

LIGHTS, ROUNDABOUTS & CIRCUSES

(ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR FOR WOKING'S ROAD USERS IN THE EARLY 1930's)

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The minutes of Woking Urban District Council in the early 1930's, particularly in the Highways Department, are full of references to schemes to install traffic lights or create roundabouts – in those days normally referred to as 'traffic circuses'.

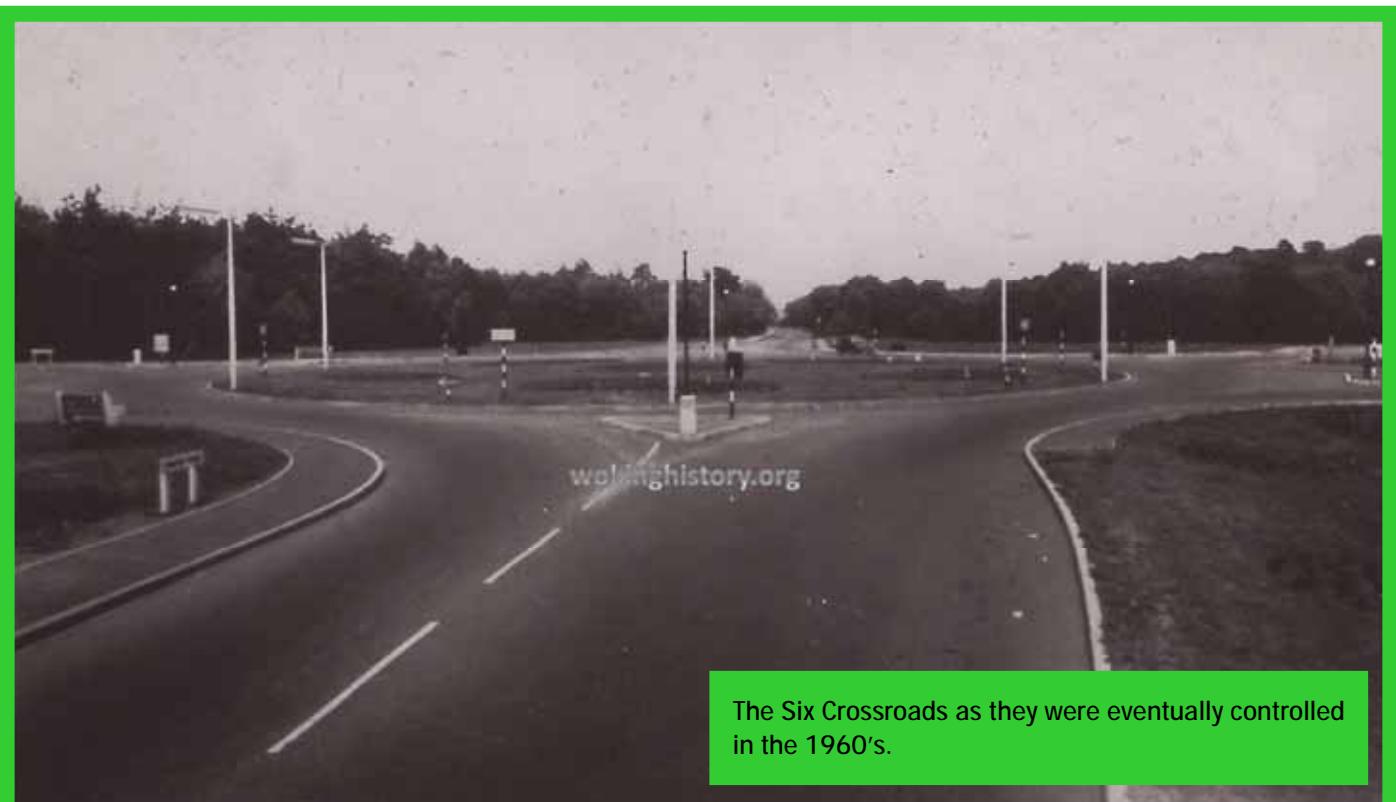
In April 1931 the Clerk of Woking Council was 'directed to negotiate with the Solicitors to the Lord of the Manor' in the matter of a 'traffic circus' for the Six Cross Ways on Horsell Common, after the Highways Committee agreed amended drawings for the scheme. By October 1932, however, they were applying to the Ministry of Transport and Surrey County Council for finance towards the installation of 'automatic traffic signals' at the junction, although the following March the Minister replied that whilst he agreed to the provision of lights at Brookwood Crossroads and the intersection of Chobham Road and Commercial Road, he refused the council's schemes for lights on Horsell Common.

The council went back to the drawing board and in June 1933 the Engineer and Surveyor showed two plans to the Highways Committee 'for minimising the danger at Six Crossways' –

a). signals for four road ends (and diverting two unclassified roads into classified roads) at an estimated cost of £1,598; and b). 'diverting two unclassified roads as in (a), but with a circus in lieu of traffic signals at an estimated cost of £1,837.15s'. In view of the Minister's opposition to traffic light, the committee

The Six Crossroads at a time when the traffic was not quite so busy as the early 1930's (let alone today).

decided to go ahead with the 'circus' plan, provided that the County Council sanctioned a grant of 20% and the Ministry of Transport 60% towards the scheme.

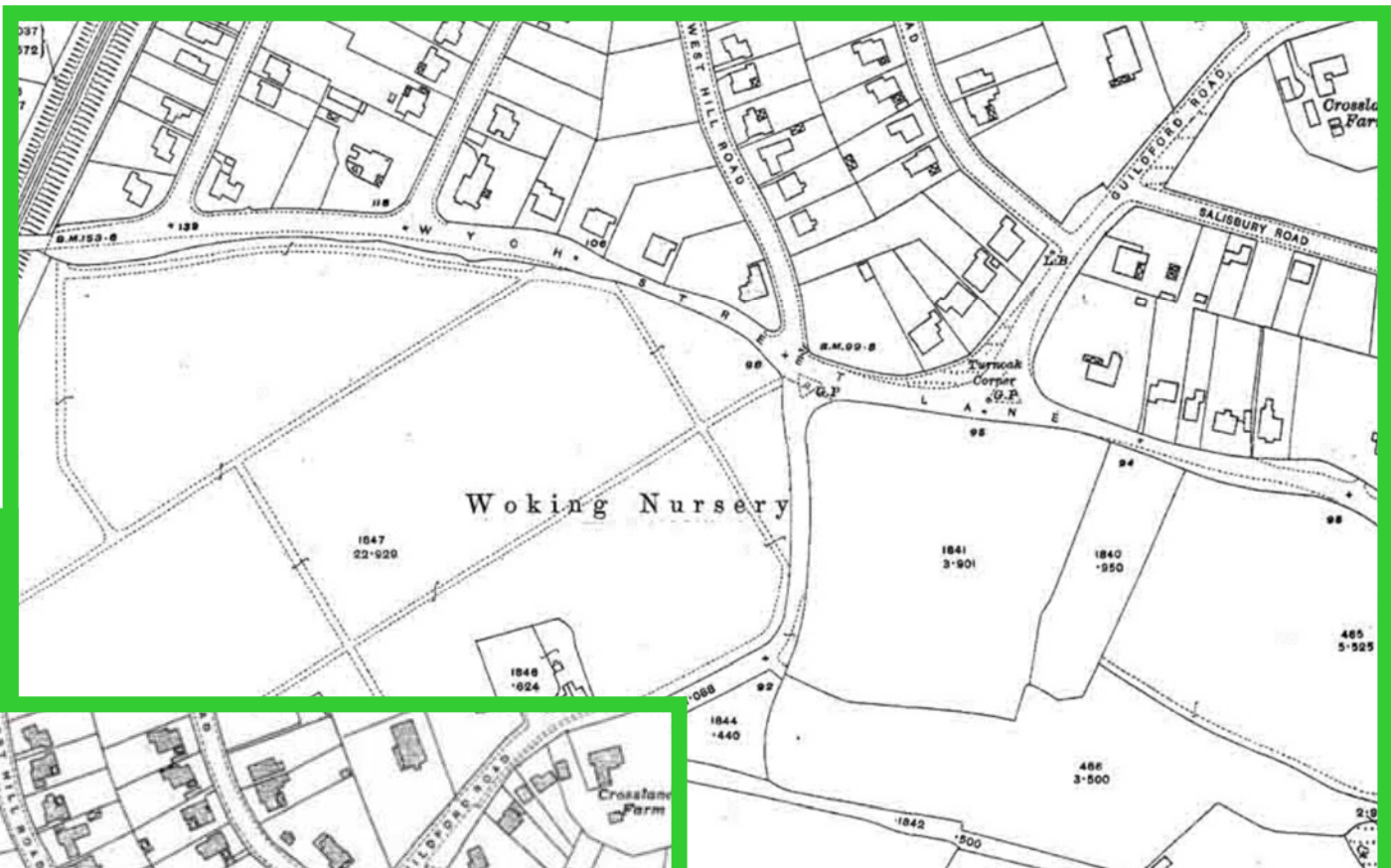


The Six Crossroads as they were eventually controlled in the 1960's.

It appears the council didn't really know what was best for the Six Crossroads, but in the meantime, in July 1933 the Ministry did agree to fund 60% of the estimated £3,833 needed to improve Turnoak Corner to the south of the town - although the Highways Committee reported that 'it was not possible to proceed with the work until Wych Hill Lane was widened'.

Consequently a conference was held with Mr

Turnoak was originally where the main Guildford to Chertsey Road 'turned' (presumably by an oak) onto Wych Hill Lane, as shown on the map, right, before the new roundabout was constructed (below) in 1934.



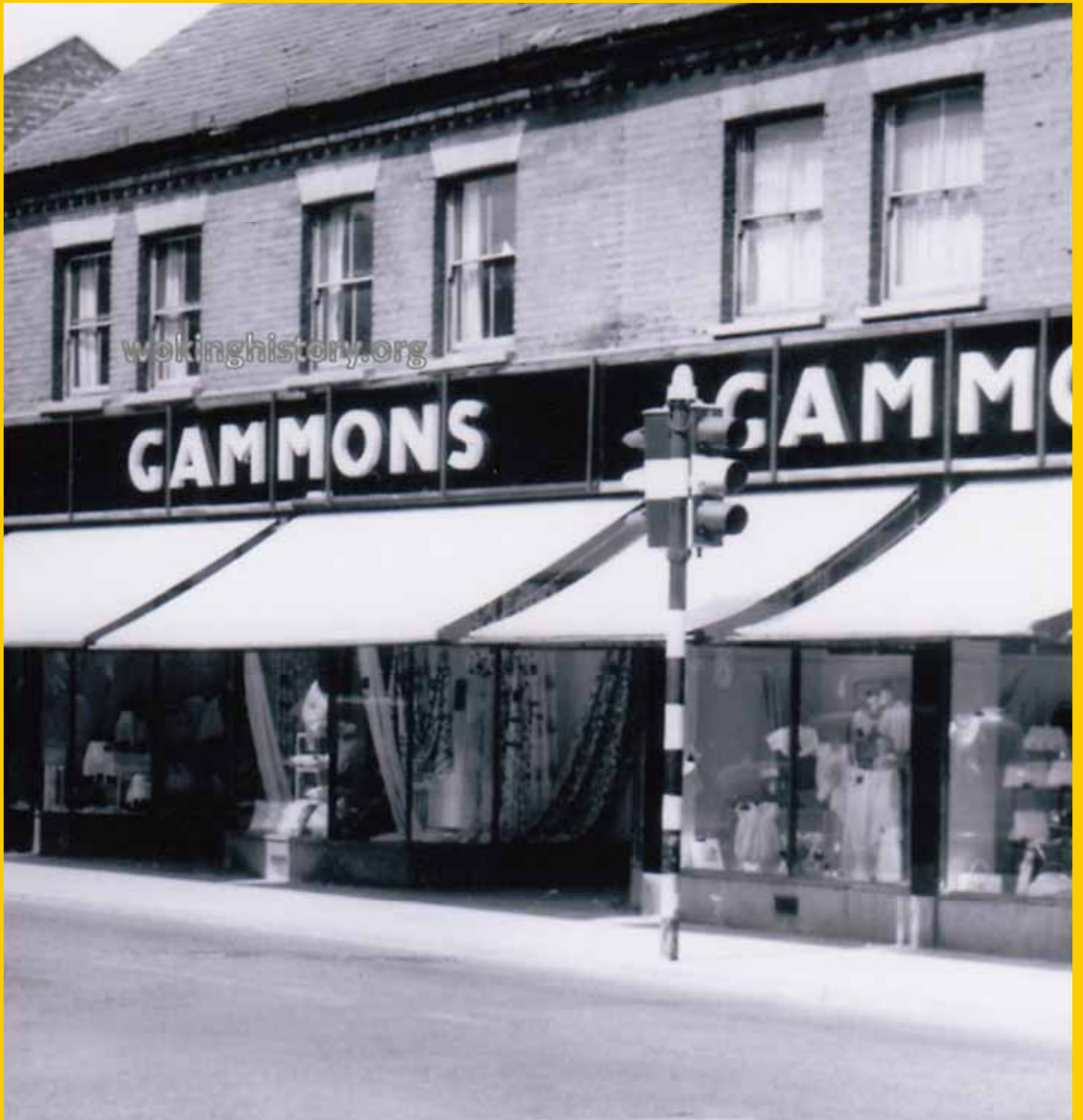
GAMMONS CORNER

As mentioned above the Highway's Committee meeting on the 20th March 1933 heard that the Ministry of Transport were prepared to 'sanction the placing of signals at Gammon's Corner', so the Engineer & Surveyor was asked to obtain tenders from the makers of the lights so that the scheme could go ahead.

The Traffic Lights were to cost £476, but no doubt concerned about running costs, when they were finally installed in late 1933 the council took the unusual decision to turn them off at 11pm – a decision that the Ministry (if not the motorist) obviously didn't approve of as in March 1934 the local press reported that the lights were to be on 24 hours a day 'at the request of the Ministry of Transport'.

As you can probably guess there were some who would have preferred that the lights had never been installed in the first place, with a deputation of traders complaining to the Highways Committee about the lights preventing cars from stopping outside their premises! But conversely the same organisation was proposing more traffic lights at 'Skeet's Corner' (Church Street/Chobham Road) and a diversion of traffic away from Chobham Road via West Street and Boundary Lane.

Not for the last time, decisions about how to keep the motorist and the shopkeepers of Woking both happy, probably ended by upsetting all concerned.



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One of the traders most affected by the traffic lights at the junction of Chobham Road with Commercial Road was probably J Wearing, whose chemist shop was one of Woking's oldest stores.

In 1887 Arthur Althorp had set up the Woking Drug Stores (more or less where the Bank of Scotland branch is today), at about the same time that James Fielder Gammon was establishing his drapers shop across the road (where Bhs would later be built). Diagonally opposite the chemists was Herbert Hart, a butcher (now part of the Slug & Lettuce bar) and opposite that the garden of the Red House Hotel – although as we have seen it would be after the drapers that this particular junction would be known.

Arthur Althorp later gave ways to Taylors, before Wearing took over and in December 1933 revealed his new shop-front for the re-modelled and re-launched 'Super Pharmacy' where every article was 'marked in plain figures' and where the 'finest selection ever offered in Woking' could be found 'at prices to please everybody'.

