

GREEN'S OF RIPLEY (NOT QUITE NOTRE DAME)!

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On Monday 10th February 1969 a lorry was delivering paraffin to a tank on the first floor of Green's Hardware Store on the High Street in Ripley. The driver, Mr George Lovett, had connected up the pipes and commenced pumping when he heard 'a rushing

noise' and saw paraffin gushing through the ceiling of the storeroom. He immediately ran to his lorry to switch off the pump, but it was too late – the store was already alight.

Realising that some of the staff were still inside, he ran round to the front and raised the

Green's Hardware Store in Ripley High Street – not quite Notre Dame!

alarm. "The place was a mass of flames. Everyone got out and when I got back to my lorry I saw that the hose, which was still connected to the storage tanks inlet, was on fire so I grabbed a knife and hacked through it before driving my lorry to safety" he said.

Within seconds there was a massive explosion. The back wall of the store blew out, shattered roof tiles were flung across the street, and a gas cylinder thrown 150 yards into trees on the village green opposite.

Eight fire engines from Woking, Guildford, Esher and Camberley attended the blaze which was so intense that windows on the opposite side of the road were cracked by the heat. One local resident claimed 'it was just like the blitz all over again', as dozens of villagers had to be evacuated.

Mr & Mrs Nokes, who had lived next door to the shop for about fifty years, and Mrs Alice Parratt whose house was on the other side of the store,



Eight engines from four fire stations eventually tackled the blaze, which threatened a number of buildings in the village centre.



At one stage water from a nearby stream had to be used, although the Chief Fire Officer later claimed that the 'water from the hydrants was adequate', with all appliances carrying 400 gallons of water 'with which to make an immediate start'.

were told to leave immediately by the police, who also ordered the occupants of properties opposite to be evacuated.

It was later questioned whether the water pressure in the village's hydrants was sufficient, as at one stage water from a nearby stream had to be used to quench the flames, but this was denied by a senior fire officer who commented that 'the water from the hydrants was adequate, but the circumstances of the fire were such that extra water was needed from the stream'.

The Chief Fire Officer also noted that 'all appliances carried 400 gallons with which to make an immediate start' and that there were two hydrants 'within striking distance' of the fire.

The firemen's attempts to bring the fire under control were partially hampered, however, by the store's position on the busy main road. The underside of a car managed to fracture a hose sending a 'huge fountain flowing in the street', whilst another car had its 'entire exhaust unit' ripped off by wooden ramps put in place later to protect the hoses from further damage.

The firemen were hampered by cars running over the hoses on the busy main road, with one managing to fracture the pipe and another having its exhaust damaged by wooden ramps put in place to protect further damage to the fire-fighters equipment.



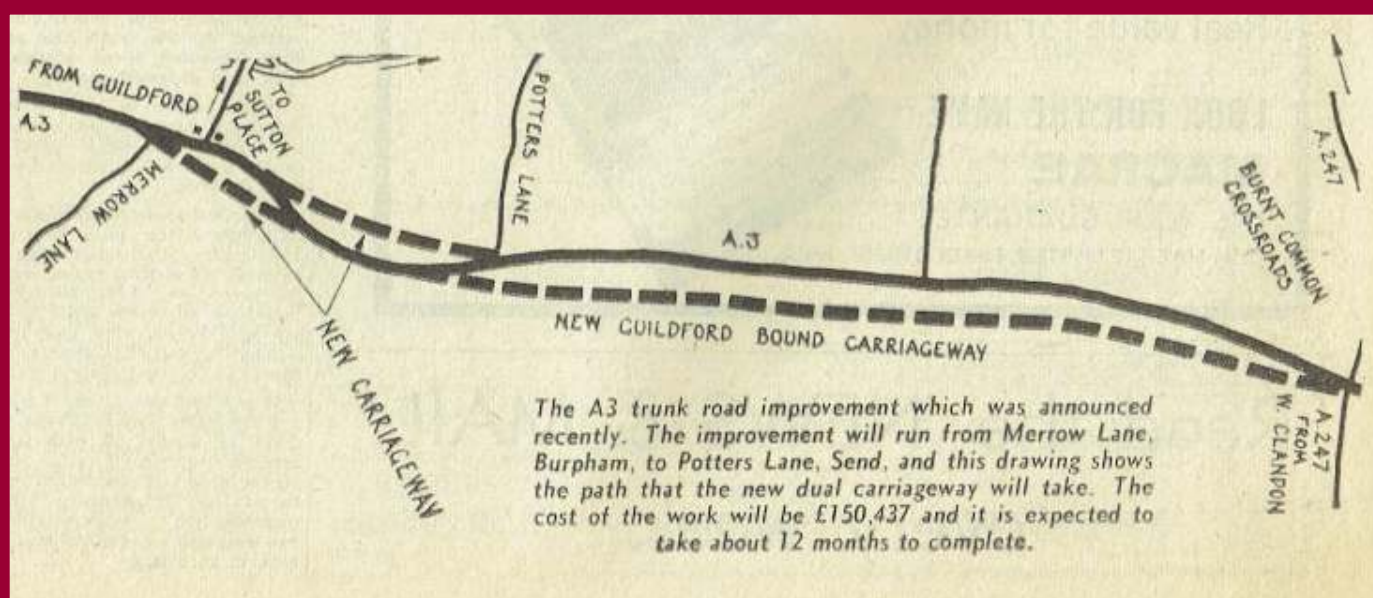


At that time Ripley High Street was still the main A3 London to Portsmouth Road. In the summer of 1966 it had been announced that improvements to the road north of the village would cost £936,000 (up from £570,000 in 1963) for a dual carriageway between Ockham Road at Ripley and Pain's Hill at Cobham, but if anything the improved road between Cobham and Ripley, would only make things worse in the village as traffic encouraged to go faster on a brief section of wide road, would then be even more frustrated when they hit the 30mph speed limit through the village.

The extra costs of the new road north of the village included a large roundabout at Ockham Road where the proposed 'Woking link road'



Plans in the mid 1960's for the new dual carriageway between Burnt Common and Burpham, and between Ockham and Cobham, meant that cars could pick up speed on either side of Ripley, but still had to slow to 30mph through the busy village street.



would join the A3, with another roundabout also planned for Wisley Common, where 'eight slip roads and five bridges will be constructed' for the interchange with what was then still known as the 'South Orbital Road' (or M25 as it is more commonly known now).

South of the village, the A3 had already been improved (in 1967) with a new section of dual carriageway between Burnt Common at Send and Burpham, but it would be many years before the part of road that really needed upgrading (the Ripley By-pass) would finally be built.