

TROUBLE BREWING FOR THE OLD BREW HOUSE

Iain Wakeford 2019

In 1715, William Harvest, decided to rebuild part of Woking's brewery – constructing an imposing brick-built 'Brew House' almost opposite the town's main coaching inn (the White Horse Hotel) incising the date and his initials (and that of his wife Mary), in a brick panel above the main front door.

Built in the form of a shallow 'H', the main interior feature was its staircase – 'a very fine example: well-proportioned, broad and with three barley-sugar baluster on each tread' – 'four half-flights with two half-landings, 32 treads in all'.

The panelling too was thought to be historic 'said to be from one of the first shipments of pine to reach this country from British Columbia'.

The brewery went on to be owned by a number of prominent brewing families, before in the late 1880's it was closed and the building put to other uses.

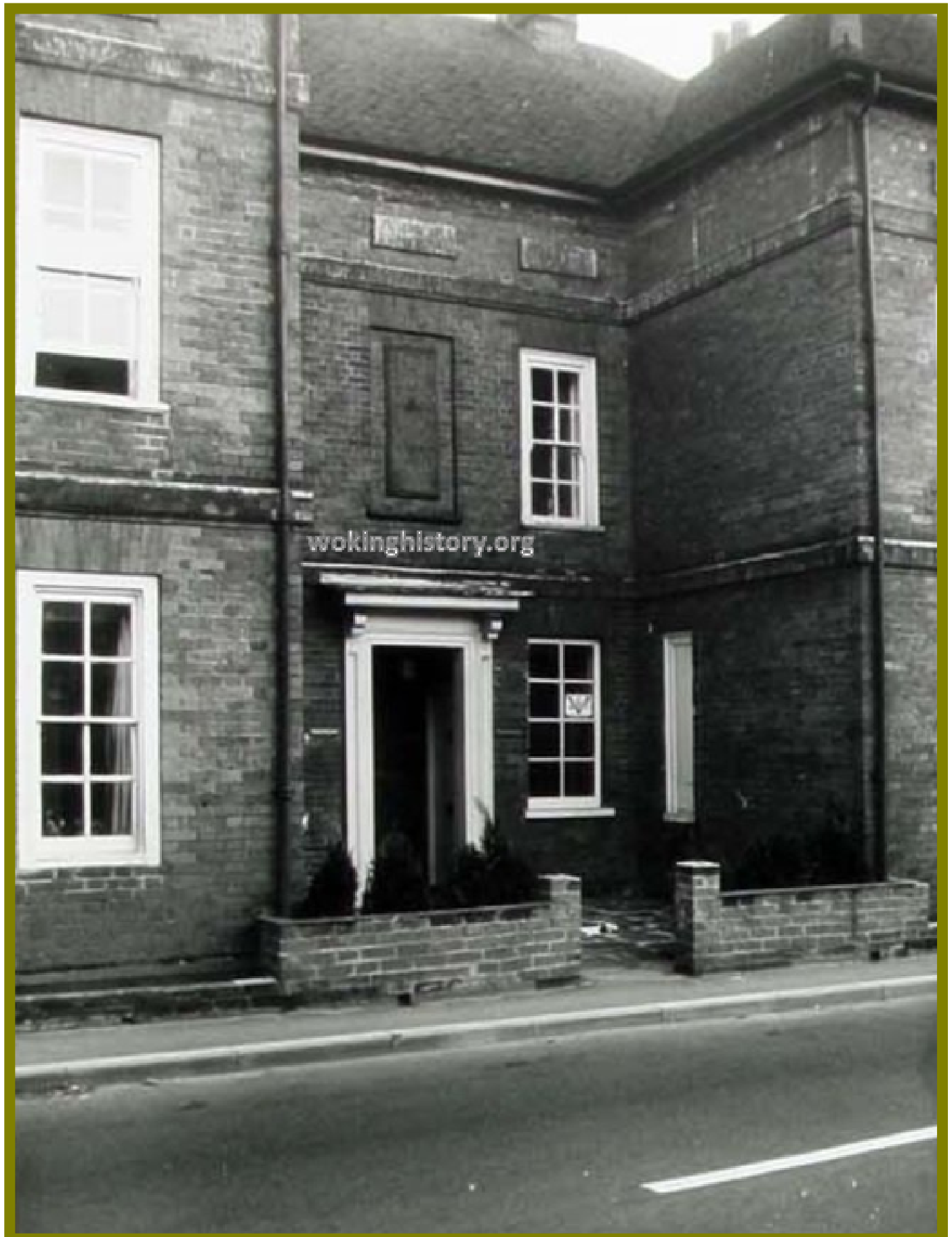
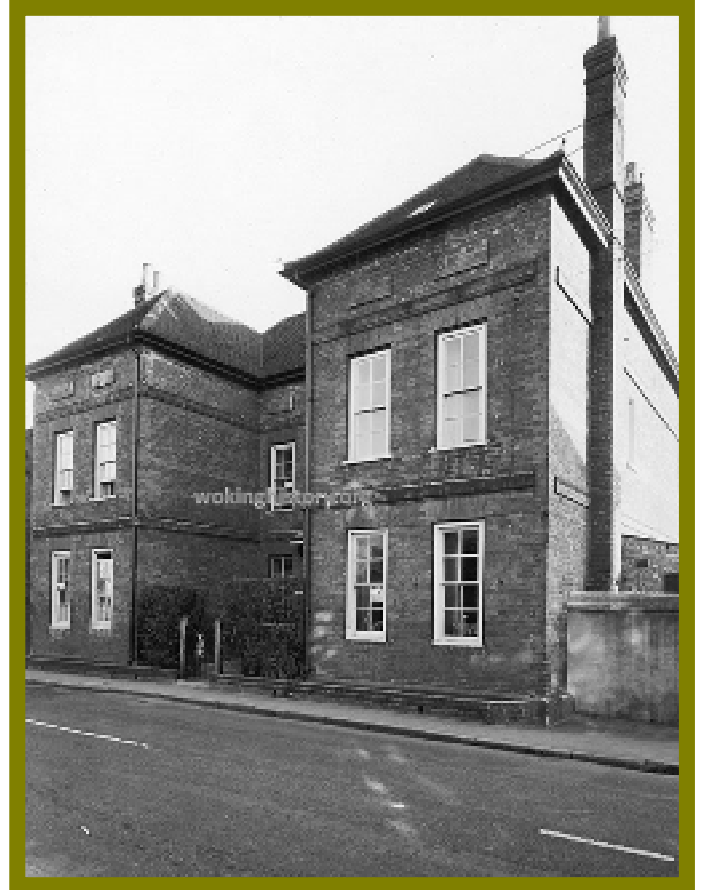
Sadly, by the late 1960's, part of the building (then known as Peartrees) was in a poor state of repair and in March 1969 its fate (and that of the neighbouring part then known as Magnolias), hung in the balance.

A proposal to demolish the property and replace it with flats and shops was to be decided by Surrey County Council and although many individual residents and amenity societies objected to the move, remarkably the council of the Old Woking Community Association were 'in favour of not obstructing progress' – one member adding that the house 'was partially responsible for a bottle-neck in the High Street'.

The Association, of course, was not a 'preservation society' (or even a 'residents' group), but were the managers of the local Community Centre (more in Kingfield than Old Woking), and their stance appears to have not gone down too well with some in the more historic centre of the village.

Even Woking Council's chief engineer and surveyor, David Ward, noted 'we should certainly regret this building being knocked down, mainly because we have so few buildings of historic interest in Woking'!

Unfortunately, in the past, the council had not held that view with regard to other old buildings in the village, and indeed the statement did not necessarily mean the council held a long-term view of the building's preservation. Mr Ward went onto to note 'if we ever had to widen the road there, the building would be required, but



For over two centuries the Old Brew House had stood in the main street of (Old) Woking undisturbed by passing vehicles, until the 20th century when motor vehicles, and in particular motor buses, found the road too narrow.





there is a long term proposal for a bypass for Old Woking and if this came about, the house would not be required’.

Mr H.D.W. Laurie, who until the previous December had lived in part of the house, pointed out that ‘when plans were drawn up for making Old Woking High Street a main thoroughfare, the necessary widening of the road involved the demolition of the house or of the Old Manor House’.

‘Both were considered to be of such interest that the plans had to be changed’ he said. ‘Surely a private development should not allow the sacrifice of a building, the importance of which prevented the making of a main through road?’

Fortunately the Old Brew House (and indeed the Old Manor House) were preserved, although not without a few later set-backs, not least because although the scheme for flats and shops was turned down, a later plan for what became known as Riverside Gardens were not. Old Woking would never be the same again.

Plans in 1969 to replace the Old Brew House with shops and flats were fortunately turned down

But sadly the old butcher’s shop next door was not so lucky and was eventually demolished to make way for the houses of Riverside Gardens

