

GLORIOUS GLOSTER'S

Iain Wakeford 2017



Some people have queried the spelling of 'Gloster Road' in Old Woking, but perhaps instead we should be questioning the surplus letters in the naming of Gloucester Square in the town. The latter is named after the Duke who unveiled the plaque upon its opening in 1992, but the former commemorates a much older association with the town as the Gloster family had been pioneers in this area long before then!

In 1876 Henry Gloster moved to Woking and opened his hardware store and corn exchange in Chobham Road – one of the first commercial premises in what would become the new town of Woking. Trade was so slight that he decided to hire a band to play on Saturday mornings to



Henry Gloster's original 'South Western Stores' in Chobham Road, before he built the 'Corn Exchange' around the corner in Chertsey Road.



entertain the shoppers, but within a few years the business had grown and Mr Gloster had purchased extra land upon which to expand. Indeed he was so confident in the prospects of Woking that in the late 1890's, when the original Albion Hotel was being redeveloped, he bought the entire garden (between Chertsey Road and Commercial Road down to his and Mr Hart's butcher's shop on the corner of Chobham Road) and built what was then known simply as 'The Pavement'.

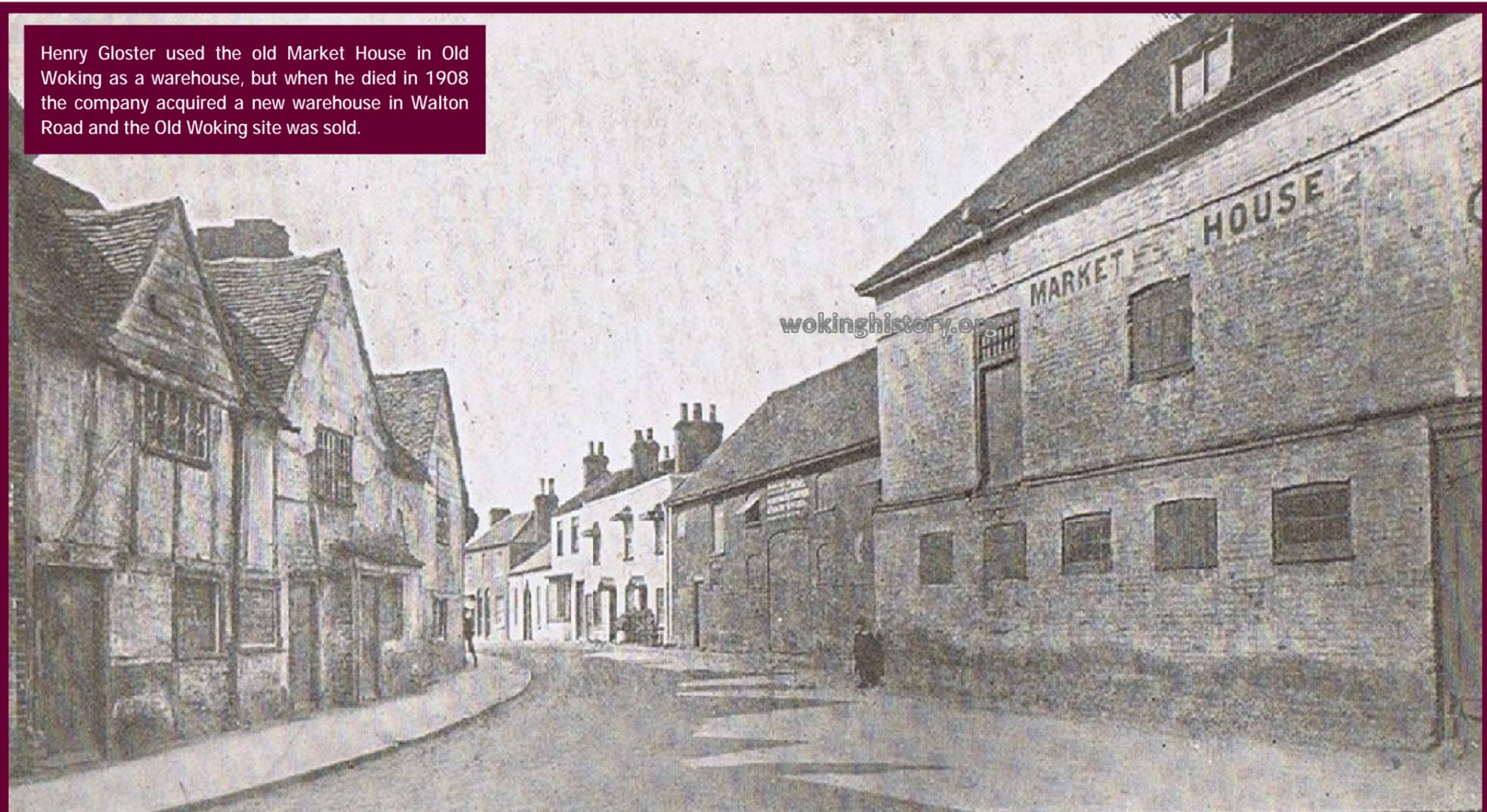


That was in 1896 when his new 'Corn Exchange' opened along with the 'Central Stores' – a grocery business also run by the family in what is now the bar called 'The Pound'.

A couple of years after opening the new shops in Chertsey Road, Gloster's bought the old Market House in Old Woking as a warehouse – a building that appears to have been demolished in 1908, the year that Henry

Gloster died. The firm, then run by his nephew Mr F J Arnold, acquired a new warehouse in Walton Road from Messrs New & Mayne, who ran the Woking Electric Supply Company at that time.

Henry Gloster used the old Market House in Old Woking as a warehouse, but when he died in 1908 the company acquired a new warehouse in Walton Road and the Old Woking site was sold.



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Photo. by J. A. Keenes.

WOKING; THE OLD MARKET HOUSE.



The Chertsey Road store in the mid 1930's. Notice the building site in the background where the original Red House Hotel had been, before the new Burton's store was built on the site.



After 1908, Gloster's warehouse was in Walton Road, part of the site where Dukes Court would now be.



Seed and grain were apparently still brought by barge along the Basingstoke Canal to a wharf off Brewery Road in Horsell, where horses and carts would carry the goods over Wheatsheaf Bridge to the town.

Later, in the 1920's, Gloster's Ltd expanded into selling coal and coke having bought the Woking depot of Messrs Drake and Mount Ltd, and with a gardening and pet food department, the company continued to expand and prosper – just as many of their tenants and neighbours had done in the period up to and immediately following the Second World War.

Sadly by the early 1960's things had already started to change and Gloster's decided to downsize their shops in the town. They moved out of the Corn Exchange in Chertsey Road in August 1960 so it could be demolished and replaced by two new shops, whilst behind, their stores and offices (and those of Tyler's Wine Merchants) were also to be redeveloped with five shops between the Albion Hotel site and number 46 Commercial Road – the 'temporary' Post Office (from 1947 to 1960) that I wrote about last week.

When the Post Office moved out in 1960, Gloster's moved in, but unfortunately the site did not prove a great success for the company and the shop was eventually forced to close – the company moving to Carthouse Lane in Horsell where they continued their wholesale business for several years.

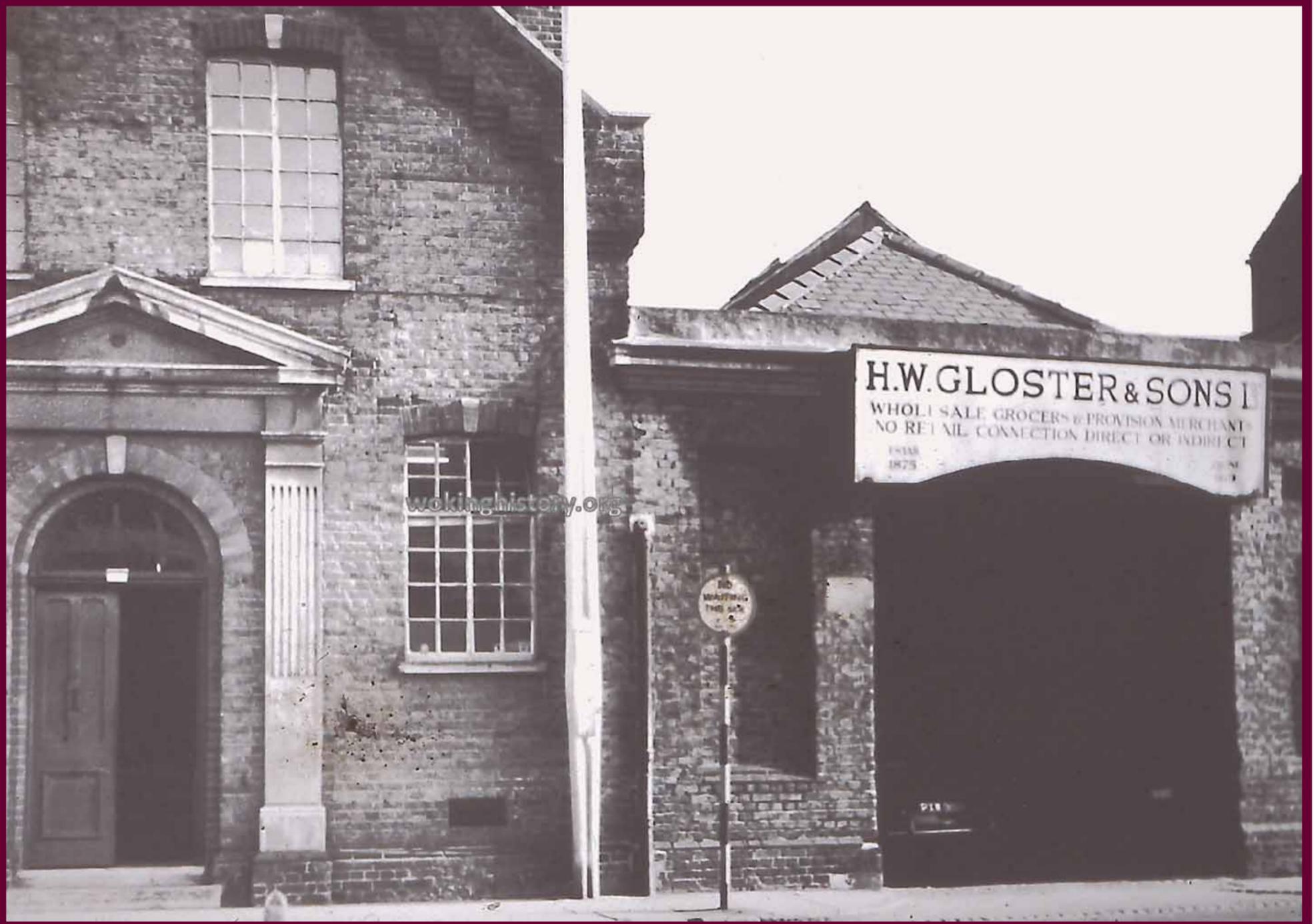


Their original store in Chobham Road, along with their old shops in Chertsey Road and number 46 Commercial Road, are locally listed buildings in the heart of Woking Town Centre's Conservation Area (created in July 1991) – but how long they and the other buildings of 'townscape merit' survive is anybody's guess.

In the 1920's Gloster's bought the coal merchants business of Messrs Drake & Mount.

Woking is constantly being rebuilt and re-invented, but one of the town's first developers was Henry Gloster – and as such I think it should be his name that is commemorated in the town.

Their offices and storerooms in Commercial Road,.





46 Commercial Road. At one time the Rendezvous Restaurant, later the Post Office and from 1960, Gloster's new shop.