

WHEN SEEING STARS IN WOKING WAS NOT UNUSUAL

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WKG .75. COMMERCIAL ROAD, WOKING.

In January 1964 it was reported in the local press that the Beatles were enrolled as members of the Y.M.C.A. at Woking. From what I can tell a couple of members of the Association from Woking had won a competition to see the 'fab four' perform at the Astoria in Finsbury Park, where they invited the group to join the Woking Branch of the organisation. Whether John, Paul, George and Ringo ever used their membership, I do not know, but at least it gave the group some much-needed publicity (the Woking YMCA that is – the Beatles not needing much more promotion).

Having seen the band rehearse, the Woking duo stayed for the actual performance, although the noise of the crowd meant that 'one of the hardest parts of the trip was managing to hear the Beatles perform at all'. Afterwards the Woking pair left with their autographed photos and apparently the last they saw of their heroes 'was when they were in their dressing-room eating jam butties'!

Of course you didn't have to go all the way to Finsbury Park to hear popular music at that time, with the Atalanta in Commercial Road, Woking, attracting several well-known names.

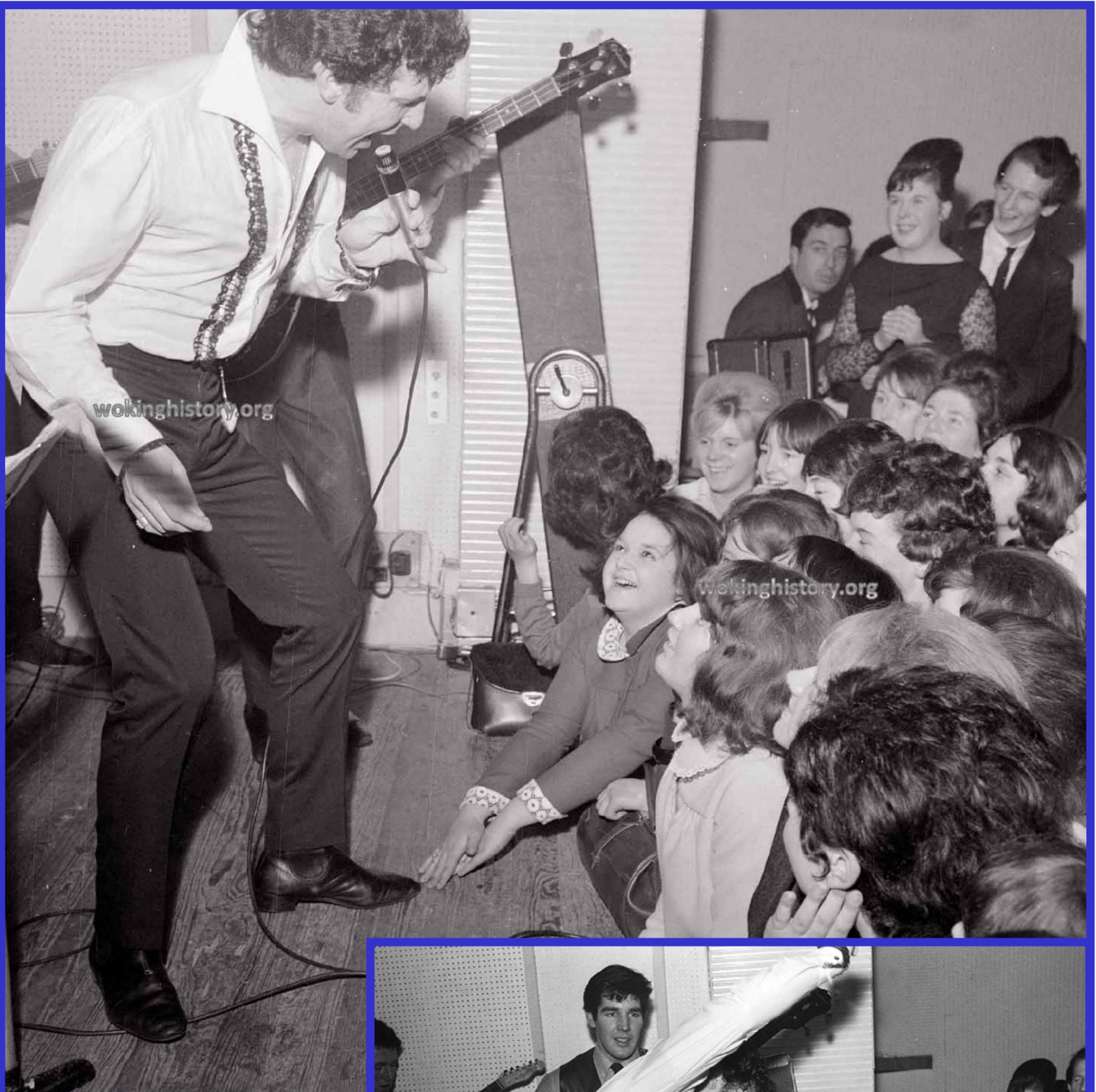
For many years the 'Ata' in Commercial Road had been Woking's top music venue

Perhaps the most famous were the Rolling Stones who played there in August 1963, but another now famous name was not so well-known at the time he performed there on the 27th February 1965!

Tom Jones was at the beginning of his career with his first hit single 'It's Not Unusual' having just reached number one in the UK singles charts (and about to be released in the United States).

I don't know for certain, but I suspect his appearance in Woking might have had





Fortunately a photographer (Cyril Maitland) was on hand at the Atalanta to capture the scene, the pictures being published in the Daily Mirror (who have kindly given us permission to reproduce them on this site).

something to do with Les Reed, the Woking born songwriter who co-wrote the hit with Gordon Mills (Tom Jones' manager). In an interview the following year, Reed claimed that the song had 'made him about £18,000' – not bad for a man who just a few years earlier was still playing the piano in the Lion Works Social Club (where he used to work)!

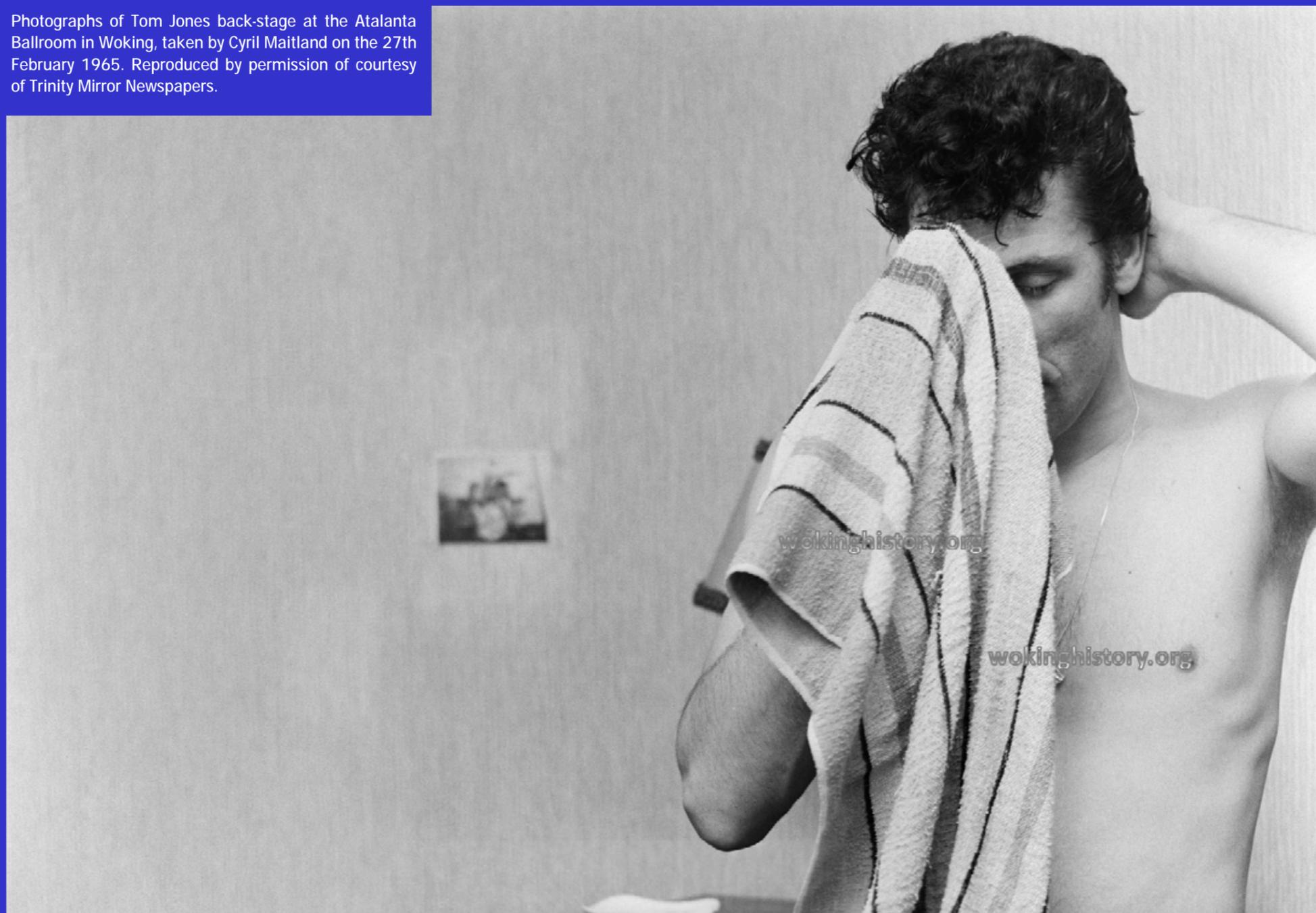
Apparently the song was originally intended for Sandie Shaw, with Jones being asked to record the demo for her to hear, but she turned it down, recommending that the single be released by the unknown Welshman instead.

By then Les Reed had moved out of his parent's council house in Granville Road at Westfield





Photographs of Tom Jones back-stage at the Atalanta Ballroom in Woking, taken by Cyril Maitland on the 27th February 1965. Reproduced by permission of courtesy of Trinity Mirror Newspapers.



and moved into a bungalow on Hook Heath (with a full-scale recording studio in the back garden). Here he apparently also wrote 'Here it Comes Again' for The Fortunes, and 'Leave a Little Love' for Lulu (as well as numerous later hit singles – including Delilah for Tom Jones in 1968).

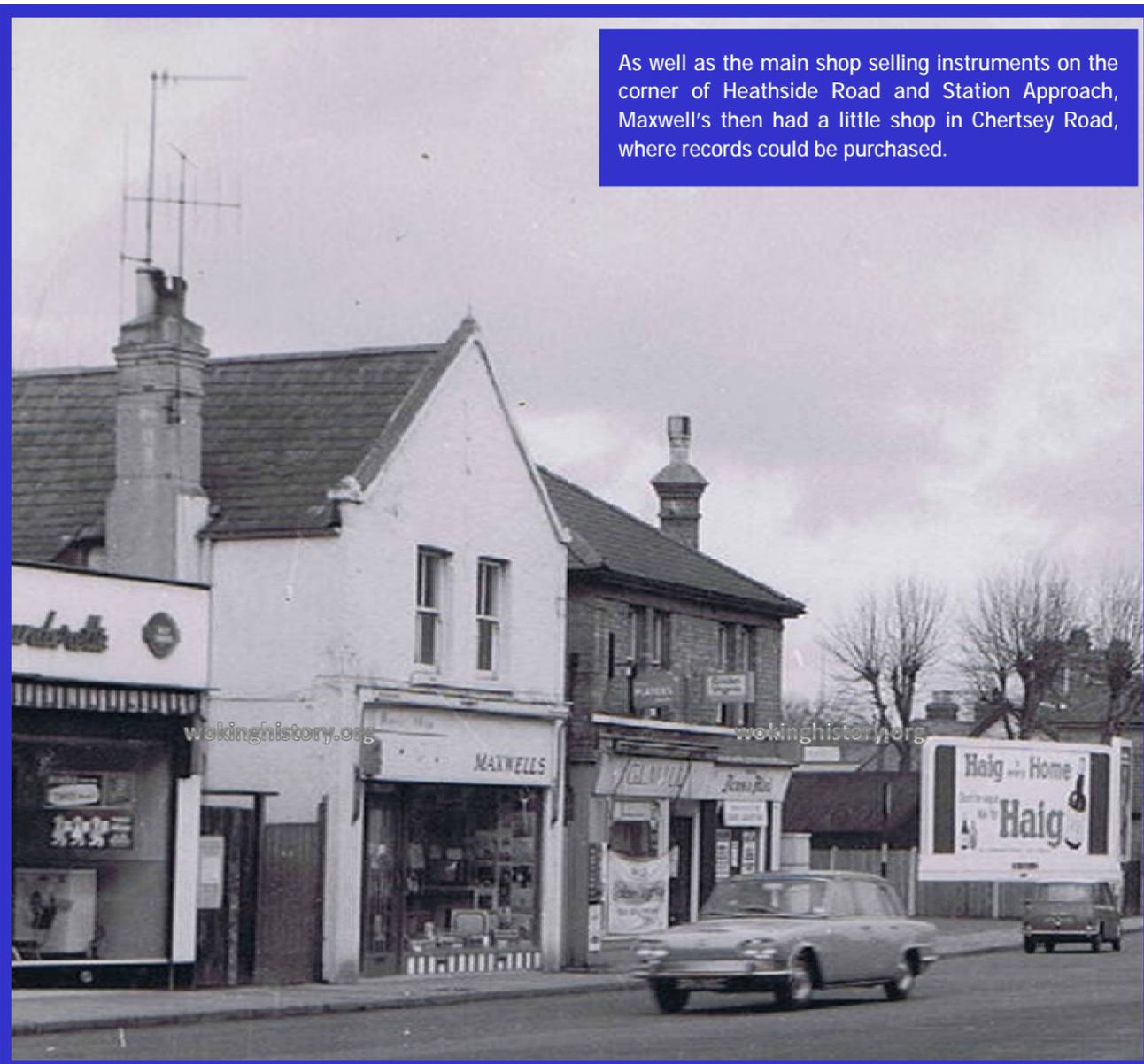
For the 'pop' fans of Woking many of those singles would have been purchased at places like Maxwell's Music shops in Guildford Road and Chertsey Road, and later in the 1960's at Aerco's on the corner of Chobham Road and Church Street (the company originally only specialising in servicing televisions and radios).

Maxwell's, of course, also sold instruments, helping many young locals take their tentative steps into the music business – helped by the fact that the town possessed numerous little village and church halls where they could practice and perform.

The mid 1960's saw a number of new 'Community Centres' being created, at Old Woking and Sheerwater, with others planned (such as Knaphill), aided by grants from both Woking & Surrey Councils, supplemented by money from central government and supported by local donations and charitable trusts.

How much all this influenced some of the youngster's growing up in and around Woking at that time I do not know, but it is clear that a venue where live music could be heard was a key factor, and without local halls and clubs (such as Michaels in Goldsworth Road, and later the Liberal Club in Walton Road), Woking (if not the world) would have been a duller place in the 1980's & 90's!

As well as the main shop selling instruments on the corner of Heathside Road and Station Approach, Maxwell's then had a little shop in Chertsey Road, where records could be purchased.



Later in the 1960's Aerco's opened their record store on the corner of Church Street and Chobham Road (opposite the Ritz Cinema).

