

WOKING'S NEW 'ODEON-STYLE' STATION

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Woking Station was first opened to the public on the 21st May 1838 – and was temporarily the end of the line for the new London & Southampton Railway, whose London terminus at that time was at Nine Elms (later Vauxhall Station).

It had a small booking office and ladies waiting room with public conveniences on the south (Old Woking) side of the line, with a footbridge connecting the two platforms and almost no facilities for travellers on the northern ('up-side') of the lines. A Goods Shed stood at right angles to the east of the Station Masters House with a turntable to help move the wagons and engines around.

At first, with no town of Woking, the number of passengers must have been minimal, but with the opening of the line to Guildford in 1845 (extended to Godalming in 1849 and eventually to Portsmouth in 1859), and the development of the new town on the common after the Necropolis Company's land sales – the station needed to be expanded.

Sidings were added to the north towards Goldsworth Road and then on the southern side bounded by the fields that would eventually become the York Road Estate.

The increase in traffic and the number of lines

through the station also required alterations so that by the 1880's the station was a hotch-potch of buildings.

In 1888 the first major rebuilding took place with the construction of a new goods shed to the west of the south entrance and extra

Despite being rebuilt many times, the northern (town) entrance has remained constrained and arguably an embarrassment to the town.

Woking's position as an important railway junction, meant the station soon expanded with extra platforms and sidings.





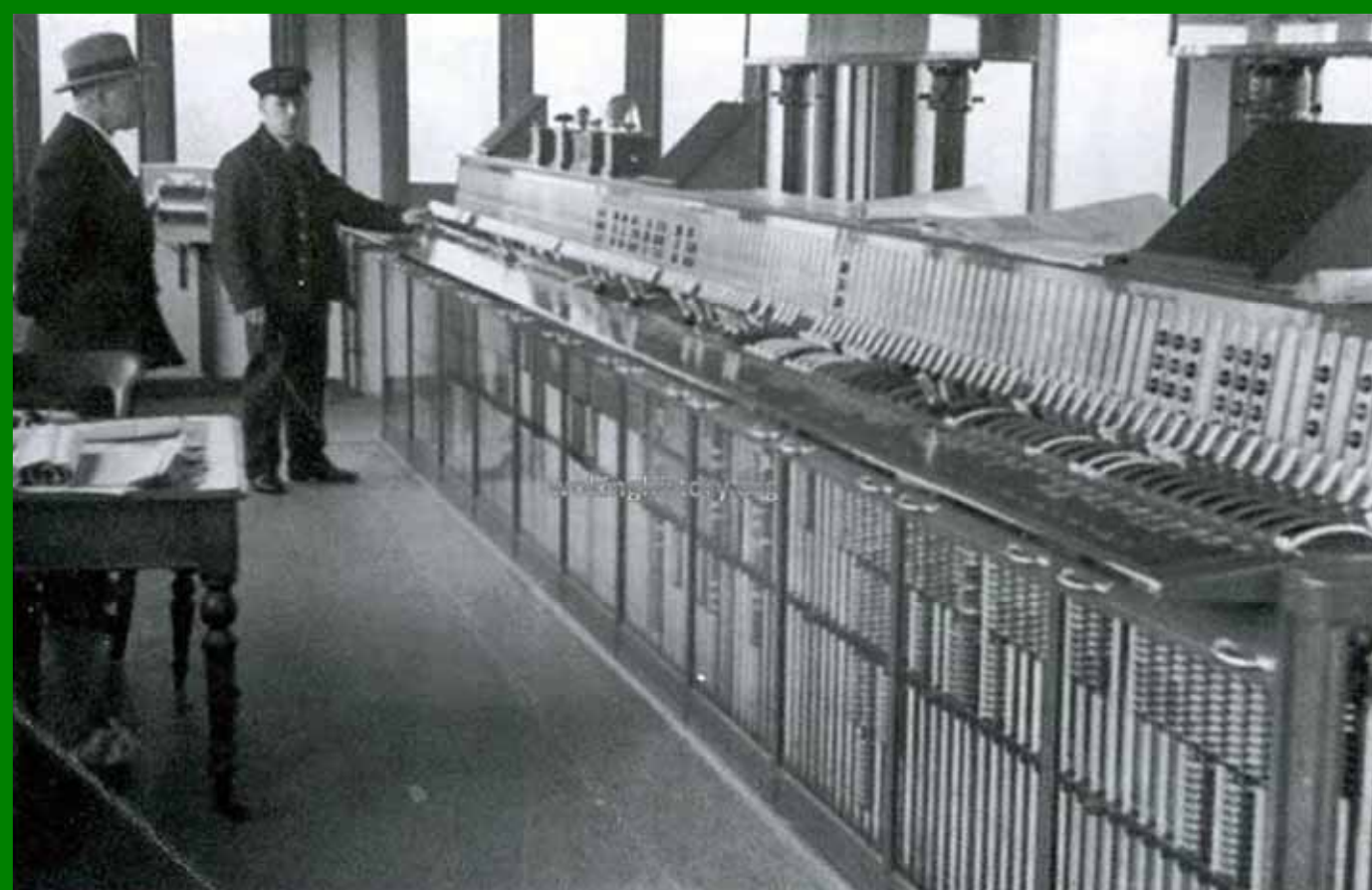
platforms as the number of lines had doubled. Unfortunately at the time no attempt was made to improve the north (Town) entrance to the station – partially as the Albion Hotel opposite the station was less than thirty years old and the railway company had no incentive to act as developer.

Just over a decade later, however, the Albion itself was rebuilt, but as the railway station was then relatively new, nothing again could be done to improve the Town's approach to the station (and so the story has gone on).

The Station had originally been called 'Woking Common', but was changed to Woking Junction when the Guildford Branch was built, changing to just 'Woking' in 1913.

Meanwhile other stations had opened in the Woking area at Brookwood (1867), Worplesdon (1886), and West Byfleet (1887 – originally Byfleet and Woodham Station until 1913) – with what became Byfleet & New Haw Station (West Weybridge) opening in 1927.

By then the London & South Western Railway had become the Southern Railway and a number of suburban lines out of London were being electrified on the third-rail system. Unfortunately the recession slowed down the work but in November 1935 the Government announced a grant would be made to the Southern Railway as an unemployment relief scheme to advance the electrification of their lines. In February 1936 the company announced that the main line to Portsmouth



The signal box (as well as the main southern entrance to the station) is now a Grade II listed building, so should be protected from any future rebuilding of the station.





would be the main beneficiary (with the Woking to Aldershot, Farnham and Alton Branch also being upgraded at the same time). The line to Guildford via Effingham Junction had been electrified for some time, but the new work

meant that now Woking Station would have to be almost completely rebuilt.

In 1936-7 the new 'Odeon-Style' south entrance and Signal Box were built – but the

poor north entrance remained cramped by the High Street running immediately past it, and despite minor alterations it arguably remains to this day a major embarrassment to the town.



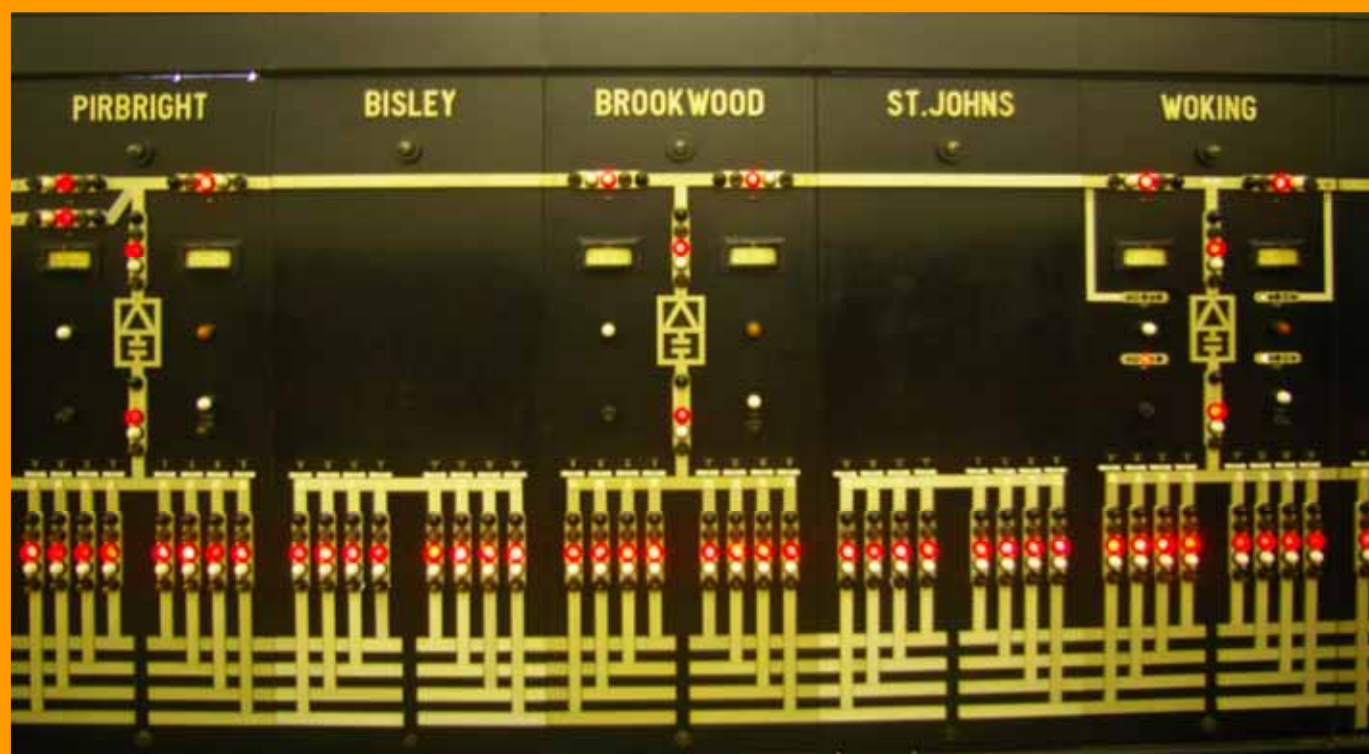
WOKING'S OTHER 1930's GEMS



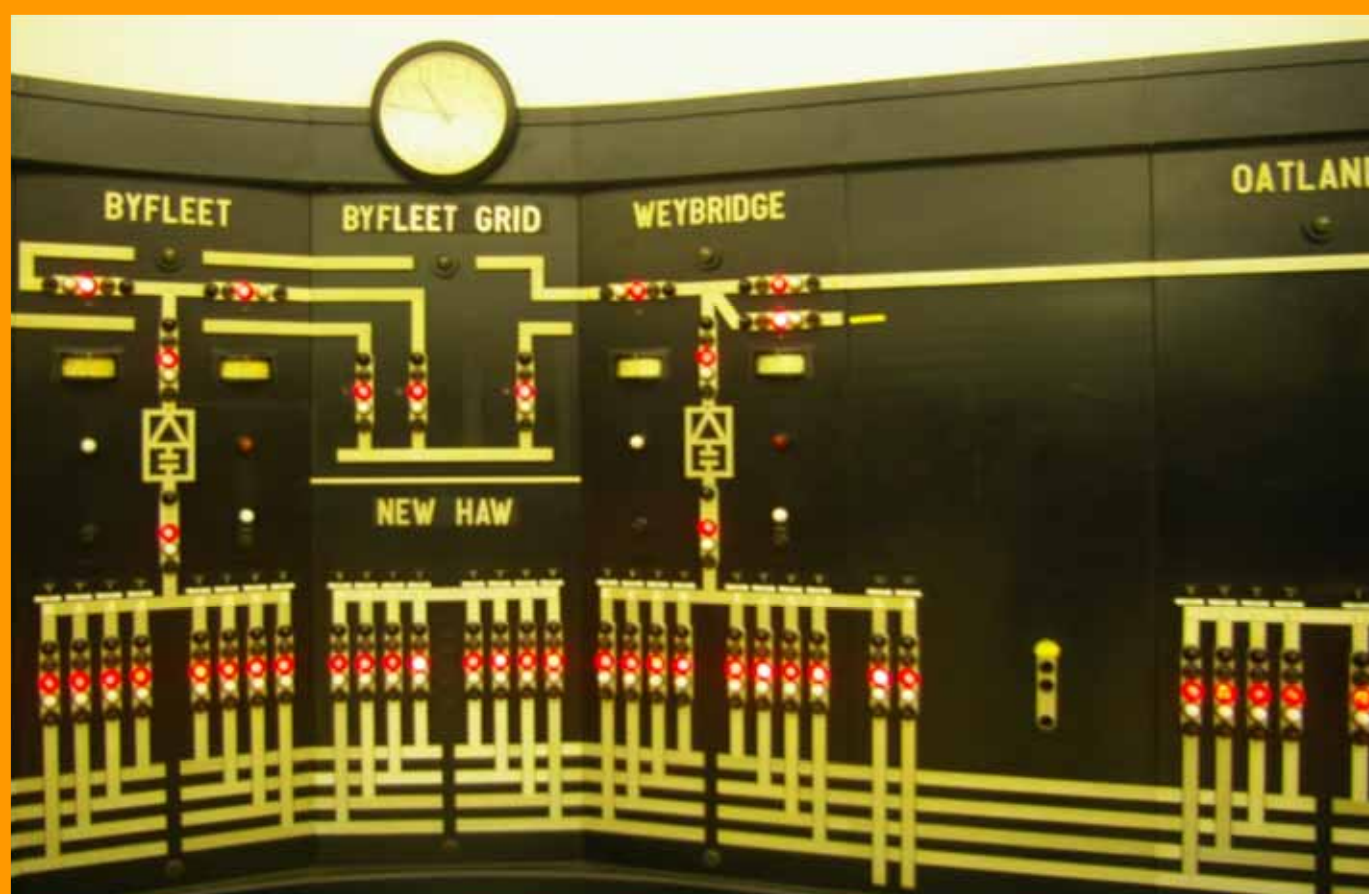
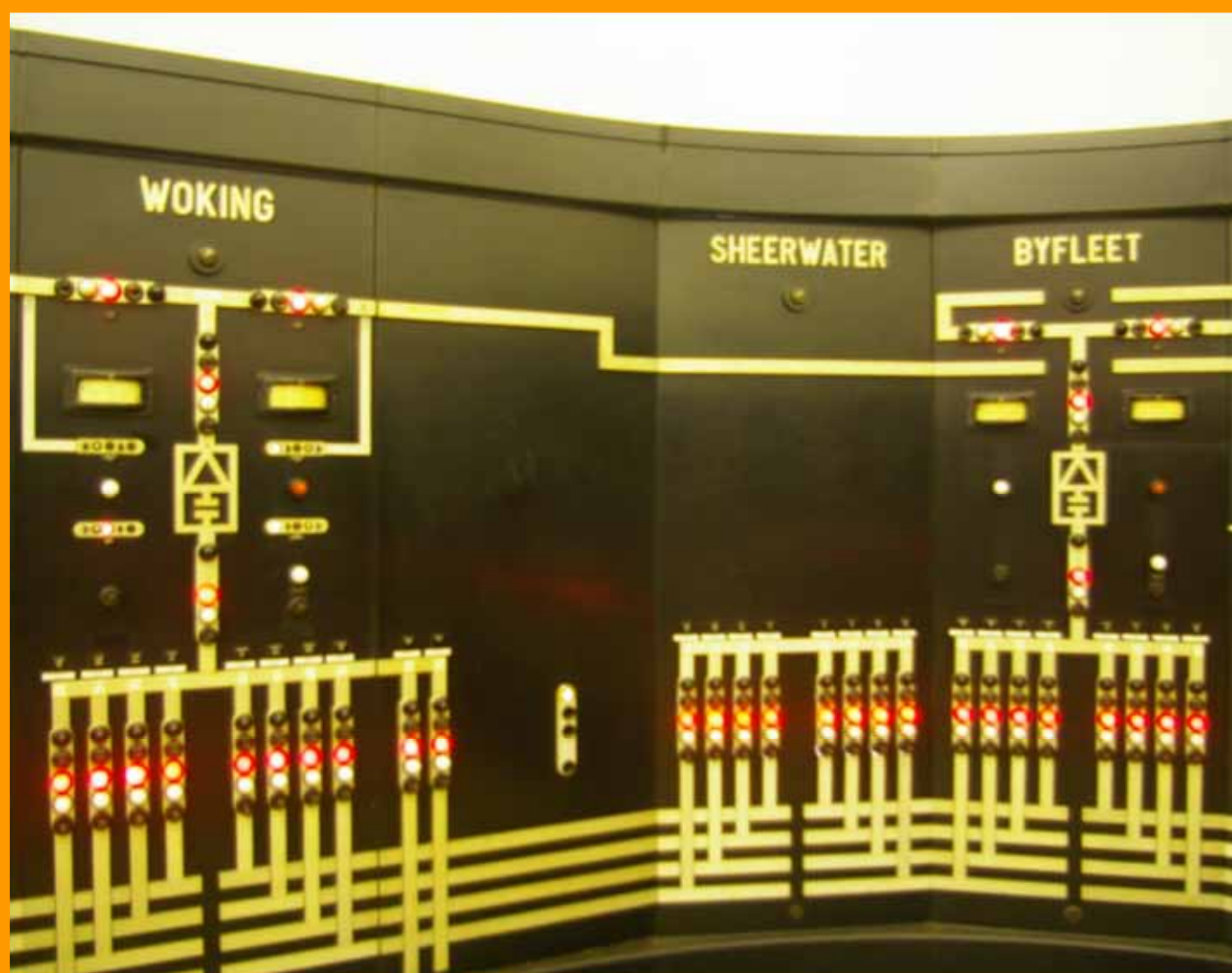
Most people are familiar with the 1930's South Entrance of the station and perhaps the equally iconic Signal Box, but there is another part of the 1930's electrification scheme for the Southern Railway that is largely forgotten (although slightly more accessible than the Signal Box). Every year on the Heritage Open Day Weekend the Electric Control Room off York Road is opened by volunteers keen to show visitors around – although sadly you will have to wait until next September for your next chance (put a note in your diary now).

It was built in 1936 to help ensure that the new line had enough electricity in the right areas at the right time, with panels of lights around the oval art-deco interior showing junctions and stations throughout this area. With war looming on the horizon the low concrete, flat roofed, building by Twin Bridges was designed to be bomb-proof. Inside the equipment (if not the building itself) was supplied by a Swedish company called ASEA - Allmänna Svenska Elektriska Aktiebolaget – which apparently roughly translates as the General Swedish Electrical Company.





INSIDE THE ELECTRICITY CONTROL ROOM BY TWIN BRIDGES

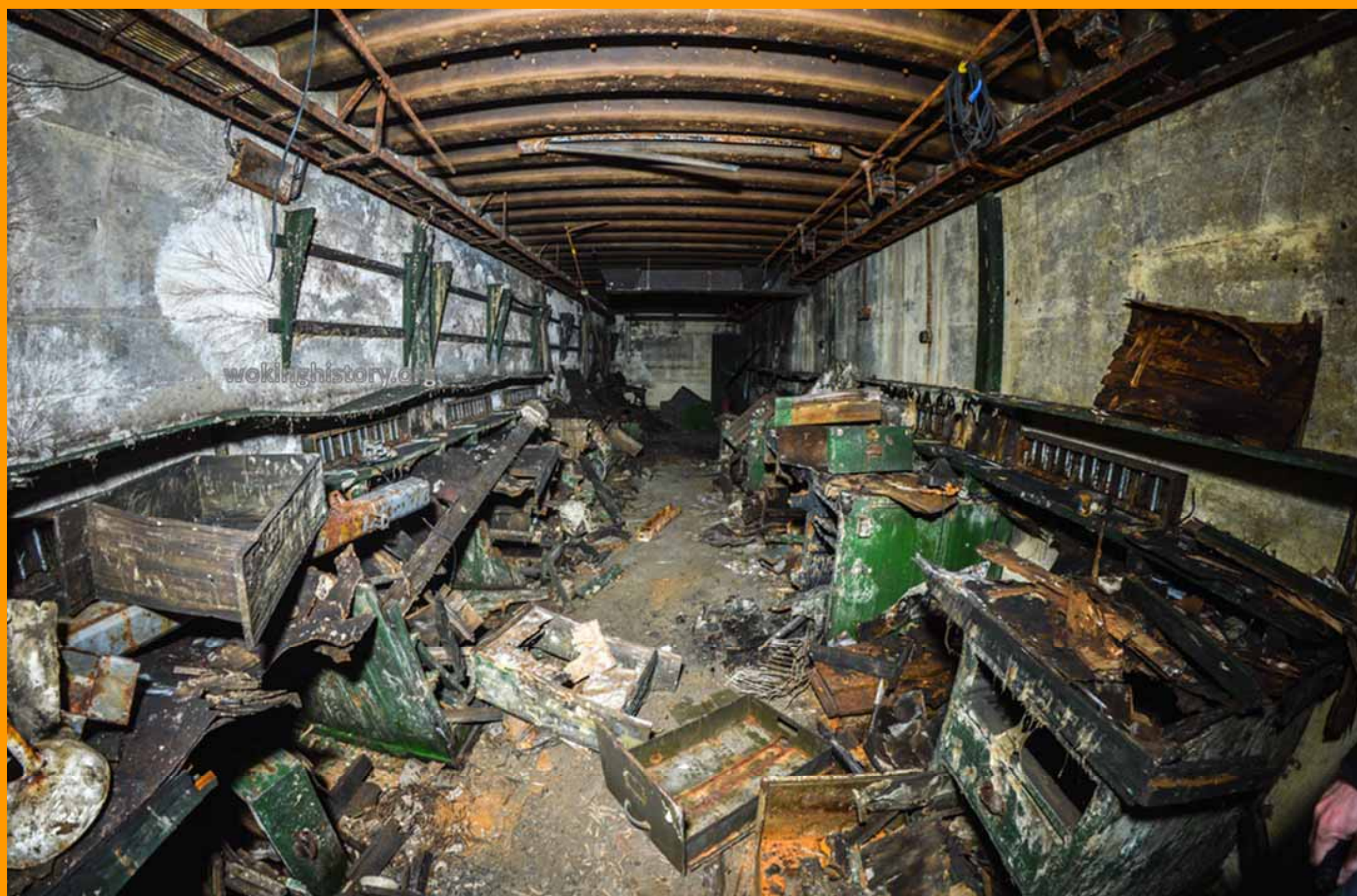




Another bomb-proof building of the time was the Traffic Control Bunker that I believe is still under part of the commuter car park immediately to the east of the station.

Unfortunately not even I have had a chance to look around this fascinating subterranean part of the town, but from what I have heard it is just as fascinating (if somewhat more grubby) than the Switch Room to the west.

Now wouldn't it be great if all these remarkable pieces of Woking's Industrial Heritage could be permanently opened to the public!



WOKING GAS WORKS CEASE PRODUCTION IN 1936



Whilst the Southern Railway were electrifying their lines through Woking, the Woking Gas Company were setting about ceasing production at their Boundary Road site.

The earliest serious attempt to provide a gas supply for Woking was in August 1866 when a meeting was held at the 'Anchor Inn' in Woking, but nothing came of it.

In September 1869 Edward Ryde recorded in his diary that he had presided at a public meeting at the White Hart, 'called to hear a proposal from Messrs. Holmes & Co. of Gracechurch Street, London to construct a Gas Works for Woking'. According to the Surrey Advertiser they had erected more gasworks than any other firm in the country.

The plan was for a small gasworks near Maybury Arch, to supply the town centre and Woking village. The response was favourable, especially since street-lighting would be made possible, but few local people were prepared to subscribe money, and once more the idea faded away.

In 1881 the issue was revived, with the rival applications of the Woking Gas & Water Co. and the Woking & Horsell Gas, Light & Coke Co., leading to the success of the former. In its 1881 Act the Company received powers to build a gasworks on a two-acre site at Tinkers

Lane, Kingfield, owned by one of the directors, George Smallpiece of Kingfield House. It is clear that the ownership of the land was the major factor determining the choice of site, for in every other way the land at Tinkers Lane (approximately where the Leisure Centre is today) was eminently unsuitable, being low-lying, flood-prone, and remote from the railway or canal which would be used to transport the coal; It is probable that the realisation of this discouraged the company from using its gas powers.

A new Woking District Gas Company held its first meeting in December 1891, following its

incorporation by Parliament in the previous session. Its directors included the same George Smallpiece who had promoted the 1881 scheme, and also G. B. and B. D. Holroyd, members of the well known Byfleet milling, landowning and political family. The new company, with a capital of £16,000, was authorised to supply gas to the parishes of Woking, Horsell, Pyrford, Byfleet, Send and Ripley. It purchased 1½ acres of former common land in Boundary Road from the Necropolis Company for £649 10s. 7d.. The land had been intended for house-building, and was already laid out in plots: local residents were opposed to the scheme, fearing

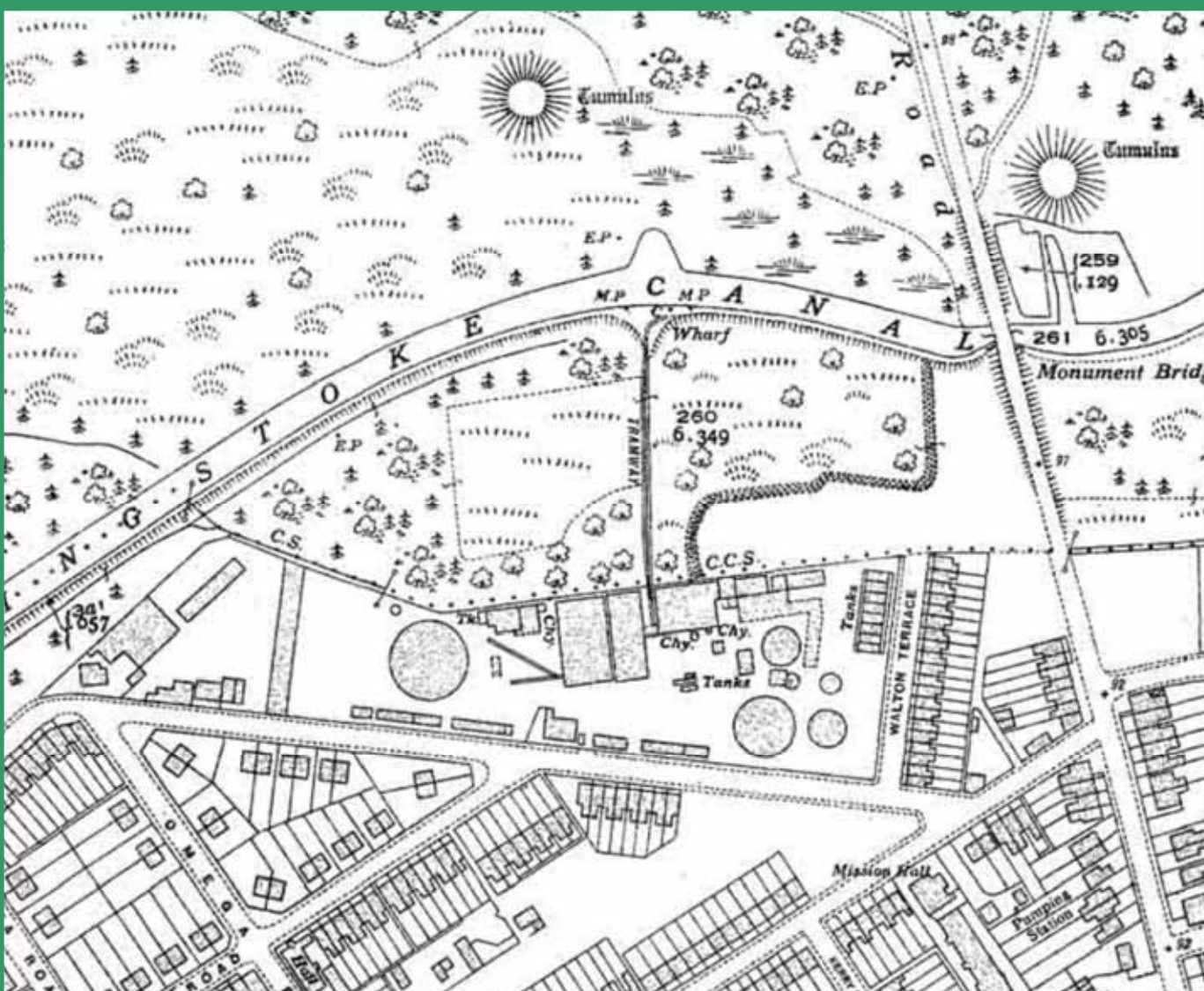


pollution and a fall in property values, but it had the great advantage of being very close to the canal, on which a coal wharf was built.

The gasworks, with a capacity of 70,000 cubic feet and a 60-foot high gasometer, were opened on 9 June 1892, and the enterprise proved an immediate success, paying a dividend of 3½ per cent to 5½ per cent regularly from the first year onwards. The increases in industrial demand and in the number of domestic consumers were most satisfactory, and a profitable sideline was developed, supplying ammonia, ashes and tar to the local authorities for highway and sanitary use. In 1901 and 1905 the works were extended to increase production, and in 1909 a tramway was built between the wharf and the works to cope with coal traffic.

Gas main reached Horsell in 1897, West Byfleet in 1899, Mayford and Hook Heath in 1902.

The Basingstoke Canal proved vital for the provision of cheap coal for its production and the carriage of coal for the gas works likewise proved vital to the continued operation of the canal. Indeed apart from the mid 1830's when the canal was used to transport goods for the building of the London & Southampton Railway, the only time it carried anything like the tonnage that had originally been predicted was in the mid 1930's when up to 14,000 tons of coal were taken off the barges and



transported on a tramway into the Boundary Road works. That ended in 1936, and although timber continued to be carried on the waterway until the late 1940's, the canal started to decline from then on.

Incidentally the concrete plinth and crane by Monument Bridge was apparently built in 1934 for a local wire manufacturer and not (as has often been thought) for the gas works, whose wharf was further up the canal towards Woking (as can be seen from the map above).

