

# SKEET & JEFFES

## THE NEW BUILDERS' MERCHANTS, BUILT BY LOCAL BUILDERS AND MERCHANTS

Iain Wakeford 2017



In 1891 a young entrepreneur called W.R. Skeet came to the relatively new town of Woking and opened an ironmonger's shop on the corner of Church Path and the High Street – almost opposite the entrance to the station in a building that had once been the town's first Post Office. Business was good until 1907 when the lease was due to be renewed and Mr Skeet found himself being outbid for the site by the London County & Westminster Bank.

The Original W.R. Skeet's shop ironmonger's shop was on the site now occupied by the NatWest Bank.

*A Satisfied Customer is the Best Advertisement.*

IF YOU BUY YOUR IRONMONGERY FROM  
**W. R. SKEET,** 2, HIGH STREET,  
WOKING.  
YOU WILL BE SATISFIED.

*Repairs to Household Utensils and all Metals.*

Garden Tools a Speciality.  
Reliable Lawn Mowers from 16/6 each.







In 1908 they demolished the old shop and erected their new establishment (which still bears the date above the door), leaving Mr Skeet to find alternative premises elsewhere in the town.

He found some stables in Church Street near the junction with Chobham Road where with the help of two new partners (one of whom was a Mr H D Jeffes) he built a much larger premises where not just ironmongery could be retailed, but items for builders, carpenters,

plumbers and gardeners could be catered for – earning the new firm of Skeet & Jeffes a reputation not just for the quality, but also the quantity of the goods they stocked or could source.

After the First World War they expanded into the former garage next door run originally by Henry Quartermaine, adding paint and tool departments to the mix, whilst upstairs were the ironmongery, plumbing and brass-foundry showrooms.

But before the war they had also acquired (at a cost of £375) the former builders yard of Messrs Drowley & Co further down, and on the opposite side of Church Street, buying a cottage

In 1908 Mr Skeet joined with Mr Jeffes (and Mr A.W. Sharpe) to open their new ironmongers and builders' merchants business on the corner of Church Street and Chobham Road



Over the years they expanded the premises, buying the former garage next door for added showrooms.



PHONE: 1295, 1296, 1297 (three lines)

## SKEET & JEFFES

LIMITED

*General Ironmongers & Builders' Merchants*

### WOKING

Have one of the largest STOCKS AND SHOW ROOMS in the Southern Counties, giving free delivery within a radius of thirty miles

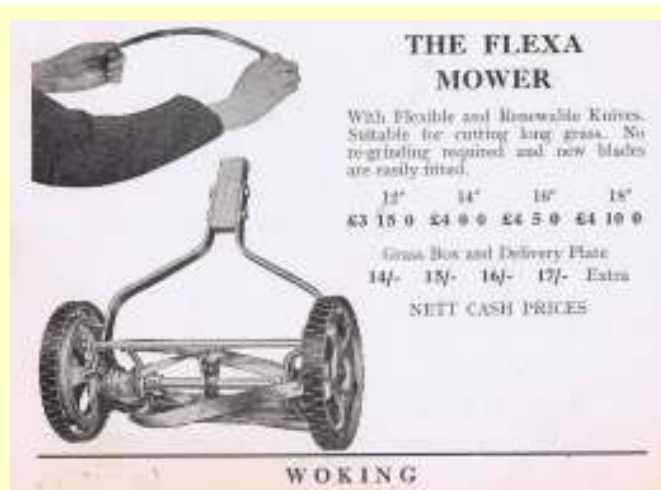
*SPECIALITIES:*

FURNISHING & BUILDERS' IRONMONGERY  
BATHS & SANITARY GOODS  
LABOUR-SAVING COMBINATION GRATES  
TOOLS & GARDEN APPLIANCES  
OILS, COLORS & VARNISHES  
WALLPAPERS & BRUSHES

ALL AT COMPETITIVE PRICES

INSPECTION INVITED TO ALL DEPARTMENTS





The Flexa lawnmower, advertised in the Skeet & Jeffe's catalogue before the Second World War, was made locally in Guildford Road, Woking.

in the street in 1928 in order to widen the entrance to the yard, and it was here that they would eventually move some forty years later.

The rapid increase in housing in the inter-war period in Woking fuelled the company's growth with a garage in Board School Road added to the estate for the delivery lorries and 'window warehouse', but whilst some rebuilding took



place in 1938 on the original Church Street site, by the early 1960's it was clear that new premises were required if the firm was to really keep up to date with the building trade.

Having commissioned local architects Scott Brownrigg and Turner to design their new showrooms in 1963 – and finally gaining planning permission – the local building firm of W Deakin & Co Ltd, was then employed as contractors in February 1967 to make their new dream a reality.

Work started almost straight away with Ebenezer Mears of Byfleet digging the massive hole for the underground car park and storage area. By the autumn of 1967 the concrete columns, floors and beams were in place for the steel-framed decking and roof to be added, and by the end of the year the pre-cast concrete panels, windows and cladding were in place, with work well advanced for the final stages of fitting out to take place in the early part of 1968. A & C Steer Ltd of Woking were the sub-contractors for the heating and plumbing, with local firm E & A Humberstone involved in the flooring.

But whilst the building was almost complete by June 1968 it took almost another three months to move the furniture, fittings, staff and stock to the site – ready for the official opening on Wednesday the 18<sup>th</sup> September 1968.

Many locals can remember the firm at the site or their subsequent showrooms on the Monument Way East Industrial Estate, but sadly soon after celebrating the centenary of the firm, trading conditions for independent builders merchants (and D.I.Y. shops as they were then becoming), led to the firms decline and eventual closure.

For a short while, whilst The Peacocks was being developed, the building had a brief new



lease of life as Woking's temporary library, but the showroom and offices have now long since been demolished and replaced by the new apartments of Enterprise Place.

But the old underground area remains – a celebration of local architects, builders and their merchants of fifty years ago (and more).

