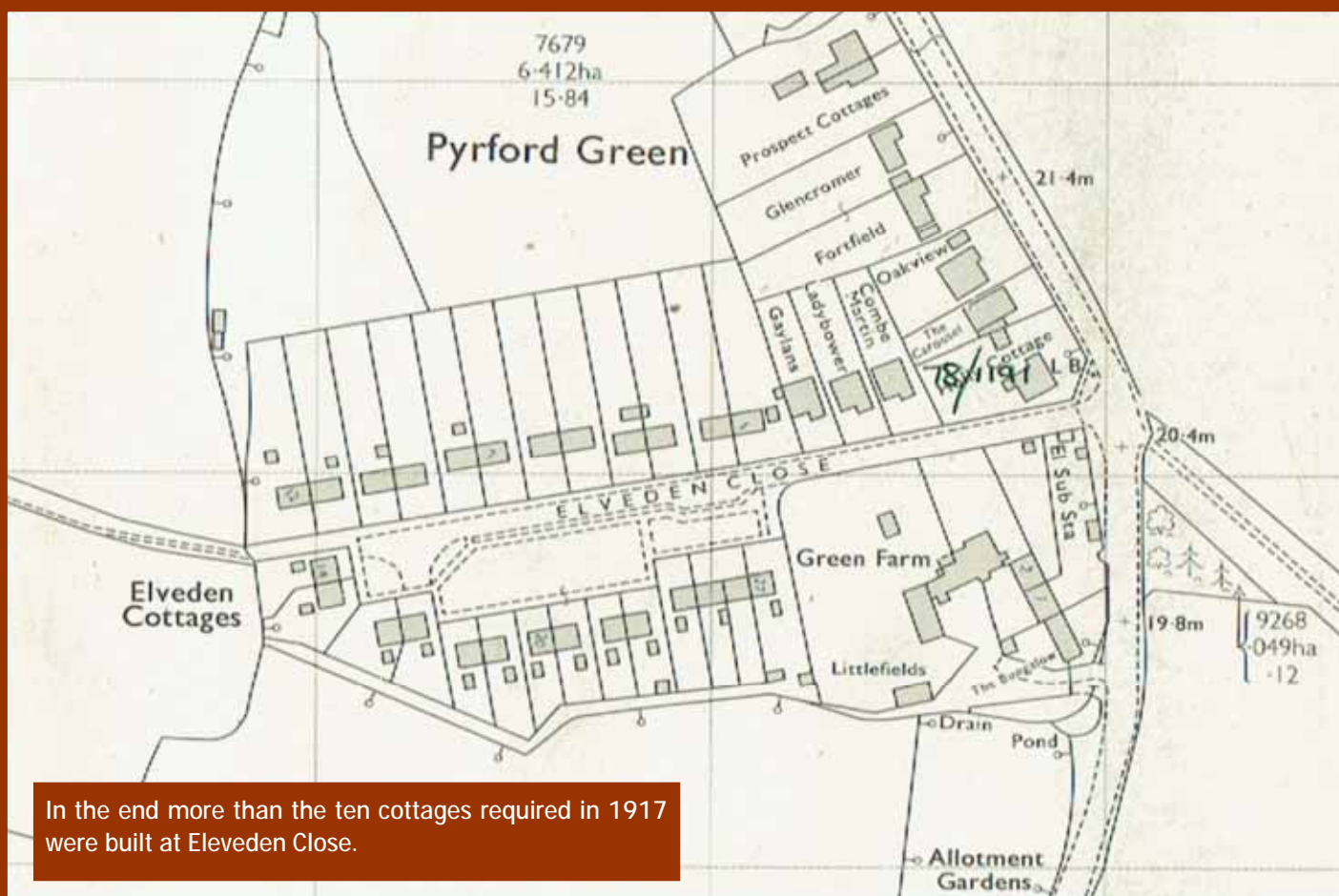
Work began in late October 1919 at Old Woking, with the first house ready for occupation by the following August. Meanwhile work had started in Westfield and



Horsell, but with penny pinching from the Ministry of Health, restrictions soon started to be placed upon the design of the homes and in April 1921, when only a few of the Knaphill houses were complete, the council were told that there was no more money available for council housing in our area.

In Byfleet, Chertsey Rural District Council faced a similar problem as it too was a 'non-priority area', but eventually land was acquired from Mrs Rutson of Byfleet Manor and houses could be built in Oyster Lane and Petersham Avenue.

Only at Pyrford did it appear that the council housing programme ran smoothly with Pyrford Parish Council suggesting in 1917 that ten cottages would be required in the village with the Rural District Council buying just over three acres at Pyrford Green from the Countess of Lovelace in March 1919 for £300 for the estate to be built.



WOKING'S NEW FIRE ENGINE



As well as highlighting a severe lack of affordable housing during the First World War, the council also noted a severe lack of equipment for the local fire brigade. Fortunately Zeppelins never came over Woking (although there was a scare in October 1915), but if they had dropped their bombs on the town, it is doubtful that the local

volunteer fire brigade could have coped. All they had was their horse-drawn steam-powered engine that had been bought in 1899, so when the new Captain of the brigade was appointed in 1917, he called for a new motor powered engine to be bought.

The council ordered one with a telescopic ladder from Dennis Brothers in Guildford, but

Woking's new Dennis fire engine, bought in 1919.

in typical Woking Fire Brigade style, it didn't arrive until September 1919 - three months after the old steam-engine 'collapsed' whilst pumping out the swimming pool. The old engine was mended and kept as standby, but it was clearly of little use and a few years later was sold for £50.