

# THE CONDEMNED COTTAGES OF WOKING

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Numbers 5-7 Church Street date from the mid 1930's, replacing the old cottages in this photograph (condemned by the council in 1932).



Pubd. by G. S. Addison, Woking. a 911/297

Woking Village

Ever since it was granted Conservation Area status in the late 1970's it seems that Woking Council have gone out of their way to destroy the 'old' bit of Old Woking. The area was established following outrage when the shops and cottages on the northern side of the High Street were demolished and replaced by Townsend Cottages (the properties on either side of the Golden House take-away). Since then Riverside Gardens, The Cloisters, Manor Mews and now the new houses and apartments replacing the ancient inn – The White Hart – have continued the destruction. The developers for the latter even had the cheek to claim that their houses were 'in keeping' with the houses of the Conservation Area because they were similar in design to the other modern developments! Only Church Street, it seems, remains as it was in ancient times.

Well, actually, even here the scene has changed and some of the 'old' houses in the street are not really as old as people think.

Back in 1932 the Public Health Committee of Woking Urban District Council appear to have started what the present authority seem hell-bent on continuing, by condemning numbers 5, 6 & 7 Church Street as well as what was then known as 1-4 Wylea Cottages. Four days after Christmas that year the owners of the cottages

were given notice to attend the next meeting of the committee when consideration would be given to 'the condition of the houses and their future with a view to recommending the council issue a demolition order'. What a lovely late Christmas present that must have been!

The next meeting was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1933 when it was reported that the owner of Wylea Cottages had 'agreed to adopt a suggestion with regard to the occupation of one of the

vacant cottages' but that the owner of the other cottages was now 'taking steps to engage a surveyor to confer with the Sanitary Inspector with regards to repairs to be carried out', so the decision was adjourned to another meeting.

Before the Public Health Committee could next meet, however, Miss E J Webber submitted plans to the Town Planning Committee on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1933 for a 'row of three cottages on Eastern side of Church Street, Old Woking'





Fortunately the four Wylea Cottages were saved from the scrapheap and converted into two cottages, now known as Wey & Lea Cottages.



which was duly approved, and so the old cottages (5-7 pictured here) were demolished.

Of course that was not the end of the story as later the old school buildings on the right (once possibly the village almshouses before the school was established in 1848) were also pulled down to enlarge the school playground (which later still was turned into a car park), but fortunately the owner of Wylea Cottages was not prepared to see all of Old Woking's history

destroyed, and in July 1933 Mr Garrod (who later I believe went on to develop the Greenmeads Estate in Westfield) obtained permission to turn the four derelict Wylea Cottages into two dwellings, so preserving one of the area's oldest domestic buildings.

Meanwhile in Horsell another ancient cottage – Ebenezer Cottage – didn't have such a lucky escape despite the council initially refusing a request from the owner for a 'demolition order'

in February 1932. The owner claimed it was uninhabitable, but the Public Health Committee were of the opinion that it 'could be made fit for human habitation at a reasonable cost' and so the Clerk was 'instructed to inform the owner accordingly'. Unfortunately, in the end, the owner got his way and the house later succumbed to the developers – yet another piece of Woking's ancient history allowed (or encouraged) to be destroyed in the name of 'progress'.



Ebenezer Cottage, between South Road and Thornash Road in Horsell, was initially saved from demolition in 1933, but was later replaced by the bungalow now on the site.



# MORE HOUSES FOR HORSELL

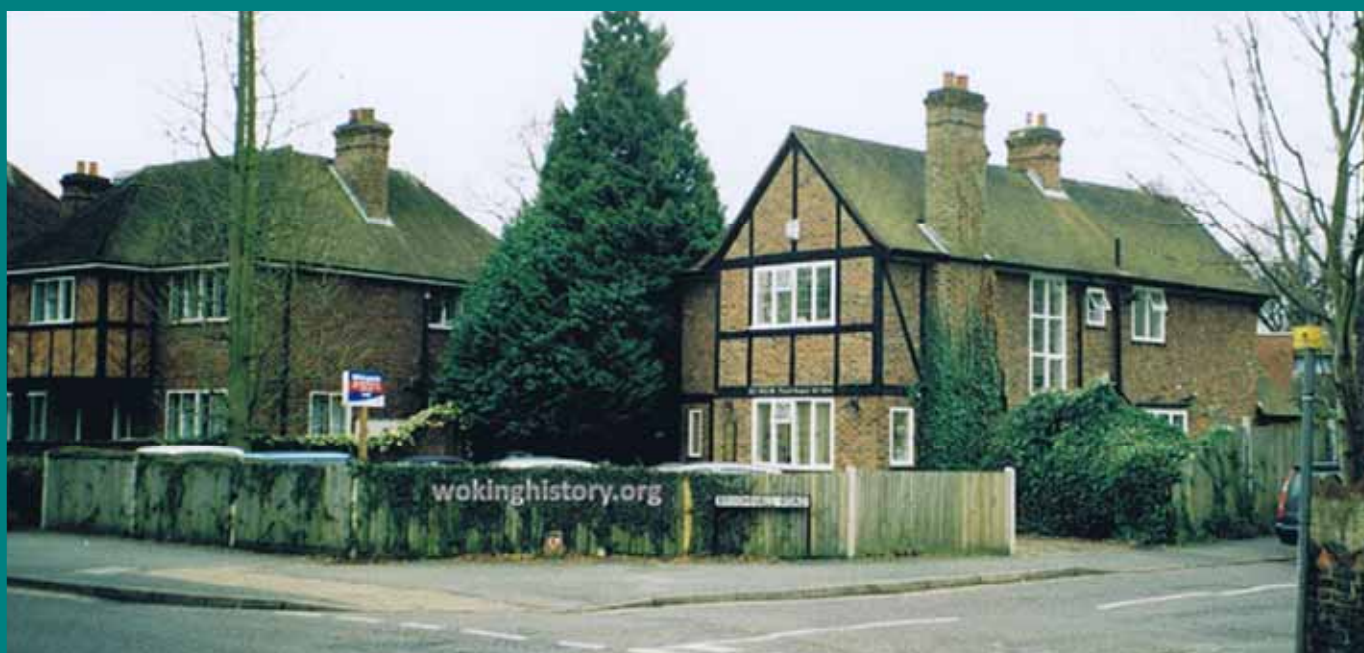
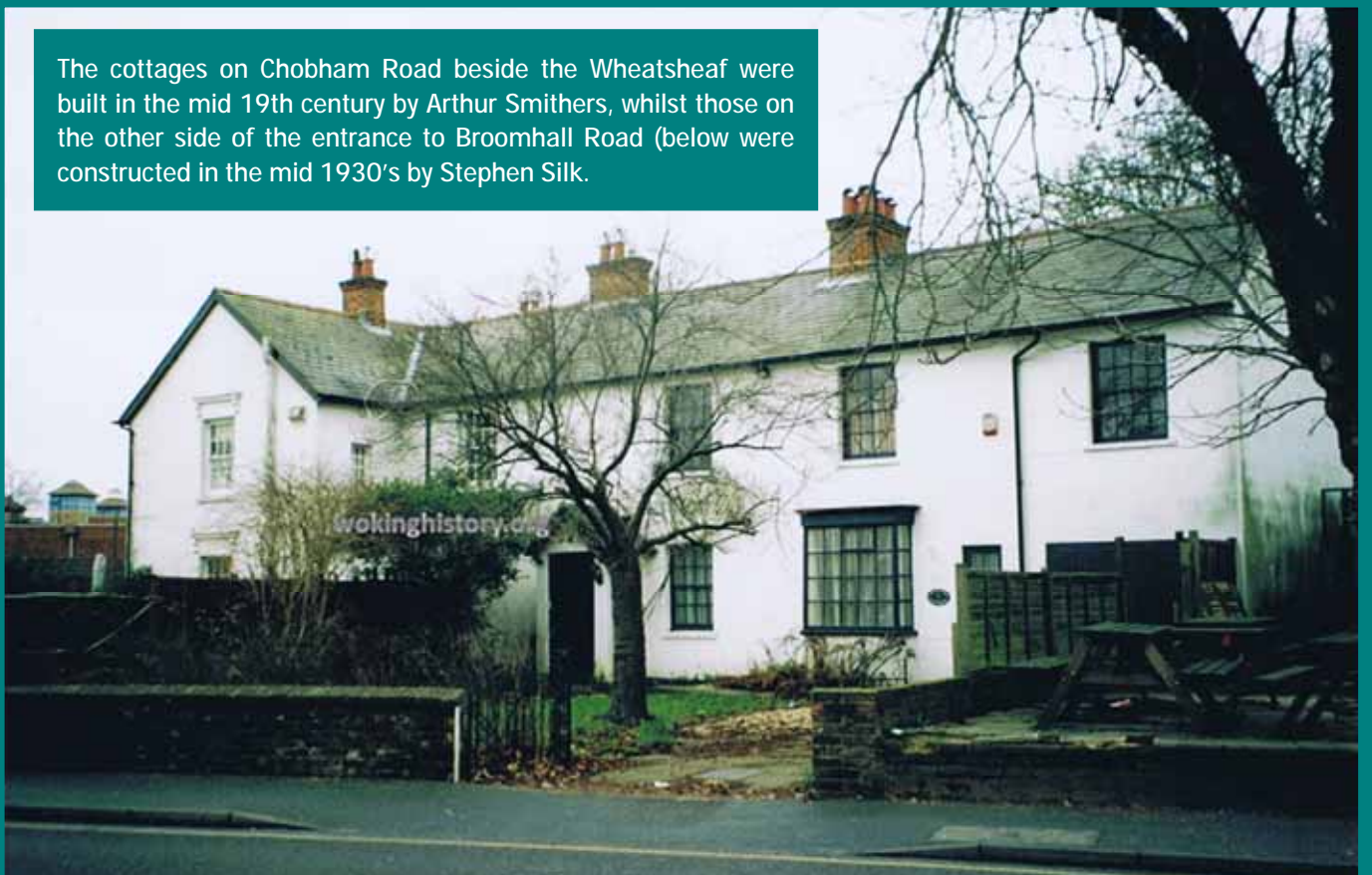


Whilst Ebenezer Cottage had been preserved for a while by Woking Council, other developments in the village meant that soon Horsell was to change out of all recognition.

The village had originally been quite a scattered community with numerous little farms and nurseries spread all over the district with just a few small clusters of old properties around Church Hill and Horsell Birch (where two of Horsell's Conservation Areas are now situated).

Since the opening of the railway to Woking Common in the 1830's, and more especially since the development of the new town of Woking on that common from the 1860's onwards, the land-owners of Horsell had discovered that money could be made from selling off odd fields for development – such as Walden's Farm and Abbey Farm in the

The cottages on Chobham Road beside the Wheatsheaf were built in the mid 19th century by Arthur Smithers, whilst those on the other side of the entrance to Broomhall Road (below) were constructed in the mid 1930's by Stephen Silk.

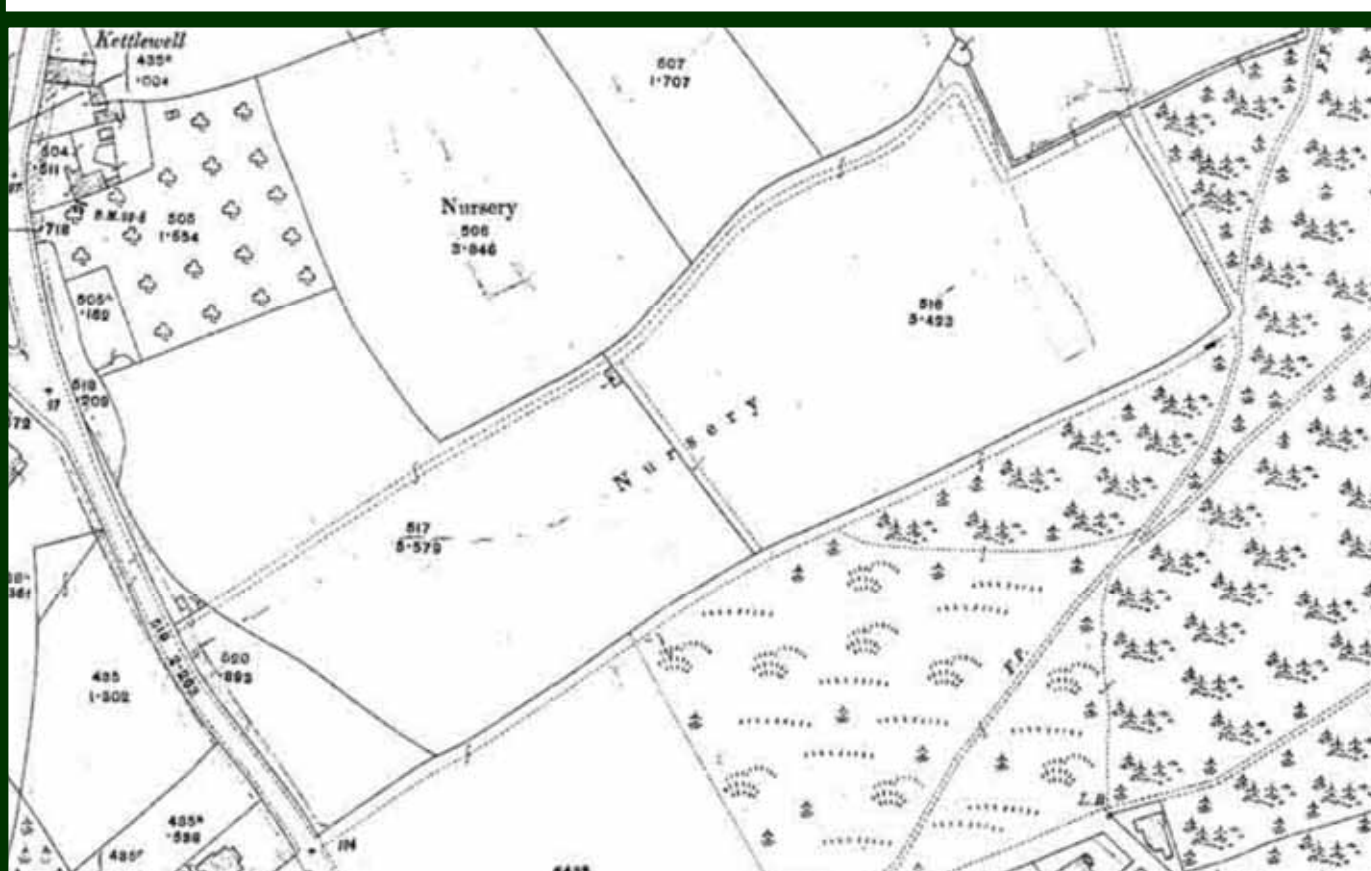
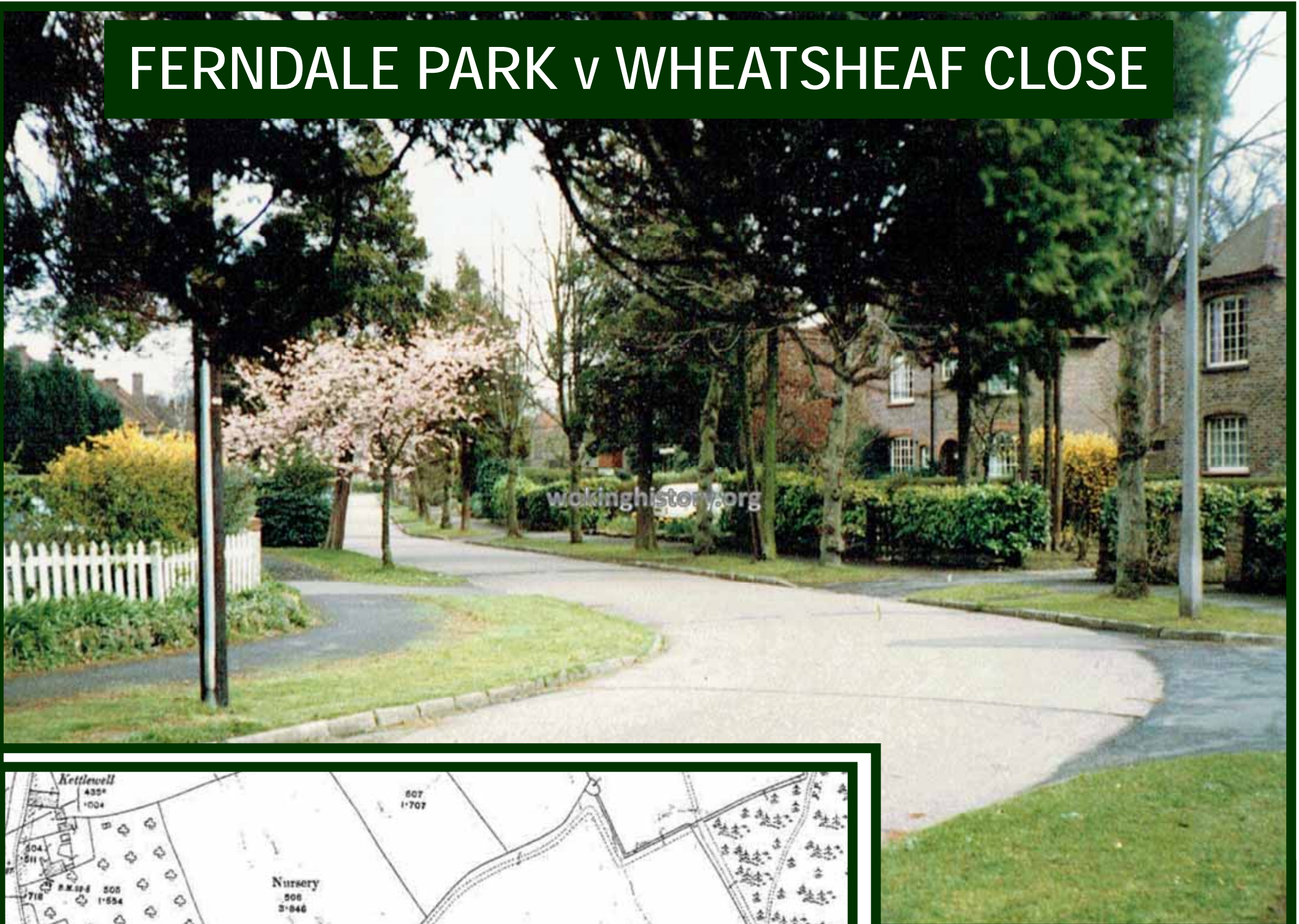


1890's; the 'Church Hill Estate' of Horsell Rise and its associated side roads in the early 20th century, and even the Woking Co-operative Society's estate at Holyoak Avenue in 1913.

Several local builders quickly established themselves such as Arthur Smithers (who built The Wheatsheaf and the cottages on the corner with Broomhall Road) and Stephen Silk who in the 1920's and 30's had what is still sometimes referred to as 'Silk's Yard' on Church Hill and built several properties in the Bullbeggars Lane area, renovating Birch Farm and constructing Court Cottage in the grounds for his son Arthur Cecil Silk.



# FERNDALE PARK v WHEATSHEAF CLOSE



Another builder in Horsell, who we came across a couple of weeks ago in the article on St Martha's Avenue at Westfield, was Evelyn Ricks, who in the early 1930's set out plans to develop the 'Ferndale Park Estate' on former nursery grounds by Wheatsheaf Recreation Ground. Previous notes in the council minutes had referred to it as the 'Wheatsheaf Common Estate', but I suspect that Mr Ricks thought 'Ferndale Park' sounded better.

The name obviously came from Ferndale Road on the other side of the 'rec' (the road, together with The Grove being developed in the mid to late 1890's on land once belonging to Cobbett's Nursery), but for some reason the council didn't like the name Mr Ricks had suggested and on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 1932 requested that 'Mr Ricks be asked to select another name'! This of course he did and a couple of weeks later the name Wheatsheaf Close was agreed by the council.

