

Chertsey Road Shops

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 1st April, 2011)

Last month we looked at some of the butcher's shops that used to be in Chertsey Road, Woking. In those days Chertsey Road was real a 'shopping' street with household names such as Freeman, Hardy & Willis' shoe shop, Timothy White's the chemist and Woolworth's 3d & 6d stores. All have now gone, of course, and although the road does have a few small shops (probably more now than in recent years), the road is now more a place to eat and drink, than to shop. But it was once Woking's main shopping centre with Sainsbury's opening in the road in 1920 and Boots, next door, only five years later.

Fortunately a number of the old original Victorian buildings still survive, with the first part of the road being a 'Conservation Area' protected by Woking Council (like the High Street and The Broadway) from in-appropriate development (if



Sainsbury's moved into Chertsey Road in 1920, before transferring to the High Street in the mid 1930's. Next door in this picture can be seen Boots with Freeman Hardy & Willis next door again.



Freemans and Boots were still in the road in the 1960's when Robinson's rebuilt their Department Store (where McDonalds is today).



This photograph, taken in 1959, shows the shops on the corner with Duke Street with the new Woolworth's (now Wetherspoon's) under construction in the foreground



It is not known when (or why) this photograph of Burton's was taken – if any readers have any ideas we would be delighted to hear from them.

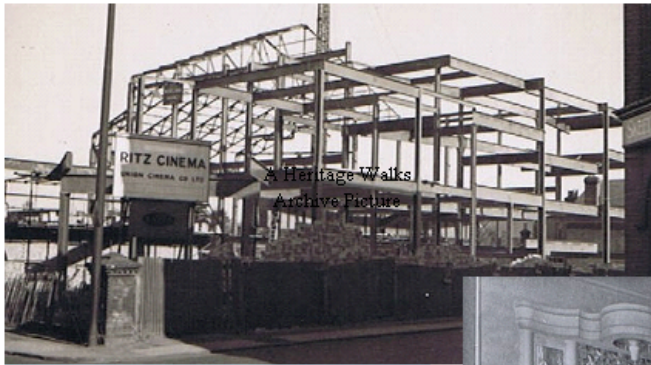
The main change though came in the 1970's when Woking's new town centre was built – later named 'Wolsey Place' and the final blow as far as shopping was concerned probably came in the 1990's with the Peacocks and the introduction of Controlled Parking Zones in the town.

you believe that, you'll believe anything! Of course most of the shop fronts have changed, but above the ground floor the elaborate Victorian architectural details can still be seen.

There has been redevelopment in the past. One of the first came in the 1930's when the original Red House Hotel, on the corner with Chobham Road, was replaced by Burton's the Tailors. After the war, in 1959, Woolworth's rebuilt their shop near the corner with Duke Street, with other small developments soon following such as the old Gaumont Cinema site in the early 1960's and Robinson's Department Store a few years later.

The Ritz

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 8th April, 2011)



The building of Union Cinema's new 'Ritz Cinema' at the junction of Church Street and Chobham Road in 1937.

This week's pictures are all of the Ritz Cinema site (or the ABC if your memories do not go back that far). It was the last of the old cinemas to close in the town – the last films being shown there in September 1982 – but was also the last to be built before the Peacock's complex in the early 1990's.



The Ritz soon after opening in April 1937

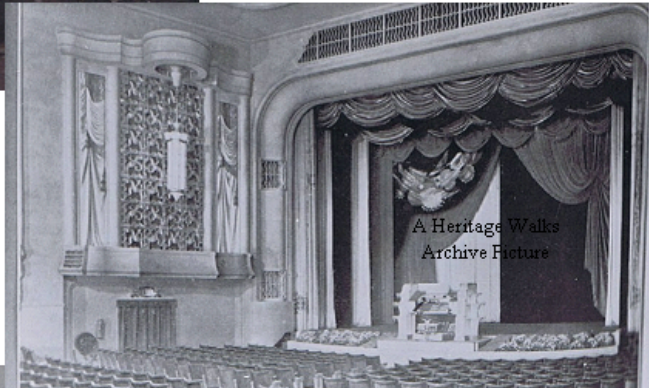
There had been several cinemas in the town before the Ritz was built in the late 1930's, but it was arguably the grandest of them all, with its own restaurant and glamorous decoration. The official opening gala took place on the 12th April 1937 with three hours of entertainment including 'The Texas Rangers' and a mini-variety bill featuring the 'Union Cinemas Ladies Accordion Band', amongst many other acts!

It originally seated 1,600 people, but in later years (as the ABC) the auditorium was divided into two so that on the last day you had a choice of Star Trek – The Wrath of Khan' on screen one, or 'The Secret Policeman's Other Ball' and

'National Lampoon's Animal House' on screen two.

The building survived a few more years as a bingo hall before it was demolished to make way for a new office block (Woking didn't have enough of those in the 1980's), appropriately named 'Hollywood House'.

In its heyday, however, the Ritz was one of the places to be seen in Woking, with 'Theatre Teas'



They don't make cinemas like that any more!

being advertised in their pre-war programmes, costing just 6d (3p). For that the 'patrons' were served a 'dainty afternoon tea tray' including a pot of tea, brown & white bread and butter and a slice of cake – I doubt there are many cinemas that do that nowadays.

One of the main features of the cinema was the organ that rose up out of the 'pits' to take centre stage. Many people remember it, but I cannot find any record of when it was removed or where it went to. It would be a shame if it was just scrapped.

Next week I hope to look at some of the other cinemas in the town, including the 'flee-pit', the 'Woking Electric Theatre' and some of the other places in and around the town that used to show 'movies'.



The cinema, looking a little worse for wear, sometime before it finally closed in 1982.

Woking Cinemas

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 15th April, 2011)

Last week we looked at the Ritz Cinema, on the corner of Church Street and Chobham Road. It was the last of the old-style cinemas to open in Woking, but there is some doubt as to where and when the inhabitants of Woking first viewed a 'moving picture' in the town.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

The Woking Public Halls in Commercial Road was probably the first place to show 'moving pictures' in Woking.

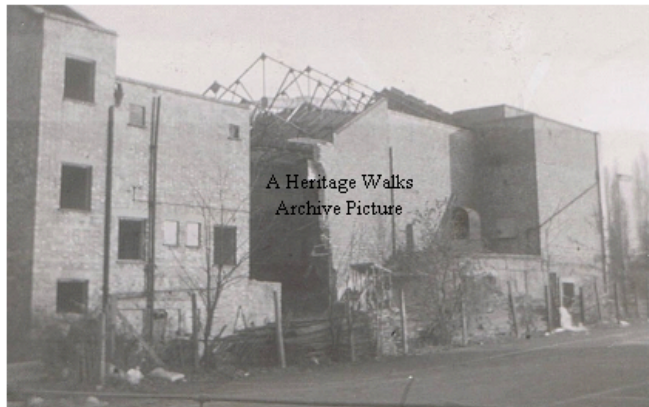
The earliest advertisement we can find comes from March 1909, when the Woking Public Hall in Commercial Road, announced that the 'Angus Bioscope Company' were showing a 'high class and up-to-date animated picture entertainment' for three nights and one matinee only (prices from 6d to 1/6d). It is probable that films were shown beforehand, possibly at other venues as well, but were just not so well advertised.

In January 1910 the 'Woking Electric Empire' advertised the 'very last word in animated pictures' continuous from 6pm to 11pm daily (6pm to 10pm on Sundays). We don't know where the 'Empire' was (other than it was also in

Commercial Road), but it was not until 1912 that Woking's first 'purpose-built' cinema was opened - the 'Central Halls Cinema' in Chertsey Road. The proprietor was Henry Quartermaine, a well-known local entrepreneur who also apparently opened the town's first petrol station in Chobham Road. The Central Halls boasted a 'sloping floor', 'comfortable tip-up seats' and a 'well ventilated building'.

The Woking Palace Theatre in Duke Street soon became known as the Astoria and finally the Odeon.

The Electric Empire continued to advertise for a year or two before it is not heard of again, but by then another venue had opened that would regularly show films - the Palace Theatre in Duke Street (later to be known as the Astoria and later still as the Odeon).



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

The Central Halls Cinema in Chertsey Road, later renamed the Plaza and then the Gaumont, was Woking's first purpose built cinema.

The Central Halls Cinema also went through several changes of name from the Plaza to the Gaumont, although to many locals in later years it was simply known as 'the flee-pit'.

The Gaumont closed in 1959 to be replaced by shops. The Odeon continued on until 1975 and, as I said last week, the ABC showed its last film in 1982, so that Woking was once more without a purpose built and permanent cinema until the Peacocks Arts Complex opened in 1993.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

When the ABC was demolished to make way for Hollywood House the pit for the organ could still clearly be seen in the foundations of the old cinema.

Centre Pools

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 22nd April, 2011)

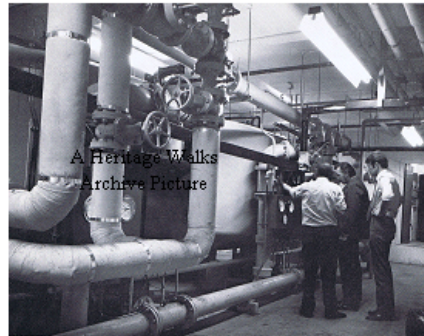


If you go to the top of the Toys R Us car park (the 'Woking Co-op Superstore' car park when this photo was taken) and look down on the side of the ramps towards the Peacocks, this is the scene you would have seen in the 1970's and 80's.

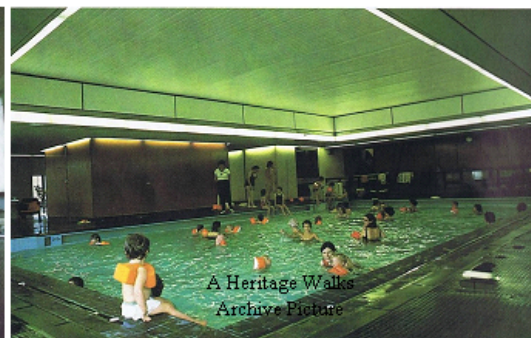
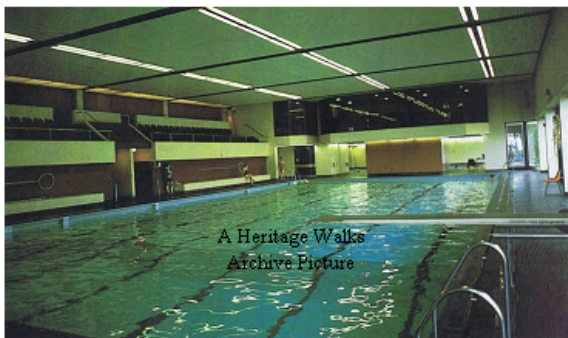
I was looking through my archive this week for a brochure on the Woking Centre Halls (to follow on from my articles about Woking's cinemas), but in the process came across the official opening programme for the Woking Centre Pools, dated 20th October 1973.

For those relatively new to the area you might be surprised to discover that Woking Park has not always been the site for swimming in the town. Originally it was (unless you count the River Wey and Basingstoke Canal as swimming 'venues'), when Woking's first swimming pool was built there in 1910. But in the 1970's the Council took the 'bold' (some might say stupid) decision to build an indoor pool in the middle of Woking new town centre. Not only that, it was built in the middle of a roundabout and because the ground was waterlogged (according to the brochure) the pools were 'constructed substantially above ground' – a decision that by the end proved to be a disaster as the pool was constantly leaking. Of

The brochure is full of interesting pictures of the Centre Pool, such as this one of the filtration plant where the 'water can be completely turned over in four hours' and the filters can be 'back washed' once every 72 hours (whatever that means)!



By the end of the 1980's it was clear the site was not ideal and in 1989 the Pool in the Park was built replacing the old outdoor Lido that had once been on that site. The leaking Centre Pool was demolished to make way for the Peacocks – one council 'folly' that has been lost, but not forgotten.



These photographs (from the Woking Borough Guide of 1985) shows the teaching pool was quite popular, the problem is probably more evident when you look at the view of the main pool – is that the best promotional picture the council could then find?

Woking Centre Halls

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 29th April, 2011)



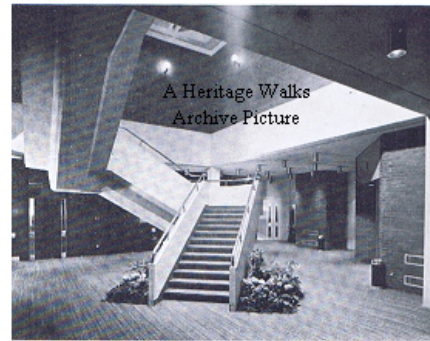
A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

Looking down onto the Centre Halls (left) and Library (right) from what became the Wolsey Place car park.

The brochure gives sample menus (and prices ranging from £2.40 to £3.80 per head for a four course meal), and photographs and plans of the various public spaces. The main suite had 'portable staging' which can be 'speedily set up by the Centre's own labour force', and ample staging available for 'all orchestras or choirs of 80/100 performers, with seating facilities for an audience of between 600/700'.

In the past few weeks we have looked at the various cinemas that have come and gone in the town – and last week the Centre Pools that lasted for less than two decades – so it seems strange to be writing about one of the town's success stories from the 1970's, The Rhoda McGaw Theatre. It was built in the mid 1970's as part of the Woking Centre Halls complex, the cultural part of the redevelopment of Woking town centre at that time. The library in the newly created Town Square was also part of that complex (although that is an entirely different story), and with the pool, the proposed police station and magistrates court (and later the new council offices – again another story), they formed a barrier between the shopping centre to the south and the new town centre by-pass – Victoria Way – to the north.

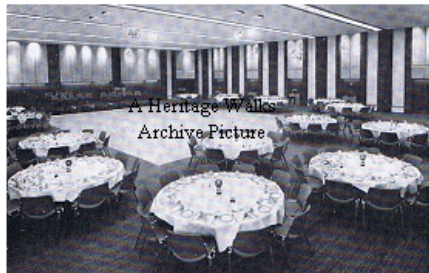
The foyer of the Centre Halls housed the ticket office and cloakroom, as well as the stairs taking you to the meeting rooms and the 'projection room' of the theatre.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

But the part that was perhaps most used and loved was the 'intimately styled theatre', with its 'well tiered and comfortable seating - for theatrical, operatic, concert, film and other similar productions'.

Of course the court and police station never even got off the ground and the site remained a car park for much of 70's and 80's, but the Centre Halls, and in particular its wonderful little theatre, became an integral part of Woking life. So much so that when the whole lot was proposed to be demolished in the late 1980's for the creation of the new, new town centre, everyone agreed that the 'Rhoda' should be 'mothballed' and incorporated into the 'Peacocks' entertainment area.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

The main hall as it would have looked for a dinner-dance.

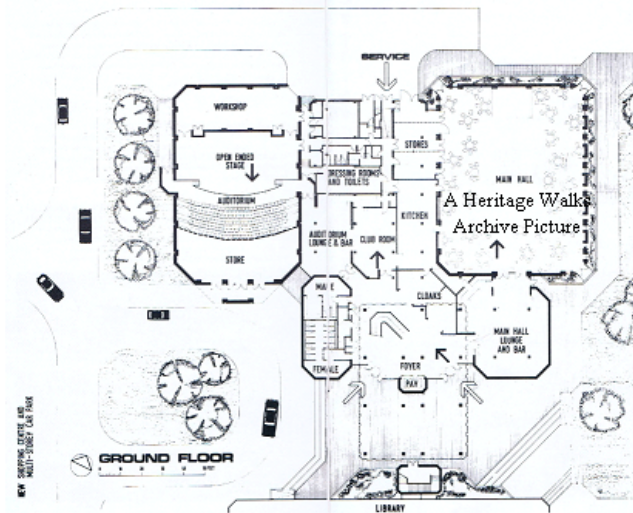
I have in my archive a brochure produced when the Centre Halls first opened promoting it as a site for wedding receptions, conferences and dinner dances. I remember our firm in the early 1980's holding the 'Works Christmas Do' in the main hall, although to be honest my teenage attempts at dancing have left a scare on my memory (if not the feet of the ladies from work)!

Woking Centre Halls

Woking Centre Halls

GROUND PLAN

GROUND PLAN



The ground plan of the complex from the brochure produced by the Council

QEII Theatre

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 4th May, 2011)

As we have seen in recent weeks, before the Second World War, Woking had three cinemas in the town centre (as well as the Woking Public Hall where films had occasionally been shown), but they all gradually fell by the wayside with first the Gaumont being demolished in 1959, then the Odeon closing in 1975 and finally the ABC in 1982. And so it was left to the Rhoda McGaw Theatre in the Centre Halls to be Woking's last venue for Woking's film-goers, until the three screens of the new Peacocks Cinemas opened a decade later. The trouble was that whilst the Peacocks was being built, the 'Rhoda' was put in 'mothballs', so Woking Council opened a temporary arts and entertainment centre in that bit of Woking Town Centre that is known as the Old Woking Road in Maybury!

It was called the 'QEII Theatre' (taking its name from the former Queen Elizabeth II School, whose buildings it occupied), and although it was far from central, it somehow managed to work quite well.

The building was originally built the late 1950's as the Woking Girls Grammar School, replacing the old army pay corp. huts in Park Road/Onslow Crescent that had been the schools original site since 1923.

When the Government decided to abolish the Grammar School in the early 1980's the County Council decided to re-open it as a comprehensive secondary school, but this too succumbed to closure in 1986 when the QEII merged with Sheerwater County Secondary on the Albert Drive site (as Bishop David Brown School).



Woking Community Play PROJECT

Public Meeting

TUESDAY 6th NOVEMBER 8.15pm

QEII THEATRE

OLD WOKING ROAD, MAYBURY, WOKING

Whatever your age, whatever your talent, come and find out how you can be involved in this exciting project to create a unique play for and about Woking. It'll be fun!

★ EVERYONE WELCOME ★
★ LICENSED BAR REFRESHMENTS ★

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The council rented the buildings for a while to a private boarding school who converted some of the classrooms to provide sleeping accommodation for students (mainly from Iraq) studying A levels, but with the closure of the Rhoda, the building was soon being converted again to house the new QEII Theatre. It opened in September 1990 with the first production being 'Godspell' by the Woking Youth Theatre.

The Girls Grammar School opened in July 1958 at a cost of £200,000.

With the opening of The Peacocks in 1992 the old school buildings were demolished to make way for the houses of Martinsyde (off East Hill), whilst part of the playing fields accommodated the new Prins Willem Alexander (Dutch) School (now the International School of London in Surrey).



The Woking Youth Theatre were the first to perform at the QEII Theatre in September 1990 with their production of 'Godspell'.

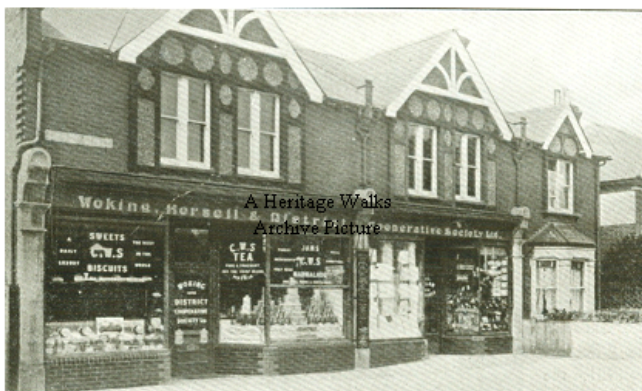
Woking Co-operative Society

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 13th May, 2011)

The other week we showed a photograph of the Woking Centre Pool taken from the top of the Toys R Us Car Park – only when it was taken it was not Toys R Us, but the Woking Co-operative Superstore.

It occurred to me at the time that I haven't actually got a photograph of the building when it was the Co-op – not surprising perhaps when you consider it was only there for about three years!

The Co-op, of course, have been in Woking for over a century, but the problems they had first getting planning permission and then operating the new £5m superstore, meant that after eighty-five years trading in Woking Town Centre, the Co-op was controversially 'forced' out.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

Over the years the Co-op expanded their Church Street store (on the site now occupied by Toys R Us), so that by the end of the 1920's they had a thriving department store on the site.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

The first Woking Co-op shop was opened in Chertsey Road in October 1899, but it was not long before the moved to new premises in Church Street.

The Woking Co-operative Society was formed in 1899 with their first shop in Chertsey Road, but by 1902 they had opened a new shop on the corner of Church Street and Percy Street and gradually over the years had added new departments and built new branches in the villages around the town.

In the 1930s they drew up plans for their new purpose-built department store on the opposite



In the 1930's they built a new shop on the opposite corner of Percy Street (now the site of SAB Miller's offices) and then in the 1970's planned their new 'Co-operative Superstore' on their old Church Street site.

side of Percy Street, but in the 1970's, soon after Woking's new town centre was built, they looked to redevelop the site of their older buildings (opposite the Fire Station) with a new £250,000 'superstore'.

It took nearly fifteen years to finally get planning permission and agreement from Woking Council to provide the multi-storey car park above the site, but after the store opened in October 1981 it soon became clear that Woking's chaotic road system would cause problems.

Just like the swimming pool, the store was effectively built on a roundabout, which meant shoppers wishing to access the store from the rest of the town centre had to cross a busy road. The Co-op asked for a pedestrian crossing, but it was not until just before the store closed in October 1984 that the crossing was put in place, and not until after Toys R Us took over that Cawsey Way was completely closed.

The Co-op, of course, did continue in the villages, and next week we shall be looking at the story of the various branches around the area.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

I might not have a photograph of the Woking Co-op Superstore, but I do have one of their plastic bags in my collection – a unique piece of Woking's history! Next time the Antiques Roadshow comes to town, I'll have to see what they think it is worth.

Woking Co-operative Society Branches

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 20th May, 2011)

This week, as promised, I am continuing the story of the Woking Co-operative Society, with a look at some of the local branches opened by the Society in the early years of the 20th century.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

The first village branch of the Co-op in Woking was in Kingfield, opposite the shops in Kingfield Road

The Woking Co-operative Society, formed in 1899, started out with a small shop in Chertsey Road, before quickly moving to Church Street by the beginning of the 20th century. It wasn't long before they decided to expand into the villages around the town and in 1910 their first branch was opened in Kingfield on a site that is now part of the car park of the Kingfield Arms.

Of course later the 'Kingfield' branch was to move to a new purpose built premises on the corner of Old Woking High Street and Gloster Road, but in the mean time many more branches were built, as well as an ambitious housing scheme (long before the local authority thought of building 'social' houses. That came in 1913 with the opening of the 'Woking Garden Suburb Estate' (Holyoak Crescent and Avenue) off Well Lane, Horsell.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

The scheme, built on land previously grazed by the company's delivery horses, originally included thirty houses and a branch store (on Well Lane), which was formerly opened in July 1913, the same month the Society opened their branch at Knaphill (now Mann & Co offices).

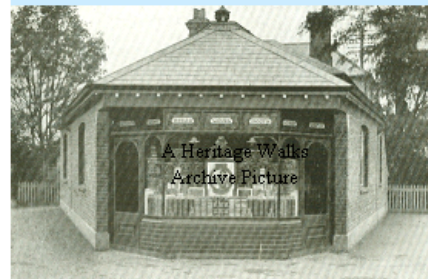
In 1913 the Woking Garden Suburb Scheme was built – the thirty houses and branch store apparently costing £9,000 to construct.

With the opening of a branch in Surbiton, the store at Maybury Arch was known as branch five.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

The Horsell Branch store was actually the third branch as the Knaphill Branch (on the corner of the Broadway and High Street) was actually opened first.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

That year must have been an exciting one for the Co-op's members as they also took over the Surbiton Co-operative Society in 1913 and had it not been for the outbreak of war the following year, the Society may well have expanded even quicker, as they had already purchased a plot of land by Maybury Arch for another branch store.

As it is, after the war, the Society decided to concentrate on expanding their Church Street site so it was not until 1919 that building work commenced on the Maybury shop.

After the Second World War, of course, the local Co-op was taken over by the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS) and so although there are now more 'Co-ops' in Woking than there once were, they are no longer quite as 'local' as they once were.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

Woking Girls Grammar School

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 27th May, 2011)



A few weeks ago I wrote an article about the temporary QEII Theatre at Maybury, which had been converted from the old Girls Grammar School (later QEII School) whilst Woking's Centre Halls were demolished to make way for the new Peacocks Centre. Mrs S Parker of West End, very kindly sent me some photographs of her own schooldays at the original Girls Grammar School in Onslow Crescent, as well as some pictures of her junior school days at Byfleet.

The old Girls Grammar School on the corner of Park Road and Onslow Crescent originally occupied huts used during the First World War by the Army Pay Corps

Mrs Parker (nee Gibson) was there from 1945 to 1951 and believes the photographs were taken in May 1951 when her teacher, Miss Hill, took the school by train to London to visit the Festival of Britain exhibition.



The Boys Grammar School had been opened in Station Approach just before the outbreak of the First World War, but it was not until 1923 that the town got around to providing a similar school for the girls of the district.

The photographs of the original Girls Grammar School clearly show the old huts that had previously been used by the Army Pay Corps. after they moved their operations to Woking during the First World War. Although the huts no longer remain (having been replaced after the Second World War by the buildings of the Park School), the bungalows built for members of staff do still remain on the opposite side of Onslow Crescent.

They don't make school classrooms like this any more! Not a whiteboard or computer in sight.



"that day my father went to the school and took photos of the huts, both inside and out. There must have been an event taking place at the school, as the hall wasn't usually full of chairs (we sat on the floor and it was also used for gymnastics), and the grand piano was normally on the left. Miss Hill's table and chair were in the middle and she used to come up the steps through the doorway in the centre at the back of the stage".



The hall in May 1958 – but what was the 'special event'?



The Girls Grammar School moved to the new site in Old Woking Road in 1958, but was closed in the early 1980's when the town went 'comprehensive' and the school became the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee School. Meanwhile the Boys Grammar School buildings eventually became the Police Station, with the Magistrates Court built on part of the school playground.

Department Stores, Part 1 - Gammons

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 3rd June, 2011)



A Heritage Walks Archive Picture

James Fielder Gammon's 'department store' on the corner of Chobham Road and Commercial Road

upon which balls containing the money would roll after being hoisted up from the till by what one person described as 'pulling on a lavatory chain'. Gammons had a similar system with compressed air, I believe.

Traffic chaos at 'Gammons Corner' in May 1969



A Heritage Walks Archive Picture

I wrote a few weeks ago about the Woking Co-operative Society and their department stores that were on the corner of Church Street and Percy Street (originally where Toys R Us are now, and then - from the 1930's - where SAB Miller's offices are today), but they were not the only department store in the town. Indeed many people considered the Co-op to be somewhat 'out-of-town', with Robinson's in Chertsey Road and Gammons on the corner of Commercial Road and Chobham Road being the more central stores. One feature that many people have reminded me of recently was the Co-op's wonderful system for transferring money from the tills to the accounts department. There was a track near to the ceiling

Gammons was actually Woking oldest department store, opening their Woking Branch in the 1880's on part of the site now occupied by Bhs. They had started out in Guildford, and later had a branch in Cobham, but their drapers shop on the corner of Chobham Road and Commercial Road soon expanded into neighbouring properties with other departments, so that by the time they



A Heritage Walks Archive Picture

Gammons Corner (probably photographed from Hart's Butcher's shop) during a parade through the town by the local fire brigade – but does anybody know when (or why)?



A Heritage Walks Archive Picture

Commercial Road, looking towards the junction with Chobham Road (Gammons Corner), with the shops beyond going down to the junction with Chertsey Road in the distance.

closed about a hundred years later, there wasn't much you couldn't buy in the store. In the beginning they advertised their goods as being sold 'at London prices', which were evidently cheaper at that time than in the 'country', but whilst their slogan later changed, it appears that little else did! Many people remember the 'old fashioned' atmosphere of the place, with several likening the place to 'Grace Brothers' from the 'Are You Being Served' television series.

Department Stores, Part 2—Robinsons
(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 3rd June, 2011)



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

Robinson's site in Chertsey Road had been a drapers shop run by a number of different families, starting with Tibbenham Brothers in the 1890's.

The same could probably be said for Robinson's whose shop in Chertsey Road developed over the years from Tibbenham Brothers, to Archibald's, to Fairhurst's and then Alfred Wyles', before the Robinson family eventually took over in the mid 1930's. They also expanded their store by buying neighbouring shops and in 1960 redeveloped their site with a new five storey 'modern' department store, but by the early 1980's the family had diversified into all sorts of other industries and their interest in the Woking shop appears to have waned. In 1982 they condensed down to the ground and basement floors (the rest being converted into offices), but it was not long before they vacated the site altogether (moving briefly into Commercial Way) with McDonalds taking over the old shop. For a while Woking had no department store, until the opening of Alders – but that is another story.

In the first part of this week's article I likened Gammons to 'Grace Brothers' from the 'Are You Being Served' television series.

Robinsons

WOKING'S LEADING DRAPERY STORE

A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

ABOVE is a general view of the ground Floor of our modern and well-lit shop where you will find a wide range of goods displayed, where shopping is easy and a pleasure, together with a guaranteed quality article at a reasonable price. For your personal satisfaction

GET IT AT ROBINSONS

15-17 CHERTSEY ROAD, WOKING. Tel.: Woking 188

ROBINSONS (WOKING) LTD

A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>GROUND FLOOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Menswear Hosiery Neckwear Haberdashery <p>1st FLOOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fashions Lineerie Corsetry Bickler Shop | <p>LOWER GROUND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linens Dress Fabrics Furnishing Fabrics Kitchen Gadgets <p>2nd FLOOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baby Linen Boyswear Girlsweat Schoolwear |
|---|---|

3rd FLOOR RESTAURANT

9-17 CHERTSEY ROAD, WOKING

This advertisement (left) from the Woking Guide of 1956 shows the interior of the old Robinsons store. The new Robinsons store (advertised in 1972, right) was built in the 1960's – now occupied by McDonalds.

Commercial Road, Part 1 - Robinsons & Shees
 (copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 10th June, 2011)



The last Robinsons store in Woking closed in Commercial Way in March 1993.

Last week we printed photographs of Robinson's in Chertsey Road, but as I mentioned, in the mid 1980's they vacated those premises in favour of a smaller shop in Commercial Way. Mrs Parker (who recently supplied the memories and photographs of the Girls Grammar School), has once again come up trumps and sent me the photograph of Robinson's Commercial Way shop.

Robinson's were only there a few years before they finally closed their doors for the last time on Saturday 13th March 1993, and since then it has had a few other tenants including Methven's Bookshop and County Property Management.

Methven's opened soon after Robinson's left, but unfortunately they too closed within a few years. The Woking branch was actually their first (at one time they had up to twelve shops in the chain), but so far I have been unable to trace a photograph from their time - anybody?

(Subsequent to the publication a photograph of Methven's did turn up - which is reproduced here. The result is that there is not enough room to include the entire article on one page - hence the 'Glosters' item under the same date).



Shees had shops in Knaphill, Frimley and Reading as well as their main Woking Branch.



Before Robinson's the shop was occupied by Shees - another well-known family firm who later moved to a shop in the Wolsey Place shopping centre - whilst before them Gloster's had one of their many shops on the site.

In March 1979 you could buy the latest Philips N1700 video recorder for only £639. It had a 3-day clock so you could 'catch programmes while you are away' (providing you only go away for a couple of days), and even 'record one programme while you watch another' - what will they think of next?

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Commercial Road, Part 2 - Gloster's
 (copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 10th June, 2011)



A Heritage Walks
 Archive Picture

Henry Gloster moved to Woking from Old Woking in 1876 and was one of the first traders in the new town, opening a small shop in Chobham Road (now part of Yates). Trade was so hard in the early days that it is said he had to hire a band to play on Saturday mornings outside his shop, in order to attract custom to the town.

Gloster's original shop in Chobham Road

Later, when the garden of the original Albion Hotel was sold, Gloster's built a new Corn Stores in Chertsey Road and also had offices behind in Commercial Road (as it was then called) - and later workshops and stores in Walton Road. The Chertsey Road/Commercial Road site was re-developed in about 1967 with new shops in both roads. The company eventually moved to Carthouse Lane in Horsell.

I should, perhaps, mention two other occupiers of the Commercial Road shop - the Post Office who were there from 1947 until the 'ultra-modern purpose-built' office were built at the other end of Commercial Road in 1960, and before that the Rendezvous Restaurant who of all the various tenants probably occupied the site for the longest. If anyone has pictures of either I would be delighted to view them.



A Heritage Walks
 Archive Picture

Glosters were one of the first traders in the modern town of Woking.

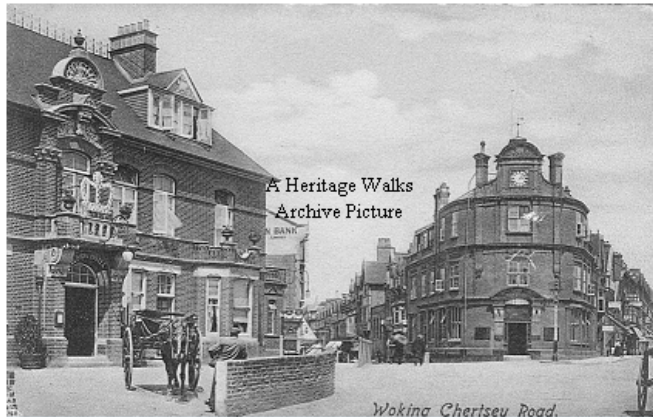


A Heritage Walks
 FOR : Archive Picture

Gloster's Corn Exchange in Chertsey Road was demolished to make way for the two-storey 1960's block on the right.

Albion Hotel

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 17th June, 2011)



The second Albion Hotel, soon after construction, with the 'Old Bank' on the corner of Chertsey Road and The Broadway were the two main landmarks of the town – the 'first impression' that everyone had of the town as they left the railway station.

Last week I mentioned about Gloster's building on the site of the garden of the original Albion Hotel, but I forgot to mention when that was. It happened in the late 1890's and was probably the first instance of 'redevelopment' in the new town of Woking.

The original Albion Hotel was built in 1856/7 by a gentleman called Reuben Percy. He had apparently been the landlord of the Wheatsheaf in Horsell and quickly realised, when the Necropolis Company began their land sales around Woking Station, that a new town would spring up on the common and that right opposite the station entrance was 'the' place to be.

It was a tall, square, three-storey building, with stables behind on the corner with Church Path and what became Commercial Road, and a garden that stretched down Chertsey Road almost to its junction with Chobham Road.

From the 1960's this was the first impression Woking chose to give its visitors.

Not surprisingly, as the town grew, pressure was soon on for the garden to be built upon, and as I said last week, Henry Gloster was one of the driving forces behind the redevelopment of the site.

The second Albion Hotel was a much grander affair, and many people can still remember its creeper-covered walls and ornate stonework. Unfortunately history began to repeat itself in the early 1960's with pressure once again for redevelopment in the town, and the Albion again succumbed to the bulldozers.

I think it would be fair to say that the new hotel, shops and office block that took over the site didn't quite have the same elegance as the old, but it was the 1960's and Woking Council didn't then have the advantage of having quite the same 'vision' it does today.



Over the years, as the stonework started to crumble and the creeper to over, if anything the 'elegance' of the old hotel improved.

Now, of course, the whole area is much better, thanks to the wonderful glass canopy covered with photovoltaic cells, partially obscuring the tower from the view of the visitors as they catch their first glimpse of our beautiful town from the station entrance!



Woking Station

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 24th June, 2011)

A couple of weeks ago, when there was chaos on the railways locally because of signal failure (due apparently to someone stealing some cables), it made me think of some of the accidents and incidents that have occurred on the railway near Woking in the past.

The first happened even before the line was completed to Southampton when on Christmas Day 1839 a landslip at the Goldsworth cutting blocked one of the two lines and seriously endangered the other. It was caused by heavy rain



The original station at Woking can be seen in this photograph taken from where the buses now stop in The Broadway. The line in the foreground has been removed and what was then platform two is now platform one.



Stationmaster at Woking was rewarded for his quick thinking when he averted a series of accidents when the signals failed during a snowstorm.

Signal failure, then as now, seemed to be the main cause of problems with three signal boxes then responsible for controlling the trains around Woking – 'Woking Junction', 'Woking Yard' and 'Woking East' – until 1937 when the new signal box was introduced with the electrification of the main line through Woking.

(that winter being one of the worst on record for rainfall), but with men working all night, and the introduction of a steam shovel, they successfully cleared the line the following day.

The first accident at Woking appears to have been on the 11th June 1846 when the driver of a goods train from Guildford hit a train going in the other direction overturning several empty wagons and slightly damaging the engine. Fortunately nobody was hurt on that occasion, but a couple of years later an engine driver was killed when his train ploughed into the back of a broken-down train at Woking. On both occasions it appears that signal failure (or the lack of certain signals) were at fault.

Another fatal accident happened in June 1877 when a passenger was killed in a collision at Woking Station, but later that year the



There were at one stage three signal boxes around Woking Station (including the Woking Junction box, pictured above left), with others at Maybury and Goldsworth. All were replaced in 1937 when the new signal box (now a Grade II listed building) was built as part of the electrification of the main line through Woking.

But that is the point. In all cases it was either 'human error' or 'mechanical failure' that caused the accidents – not wanton vandalism or deliberate damage. Never in any of the early reports was it noted that an incident was caused by someone 'stealing' cables. Society really has progressed.



The main station entrance to the south was rebuilt in the mid-1930's in what has often been described as the 'Southern Railway 'Odeon' Style'.

Incidentally, I read a report on the BBC News website about the recent delays stating that a lady got on the '1833 train from Clapham', but came to a 'grinding halt at around 1915' near Woking (which is odd because the line to Woking wasn't built until 1838)! Eighty-two year delay – South-West Trains are doing well!