

ST JOHNS HEALTH CENTRE

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Like all major developments, the building of the St Johns Health Centre took many years to plan, with many false starts and hopes dashed before work on the site finally got underway. It was back in the early 1960's that the idea was first mooted of building a new type of health facility in the area – incorporating local doctors' surgeries with other health service provisions.

Hopes were high in late 1965 that work on the £49,000 centre would be included in the County Council's budget for the following year, although it was not until December 1967 that Woking Council announced the tender of £49,163.12s.6d. from A.W. Middleton & Co Ltd had been accepted.

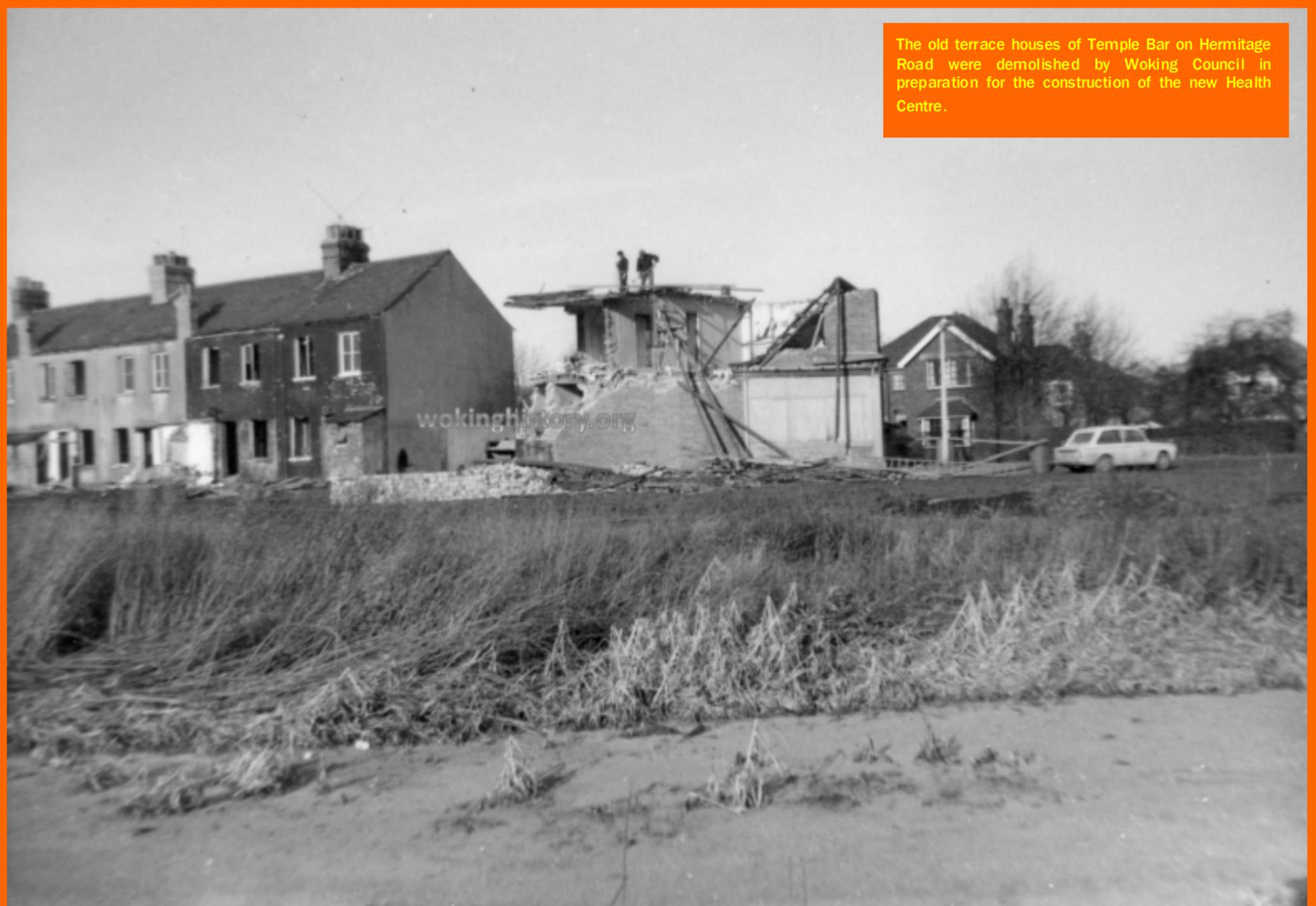
The land in Hermitage Road had already cost Woking Council £20,000 (four times what the original estimate for the site had been) and by the time the design for the new centre had been approved by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, the cost of building had also apparently increased to £55,645.

Unfortunately the complex ownership of the site and building led to a dispute over how much the two doctors' surgeries were to be charged for rent, apparently adding to the delays (if not the costs).



Woking Council owned the site, but the County Council were to provide the money for construction with the South-West London and Surrey Executive Council of the National Health Service (and Doctors) obviously running it once it was complete.

Headlines in February 1968 proclaimed a 'fight' to save the plans from being shelved. By then the cost was estimated at £60,000 with £28,000 having already spent on preparations for the construction!



The old terraced houses of Temple Bar on Hermitage Road were demolished by Woking Council in preparation for the construction of the new Health Centre.



Work finally got underway on construction in April 1969, even though a final agreement had yet to be reached with all parties regarding how the centre would be used.

It was due to open the following April, when a 21-year lease had been agreed with the doctors who would occupy the site, but for various reasons that was delayed until the end of

August 1970, with the doctors not being told until the middle of September that 'it was now expected that the centre would be ready on October 1st'!



After years of planning, construction could finally start in April 1969.



Even then, there was still a dispute between the two authorities over the scale of the rent, with the District Valuer being asked to intervene, resulting in the doctors not moving in until December 1970.

When the 7,000sq.ft building, with its fifty-eight rooms, did finally open, the cost had apparently increased to £80,000, with the official opening delayed until the following summer.

In the meantime the residents of St Johns and

district were able to enjoy the 'palatial' new facilities including Speech Therapy, Ante-natal and relaxation classes; Family Planning Sessions; and Child Health, Dental, Well-Women and Geriatric Clinics, although one visitor to the latter clinic was not necessarily impressed by the 'harmonising silver, orange and lemon' decor.

It took about eighteen months to complete the building at an eventual cost of £80,000.

In January 1971 Mrs Emily Young (or not so young as it turned out - she was 75), described the buildings as 'far too modern' adding that she preferred 'quieter colours'.

The health centre was not the only new health facility in the area at that time as 1971 also saw the Woking Ambulance Station, previously in the town centre, move to a new site on the Bagshot Road at Knaphill - opening in March that year.

