

WOKING'S RESTAURANTS & TAKE-AWAYS

Iain Wakeford 2019

Wandering around Woking over the Christmas Holidays, I started to count the number of restaurants and eateries now established in the town. There can hardly be any type of taste that isn't catered for, with cuisine from all corners of the globe available – but when did Woking first start to become quite so cosmopolitan?

As I said last week, some of my earliest memories are of walking into Woking with my mum and going to the tea-room above Pullinger's Bakery or the restaurant at Robinson's, but being only four or five at the time my memories of other eateries are limited – we were not really into socialising!

The Wimpy Bar at 44 Commercial Road (which opened in 1967) was not quite our style, and I doubt I would have been allowed at that age into Michael's Steakhouse in Goldsworth Road.

By then the restaurant above the Ritz Cinema had long closed down (the cinema being re-named the ABC), but almost opposite it's car park in Chobham Road, by the early 1960's, the West End Restaurant was serving both British and Greek food, to what must of been some of Woking's first 'adventurous' diners.

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By the 1960's they were no longer 'putting on the Ritz'.

Goldsworth Road – the Las Vegas of Woking





The mid 1960's saw the opening of the restaurant on the top floor of Robinson's Department Store in Chertsey Road

In Chertsey Road was the Tong Do Chinese Restaurant on the corner with Church Street, whilst up Duke Street could be found the BaFa, a few doors down from the Odeon Cinema.

Around the corner again could be found the Shahee Mahal Indian Restaurant in The Broadway. It opened in April 1968, where from Monday to Friday a three course lunch was available for just five shillings (25p)! It was fully licensed and open from noon until midnight (1 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays), with room for up to sixty people.

A few months earlier the Tandori Mahal had opened in Commercial Road – promoted as Woking's first 'Pakistani Restaurant'. It was opened by Mr & Mrs Jaffar Ahamed, who had seven years experience owning such restaurants and had apparently 'fell in love with Woking' – 'after searching all over England for a suitable place to have our restaurant'.

Having paid £27,000 for the premises and the refit what had up to then been the decidedly British 'Yorkshire Restaurant', they naturally wanted to stamp their own mark on the site, with Mrs Ahamed in particular setting her heart on having an appropriately 'Oriental style' shop front. But in October 1967 Woking planners turned down their application for a brightly coloured dome covering the front window, noting that it would have been 'out of keeping with the rest of the street'!

The Ahamed's, however, were not the last to fall foul (if you will pardon the pun) of Woking's planning committee, as the following year Kentucky Fried Chicken also met opposition for their new Commercial Road take-away. The problem appears to have been the firm's slogan 'It's finger lickin good', which the company wanted to display above the door. There was apparently fierce debate in the council chamber about the slogan which, according to the local press, resulted in the council only giving the go ahead for the take-away 'on the understanding that the slogan is dropped'. A council spokesman was forced to explain that 'the inclusion of these particular words would make



It might be 'finger lickin good' for Carnaby Street – but that sort of thing should not be allowed in Woking!

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The Tandori Mahal in Commercial Road claimed to be the town's first 'Pakistani Restaurant'.

the shop front rather out of keeping with the general standard of architectural environment' the council sought to achieve for this area!

When the local Labour Councillors later tried to get the committee to change their mind, one Tory countered that 'this is Woking, and I don't think we should be influenced by Carnaby Street or anywhere else', with some still apparently objecting to the slogan on the grounds that it could promote an unhealthy way of consuming food!