

OLD WOKING DEFINED

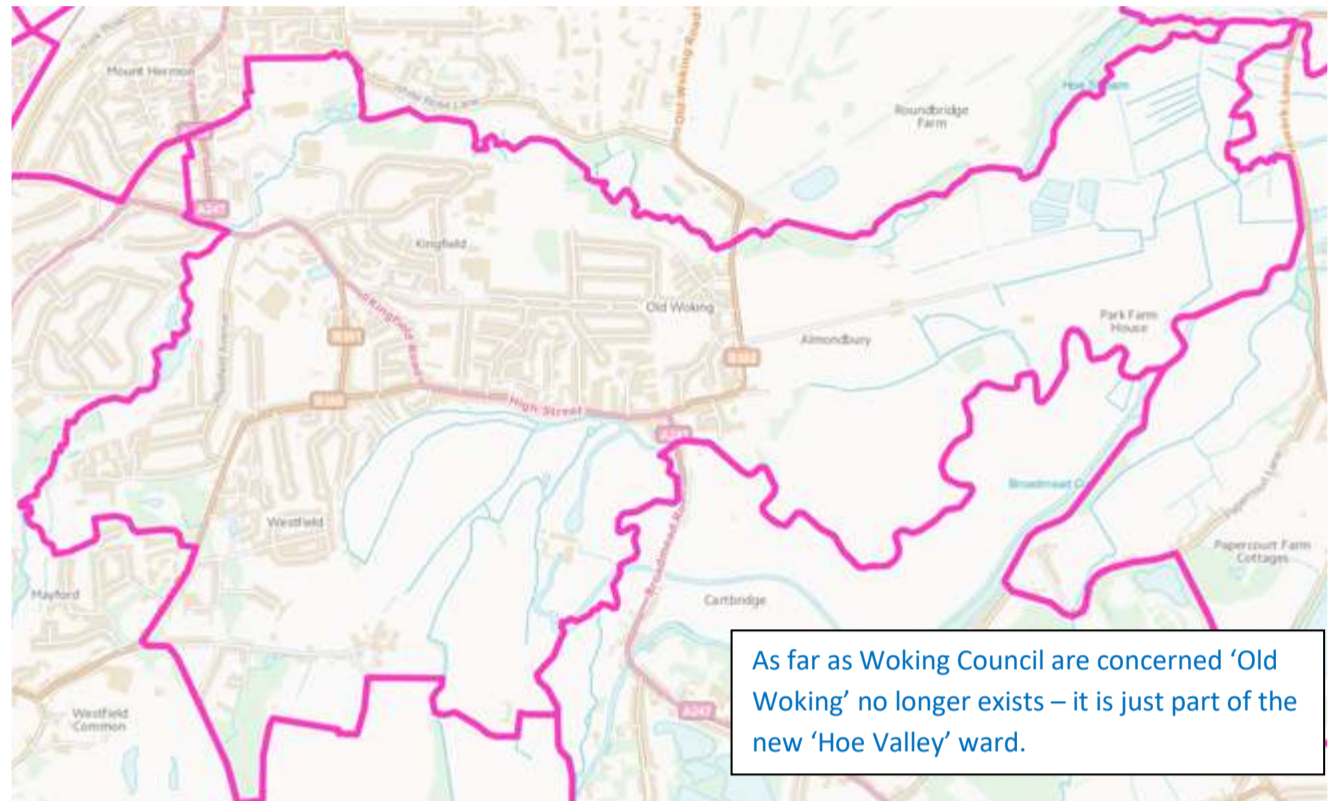
Until the coming of the railway in 1838, and the eventual growth of a new town around the station in the second half of the 19th century, what we now call 'Old Woking' was 'Woking'.

Even in the late 19th century some referred to the new town around the railway as 'Woking Station'¹ and the original town as 'Woking', but gradually the terms 'Woking Village' or 'Old Woking' came to be used.

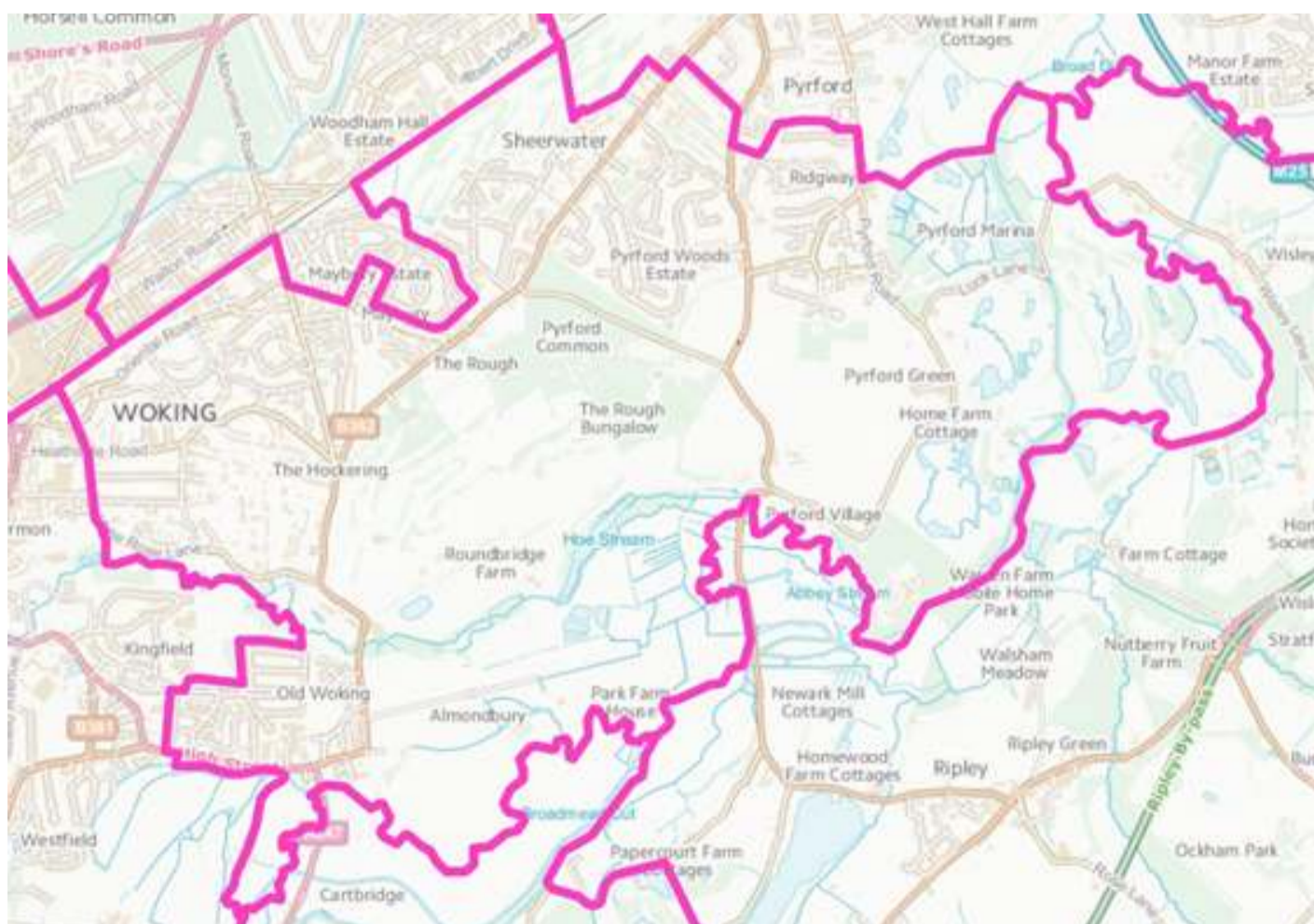
In 1893, when the Woking Local Board was formed, this area was part of the 'Woking Village and Mayford' ward, but in the early 20th century the name 'Old Woking' seems to have been settled upon², even if the council didn't entirely catch up with the change until the middle of the century (when the Old Woking, Mayford and Sutton Ward was formed³).

With the creation of the Borough of Woking in 1976, Old Woking was split away from the others to become a ward of its own, until 2015 when it was once more lumped together with parts of Kingfield and Westfield to become the 'Hoe Valley' ward. If we really must be a 'valley' ward, shouldn't it be called the 'Wey Valley Ward' after the main river that has always proudly defined the districts southern limits, rather than the 'back-water' that only partially defines the new wards northern boundary?

But despite the name, the boundary of the new council ward does at least have some historical logic - although why Woking Park and Claremont Avenue (across the Hoe Stream), are included is a mystery to me.



When it comes to the County Council ward boundaries, all logic disappears. The residents of Kingfield, Westfield, Mayford & Sutton Green all vote for the 'Woking South' County Councillor⁴, but 'Old Woking' (east of the Shackelford Road area), is within the 'Woking South-East' ward, along with Pyrford and much of Maybury⁵. Old Woking's inclusion with its more affluent neighbours to the north and east is already illogical from a political point of view, before you realise that its boundary south of the High Street follows the old mill stream - right through the centre of the new 'Gresham Mill' development. Those to the west of the stream are in 'Woking South', those to the east in 'Woking South-East' – how those who live above the stream know who represents them is anybody's guess!



The council's abolition of the name 'Old Woking' from its lexicon, is just the latest manifestation of a policy to present the borough as a town of the future, rather than one that should be proud of its past. Since the creation of Woking Council in the late 19th century they have gradually been chipping away at our history – demolishing countless historic buildings in the heart of the old village, and sanctioning the building of ugly modern housing estates within its midst.

In the County Council's 'Woking South East' ward, the political allegiance of the voters of Old Woking are swamped by the more affluent districts to the north and east.

¹ p26 (Bevan 1887), p309 (Jerrold 1901) 'Woking Station – Quite a large modern village has sprung up around Woking Junction, on the L&SWR (24¼), nearly 2m N of the old village'.

² Even as late as 1905 it was still referred to as 'Woking' (Hope Moncreieff 1905) p42, 'Woking lies stranded 1½ mile south of the Junction, round which a considerable new town has sprung up'.

³ After the local elections in May 1955.

⁴ Along with the voters from the 'Mount Hermon' area of town.

⁵ Excluding the Maybury Estate – an odd outlier of 'Woking North' to the south of the railway.

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Back in medieval times Woking's importance was reflected by the fact that it was the name given to one of the fourteen large administrative areas of Surrey known as 'Hundreds'⁶ - each hundred⁷ believed to have originally contained one-hundred tithings, with each tithing or 'ten-thing'⁸ supposedly containing the land of ten households.

Woking's Hundred stretched from East Horsely in the east to Ash in the west, with Windlesham to the north, cut off by the lands of Godley (or Chertsey) hundred - which in those days included Horsell, Pyrford and Byfleet (areas that didn't become part of the Urban District of Woking until the early part of the 20th century⁹). It should, perhaps be noted, that the Manor of Guildford was then part of Woking Hundred¹⁰!

In Woking itself the bounds of the various 'tithings' helped to differentiate the 'Town End'¹¹ (around the parish church) from 'Shackleford'¹², and Kingfield¹³ to the west, and from 'Heathside'¹⁴ tithing, mainly to the north of the Hoe Stream. Woking Mill and Westfield came under the 'Hale End'¹⁵ tithing to the south and west, with the large area of 'Goldsworth'¹⁶ tithing covering what is now St Johns, Brookwood and Knaphill (as well as much of present day Goldsworth Park). In the south were Sutton, Mayford and Bridley.

But these were just the administrative boundaries of the parish¹⁷ - the manorial boundaries did not always follow the same lines as the parochial ones.

Part of the manor of Woking was in the parish of Send (the 'Woking Broadmeads', which even to this day are not within the modern Borough of Woking), with a large part of the southern district the ancient 'Sud tone' - the separate 'south manor' of Sutton. Even the main manor of Woking had separate entities within it at Mayford and Crastock (Bridley), and there was the 'sub-manor' of Rude Hall at Goldsworth and the independent manor of Woking Rectory (or Emley) with scattered landholdings across the whole area, including what is sometimes referred to as the 'Manor of Runtley' between Woking and Sutton Green.

Parochially, of course, the original centre of the area was St Peter's Church - although physically it could hardly be described as the 'centre', with the building and its churchyard nestling at the end of Church Street in the south-east corner of the ancient parish.

In 1840, to overcome the distance those in the western part of the parish had to travel for worship, a small 'Chapel of Ease' was constructed dedicated to St John the Baptist. Eventually, as the population increased in Victorian times, the parish of St John's was split away from St Peter's, with new chapels later being constructed and then converted into break-away parishes of its own (Christ Church, St Paul's, St Mary of Bethany, Knaphill and Brookwood), as the population continued to grow.

From the above I think it is clear that 'Woking' has meant different things to different bodies at different times - with the bounds of 'Old Woking' being even harder to tie down. For the purpose of this and subsequent studies in this series, therefore, I intend to be quite liberal when it comes to interpreting what is and what is not part of 'Old Woking' - with the ancient tithings of 'Town End' forming the main focus.



The Hundred of Woking stretched from East Horsley in the east to Ash in the west, with Windlesham cut off by the lands of the Hundred of Godley

⁶ The other thirteen being Blackheath, Brixton, Copthorne, Effingham, Elmbridge, Farnham, Godalming, Godley, Kingston, Reigate, Tandridge, Wallington and Wotton. The Woking History Society noted in their book on Old Woking (Members of the Woking History Society 2014), p4, Glossary, that a hundred was 'a sub-division of a county established from the 10th century, and covering about 100 hides. It had military, judicial and administrative functions, and its inhabitants met at a convenient point in each area. Woking hundred probably met at Harmes Hatch, in the parish of Send.'

⁷ p33, B87 (Richardson 1989)

⁸ p35, B120 (Richardson 1989). The Woking History Society (Members of the Woking History Society 2014) p5, Glossary, noted that 'the medieval basis of the tithing was a group of ten households responsible for keeping order in their area. They would be represented by a tithingman in the manorial court. Woking parish was divided into nine tithings.'

⁹ Horsell in 1907, Pyrford and Byfleet in 1933).

¹⁰ See the Domesday Survey for Surrey, the first entry of which is for the manor of Guildford in Woking Hundred.

¹¹ Mainly properties to the east of Hipley Bridge.

¹² Still commemorated in Shackleford Road on the site of the old Shackleford Farm - not to be confused with the village of the same name in Waverley Borough. The name is thought by some to denote a crossing marked out by connected stakes - in other words a 'shackled-ford' - an old path from the Shackleford Farm area once crossing the shallow stream by what is now the Vicarage, across to the fields beyond. Another suggestion is that the first element comes not from the OE sceacol (to shackle), but from the Old English 'sceacan', meaning to 'shake'. Gavin Smith (Smith 2021) suggesting that the ford could have had a 'shaky or loose bottom', but that the 'ford' element of the name was more like the Welsh 'ffordd' meaning a 'road-way' than the conventional modern English interpretation as a crossing of a stream. He suggests that the shaky ford in Old Woking High Street could then represent a causeway, possibly built on brushwood.

¹³ Sometimes referred to as 'Kenvil' - thought by many to be a corruption of the 'King's field' - although possibly a corruption of 'Kine field' (a field with cattle in).

¹⁴ The 'side' of the 'heath' - although in practice the tithing covered land on both sides - the heath where the town centre is today and the arable, on the slopes leading down towards the Hoe Valley.

¹⁵ Between the River Wey and the lower slopes of Hook Heath.

¹⁶ Originally known as 'la Goldhord', and later as Golding - possibly named after a hoard of gold found in the area sometime before the early 13th century..

¹⁷ p5 (Members of the Woking History Society 2014) In the 'Glossary' they note that 'following the minster arrangement of church provision, from about 1200 local landlords began to establish churches and parishes on their estates, and these, though based on the church, were responsible not only for worship and spiritual wellbeing, but also the administration of the area, through the vestry.'

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Heathside (and indeed parts of the ancient Kingfield and Goldsworth tithings) was largely covered by my 2003 book on *Woking Town Centre, An Illustrated History* – which used as its bounds the Victorian & Edwardian ‘Christ Church, St Paul’s and St Mary of Bethany parishes’¹⁸, but the rest of the tithings of Goldsworth (sometimes recorded as ‘Goldings’) and Kingfield (Kenvil), with have to wait for separate reviews, as will Shackleford, Hale End, Mayford, Sutton and Crastock (Bridley) tithings.

In my ‘Woking Town Centre’ book I gave a brief outline of the formation of the soils of the Woking area, mainly concentrating on the Bagshot Sands that contributed to the unique history of that part of our district, but ‘Old Woking’ is different, lying as it does in the valleys of the River Wey and Hoe Bourne. In fact, when you come to look at it, it is probably the geology that best defines the area currently under review.

Between the alluvium of the River Wey and the Hoe Bourne is a low terrace of sand and gravel. On this sits the old town of Woking and its neighbouring districts of Kingfield, Westfield and Shackleford. To the south of the ancient course of the River Wey is Send; to the north and west of the narrow valley of the Hoe Bourne is Hook Heath and Heathside (and the ancient common land where the town centre now lies); whilst to the east the two river valleys merge in a wide belt of alluvial soil around Newark Priory and Pyrford. Only upstream is it harder to fix a geological boundary to our area, as the meadows merge with those of Sutton and Mayford.

It is just above the flood waters of the Wey and Bourne, on this low river terrace, that our story really begins.

F.H. Dines and H.G. Edmunds¹⁹ noted that this river terrace, which reaches from Guildford through Send, Woking, Pyrford and Wisley to Byfleet, ‘is about three-quarters of a mile wide on the London Clay outcrop, but rapidly widens to almost double that distance over the outcrop of Bagshot Beds, the loose sand of those beds being more easily eroded, and lending itself to the formation of a wider valley, than the more coherent London Clay.’

They also noted that near Fishers Farm, ‘blue silt was exposed to a depth of 14ft’ (‘which resembles the pyritous sand at the base of the Claygate Beds in Essex’²⁰), and ‘everywhere the alluvium appears to consist of sand and loam, gravelly material being absent’²¹. At Woking Mill four foot of black-sand to clay was found, below sixteen foot of brown sand and gravel, which itself was six foot below the surface of peat-moss²².

The alluvial soil, particularly to the east of the Old Woking Road (on either side of Carters Lane), is good agricultural land (and should thus **NEVER** be built on²³), contrasting with the poor sandy soils of the Bagshot Beds to the north and west of the Hoe Stream. It is the Bagshot Sands that forms the poorer spurs of land – in Old English ‘Ho’ – where the Hoe Bridge Golf Course and the high ground of Hook Heath are today (in ancient times Hook Heath was one of the poorest parts of the area).

Much of the area between the rivers is low-lying, especially around ‘Hiple Bridge’, with the High Street to the west (almost as far as Gloster Road) in places just under 23m above sea-level, and at times subject to flooding from the River Wey via Mill Moor to the south. Further east, along the High Street (from the houses of Moor Hatch), the ground rises gently to almost 2m higher, so that none of the properties in this part of Old Woking are within the flood plain. The same applies in the other direction around Kingfield and Westfield, with only the fringes of the Bourne valley succumbing to floods in recent times.

Even in the low alluvium valley of the Wey there are pockets of slightly higher ground at Woking Palace, the Furzes and Woking Mill – all ancient settlement sites - showing that our forebears knew where the best places to build were (dare I say better than many modern developers or town planners)!

In 2002 the Surrey County Archaeological Unit published a report on Old Woking²⁴ as part of their ‘extensive urban survey of Surrey’ (part of an English Heritage initiative). They noted that ‘Old Woking is now a village, with some of the attributes of a small town, for which there is a small body of archaeological and historical information’, although they went on to note that ‘there is not a great deal of documentary evidence to the village of Old Woking’, and to almost reinforce this then went on to quote just four main sources, concluding the introductory paragraph on ‘documents’ by noting ‘there is little else of substance published’.

In 2014 the Woking History Society published its long awaited ‘Old Woking – A History Though Documents’, the results of a Surrey Archaeological Society ‘Millennium Project’ first proposed as far back as 1995. They noted that ‘there is certainly no mapping of Woking, and little documentation before the Tudor period’, but praised the work of John Blair on his studies into Early Medieval Surrey, Phillip Arnold for his work on the local parish registers and the ‘magisterial History of Woking’ by Alan Crosby!

There is even a whole website dedicated to the history of Old Woking (www.oldwoking.org), although as the author of the site acknowledges ‘you will mainly find here details of building built prior to 1700’ – so that a large part of the more recent (and indeed ancient) history of the village is absent from that site.

This series of essays, born out of my research into the history of my house, will (I hope) add to the excellent research mentioned above, with my next article taking a look at the prehistory of this area – concentrating on the ‘core’ of Old Woking to try to understand how, when and why it emerged as the main settlement area.

¹⁸ Roughly the original ‘Goldsworth’, ‘Chertsey Road’ and ‘Maybury and Mount Hermon’ wards of the Woking Local Board (1893) and later Urban District Council.

¹⁹ p140 (Dines and Edmunds 1929).

²⁰ p88 (Dines and Edmunds 1929)

²¹ p146 (Dines and Edmunds 1929)

²² pP257 (Whittaker 1912)

²³ It is also firmly in the Green Belt – although sadly such a definition is no longer a guarantee against development. The fields between the Egley Road and the Railway is Green-Belt, but that didn’t stop the council from allowing the building of the Hoe Valley School (education and recreation apparently being allowed), and at Byfleet the council are intent on removing Green Belt status from perfectly good agricultural land.

²⁴ (Robertson March 2002 (revised June 2003))

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