

THE HERMITAGE ESTATE IN 1938

Iain Wakeford 2016

The old Hermitage House was demolished in the mid 1930's



Last week I mentioned the 1928 North West Surrey Plan and how it envisaged Woking to develop during the 1930's. Remarkably one area that the plan did not foresee being developed with housing was the land of The Hermitage at St Johns (although it did foresee a new road cutting across the Hermitage Woods from below the Crematorium to more or less where Gorsewood Road today joins the road near Hermitage Bridge).

The Hermitage was a large country house built in the early 19th century on a site that first appeared in the history books in the mid 14th century. Whether there ever was a 'hermit' at the Hermitage is unclear, but what we do know is that Lady Margaret Beaufort and her husband Henry Stafford entertained Edward IV at their 'hunting lodge' (thought to be the Hermitage) in the great wood of Brookwood on the 20th December 1468, the household accounts apparently listing "Conger eel, lamprey and 700 oysters, served off a pewter dinner service bought specially for the occasion"

John Aubrey, writing in the late 18th century noted that 'part of the house, built of stone and timber, yet remains', although by the early 19th century this seems to have been demolished and a new house built – possibly by Joseph White, whose widow, Margaret, sold the property in 1823 to a gentleman called John Gates for £3,600.

In the 1850's Henry Wedgewood (son of the potter Josiah Wedgewood II), brother-in-law to

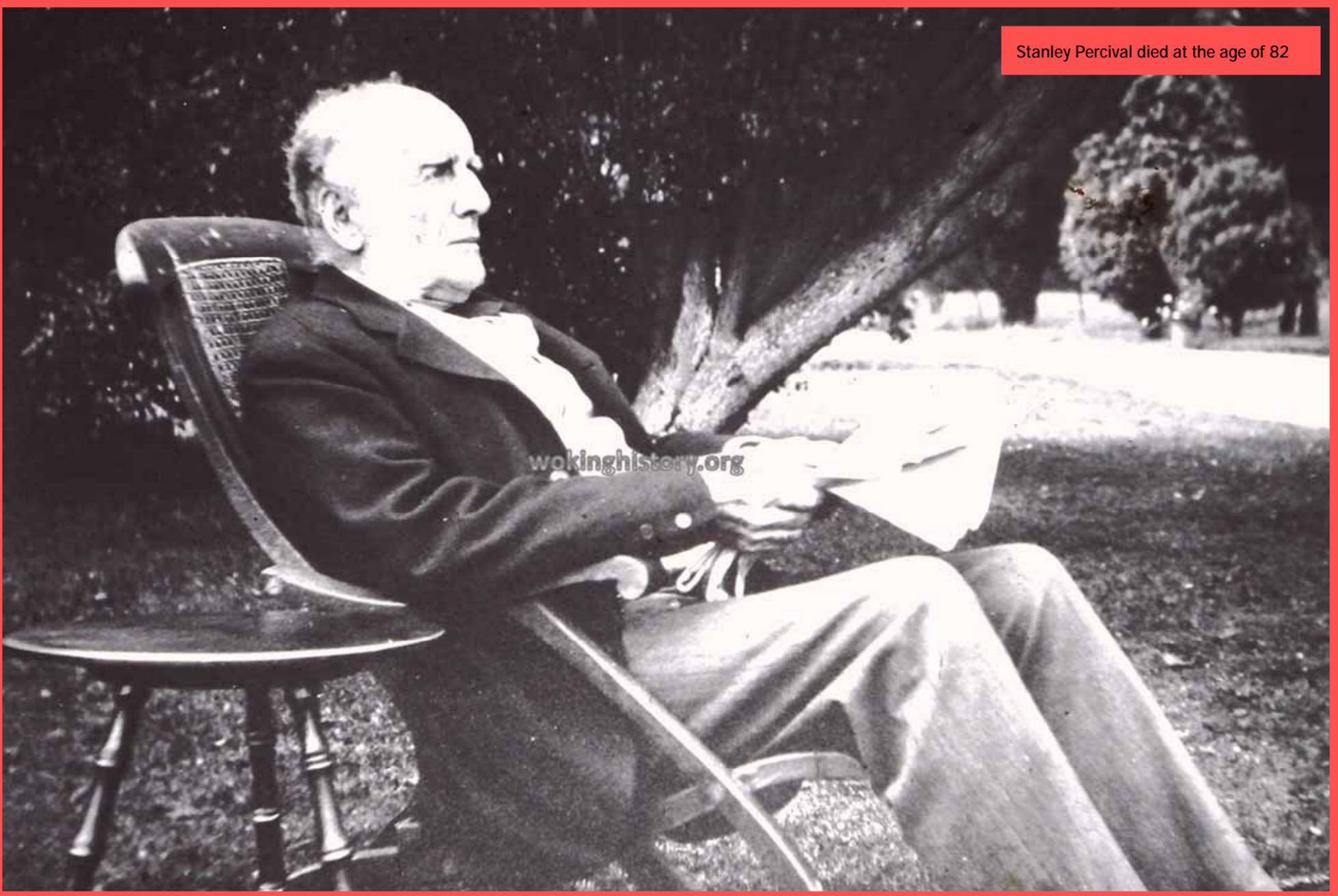
Charles Darwin, lived at the house with his family. Indeed it is known that Darwin visited him here on several occasions (such as in 1853 to see the army encamped on Chobham Common), and it has been claimed that the eminent scientist liked the property so much that if he could have found somewhere similar nearby he would have bought that instead of settling at Downe House in Kent!

In the 1870's the house became the property of Stanley Percival who lived there until he died aged eighty-two with his wife, Charlotte (who died in 1919 aged 100) and their daughter, Margaret, who herself lived to the age of ninety – dying in 1950 and therefore outliving the house by about fifteen years.

Plans for the new Hermitage Estate had been



Stanley Percival died at the age of 82



drawn up as early as 1934 when permission was given for 183 houses and six shops on the site, but sales were apparently slow and even in 1938 A F Tucker, the developer, was still

offering 'superior built houses, fitted with gas cookers and fires and electric light' from £450 freehold - £25 deposit and 11/- a week thereafter. The larger 'A' Type houses on the

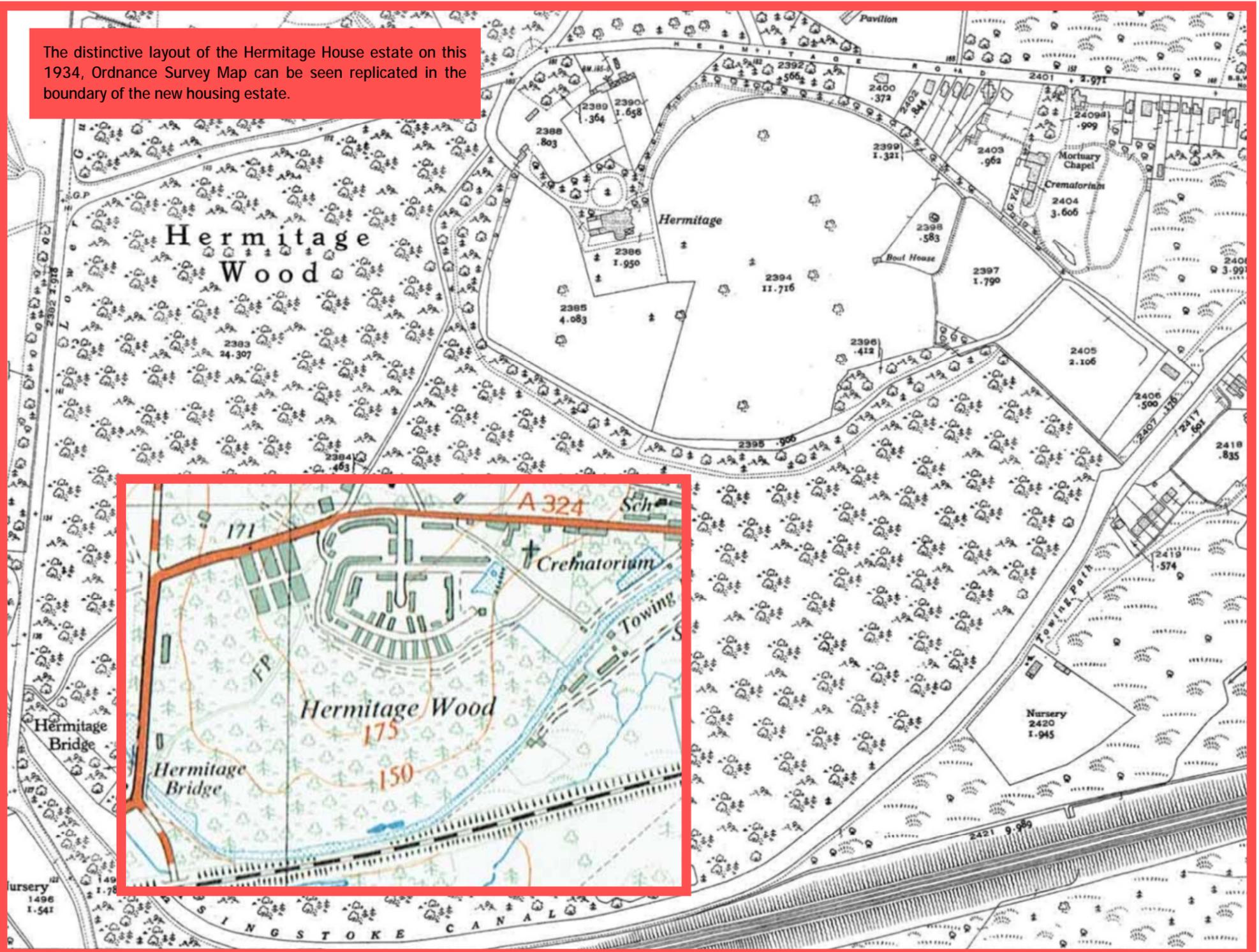
site (with a large garden and mains drainage) fetched £575.

In 1987, Jim Wayte, recalled when his family moved into one of the new semi-detached



His wife, Charlotte (on the right) reached the age 100.

The distinctive layout of the Hermitage House estate on this 1934, Ordnance Survey Map can be seen replicated in the boundary of the new housing estate.



houses in Batten Avenue (No. 130). 'At the time we moved, the estate consisted of just Amis Road and Batten Avenue, joined by a small crossroads, with a square island in the centre (removed after the war)'.

'At the time the concrete road ended just beyond our front gate. The Mansion was still standing, though derelict, and as a young lad I can well remember exploring all around it.

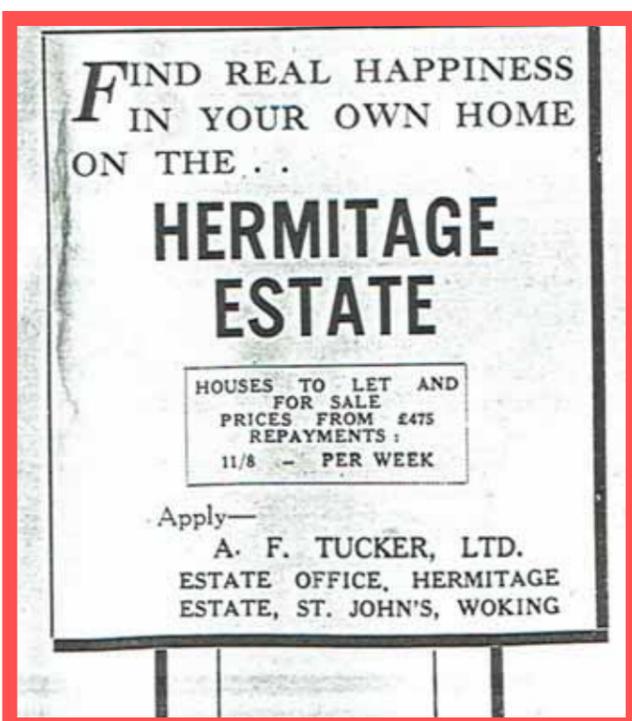
'Very shortly after we arrived a large number of Irish navies arrived to demolish the mansion and level the site, ready for the road layers and builders to continue into Oak Way and build the

rest of the estate'.

'The Irish navies set to and started demolishing the Mansion with pickaxes, crowbars and shovels (no bulldozers in those days). It took them weeks and weeks. I well remember going with my father in the evenings

to see how far they were progressing with the work.'

In the late 1950's the Hermitage Woods Estate was built on the land surrounding the old house and garden – but that story will have to wait until next year to be told.



As well as houses the new estate featured eight shops to serve the new residents.

BYFLEET METHODIST CHURCH - 1939

In previous articles I have mentioned the generosity of local 'mail-order' tycoon, Frank Derry, and his contribution to the building of the new Methodist Church at Knaphill in 1936, but he was also responsible for the rebuilding of another local church – the Methodist Church in Rectory Lane, Byfleet.

There had been a Wesleyan Chapel in the High Road at Byfleet in Victorian times, but in the 1920's it was closed (and subsequently sold to the Church of England for use as a Church Hall –later housing the village library), so that in the late 1920's a new hall and Sunday School could be erected in Rectory Lane.

The Hall was built first and registered as a place of worship on the 13th March 1933, but apparently the construction of the Church was delayed (presumably through lack of funds), until Mr Derry pitched in to pay for its construction in 1939. A stained glass window in the south aisle of the church commemorates his and his wife's gift.



SEND CATHOLIC CHURCH - 1939

The former Catholic Church at May's Corner in Send was also built in 1939 – being blessed on Sunday 29th December that year. It was built in a simple Gothic style and paid for by Mrs Emma May of Ashburton House (near Cartbridge) in memory of her husband, William, a former partner in the solicitor's firm of Slaughter and May.

The church was dedicated to St William, a 12th century Bishop of York (also known as William Fitzherbert or William of Thwayt) who was appointed Bishop in 1142, but deposed amid some controversy just five years later. He was re-instated, however, in 1153 but died just a few weeks later – apparently being poisoned!

The church at Send closed in 2007 and was then sold for development.

