

## Woking Magistrates Court

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 7th January, 2011)



Woking Magistrate's Court is due to close to help prevent the country from becoming another Greece or Ireland. The fact that it is the most modern court in Surrey doesn't matter, any fool can see that it should close – which probably explains why I and most 'normal' people cannot see the sense in it!

Obviously I don't know the 'real' reasons behind the closure, but I suspect that its prime location near to Woking Station (and now surrounded by

The original police station (on the right) was built in 1887 on the corner of Station Approach and Heathside Road.

At first court cases were held on alternate Saturdays at Guildford and Woking, with the Onslow Hall (almost opposite the police station), being the used until a courthouse was begun in 1904 in Heathside Road. It was completed in 1912, by which time Woking had also become a Petty Sessional Division.



A Heritage Walks Archive Picture

The court house (seen here being enlarged in the 1950's or 60's) was built behind the original police station in Heathside Road.



This photograph, taken during the General Strike of 1926, shows one of the Special Constables employed to direct traffic at the junction by the police station. The building on the left was Maxwell's music shop, demolished in the 1980's when the police station moved into the old school next door.

In the 1970's, when Woking town centre was being re-developed, it was proposed that a new Magistrate's Court and Police Station should be built just off of Victoria Way, between the Centre Halls and the Indoor Swimming Pool, but fortunately that never happened and in 1982 it was proposed that the former Boys Grammar School should be converted into a new police station with the new £3.7m courthouse being planned for the schools former playground the following year.

I don't know how much it eventually cost, but its closure will save this country from financial meltdown – or so we have been told.

high-rise apartment blocks either complete, in progress or planned) might have something to do with it. How long before its next-door neighbour, Woking Police Station, is found to be too expensive for the country to afford?

Woking's first police station was built in 1887 and had room for just three police officers and four cells. It cost £2,750 to build (plus £300 for the land), but it wasn't long before the accommodation had to be increased. In 1908 Woking became the centre of a new police division and the staff had increased to a superintendent, an inspector, two sergeants and fourteen constables, with other officers stationed in the nearby villages bringing the total to thirty-one. If only that was all that was needed to police the streets of the town today.



The old Boys Grammar School was converted into the police station in the late 1980's, with the present Magistrate's Court on the site of the playground (shown here in the foreground).

## Old Woking Church

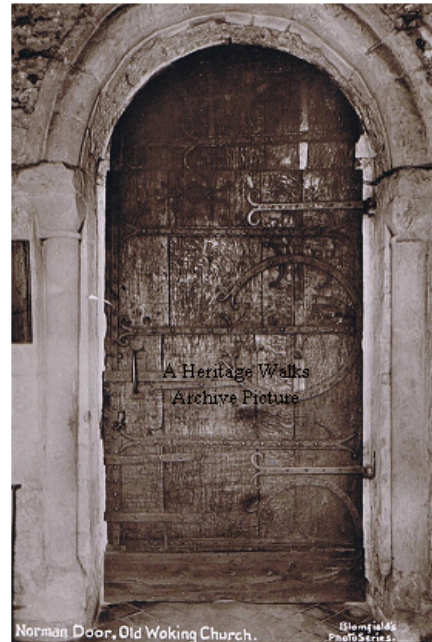
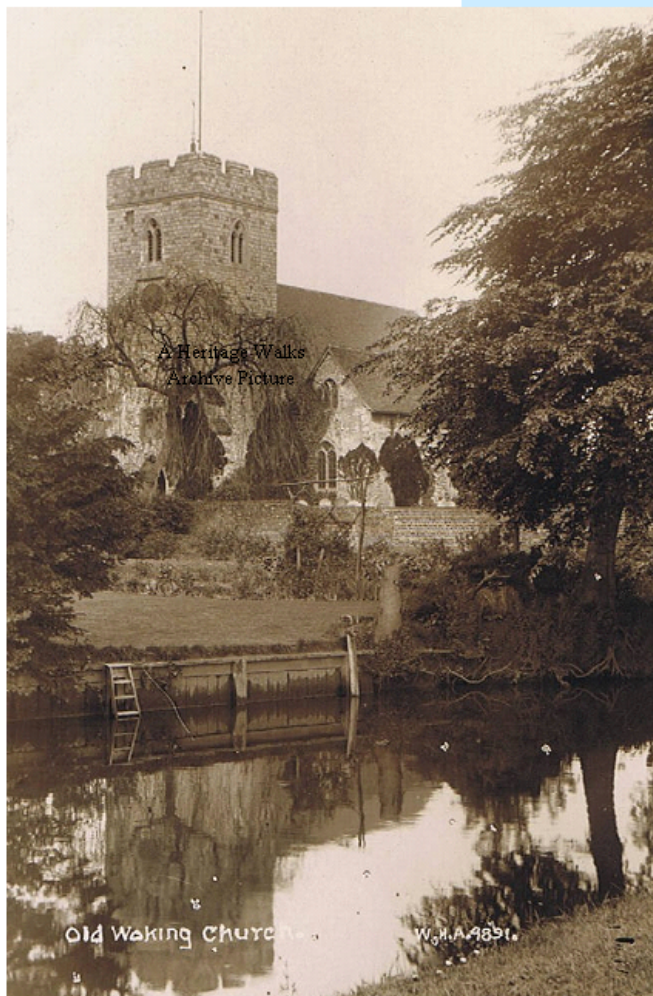
(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 14th January, 2011)

My Heritage Walk this weekend is around the Old Woking area, where I will be talking about the first reference to the name Woking – or at least the earliest surviving record of the name. Actually that may not be strictly true – let me explain.

Sometime in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century (between 708 and 715 A.D.) a priest at a monastery called Medhamstead (now the site of Peterborough Abbey), wrote to the Pope asking for certain privileges for two 'daughter' monasteries at Bermondsey and Woking. We know this because in the 12<sup>th</sup> century somebody (presumably a monk at Peterborough) wrote a copy of that letter which has survived and been translated for us to read. The actual name 'Woking' was then written as 'Woccingas' and is thought to come from a personal name 'Wocce or Wocca', with the 'ingas' element meaning 'the settlement of' his people.

The door into the church from the 13<sup>th</sup> century tower has in the past been ascribed to the 'Saxon' period.

The 8<sup>th</sup> century monastery was probably a simple wooden structure. The earliest part of the present church was constructed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, although the tower does incorporate tiles that are thought to be Roman in origin.



It is possible that the 12<sup>th</sup> century 'copy' is a fake (in which case this is not the first reference to Woking), but all the evidence seems to suggest that it isn't, as Peterborough Abbey (nor anybody else) had anything to gain from the document and so no reason to make a 'forgery'.

The document refers to a monastery somewhere, therefore, in the area occupied by Wocca's people, which in those days covered a much larger area than the present day Woking. In fact it appears that before about 675 A.D., when Chertsey Abbey is said to have been founded (according to another 12<sup>th</sup> century copy of a much earlier document), 'Woccingas' covered almost the whole of north-west Surrey, from the Thames in the north to the Downs in the south, with a line taking in Byfleet, Ockham and Horsley forming the eastern boundary.

Where exactly this monastery was in that vast area is not known for certain, but the most logical place is the site of the present St. Peter's Church in Old Woking. We know from the 8<sup>th</sup> century document that the monastery was dedicated to St. Peter, and although the earliest part of the present church is only 11<sup>th</sup> century, there was a church here before the Norman Conquest and the iron-work on the original west door has in the past been ascribed to the 'Saxon' period (although I will explain on the walk why it is not!).

Unfortunately we may never know exactly where the monastery was – we are certainly not going to pull down the church, just to see if anything lies beneath!

## Common Land Housing

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 21st January, 2011)



These old postcards show the common land that is now Brewery Road Car Park, together with the Basingstoke Canal

The news that the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) are going to be allowed to 'live' rent-free on Brewery Road Car Park by Woking Council, when they are given permission to build their new offices, could be good news. If you would like to live 'rent-free' in a penthouse on top of the Victoria Way Car Park, or build a nice little cottage in the car park at Knaphill, now is the time to put in your plans – surely Woking Council will look just as favourably at your scheme. Of course it might be that the council are only thinking of organisations to build on their land for nothing, in which case the trustees of St Johns Memorial Hall might be looking at the car park on the Lye with envious eyes. Like Brewery Road it was once common land, but unlike the WWF site, there are many who consider it still is!

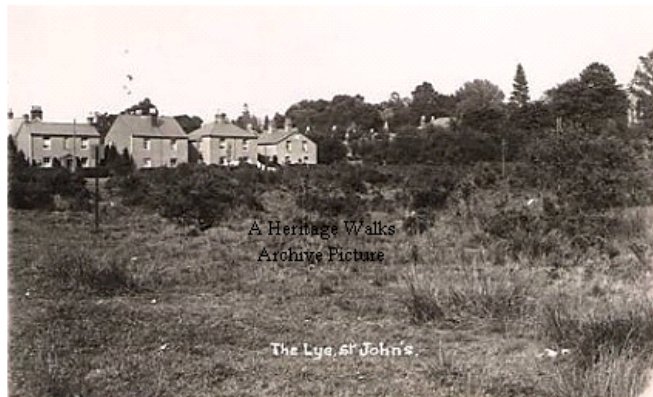
It was during the 1850's when the Necropolis Company wanted to buy the whole of Woking Common for their cemetery, that St Johns Lye was excluded from their plans at the request of the Vicar of Woking. He was anxious that the poor people of Woking would still have some land upon which to exercise their 'common rights'. These allowed them to graze their animals on the common, take dead wood for fires, gorse for their bread ovens, or turves for thatching their roofs, amongst many other small 'privileges'. Even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was instances of locals turning their pigs out onto St Johns Lye.

Animals do still graze on the commons at Smarts Heath and Prey Heath but in these instances it is to help preserve the heathland, rather than as some ancient right. The fact is that it was because of the commoner's right to graze their animals that the heathland survived, and when the grazing stopped the commons started to revert to woodland.

Of course Smarts Heath and Prey Heath are owned by Woking Council, so if you are looking for a more rural location for your new rent-free abode, just write to Woking Council Planning Dept.



The damage caused by pigs rooting up acorns, caused many problems in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Some of the occupiers of the cottages on the edge of St Johns Lye claimed 'common rights' well into the last century.

## Old Woking Shops

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 28th January, 2011)



Leigh's Garage, now replaced by the new houses opposite London House, was formerly part of Fleming's Garage and before that Conway West Motors, but the building was originally a 17<sup>th</sup> century inn called the White Horse Hotel.

A couple of weeks ago, after my walk around Old Woking, I was talking to a gentleman who used to live in the village seventy-odd years ago. Where the walk started, at the entrance of the car park at 'Send Corner', there were then a number of shops (a boot-makers, coal merchant, drapers and bakers), with a garage (Conway West Motors) where the new houses are beside the Old Manor House. On the opposite side of the road (where the village sign is now) were a few more shops and cottages, with a 'dress-makers' and

'refreshment room' on the other corner (where the car park to 'London House' is now) - all of these were demolished by the council for 'road improvements', although whether it was an improvement or not is debatable. London House itself (now a restaurant) was then another drapers, before the Post Office moved there from its original site on the corner with St Peters Road.



London House was formerly Old Woking's Post Office, but originally it was a drapers. Apparently London measures of cloth were slightly more generous than others, so the name 'London House' was advertising to your customers that you would be giving great value for money. Hopefully when the new 'London House Restaurant' opens in April, the same will be true.



So much has changed since this postcard was produced that the only building still recognisable is the white building on the right (then a newsagents). The shop next door has been replaced by six apartments, and the house and outbuildings on the corner with Church Street are now a number of 1960's houses. On the left, the 'Market Cottages' (beyond the lamp-post) are still standing (minus their canopy), but most of the others buildings have been replaced by Townsend Cottages. The only old 'shop' is the Chinese Takeaway, off course.

On the other corner of St Peters Road with the High Street was another bakers and confectioners, with a garage and cycle shop (formerly a blacksmiths) further down the road, and on the other side a number of little shops including a general store, a greengrocers and fishmonger, a couple of newsagents and a saddlers workshop.

In the other direction, where Riverside Gardens is now, was a butcher's, so that all in all Old Woking was quite self-sufficient for its shopping needs. Apart from the 'new shops' (built in the 1950's at the entrance to Manor Way - where you can get a sandwich or have your hair done), now all you can get in the 'historic' centre of the village is a Chinese Takeaway!

## St Johns Shops

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



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

Last week I wrote about the shops (and current lack thereof) in Old Woking, which seemed to have prompted one shopkeeper in Knaphill to give me a little 'lecture' on the evils of the modern superstore (and a certain 'Brookwood' shop in particular).

It reminded me of an item I read several years ago when the building that is now the Co-op in St John's was first built. A number of local people had protested when they realised that the four units that had originally been proposed on the site, were going to end up as one small shop and one 'large one' taking up three units (the Co-op, of course now taking up all four)! A local shopkeeper in the village wrote to the press noting that if the people didn't want a 'large' shop in the village they could easily do something about it. When it opened, he proposed, the villagers should simply refuse to shop there and the owners would soon shut up shop and allow the site to be converted back into four small units, for four 'local' shops. It was tongue in cheek of

St Johns Road before the construction of the four shops now occupied by the Co-op.

On the other side of St Johns Road, by the mini-roundabout, St Johns lost another butcher's shop.

There was controversy when the shops were built and it was announced that instead of four small shops, there would be one 'large' convenience store and just one small shop.

course, because he knew that despite the protests people wanted the convenience of being able to get all their shopping in one place. It was not long, I think, before the particular shopkeeper closed his doors and sold his site for redevelopment.

The truth is, that no matter how much we might moan about the demise of the little independent shops, it is ultimately up to us to ensure they



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

survive – by spending our own time and money shopping in them. I know I am as much to blame as the next person (probably more so, as I try not to 'shop' at all), but it did get me thinking about how many truly 'independent' shops we still have in this area and whether it is possible now to be able to get all you need without setting foot in one of the big 'multi-national' shops. Have we already reached the point of no return?



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

## West Byfleet Shops

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 11th February, 2011)

The plight of local shops seems to have struck a chord, and thankfully I am discovering that despite the rise of the modern multi-nationals, it is still possible to 'shop locally'. In fact the more I look at local 'village centres' (as opposed to the town centre), the more I realise that the independent is still alive and kicking. Take West Byfleet, for instance – before the war there were probably more 'national' shops in the village than there are today with Sainsbury's, MacFisheries, the International Tea Stores and United Dairies all having shops in Rosemount Parade. The result is that although you can probably still get all you



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WEST BYFLEET

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Some of the first shops to be built in West Byfleet were at the junction of the Old Woking Road and Pymford Road – known as Byfleet Corner.



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

THE STATION AND APPROACH, BYFLEET

H 5742

These shops in Station Approach are now locally listed buildings, contrasting with the 1960's development further up the road!

need in the village, in the past it seems there was much more choice of supplier (if not more choice of goods), with most trades being served by more than one outlet.

Looking at the local street directory for 1937 the village boasted three butchers, two fruiterers and greengrocers and a bakers and confectioners - H.C. Hart in Rosemount Parade - with a Mrs Nott also being listed as selling 'homemade cakes' just down the road. There were at least half a dozen newsagents/tobacconists, several of which were also listed variously as 'stationers', 'booksellers' or 'library' and there were numerous boot and shoe retailers, repairers and makers (one at Byfleet Corner and two each in Rosemount Parade and Station Approach). There were also several dyers and cleaners - Hardings Ltd in Station Approach, with Brooklands Cleaners, Eastman & Son and P. Callard (also a tailors) in Rosemount Parade, as well as various other menswear shops, costumiers, milliners and drapers, but perhaps the most striking difference with today is what they didn't have. There was just one 'café' (The Green Room in Station Approach), and no restaurants or take-away's. There wasn't a shop where you could buy computer consumable either!



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

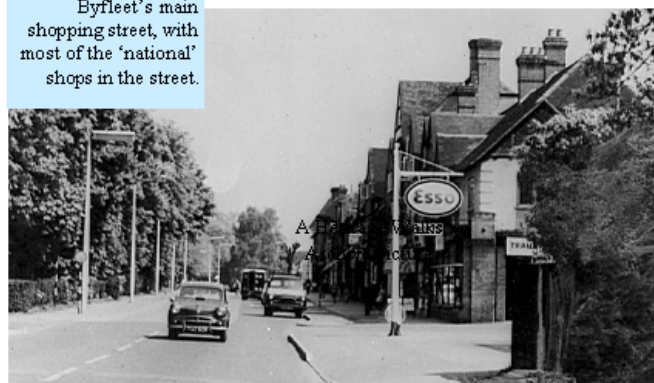
STATION APPROACH, WEST BYFLEET

H 5744

The butchers on the corner and the newsagents next door, although long since changed hands, shows that some things haven't changed in West Byfleet.

Before the war Rosemount Parade was probably considered to be West Byfleet's main shopping street, with most of the 'national' shops in the street.

Next week I will continue the look at local village centres, concentrating on Knaphill in the 1960's.



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

## Knaphill's Shops

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 18th February, 2011)



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

This early photograph of the International Stores in the Broadway, Knaphill, shows that even before the war, Knaphill was an important shopping centre for west Woking.

Knaphill grew quite rapidly in Victorian times with the opening of nearby institutions and the expansion of local industries. Its shops served not just its immediate area, but also developed to



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

The 1960's and 70's saw many changes to the Knaphill Street scene, although in this view of The Broadway only the Lloyd's Bank building

serve places further afield such as Bisley, West End and even Pirbright. By the late 1950's Knaphill was firmly established as the main shopping centre for the west of Woking, and in the next couple of decades that position was strengthened with the building of new parades of shops such as Albion Parade, Anchor Crescent and even the 'Cresswell Corner' and 'Orchardlea' developments on Anchor Hill.

The Woking Co-operative Society had opened a branch in the village as early as 1913 but in 1971 the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society redeveloped the Co-op's second site in the village (on the corner with Englefield Road), and the following year their original store on the corner with the Broadway was converted into an Estate Agency.

Although the Co-op wasn't the only major grocer in the village (the International Tea Stores had a branch in the Broadway), the new shop was probably built to help re-establish the stores dominance in the village following the opening two years earlier of a new Tesco self-service supermarket in Anchor Crescent.

That development really was a radical idea for Knaphill - a 'pedestrian precinct' with a canopy in front of the shops to protect the customers when it rained and even its own car park! The ten shops, with rents originally ranging from £750 to £950 p. a., included the village's new Post Office (opened August 1969), with a butchers, bakers and greengrocers eventually making it the new 'centre' of the village - away from the old one around the Broadway/High Street junction.



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

The buildings have not changed, but some of the shops (and vehicles) have.

Even away from the main village centre, new shops were built in Victoria Road (near to Inkerman), and, as mentioned above, on Anchor Hill. Here Knaphill also gained 'Surrey's newest freezer and frozen food centre' in October 1972 when the 'Icepak' opened its doors at 8 and 9 Cresswell Corner - long before Bejam's opened their store in Woking town centre!

The post office and dry cleaners remain, but Tesco's is now the site of Knaphill Library.

Of course Knaphill still has its Co-op (now competing with Sainsbury's instead of Tesco), but it has lost its freezer centre, its butchers and its greengrocers - although thankfully not its bakers. Lets hope it stays that way.



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

## Woking's Shopping Centres

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 25th February, 2011)



The International Tea Stores (Importers and Shippers) were one of the first national stores to open in Woking (on the corner of Addison Road and Chertsey Road).

Argos is today). That shop had previously been Kibby's Supermarket, but the International had previously had a shop in Chertsey Road too.

Gateway's, of course, later took over Fine Fare before they were acquired by Asda, who closed down the shop and sold it for the 'H.G.Well's Planets' (now The Big Apple).

It should also be noted that at one stage Tesco's had a store where the 'Rat & Parrot' pub used to

Over the past few weeks we have looked at the changing face of several village shopping centres, and noted that although the large national stores have had an impact, some local 'village' shops have managed to survive. When it comes to the town centre, however, it is hard to find too many 'local' shops left - Harper's Photographic being



How many people have forgotten that Bejam's used to occupy part of the ground floor of the 'Wolsey Place' car park? Burger King and the entrance to The Peacocks would now be where their car park and Cawsey Way once went.



By the time Woking's 'new' shopping centre was being modernised and named 'Wolsey Place' the Supermarket facing Town Square had already gone, to be replaced by Dixon's in one half, and later Burton's in the other.

be (Perring's Furniture Store occupying the site in the interim), and that we also had the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (now Toys'R'Us) and Bejam's Freezer Food Centre in the town. Like many shopping centres most of Woking's food shops have given up with the advent of 'out-of-town' shopping.

one of the few exceptions - but some of the large national stores have come and gone over the years as well.

Look at The Peacocks. When it first opened in 1992 its main 'anchor' stores were Alders (now Debenhams), C & A's (now Primark), Marks & Spencer's (now H & M) and Woolworth's (now Next).

Wolsey Place has perhaps fared better, with Boots, Sainsbury's, Robert Dyer's and W.H. Smith's all continuing to do business, but even here the shopping centre has lost a couple of its original 'big names' in Mothercare and MacMarket.

Of course MacMarket (who formerly had a store in Chertsey Road as MacFisheries), later became Gateway's who also had taken over the International Store in Commercial Road (where



As well as its shops changing in the past twenty years, the Town Square entrance has also changed a couple of times too.



## Chertsey Road Butchers

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



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

Robert Wasley's shops at 41 and 43 Chertsey Road can be seen in this photograph (the first shop with the shutter down is No. 41), whilst their shops at 26 and 28 were just across the road.

I mentioned last week about Mac Fisheries having a shop in Chertsey Road. It was at number 18 (now Barbers Picture Framing – another great survivor from Woking's shopping past). What I didn't realise was that before the shop was Mac Fisheries, it was one of the many shops in Chertsey Road run by Robert Wasley Ltd – surely one of Woking's most prominent butchers, poulterers and fishmongers before the Second World War.

I don't know when (or why) that particular shop was taken over by Mac Fisheries (it was actually listed as The Mac Fisheries Ltd – R. Wasley – Fishmonger and Poulterer in 1921), but by 1926 Walsey's were obviously concentrating their efforts on the other four shops they had in the road, as the advertisement from the Official Woking Guide of that year shows (you don't find advertisements like that any more).

**ROBERT WASLEY, Limited**  
From Woking 25 and 195. Phone: Aldershot 10.

HIGH CLASS  
**BUTCHERS, GROCERS**  
 AND  
**PROVISION MERCHANTS**

WE SPECIALISE IN  
**BEST DANISH BACON**  
 ONLY.  
 Which is Cured in our own Stoves.

Every description of High Class  
**GROCERIES and PROVISIONS**  
 Kept in stock.

*See our Advertis in your  
 Local Paper each week for  
 SPECIAL BARGAINS*

KEEN SERVICE. SMART DELIVERY.  
 AT LONDON STORE PRICES.

**COMPLETE PRICE LIST**  
*forwarded on application.*

*Note Address :*  
 26, 28, 41, 43, Chertsey Road, WOKING  
 and 37, Union Street, ALDERSHOT.

**ROBERT WASLEY, Limited**  
From Woking 25 and 195. Phone: Aldershot 10.

HIGH CLASS  
**BUTCHERS, GROCERS**  
 AND  
**PROVISION MERCHANTS**

NOTED FOR  
**FINEST SCOTCH BEEF**  
**MUTTON AND LAMB**

PRIME CHILLED BEEF  
 NEW ZEALAND LAMB.

**COOKED MEATS** of every description  
**MADE DAILY IN OUR OWN**  
**HYGIENIC FACTORY**

**FAMILIES WAITED ON**  
**DAILY.**

The Firm with the most Up-to-Date  
**COLD STORAGE** and  
**FLEET of DELIVERY VANS**  
 at YOUR DISPOSAL.

These advertisements from the 1926 Official Woking Guide demonstrate how much advertising has changed as much as how Woking has changed.

What is perhaps remarkable is the fact that Wasley's were not the only butchers in the street. In 1921, a few doors down at 34 Chertsey Road, was the London Central Meat Co Ltd, with Eastman's Ltd, butchers, at No. 42, and on the other side of the road E.G. Marshall 'family butchers' at No. 65 (between the junction of Duke Street and Walton Road), and James Lush, 'port butcher and provision merchants' at No. 73.

Now Chertsey Road is mainly places to eat and drink and the nearest butchers (in fact the ONLY butchers anywhere near town) is on the other side of the railway line in Oriental Road.

The other thing to note, of course, is that not only were there many butcher shops in the area, but there was also many local farms serving them. Marshall's had their own at Barnsbury (as well as in Rogate, Sussex), where according to a brochure I have (produced before the First World War) they reared the 'best quality table poultry, ducks, geese and turkeys'. Now the fields of most of those farms are either occupied by horses, or (more likely) houses!

**E. G. MARSHALL, CHERTSEY ROAD, WOKING.**

Prime Ox Beef. Welsh Mutton. Small Pork.

Deliveries to Pyrford & West Byfleet, three times daily.

A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

By obtaining Stock from our own Farms and well-known local feeders including Hon. Rupert Guinness, Pyrford Court, we can supply our patrons with the choicest meat at the lowest possible prices.

Testimonials in the brochure include one from Lady Dilke at Pyrford Rough and Gaston Baudequin, Chef to Lord Northcliffe – 'Dear Sirs, I have much pleasure in testifying to the high quality of your Meat and Fish, also to the prompt and satisfactory manner in which it is delivered.'

Now there is only one butcher's shop near Woking Town Centre – but fortunately they do not display their meat in quite the same unsanitary way as shops did in the past.



A Heritage Walks  
Archive Picture

## Tesco & Asda

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 11th March, 2011)



Newcomers to the town will not recognise this view of the junction of Commercial Road at its junction with Chertsey Road (taken from the corner with Duke Street). The shops on the right were demolished to make way for the new Tesco store in the early 1960's, with the remainder disappearing when the Fine Fare store was built, blocking the end of Commercial Road.

I have written in recent weeks about various supermarkets that have come and gone over the years in Woking Town Centre. Places such as the International, Mac Market and Gateway – names that have all disappeared from every High Street – but also places such as Tesco who once had a store in Commercial Road at its junction with Chertsey Road (when Chertsey Road was the main shopping street in the town).

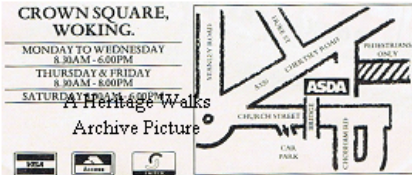


In the 1970's, when the emphasis of Woking Town Centre shifted to the other end of Commercial Road (with the building of what became Wolsey Place), Tesco's looked to build a bigger and better store in the town. One site they looked at apparently was where Bhs is now (a site also suggested as suitable for Mark's & Spencer's), but Tesco's also had eyes on the site that is now the 'Big Apple' – before Fine Fare beat them to it there.

In more recent years Tesco were rumoured to have planned a new 'home style' store in The Peacocks, but also put in plans for a conventional foodstore on the Westfield tip site (losing that battle when Safeway got permission for their

The laundrette next to Tesco's can be seen on the left of this picture, but not the shop itself. If anyone has a picture of Tesco's in Woking, please let me know.

The Focus store at the Lion Retail Park was almost completely destroyed by fire a few years ago. Now Argos occupy half the site, leaving Asda with a little over 1,500 sq metres (about the size of Waitrose) for their new style store, due to open in the autumn.



Asda last had a shop in the town twenty years ago, as this map from one of their leaflets of 1992 shows.

In October 1993 the Asda shop closed (to be replaced by the H.G. Well's Planets), by which time Sainsbury's were the only major supermarket left in the area.

**£2 OFF**  
A Heritage Walks Archive Picture  
**YOUR SHOPPING WITH OUR COMPLIMENTS**

Your ASDA Store at Woking will be closing for the last time at 4 pm on Saturday 30th October 1993.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and custom, and we hope that you will continue to shop at ASDA in the future.

You can save £2 on your shopping when you use the voucher overleaf, between 1st and 14th November, at ASDA Slough or Farnborough.

shop off Goldsworth Road). I wouldn't be shocked, therefore, to read that Tesco's were planning to come back into the town\*, so I shouldn't have been surprised to read of Asda's re-emergence in the area.

The site for the new Asda has quite an interesting history (which I will go into in more detail next week), but it does mean that along with Brooklands just over the borough boundary, the residents of Woking will once again have as much choice of 'big name' supermarkets, as they had in the latter part of the last century. Is that that they call progress?

\*which they did within a few months of this article being printed!



## Lion Retail Park History

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 18th March, 2011)

Last week, following Asda's announcement that they were buying the Focus DIY site at the Lion Retail Park, I commented on the importance of the sites history. Looking at the old photographs again, I cannot help but wonder why the 'powers that be' refused to help preserve what was clearly a wonderful piece of architecture, albeit slightly 'knocked about' in its final years as one of Woking's major industrial sites.



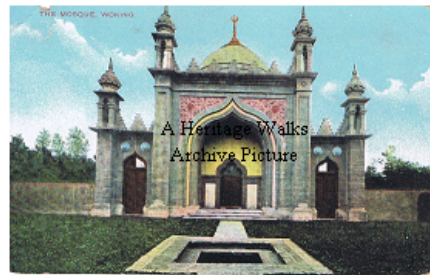
The buildings started out in life in 1860 as the Royal Dramatic College, a sort of 'fame school' where (as The Times newspaper noted at the time) 'decaying actors and actresses' would live in ten houses on either side of the Great Hall and teach their profession to a new generation. Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray were amongst the trustees, with Prince Albert one of the benefactors.



In the end the venture failed and in 1880 the site was put up for auction and eventually sold to a Hungarian gentleman by the name of Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner. He converted the buildings into the Oriental Institute, a centre where people wishing to travel to the East could discover its culture and history before they left, and where Muslims visiting Europe could 'feel at home'. It was because of the Institute that Britain's first Mosque was built here in 1889.

Unfortunately when Leitner died in 1899 the Institute (and for a short time the Mosque) 'died' with him. His son, Henry, was a director of

It is because of the Institute that Britain's first purpose-built Mosque was built here in 1889



Albert, the Prince Consort, laid the foundation stone for the Royal Dramatic College on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1860.

several local companies and by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the old college hall and houses were converted into workshops.

In 1910 the Martinsyde Aircraft Company had taken over part of the site to assemble their planes (that were then transported and flown from Brooklands), and by the end of the First World



The upper part of the original central hall was used as a boardroom by James Walkers.

War, with government help, the site at Maybury had become one of the largest aircraft factories in the world.

In 1877 the College closed and the site was put up for auction, finally being sold to Dr. Leitner for the Oriental Institute

Unfortunately for Martinsydes, after the war the government cut back on their investment in the fledgling air force and although the company struggled on making motorcycles, a fire in the early 1920's helped to put the company into liquidation.

In 1926 James Walkers Ltd (makers of 'Lion' packings and seals) moved into the works, and the rest, as they say, is history. They still have offices on part of the site, but the remainder of the buildings, including the magnificent Board Room (in the original Great Hall), were unfortunately demolished to make way for the Lion Retail Park.

Unfortunately nothing now remains of the original college buildings, which would have been were the car park of the Lion Retail Park is today.



## L&SWRS Orphanage

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 25th March, 2011)



The imposing Edwardian Orphanage in Oriental Road, facing the railway, was a familiar sight to commuters as they approached Woking Station from the north.

Last week I wrote about the various institutions (and industries) that once occupied the Lion Retail Park site, but there was another institution on the site next door that also had an interesting history – the London & South Western Railway Servants Orphanage (later the Southern Railwayman's Homes).

The original long-winded name resulted from the fact that the orphanage was founded by employees of the London & South Western Railway and the company insisted on the 'Servants' being added to avoid any possible liability. The first home for girls was set up in 1885 in Clapham, with a separate home for boys being purchased in 1895. Although these were added to in the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by 1902 the trustees decided that a new purpose built home was required 'in the country' which is why in 1907, seven and a half acres in Oriental Road were purchased from the London Necropolis Company for £2,900.

Work on the new site began almost immediately with the Duchess of Albany coming to Woking to lay the foundation stone on the 1<sup>st</sup> October that year. She returned just over twenty months later to officially open the site.



This old postcard (with a postmark of October 1916), shows the members of the Boys Gymnastic squad on the Orphanage's playing field, with the mosque clearly visible in the background, whilst another old postcard shows some of the boys playing in the yard of the Orphanage, whilst those in the foreground attend to the garden.

The book 'Changing Woking, 1900-1929' by the Woking Community Play Research Group (published in 1992), has an interesting chapter on the orphanage, with extracts from minutes of the board of guardians, including the following.

'1912, July. Mr Whittle proposed that ladies be eliminated from the House Committee owing to their lack of business methods and lack of unity which causes unpleasantness. The ladies protested that they had never been instructed in their duties.'

'1915, March. War economy meant that the boys were fitted out with new knickers only instead of full suits and the girls were instructed to wear hair ribbons on Sundays only.'



This photograph, taken not long before the Orphanage was demolished, shows the scale of the buildings.

There were many more in the book including ones connected with the conduct of some of the staff (which occasionally left a lot to be desired), but on the whole the Orphanage appears to have been quite a happy place, and it was sad, in 1988, when the building was demolished to make way for new houses and apartments.

