

SCHOOLS IN BYFLEET & WEST BYFLEET

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Late last year we looked at new school buildings in the west of the borough in the late 1960's, this week I want to turn to the east where new housing developments in Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford were putting pressure on existing schools to expand - and new ones to be built.

The old St Mary's School, at the junction of the High Road and Rectory Lane in Byfleet, was clearly woefully inadequate having originally been built in 1856, when just one room (divided by a curtain to create a couple of classes) was all that was required for the village's education needs.

An infants' room was added in 1877; a 'temporary tin hut' erected in the playground in 1903; and a new central hall and two large rooms added to the primary school in 1905; but by the 1960's more 'temporary' buildings had to be added in the playground to accommodate the village's burgeoning population, before work on a new primary school could begin.

It was February 1966 that work started on the new St Mary's School in Hart Road - thirty 'happy children' escaping Friday afternoon class one week to 'turn the first turf on the site of their projected new school'.

The four acre site had been zoned for educational purposes as far back as 1948, but budget cuts had meant work had been put back a number of times, until finally work could start on the new £90,000 project.



The original village school was built in 1856.

When it opened in April 1967, the old school concentrated on the infants, who were promised their own new buildings in Sanway Road (projected to cost £64,500 in January 1968) - although it would not be until the early 1970's that that promise was kept!

Even then when the new 'Manor School' was complete, the old school buildings still had to be used, as the number of children in the area continued to increase.

It was extended several times, but even with huts in the playground was woefully inadequate by 1967.





The new school opened in Hart Road in April 1967.

At West Byfleet the Secondary School was also inadequate to cope with the increased demand of post-war developments, so it was agreed that a new school should be built elsewhere in the village. A site in the Green Belt at West Hall was identified, where 'one aspect of its design had been hailed as a break-through for its sport and recreation facilities would have been used by both pupils and the public'.

At the same time it was planned that the old site in Camphill Road would be utilised by both an enlarged County Council and a new Roman Catholic controlled primary school, although in the end the Council's school took over all the old building as the Marist School was developed on the Old Woking Road.

In January 1968 it was announced that construction on the 'first stage' of the new Secondary School (a two-form entry of an eventual £172,000 eight-form school by 1970-71) could start later that year, following approval from the Department of Education and Science, so you can probably imagine the anger of parents (if not pupils) when just a couple of



The new school library (top) and playground (below).

months later it was reported that there would be no new Secondary School at West Hall – and indeed there would be no old one in Camphill Road either!

Instead when the Secondary School closed at West Byfleet to make way for the enlarged primary school, all pupils would be transferred to Fullbrook Secondary School (opened since 1954) across the canal at New Haw. No longer would children in the eastern part of Woking be educated all their school life within the district!

Not surprisingly such a move caused much controversy, with many parents in West Byfleet, Pyrford and Byfleet not keen (to say the least) for their children having to go to Fullbrook (and probably some in New Haw not keen to see their school being enlarged to accommodate kids from across the canal).

Of course it was several years before the old school finally closed its doors, with the local PTA, School Governors, Teachers and the Woking Education Committee all against the move proposed by Surrey County Council.

Some members of Woking Council, however, thought the opposition was based on 'emotional rather than educational' grounds and declared that 'parochialism and sheer contemptible snobbery also played a part'. The West Byfleet School, claimed Cllr Rhoda McGaw, 'was thought of as an exclusive school by those people who like to be one side of the railway'. That may have been so. One local resident once pointed out to me 'it could have been worse – the kids could have been transferred to Sheerwater'!

