

CLOSURE OF PRIVATE SCHOOL LEAVES PUPILS IN TEARS

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On Friday 3rd November, 1967, John Lindsay, the Treasurer of St Mary's Hill School on Church Hill at Horsell, called a meeting with staff telling them that the school was to close with immediate effect. It was the day before the half-term holiday was due to start and as parents came to collect the twenty boarders and twenty-one day girls at the school, they found many in tears (staff included).

Some parents were not surprisingly angry at the situation - noting that 'if we had only been given some warning we might have worked out some scheme to keep the school running, even if it was only until the end of term'. The fees, of course, had already been paid (which averaged 100 guineas a term for boarders and between £60 to £70 for day-girls) - not to mention the cost of school uniforms - but finding the girls new places at other private boarding schools or even state schools halfway through the school year was the main concern of most parents.

The matron-cum-school secretary stayed on for a short while, assisted by a couple of part-time helpers and two Spanish cooks, to look after those boarders whose parents were away or could not be contacted, but it was soon clear that there was little prospect of the school reopening.



For over forty years the Victorian St Mary's Hill House had been a boarding school for girls aged 4 to 18.

St. Mary's Hill.

One member of staff told a reporter that she was 'very bitter about it. Suddenly I find myself out of a job and a home', and there were calls for a public inquiry into the situation.

Unfortunately the Principle of the school, Miss Iris Auer, was in India at the time (apparently recovering from a severe breakdown), and the acting Headmistress, Mrs Jean Marshall, had



The old house interiors made for a friendly atmosphere.

The Drawing Room



Big Schoolroom.



The Dining Room.

left at the end of the summer term, when (to add insult to injury) the fees had been raised due to 'rising prices, increased taxation and financial pressures'.

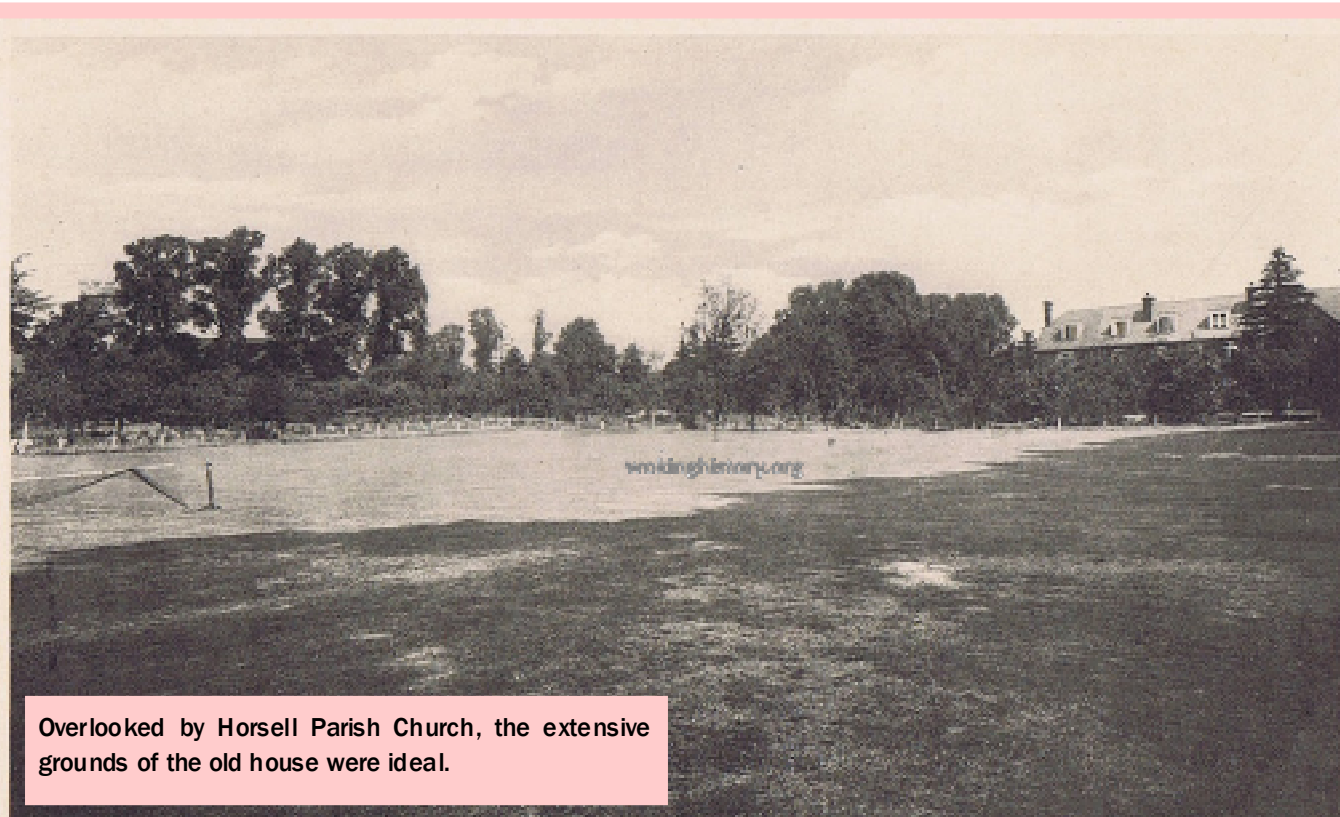
Mrs Marshall did try to initiate a recovery plan, telling the local papers that 'I am going to cable Miss Auer today telling her that I want to take the school over and reopen it as soon as possible. Obviously, because of legal formalities, I would not be able to buy the school for some time, but I hope to be able to take over as a sort of caretaker head-mistress.'

She then added that 'if I eventually become the proprietor I will change the name of the school and make a completely fresh start', but she noted 'I feel I have the confidence of parents and the staff would support me', some of the parents apparently already being in touch as soon as it was announced that the school would close.

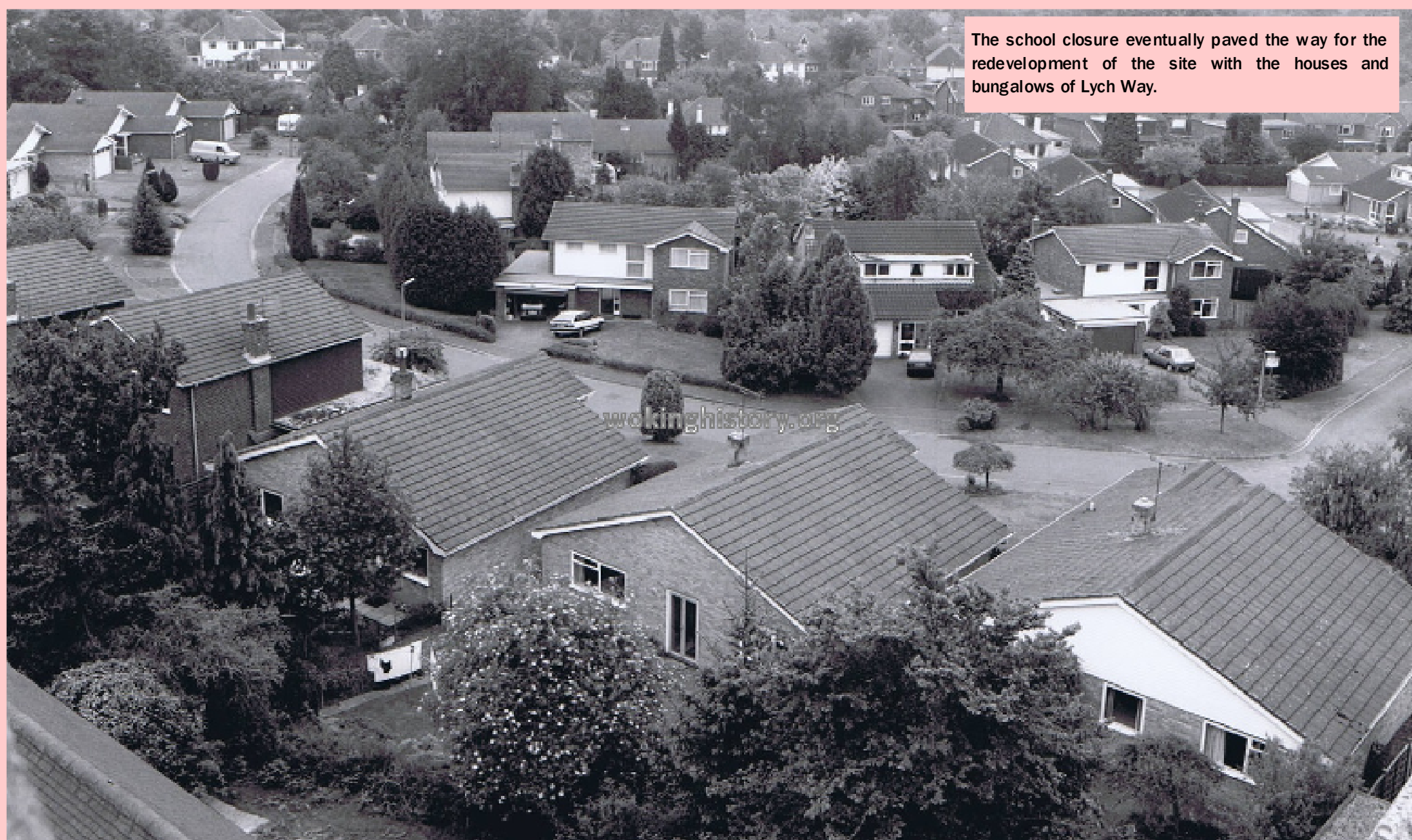
Unfortunately it soon became clear that the large house and site, next to the Horsell Church with good views to the south (albeit looking towards Woking), was more valuable as a building site than as a school.

Already in 1961 and 1963 outline plans had been submitted to Woking Council for up to seventy-two flats on the site, and although they had been turned down, by the late 1960's things had obviously changed with permission being granted in September 1968 for 'the demolition of the existing school buildings and the provision of roads, sewers, and the erection of twenty-three detached houses with garages and nine bungalows with garages'.

The new cul-de-sac of houses meant it was the end of the road for the old St Mary's Hill House, and yet more modern development for the once sleepy little village of Horsell.



Overlooked by Horsell Parish Church, the extensive grounds of the old house were ideal.



The school closure eventually paved the way for the redevelopment of the site with the houses and bungalows of Lych Way.