

THE UPS & DOWNS OF OCKENDEN

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Staff of the Ockenden Venture and some children can be seen here outside the house in 1958.



I have mentioned before in these columns the work of the Ockenden Venture and the role that Joyce Pearce played in the founding of the organisation, originally set up as a result of a scheme in 1951 to give displaced children from Eastern Europe a 'holiday' at Miss Pearce's family home in White Rose Lane. The idea was given support by many local people and organisations, and formed part of the town's contribution to the 'Festival of Britain' that year – but like all good ideas, one thing led to another, and before she knew it Joyce and her colleagues were leading a major international charity helping refugees from around the world.

All that cost money, and whilst the great and good of Woking (and indeed elsewhere) gave up their time and money in support, Joyce Pearce seems to have been prepared to sacrifice almost anything for the cause – including her beloved family home, Ockenden, near the corner with Hillview Road.

Early in 1963 an application was submitted to Woking Council for the demolition of Ockenden and replacing it with 'twenty-six patio houses and sixty bed-sitting room flats, in three fourteen-storey blocks and two nine-storey

blocks'. The house was within the new 'high-density development' zone, but it was only just within the scheme and the original idea was

that any tall buildings would be in the centre, with lower high-density buildings trailing off towards the edges. Perhaps not surprisingly the council refused 'unless more time for consideration' was given, which appears to have been the polite way of saying 'go away and come up with something we can approve'.

The Pearce Family Home was eventually redeveloped with houses and town houses, rather than the 'bed-sits' originally planned.





I am not certain that Miss Pearce got the hint as the next application was still for the twenty-six patio houses, with the bed-sits now to be housed in 'a point block of 14 and 11 storeys' – which likewise was immediately refused by the council.

No doubt Miss Pearce and her supporters had been encouraged by the new ten-storey block of flats then being constructed on the edge of the high-density area at Craigmere on Guildford Road. There the council were even thinking of creating a one-way system up Guildford Road and down Constitution Hill to accommodate the new tower-block (and others planned across the road – overlooking the park), but on White Rose Lane things were different, and whilst approval for Craigmere had been won on appeal, approval for a similar scheme here (overlooking the expensive houses of Heathside Park Road and Ashwood Road), was clearly not to be.

Judging by contemporary photographs of her, I wonder how the officials at Woking's Planning Department managed to refuse her permission for anything – she looked quite formidable and was obviously then at the height of her power. In January 1964 she was awarded the MBE in the New Year's Honours List, and with her sister Mary, and long-time supporter Ruth Hicks, she visited Buckingham Palace later that month to receive the honour from the Queen.

The following year the house was visited by the actress Ingrid Bergman (who was in the area for a play at Guildford's new theatre), but whilst

Miss Pearce no doubt charmed the actress (and indeed Her Majesty), her persuasive powers as far as the planners at Woking were concerned were on this occasion ineffectual.

Later a more modest redevelopment of the site was agreed and the houses and town-houses that now bear the Ockenden name were built on the site in the late 1960's.

In January 1964 Joyce Pearce was awarded the MBE, visiting the Palace with her sister Mary (right), and Ruth Hicks (left).

A model of the proposed development at Ockenden with White Rose Lane on the right and Hillview Road across the top. The model was shown to the public inquiry (and printed in the local press) in February 1964, but Miss Pearce and the developers lost the appeal.

