

REBUILDING ALBION - THE STORY OF THE 'WOKING ONE' SITE (NOT BRITAIN AFTER BREXIT)!

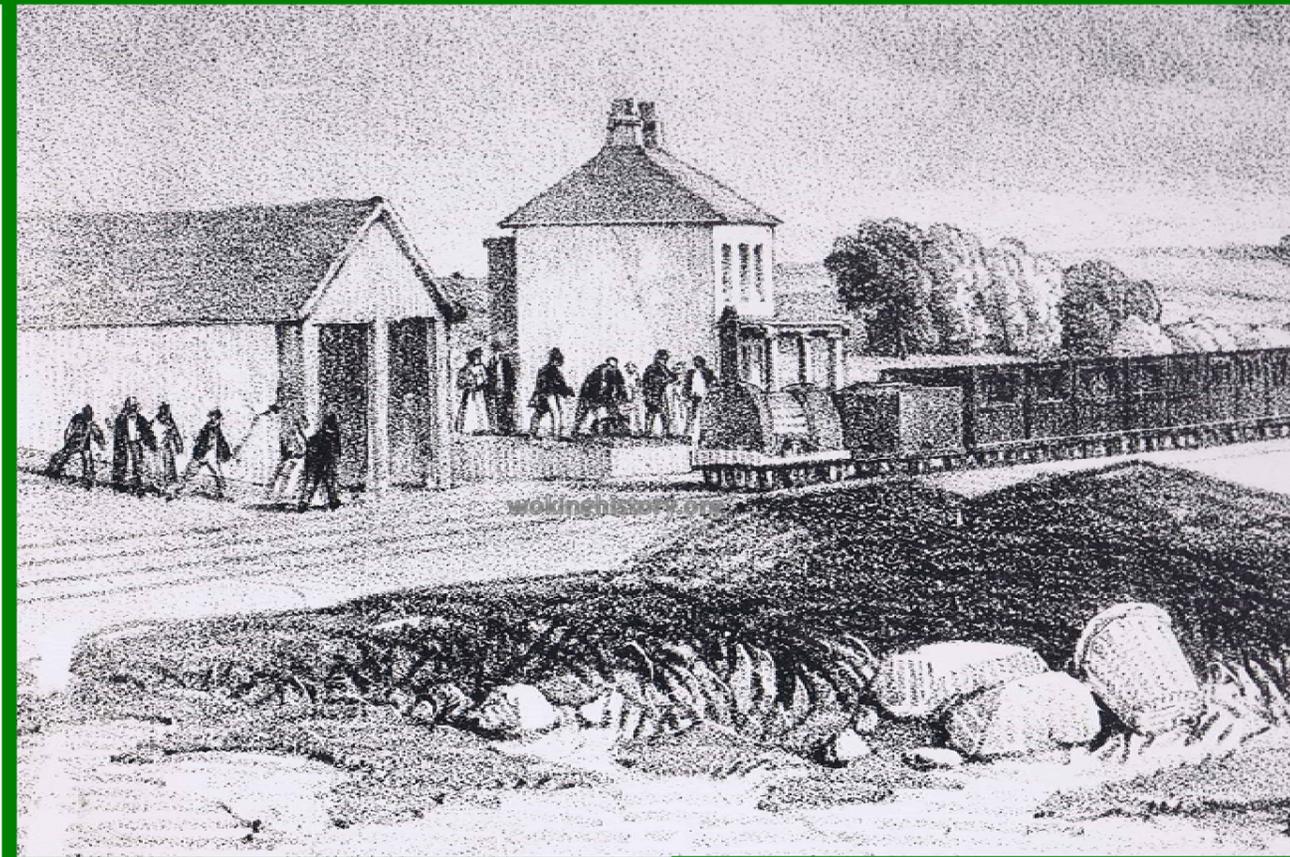
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Restyled, rejuvenated, re-developed – how would you describe the work currently being carried out on Albion House (above)? I am not certain that the latter is quite the right word as the concrete core of the building remains. Redevelop to me means completely demolishing what was there before and replacing it with something new – which is what happened to the old Albion Hotel in the mid 1960's, and indeed to the original one (built in 1856) in the late 1890's.

In fact what they are now calling 'Woking One' is probably the fourth reincarnation for the site, making it probably the most reconstructed property in Woking (along with the railway station). That is perhaps not surprising as the original Albion was the first place to be built to the north of the station following the land sales in the mid 1850's by the London Necropolis Company.

When Woking Station first opened one-hundred and eighty years ago, there was nothing but open heath where the town centre is today. The nearest properties were probably across the canal in Horsell, or the old Ramwick Cottage in Park Road. Woking Heath was common land, which meant that although it was owned by the Lord of the Manor (Lord Onslow), the local farmers and smallholders had certain rights to graze their animals on the land, and take products such as gorse, heather and sand for their own use. The main entrance to the station



was on the south side (facing Guildford where most of the early coach traffic came from), with hardly any railway facilities to the north.

The purchase of the common (and eventually the payment of compensation to the commoners) by the London Necropolis & National Mausoleum Company in the 1850's paved the way for the land to be sold and the new town of Woking to be built, when the company decided that the area around the station was surplus to their requirements.

The Railway Hotel (now the Sovereigns) had been constructed in 1840 on a small plot of farm land to the south of station, but the Albion was the first to the north – almost immediately opposite the station. It was built by a man called Reuben Percy who had been the landlord of the Wheatsheaf Hotel in Horsell. It wasn't long, however, before his square, three-storey

When Woking Station was first opened in 1838 there was nothing but common land where the town centre is today. The main station buildings were on the south side, where most of the trade came from.

property proved to be too small, and in the late 1890's it became the first place in town to be redeveloped (unless you count some minor rebuilding at Woking Station in the 1880's).

That has always been Woking's problem. If they had thought about it at the time, it would have made sense to reserve the land for the railway company to build a better town entrance, but in the 1850's the station was only about twenty years old, and so there was no objection to the original Albion being built. When the station was partially rebuilt in the 1880's the Albion was only about thirty years old, and a decade later when the hotel was rebuilt, the railway company were not interested in acquiring the land and building a new north entrance.



In 1856 the first Albion Hotel was built on land sold by the Necropolis Station, so that when the station was partially rebuilt in the 1880's the Albion Hotel effectively blocked any grand entrance to the station being built on the town side.





When the Albion was demolished in the late 1890's, the London & South Western Railway Company was not interested in acquiring the site to build a grand new town entrance to the station, as they only a decade earlier they had partially rebuilt the station, and the fledgling Woking Urban District Council were too timid to acquire the site themselves.



With electrification of the main line in the mid 1930's Woking Station was rebuilt with a new entrance to the south, but to the north the new Albion Hotel was in its heyday and not available for redevelopment.



By the time the station was rebuilt in the late 1930's the second Albion was still in its prime, but by the early 1960's when the new Albion House office development was first proposed,

the station was still relatively new, and British Railways were in no position to provide Woking with the town centre entrance to the station that it deserved.

By the 1960's when Albion House was first proposed, British Rail were in no position to buy the site and provide Woking with the station entrance it deserved, and once again the local authority didn't have the guts to intervene.





And now, with the work taking place on 'Woking One' the opportunity to provide a grand station entrance has been lost once more. You

can pave the street all you like (and restrict it to just buses and taxis) – you could even erect a massive canopy over the top (if you really

wanted to waste your time and money) – but without a co-ordinated plan to redevelop BOTH sites, Woking will continue to be 'back-to-front'!



The north entrance is still just as cramped as always, and no amount of fancy paving can compensate for the planners lack of vision.