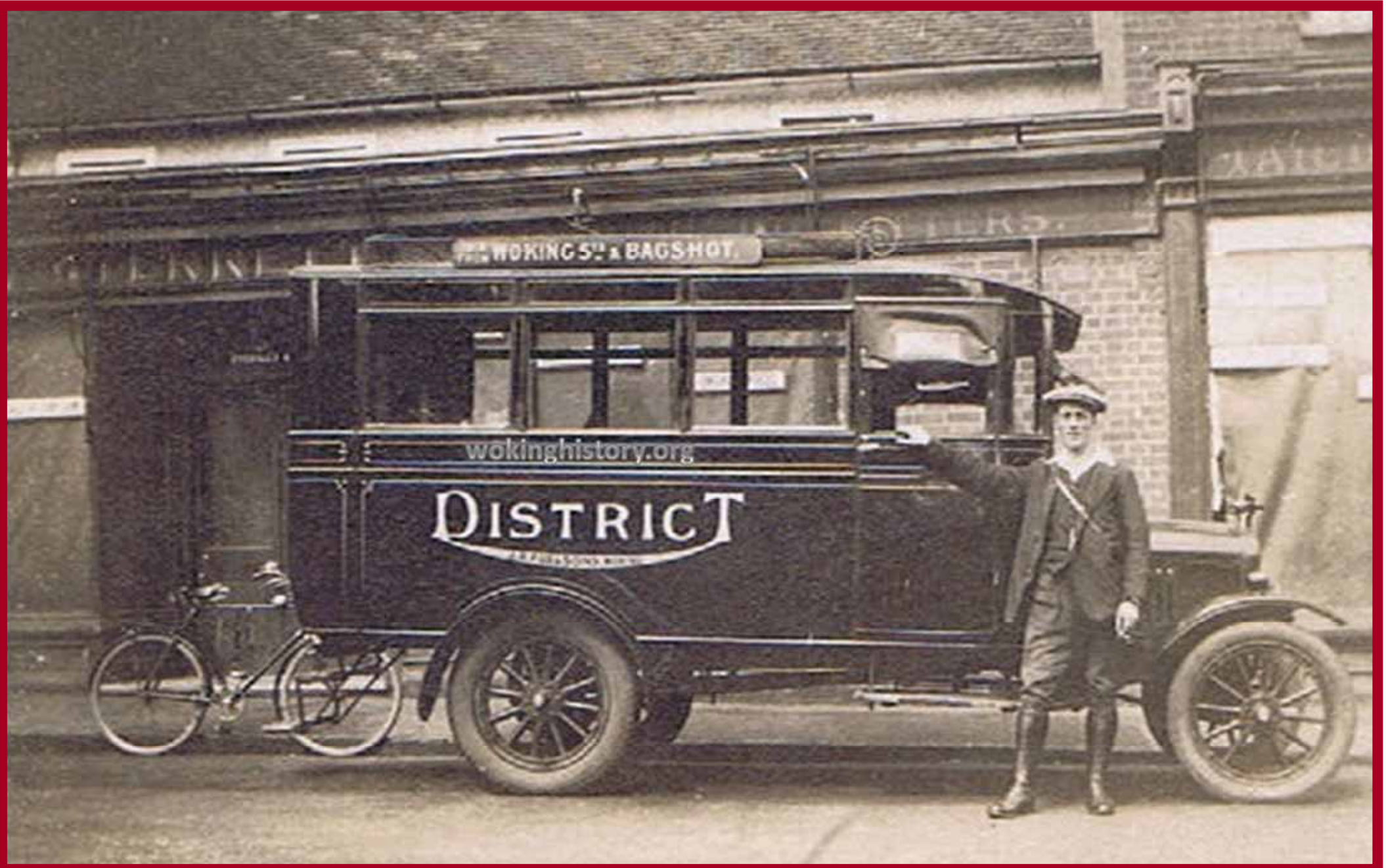


# THE WOKING & DISTRICT BUS COMPANY

Iain Wakeford 2016



During the First World War horse drawn buses were starting to be replaced by motorised ones, with Frank Mills of St Johns being one of the first of the motoring pioneers. But after the war he soon found himself facing rivals, amongst whom were Arthur Smith of Knaphill; Robert Bullman, Lily Leam and the Renshaw family of St Johns; William Eggleton of Walton Road; and Mr J R Fox and his sons, whose Woking & District Bus Service was to dominate most of the town's routes during the late 1920's.

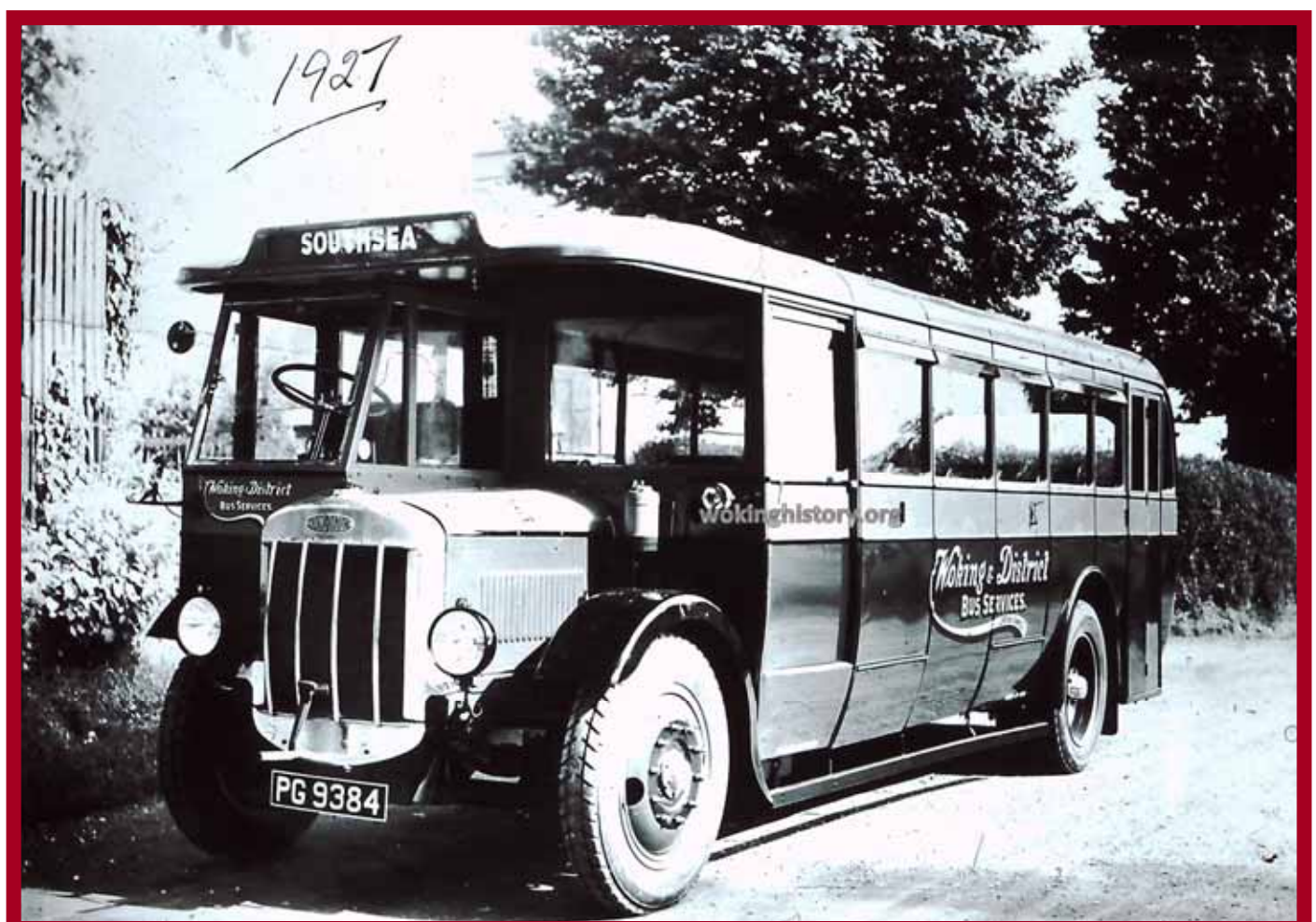
Like Frank Mills it appears that the Foxes cared little about keeping to timetables and regulations, much to the chagrin of Woking Council. They were not the only ones, however, and despite the council publishing timetables to assist the public to know exactly where and when a bus was due to travel a particular route, rivalry amongst the numerous private owners and larger companies (such as the Aldershot & District Traction Co Ltd), meant that the timetable was in fact more used by the bus operators to see when their competitors were due at a certain point, allowing the more unscrupulous to get in first and steal their passengers!

Again, as in the Great War, the routes from Woking to St John's and Knaphill were the most popular, with soldiers from Inkerman Barracks travelling to and from Woking Station. On one

occasion an observer noted no less than five buses continuously in view on Hermitage Road, only one of which was probably full. In one eight hour period they found twenty six buses on the route completely empty with thirty-nine others carrying five or less passengers!

During this period J R Fox also ran an

unlicensed charabanc between Brookwood Station and Pirbright Camp and according to Laurie James in his wonderful book on *Woking Buses, 1911-1939*, 'on an unspecified occasion one source recalled that allegedly Fox blocked St Johns Road, outside his garage, with buses to prevent other buses running to schedule'.





James Richard Fox had been a butcher (before running buses in Woking), a profession still carried on by Frank Renshaw, whose bus was apparently converted to carry the carcasses of meat on market days (hopefully being washed down before being put back into service)! It appears that Lily Leam was the manageress of Renshaw's butcher's shop in St Johns, before joining her boss on what was known as the

'Grey Bus Service'.

Arthur Smith's 'Blue Omnibus Service' was taken over by the Aldershot & District (green and cream) in 1926, whilst the Fox family's livery was apparently maroon, with a fleet of converted Model T Ford's provided with 'Perfecta bodies' by F W Coulter of Woking. The bus stops of Woking must have been a colourful sight in the late 1920's and early 30's.

All these numerous little (and not-so-little) operators meant that the service (when it was running properly) was much better than it is today, with one lady in Send recalling that she regularly returned home from Woking for lunch and was able to get back to work within the hour.

In 1930, however, the Road Traffic Act meant that buses were to be regulated much more, and like Arthur Smith before them, the Fox family decided to sell to the Aldershot & District, with Mr Fox senior retiring and his sons (some of whom briefly drove for A&D) eventually switching trade and setting up the Woking & District Driving School.

## GREY BUS SERVICE.

KNAPHILL—ST. JOHN'S—WOKING. *Hourly service each way, weekdays and Sundays. ALTERNATIVE ROUTES—via Goldsworth Road or via Star Hill and Hook Heath.*  
 WOKING—FOX CORNER via Star Hill, Fishers' Hill, Worplesdon Golf Club and Brookwood Cemetery

	WEEKDAYS.										SUNDAYS.									
	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.
Woking ... ..	8 42	9 35	10 40	11 45	12 50	1 45	3 15	4 35	5 35	6 30	7 20	8 40	9 45	10 35	12 20	1 45	3 05	4 40	5 40	6 45
Star Hill ... ..	8 47	9 40	10 45	11 50	12 55	1 50	3 20	4 40	5 40	6 35	7 25	8 45	9 50	10 40	12 25	1 50	3 10	4 45	5 45	6 50
Fisher's Hill ... ..	9 09	45	10 50	11 55	1 01	5 53	2 54	4 55	4 55	4 50	7 30	8 50	9 55	10 45	12 30	1 55	3 15	4 50	5 50	6 55
Worplesdon G.C. ... ..	9 49	48	10 53	11 58	1 31	5 83	2 84	4 85	4 85	4 80	7 33	8 53	9 58	10 48	12 35	1 58	3 18	4 53	5 53	6 58
Brookwood C. ... ..	9 69	50	10 55	12 01	5 2	0 3	30 4	50 5	50	—	7 35	—	10 0	10 50	12 40	2 03	1 54	5 5	6 25	8 55
Fox Inn ... ..	9 10	9 55	11 0	12 5	1 10	2 5	3 35	4 55	5 5	—	7 40	—	10 5	10 55	12 50	2 5	—	4 10	5 6	30 9

Buses marked \* meet St. John's Bus at Star Hill.

WOKING—FOX CORNER and Return, via Mayford, Saunderson's Lane and Perry Hill.

DEPART.	WEEKDAYS.										SUNDAYS.									
	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	A.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.	P.M.
Woking Station ... ..	8 50	9 40	10 50	12 22	1 18	2 45	4 10	5 06	15 7	0 8	0 3	10 5	30 7	30 9	0	—	—	—	—	—
Egley Cross-roads ... ..	8 55	9 43	10 53	12 25	1 22	2 48	4 14	5 06	15 7	0 8	0 3	10 5	30 7	30 9	0	—	—	—	—	—
Mayford Post Office ... ..	8 58	9 48	10 58	12 30	1 28	2 54	4 20	5 06	15 7	0 8	0 3	10 5	30 7	30 9	0	—	—	—	—	—
Saunders' Lane ... ..	9 0	9 52	11 2	12 35	1 34	2 58	4 24	5 06	15 7	0 8	0 3	10 5	30 7	30 9	0	—	—	—	—	—
Crastock ... ..	9 3	9 54	11 6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bridley ... ..	9 5	9 55	11 10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Worplesdon Hill ... ..	—	—	—	—	—	12 40	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Brookwood Cemetery ... ..	—	—	—	—	—	12 42	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fox Corner ... ..	9 8	10 0	11 12	12 46	1 50	3 15	4 30	5 06	15 7	0 8	0 3	10 5	30 7	30 9	0	—	—	—	—	—
Goose Rye ... ..	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Star Hill ... ..	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Perry Hill ... ..	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

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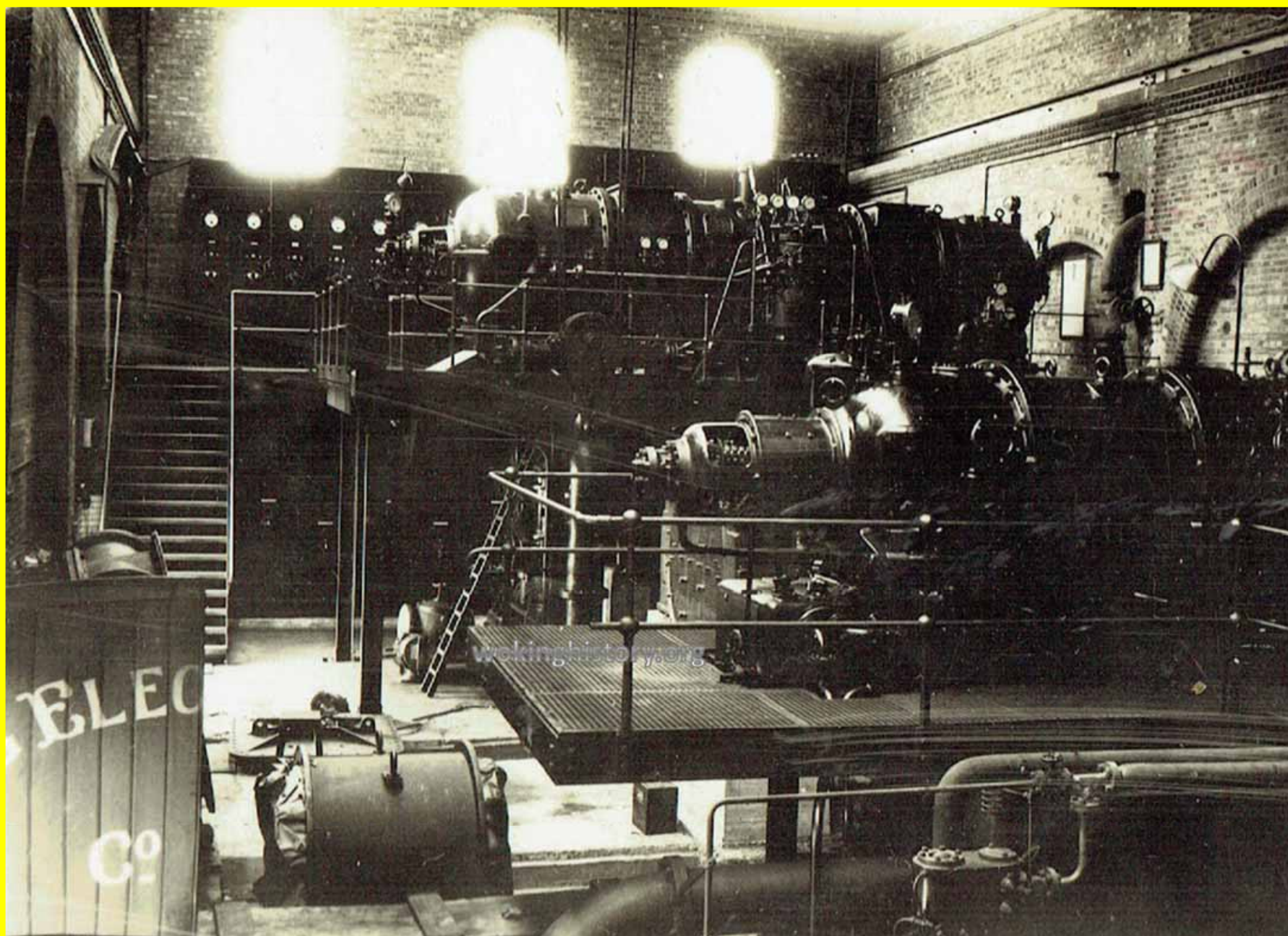
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# WOKING STREET LIGHTS - GOING BACK TO THE FUTURE



In the 1890's, when Woking Council decided to light the streets, the contract had been awarded to the Woking Electric Supply Company (WESCO), but the service in those days was so unreliable that when the contract came up for renewal in the autumn of 1900, the local authority decided to switch to the gas company instead. Some of the electric standards could have been converted, but the majority of 'new' gas lamps were in fact second-hand ones, purchased from Battersea Borough Council. In 1902, just as almost every other town in the country was changing from gas to electric, Woking was going from electric to gas!

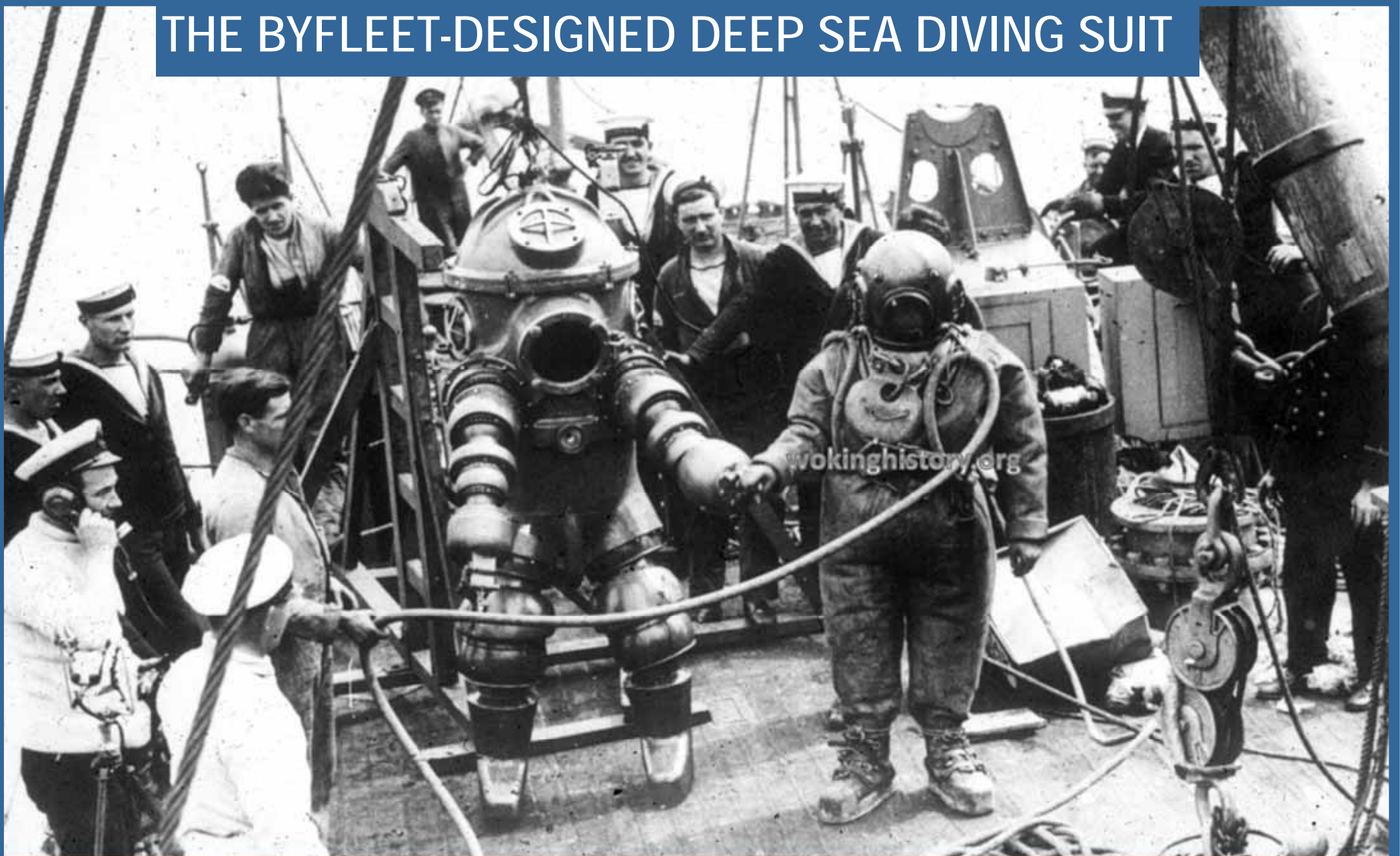
During the First World War the gas company experienced many problems with inferior quality coal, men away on service, and a partial black-out resulting in vehicles colliding and damaging the lamp standards, and in the late 1920's coal-strikes and local vandalism forced the council to look once more at the lighting of Woking's streets.

By then new equipment at the WESCO works in North Road meant their supply was much more reliable so that when in May 1931 the council conducted tests (with both gas and electric lamps set up in four key locations), WESCO came out clear winners. When it came to lighting the streets, Woking had in effect gone 'back to the future'!



Sadly the new electric lamp standards in the 1930's were not as ornate as the old gas lamps, shown here outside William Ruglys' store in Knaphill just prior to the First World War.

## THE BYFLEET-DESIGNED DEEP SEA DIVING SUIT



In 1930 in a water tank at W G Tarrant's builder's yard in Byfleet, Joseph Salim Peress demonstrated his new 'Tritonia' atmospheric diving suit.

Peress started working for Tarrant's in 1918, but since growing up in the Middle East he had always had an interest in diving, and with Tarrant's encouragement he developed his ideas for a suit that would not only be dry and flexible, but could also work under immense pressure – in other words at great depth. His first attempt was machined from solid stainless steel, but was too heavy for anyone to work in, so he turned to cast magnesium alloy instead and used 'trapped oil' in the joints to make them move more smoothly.

After the Byfleet trials Peress and his assistant Jim Jarret, went on to demonstrate the suit in Loch Ness where Jarret dived to a depth of over 400ft. But that was nothing compared to when Jim explored the wreck of the Lusitania at a depth of over 1,000ft (in 1935).

Sadly, despite demonstrating the great advantages the new suit could bring, the Royal Navy were not interested in Peress' work, and it wasn't until the advent of North Sea Oil exploration in the 1960's and 70's that his ideas were once again examined and the 'JIM Suit' (in honour of Jarret) was re-invented.

Peress' original suit was a star exhibit in the Science Museum in London, where for over forty years it was on display - although now it appears that the suit has been put into storage. Perhaps the local museum should try to borrow it and put it on display alongside their other examples of local pioneering engineering. Concorde may be king of the skies, but Joseph Peress' suit was the sultan of the seas.