

*Commercial Road car park, prior to re-development. This view is looking across from Bath Road (where Middle Walk is now) towards the houses of Church Street.*

*Sparrow Park with the new Cawsey Way cut through – just before the War Memorial is removed to the new Town Square.*

*The new town centre under construction along Commercial Road – later renamed Commercial Way.*



## Woking New Town Centre – The 1970's.

In 1968 work began on demolishing properties to the north of Commercial Road. The plans of 1963 had included 59 shops, five major new stores, 48 flats and over 125,000 square feet of offices. A comprehensive development area was designated in 1969, and in 1970 the Council reached agreement with Norwich Union (again)! The scheme was designed by Scott, Brownrigg and Turner (whose offices were in Commercial Road) and building work began in mid-1971, with local contractors Gilbert Ash (of Albion House) being awarded the three-year contract.

Part of the design was for a bypass (Victoria Way), with a multi-storey car park also helping to keep traffic away from the centre. This was to complement the multi-storey car park already being built on the site of Oakfield Road (between Church Street and Boundary Lane). It was opened on 1st June, 1971, at a cost of £568,000 and catered for 970 vehicles - at that time paying just 3p for up to two hours parking.

The new town centre car park (known to locals as 'Sainsbury's Car Park') was opened in 1973. The new town centre offices were 'topped out' in July 1974 and a year later it was announced that British American Tobacco (B.A.T.) would be moving their Export Division to the newly-christened 'Export House'.

The shopping centre itself began to be occupied soon after, although the official opening was not until 14th October, 1975.



*Two views of the Commercial Road car park just before work started on the new town centre. In both views the side of the Atalanta Ballroom can clearly be seen.*



The original Town Square was quite different from today's. The canopies of Wolsey Place and the unit originally occupied by Sabaro (later Mel's Café, later still Café Gardino) were not there. Mac Market occupied the units later used by Burton's and Dixon's in Wolsey Walk and the Nationwide Building Society in Mercia Walk. Where the entrance to Christ Church is today was a hexagonal manse, whilst Christ Church Hall (built in 1972) was on the opposite side of Church Street, where Barclay's Bank is now. Town Gate did not exist. St. Andrew's House was an empty building site and the Library, although on more or less the same site, was not the same at all! Confused?

The only constant feature appears to have been the War Memorial, moved to Town Square from 'Sparrow Park' in February 1975 - but even this was moved (at great expense) when 'The Peacocks' shifted the centre of the square slightly to the north and west.

Another mid-1970s development later affected by 'The Peacocks' was the Market. The original Market was in Goldsworth Road (on the site of System House), but in July 1972 plans were announced for a sixty-six stall market outside the Post Office. Unfortunately it was soon discovered that the hexagonal multi-coloured glass-fibre roofs seemed to attract frost (which dripped down on the goods when it thawed) and the site was both wet and windy. It opened in 1974 but less than three years later traders were leaving and the new Market was being labelled a 'white elephant'. But it was not the only one in the area!

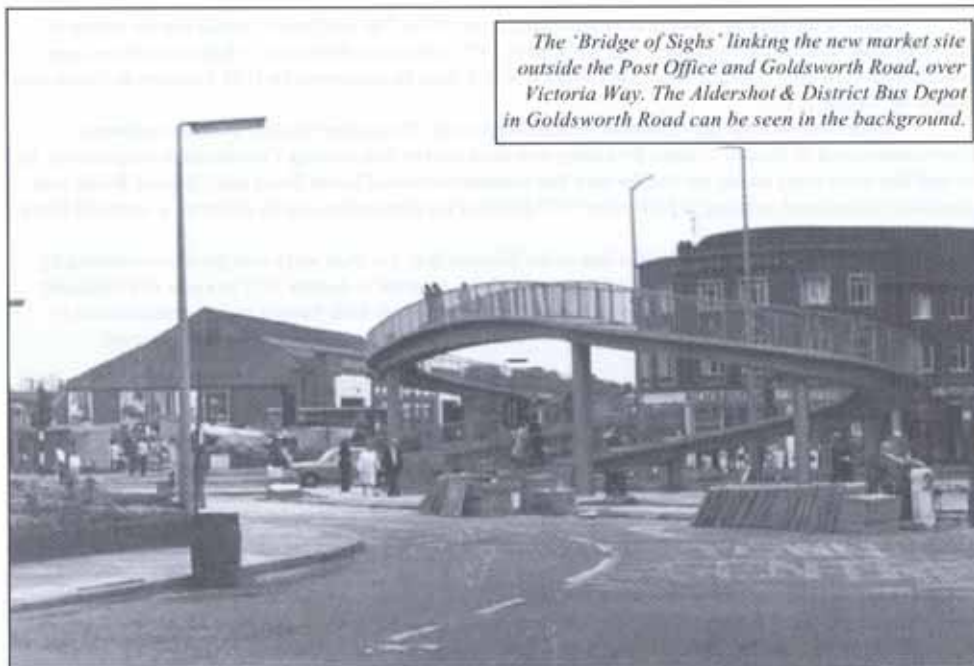


*Above – the old market site in Goldsworth Road – now occupied by the office block of System House.*



*Above – an artist's impression of the new market site on the opposite side of the new Victoria Way. One of the octagons still survives in the new market on the same site. The underground toilets (below the flower beds – pictured right), were filled in and are, presumably, still below the present market buildings.*





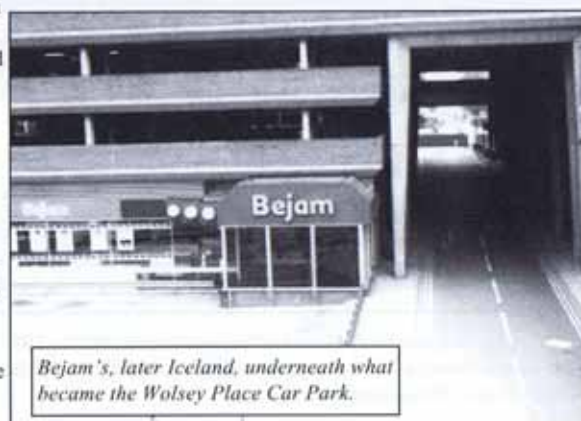
*The 'Bridge of Sighs' linking the new market site outside the Post Office and Goldsworth Road, over Victoria Way. The Aldershot & District Bus Depot in Goldsworth Road can be seen in the background.*

The footbridge linking Goldsworth Road with the Market Square quickly earned the nickname 'Bridge of Sighs'. It was opened in the summer of 1973 at a cost of over £22,000, but as a spokesman for the Council pointed out at the time, 'you can't make people use it'. They didn't, and by 1975 Woking was already looking for someone to take the unwanted bridge off their hands. It was finally pulled down in September 1986.

The other access way to the Market was almost as bad, with the new Cawsey Way dividing the Market from the new town centre and the rest of the re-named 'Commercial Way'. Despite pedestrian priority on the crossing by Boots, the area was (and still is) an unwanted piece of land cut off from the town – which probably explains why the Council have decided to move the Market back there!

Cawsey Way linked the High Street to a roundabout on the site of Clarence Avenue. Percy Street became Victoria Way and beyond its junction with Church Street was dual carriageway. The large roundabout enclosed the new indoor swimming pool (of which more later), with the site of the proposed Co-op store to the south. Victoria Way then continued east to Brook House roundabout where the dual carriageway ceased and Chertsey Road took over. There was no right turn into, or out of, the northern section of Chobham Road and the southern section of the road was completely blocked off. Barriers were later erected to force pedestrians to use with reluctance the subway, which was then 'hated' almost as much as it was 'loved' when the Council proposed to close it years later! Drivers from Horsell had to turn left and then go around Brook House Roundabout before they could park their cars in the town centre car parks!

The 'Brook House' end of town soon attracted more and more offices, as well as the Salvation Army Citadel (on the corner of Stanley Road and Walton Road) and the Liberal Club (since demolished) on the newly created corner of Chertsey Road and Stanley Road. The new Salvation Army Citadel was built in 1972, whilst their old site in Church Street was soon replaced by Bejam's Freezer Centre in the south-west corner of the ground floor of the town centre car park.



*Bejam's, later Iceland, underneath what became the Wolsey Place Car Park.*

South of the railway, more offices were built in the 1970s. The old Dove's Garage (on the corner of Guildford Road and Station Approach) was replaced in 1972 with a new showrooms, shops and offices (now called Southern House), whilst in Bradfield Close the V.A.T Area Headquarters for H.M. Customs & Excise was built by W. Deakin & Co.

Offices were not the only places to be built at this time. To counter the drift of shops westward, Tesco's announced in June 1972 plans for a large new store next to their existing Commercial Road premises. In the end this never came about, but the site they had in mind (between Church Street and Chertsey Road) was eventually redeveloped, opening in November 1977 as Fine Fare (later taken over by Gateway's, later still taken over by Asda, later to become...).

Fine Fare boasted a direct bridge-link to the Victoria Way Car Park and a roof garden overlooked by the ultra-modern, brown-glass Crown Life Insurance building (opened in August 1977 at a cost of £5 million).

The opening of Fine Fare prompted a price war in town, with both Tesco's and the International in Commercial Road cutting their prices. The Co-op in Church Street responded by closing their grocery department altogether.

By then the Co-op had plans to build a new superstore with Council-funded multi-storey car-parking above, on the site of their original department store in Church Street (opposite the Fire Station), but in September 1977 Woking Council announced that they no longer had the money to pay for the car park and it was not until March 1979 (eleven years after the plans were first mooted) that contracts were exchanged. The Co-op Superstore opened in 1981, but closed just a few years later as access across the busy Cawsey Way made getting to the shop difficult. The building was then taken over by Toys 'R' Us, with the Council finally managing to solve the access problem by closing part of Cawsey Way and creating a pedestrian link to Wolsey Walk.

Another 'problem' site in the late '70s and early '80s was the site of Gammon's in Chobham Road (which had closed in 1973). At one time it was rumoured that Tesco's, Bentall's and even Marks and Spencer's were interested in the site, but British Home Stores (Bhs) emerged as the main contender and in March 1978 they announced plans for a 60,000 sq. ft. store due to open by the end of 1981. Work did not, however, start until early 1980 and it was not until May 1982 that it was officially opened.



*British Home Stores with the Fine Fare Superstore in the background (now the site of The Big Apple).*

The increase in shops and office space meant that by 1971 more people commuted to work in Woking, than commuted out of the borough to London, and by July 1979 there were apparently 680 unfilled jobs in the area, with just 536 registered unemployed!

# £35,000 Woking dance hall talks are deadlocked

**THE** future of the Atalanta dance hall, Woking, looks bleak now that negotiations for its rebuilding have reached deadlock.

Mr. Bob Potter, who runs the Atalanta, said this week that the conditions laid down by the developers, the Norwich Union were "unreasonable" and impossible to comply with.

He said: "I have not let anyone down—I have done my best, now it is up to them."

Talks between the Norwich Union and Mr. Potter, who operates the Atalanta, have been going on for three years but reached a halt last week when Mr. Potter said a firm "no" to the latest offer.

His main objections are:

- Norwich Union would only allow 12 weeks for Mr. Potter's company to transform a "shell" into a fully equipped dance hall. The "shell" would be handed over in August, 1972.
- Norwich Union wanted Mr. Potter's company to be a general contractor of the new project in addition to the £35,000 he will spend on it.
- The rent, £8,500 a year.

### BIG PROJECT

Mr. Potter said the fact that he is putting in £35,000 on the new hall is a fair enough indication of his good faith.

He said: "It is a big project and the new town centre is a big project. The rent is for new halls. They want £4,500 a year and I am paying £3,000 now. Before Christmas it was only £1,500."

Mr. Potter stresses both the Norwich Union and Woking

Council of failing to show sufficient interest in the project. "Norwich Union don't really want a ballroom in Woking—they have already told me this. It is not their thing. I just would not agree with their aims," he said.

"I thought originally that I would be dealing with Woking Council but you are really dealing with Norwich Union. And I believe Woking Council should have kept control of the Atalanta. The Norwich Union will raise these kids out of the market."

### OUTSKIRTS

"Neither of them seem at all interested in a dance hall for the townsmen," added Mr. Potter.

Mr. Potter says a "shell" cheaper price for a dance hall should be found on the outskirts of Woking.

"Woking Council should get a grip on this and find some pressure on the viability of the town—this hall is not the answer," he said.

Already the new town centre work has had a damaging effect on the Atalanta. Mr. Potter said that three-quarters of the customers have been lost,

mainly because a lot of people think it is closed or pulled down.

The proposed new Atalanta would have been on the first floor of an office block.

### COMBINED

Mr. Bob Kelly, Woking council's town clerk, said he expected a dance hall in Woking as "more important than almost any other building in the town."

But Mr. Kelly is confident that the vast majority of Woking councillors will be sympathetic towards Mr. Potter's requests.

"We must have this facility in the town and any difficulty which may arise will have to be overcome," he stated.

Mr. A. L. Vign, Woking Council's director of legal and administrative services, said: "The council thinks it has done all it can. It has secured the Norwich Union have offered Mr. Potter a new dance hall negotiations appear to have broken down."

"Having secured this opportunity there is no more we can do. The council has been generous but the advice we have received is that other people are reasonable."



The Atalanta dance hall, Woking. Negotiations to replace it have reached deadlock.

*A cutting from the Woking News & Mail of 8th August, 1971, reporting on the 'deadlock' over negotiations on the future of the Atalanta Ballroom in Commercial Road. The deadlock remained, with the owner, Bob Potter, finally pulling out of the town altogether and concentrating on his new night-club and hotel complex at Frimley Green - Lakeside.*

With the 'work' came a need for more places to 'rest and play'. The increase in housing during the '70s and '80s we shall look at later, but as far as recreational facilities were concerned, the early 1970s got off to a bad start.

The plans for the new town centre in 1963 had included a replacement for the popular Atalanta Ballroom, but the proposed rent was considered too high and Woking Council's alternative site was described as 'more like an air raid shelter than a dance hall!' In 1974 the Atalanta closed and the site earmarked for its replacement is now offices, known as 'Alexandra House', above the shops between Mercia Walk and Church Path.

The following year another blow was dealt to the local entertainment scene when the Odeon Cinema (in Duke Street) closed - leaving just the ABC (formerly the Ritz) in Chobham Road.

For sports fans, however, things were looking up. The long-awaited indoor swimming pool was at last open. The idea had been mooted in 1966 for a pool in the town centre costing £200,000. In December 1967 plans were drawn up for the £400,000 pool and in June 1970 Gilbert Ash were awarded the contract to build the new indoor pool at an estimated cost of £450,000. In the end, the £575,000 Woking Centre Pool was finally opened in October 1973. It was built in the middle of a roundabout and the only public access was via another very unpopular subway - or more often than not by a death-defying run across Victoria Way!



The ABC Cinema, on the corner of Church Street and Chobham Road - now the site of the office block known as 'Hollywood House'.



*The Centre Pool, in the middle of the Victoria Way roundabout – where part of The Peacocks is today.*

It should be said that doubts about the site of the Centre Pool were expressed even before it was built and in 1971 one councillor, Bill Bocking, stated that 'it should be put in Woking Park beside the outdoor pool where it would be of far more use and cost half the money'. For once he was proved right!

The Park was the site chosen for another controversial sporting venue - the Leisure Centre. Plans for this £830,000 'space-age' sports and recreational centre were announced in 1972 and in 1974 the £1.5 million scheme was given the go-ahead. It finally opened in November 1976, by which time who knows what it cost?: but at least it still survives – for the moment.

For the more cultured there were the Centre Halls and Library opened in 1974-75. The Library (the largest in Surrey) was actually opened first - in 1974, with the Centre Halls behind it opening a few months later.

The Centre Halls (and especially the Rhoda McGaw Theatre), provided a focus for the many local amateur dramatic and music societies. Again there are too many to mention by name, but as an official guide in the early 1970s pointed out 'There are approximately 200 organisations in the district', embracing everything from A (for Art) to Y (for Youth). A Zoological Society (as far as I know) is still missing!



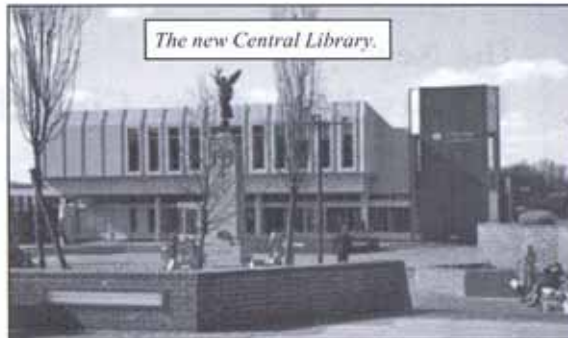
*An artist's impression of the Leisure Centre in Woking Park.*



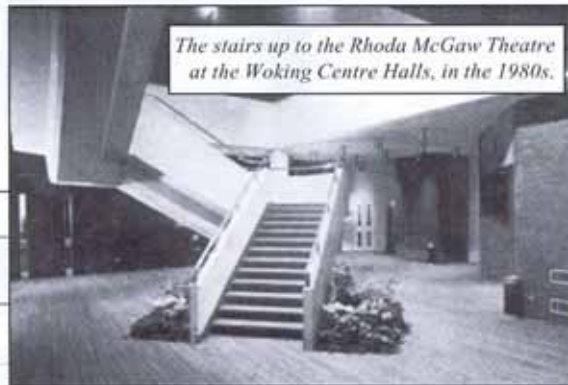
# WOKING LIBRARY A NEW LOOK



Brochure produced by the County Council promoting the new library in Town Square.



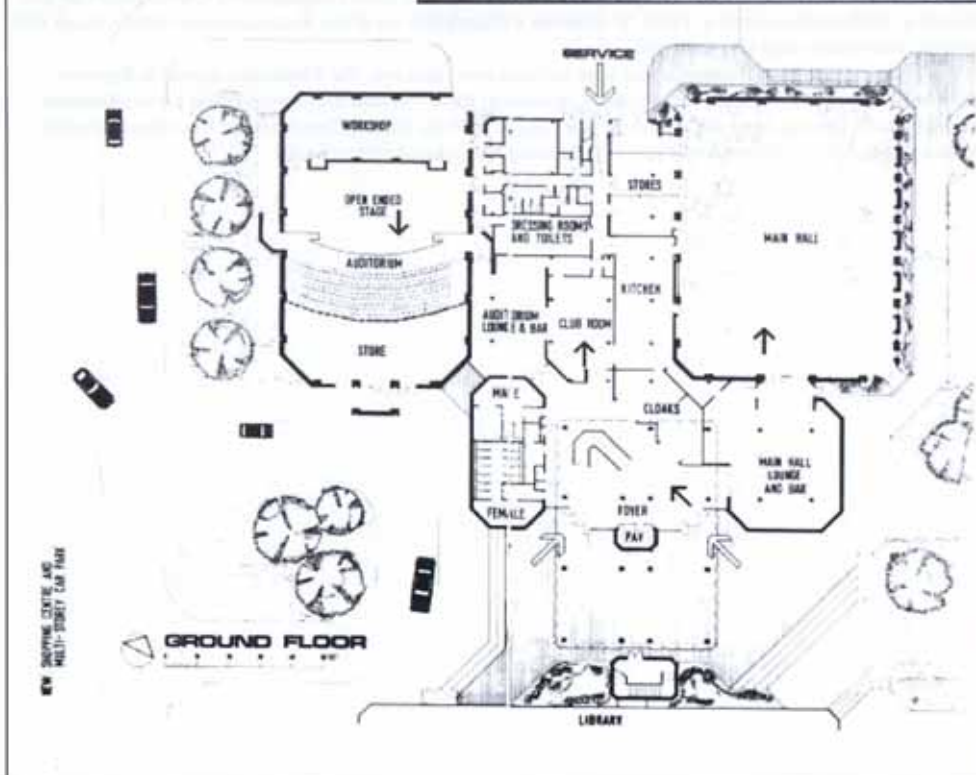
The new Central Library.



The stairs up to the Rhoda McGaw Theatre at the Woking Centre Halls, in the 1980s.

## GROUND PLAN

A plan of the Woking Central Halls.





**The New  
Trinity Methodist Church  
Woking, Surrey**

*Programme from the dedication  
of the new Trinity Methodist  
Church in Brewery Road,  
Horsell – replacing the old  
church in Commercial Road.*

**Dedication 12th June 1965**      **Official Souvenir**

Many of these societies met and had previously performed in local church halls, such as St. Paul's Church Hall (built in the late 1950s), St. Mary's (1960) and the York Road Congregational Church Halls (the first opened in 1955 and the second in 1964). St. Dunstan's Church Hall (in White Rose Lane) and Christ Church Hall (already mentioned) were also well used.

Meanwhile some denominations were building new churches. The Methodists moved to Brewery Road in Horsell in 1965 after the old church in Commercial Road was sold to Norwich Union for development (the old church burning down the following year) and in 1978 the Baptist Church moved from Percy Street to the new 'Coign' site in Church Street (the old site being redeveloped with offices).

## Consolidation – Woking in the 1980s.

The buildings of the new town centre didn't just replace old churches. Most of the redevelopment involved Victorian and Edwardian houses. For the first time in a century, few people actually 'lived' in the town, and although some homes were provided in the form of flats above the shops along Commercial Way, most people moved out to estates, such as the newly begun Goldsworth Park.

The history of Goldsworth Park does not really come under the area of this study, but its impact on the area was so great that a brief history of its development must be included.

Basically, the Master Plan for the estate was drawn up in the late 1960s, with agreement being reached between Woking Council and New Ideal Homes to develop the estate in the early 1970s. Work actually began in October 1973 and the first property was ready for occupation the following summer. Originally it was to include a new sixth-form college, secondary school, library and fire station, but whilst none of these actually came about, the shopping centre, church, health centre, pub and sporting and community facilities were finally built (although not all in the same place, or to the same scale, as originally planned).

Welcome  
to  
*Goldsworth Park*



*The houses of Bardon Walk, Goldsworth Park, under construction in the early 1980s.*



*The start of Goldsworth Park –  
The building of the Silversmith Way area in 1973.*

Other smaller estates were developed in the area. De Lara Way (off the Kingsway) was begun in 1973, with the Georgian-style town houses soon on the market for £12,995 each.

Across the railway line the development of Wych Hill Park was begun nearly ten years later. Here, one-bedroom flats were sold by Wimpey, the developers, for £33,995, with a three-bedroom semi-detached costing a further £16,000. In all, Wimpey had permission for 134 dwellings on the site, and with a few housing association properties as well, Wych Hill Park is one of the larger of the recent housing estates in the area under review in this book.

To the south of the railway, the Victorian and Edwardian houses of York Road have in general survived, although many have been sub-divided. But nearer to town, and in Mount Hermon Road, nearly all of the old houses have been swept away and replaced by modern terraces or blocks of flats. These include the McCarthy & Stone 'Homebeech' and 'Homeworth' homes begun in the early 1980s and places such as The Rowans on the site of part of the old Council Offices in Mount Hermon Road.

Even the creation in 1987 of a conservation area at the Wych Hill Lane end of Mount Hermon Road (including West Hill Road) has not prevented new developments from replacing older properties - such as Ruxley Court on the corner of West Hill Road and Mount Hermon Road.

Other Conservation Areas designated at this time included part of the older area of Woking Town Centre (mainly Chertsey Road and The Broadway), the Hockering Estate and the Basingstoke Canal which has been lovingly restored from a derelict waterway (and shopping-trolley park) of the early 1960s to (hopefully) a thriving waterway of the 21st century!

Meanwhile, many of the institutions in the area (especially around Maybury) found that they no longer needed large grounds or out-of-date buildings and in the 1980s sold off land for development. 'Rose Wood' (off White Rose Lane) was built in the grounds of Ashwood (the former National Children's Home which was later converted into apartments) and 'Foxhanger' on the site of Evershed House, Oriental Road (an annex to the Southern Railwaymen's Home); and



*Above and right - New Ideal Homes' estate on the site of the former Orphanage in Oriental Road, 1989.*

in 1988 the Railway Orphanage itself was demolished and replaced by the houses and flats of Dorchester Court. This last estate was built by New Ideal Homes, who in the early 1990s began the development off Lavender Road on land formerly belonging to the St. Peter's Convent.



*The 1960s' Bernard Sunley Home in College Road.*

At the same time other 'institutions' have developed in the area such as the Bernard Sunley and Smiles Homes in College Road (their 1960s blocks being replaced by more pleasing, modern buildings), Woking's Hospice in Hill View Road and the Woking Community Hospital (on the site of the former Beechcroft Hospital) in Heathside Road.

The 'Woking Association of Single Homeless' site at Bedser Close, and the remodelling by the Surrey Care Trust of the YMCA building in Heathside Crescent into short-stay bed-sit accommodation (opened in February 1993 by Prince Edward), are also a credit to the town, whilst Woking Council have provided useful day centres for the elderly, first at the Westgate Centre by Wheatsheaf Bridge (now, sadly, closed) and then in the Marjorie Richardson Centre in the High Street.

Again, it is impossible to name every good cause, but one other development that easily springs to mind is the Maybury Centre in Board School Road, opened in 1994. As well as being a great focal point for the community, it also helps to preserve one of the few historic buildings in the area – the original 'Board School' - a feat which, happily, was replicated at Westfield and Byfleet.

Just as the increase in work opportunities brought the need for more housing, so the increase in the population brought the need for more work, and so the cycle continues.

The site of the old Odeon Cinema in Duke Street was originally covered by a condition requiring the developers to include 'leisure facilities' in the scheme, but in 1982 that condition was 'waived' by the Council (at a price) and the whole site was turned into offices.

Across the road, Harry Hyams (the developer of Centre Point in London) had his eyes on the land between Duke Street and Stanley Road. A permit for the area was at first refused by the Government, however, and for several years the site remained a car park. Construction of the £30-million scheme finally began in January 1983, being complete by the autumn of 1985.



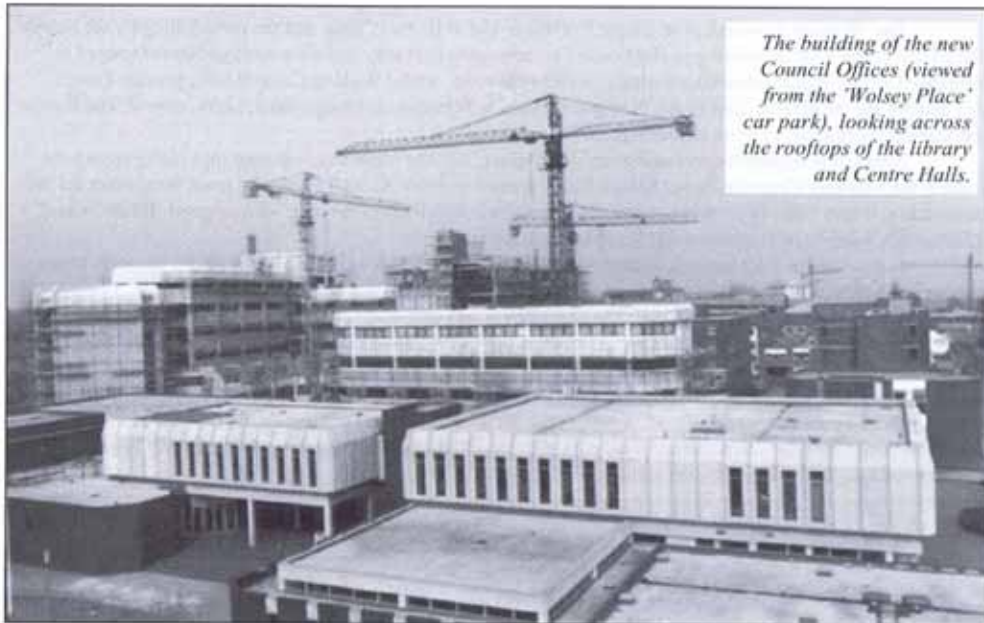
*An artist's impression of 'St. Andrews House'.*

By then, many more offices had been built in the town, including St. Andrew's House in West Street (home originally of Costain International, who briefly renamed it Costain House).

Attached to St Andrew's House were the new Woking Borough Council Offices, built by Wates Construction at a cost of over £7 million - twice the price originally estimated in 1978. The new offices were opened by the Duke of Gloucester (hence Gloucester Square) in April 1983.

*The Council Offices under construction in the early 1980s, viewed from across Victoria Way and the Basingstoke Canal.*





*The building of the new Council Offices (viewed from the 'Wolsey Place' car park), looking across the rooftops of the library and Centre Halls.*



The Civic Offices, on one side of the Centre Halls, were to be complemented by a new Magistrates' Court and Divisional Police Headquarters on the other side. Fortunately these were never built and in 1982 the County Council approved a scheme to convert the former Boys' Grammar School in Station Approach into the Police Station. The following year plans were announced for the £3.7-million Magistrates' Courts to be built on the former school playground.

Meanwhile the old Council Office site in Guildford Road was up for sale. At first it was hoped that the 2.9-acre site (with permission for 90,000 square feet of offices) would fetch £7 million (to pay for the new Council Offices), but in November 1982 the original developers (Guildbourne) pulled out of the deal and in April 1983 the Council were forced to accept the lower offer of £5.75 million.

*The site earmarked for the Magistrates' Court and Police HQ between the Centre Pool and Centre Halls.*



Work began on demolition in June 1983 and in April 1984 the new building was 'topped out'. Originally the office block, set around a central courtyard, was called 'Olympic House', but after remaining empty for three years the development was occupied by Phillips Petroleum who renamed it 'Phillips Quadrant'. Phillips also moved into another new block - Phillips Court - built on the former Aldershot & District Bus Depot in Goldsworth Road, but in the 1990s Phillips concentrated their offices on the Guildford Road site and the Goldsworth Road building was later taken over by PepsiCo International Restaurants (later renamed Tricon in 1997 and later still, 'Yum Restaurants International').

The Goldsworth Road area was by then fast becoming the 'office capital' of Woking, with Goldvale House in Church Street West begun in June 1983, Cavendish House topped out in 1983 and what became known as Technology House due for occupation by October 1983.

Each had its own style (or lack of style, as the case may be), but 1983 seems to have started a trend, as some of the offices built the following year were certainly different, with Luke House on the corner with Poole Road catching the eye, and Church Gate and Hogan House in Church Street West likewise causing comment.

Another large office block completed in 1984 was Meirion House in Guildford Road. This was to include four shops, but these have since been turned into more offices. The block is apparently named after Wynn Meirion Evans, the designer of the scheme, who died before its completion. This feat is recorded on a plaque on the base of the cannon (at the entrance to Bradfield Close) which the developers insisted was pointing at their offices and not the building beside it, then occupied by H.M. Customs & Excise!



*The Cannon in Bradfield Close.*

As if all the above were not enough, two other blocks were completed in 1984 in

Chobham Road - Chobham House (designed by Scott Brownrigg & Turner) and Victoria Gate (on the site of the 1960s office block, Ryde House). It should not, however, be assumed that office work was the only occupation available in Woking, as other employment opportunities were also developed in the 1980s and '90s.



*'Chester House' No 76-86 Chertsey Road, was also built in the 1980s (next to Brook House).*

Woking Business Park was built in 1981 on an 11-acre site formerly occupied by Sorbo Rubber Products. The estate, built by Balfour Beatty, was officially opened in July 1981 with 23 factory units and warehouses ranging in size from 1,900 to 94,000 square feet. Meanwhile, the smaller-scale Wintonlea site at Monument Way West was opened six years later, followed in the 1990s by the Boundary Road Business Centre. The 1990s also saw former factory sites in Albert Drive and Foster Road, Sheerwater, redeveloped for small workshop and factory units - including the Genesis Business Park.



*The Woking Business Centre (above) on the site of the former Sorbo Rubber works (below), off Albert Drive.*



## Another New Town Centre! – The 1990s and Beyond.

In the late 1990s the biggest development as far as industry and employment was concerned was the loss of one of the town's major industrial employers - James Walker's Lion Works at Maybury. The site was redeveloped with six retail warehouses - Lion Park - including Pets at Home (formerly Petsmart, formerly Pets City), Shoe City (later Curry's), Carpet Warehouse (Carpetright), Halford's (still there!), Seeboard (Harvey's) and Great Mills (later Focus and then Focus Do It All). The rapid turnover of firms on the estate is an indication of the fast changes in the retail world in recent years.



*James Walker's factory at Maybury - now the site of the Lion Retail Park.*

Down the road, at Monument Way East, Skeet & Jeffes finally closed their doors after trading in the town for over a hundred years (first in the High Street, then Chobham Road and then Church Street), whilst Hall & Co. moved out of Vale Farm Road to take up the retail mantle on the estate, before being taken over by the Builder Center.

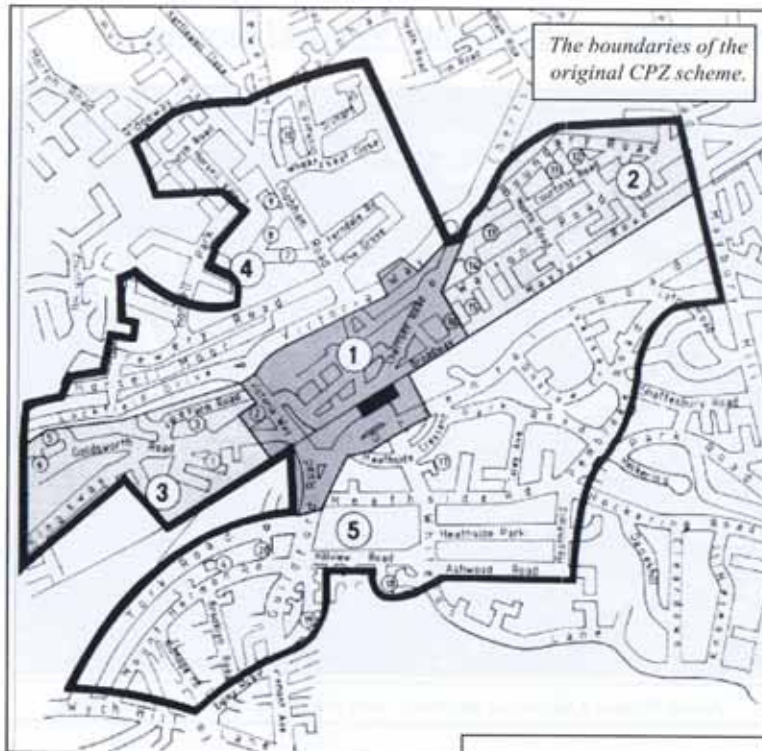


*The Woking Victoria Hospital (above and right) under demolition. Some of the money raised from the sale of the site went towards the building of the New Victoria Hospital (now the Woking Community Hospital) in Heathside Road.*

Retail warehouses were going to be built on the former Victoria Hospital site, but Woking Borough Council stopped this by purchasing the site (for an undisclosed amount). It was not until 1998 that the Council sold the site for housing, and in the meantime the empty site was used as an open-air car park.







Car parks have also played a major part in the town's development, the number of places and their convenient locations helping to encourage shoppers to the area. Since the 1970s their number has steadily increased and one car park - Heathside Crescent - actually won a National Design Award! That was in 1991, but the following year Woking Council won little praise when it introduced its controversial Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs). Like most controversial schemes, the CPZs have since proved popular, with residents in areas not originally covered asking for the boundaries to be extended to include them.

The biggest problem with the original scheme seemed to be the pedestrianisation of Chertsey Road, which was quickly abandoned - although it has since been virtually reintroduced with new paving and flower beds (added in 1997) as part of a general improvement for the area.

Whether the decline of Chertsey Road as a shopping centre in the early 1990s was due to the CPZ (started in January 1992), or whether it was more to do with the opening of The Peacocks a few weeks after its introduction, is debatable. What is surely not debatable is the courage with which Woking Council admitted the mistakes of less than two decades earlier and decided in 1988 to demolish the Centre Pool, the Centre Halls and the biggest and best library in Surrey, to create 'The Peacocks'.



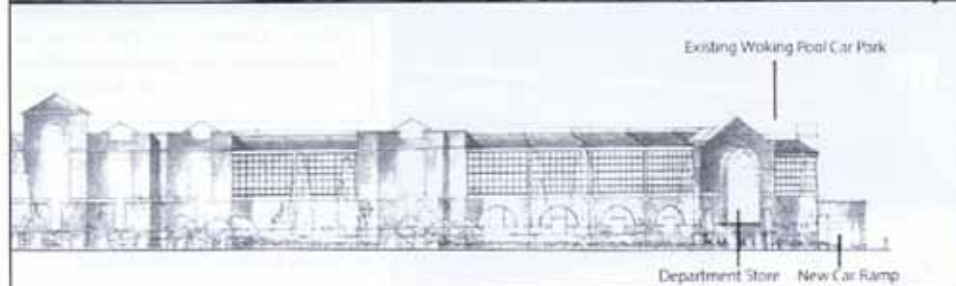
*Above - The site now occupied by The Peacocks just prior to construction.  
Below - the amended plans for The Peacocks, October 1988.*



The original plans for The Peacocks with the domed-glass roofs of the Town Square entrance (right) and the Bandstand Mall entrance (below) - neither of which was adhered to.



Work started on demolition of the old Centre Pool, Centre Halls and Library in late 1988. This view, from the 'Wolsey Place' car park, shows the excavations for the new centre, looking towards Lockfield Drive and Goldsworth Park.



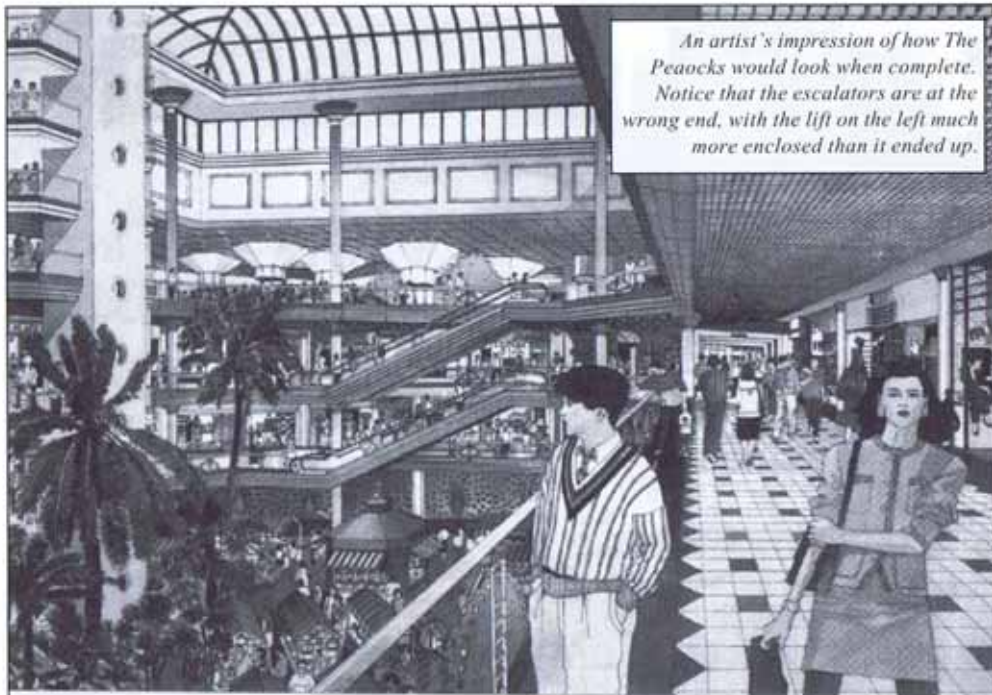
Existing Woking Pool Car Park

Department Store New Car Ramp



*Above – Construction of the library at 'The Peacocks' with the Council Offices in the background.*

*Right – The ramp to the car parks with the Rhoda McGaw Theatre behind.*



*An artist's impression of how The Peacocks would look when complete. Notice that the escalators are at the wrong end, with the lift on the left much more enclosed than it ended up.*

Detailed plans of the scheme by the London & Edinburgh Trust (not Norwich Union) for a change, were passed in November 1988. These included a children's play centre on the 1st floor; a nightclub for 500 and a health and beauty club. In the end the 'crèche' ended up on the lower concourse (for a short while), the nightclub only lasted four years before it closed and the health and beauty club was never built - but otherwise the scheme was a great success.

Demolition work on the 'old' new town centre began in 1989, with the remodelling of Town Square taking place in the autumn of 1990 (although it was not officially re-opened until 5th November, 1992, when the Duke of Kent visited the town). By then the impressive 'Town Gate' had been erected, along with the new Barclay's Bank, on the site of the former Christ Church Hall. The money from the sale of the hall (£1.6 million) went towards the £2.2 million cost of refurbishing of the old church across the road, with new halls, meeting rooms, offices and crèche facilities together with the popular coffee shop which was opened in February 1991 by the Bishop of Guildford.

Whilst all this was going on, the cultural side of the town was housed in temporary accommodation - the Library occupying the old Skeet & Jeffes site in Church Street East, whilst the former QEII School in the Old Woking Road (originally built in the 1950s as the Girls' Grammar School) was used as the town's temporary theatre.



*The construction of the new Library (left), with Barclay's Bank (centre) and the hoarding around Christ Church (right).*



*Town Square with the raised flower beds and the old Christ Church Hall in the background.*



*New units were added at the 'Bandstand' end of Wolsey Walk covering the car park entrance to 'Export House'*



*At the 'Town Square' end, the unit originally occupied by MacMarket was divided to make way for Dixon's and Burton's in Wolsey Walk and the Nationwide Building Society in Mercia Walk.*



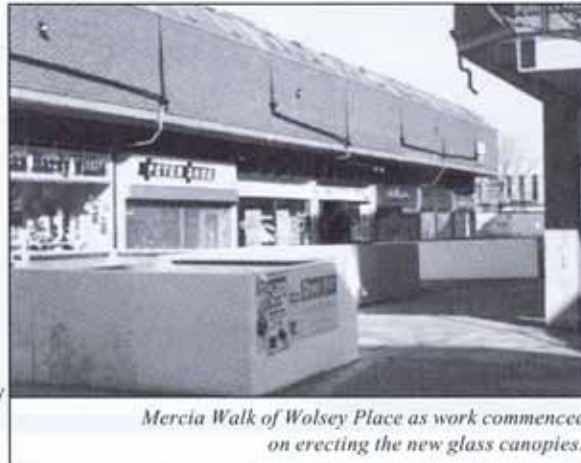
*One unit that was added on the Town Square end (next to the unit that had been the 'Chelsea Coffee Shop' - (now Athena) was the unit now occupied by Café Giardino.*




Meanwhile the 'old' shopping centre was refurbished by Norwich Union at a cost of over £350,000 and re-opened as Wolsey Place in the autumn of 1988. Further refurbishment took place in 1996 and again in 2002.

In the spring of 1991 most of the major 'anchor stores' for The Peacocks (Allders, Woolworth's, C&A's and Marks and Spencer's), were fitted out and the new Central Library was built (opening in December 1991). The shopping centre itself opened to the public on 10th April, 1992. Of course, many of the shops have come and gone, although of the original 'anchors' only C&A's have fallen so far (to be replaced by Primark) and with T.K.Max, Next and Virgin Megastores (to name just a few) it could be said that the centre has 'gained' more than it has 'lost'. The food court, too, has changed, but here again, with more high profile brands catering for the shoppers, the reputation of The Peacocks has increased.

The other side of The Peacocks - the Arts and Entertainment centre (renamed The Ambassadors in 1996) - also began to open from 10th April, 1992, onwards (starting with the three-screen cinema), with the 1,304-seat New Victoria Theatre finally opening on 8th June that year. By then the whole centre had cost over £120 million to construct - and as far as Woking is concerned, it must have been worth every penny! The fact that, less than four years later, Fantails (the nightclub), the Committee Rooms and the Wells and Shaw Rooms (the Function Suite) closed, is beside the point. It merely shows how quick Woking is to 'move with the times'! Three more cinema screens, a hospitality suite and better eating and drinking facilities have been provided in their place.



*Mercia Walk of Wolsey Place as work commenced on erecting the new glass canopies.*



**THE SHAW ROOM**

**CONFERENCES AND BANQUETING**

The Function Suite is equipped with all necessary conference aids and secretarial and office support services can be arranged. Staff and student facilities are excellent. Parking for 250 cars. Wheelchair access.

**Catering**  
The prestigious local Alexander Road Florist Ltd - a name synonymous with the highest standards of professional service and attention to detail - will provide catering services for the Function Suite.

For a full information pack contact The Function Co-ordinator, The Peacocks Arts & Entertainment Centre, Woking, Surrey GU21 3JQ. Telephone: 0442 747 022.

**THE SHAW ROOM**

- 60m floor space
- Accommodation for up to 400 people
- With a stage and large marshall
- Regularly decorated to the highest standards
- Movable partitions (8m x 4m)
- Flexible lighting and stage space for dinner dances to ball stage-light.


**THE WELLS ROOM**

- 30m floor space
- Accommodation for up to 80 people in pleasant and intimate surroundings
- Can be used in conjunction with the Shaw Room

**THE WELLS ROOM**

- Four detailed meeting rooms - each over 420 sq ft
- Accommodation for up to 20 people
- Movable partitions enable us to provide two large meeting rooms of 420 sq each with 100 seats or three 140 sq each for up to 120 people in each room.

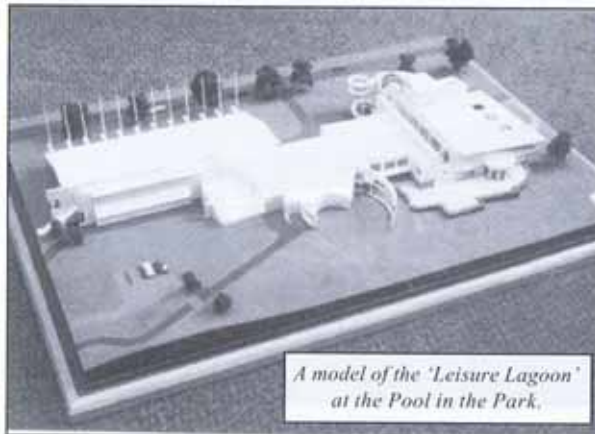
We also cater for all your requirements - our friendly, efficient and professional staff are dedicated to the success of your event.



**THE WELLS ROOM**

- 10m floor space
- Accommodation for up to 80 people in pleasant and intimate surroundings
- Can be used in conjunction with the Shaw Room

*Brochure for the Shaw and Wells Rooms of The Planets 'Arts & Entertainment Centre'.*



A model of the 'Leisure Lagoon' at the Pool in the Park.

The impressive 2,000-seat 'Leslie Gosden Stand' at Woking Football Ground is also a credit to the town, although its construction did raise a few eyebrows when it was built in 1995. The stand means that, should the club win the Conference League, they would be allowed promotion to the Nationwide League. Of course, at the time of writing (May 2003) that seemed easier said than done! Woking just avoided relegation, thanks to some help from their bitterest rivals – Stevenage Borough and Farnborough Town. Hopefully, by the time you read this, Woking will have not only have won promotion but also emulated their heroic F.A.Cup runs of the late 1990s and their F.A.Trophy Final victories of 1994, 1995 and 1997.

**OPENING**  
11th MAY '96

H.G.WELLS

# PLANETS

WOKING

## Out of this world

Apply for your PASSPORT  
**NOW**

Call in at Crown Square, Woking  
or Telephone (01483) 727100  
to obtain your Free Passport

- ◀ Brewery
- ◀ Themed Restaurant
- ◀ Laser Games
- ◀ Hyper Bar
- ◀ 10 Pin Bowling
- ◀ Video Sports Games
- ◀ American Pool Tables
- ◀ Internet Studio
- ◀ Childrens Play Area
- ◀ Hotel

[www.planets.co.uk](http://www.planets.co.uk)

A flyer advertising the opening of the 'H.G. Wells Planets'.

All of these facilities are far better than the old Centre Halls, whilst the removal of the pool to Woking Park in 1989 (unimaginatively named 'The Pool in the Park') was surely the right decision. The addition of the 'Leisure Lagoon' in August 1992 further increased the pool's attraction.

The Kingfield Road end of town is certainly the 'sporting mecca' of Woking, with the pools and the leisure centre, not to mention the Snooker Centre, Gym Club and the David Lloyd Leisure Centre (originally opened as the Chris Lane Tennis Centre).

FA TROPHY  
**FINAL**

# WOKING

VS

# RUNCORN

SATURDAY 21st MAY 1994  
K.O. 3.00pm

## WEMBLEY STADIUM

Match & Coach Tickets purchase directly from  
**WOKING FOOTBALL CLUB**

**OLC**  
MAIN SPONSOR

Official Woking F.C. Trophy Souvenirs only available from the Club Shop situated at the Kingfield Sports Ground

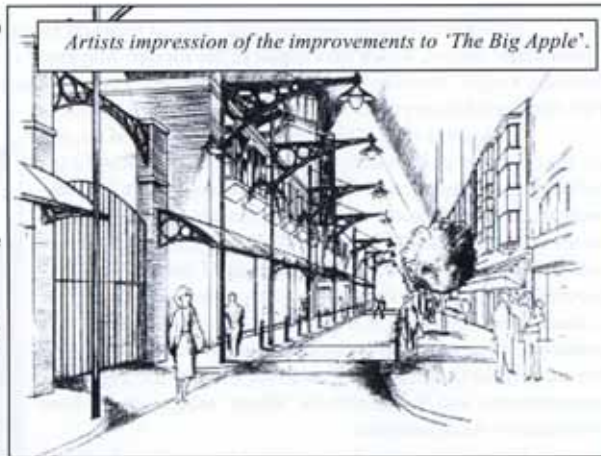
*Poster advertising the first of Woking's three F.A. Trophy finals of the 1990s.*

Less energetic leisure pursuits were provided in the town at the 'H.G. Wells Planets' where ten pin bowling, virtual reality games, a brewery, bars (one including a full sized Buccaneer Jump Jet), a restaurant and an adventure playground made up what was said to be at the time 'Surrey's largest indoor theme park'!

The Planets (despite going into receivership less than two years after its opening) also included a thriving 'lodge-style' hotel (in what used to be Playtex's offices), a bingo hall, and – where the roof garden of Fine Fare used to be – a large 'conference room', the H.G.Wells Suite, together with smaller meeting rooms and a bar. Whilst the latter facilities still retain the Wells theme and name, downstairs 'The Planets' has been re-vamped (less brewery and jet) and re-launched as 'The

Big Apple', with the long awaited nightclub (Quake) opening in the spring of 2000.

H.G. Wells (or at least his Martians) seem to have featured in most of Woking's public art of recent times, including the Town Gate (look for the Martian's Tripod); the Victoria Arch enamelled panels; and the tile mural in the Victoria Way subway. Only the mural in the High Street has no reference to 'H.G.', although it could be said that, as a representation of life in Edwardian Woking, it shows the world that the Martians would have 'known'. The main piece of modern art, however, is Michael Condon's seven-metre tall 'Martian' (actually its tripod, not the 'creature' itself) erected in Crown Passage, at its junction with Church Street, in 1998. Together with the 'cylinder', the fancy paving and lighting, and the elaborate opening ceremony, it certainly caused much controversy at the time, with many believing it to be a waste of tax-payers' money. The Council, however, claimed that works of art such as this attract visitors to the town and that by bringing pleasure they are worthwhile items for public expenditure. I will leave you to decide which camp is right.



**WOKING COMMUNITY PLAY**

**CHANGING PLACES**

Written & Directed by  
**ANN JELlicoe**

**MON. 25th MAY - SAT. 6th JUNE**

at 7.30 pm each evening. Matinee Saturday 10.30 am of 1.30 pm

**THE SHAW ROOM  
PEACOCKS CENTRE, WOKING**

*The first Woking Community Play –  
"Changing Places" by Anne Jellicoe.*

In the case of the 'Astronomical' clock, proposed to mark the Queen's Jubilee in 2002, its fate was decided by the Council's much-vaunted 'Citizen's Panel', set up to help the elected members decide on controversial projects. £350,000 was needed for the project, but with just £175,000 raised (mainly through 'planning gain') by October 2001, 56% of the 1,396 panel members who voted (70% of the members) voted against the scheme and the clock was quietly dropped.

The Council's enthusiasm for public art in the town has been matched by its love of civic celebration – 'Woking 150' in 1988 (the 150th anniversary of the coming of the railway) and somewhat confusingly 'Woking's Centenary' in 1994-5, to celebrate the 100th year of local government in the area. There was also the 'War of the Worlds' centenary in 1996-7 (one year before anyone else as we celebrated the writing of the story in Woking and not its publication as a book), and the Woking Community Plays – 'Changing Places' by Anne Jellicoe (1992) - one of the first events in the newly opened Wells Suite at the Peacocks – and 'Running Red' by Richard Hayhow (1996) - one of the first events in the newly opened Wells Room at the Planetes. The former looked at Woking in the early 20th century, whilst the latter (based loosely on War of the Worlds) looked to the future of Woking in the early 21st century.

Of course, there are many other celebrations and events that regularly take place: The Woking Dance Umbrella in the early spring; the Canal Festival at Easter; the Woking Bikeathon later in the spring; the Woking Mela at the Mosque in the Summer; and in the autumn everything from festivals of Drama and Music to the Woking Beer Festival and the wonderful 'One-World Week' where the town's ethnic communities get together to celebrate Woking's unique cultural heritage. Woking has the largest ethnic mix of people in Surrey, with almost 10% of the population 'non-white' and almost every country of the world represented in the town's population of 93,500 and still counting!

The population of Woking is still increasing and with more single-person households the number of houses and flats in the area has increased. Developments such as Brookwood Hospital at Knaphill have accounted for some, but in recent years, with pressure to develop 'brown-field' sites rather than build in the countryside, a vast amount of 'infill' development has taken place in the central part of town, such as at Vale Farm Road and Stanley Road.



Most have replaced older housing, such as Howarth Homes' 'Brookland Mews' of 10 four-bedroom 'mews-style' houses, which have replaced the former 'Mayhurst' residential home in Mayhurst Avenue, and Nicholas King's 'Meridian' development of just four 'luxury' detached four and-five bedroom homes between Park Road and Maybury Hill (both under construction in 2003).

On a larger scale, Thirlstone Homes developed the site of 'Brackenbrae' in Heathside Crescent with a crescent of 72 two-bedroom apartments (and 24 'affordable' houses). The scheme went ahead despite protests from many people over the impact on the area and its wildlife, especially the badgers and pipistrelle bats that had been reported in the grounds of the old house. Surprisingly (or not, as the case may be), a survey for the Council, after development began, found no trace of these protected species and the developers were allowed to continue. Presumably the Council still received the £50,000 for 'highway improvements' and the £96,000 for 'leisure' schemes in the town promised by the developers!

Meanwhile, other developments have replaced public buildings such as Mountside Place on the old Court and Police Station site; St. Andrew's Gate on the site of the old Registry Office next door; and more recently the 'Lismore Gardens' development on the site of the former Surrey County Council Education Office at Lismore - all in Heathside Road.



*Above - Construction of the crescent at 'Brackenbrae' off Heathside Crescent.*

*Left - the demolition of Lismore, Heathside Road.*



*Below - The building of 'The Point' on the site of the former Liberal Club (on the corner of Chertsey Road and Stanley Road). The Club moved around the corner into the old Working Men's Club in Walton Road.*

*All pictures on this page were taken in the Summer of 2003.*

The latter scheme was highly controversial, with at one stage a 114-signature petition against Bellway Homes' plan for 74 flats on the site.

The same developer also built the 38 one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments at 'The Point' on the corner of Chertsey Road and Stanley Road (on the site of the old, 1970s, Liberal Club). It was still being built at the time of writing, so that by the time you read this it may have been renamed something else. It can be quite confusing when developers give a fancy name to a scheme (to help sell it), only for the Council, or whoever, to rename the development when it is complete!



*“We bought a brand new apartment at Victoria Waterside – the advantages were irresistible!”*

**COME ALONG TO OUR PART EXCHANGE ROADSHOW ON SATURDAY 25TH & SUNDAY 26TH MARCH BETWEEN 11AM & 4PM**



**HUGE** 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms – over 1400 sq. ft! (That's bigger than many new 4 bedroom houses today)

**EASY** No external maintenance and no gardening – just more time to enjoy ourselves!

**CLOSE** Around 1/2 mile from the station and even less to the town centre shops – we can easily walk it!

Best of all we part exchanged our existing home through Barratt with no estate agents fees to pay – and no hassle!

Century Court, on Victoria Way, was advertised as 'Victoria Waterside' when it was being developed, whilst Little Ridings, Oriental Road, was called 'Glebelands' in its early literature.

Other sites under construction during the summer of 2003 included 'The Old Dairy' in Goldsworth Road (on the site of the old Unigate Dairy, by the footpath from Step Bridge to The Kingsway and Twin Bridges); 'Bramley House' and 'Birtley House' (on the corner of Claremont Avenue and Wych Hill Lane, by Elmbridge's); and Claremont Lodge (further up Claremont Avenue, on the corner with Popular Grove).

The last-named scheme was on the site formerly occupied by the Northfleet Hotel, whilst the fate of its one-time rival, The Litten Tree (formerly The Cotteridge Hotel), was also in the balance at the time of writing. An application in June 2002 by Berkeley Homes for 62 flats (including 15 'affordable' units) in an eight-storey block was turned down by the Council, whilst in December 2002 a similar scheme (one storey and six flats fewer) was also rejected, but went to appeal. Of course, both the Litten Tree and Northfleet developments would probably not have been proposed had it not been for the opening in April 2001 of the 161-bedroom 'Holiday Inn' in Victoria Way (on part of the site formerly occupied by Skeet & Jeffes' showroom).

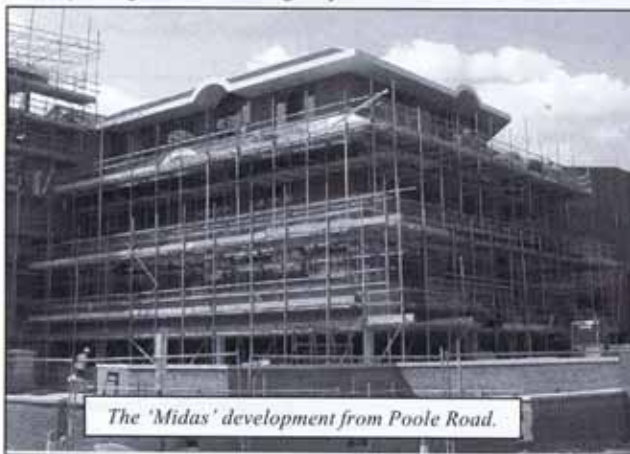
*Century Court (below), originally developed as 'Victoria Waterside' (above) was built on the site of the former Woking Victoria Hospital. The low building in the background was the Westgate Centre, a drop-in centre for the elderly.*



The area has also seen sites of former offices redeveloped with housing, such as Laing Retirement's 'Consort Court' on the former 'Planet House' (Tyler's Wine Merchants, later Victoria Wine's office block) in Guildford Road, and 'Hillside Mews', a development of 13 four-bedroom town houses with six apartments by Fairview Homes, on the site of the old NEU Engineering offices, also in Guildford Road. When they were first on the market in early 2002, they started at £399,000; later in May that year they were £385,000; whilst by October they were advertised at £352,000. The excess of developments coming on to the market at that time (together with 'national' pressures) obviously affected the asking price. That, however, seems to have been the exception rather than the rule, as house prices in this area seem to have followed a steady upward spiral.

The two latter schemes saw the demolition of old offices, but at Sundial House in Goldsworth Road this was not necessary, as in 2002 the former empty offices above the shops were converted into nine flats – perhaps the first of many such schemes in the town.

The Goldsworth Road end of town has seen some major changes in recent years, with the £6.5 million Surrey History Centre (opened October 1998) being built on the site of the old Goldsworth School (with the ultra-modern new Goldsworth School being constructed next to Bridge Barn); and Safeway's £10 million supermarket (opened May 2001) on the site of Wadham's motor showroom, the old Price's Bakery and the railway sidings behind the Kingsway.



*The 'Midas' development from Poole Road.*

At the time of writing, the Safeway chain of supermarkets was subject to a number of bids from rival supermarket chains (and others), and so by the time you read this book it is possible, if not probable, that its name has changed, if it has not closed altogether (as at Addlestone)!

One of the biggest developments in the road in recent years, however, was the offices between Goldsworth Road and Poole Road. Named 'Midas' by the developers, both the 48,470 square feet of office space and the four shop units below were still to be occupied at the time of writing this book.

Other office development included Allianz Cornhill's new office building in Goldsworth Road, the new 'Brook House' (replacing the 1970s block of the same name) at Brook House Roundabout and Cap Gemini's offices: the first, originally called Shaw House, is on the corner of Church Street West and Victoria Way, with the second development (in Forge End) being linked to the first by a covered pedestrian bridge.



*Shaw House and (below left) the home of Cap Gemini.*

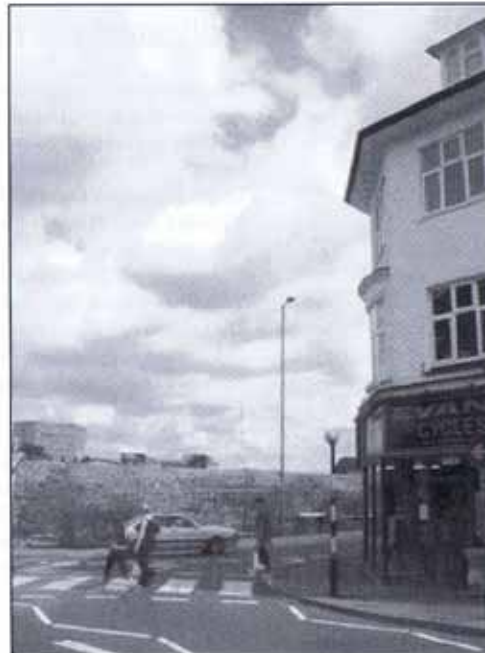


And finally, let us consider some places that will probably be redeveloped in the future (or is it already the past?). Only time will tell, but perhaps you may like to use the blank pages at the back of this book to write your own notes and photographs of developments, as they take place, for your own personalised 'Illustrated History of Woking Town Centre'. In no particular order...

- Woking Railway Station and the 'Banana Shed' site.
- The old Telephone Exchange site in Oriental Road.
- The old 'Court's' furnisners site in the High Street.
- The bottom of the Wolsey Place car park.
- The Post Office and Fire Station site beside Cawsey Way.
- The junction of Goldsworth Road and Church Street West.
- The former 'Esso' petrol station in Goldsworth Road.
- The site of the Coign church in Church Street West.
- The Brewery Road Car Park.
- The former Westgate Centre site by Wheatsheaf Bridge.
- The last remaining houses off Victoria Way, by the Brook House roundabout.
- The common land by the Brook House roundabout.
- The former Phillips Petroleum Offices in Guildford Road (Phillips Quadrant).
- The sidings behind the houses of York Road.
- The commuter car park at Oriental Road.
- St. Dunstan's Church (below) in White Rose Lane.



- The site of the former St. Francis Roman Catholic First School in Park Road.
- Marie Carlisle House in Coley Avenue.
- The Litten Tree in Guildford Road.
- The site of the old greenhouses in Blackness Lane, Woking Park.
- The land around the Leisure Centre (if not the Leisure Centre itself).
- Woking Football Ground.
- The site of the former Westfield Tip, off Westfield Avenue.
- The fields between Egley Road and the railway.
- Any piece of green space within Woking Town Centre (especially if it is owned by the Council).
- Any old house in any road on which a developer can cram more 'apartments'.



*Above – the station site, given planning permission for 240 apartments (early in 2003) within a 15-storey 'landmark development'. Permission was granted for a further 48 apartments for the 'second phase' of the scheme on the telephone exchange site.*

*In the summer of 2003 Surrey County Council expressed an interest in moving County Hall to Woking. The Brewery Road car park site was their preferred option, much to the disgust of some local residents – Watch this space!*



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Copies of some of the above are held in the author's own collection, which has also been consulted for various maps, plans, sale catalogues and other local memorabilia. Reminiscences, correspondence and other unpublished material held in the collection have also been used.



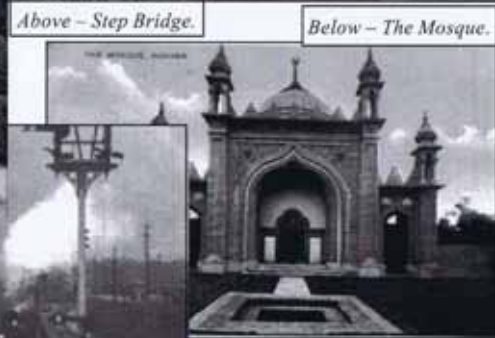
Above - on The Common.



Above - Step Bridge.



Right - Chertsey Road Bridge.



Below - The Mosque.



Above - The High Street.



Left - The view from Twin Bridges.

Iain Wakeford's latest book on the history of Woking is a must for anybody interested in the past, present or even future of the town. This is the first book to concentrate on the history of just the town centre and with its numerous illustrations it is a joy to look at as well as read.



The chimney of the Woking Electric Supply Co., in North Road.



Above - The Woking Home Guard.



Left - The Goldsworth Arms on the corner with Poole Road.

Below - The 'Bridge of Sighs' over Victoria Way at its junction with Goldsworth Road.



Below - Commercial Way and the building of Wolsey Place.



Below - Plans for the Peacocks



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