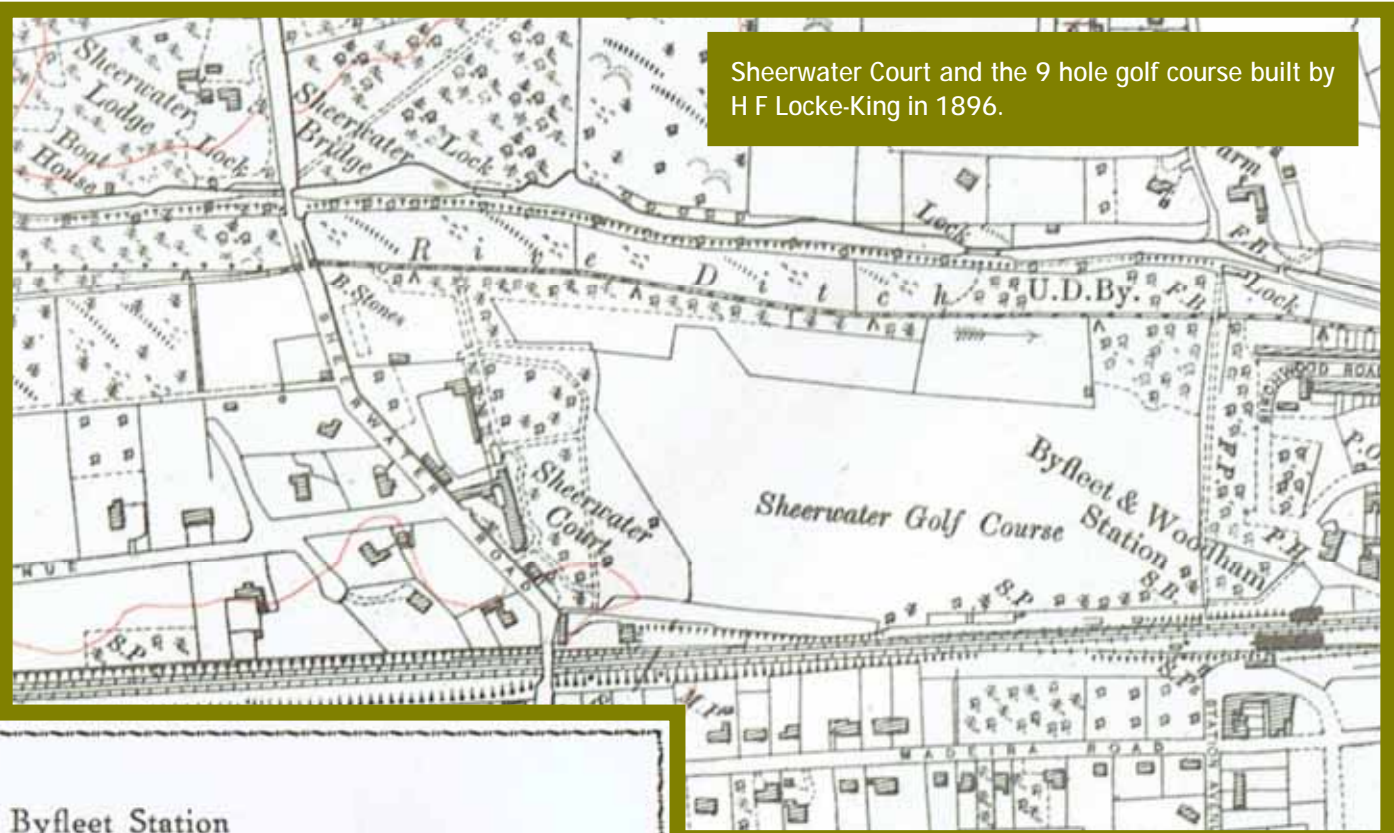


THE BUILDING OF THE SHEERWATER ESTATE IN THE 1930's

Iain Wakeford 2016

The name 'Sheerwater' nowadays has the burden of over sixty years association with the estate established by the London County Council in the late 1940's - the central core of which Woking Council now wish to demolish and replace with swanky new apartments and houses. Some have suggested that when 'New Vision Homes' eventually bulldoze the heart out of the old estate a new 'better' name than Sheerwater will be chosen for the scheme (I have heard 'Morganmere' suggested), but that would be a shame. I know that the 'powers-that-be' at Woking Council seem to hate anything historic, but the name Sheerwater (possibly from the Old English word



Sheerwater Court and the 9 hole golf course built by H F Locke-King in 1896.

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meaning 'clear') is centuries old and was once the name of a series of lakes fed by the River Ditch that in the 17th century is said to have supplied fresh fish for the London markets.

In the early 18th century trees were planted in the Sheerwater Valley to help drain the lakes and by the mid 19th century a country house – Sheerwater House – had been built near where the Sheerwater Road crosses the canal. The name in those days carried no negative baggage.

Indeed behind that house, in 1896, local landowner and sportsmen Hugh Fortescue Locke-King (who the year before had established the New Zealand Golf Course), built a nine-hole course which he called the 'Sheerwater Golf Club'. Later he would go on to construct the Bleakdown (now West Byfleet) Golf Club on the opposite side of the railway in 1906. With its two full-sized neighbours so close the little Sheerwater course did not survive and in the early 1930's the land was bought for development as the 'Sheerwater Estate'.

This was not, of course, the Sheerwater Estate that currently bears the wrath of the council, but the 'original' estate of that name built by local developer E Thomas on the opposite side of Sheerwater Road (Hollies and Woodlands Avenues). He at least saw the beauty of the area as numerous advertisements in local newspapers and county guidebooks of the time testify.

Under the title 'A Question of Locality – A Home in Nature's Own Setting' his publicity people penned a 'blurb' that New Vision Homes will find hard to equal.



Building started in about 1933, with only part of the roads laid out by 1934 when the Ordnance Survey published their 25" map (below), but plots for houses and bungalows on the estate continued to be developed into the late 1930's.

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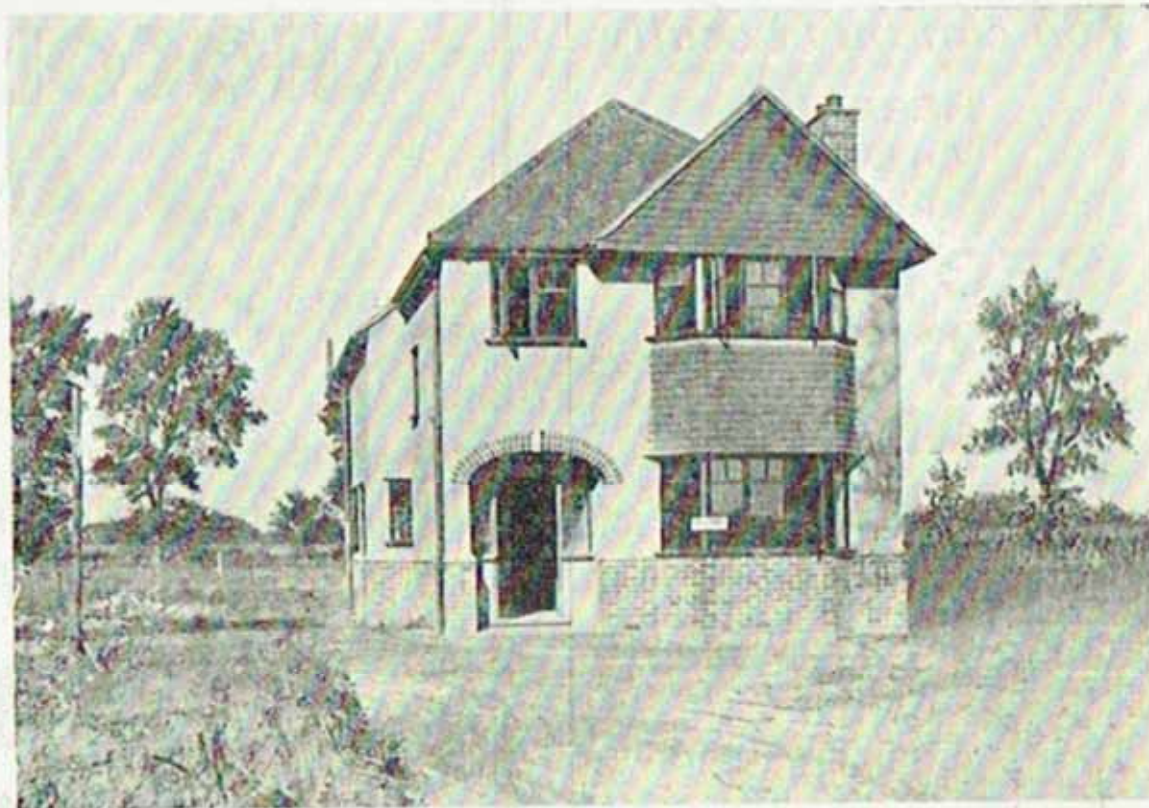
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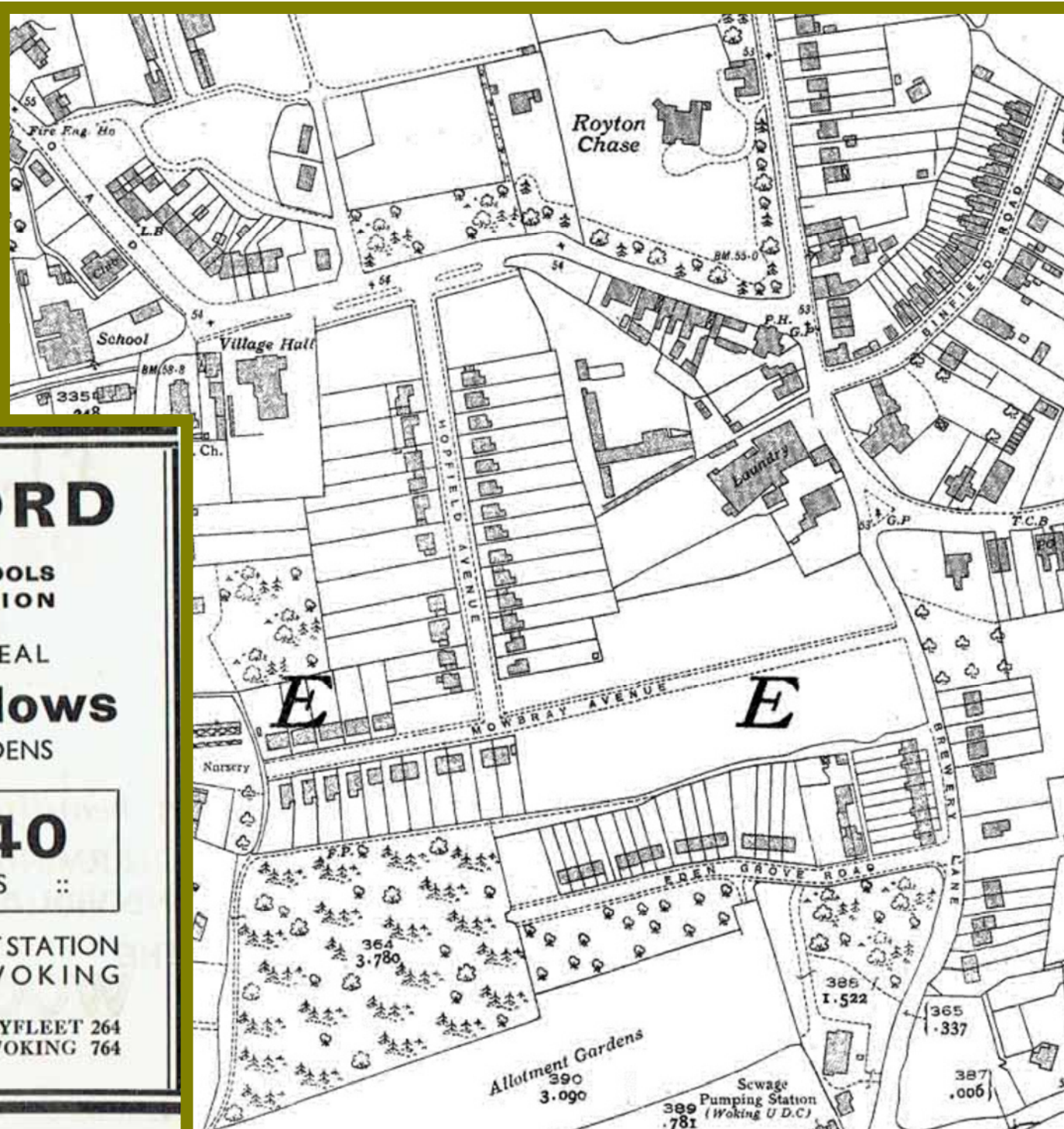
Building Owner :
THE ELMS, WOODHAM LANE,
W. BYFLEET

The 'houses of distinction', as the adverts declared, 'combine elegance and refinement with convenience and moderate cost', being 'soundly constructed on modern lines, with three bedrooms' (for £650), including 'kitchenette, dining and drawing rooms and usual offices'.

The estate took a few years to complete, with plots still being sold or developed up to the end of the decade, possibly because there were in fact other houses and bungalows in equally 'first-class' locations available in the area – such as Smith Brothers developments at Floyds

Lane in Pyrford, and Mowbray Avenue in Byfleet (apparently so named because the builders were born in Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire). Indeed it seems that the whole of Woking in the

late 1920's and 30's was one vast building site – as we shall examine in more details in the next few weeks.



Smith Brothers of West Byfleet were developing similar estates at Pyrford and Byfleet at this time.

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WOKING CARNIVAL 1934



We looked at the staging of Woking's Hospital Carnivals in this column a few months ago, when Mrs Eunita Hutchinson-Driver played the Carnival Queen in 1926, but that was not the only carnival organised by the Friends of the Woking Cottage Hospital, as this view from 1934 shows. It is looking along Commercial Road with 'The Sports Dome' (on the corner with Church Path) just visible on the right. As we saw a couple of weeks ago in this column the controversy of new traffic lights in Woking was raging at this time – perhaps prompting the fancy-dress policemen to carry effigies of the hated signals in the parade.

RUNNYMEDE PAGEANT 1934



Whilst Woking was holding its Hospital Carnivals the people of Egham were perhaps going one stage further, by holding their Runnymede Pageant in June 1934. Actually it wasn't just the people of Egham (some Woking people were apparently involved too), with about 5,000 actors and two-hundred horses taking part in the eight day event chronicling English history – including the Roman Invasions, the sacking of Chertsey Abbey

by the Danes (shown here) and of course the signing (or sealing) of Magna Carta in 1215.

Besides the actors there were also numerous volunteers behind the scenes making props and costumes and organising the event that was directed by the noted theatre producer of the time, Gwen Lally, and patronised by dignitaries such as the Duke and Duchess of York (later George VI and Queen Elizabeth), and the Prince of Wales (soon to become Edward VIII).

The parade was even to include four elephants, although they were apparently withdrawn at the last minute.