

PRIORS CROFT, OLD WOKING

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During the period between the end of the Second World War and 1956 Woking Council built 1,756 new homes (an average of about 160 a year), but between 1957 and 1966 the average had fallen to just over fifty per annum.

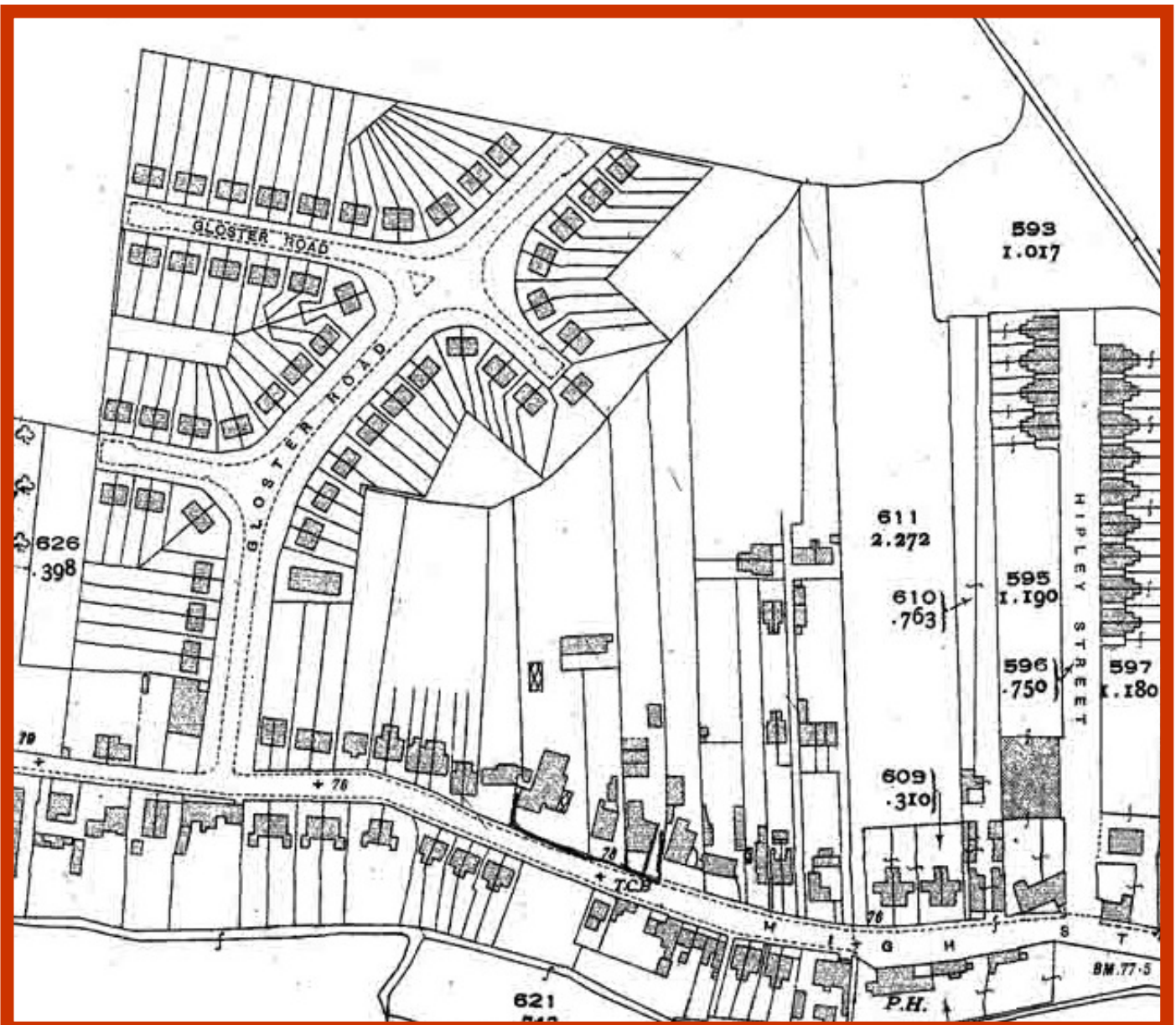
At the time the council were accepting about 240 applications a year for the priority housing list, but as one official told a public inquiry in January 1966 'a couple with two children sleeping in the same bedroom as the parents would need to wait at present approximately 3½ years before an offer of accommodation could be made'.

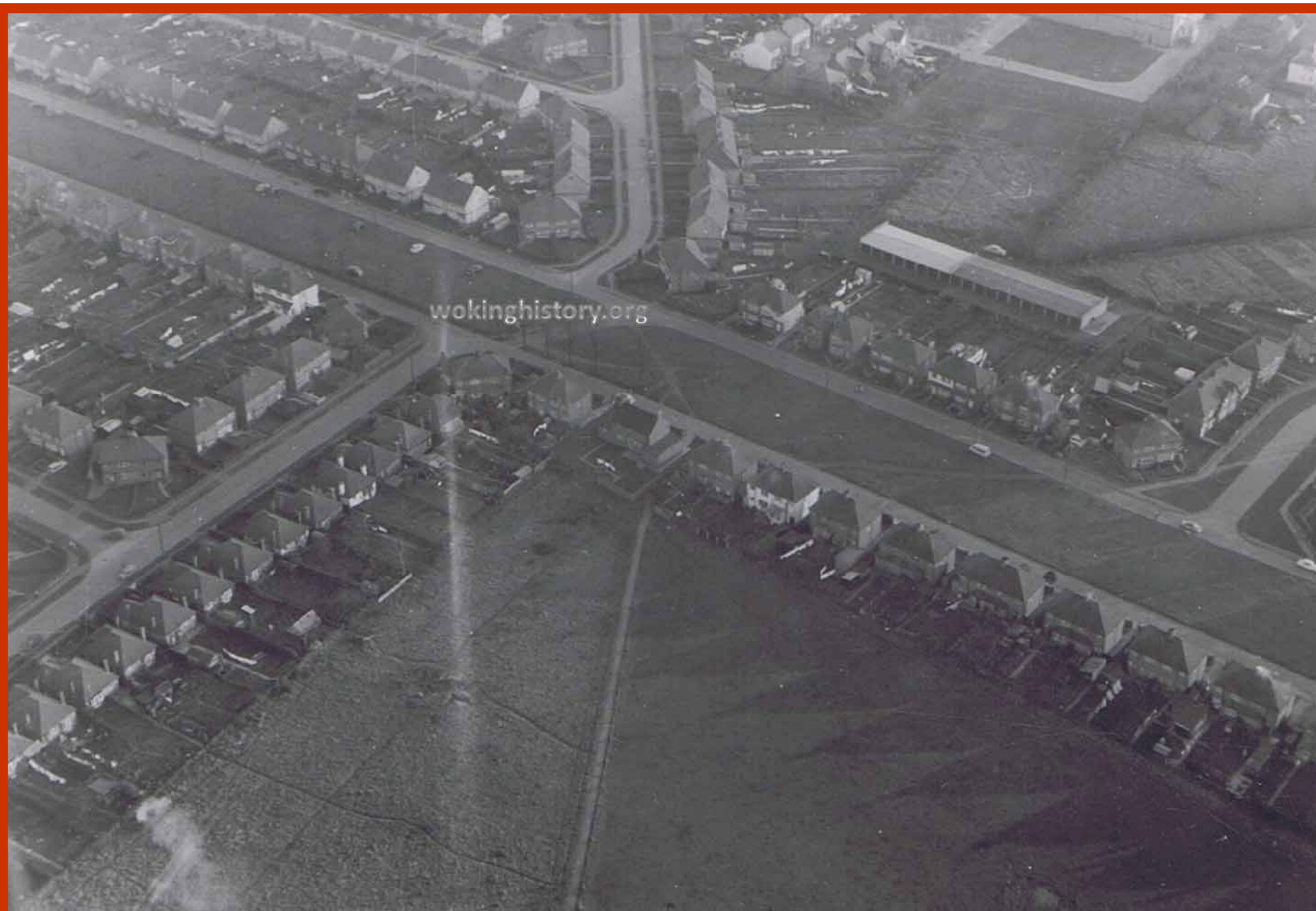
A couple of weeks ago I wrote about the early council plans to build the Bullbeggars Estate in Horsell (and my personal connection in the early 1970's once construction had begun), but whilst the council were waiting for Ministry of Housing approval for the Horsell site, they managed to acquire another plot of land for housing – this time in Old Woking (where coincidentally my wife's family had a close connection at that time).

At the beginning of 1965 a Public Inquiry was held into Woking Council's Compulsory Purchase Order on thirty dwellings and two garages between the High Street and Rydens Way. Not surprisingly there were some objections to the scheme, but the furore in Horsell to council houses appears not to have been matched in Old Woking, with two

complainants withdrawing before the Public Inquiry was held, and perhaps more remarkably nobody actually turning up in person to object at the meeting itself!

Negotiations with the owners of numerous properties to the north of Old Woking High Street (as shown on this Ordnance Survey map of 1938), eventually allowed the council to commence constructing the houses of Priors Croft in 1965-66.





Old Woking from the air, showing the site of the Priors Croft Estate.

In September 1964 the Housing Committee of Woking Council agreed an exchange of land with the Old Woking Service Station of an adjoining piece of land 'in order to achieve a better layout for the Old Woking Housing Site'; the Planning Department approving an application for the service station to extend their premises.

Unlike Horsell, it seems Old Woking was more at ease (or maybe resigned) with new Council tenants in its midst – after all Woking Council's first housing estate had been built in the village just after the First World War at St Peters Road and Corrie Road, with Gloster Road following later in the 1920's.

After the Second World War some of the houses on what had originally been called the 'Hoe Bridge Estate' were built for the council by the developers A & J Simmons, in Ford Road, Farm Road and part of Rydens Way – with other estates such as the nearby Elmbridge Estate in Kingfield adding to the concentration of council tenants in the area.

Even without the expected objections, however, the new Priors Croft development was not all plain sailing for the council. With numerous different owners to negotiate with, and some compulsory purchase orders having to be made, getting the site had taken its time, but in the autumn of 1963 the Engineer and Surveyor was able to report that 'it did not appear that there would be any excessive site development costs, nor would the acquisition of land be unduly expensive'. I don't know about the latter statement, but when it came to development costs, the council had clearly underestimated what was involved. In the autumn of 1966 it was found that the high water table and loose

soft sub-soil meant that special foundations would be necessary under each of the forty houses being built on the first part of the scheme – increasing the costs by £112 per house for that part of the estate to an overall cost of £110,360.

The extra costs of the first phase (which also included an extra £31 for each house to meet building regulations on improved sound proofing) had a knock-on effect to the second phase of thirty-six homes, but how the builders, A.H. Swann & Sons were unaware of the soil conditions when presumably it must have been the same for all surrounding properties, is not

recorded. A local builder, like the Simmons Brothers, would undoubtedly have known this.

Not that A & J Simmons were short of work at the time – 1966 saw them gaining permission for what would become known as Trentham Gardens, just off Old Woking High Street, behind the new Baptist Church Hall that was also under construction at that time and next to the Old People's Flats at Hassall Court, built for the council by C.W. Norton Ltd in 1965

A family photo of Rydens Way in the Summer of 1965, with my wife hardly showing as a mere 'dump' on my future mother-in-law!

