

GAMMON'S & EARLY CLOSING DAYS

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James Fielder Gammon's original Woking shop was on the corner of Commercial Road and Chobham Road.



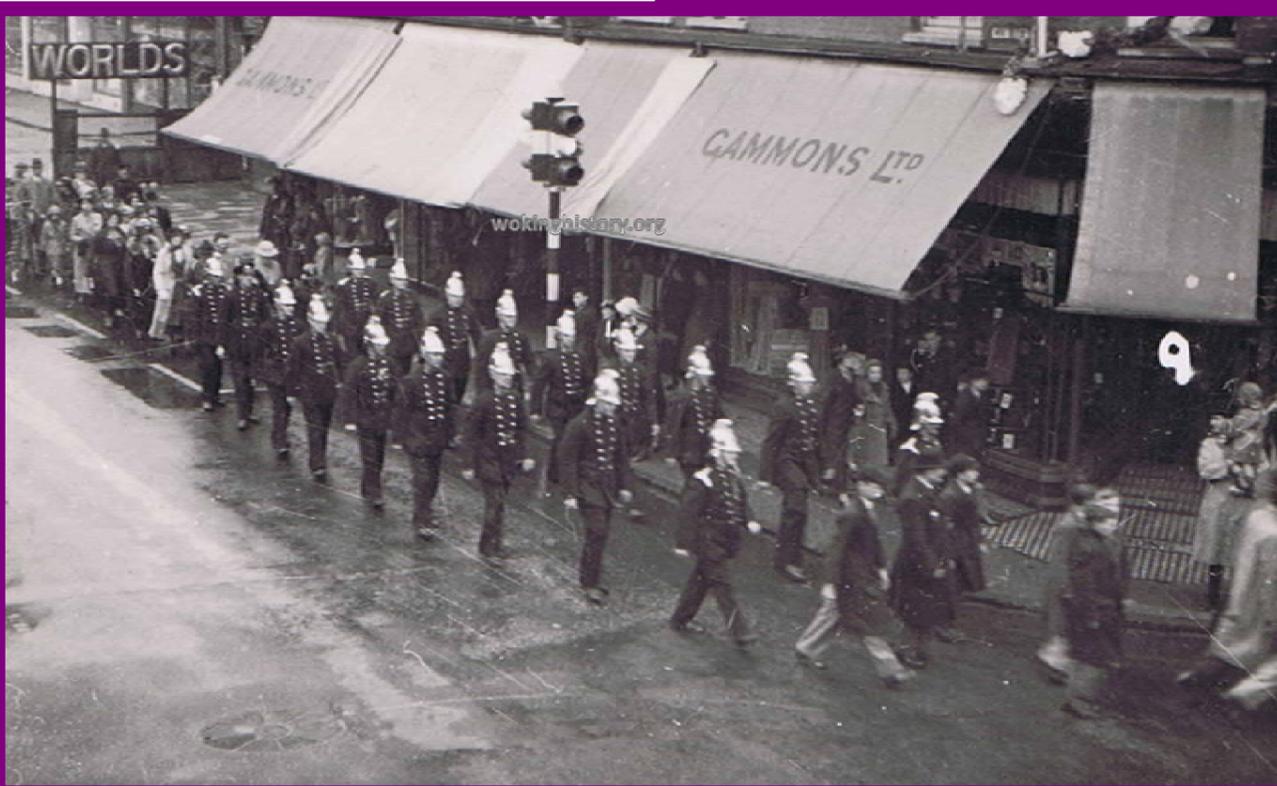
In the early 1960's Woking had three department stores – Robinson's in Chertsey Road, the Co-op on the corner of Church Street and Percy Street (Victoria Way), and Gammon's on the corner of Commercial Road and Chobham Road (on part of the site now occupied by the British Heart Foundation shop).

Of the three the oldest was Gammons, which had originally been set up by James Fielder

Gammon, a draper from Guildford (hence the Woking shop being called 'Guildford House') whose first shop was opened there in 1878. By the 1880's he had set up the Woking branch, with stores in Cobham and Cranleigh eventually being established as well.

A parade past the store - probably one of the Hospital Carnival processions heading for the Wheatsheaf Recreation Ground.

Over the years the draper, outfitters and boot store in Woking had been expanded as neighbouring shops were gradually taken over – so that Gammons development into a 'department store' was really quite gradual. Its layout certainly reflected the fact. I can well remember the differing levels within the shop with odd ramps and steps up and down were





Gradually the store expanded into neighbouring shops in Commercial Road - including the World's Stores.





doors and corridors had been knocked through old dividing walls. But perhaps the most memorable part of the shopping experience was the system by which money was sent from the tills to the accounts department by way of pneumatic tubes across the ceiling – a mesmerising sight for all to observe.

They also took over a number of shops in Chobham Road - eventually owning most of the site that would in the future be redeveloped as British Home Stores (now the British Heart Foundation Charity Furniture shop).

Of course by the time I knew the shop it was no longer owned by the Gammon family, but had

been taken over by the Debenham's Group, who in January 1962 apparently paid 'a total equivalent of nearly half a million pounds', for the headquarter business in Guildford and the Woking and Cobham stores (the lease on the Cranleigh store due to expire and so excluded from the purchase)!





In 1962 Maxwell's adopted the 'Sainsbury Experiment' of opening just five days a week.

1962 appears to have been a time of great change for shoppers in Woking as several local shops changed their opening times in line with what was then referred to as 'The Sainsbury's Experiment'. Until then many shops in town adhered to the Wednesday 'half-day closing', with some also taking Saturday afternoons off - Sundays then being a complete day of rest for everyone (except the local clergy, of course).

Incredible as it may seem today Sainsbury's had decided to keep all their stores throughout the South-east open all day on scheduled 'early-closing days' but to close them on Mondays, giving their staff two full consecutive days off.

Maxwell's music stores in Guildford Road (above) and Chertsey Road (below) were



amongst the first to adopt the Sainsbury's scheme locally, with the Woking Chamber of Trade debating the idea in March 1962. Mr E Russell, the jewellers, wanted to see the Chamber take the lead and adopt the plan, but others were not so certain it was a good idea, with Mr A C Elton (the stationers) asking whether the 'real issue was whether there was to be a five-day week for both staff and shops, or a five-day week for staff and a six-day week for shops'.

Inevitably the latter won out in the end, although perhaps 'the end' is not exactly the right term to use. I don't think there are many shops that close for two full days a week, although there are some places where 'early closing days' do still exist. Some stores (like The

Entertainer) insist on shutting on Sundays, but the majority are now open seven days a week, with some staying open for at least one late-night a week as well.

Back in the early 1960's if you had predicted that within fifty years shops would be open seven days a week, they would have thought you were mad – let alone if you had told them that you would be able to buy items 24/7, 365 days a year using a phone that could be carried in your pocket on a thing called the internet! That's progress for you.

Mr A C Elton, of the stationers in Chertsey Road, was not so sure, predicting that most shops would stay open six days a week. In the end, off course, they were both proved wrong!

