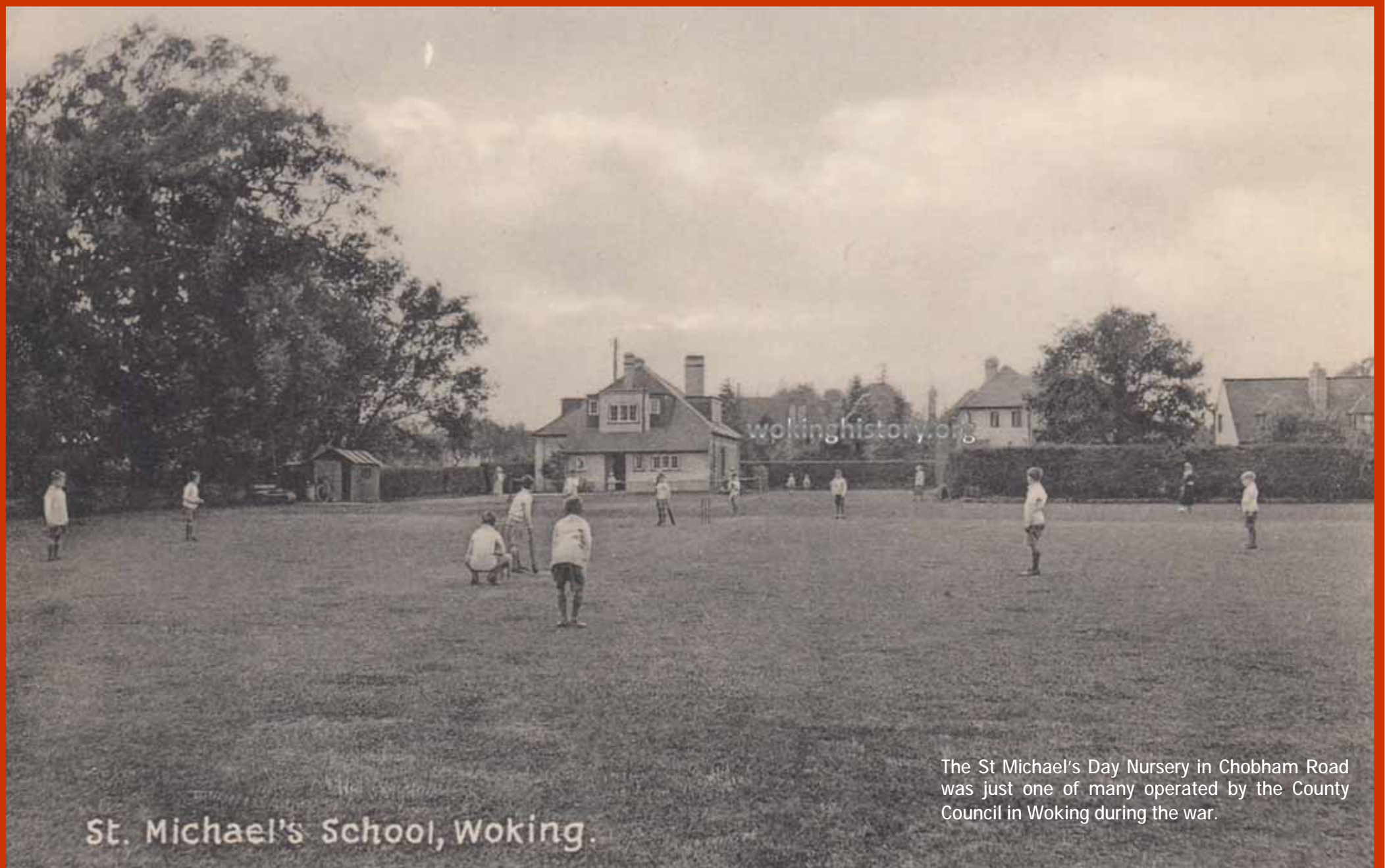


COMMANDEERED BUILDINGS — 1939-45

Iain Wakeford 2017



The St Michael's Day Nursery in Chobham Road was just one of many operated by the County Council in Woking during the war.

Last week we touched upon the commandeering of buildings for the war effort – local schools being used for billeting evacuees and then sharing their accommodation with the evacuees' schools until houses such as Barricane at St John's could provide temporary accommodation for the Putney Girls School; or The Gables at West Byfleet becoming the more permanent home for the Marist Convent School from Fulham.

We also noted the commandeering of houses such as Lismore in Heathside Road which became a Surrey County Council Hostel during the war, before being retained after the conflict as the local Education Office.

It is clear that no matter how much some might have wished changes of ownership and/or use to be only for the duration of the war, in many cases the 'temporary' alterations ended up being much more permanent than originally intended.

Surrey County Council converted Uplands on Maybury Hill into a 'Remand Home for Boys' in 1940. It remained a home for a while after the war, until eventually being sold off for development. On the opposite slope of Maybury Hill, St Fillian's was turned into a 'Day Nursery', adding to those already established at St Michael's (Chobham Road) and Penlea (Claremont Avenue). At the latter two the County Council apparently erected extra accommodation in the grounds towards the end of 1943 without seeking permission from Woking Council. They took 'grave exception' to

not being informed but nevertheless agreed to the buildings remaining 'for a period not exceeding six months after the cessation of hostilities'. Both properties continued as nurseries with or without their temporary extensions.

In March 1944 the County Council were also given permission to carry out alterations to Arden House at Byfleet as a 'wartime day nursery', but a couple of months later Woking Council were not so keen on Surrey taking over a house called Kilworth in Onslow Crescent for us as a hostel 'for housing high grade patients from Botley Park Institution'. Botleys was at that stage a mental health facility in the grounds of St Peter's Hospital (or, as we shall see in a few weeks time, St Peters was more precisely a war hospital in the grounds of Botley Park House)!

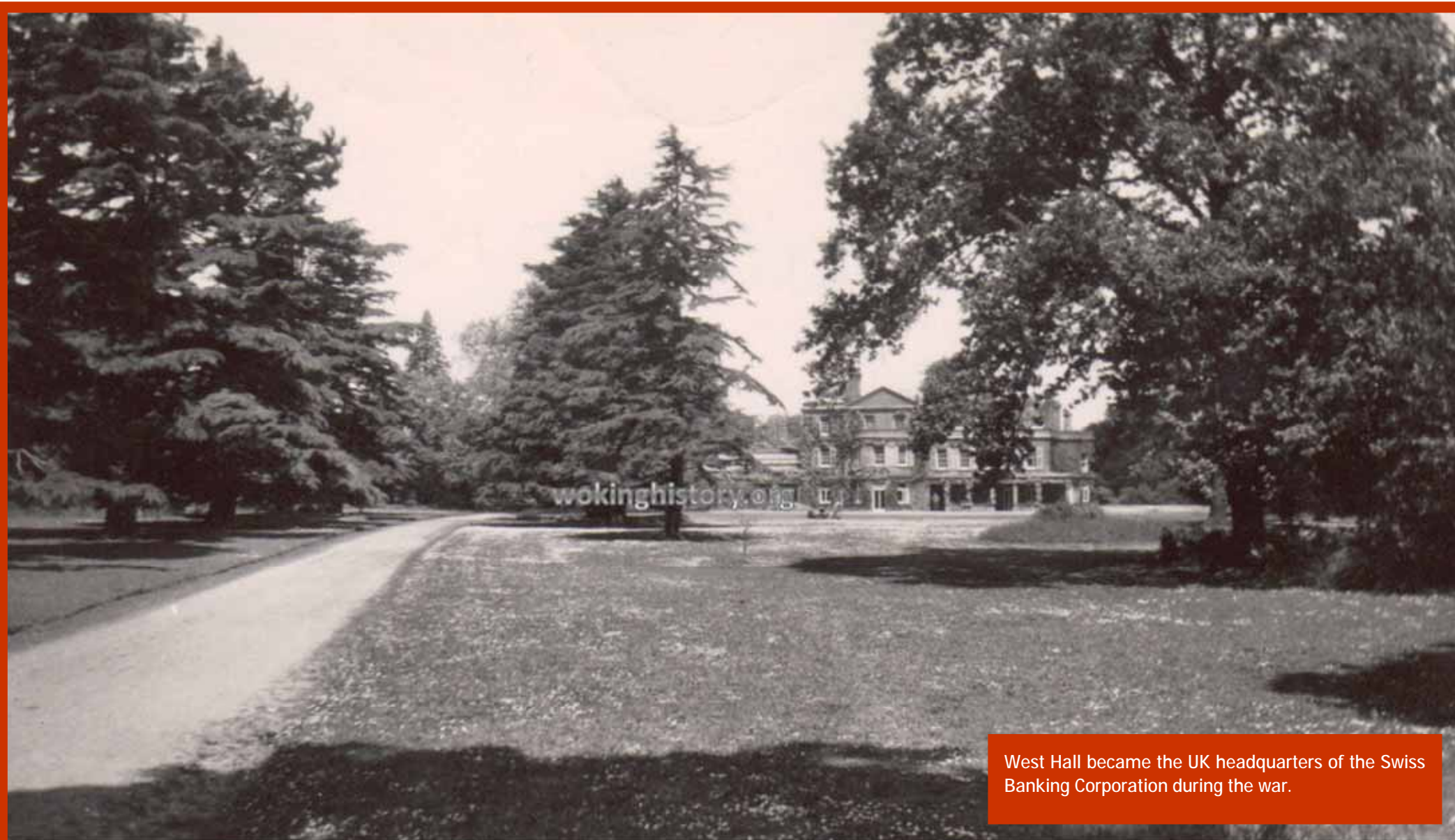
They were equally unhappy about proposals from the County Council to convert Comeragh Court at Hook Heath (below) into a

convalescent home for those suffering from tuberculosis, Woking Council receiving almost ninety letters of objection from neighbours! Likewise the 'neighbours' were probably not too pleased when Aigburgh in Mile Path was taken over by London County Council as a hostel.

In Horsell, Arreton House in Shores Road had been acquired by the 'Servers of the Blind League' during the war, who in May 1944 sought permission for the house to be permanently used as accommodation, and just before the war ended the 'Byfleet Home' committee sought permission to permanently use Redcourt at Blackdown Avenue in Pyrford as a 'convalescent home for young children'.



Redcourt in Blackdown Avenue at Pyrford



West Hall became the UK headquarters of the Swiss Banking Corporation during the war.

At West Byfleet, even before the war broke out, the Swiss Bank Corporation foresaw that it would be desirous to move out of London into the safety of the suburbs. In May 1939 they asked for permission to use West Hall – the home of the Stoop family – as offices ‘in the event of war’. Within a few months they moved in, although part of the site at least appears to

have been used as a hostel for land army girls later in the war.

At St Johns Hill Road the ‘Scientific Poultry Breeders Association’ were given permission in July 1939 to lease Deerstead House for offices ‘in the event of the country being involved in war’ and to ‘erect, if necessary, an air raid shelter in the grounds’, and at Horsell Church

Hill House was taken over by the Performing Arts Society Benevolent Fund as their offices and a convalescence home.

Other local properties were also commandeered for the war effort. The Navy, Army and Air Force Institute (Naafi) took over Mayhurst at Maybury Hill as a training school, whilst at the Dane Court School in Pyrford the





523 Field Survey Company were apparently using the buildings – at least during 1942-43 they were.

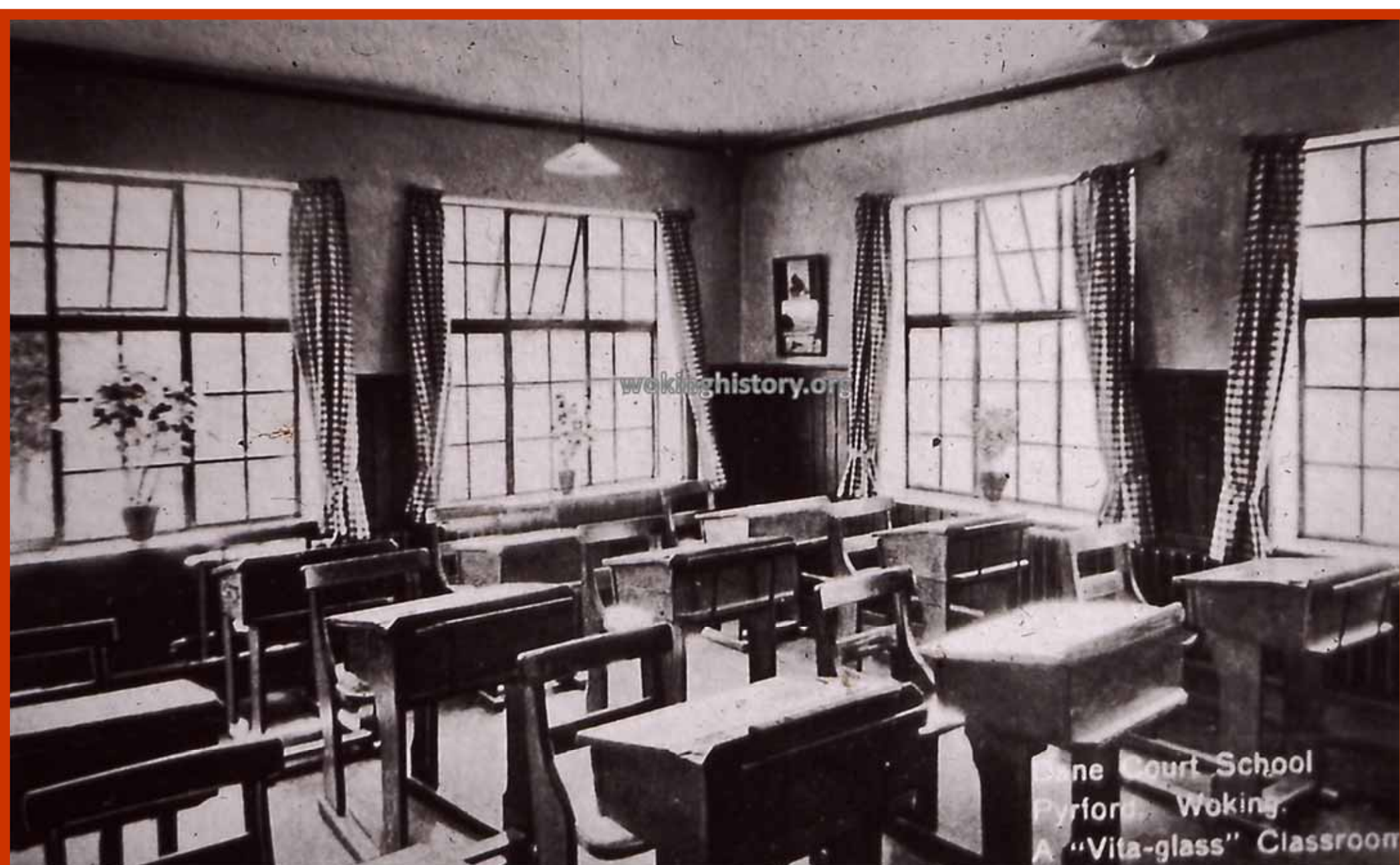
Brigadier A B Clough in a book entitled 'Maps and Survey' published by the War Office in 1952 noted 'For the raid on a German radar station at Bruneval, and for other raids of a similar nature, large scale maps of specified coastal areas were produced. The printing of

these special maps, which were compiled and drawn at G.H.Q. Home Forces, was undertaken under conditions of high security by 523 Field Survey Company R.E. located near Byfleet, Surrey. Its work was of the highest class and, both from the security aspect, speed of output, and reliability, this unit gave splendid service.'

A diary kept by the unit notes that they were actually at Dane Court, Pyrford, perhaps using

the new 'Vita Glass Classroom' with its large windows providing the ideal light for the map-makers to work in.

These were just some of the many commandeered buildings used in Woking by the County Council as day centres and hostels, by companies moving out of London as offices, and by the military. Woking really was playing its part in the war.



WOKING'S WAR-TIME SALVAGE HUNTERS



To help the war effort provisions were made for the salvage of bones, tins, bottles and metal, but it seems that at first the council were reluctant to sacrifice the railings around Sparrow Park for the war effort. Early in 1940 Slocock's Nursery had suggested to the council that the park – officially known as Victoria Gardens – would look better with the railings removed, but the council refused to entertain the idea. When the nursery asked 'why', the council decided not to answer and even when the 'Iron and Steel Department' of the Ministry of Supply wrote to the council in June 1940 their response was to adhere to the previous decision (again without any explanation it seems). It wasn't until July 1941 that the

council agreed to remove the iron fencing around the War Memorial Gardens (whilst at the same time insisting that the 'gates remain').

Eventually the council gave in, with railings in from of the council houses in Walton Road, from the island at the top of Hillview Road and from the 'superstructure on the roof of the pool café and pumping house' in the park also being removed for scrap.

In April 1940 the Public Health Committee of Woking Council reported on the collection of waste paper that had been instituted a couple of months previously. Apparently only 12 tons were collected in the first month but this had

risen to 32 and the money raised through the sale of the paper (£140) covered the expenditure of collection. Depots were apparently set up around the district where paper was collected, including Beech Hill at Mayford, Howell's outfitters in the High Road at Byfleet and the Fire Station at Old Woking (amongst other places).

It is noticeable too at that time, that the council were doing their bit to save on paper also, as the type-face on the printed council minutes was reduced – making my wartime volumes of the council's minutes fit neatly on my shelves, but at the obvious expense of my eyesight as I trawl through them now!



CHOBHAM'S CANNON SOLD FOR SCRAP IN 1942

In 1853, 16,000 troops gathered on Chobham Common to be inspected by Queen Victoria. When she died in 1901 the villagers decided to place a cannon from the period on the Village Green as part of their memorial to the late queen, but in 1942 as part of the 'saucepans into spitfires' campaign the villagers decided to sell the old weapon to help fund the new.

The cannon that now stands in front of Cannon Cottage dates from the 18th century and was loaned in 1979 by the National Artillery Museum to be displayed on a replica gun-carriage made by local craftsmen.

