

THE WOODHAM HALL ESTATE

Iain Wakeford 2016



Before the Woodham Hall estate was built the land was the home of Robert Norton Stevens, a local benefactor who enjoyed cricket matches being played on his lawn.

A couple of weeks ago I mentioned a proposal for an eastern by-pass for Woking that would have linked Norfolk Farm Road at Pyrford, via a new bridge over the railway at Sheerwater, to Woodham Lane and the Six Crossroads. The route would have passed through the land of Woodham Hall, a large country house built in the late 19th century for Robert Norton Stevens, but bought in the early 1930's for redevelopment by Thomas Higgs, who not surprisingly opposed the council's plans.

As his agents pointed out in a brochure produced in 1935 'It is most difficult at the present time to find a good building site within easy reach of London, the environments of which are safe from the future haphazard development by the speculative builder. If great care is not taken in the selection of the site, the value of the house may quickly depreciate without any possible redress to the Owner'. Whilst highlighting this fact, the brochure very skilfully shies away from guaranteeing Mr Higgs estate will not be encroached upon, the brochure simply going on to point out that the 'beautiful park of 65 acres' was being developed by 'a builder and engineering contractor of wide experience, ability and unimpeachable reputation.'



1920 Ordnance Survey Map showing Woodham Hall and its grounds before the estate was built.

An advertisement from July 1934 offering houses on the estate for 'upwards of £1,000).

Last week I related the wonderful estate-agents 'blurb' for the Sheerwater Estate at West Byfleet, but Mr Higgs' advertising agent probably went one better in July 1934. Under the title 'Where shall my home be?' an article that appeared in at least one local newspaper recalled how a 'Wanderer from the Midlands' came across a tall board that informed the female visitor that the 'houses of character' were on the 'Woodham Hall Estate'.

'I turned in and found myself traversing a splendidly made concrete road. Houses of character! True indeed, and beauty too. Real architecture could be seen here, and colour and individuality. There was scarcely two alike.

With envious eyes I stood before a beautiful Tudor house with its timbered front and heavy oak door; then passed on to a modern building of white walls with green paint and green tiles, and then, perhaps most fascinating of all, to one in the Sussex style. Each stood in its own grounds; nothing semi-detached here! And what art in placing them! You might have a couple of rhododendrons flanking your front door, or two or three tall pines standing sentinel at the bottom of your garden, but most of your windows would face the sun. The natural beauty of this wonderful spot has been left untouched

The cover of the 1935 brochure for the estate.



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£1,000
UPWARDS

No
Road
Charges



A beautifully timbered and matured Estate
**CHARMING SITES, HOUSES OF CHARACTER
INDIVIDUAL DESIGN AND EXPERT PLANNING**

Set amidst delightful surroundings, close to the New Zealand and West Byfleet Golf Courses, and within easy reach of Shops, Church, Cinemas, Post Office, etc.

The Estate is about one mile from Woking Station, with a frequent and excellent service of trains reaching Waterloo in about 35 minutes. A bus service passes the entrance of the Estate, to Woking, where there are excellent bus services to the surrounding districts. Artistically designed Houses with all modern labour-saving conveniences, erected in modern avenues and roads carefully laid-out in natural settings.

All Services are provided : Company's water supply, gas, electric light and main drainage.

Residences will be erected with accommodation to suit Purchasers' requirements.

The Estate Office is open daily, including Saturdays and Sundays. Inspection is invited.

THE

**WOODHAM HALL ESTATE
WOKING, SURREY**

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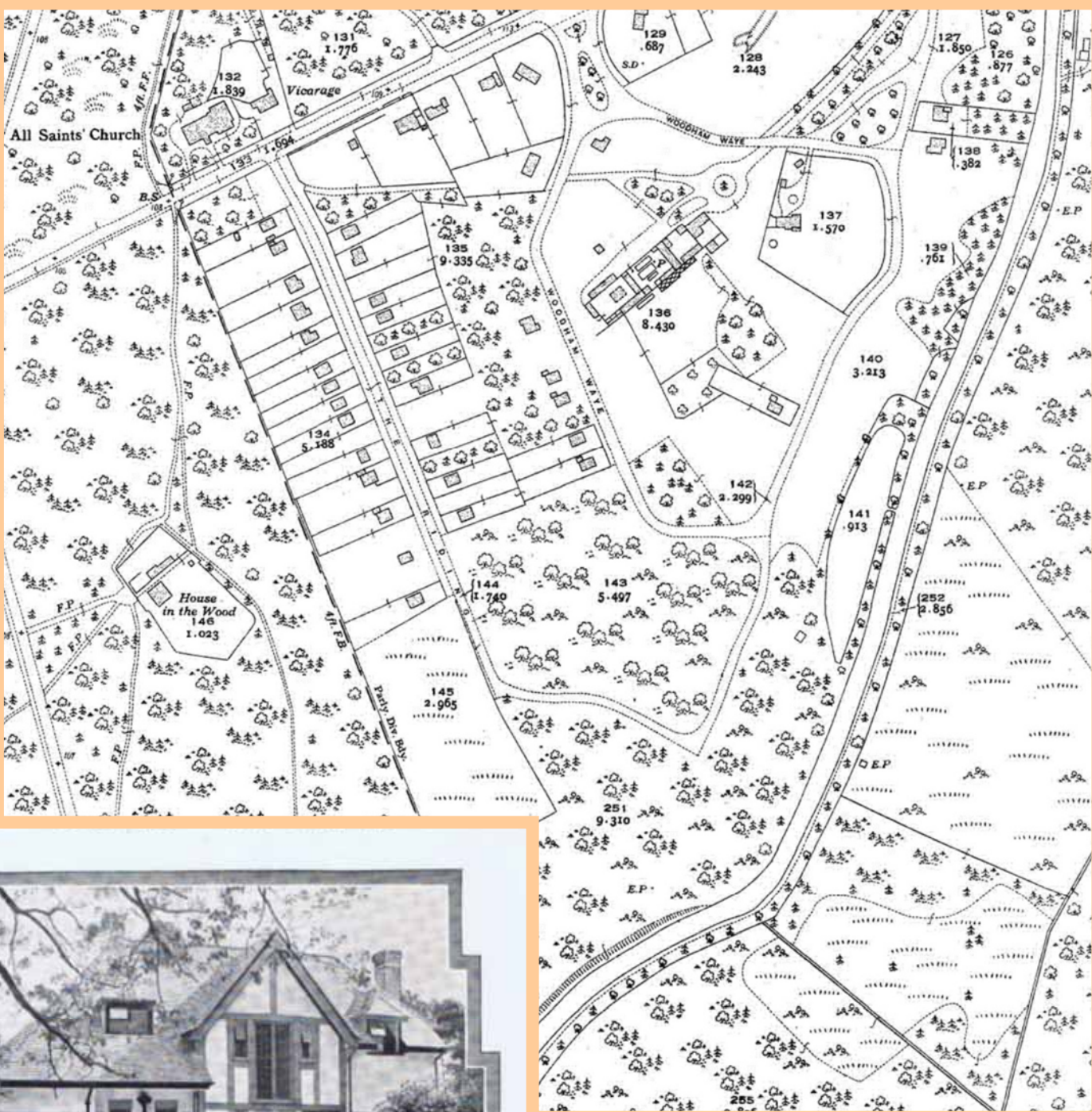
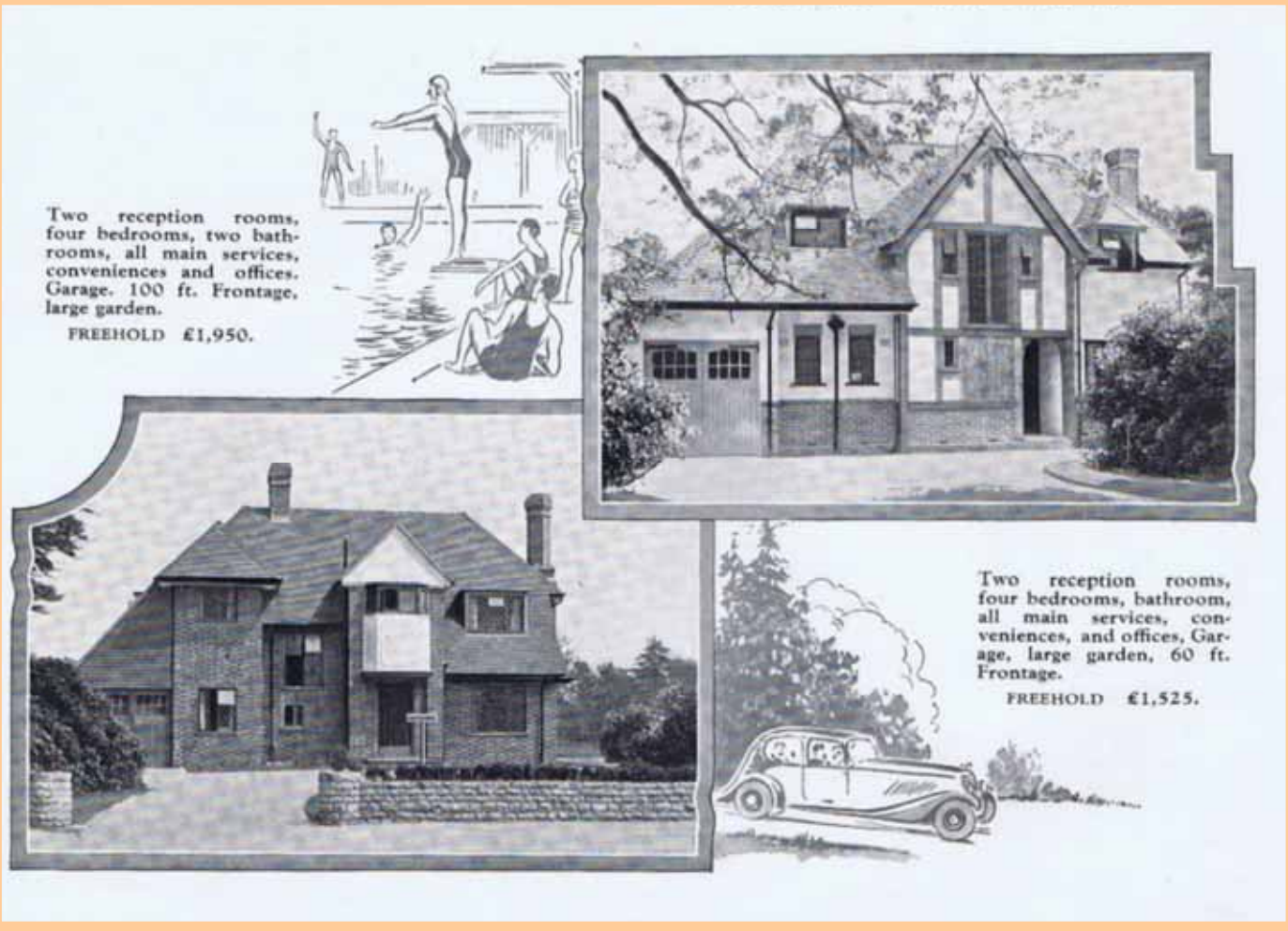
A Home amid the Pines

as far as possible. There has been no wholesale destruction of trees, but only sufficient to allow access to plenty of sunlight and air.

Then inside. What spacious rooms and splendid wood-work! The doors and window-frames really *do* fit, and, marvellous to relate, there are cupboards and places for things! Never have I seen more attractive bath-rooms, with their bright colour schemes, chromium fittings and enclosed baths, complete with showers. They are only out-rivalled by the kitchens. Surely a master mind has been at work here: is it a woman's, I wonder?'

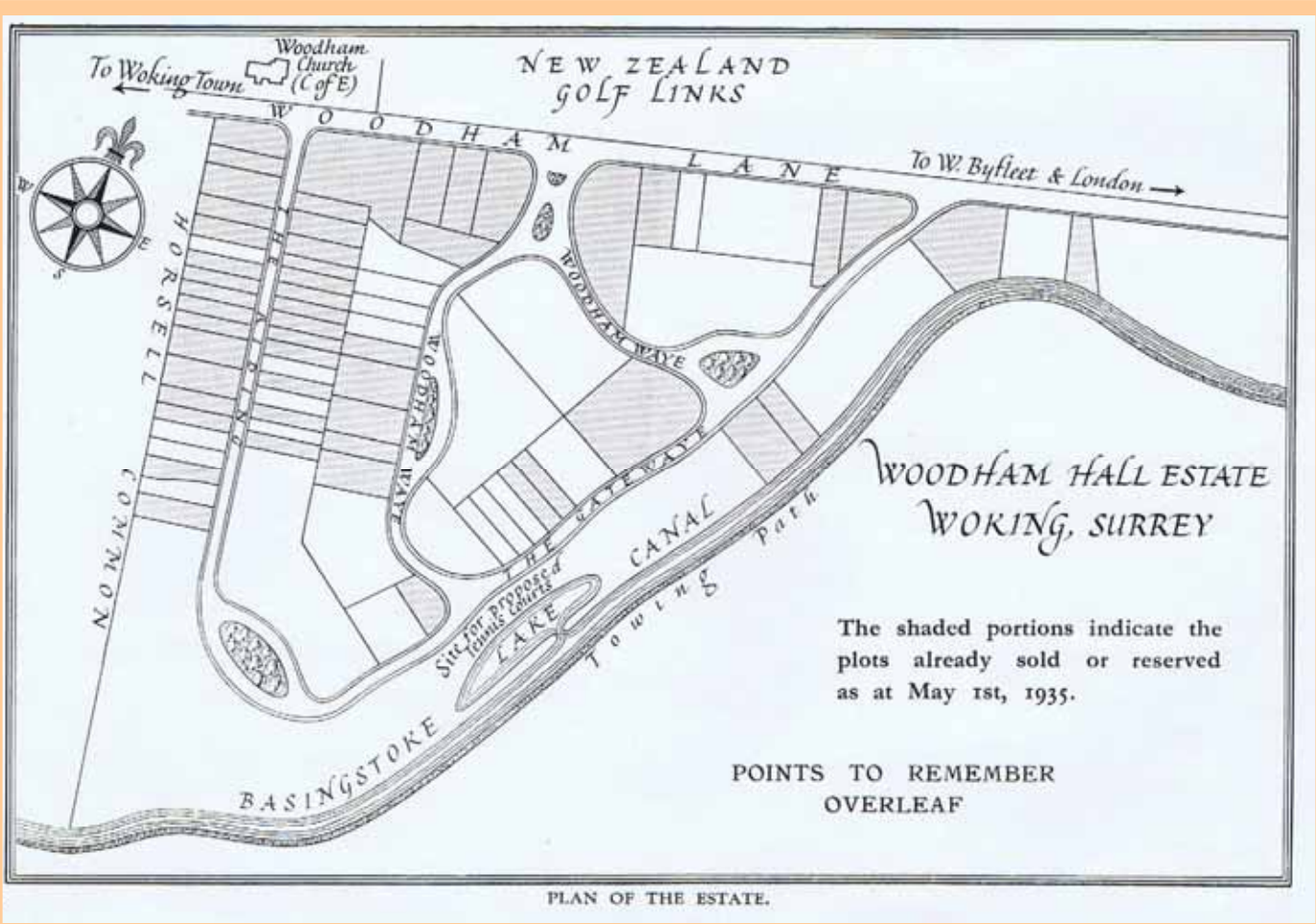
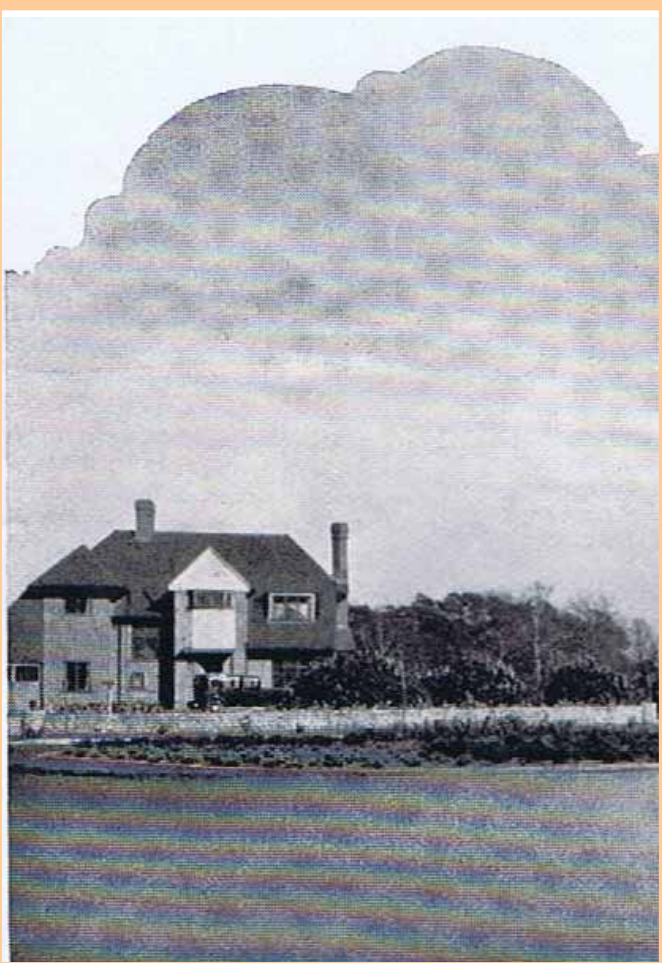
I am not certain whether the interior design of the houses (or even the advertisement) was the work of a woman, but they certainly met with many ladies approval with houses being sold almost immediately after planning permission was first granted.

More Illustrations from the brochure for the estate produced in May 1935..



1934 Ordnance Survey Map showing Woodham Hall and its grounds with the first part of the estate already laid out.

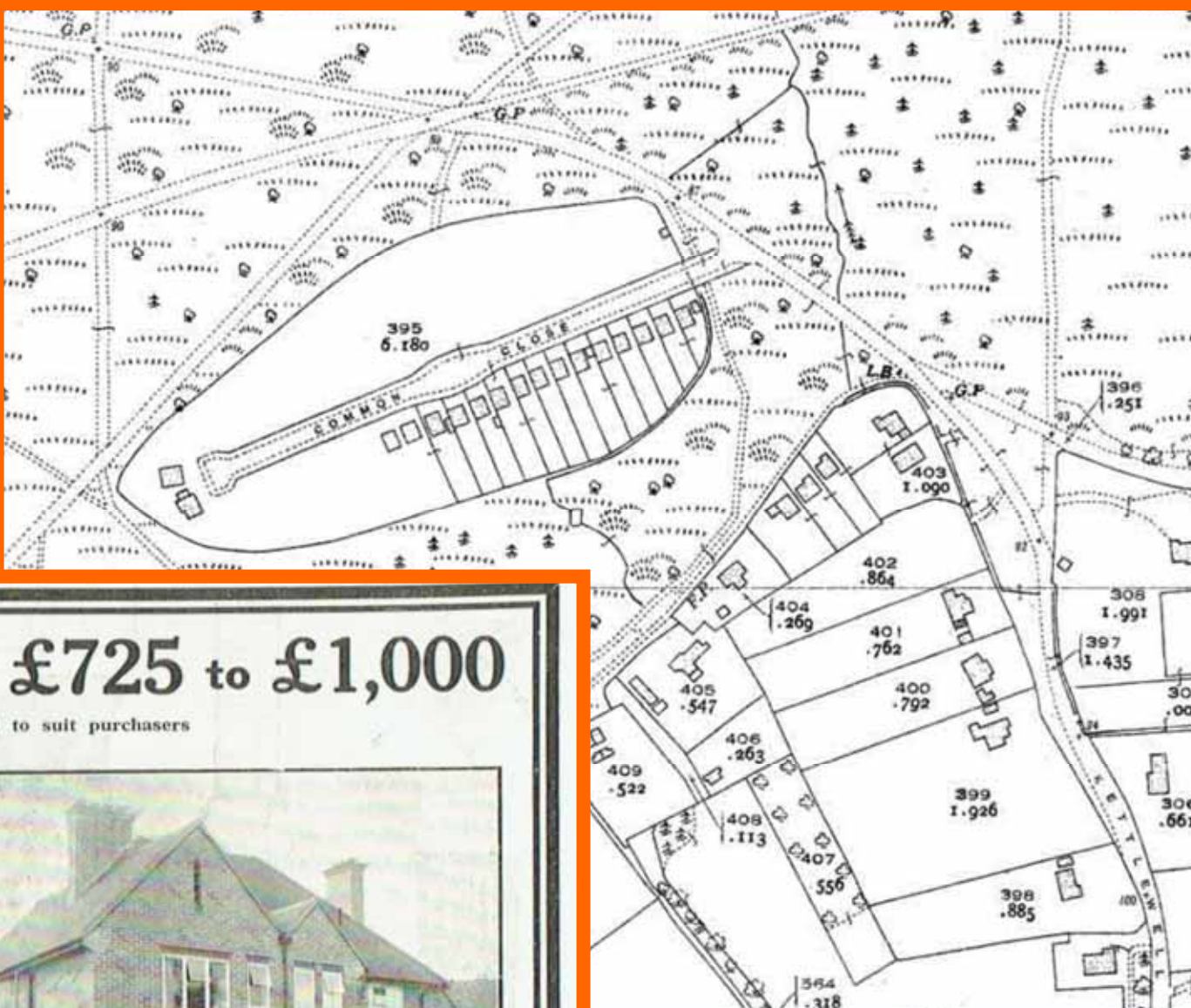
The roads are now called Woodham Way, The Ridings and The Gateway, but it appears from the minutes of Woking Council that originally Mr Higgs had other ideas for the names, with the council approving plans in May 1933 for a 'detached house on the eastern side of St Olaf's Drive' and a house 'on the west side of Woodham Crescent' being approved in September that year.



THE COMMON CLOSE ESTATE

In previous editions of these articles I have written about the homes built by local developer Evelyn Ricks of Kingfield. Having constructed mainly bungalows in Westfield Avenue, and the roads on what had once been Kingfield Farm (Apers, Downsview and St Martha's Avenues), he then moved on to Horsell where first the houses of Wheatsheaf Close were developed, before moving onto Common Close (and later still Kettlewell Close).

As with Wheatsheaf Close (which he wanted to call Ferndale Park), Mr Ricks' initial name for the 'Cheapside Estate' was not approved of by



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the council and in September 1933 the Surveyor was instructed to 'ask the owner to submit alternative names' – which evidently he did as later that month the Town Planning Committee approved the layout of forty-eight houses (of three types) on Mr Evelyn Ricks' new estate off Chobham Road called 'Common Close'.

THE CHOBHAM BRICK & TILE WORKS AT MILLBROOK, HORSELL

The bricks for all these new houses in Woking were probably coming from the East Midlands where vast new brickyards were opening up, but as we have seen in the past there had been several small brickfields in this area, which by the early 1930's were finding it hard to compete with the big boys like the London Brick Company.

In Chobham there had been brickworks since at least the early 1600's, when clay was found in what is now called the 'Brickhill' part of the village, to the west of Chobham Common, near Valley End and the boundary with Windlesham (where the brick-makers could later quench their thirst at the Brickmakers Arms). By the 1880's, however, the brick kilns here appear to have been deserted after a dispute with Lord Onslow, the Lord of the Manor, and some parishioners.

The brick and tile works at Millbrook, near the Castle Grove public house, were opened soon after, although exactly when these closed I have so far been unable to positively ascertain (although the Britannia Manufacturing Co Ltd are listed at the brickworks in my directory of 1948 – see archive section, under directories).



THE HORSELL HIGH STREET ESTATE



Ricks was not the only person building new houses in Horsell at this time, as another local builder, H W Crane of Thornash Road, was busy developing the Horsell High Street Estate (selling at between £650 and £800). He was advertising 'your home in healthy Horsell' with special terms of £5 down and repayments of 18/7 (93½p) per week thereafter, emphasising (like Ricks) the advantages of main drainage and other services with 'no road charges or legal fees'.

The accessibility of Woking Station was obviously a selling point for the Cheapside Estate (although how many now would think to walk to the station), but Mr Crane was obviously thinking of the future as he noted that each house had 'room for a garage'. Judging by the increasing number of applications to the council at that time for such a feature, that was obviously quite a smart move.

Your Home in Healthy Horsell
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