

Red House Hotel

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



The creeper clad walls of the original Red House Hotel (on the left of the picture), were quite a feature of Chertsey Road in the early part of the 20th century, judging by the number of postcard's produced showing this scene.

A couple of weeks ago I wrote about the Albion Hotel – the first place to be built in what is now Woking Town Centre, whilst in the past I have mentioned the Railway Hotel (later renamed 'The Cardinals' and now known as the 'Sovereigns'), which was the first new building to be constructed to the south of the railway in the early 1840's. So this week I thought I should mention the 'Red House Hotel'.

The original hotel was apparently built in the late 1860's or early 1870's, so that the new town of Woking that sprung up on the former Woking Common had three public houses before any place of worship was built! Woking, in the early days was often described as a 'wild-west' type of town.

Like the Albion, the Red House's garden (which would have been to the left of the old picture) was soon redeveloped, although in this case it was the

pub itself that 'expanded' to take over the site. Eventually, of course, the old site, on the corner of Chobham Road and Chertsey Road, was also redeveloped, with Burton's building their new store on the site (now Ladbrokes).

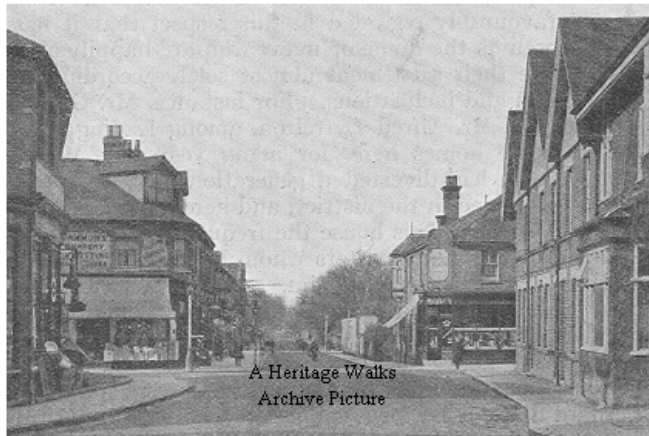
It is amazing, as I travel around the country, how many old 1930's 'Burtons' buildings there are. They are quite distinctive and in most cases you can still find the original foundation stones in place – in Woking's case on the corner beside the passage by the new 'Red House'.

I say 'Red House' because to most 'old' residents (or should I say residents with long memories) that is what the pub will always be known as, despite being renamed several times (I forget some of the more stupid ones that were proposed in the 1980's) and now known as 'O'Neills'.

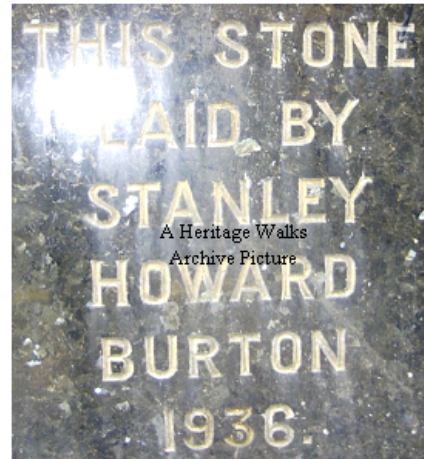
There were other hotels later built in the town – The Heathside Hotel, Cotteridge and Northfleet, to name just three - but we will have to cover them another week.



The 1930's pub, now O'Neills, shortly before it was re-named.



The hotel was soon extended to the junction with Commercial Road, as this photograph (taken from the 'Homeland Guide to Woking' of 1904) shows. The hotel is on the right.



The foundation stone of Burton's, still on the Ladbrokes building

Pyrford Flower Show

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



Another major event in the village before the Second World War was the 'Pageant of St George' held in the ground of Pyrford Court to raise money for the St George's Home 'for children of officers killed, wounded or financially distressed through the war'.

This Saturday (9th July 2011) is the Pyrford & Wisley Flower Show and Fete. It is the 64th annual show, the first one being held on the 18th August 1948, but its history goes back much further than that as it was originally organised by the Pyrford Horticultural Society, itself formed in May 1909. Of course 'horticulture' was an important part of the two villages history long before the society was established, with several market gardens in the area and the opening of the Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Wisley in 1905.

The gardens were actually established by George Ferguson Wilson in 1878 when he purchased Glebe Farm and laid out his 'Oakwood Experimental Garden' on the 60 acre site. When he died in 1902 the farm was bought by Sir Thomas Hanbury, who gifted the site to the RHS the following year.

The flower show starts at 12.30 on the ground of Pyrford Cricket Club (itself formed in 1858), with the Village Hall next door also an integral part of the event. The hall was built in 1921 as the village's memorial to those who died during the First World War – so this year it is celebrating 90 years of serving the village.

Pyrford has a long tradition of organising garden party's and shows, as the poster of the Waifs & Stray's Society Garden Party shows, but what year this particular one took place is uncertain - my guess would be the 1920's or 30's (possibly 1920, 1926 or 1937).

The St Nicholas Home has sadly long gone, but with the local schools, the scouts and guides, WI's and other local groups all taking part in the flower show and fete, it is good to see that the true 'community' spirit so often shown by the villagers of Pyrford (and Wisley) in the past is still alive and well – long may they all continue.

WAIFS and STRAYS SOCIETY

A

GARDEN PARTY

WILL BE HELD ON

THURSDAY, JULY 13TH,

At 2.30 p.m., at

ST. NICHOLAS' HOSPITAL, PYRFORD.

TO BE OPENED BY

THE COUNTESS OF ONSLOW

Supported by MR. GILLIE POTTER, who will preside.

DANCING DISPLAY arranged by Madame BARNES.

PLAY by the Horsell Women's Institute.

MADAME MYSTERE, *Palmer's* A Heritage Walks Archive Picture

DOG SHOW at 4.30 p.m.

Entrance Fee for each event 1/6, which should be sent to Mrs. Gibson, Little Croft, Pyrford.

STALLS. TEAS. SIDE-SHOWS.

BAND OF THE DURHAM LIGHT INFANTRY.

(By kind permission of the Band President).

Admission, 6d. Children, half-price.

The Waifs & Strays Society organised a number of events at their St Nicholas' Hospital (later Rowley Bristow Hospital) in Pyrford, but when this Garden Party took place is not, unfortunately, known.

Byfleet Church

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

My Heritage Walk this Sunday (17th July 2011) is around Byfleet (starting at 2pm opposite The Plough) – a village with a long and proud history, but a remarkable ability to hide most of it away amongst 1960's & 70's housing estates!

I gave a talk many years ago in the village when I mentioned about the ancient church being a long way from the village centre. I was interrupted by an elderly gentleman who pointed out that "the church wasn't built away from the village – it was the village that was built a long way from the church".



He was right of course, as the original St Mary's church dates back to before the Domesday Survey, although the oldest part of the present building dates from the late 13th or early 14th century.

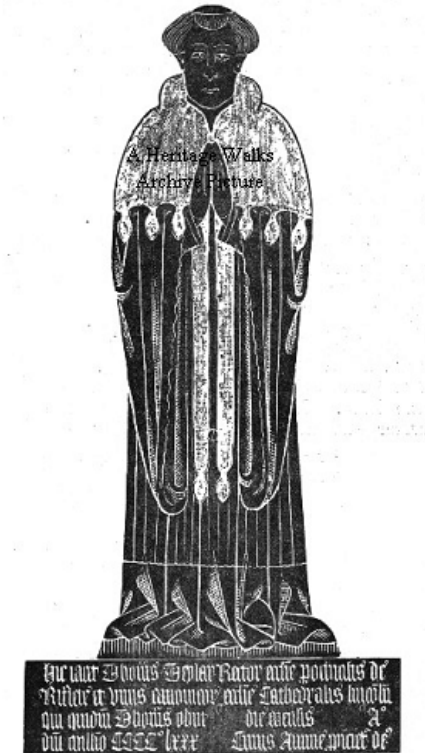
Inside the church can be seen some early 14th century wall paintings (above the north door) and a 'brass' depicting Thomas Taylor, the rector of Byfleet from 1454 to 1489.

Like many churches, St Mary's was extensively 'restored' by the Victorians who added the South Aisle in 1841, the Transept in 1864 and Vestry in 1881, whilst restoring the tower in 1868.

In the graveyard are several interesting graves including that of John Parry Thomas, the racing driver who died on Pendean Sands in 1927 whilst trying to break the World Land-Speed record.

George Smith, a wealthy Victorian writer and publisher, is also buried here. He was editor of

An interesting 15th century brass to Thomas Taylor, the rector of the church from 1454 to 1489.



A church at Byfleet is mentioned in 1086, although the oldest part of the present structure is only 13th or 14th century

several Victorian magazines and a regular contributor to The Times and Encyclopaedia Britannica. He wrote biographies of Shelley, Gladstone and Robert Peel, but from a local historians point of view his most famous contribution to society was his founding of the 'Dictionary of National Biography'.

It was because of the work carried out in 1865 on the church that the Byfleet Parish Day was first arranged (as a thanksgiving tea), with this year's Parish Day taking place on Saturday 16th July starting at 12.30 on Byfleet Recreation Ground.

Saturday also happens to be the day for Knaphill's Village Fete, held once more at Mizen's Railway in Barrs Lane.

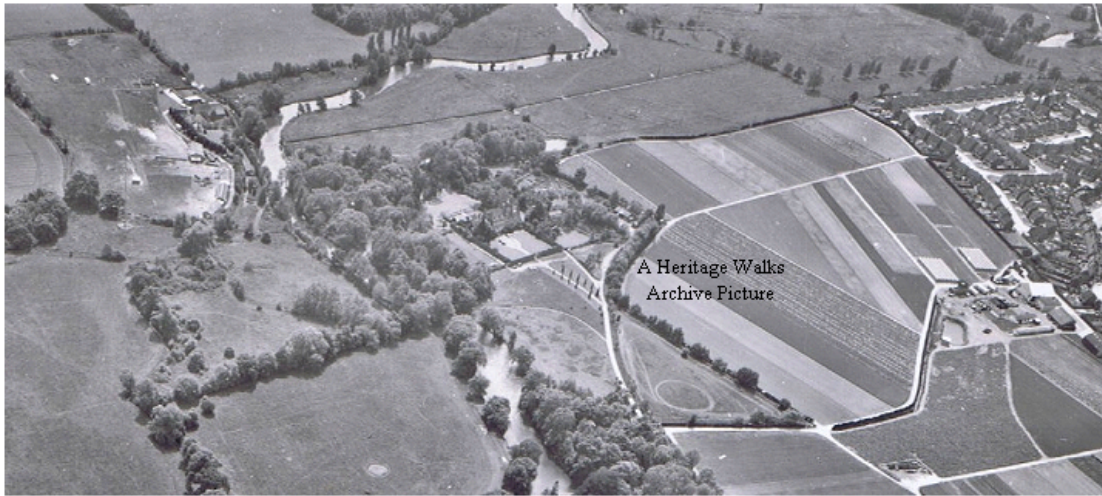
Hopefully the weather will be kind for all events.



John Parry Thomas, who broke the land-speed record on Pendean Sands in 1927, is buried in Byfleet Churchyard.

Byfleet Manor

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



The Manor House, tucked away down Mill Lane, is still very much 'out of sight - out of mind' as far as many people are concerned.

Last week I mentioned about Byfleet Church, but this week I want to concentrate on the history of the Manor House, an important building in the history of the village, but a site that is often 'out of sight - out of mind' as far as visitors to the area are concerned.

When the first manor house was built at Byfleet we do not know, but at the time of the Domesday Survey the manor (part of the Hundred of Godley) was held from the Abbey of Chertsey by a gentleman called Ulwin (or Wulfwin). The first positive record of a house comes in the 13th century when Geoffry De Lucy held the manor. There was also a deer park and in 1267 a number of people were accused of breaking into the park and stealing 'bucks, does, pigs and horses'.

In 1297 Henry de Leybourne took possession of the manor and in 1302 he was arrested for holding an illegal jousting match at 'Biflet'.

By 1308 the manor had reverted to the crown and was granted by Edward II to one of his favourites - Piers de Gaveston.



The present house is mainly 18th century, but with 19th century wings on either side of the main house.

From 1337 until his death in 1376, Byfleet was held by Edward III's son, the Black Prince. His registers record work at Byfleet including repairs to the kitchen at 'Byflete' in January 1347 and 'repair of the defects of the houses' and 'making of new houses'.

The manor was then part of what we would now call the 'Duchy of Cornwall', but in the 1530's Henry VIII gave the manor to Catherine of Aragon as part of her settlement from their divorce.

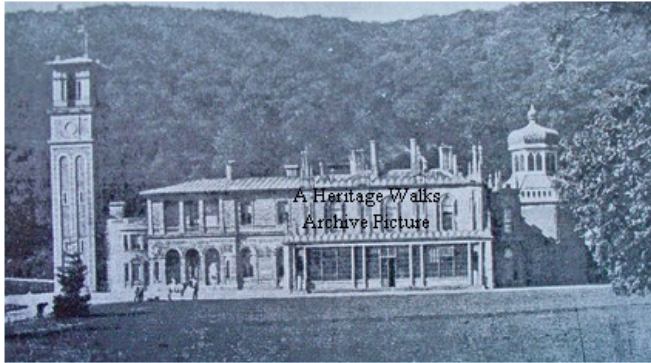
Most of those mentioned above are now commemorated in the road names of the area - Godley Road; Ulwin Road; Leybourne Avenue, Edward II Avenue; Gaveston Close; Black Prince Close; Cornwall Avenue and Catherine Close, with Thomas Fullerton (who completed the rebuilding of the Manor House in the 17th century) having a 'Drive' 'Way' and 'Road' named after him.



The first record of a manor house at Byfleet comes from the 13th century.

W.G. Tarrant

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



The Italianate style house at Hafod was partially in ruins when W.G. Tarrant bought the house in 1940, but after his death it became completely derelict and was demolished in 1956.



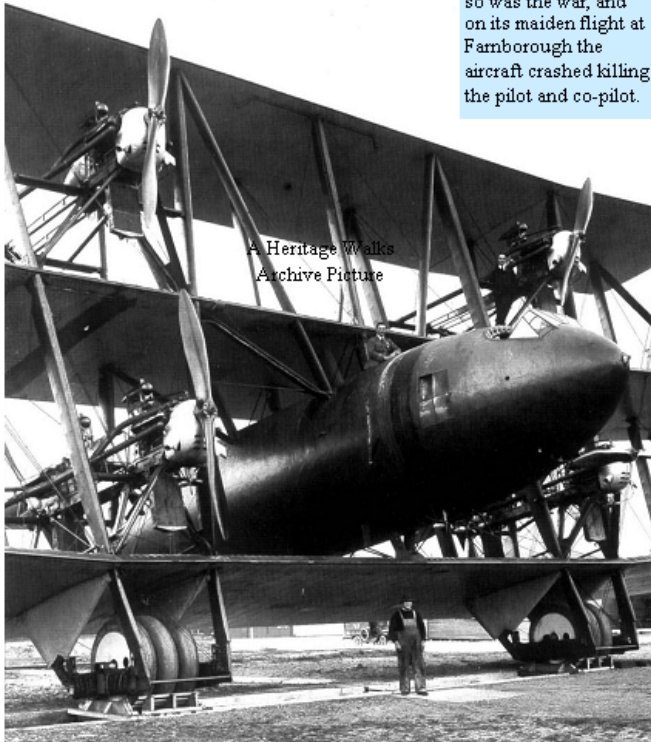
Walter George Tarrant died suddenly of a heart attack on the 18th March 1942. He is buried in the churchyard at Hafod.

I was on holiday a couple of weeks ago in mid Wales, staying in a wonderful cottage in the hills just outside Aberystwyth. To my surprise (and groans from my family) I discovered a piece of 'Woking' history only a couple of miles from the cottage – the 'Hafod Estate', now just a ruin, but once the home of W.G. Tarrant, the builder from Byfleet whose name is synonymous with high-class and high-quality houses throughout North-West Surrey.

During the First World War Tarrant's produced prefabricated buildings for use on the front and designed and built this wonderful tri-plane bomber. Unfortunately by the time it was finished, so was the war, and on its maiden flight at Farnborough the aircraft crashed killing the pilot and co-pilot.

It never ceases to amaze me how many wonderful houses he managed to build in this area – mainly on Hook Heath or around Pyrford and West Byfleet (as well as St George's Hill and Wentworth, of course), but it also makes me laugh when estate agents feel that they have to try to sell almost any large house of the period as 'Tarrant Style'.

Walter George Tarrant's skills were not refined to fine houses. During the First World War the company built many prefabricated buildings for the military and were involved in aircraft manufacture as well. But he was evidently not quite so well known in West Wales, where one guide-book described him simply as a 'Surrey timber merchant and builder'.



Tarrant bought the Hafod Estate near Pontrhydygroes just before the Second World War when the historic house was in a perilous state. He used his skill (and a great amount of money) on restoring the property, including constructing a dam across the river to provide hydro-electric power for the estate's properties. He tried to persuade the Government to get involved in re-opening some of the lead mines up the valley at Cwmystwyth in order to help the war effort, but his pleas fell on death ears and although he started to manage the estates vast woodlands, he unfortunately died before his work on the house was complete.

After his death the house fell into ruin once more and has since been completely demolished, but the Hafod Trust are working on restoring some of the fine woodland and waterfall walks which no doubt partially attracted 'W.G.' (and myself) to the area.

I wonder what local link I'll find when I next go away?

Heathside's Hotels

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 5th August, 2011)

I read a few weeks ago that Travelodge are planning to convert the offices on the corner of White Rose Lane and Oriental Road (opposite the sorting office) into a new hotel – ideal for people using the railway to travel to or from the town. They are not the first to recognise the potential of the area from that point of view, with many small hotels having opened (and ultimately closed) on the south side of the railway over the years.

The first was the Railway Hotel in Guildford Road, opened by Edward Woods in 1840, just a couple of years after the station was opened on what was then just Woking Common. The modern town of Woking wouldn't be built for many years so the Railway Hotel's trade must have almost exclusively been from railway travellers looking for somewhere to stay for the night.

**THE
RAILWAY HOTEL**

Guildford Road,
WOKING.

'Phone : Woking 185.



A Heritage Walks
Archive Picture

Family and Commercial.

WINES, SPIRITS, &c.
BEST QUALITY ONLY.

Headquarters: WOKING BOWLING CLUB:
WOKING CRICKET CLUB:
WOKING HOCKEY CLUB:
WOKING RACING PIGEON CLUB.

PROPRIETOR:
GEO. R. GODLEY.

The Railway Hotel changed its name in the late 1960's/ early 1970's to 'The Cardinal' (when it ceased to let out rooms I believe), and has since been re-named The Sovereigns, but it was not the only hotel in the 'Heathside' area. The Cotteridge Hotel, on the corner of Guildford Road and Constitution Hill, opened in the early part of the 20th century (and closed as 'The Litten Tree' almost a century later), having been converted from a large private house (at one time also used as a school).

The Heathside Hotel in Coley Avenue was replaced by the Heathside old people's flats in the 1960's



There was also a private hotel in Coley Avenue called the Heathside Hotel which again appears to have been converted from a private residence in the early part of the 20th century, whilst after the Second World War a number of old houses found themselves opening as guest houses or small hotels, including the Bishopgarth Hotel in Heathside Road, the Crosslee Hotel on the corner of Park Road and Heathside Crescent and the Northfleet Guest House (later Hotel) in Claremont Avenue. There may have been others, but unfortunately details of most of the above are quite sketchy as few records have survived, even though some (such as the Northfleet) managed to continue in business for several years.



Before it was a hotel (in the late 1890's) and before it changed its name to the Litten Tree in the late 1990's.

An advertisement for the Railway Hotel from 1926



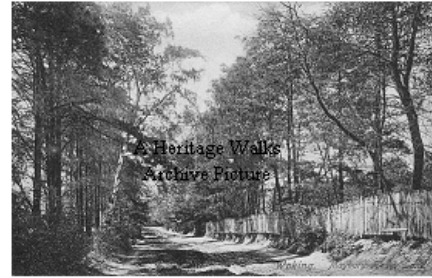
Castle Ramwick & College Arms

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 12th August, 2011)

Last week I mentioned the Railway Hotel being the first place to be built near Woking Common after the railway opened in 1838, but I should perhaps have mentioned that there were already some ancient buildings in the Heathside area, including Ramwick Cottage in Park Road, an old 16th or 17th century listed building that has an interesting history.

When the railway was opened it was an inn known as the 'Castle Ramwick' and in the mid 19th century was apparently frequented by the

In those days the Heathside and Maybury areas were quiet countryside as this old photograph of 'Maybury Heath' (believed to now be Oriental Road) shows.



spectators and participants in the illegal prize fights that used to take place on Woking Common (before the area became too built up and the authorities clamped down on them).

The most famous fight on Woking Common was between Nat Langham (the English champion) and William Sparkes of Australia who had come over to Britain to establish which of the two countries produced the best bare-knuckle boxers in the world.

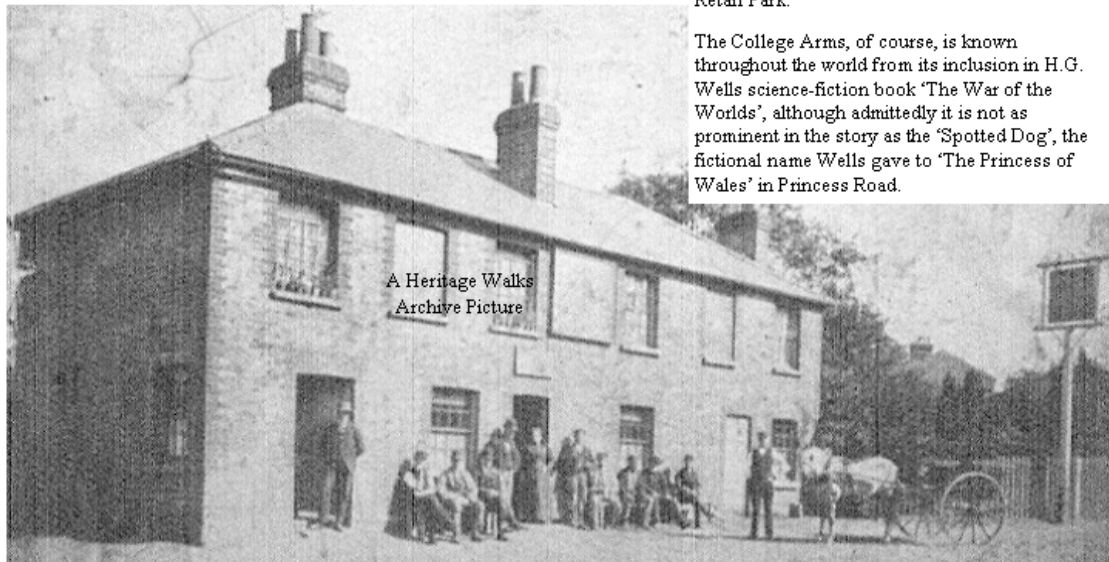
Ramwick Cottage in Park Road was one of several old cottages on the edge of Woking Common when the railway was built in 1838.

Apparently the fight was fairly even until the 36th round when Sparkes knocked Langham off his feet. Langham fought back and in the 62nd round caught Sparkes with a blow to his neck. After a struggle the two fell to the ground with the Englishman on top. The fall broke Sparkes right arm, and although he came on for five more rounds, eventually he had to give up as his backer threw in his hat.

The last fight at Woking, in about 1865, lasted for four and a half hours, and only ended when one of the fighters had his eye put out and the other broke his arm.

Sounds like a typical Friday or Saturday night in Woking!

The 'Castle Ramwick' almost certainly opened up as a 'beer house' serving the navvies employed on constructing the railway, and the same was probably the case with the 'College Arms' that used to be in College Road. It must have been called something before, as the 'college' refers to the Royal Dramatic College, established in the 1860's on the site now occupied by the Lion Retail Park.



The College Arms, of course, is known throughout the world from its inclusion in H.G. Wells science-fiction book 'The War of the Worlds', although admittedly it is not as prominent in the story as the 'Spotted Dog', the fictional name Wells gave to 'The Princess of Wales' in Princess Road.

Like the 'Castle Ramwick Inn' the 'College' probably opened as a 'beer house' serving the navvies who constructed the railway.

Woking's Lost Hotels

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 19th August, 2011)

The other week I wrote about some of the hotels in the Heathside area of Woking, and how most have managed to come and go without leaving too much in the way of records. Since then I have had a few items sent to me, including an undated brochure for the Cotteridge Hotel when the tariff for 'room, bath and breakfast' was '15s.', with 'meals served in bedroom' or 'early morning tea' for just one shilling (5p) per person extra. Also available was 'garage accommodation' for 2s6d per night or 10s6d weekly.

What the 'Hotel Inspector' would make of the interior of the hotel is anyone's guess, but in its day the 'Cotteridge' was THE place to be – the Woking Rotary Club (amongst others) choosing to meet there.

One hotel that does have a few more surviving records is the Mayford Manor Hotel, off Maybourne Rise in Mayford. The Surrey History Centre in Goldsworth Road has a file of documents and cuttings from the late 1950's to 1963 when the owners, Mr & Mrs McCaw, apparently sold the site. But even here there are more questions than answers, as the documents appear to show that prior to 1957 the hotel was known as the 'Hollis Court Hotel and Country Club'.



THE DINING ROOM

According to the Woking Street Directory for 1957, however, the building was at that time the south-eastern area office of the 'Fatstock Marketing Corporation Ltd' (which was set up in 1954 by the National Farmers Union upon the deterioration of meat after the 2nd World War - the records of which are at the Museum of Rural Life at Reading University), and I can find no records anywhere of a 'Hollis Court' in Woking.

The Mayford Manor Hotel carried on for many years after the McCaw's sold it (as the advertisement from 1972 shows), finally closing in the mid/late 1980's (or was it the early 1990's?) when it was replaced by housing.

That is the problem, although many of these places operated and closed within living memory, actual written records are still often difficult to trace.

I also had an email enquiring about the Farm Hotel in Triggs Lane, which was on the site of what is now Triggs Close. As the name suggests it was once a farm – Royal Oak Farm – but quite when it became a hotel (and what sort of hotel) is unclear. Several people remember having cream teas there, but nobody seems to remember staying the night, and although I have a photograph that is believed to be the premises, I cannot be sure as nobody seems to remember exactly what it looked like – despite the fact that it was still in operation until the early 1960's.

Is this the Farm Hotel or some other long lost Woking establishment?



Mayford Manor Hotel

GUILDFORD ROAD (A320)
WOKING

AA

RAC

FULLY LICENSED

*Under the Personal Supervision of the Owner
M. B. V. BLEWETT*

ACCOMMODATION

Executive Suites
A choice of Bedrooms with or without Private Bathrooms
Central Heating Drying Room

WEDDING RECEPTIONS BUSINESS CONFERENCES
TRADE SHOWS

BAR AND RESTAURANT

Open to Non-Residents

COURTEOUS AND HELPFUL STAFF AT YOUR SERVICE

Whilst the name 'Manor' might be good marketing, the building never was an actual 'Manor House'.

Byfleet Hotels

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 26th August, 2011)

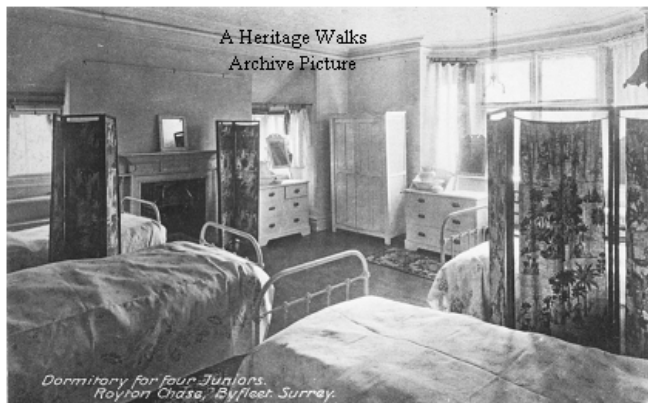


The Royston Chase Hotel being demolished in 1957

The mystery of the Farm Hotel off Triggs Lane, Woking, still hasn't been solved, but it seems that it is not the only hotel in the area that requires a bit more investigation. Unlike the Farm Hotel, the Royston Chase Hotel in Byfleet is quite well documented from a photographic point of view, but that is partially the problem - as one of the old postcards (reproduced here) shows the 'dormitory for juniors'. What sort of a hotel has a 'dormitory'?

Centre of the Byfleet Heritage Group's room at Byfleet Library (who very kindly supplied most of the illustrations here).

The Byfleet Hotel on the other hand has a long and interesting history. When the railway station opened at West Byfleet in 1887 (originally called Byfleet & Woodham Station), the landlord of the Sun Inn in Pyrford Road decided to build a new establishment immediately opposite the station entrance.



Dormitory for four Juniors.
Royston Chase, Byfleet, Surrey.

Some early postcards show it as the Station Hotel, others as the Byfleet Hotel, but in more recent years it was known as the 'Claremont' and is now called the Catherine of Aragon.

Another West Byfleet hotel still in use as a public house and restaurant is the Harvester on the Old Woking Road, which was once known as the 'Crown Hotel' before becoming the 'Yeoman' in the early 1990's, but again does anyone know more of its history. Answers please...

What sort of a hotel has a dormitory for juniors?

Again not a great amount is known of the 'Chase's' history. We know when it was demolished and replaced by the shops and 'Village Green' (and when the shops were demolished and replaced by the apartments), but when was the hotel built - or should I say converted, as it looks like it was a family residence before becoming a hotel?

Another hotel in the Byfleet area that should have plenty of pictures and memories is the Sheer House Hotel at West Byfleet (demolished to make way for the new shopping centre in the 1960s), but again there appears to be little in the 'official' archives at either the Surrey History

THE BYFLEET HOTEL

OUTSIDE WEST BYFLEET STATION

— BYFLEET 45048 —

| | | |
|---------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Residential | | Open to non residents |
| Lunches | | Private Parties |
| Dinners | | Off Licence |
| Receptions | | |
| Three spacious bars | | |

Your hosts, Bill and Rosa Clay

An advertisement for the Byfleet Hotel from 1970.

New Hotels

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 2nd September, 2011)

A couple of weeks ago we published a picture that we had been told was of the 'Farm Hotel' in Triggs Lane and asked for any information on the establishment. Part of the mystery has now been solved – the picture is not of the hotel - but at least it prompted a number of people to get in touch with their memories.

Apparently it was mainly a residential hotel (with some residents staying long enough to have established their own 'patch' of garden), although the restaurant was open to non-residents and evidently one of the places to go for a great afternoon tea.

Some of the staff were accommodated in the bungalows up Triggs Lane (towards Cavendish Road), with many remembering Miss Farr as the manageress and Mr Peters the owner. If anyone has a photograph of the hotel before (or during) demolition, I would be delighted to see it.

For a time Woking had quite a number of small family-run hotels, most of which have been demolished, but now there seems to be a revival in hotel beds in the town with several 'big names' already in the area and others apparently on their way.

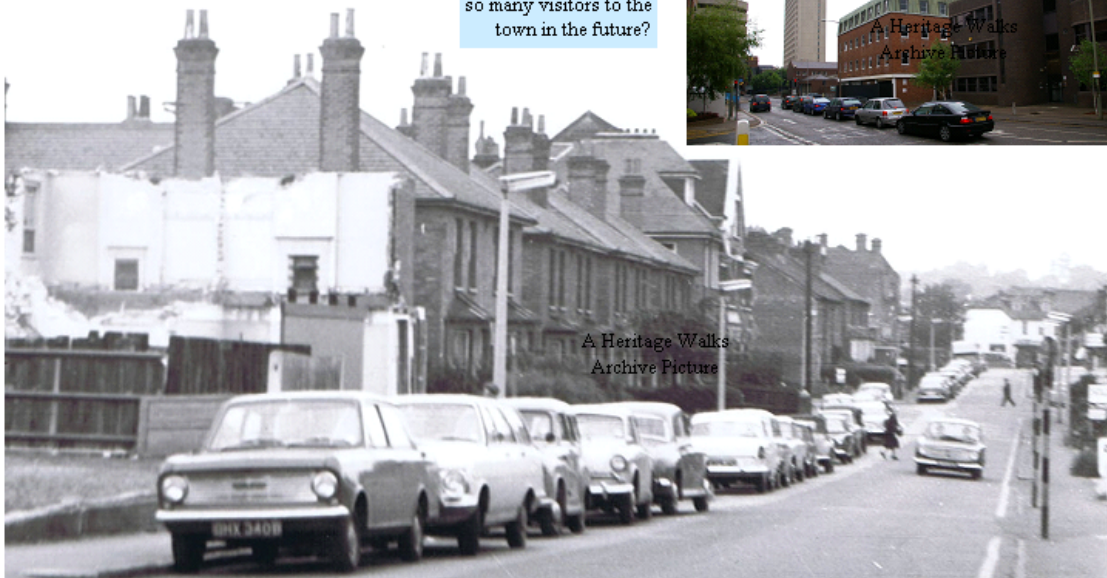
One recent application was for a 105 bed hotel (with offices, shops or restaurants) on the site of Eurobet House in Church Street West. Another is the 63 bed hotel and 97 residential units in the 13 storey replacement for St Dunstan's Church in White Rose Lane, which itself is next door to the 110 bed Travelodge in the refurbished and extended White Rose Court.

Imagine an eleven-storey hotel on the site of Eurobet House (on the right), with the eighteen-floor office block proposed for the 'Select House' site next door. Could it be Woking's architecture that will be attracting so many visitors to the town in the future?



The former St Dunstan's Catholic Church shortly before it was demolished. Unfortunately my views on the demolition of the church (let alone the proposed development) cannot be published in a 'family' newspaper!

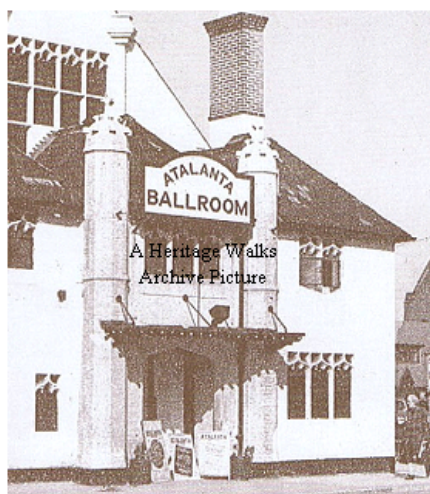
I cannot help wonder where all these new visitors are coming from (or coming for)? Has Woking become the new leisure resort of the South-East? What is more important, however, is how are they all going to get here? Presumably very few are expected by car. Travelodge have 53 parking spaces, St Dunstan's 47 (for 63 hotel rooms and 97 new residents!), whilst the developers of Eurobet House have allocated just 13 car parking places for all the hotel staff/office/shop workers and hotel guests. To be fair they have allowed for ten cycle parking places as well. I wonder how long it will be before the advert shows Lenny Henry balancing a suitcase on the handle-bars of his bicycle as he rides down Church Street West?



Once people actually lived in Church Street, as this 1970's photograph of some of the houses shows.

Music Venues

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 9th September, 2011)



Originally a ballroom, with the best sprung floor in the area, the 'Ata' was one of the places to go before it was demolished to make way for what is now Wolsey Place.

the television (not to be confused with 'Ready, Steady, Cook'!) – and I am sure there were many others who played at some of the various 'clubs' in the area, such as 'Michaels' in Goldsworth Road. If anyone has any memories of the period I (and my young emailer) would be delighted to hear.

There has been a lot of talk recently about whether Woking should have a 'special' venue where local bands could play, but from what I can see you could hardly call any of the above venues particularly 'special'. And as for local bands, Woking seems to have managed to produce quite a few musicians who have gone on to make a name for themselves, despite - or maybe because - we don't have a wonderful 'concert hall'. Maybe having to try a bit harder to get known (rather than have it handed to you on a plate on some 'opportunity knocks' type programme) was good for them. School Halls, Village Halls and Youth Centres appear to have worked well in the past and if anywhere needs to be revived it is perhaps some of the Youth Clubs - not some of the bars!

I had an email the other week enquiring about 'Woking's Nightlife' – which seemed a natural progression from the many articles recently about places such as the 'Red House' and 'Albion' – the bars of which played host in the past to many well-known pop-groups and singers. I seem to remember being told that Tom Jones was playing at the Red House (or was it The Albion) when the 'Green, Green Grass of Home' was announced to be number one in the charts. He wasn't the only one in Woking at that time. The Rolling Stones performed at the Atalanta Ballroom in Commercial Road on the 19th August 1963, a week before appearing on 'Ready Steady Go' on



The Albion and the Red House were just two local pubs that were popular venues for gigs in the 1960s and 70s.



Local clubs and restaurants (such as Michaels in Goldsworth Road) were also popular places to 'hang out' at in the past.

MOLLY BRET

Finally, on a completely different note, I had another email last week from a lady in the USA who is researching the life of Molly Brett. Even if you don't know the name, you probably know her work, as she illustrated a number of children's books and produced numerous paintings that have been published as greetings cards/postcards by the Medici Society. If anyone has any memories of Molly (who died in April 1990, but used to live in Horsell Vale – and before that in College Road and apparently Sandy Lane), I would be delighted to hear from them.

Ryde House & The High Street

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 23rd September, 2011)

The other week I published a photograph showing the offices that used to stand on the corner of Church Street West and Victoria Way (or Percy Street for those who remember the town before the mid 1970's)! Is it just me, or are others amazed at how quickly new buildings can be considered outdated and demolished? It is all very well companies claiming how 'green' they are when they design new 'environmentally friendly' offices, but surely it cannot be that good for the environment to rip down perfectly serviceable buildings – no matter how much of the old you 'recycle'.

I know that none were particularly 'pretty' (and I am certainly not advocating 'listing' or preserving any of them on historical grounds), but it just seems such a waste of money, not to say resources, to keep changing things for changes sake.

In the 1960's Norwich Union built three office blocks in Woking Town Centre. The first, Albion House, has survived almost unchanged (on the outside at least), although for how much longer is uncertain. There are plans to re-develop the whole of the High Street area, with even the future of the infamous canopy possibly in the balance (what a wonderful waste of money it will be to demolish that, on top of the wonderful waste of money we spent on erecting it)! The fact that in July 1991 Woking Council designated part of the High Street (and Church Path) as a 'conservation area' apparently means nothing – Woking has to change.

The second Norwich Union office building - Premier House, in Commercial Road - has since been re-clad and re-named, but the third – Ryde House, in Chobham Road – was probably one of the first office buildings in the town to succumb to the developers axe. It was replaced by



Built in the late 1960's, Ryde House, certainly didn't deserve preserving (although arguably Terry's did).

'Victoria Gate', along with the old, much-loved, Terry's newsagents (who subsequently moved into Church Street East).

One cannot help wonder how many more perfectly good buildings will be knocked down in Woking, before the developers (or the council) realise what they are doing to our environment?

Next week I will look at the history of some more of Woking's offices.



Although the shop fronts may have changed, above the ground level the properties of the High Street still show the character that persuaded the council to include them in the Town Centre Conservation Area in 1991.

Guildford Road Shops

(copy sent to the Woking Informer for print w/e 30th September, 2011)

Last week I bemoaned the constant cycle of build/demolish/rebuild in and around Woking Town Centre, although commented that few of the offices that have been demolished were worth preserving for their beauty. I was thinking, of course, of the 1960's and 70's office blocks that have come and gone, but it has been pointed out to me that several older offices have disappeared in the past, and that perhaps some of these should have been preserved. Places like the old water company offices on the corner of Commercial Road and Percy Street and the old council offices a few doors away. Those Victorian and Edwardian buildings were demolished in the mid 1960's, but a more recent office block to have vanished, which I think had some architectural interest, was the 1950's Coronation House in Guildford Road. Apart from the Liverpool Victoria building on the corner of Goldsworth Road (which I fear will not last much longer either), I can think of few early post-war buildings in the town centre.



It is not hard to work out exactly when in the 1950's 'Coronation House' was built.



Of course Coronation House was just one small part of the site that is now 'Woking Central' – apparently the new 'housing quarter' of the town (can anyone name the other three quarters?). Also gone are the former Customs offices in Bradfield Close and the 1980's 'Meirion House' which replaced a number of small shops and workshops.

If people cannot remember the 1980's office block, what chance have the old shops and workshops that used to occupy the site being remembered? These pictures were taken not long before they were knocked down, but can anybody remember them when they were in their heyday?



It is amazing how many people have forgotten Meirion House, completed in 1984 and demolished less than twenty-five years later.



It is interesting to note that when Meirion House was developed there were supposed to be replacement shops on the ground floor, but it was designed in such a way that nobody actually took up the leases. Whether the same will apply with 'Woking Central' only time will tell – although with Tesco's apparently taking over the main unit (next to the Sovereigns) at least part of the new development will live up to the promises made thirty years ago!