

# WOKING TOWN CENTRE

## AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY



By Iain Wakeford

**AUTHOR OF NUMEROUS BOOKS, BOOKLETS AND ARTICLES  
ON THE HISTORY OF WOKING AND NORTH-WEST SURREY**

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## Acknowledgements.

To everyone who has ever written or researched anything about the history of Woking and has made that work available to researchers such as myself, I would like to express my thanks. To those who have lent or given me material over the years, and those who have given encouragement in any way, I should also like to express my thanks. To Pat Brown, who not only gives encouragement but also advises me on my numerous grammatical errors, I should like to give special thanks. But I should especially like to thank my wife and family for putting up with my hobby and everything that goes with it. If this book is dedicated to anybody, it must be dedicated to Glenda, Amey, Hannah and Denise – without their understanding you would not be reading this book!



*Chertsey Road, Woking. This was THE town centre in 1970 when this photograph was taken, but by the end of the decade the town centre had shifted with the opening of the 'new town centre' (now called Wolsey Place). By the end of the century it had moved even further as The Peacocks was built and many of the shops of Chertsey Road closed. Nowadays most of the premises are occupied by bars, restaurants and other places to eat or drink.*

*Overleaf – The 'public' buildings of Commercial Road.*

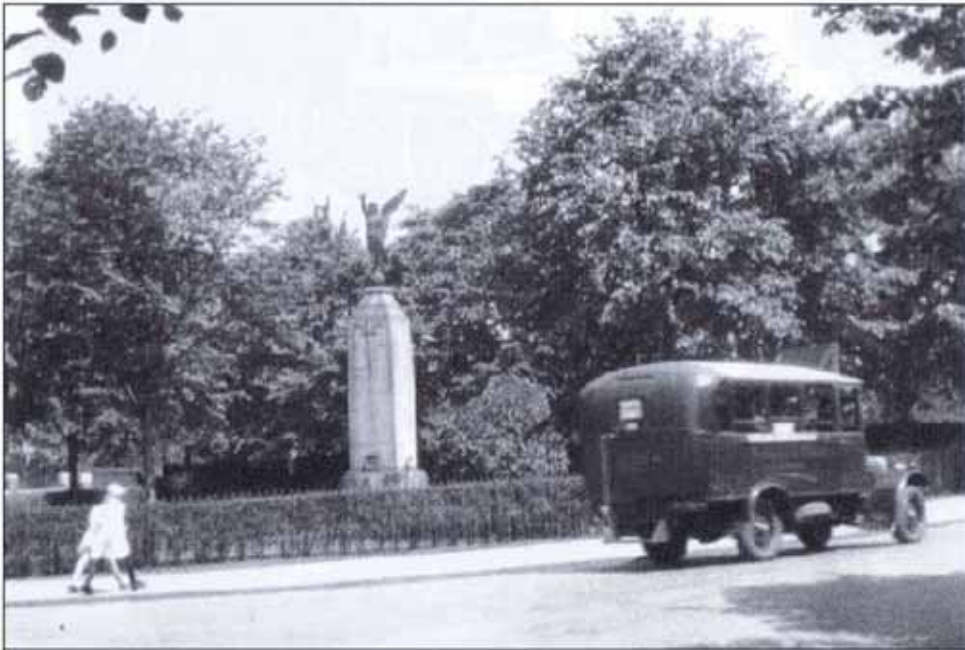
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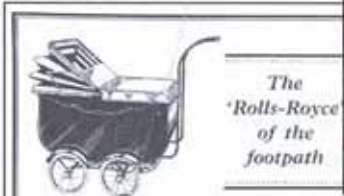
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*The High Street at its junction with Commercial Road, with the War Memorial in Sparrow Park (officially created in 1904 as Victoria Gardens in memory of the late Queen).*

Guildford Road, at the junction with Victoria Road, looking from Victoria Arch. Evan's Cycles now occupy the shop on the corner.



The  
'Rolls-Royce'  
of the  
footpath

### Furnishing Section

His or Her Majesty  
The Baby  
deserves these  
Better Carriages

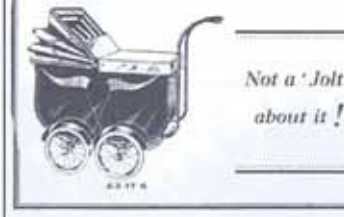


Easy Riding  
Easy Paying  
Made by  
Co-operative Labour

The Woking Co-operative Society, formed in 1899, was one of the town's main 'department stores' by the time this advertisement appeared in the mid-1930s. The shop was then on the site now occupied by Toys 'R' Us, but within a few years a new store had been built on the other side of Percy Street (Victoria Way).

### Woking Co-operative Society, Ltd.

Mr. S.C. Knight was one of the first traders in the town, opening in 1870 in the High Street (advertised and pictured below).



Not a 'Jolt'  
about it!

COMPLETE HOUSE FURNISHERS  
IRONMONGERS  
CHINA & GLASS MERCHANTS  
BOOT & SHOE FACTORS

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WOKING

DRAPERS & MILLINERS

GENTS & BOYS' OUTFITTERS

PHONE 140



## Preface.

Over the years, many books have been written about the history of Woking in general and certain subjects in particular. This is the first to present the history of 'new' Woking - Woking Town Centre - in one short volume. If it encourages you to learn more, then I should like to recommend the 'further reading' list at the back of this book.

'Woking' represents many things to many people. To some it is just a stop on the railway line, to others it is a modern shopping and entertainment centre, whilst to many 'Woking' is the borough to which they pay their rates. Our MP's 'Woking' includes places outside the borough, as does the Post Office, who insist that people in Send or Chobham use 'Woking' in their address (and people in Byfleet do not)! For the purpose of this short history I have concentrated mainly on the central urban area of modern Woking. This is roughly the original 'Goldsworth', 'Chertsey Road' and 'Maybury & Mount Hermon' Wards - or if you prefer, the old 'Christ Church', 'St. Paul's' and 'St. Mary of Bethany' parishes.

Of course, reference will be made to features outside this central area. To include the full history of places such as Knaphill or Byfleet, however, would either turn this book into anything but 'short', or would mean that only the very basic facts could be included. It is to be hoped that other books will look at 'a short history' of other parts of Woking (if this one sells well enough)!

If the number of pages dedicated to each part of this story related to the number of years involved, the first section - on our prehistory - would fill most of the book! The rest of the story would be confined to a couple of short paragraphs (at the most), with the last hundred years being the last word - literally just the last word!

We know very little about this area in prehistoric times, and probably too much (although never everything) about modern times. Throughout the researching and writing of this book, decisions have had to be made about what should and should not be included. I hope I have made the right decisions and that what follows forms an interesting and informative story of my town.

Please remember: this is a 'short' illustrated history and not a 'complete' history - that will have to wait for someone more qualified than I to write.



*This section of Maybury Road was not officially renamed 'The Broadway' until 1923.*

## Origins.

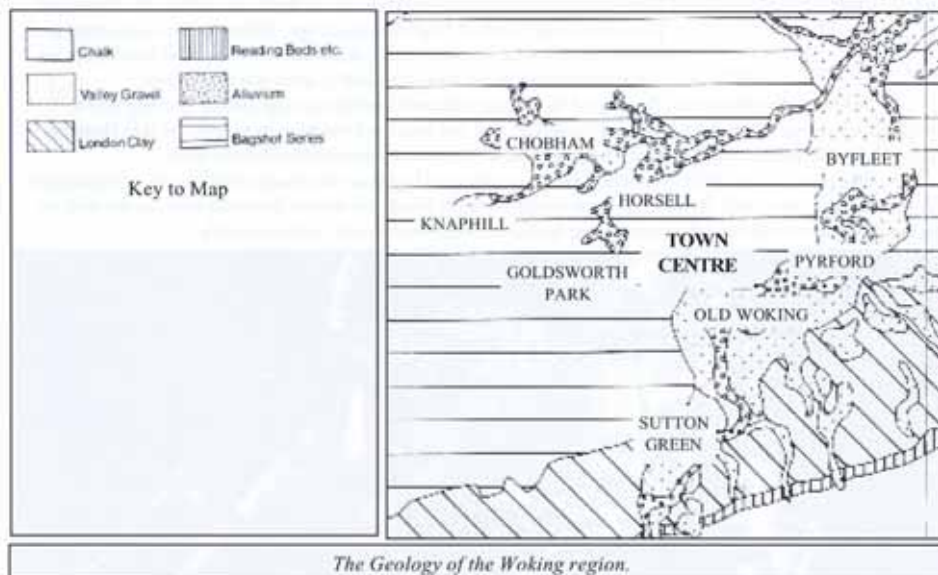
Why is it that much of the land around Woking is considered so poor that large areas are 'set aside' or developed as golf courses? Why is it that in the 1850s this area was considered suitable only for a vast cemetery? Why were the railway and the canal built here, when 'here' was just open heath? And for that matter, why was it heathland in the first place?

Those questions and more will be answered in the next few pages, but to begin with we need to look at what was here 'to begin with'.

It would require a geologist to try to understand fully how our soils have evolved - and even they cannot be 100% certain. Much of the evidence is buried deep beneath the surface or has been eroded by rivers and streams.

It is thought that the Bagshot Sands, upon which most of Woking lies could at one time have been covered by another layer of younger 'rock'. All the rocks in the south-east are sedimentary - laid down one upon the other in various under-water conditions. Sometimes they were formed in fresh or brackish water lakes (like the Weald Clay), sometimes in shallow bays (like the Greensands) and occasionally deep under the sea (as with the chalk).

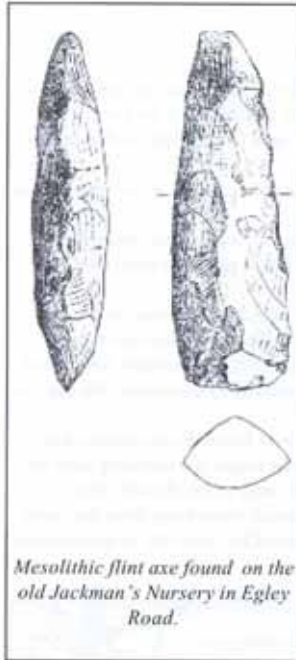
About 65 million years ago these rocks began to be lifted above sea level by earth movements that were ultimately, further east, to form the Alps. More locally it created a dome, the edges of which now form the North and South Downs (with the middle worn away to reveal the lower, older, rocks of the Weald). This process was very slow. Before this area was finally lifted above the sea, the material worn away from the centre of this dome (and elsewhere) was deposited - first in a muddy delta as the London Clay, and later in more marine conditions, as the Bagshot Sands.



This area continued to be lifted out of the sea and subsequently it, too, began to be eroded. Now we are in the next phase of the cycle whereby some of our soils will eventually be washed downstream to form new sediments in the Thames Estuary! But that is now.

Let us go back once more to this alien land when man first entered our area. The Ice Ages were not all ice and glaciers never reached further south than the Thames Valley. At times during the 'Ice Age' it was warmer than it is today. Indeed most people now accept that we are merely in a brief inter-glacial period and that some time in the dim and distant future the ice will return (global warming permitting).

It was after the last glacial period that Upper Palaeolithic man first visited this area (or should I say first left any evidence that we have found). He wouldn't recognise the area today! The River Wey, the Bourne and the many other small streams of the area would not have cut into their valleys quite so deep as they do now.



It was near the start of the fledgling Parley Brook (to the north-west of our area) that Old Stone Age man may have decided to make a temporary camp for a while. There, in an area that over 10,000 years later was to become the playing fields of Goldsworth Park, thousands of flint chippings and tools were discarded, waiting until the 1920s to be discovered. Some say there was evidence of charcoal and pottery as well - Goldsworth Park may be Woking's oldest housing estate!

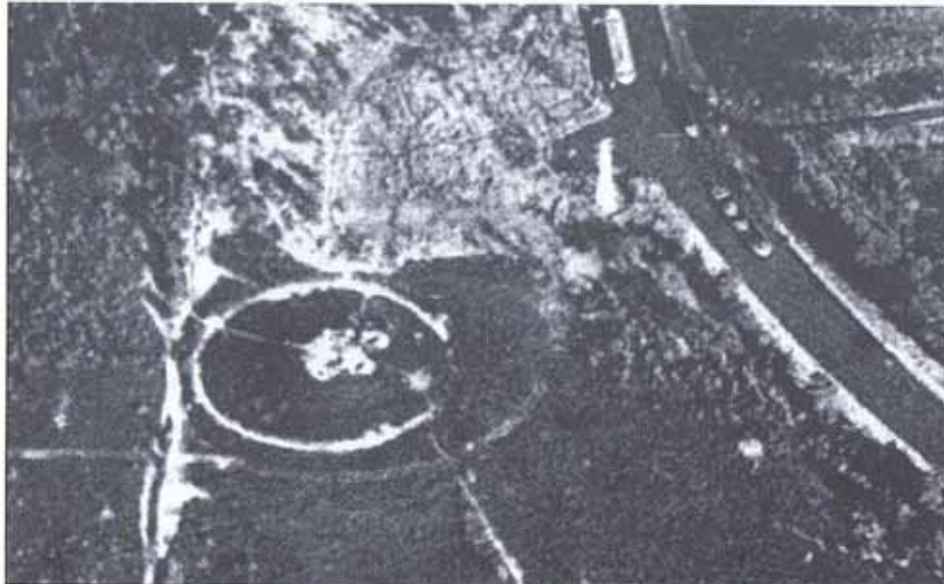
This one site (and an isolated flint found in Pyrford) is all that remains of man's existence in the Woking area from the later part of the Old Stone Age.

As the climate began to grow warmer, thick forest began to grow (with the decaying leaves and other material adding to the fertility of the soil). Into this forest came Mesolithic - or Middle Stone Age - man. Like his predecessors, he was a hunter-gatherer: he used stone tools to kill and cut up his prey. A few of his tools have survived, such as a mottled-grey axe found at the old Jackman's Nursery in Egley Road (where Wych Hill Way is now).

The difference between the Old Stone Age and the Middle Stone Age is slight - a difference in the technology of the tools which were used. For a time, both may have lived side by side and the same could be said for the next phase in man's development - the New Stone Age, or Neolithic period. There is a change in tool technology here too, but a more important change was the move away from hunting and the introduction of simple farming. Neolithic man learned how to cut back and control the forest and develop fields in which to grow basic crops. When the land was exhausted, he moved on. The forest probably returned, before several hundred years later another Neolithic farmer cleared it again and set up home.

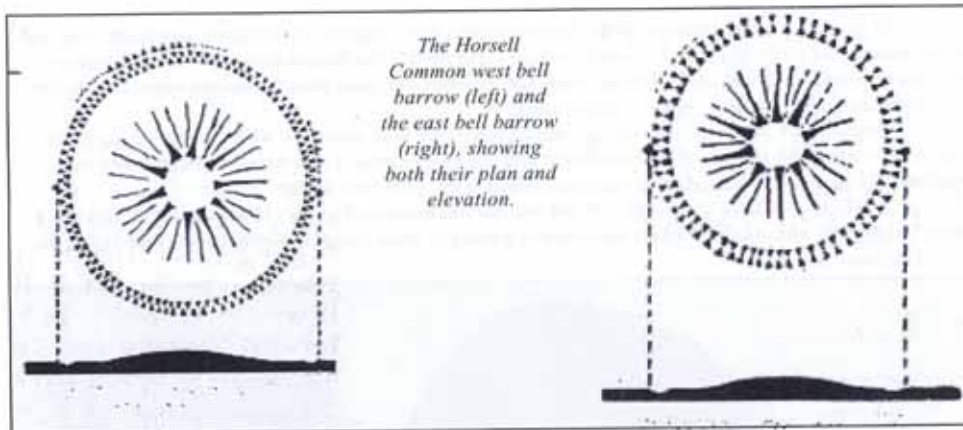
There are few finds from this period in Woking and none from the central area of Woking Town Centre. It was possibly during this period, however, that our ancestors began to over-farm the thin Bagshot Sands where the town centre is today. The soil became infertile and the heathland developed.

The process started by Neolithic Man was continued by those who discovered the use of bronze as a means of making new tools. Bronze Age man almost certainly lived (and almost definitely died) in our area, as the two bell-barrows and one disc barrow just across the canal on Horsell Common testify.



Horsell Common west bell-barrow, with the canal on the right.



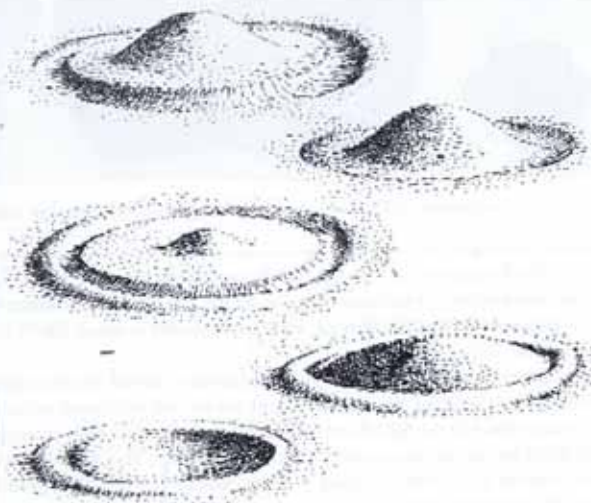


*The Horsell Common west bell barrow (left) and the east bell barrow (right), showing both their plan and elevation.*

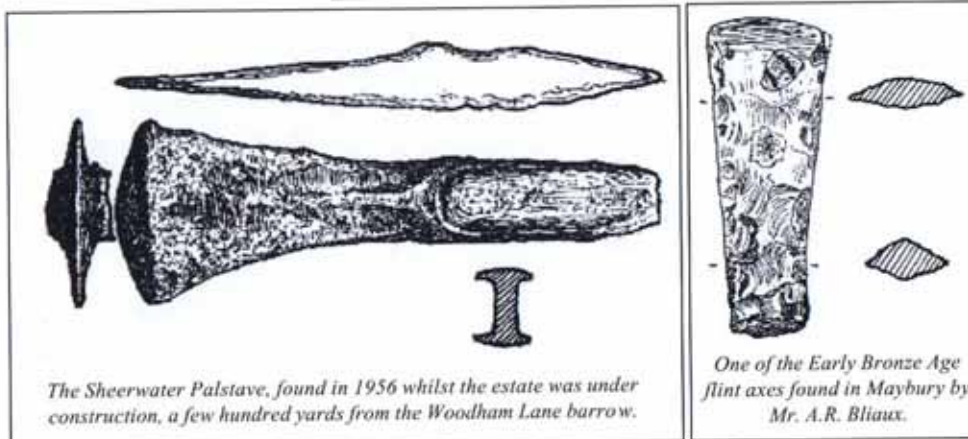
There were other burial mounds in Woodham Lane. These may be connected to a bronze palstave found at Sheerwater in 1956 (about 100 yards to the south of the Woodham Lane barrow). A similar implement was discovered in the 1920s at Harelands, near the Basingstoke Canal in what is now Goldsworth Park.

Not all of Bronze Age Man's tools were of bronze, however, and two polished flint axes from the period have been found at Maybury.

The unintentional formation of the heath, and the lack of fertile soil to farm, may account for the scarcity of finds from the Iron Age in this area. In the Wey and Hoe valleys, however, a few finds have come to light.



*Types of burial mounds – Top: a bell-barrow, below a bowl barrow, with a disc barrow in the middle, a saucer barrow at the bottom right and finally a pond barrow bottom left.*



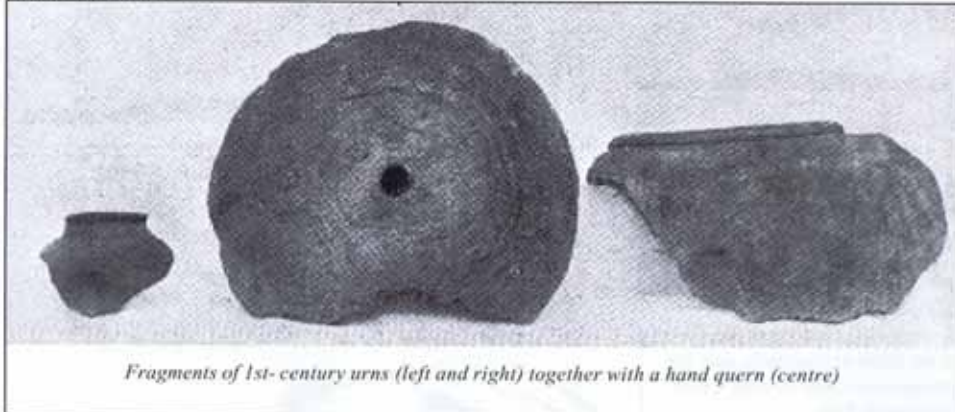
*The Sheerwater Palstave, found in 1956 whilst the estate was under construction, a few hundred yards from the Woodham Lane barrow.*

*One of the Early Bronze Age flint axes found in Maybury by Mr. A.R. Bliaux.*

In 43 AD Britain became part of the Roman Empire, but to suggest that suddenly, overnight, everyone in this area started acting like Romans would be wrong. The truth is that Roman influence may have come to this area before the invasion, and traditional 'Iron-Age' methods continued after the legions came. During this period this area seems to have enjoyed a mini-revival.

Fragments of 1st-century storage jars and a quern stone were unearthed when the Hockering Estate was being constructed just before the First World War. Nearby, on what is now the Hoe Bridge Golf Course, evidence of 1st-, 2nd- and 4th-century occupation was dug up in the early 1960s.

A Roman coin dated to between 337 and 361 AD was found on Maybury Hill in the 1950s. The place name 'Goldsworth' may also indicate the discovery of a hoard of coins (possibly Roman) some time before the early 13th century!



The Romans left in 450 AD and the period some now call the 'Dark Ages' began. Apparently the first reference to anywhere in this area comes from the late 7th century, when the boundary of Chertsey Abbey's lands was being established. Woking was first recorded in about 708-715 AD, when there was a monastery somewhere in 'Uoochingas'.

It is now thought that Chertsey's lands were carved out of an earlier administrative area probably centred on (Old) Woking. The name Woking means 'the settlement of the people of Wocca' and most put Wocca's existence to the 6th or early 7th century. Indeed it has been suggested that Woking could have been the centre of one of the four ancient 'regiones' of Surrey. This was almost on the lines of the 'unitary authority' proposed in the mid 1990s, covering Woking, Runnymede and Surrey Heath boroughs! In this case, however, history did not repeat itself.

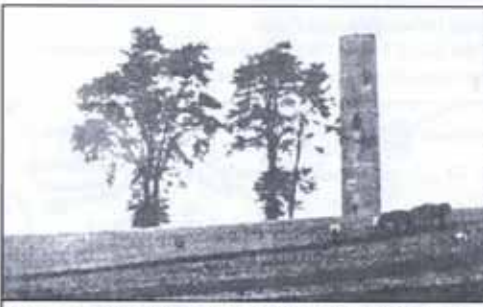




Thomas Wolsey is said to have been staying with Henry at Woking when he received news from the Pope that he had been made a Cardinal. It is in commemoration of this fact that we have the 'Wolsey Place' shopping centre in the town, and the reason why the football club play in 'Cardinal' Red (hence the nickname, 'The Cardinals' or 'The Cards').



*Hoe Place, by Hoe Bridge, now a private school, was originally built by Sir Edward Zouche in the early 17th century. The oldest part of the present building is probably early 18th century.*



*The Monument, where the Hoe Bridge Golf Course is today, is said to have been built in the early 17th century by Sir Edward Zouche to guide messengers for the king, who often stayed with him at Hoe Place.*

The royal visits brought prosperity to the area, with many houses in Old Woking and the surrounding area dating from the early 16th century. When Elizabeth came to the throne, however, she seems to have abandoned Woking Palace and the town fell into decline. In James I's time the Manor of Woking was granted to a gentleman by the name of Sir Edward Zouche. It was Zouche who finally pulled down much of the palace buildings, using the materials elsewhere, on projects such as at his house by Hoe Bridge (Hoe Place) and on his 'beacon tower' or 'Monument' on the hill where the Hoe Bridge Golf Course is today. It is said that the tower was used to guide messengers from Oatlands Palace at Weybridge to Hoe Place, where the king often stayed. The 'Monument' eventually gave its name to the road that headed towards it from the crossroads on Horsell Common.

It was not until the mid-17th century (after the lifting of the Forest Law) that things started to look up again, highlighted in 1661 by the granting of an annual fair in September and a Market Charter for the town. That was for the area we now call Old Woking. On the heathlands the Forest Laws had restricted development. For the poor people of Woking, however, the heathland was vital to the many small farms in the area. Technically this 'waste' land was owned by the lord of the manor, but over time the freeholders and tenants of the manor had gained various rights - including the grazing of livestock, although most cattle would have been found on the riverside meadows. On the common you would have found the commoners' sheep and pigs, with one agricultural improver noting in 1794 'a few starved animals unworthy of the name of sheep.'



On The Common near Woking, Surrey

'On the common near Woking' - from a Victorian postcard.

Other common rights included the removal of sand and gravel (for local use, such as on the parish roads) and the removal of furze, brushwood and the cutting of turf for fires. This last 'common right' was particularly important in an area with no natural fuel.

It was still illegal to enclose any of the heathland or common without permission, but in practice permission was almost always granted - at a price! There was some illegal encroachment, however, with 'squatter settlements' growing up in places such as Frailey Hill (Maybury).

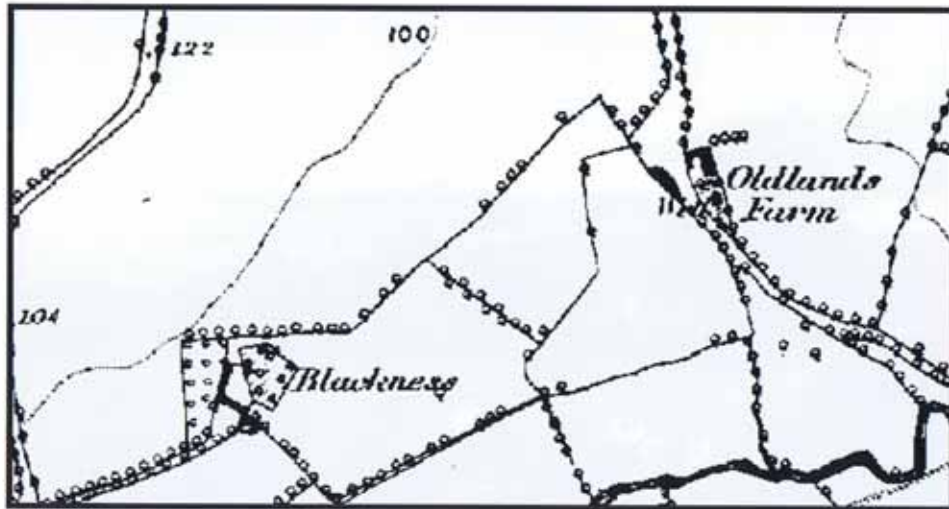
On the southern and western edge of our area, small farms had developed and a couple of the old 16th- century farmhouses still survive - White Rose Farm in White Rose Lane and Cross Lanes Farm in Guildford Road.

Other farms included Heathside Farm (at the junction of Heathfield Road and Heathside Road),

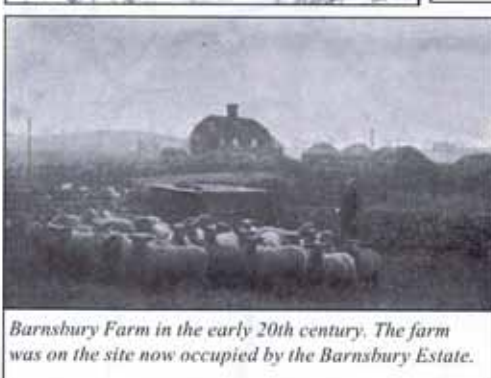


Cross Lanes Farm (above) in Guildford Road, between Claremont Avenue and Salisbury Road, with a map (below) showing Heathside Farm in the early 1870s.





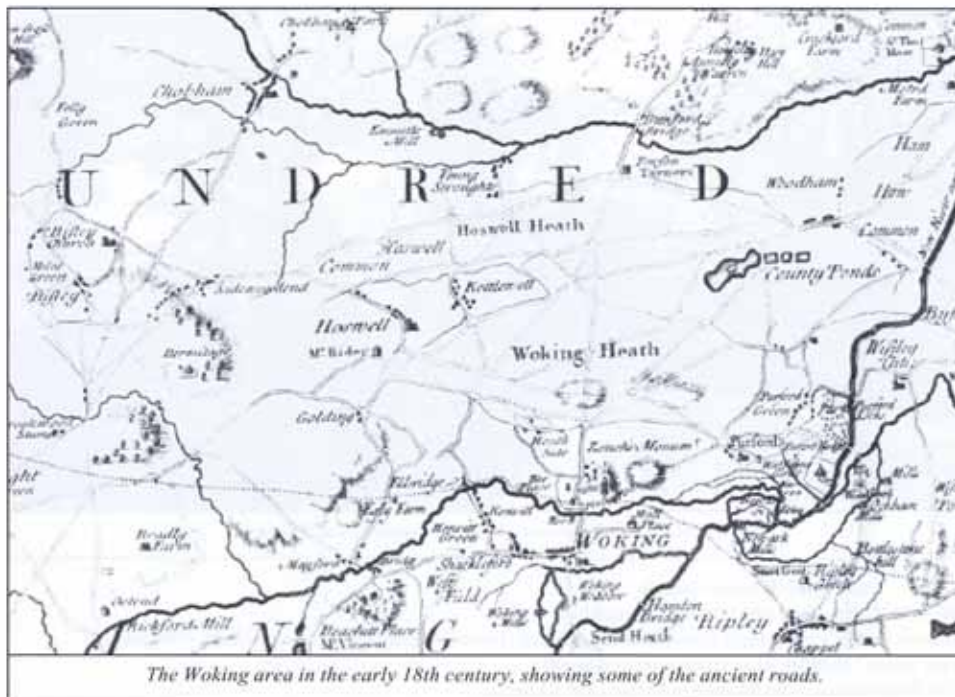
Above – Oldlands Farm and Blackness Farms in White Rose Lane and Blackness Lane respectively. Left – Lysee Farm, sometimes recorded as Royal Oak Farm, in Triggs Lane, and Whitstreet Farm on Wych Hill. Below – Oaks Farm, Goldsworth Road. The trees to the right of the farm buildings mark the footpath from Kingsway to Step Bridge.



Barnsbury Farm in the early 20th century. The farm was on the site now occupied by the Barnsbury Estate.

Oldlands Farm (opposite the White Rose Lane entrance to Woking Park), Blackness Farm (on the site of the Bowling Green in Woking Park), Whitstreet Farm (at the entrance to Wych Hill Park), Lysee Farm or Royal Oak Farm (Triggs Close), Oaks Farm (in Goldsworth Road between the Surrey History Centre and the footpath to the Kingsway and Step Bridge), Egley Farm (on the site of Barnsbury School), Bedford Farm (where Evelyn Close is) and Barnsbury Farm (where the Barnsbury Estate is now).

Linking these farms to their fields, their neighbours and the wider community was a network of roads - many of which survive today.



The main road was the Guildford to Chertsey road. This followed the line of Egley Road to Turnoak Corner where the track called Guildford Lane now marks the original route. Here the old road 'turned' at Turnoak Corner towards Old Woking (along part of Wych Hill Lane), and then turned again past Cross Lanes Farm and up on to the heath. In those days there was no railway or canal and the route across the heath was straight along what is now Guildford Road, Station Approach and Chertsey Road to Horsell Common.



One of the ancient routes across Woking Common – probably the future Oriental Road.



*Heathside Road, the route between Knaphill and Pyrford.*

Other 'ancient' routes include...

Wych Hill Lane (from Old Woking to Knaphill);

Arthurs Bridge Road/Triggs Lane/Blackbridge Road (Horsell to Barnsbury and eventually Westfield);

Park Road/ Chobham Road (Heathside to Horsell);

Old Woking Road (Old Woking to Pyrford and Byfleet);

St. Johns Road/Goldsworth Road/Poole Road/Heathside Road (Knaphill to Heathside and Pyrford);

Maybury Hill/Monument Road (Old Woking to Chertsey); and

White Rose Lane/Chobham Road (Old Woking to Kettlewell Hill and Horsell).

There were undoubtedly other minor roads, but as far as the early maps are concerned these seem to have been the main ones - consistently marked on maps from the early 1700s up to the early 19th century.



## Transport.

The ancient roads formed the local links, but their condition could not have been too good - despite plenty of sand and gravel from the heath being made available for repairs - and in the often-quoted comments of Defoe (writing in 1724), Woking was 'a private country market town so out of all road, or thoroughfare as we call it, that 'tis very little heard of in England.'

The Wey Navigation, developed in the 1650s by Sir Richard Weston of Sutton Place, had brought a little development to (Old) Woking, but it was too far away from the heathland to make much difference.

Another waterway was to have an impact, but its long-lasting influence was to restrict development rather than encourage it!



*The canal and pines at Woking in the early part of the 20th century.  
Notice the cows grazing on the common land on the opposite bank.*

In 1770 the townsfolk of Basingstoke first proposed to build a canal to the Thames. This never came about, but in 1778 another scheme for a canal linking with the Wey Navigation at Woodham was passed by Parliament. The route crossed the cheap commonland of Surrey and Hampshire to help save costs, and probably reduce opposition.

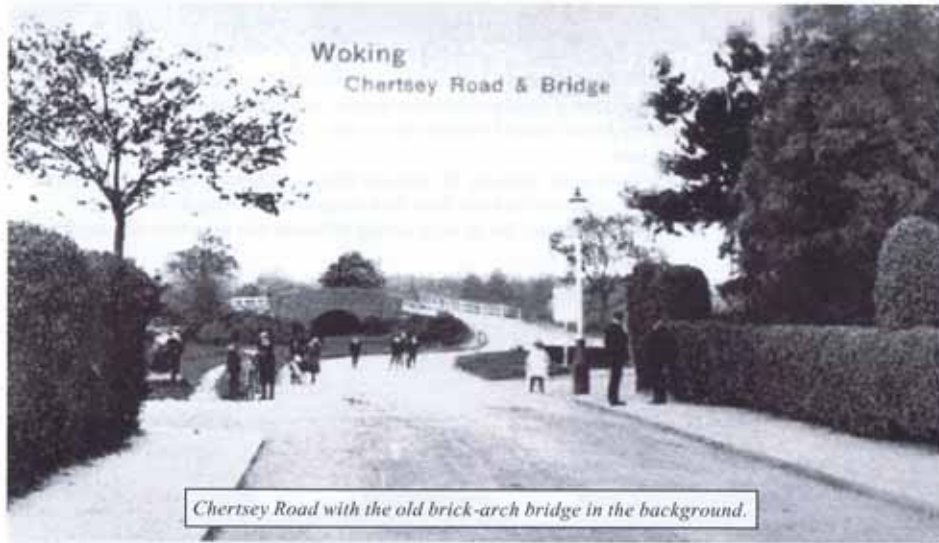
Problems in raising the necessary capital meant that it was not until 1788 that work began. William Jessop was appointed the surveyor and consulting engineer, and presumably in 1787 or early 1788 he (or his associates) could be found walking the Woking area looking for the best route to take.

The canal had to climb out of the Wey Valley on to the heathland of Ham Haw Common and Woodham Heath. Altogether six locks were needed to lift the barges to the 'Woking Pound', with a slight embankment on the southern side as the canal passed Sheerwater (a clause in the Act preventing them from taking any water from 'Lord Onslow's ponds' - the 'Sheerwater' lake).

Already two bridges were needed to carry roads from Pyrford to Chertsey and from Pyrford to Woodham, but as the navigation entered our area another bridge was required for the (Old) Woking-to-Chertsey road. This bridge was originally called 'Bunkers Bridge', but its modern replacement is now more commonly known as Monument Bridge.



*Bunkers Bridge at Maybury, rebuilt and renamed as Monument Bridge.*



Other bridges were required at Chobham Road, Chobham Road and Arthurs Bridge Road, with a footbridge being built at Horsell Moor. All the road bridges were simple brick arches built at right-angles to the canal (with the roads being diverted if necessary), as this was the cheapest and easiest method of construction. Three such bridges survive just outside our area - one at Scotland Bridge in West Byfleet and the others at Langmans and Woodend in Goldsworth Park.





Apart from the bridges, the Woking section required little engineering work, although as it approached Horsell Moor it needed another slight embankment where the valley of the 'Rive Ditch' was encountered - the 'vale' of Vale Farm Road. The Rive Ditch is an ancient stream that is now mainly piped underground.

Winding holes were provided for the barges to turn near Monument Bridge and Arthurs Bridge, and a wharf (probably the one at Brewery Road) constructed at Horsell to serve that village. (Old) Woking was too far away to benefit very much from the canal.

Beyond Arthurs Bridge the canal again had to rise through five locks to skirt Hermitage Hill and cross the stream at Brookwood. This small stream (the one that floods the railway arch in Blackhorse Road) could not be fed into the canal, as its waters eventually drained into the Wey Navigation at Pyrford - the Navigation Company inserting a clause in the Canal Act restricting the loss of any of their water above Woodham.

Work began in October 1788 at Woodham, and although it was hoped that the canal would be complete within four years, it appears that the quality of many of the bricks used to build the locks was so poor ('with a composition of sand and rubbish almost without lime'), that over 160,000 of them had to be removed and

*Two views of the canal, probably between Wheatsheaf Bridge and Chertsey Road Bridge, in the early 20th century. The boat in the top view was probably hired from Belton's boatyard in Boundary Lane (opposite the Brewery Road car park site).*





replaced! Some of these bricks may have been made locally, as in December 1788 Mr Pinkerton, the contractor, was advised that 'Mr. Wildgoose of Horsell' would know the best places in the area where clay could be found. The brick-fields at Goldsworth were developed at this time. The name 'Kiln Bridge' in what is now St. Johns records the brick-kilns there.

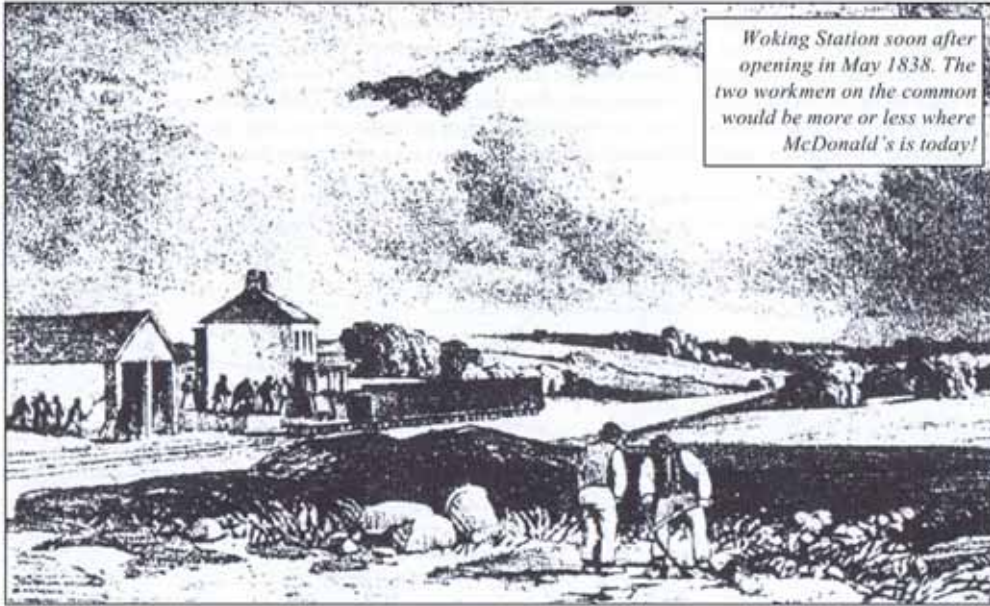
In 1791 the canal was opened to Horsell, by 1792 to Pirbright and in 1794 it finally reached Basingstoke. The first tolls to be taken were actually in 1791, when twenty-eight tons of goods were carried from the Wey Navigation to the wharf at Horsell. A notice of 1794 gives the charges for goods carried from London to Horsell as 1s.2d. for every quarter ton or under (24p per ton).

The canal was never a great success. It was an agricultural waterway, with flour and timber being the main goods carried downstream towards London and coal the main commodity on the homeward journey.

The company was on the verge of bankruptcy in 1796, but trade gradually increased until 1839 when a slump was hit once more. The cause of this slump was the result of the canal company's best ever annual tonnage the previous few years. The canal had been used to build the railway, and when it opened to Basingstoke trade declined almost overnight!



*Two views of the canal showing the section between the Brewery Road car park and what is now Victoria Way.*



*Woking Station soon after opening in May 1838. The two workmen on the common would be more or less where McDonald's is today!*

The railway was first proposed in 1830 to link the port of Southampton with London. It was one of the first railways to be proposed in the south of England. Its route was designed partially to allow for a branch to be built from near Basingstoke towards the South West (and Bristol) - hence the name London & South Western Railway. Another reason for choosing this line (instead of a more direct route to Southampton) was that it crossed less farmland, would face less opposition and so cost less to construct. It is therefore no coincidence that the railway follows more or less the same route as the Basingstoke Canal (at least in our area).

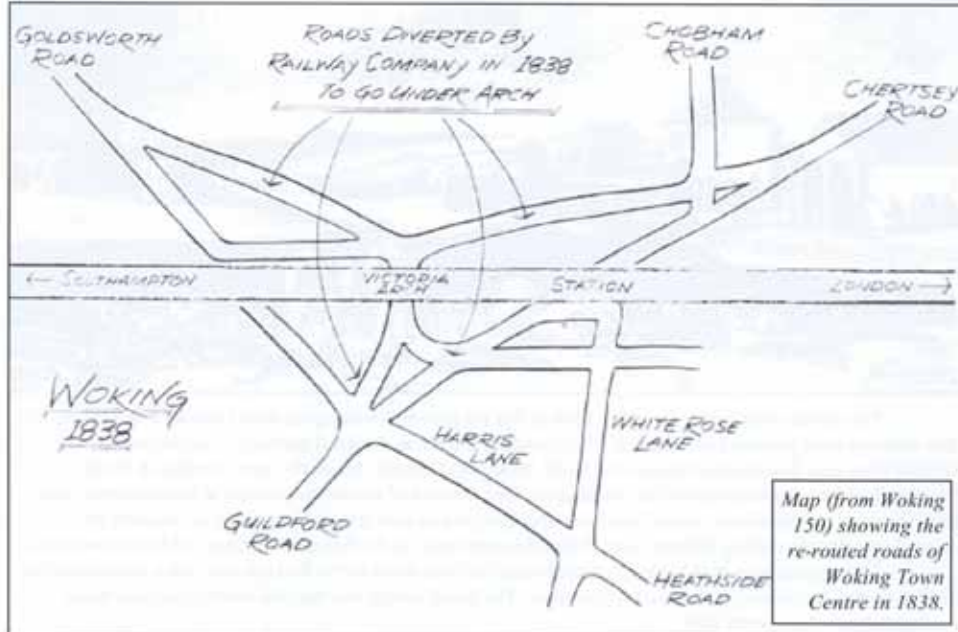
The original plan in fact was to cross the canal several times in the Woking area, but a revised plan in 1837 re-routed the railway to the south of the canal. The disadvantage was that this route required a major cutting through Goldsworth Hill.

Work had actually begun in 1834, but it was not until the following year that the company could compulsorily purchase any land. In Woking seventeen landowners were affected, and although four disapproved of the railway, the majority either supported the Bill for its construction or expressed no firm view.

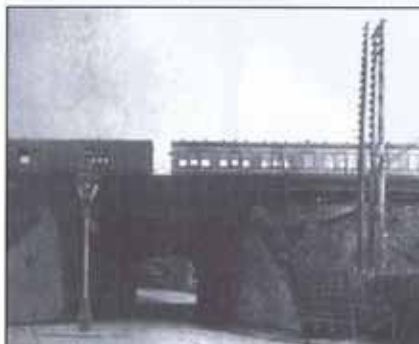


*The railway from Twin Bridges or 'Tin Bridges' as they are sometimes called.*

The route across Woking Heath required a low embankment from the Sheerwater area until it reached the Guildford-to-Chertsey road. It was here that the Company decided to build its station to serve West Surrey. With most of the trade predicted to come from the stage coach trade of the Portsmouth road through Guildford, the main entrance was built on the southern side of the line. The route of the Guildford-Chertsey road was obviously not very important, as it was diverted to the west of the station to go under the railway where the 'Goldsworth' embankment was of sufficient height for an arch, which in later years was to be named 'Victoria Arch'.



The Chertsey Road was not the only road to be diverted, and to save building several arches (or bridges) in this area the Heathside-to-Goldsworth road and the Woking-to-Horsell roads (mentioned in chapter two) were also diverted to go under the same arch. The result was a number of new sections of roads, with parts of the ancient tracks completely cut off. The original Goldsworth Road, for instance, went along what is now Poole Road before being lost under the railway and emerging in the area of Bradfield Close. The line of the old road continued along Heathside Road which, if you look on a modern map, lines up exactly with Poole Road!



The original, 15-foot-wide, Victoria Arch, c.1906. In the 1830s, when the arch was built, there was very little traffic on the roads of Woking Common.

The station was originally a small, square, two-storey building and for the first few months after opening was the end of the line. The track to Woking opened to the public on 24th May, 1838, with Winchfield being reached that September, Basingstoke in 1839 and finally Southampton in 1840.

Beyond the station, the railway again needed a small embankment at Goldsworth, before reaching the large cutting of Goldsworth Hill. It was during the construction of this cutting that sharks teeth were found (so helping to confirm the marine origin of our area's soils).

The material taken from the cutting was undoubtedly used to help build up the embankments on either side of the hill, with a long embankment needed at Brookwood Lye to carry the railway over Blackhorse Road and the Bagshot Road towards Pirbright Common. Brookwood Station was not built until 1864, the next station originally being Farnborough (to serve north-east Hampshire).



When the railway opened to Woking in 1838 there were five trains each way, seven days a week. The fares from Woking to Nine Elms (at that time the London terminus) were 5s. (25p) for first class, 3s.6d. (18p) second class and 2s.6d. (13p) for those travelling third class on a goods train. When the railway was fully opened to Southampton two years later the service was even better, with nine trains each way stopping at Woking, some having Woking as the first stop from London. On these fast trains, Nine Elms was just over fifty minutes away, whilst the 'stopping trains' still took less than 80 minutes!

With such a good service to London, it is not surprising that several of the stage coaches from Portsmouth diverted from Guildford to Woking Station. Here, their passengers could alight and have a quicker (and no doubt more comfortable) journey to the capital. With the increase in traffic, the Guildford road soon became blocked. In some places it was 'only with the greatest of difficulty that two stage coaches could pass each other'.

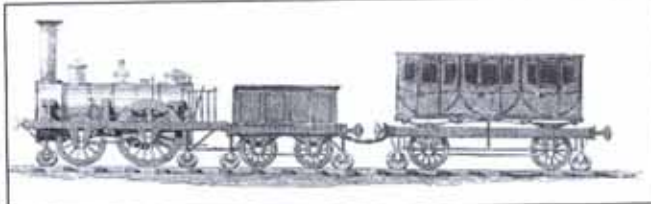
To help cater for this sudden influx of visitors to Woking Heath an enterprising local businessman, Edward Woods, bought a piece of farmland (the closest he could find to the station) and in 1840 built the 'Railway Hotel'. It is still there and is now called 'The Sovereigns' - a locally listed building and one of the oldest in the modern town centre.

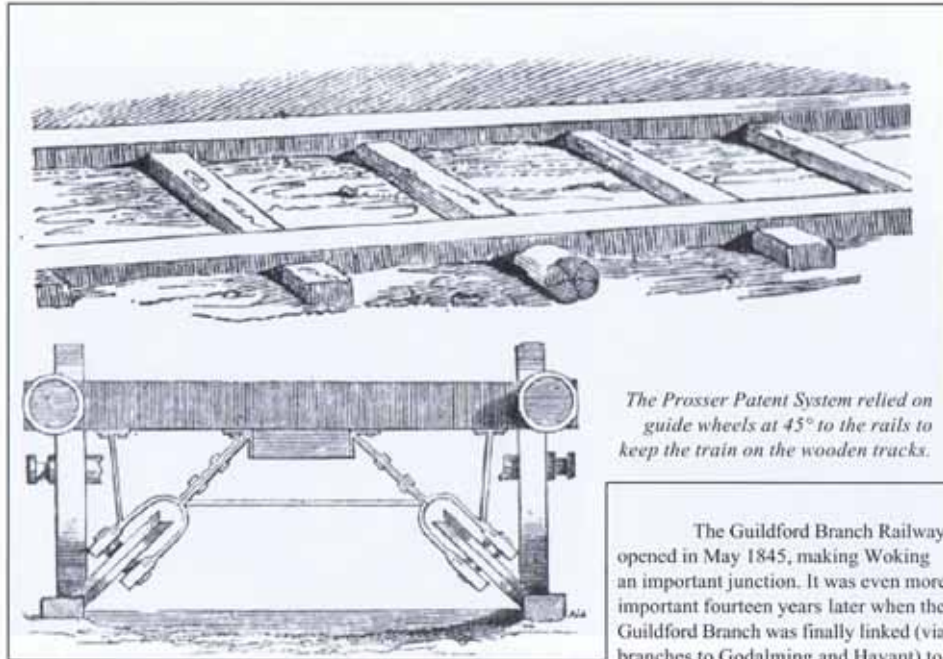
The traffic from Guildford only lasted five years. Even before Woking Common Station was opened, there were plans for a branch line to Guildford. Unfortunately the original plans were for a completely level track which would have required massive feats of engineering, including a huge embankment across the Hoe Stream at Mayford. In 1843 the plans were dropped, leaving the way for a new company (the Guildford Junction Railway) to propose an even dafter scheme for a line based on the 'Prosser Patent System'.

This scheme has already been described in my book 'Woking 150, the History of Woking and its Railway', but as you can see from the above illustration, the type of railway proposed would have meant changing trains at Woking to travel to Guildford and, as such, this proposal was also quickly dropped in favour of a more conventional line.

*Above - Staff at Woking Station at the end of the 19th century.*

*Right - Prosser's Patent System. The system was demonstrated on Wimbledon Common, before being proposed for Woking.*





*The Prosser Patent System relied on guide wheels at 45° to the rails to keep the train on the wooden tracks.*

The Guildford Branch Railway opened in May 1845, making Woking an important junction. It was even more important fourteen years later when the Guildford Branch was finally linked (via branches to Godalming and Havant) to

Portsmouth. The number of trains from Woking was further increased, giving Woking an unrivalled service to London and the South Coast.

It is not surprising that a new town should be built on the heathland of Woking. It was not, however, the London & South Western Railway Company that was responsible, but another, more sinister-sounding company - The London Necropolis & National Mausoleum Company.

