

DEMOCRACY, 1874 SCHOOL BOARD STYLE

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Last year we voted (those that could be bothered that is) for our representative at the European Parliament. The year before it was the turn of Surrey County Councillors, and this year (as I am sure you are well aware) is the turn of our Members of Parliament at Westminster (not forgetting certain borough council elections as well). Woking no longer has parish councillors (although some of the villages just beyond our bounds do), but how would you feel if you had to vote for members of the local vestry, the local highways board, the local sanitary board and the local school board as well as all the other layers of 'democracy' mentioned above?

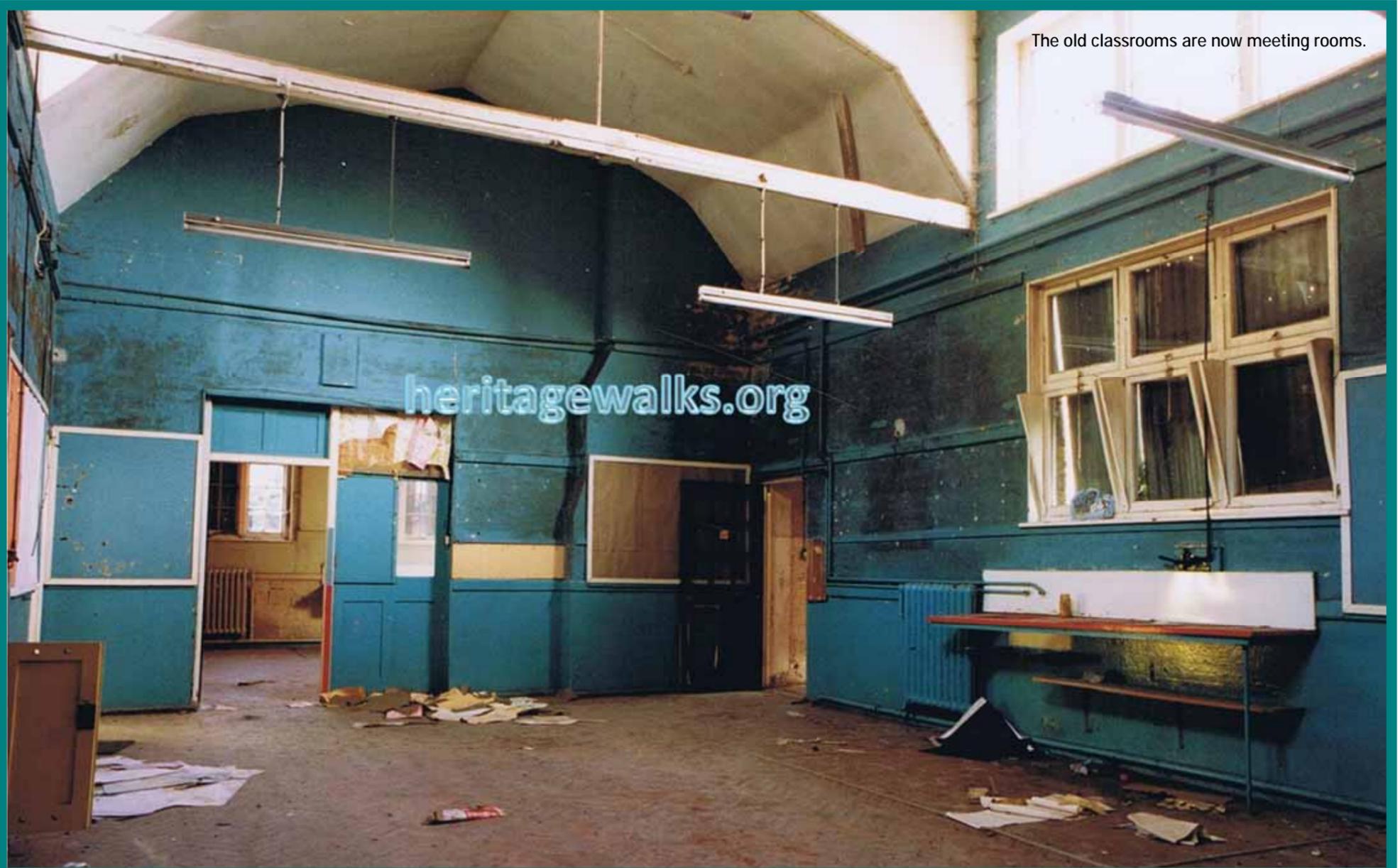
Of course, the truth is that most of us in 1874 wouldn't be allowed to vote in most elections, although the voting for a School Board was not quite so restrictive with women ratepayers able to vote (and even stand for election) if they so wished. The votes were also cast in a slightly different way than we now expect, with each voter being given three votes for members of the board, which could either be used to elect three different people, or all cast for just one candidate in what was known as a 'cumulative vote'. This meant that some popular candidates could get more votes than there were actual electors.

The Education Act of 1870 made elementary schooling compulsory for all children, and where provision was inadequate gave local authorities the power to use money from ratepayers to establish schools through the

The original Board School in Board School Road has now been turned into the Maybury Centre



The old classrooms are now meeting rooms.



The original Master's House has now been demolished to make way for the car park for the Maybury Centre



provision of a school board – so as you may appreciate the formation of a School Board was not universally popular as in this case democracy certainly came at a price!

In Woking in the early 19th century any children that went to school attended either a 'Dame Schools' (such as Mr Ross' school at the Old Manor House in Old Woking) or more probably one of the voluntary schools established by organisations such as the Church of England's 'National Society for the Promoting of Education for the Poor'. National School's (as they were often known), had been set up in the 1840's and 50's at Byfleet, Pyrford, Horsell, St Johns Westfield and Old Woking, with a similar organisation known as the 'British and Foreign School Society' opening a 'British School' in connection with the Baptist Chapel in the Wheatsheaf area of Horsell in the 1830's.

But whilst the children of the outlying villages of the Woking area were benefitting from the education provided by these voluntary organisations, the poor people of 'new' Woking and Knaphill were not, and in December 1870 a public meeting heard that over two hundred children in the parish of Woking were receiving no education at all because of a desperate shortage of places.

In June 1872 Woking Vestry recommended that a School Board be set up, but the proposal was not met with support from the ratepayers of Woking Village, St Johns and Westfield (who already had Church Schools). Perhaps not surprisingly they were 'strongly opposed' to having to pay a rate for something they were already getting for nothing – or next to nothing as a small payment did have to be paid each week for the children to attend the Church Schools.

Not surprisingly the people of 'new' Woking and the rapidly growing district of Knaphill did not agree, but in a poll held in February 1873 to try to establish the School Board they were narrowly defeated – the villagers in the 'old' areas out-voting the 'new' by 155 votes to 142. Undaunted the Vestry tried again and with a more solid support from the 'station' area, they were able to set elections, with the new board meeting for the first time on the 30th April 1874.

Within a month the new board had negotiated with the Necropolis Company for land near the station and within a year the new Board School had been built, giving its name to the road it was built on – Board School Road. It had places for seventy infants and 180 older children, but as we shall see over the coming weeks and months it was not long before it had to be extended again and again and again with the dramatic growth of the area.



BISLEY VILLAGE HALL - BUILT 1874, OPENED 1960



Last week I mentioned how the new Vicar of St John the Baptist Church at Bisley had raised £8,000 to rebuild the church, partially in response to the need to accommodate the extra 240 boys at the Shaftesbury Homes in the village, so I wonder whether he was aware that at the time the Homes were planning to build their own chapel

on a piece of common land near their original 'Farm Refuge'?

Maybe the Vicar kept that fact quiet so that he could raise more money for his dilapidated church, or perhaps there was a genuine lack of communications between the two, whatever the reasons the result was that in 1874 not only did Bisley get a newly rebuilt parish church, but

also a new chapel for the Shaftesbury Boys too.

I cannot find too much detail on the chapel's early history but when the schools closed in the late 1950's the village took over the building for use as a Village Hall – which is how it was built in 1874, but not opened to the public until 1960!

THE CANAL - A BARGAIN IN 1874 FOR JUST £12,000

1874 was a good year for the Basingstoke Canal with the formation of the Surrey & Hampshire Canal Company. They bought the waterway for £12,000 from the liquidators of the original company (The Basingstoke Canal Navigation Company), who had spent over seven times that amount on constructing the waterway just eighty years earlier!

Inflation caused by the American War of Independence had forced up prices and even before it was complete the original share capital had run out and a further £60,000 had to be raised.

According to Glenys Crocker in her History of the Basingstoke Canal (published in 1973) 'George Stubbs, Chairman of the Committee of Accounts, continued to pay the interest [on the original shares] by issuing bonds, part of the value of which represented arrears of interest on the original capital. In addition, in order to pay interest on the bonds, he had by 1797 run up a debt of £7,500'.

Unsurprisingly Stubbs was soon sacked, but the problem didn't go away and the canal continued to struggle to pay its way – particularly after the late 1830's when the London & South Western Railway took away a lot of its trade. No dividend had ever been paid on the original shares, little (if any) profit had been made and in 1866 the original company went into liquidation.

