

# WOKING'S HOSPITALS & THE HOSPITAL CARNIVALS

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The original Victoria Cottage Hospital opened in September 1899.

Last month we looked at the auxiliary war hospitals set up in the Woking area during the First World War, and mentioned the moves to extend the town's hospital as part of the memorial to the servicemen who didn't return from that conflict.

But as you may recall the money raised could only just about pay for the war memorial itself, and only a couple of thousand pounds was left over to extend, rather than rebuild, the Victoria Cottage Hospital.

The old hospital, with just seven beds, had been opened on the 18th September 1899 at a cost of £4,156 raised locally to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. It replaced an equally tiny cottage hospital (the Woking, Horsell & Woodham Cottage Hospital) that had

The plans by Messrs W A Pite, Son & Fairweather, 'provided for an immediate addition of 14 extra beds for patients, and show how 16 more beds can be added at some future date'.



WHAT WE ARE STRIVING FOR.



The carnival float of the Woking Electric Supply Company was just one of many that made its way through the streets of the town in 1923.



operated from a converted house in Bath Road, Woking, since November 1893.

In fact only £1,356 had been raised at the time it was built, with £2,800 being borrowed on a mortgage - an endowment fund being established to raise the extra funds.

It wasn't long before it had to be extended and in 1901-3, as a memorial to the late Queen, the inhabitants again (supported by Woking Urban

District Council), raised more money to build a second floor onto the original single storey wings - providing an extra five beds to be used by the estimated two-hundred in-patients each year (Woking and Horsell having a population at that time of over 18,000).

There were some private beds as well, with a small operating theatre and out-patients department, and after 1909 a temporary children's ward of ten beds, but with an ever

growing population the need to extend it again after the First World War was obvious and by 1922 the money left over from the memorial was put to good use and the number of beds almost doubled to twenty-three.

That was still not enough as far as some people were concerned and so began the 'hospital carnivals' in order to raise more money for what had by then become the much loved 'Vic'.

The carnival procession appears to have started outside Barclays Bank on the corner of Chertsey Road and The Broadway.







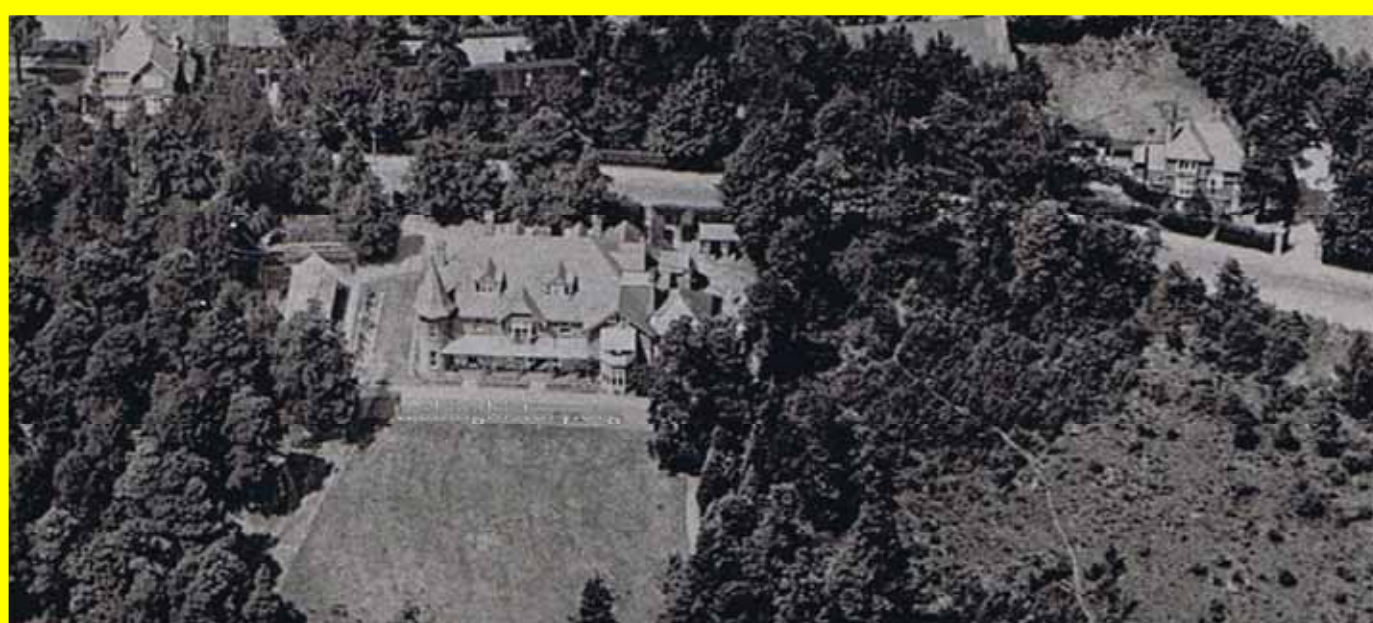
The Carnival procession from the balcony of the Council Offices in Commercial Road.

I am not sure how much was raised by the event in 1923, but according to the Kelly's Directory the following year 'the hospital was enlarged and rebuilt in 1924' so that it now had forty beds and three private wards! The plans also included a 'casualty ward with separate entrance; an anaesthetising and sterilising room; an X-ray room; and a bed lift to the upper floor' as well as 'ample accommodation for the nursing and domestic staff'.

Meanwhile another organisation was also raising money for the establishment of a Maternity Hospital in the town – the Woking Health Society. Again you may recall from earlier articles that during the First World War several houses were used by the military as offices, including a house in Oriental Road called Wynberg, home of the Royal Army Pay Corps. After the war the house was vacated and was acquired by the Woking Health Society for their 'Maternity Home and Nursing Association', where patients could be attended by the home's certified midwives or 'by their own medical practitioners from any district'.

The new home 'charmingly situated in a lovely large garden in a quiet locality about seven minutes from Woking Station and fully equipped with every modern convenience' was opened by the Duchess of Argyll, Princess Louisa, in May 1921 and was approved by the Ministry of Health to train midwives, as well as provide beds for expectant mothers.

Once home the new mothers of St Johns (at least), had access to 'The Parish Bag', which was looked after by Mrs Davis of St John's Road. For a shilling (sixpence of which is



returned after use), the mothers were allowed the use of the contents of the Maternity Bag for a month! Exactly what it included I do not know, but an appeal in the St Johns Parish Magazine later called for 'sheets, pillow-cases, baby clothes, etc, from any lady who has such to part

with, in order to replace such as have been worn out and become unsuitable for further use'.

It seems that the patients of Woking in the early 1920's were relatively well looked after.



# WOKING GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS



Whilst the Woking Health Society took over Wynberg for their Maternity Home, the Royal Army Pay Corps' huts, between Park Road and Onslow Crescent, were also reused, becoming the much needed home of the Woking Girls Grammar School.

Fifty years later one of the original pupils, Mina Axtell (nee Hopley), recalled that the school was 'less impressive than the ones pictured in "The Schoolgirls' Own"', consisting as it did of

two converted huts 'with a sort of bridge joining them together', but despite the accommodation the school thrived, helped no doubt by its enthusiastic staff and benefactors.

It opened in October 1923 with Miss Maris as the first head-mistress. In 1945 (as Mrs Kingswell) she recalled the early days of the school, noting 'the name of W R Skeet is inseparable from the school to those who were associated with its early years. It was largely

due to his energy, inspiration and ability to foresee and overcome difficulties that it came into existence', and she went on to note that 'he made us feel it was the beginning of a great adventure and that it could not fail to be crowned with success'.

Mina Axtell also recalled the school uniform with dread, in a way that might chime with some readers (young and old)!

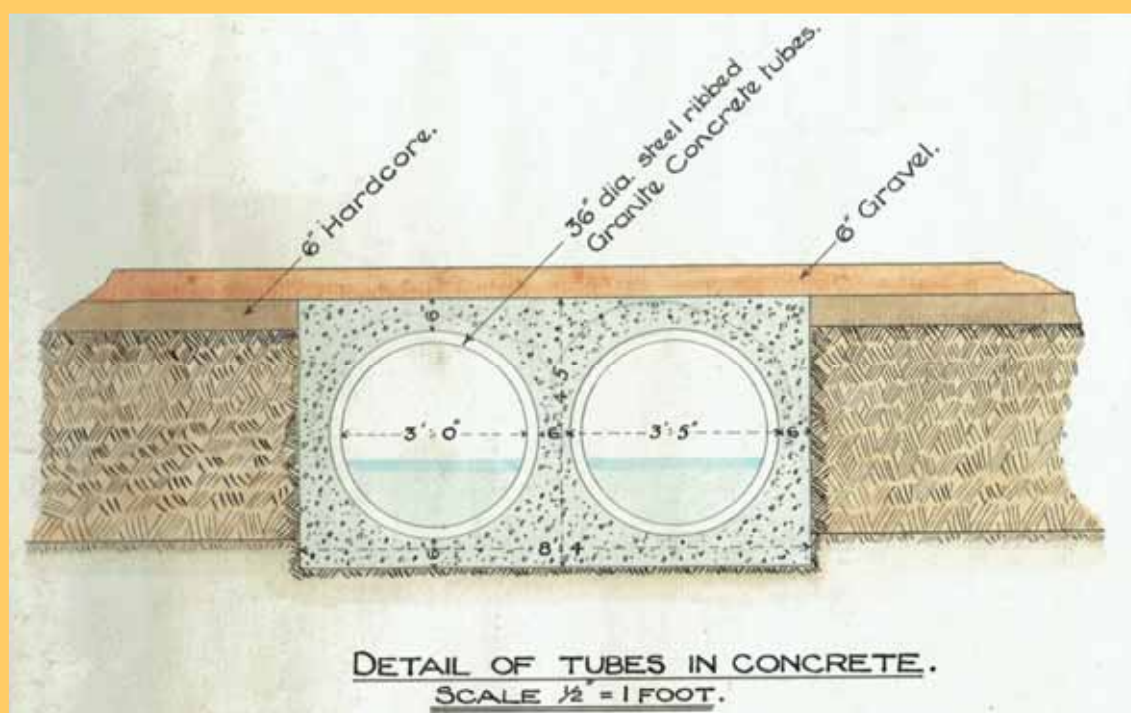
To take part in all these exciting "goings on" I should have to wear a UNIFORM. Now here I suffered a setback to my hopes. During the summer we had received a list of clothes and equipment needed to fit me out, the clothes to be bought from a shop in the Broadway, Woking. My mother, who was rather eccentric, anti-establishment and, above all, possessed of a desire to dress me differently from other children, chose to ignore or change some of the listed items. Thus, to my horror, I found myself on this exciting, opening day, standing outside the school clad approximately in the uniform required but NOT QUITE RIGHT! I was wearing the navy serge tunic, Danish pattern, but not bought at the shop. A superior serge had been purchased and the tunic had been "run-up" at home. The regulation Wincyette blouses had been inspected by my mother and found to be – "of poor quality" and "badly cut"! So my blouses were made of white delaine, so expensive that she could afford sufficient only for sleeves and the part that showed above the V-necked tunic, the rest was made of cheap cotton material! I was to suffer agonies when we changed for Gym. I knew all the girls would laugh at my funny blouse so I had to change in the lavatory and hope no one would see! Instead of the listed black, low heeled, lace-up shoes mine had buttoned, cloth tops, with – worse and worse – rather high heels. My hat (smooth black felt on list) was very fluffy velour which practically covered the green and white hat band and badge. As a final indignity the navy blue coat or raincoat, listed, was ignored by my dear mama completely and there I stood in an outer garment of black and white check! – oh dear!



The ex-army huts that became the Girls Grammar School in 1923.

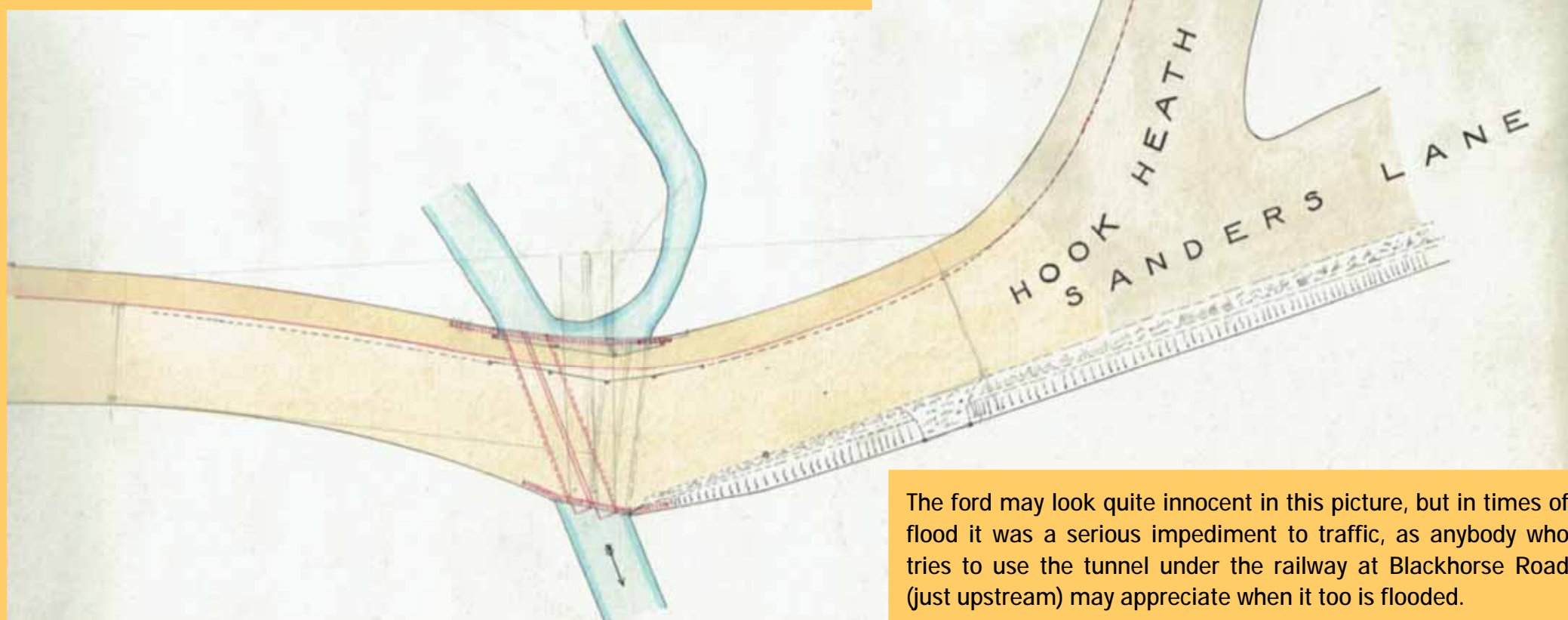


# SAUNDERS LANE WATERSPLASH



Last week we looked at the work carried out by the council to repair the bridge over the Basingstoke Canal at Chertsey Road, as well as 'unemployment relief' work at Hermitage Hill, The Triangle and Triggs Lane, but they were not the only road improvements carried out at this time by Woking Council.

What might at first seem a relatively minor improvement was the bridging (or more accurately 'culverting') of what is now generally known as the Coresbrook across Saunders Lane, below Hook Heath, where previously there was just a 'water splash'.



The ford may look quite innocent in this picture, but in times of flood it was a serious impediment to traffic, as anybody who tries to use the tunnel under the railway at Blackhorse Road (just upstream) may appreciate when it too is flooded.

