

# THE 'NEW' BUILDINGS OF BROOKWOOD IN 1875

Iain Wakeford 2015



This map from 1871 shows the site before any of the surviving buildings were built. The old road from Hermitage Hill across the site to the Nags Head on Bagshot Road can clearly be seen..

The church is on the opposite side of the road to where it is today and the gas works were where the childrens' playground is today.

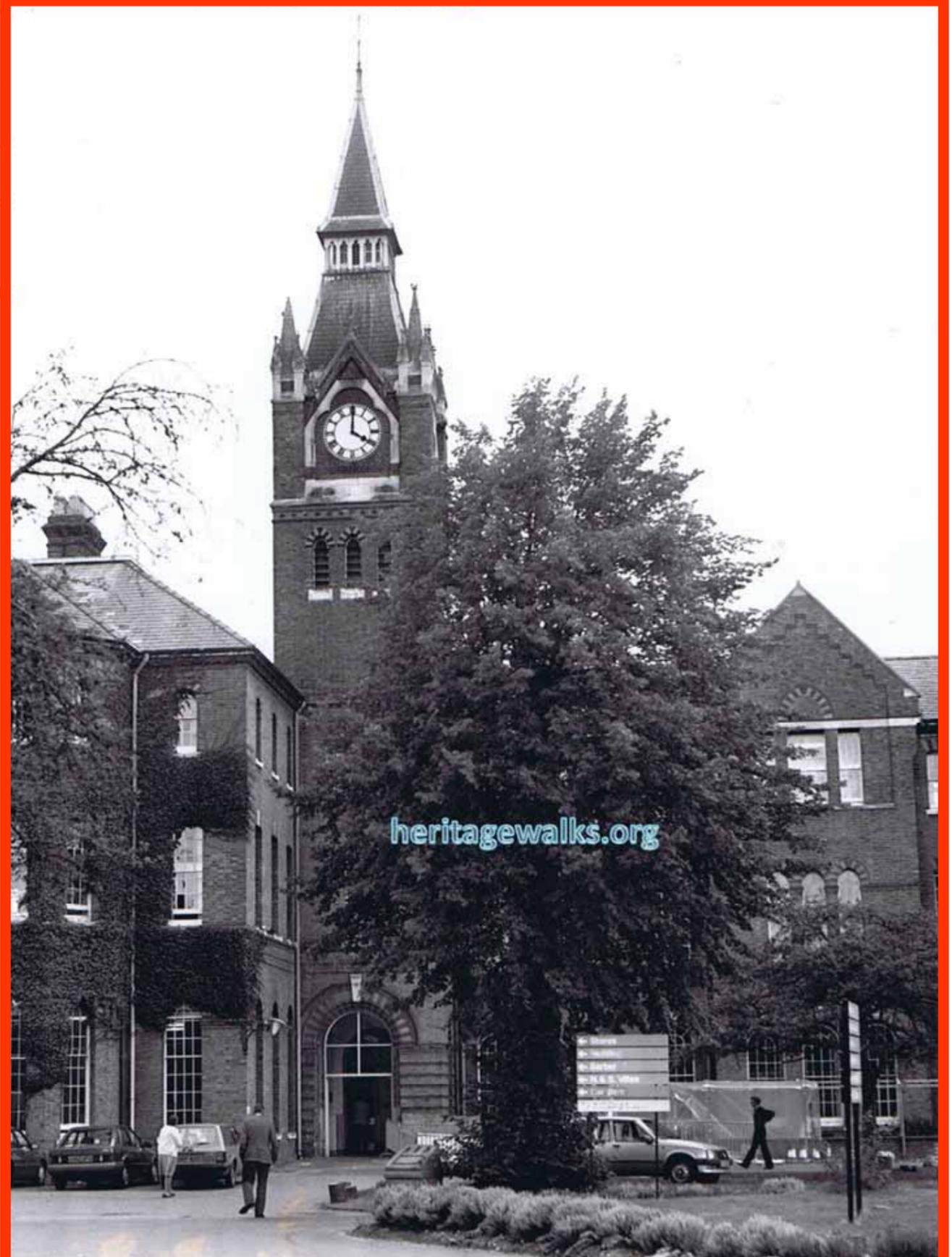
Florence House, now converted into apartments, allowed the institution to increase the number of patients when it was built in 1875

A couple of months ago, whilst writing about Woking in the late 1860's, I looked at the opening of the second Surrey County Pauper Lunatic Asylum at Knaphill where Sainsbury's, Homebase and the surrounding housing estates off Redding Way are today. I mentioned then that none of the original buildings are still standing, which evidently confused some people who probably thought I had gone insane and a suitable candidate for the old institution. One of my regular walkers quietly pointed out that some of the old hospital buildings have been converted into apartments and that the old chapel and mortuary have been taken over by the Buddhist monks. They were right, some of the old buildings have been converted, but I was right too as none of those buildings are the 'original' 1867 buildings!

The really old buildings were apparently in a much poorer state than the slightly better built 1875 additions – including Florence House named after 'the lady with the lamp' (who as far as I know never set foot in the hospital).

Looking at old maps of the site the hospital appears to have been continually evolving during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, presumably as more and more space was required for the growing number of people whom the Victorians thought to be 'lunatics'. They included the 'morally insane' such as adulteresses and single mothers (it appears that the women were always classed as more 'immoral' in such circumstances than the men)!

With the number of patients increasing there



was a need for more staff too – although whether there was ever enough to look after all the patients residing in the hospital is debatable. In 1871 the ratio of staff to patients at Brookwood was apparently one member of staff for every twenty patients, a figure that the Lunacy Commissioners chastised the Surrey County Magistrates for.

An interesting study into how long staff stayed at the institution in its early years was published in 1999 by Dr David Wright (then of Nottingham University School of Nursing). He noted that about 30% of female staff at

Brookwood left within six months of taking employment at the institution, with a further 11% leaving before a year was up and 24% by the end of the following year. He also noted that the average age of female assistants at the hospital was in their late 20's – older than the average domestic servant at that time. It is evident that it took a certain kind of lady to take on, and remain, in the job.

He also found by looking at the 1871 census that 18% of staff came from Surrey; 21% from neighbouring counties, and a staggering 61% from elsewhere, although by 1881 (when the

number of staff had almost doubled) the ratios were slightly different at 17% Surrey; 27% neighbouring counties; and 56% elsewhere.

This shows the impact that institutions such as the Pauper Lunatic Asylum must have had on the area, with vast numbers of people moving into the area from all over the country.

I shall be returning again and again to the history of this important institution in later weeks and months, as we continue this year by year look at the history of Woking and the surrounding area.

## THE CONDITIONS AT THE ROYAL DRAMATIC COLLEGE WERE DECIDEDLY DICKENSIAN IN 1875

This illustration from the Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News of the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1875 shows the Royal Dramatic College buildings at Maybury, where the Lion Retail Park is today.

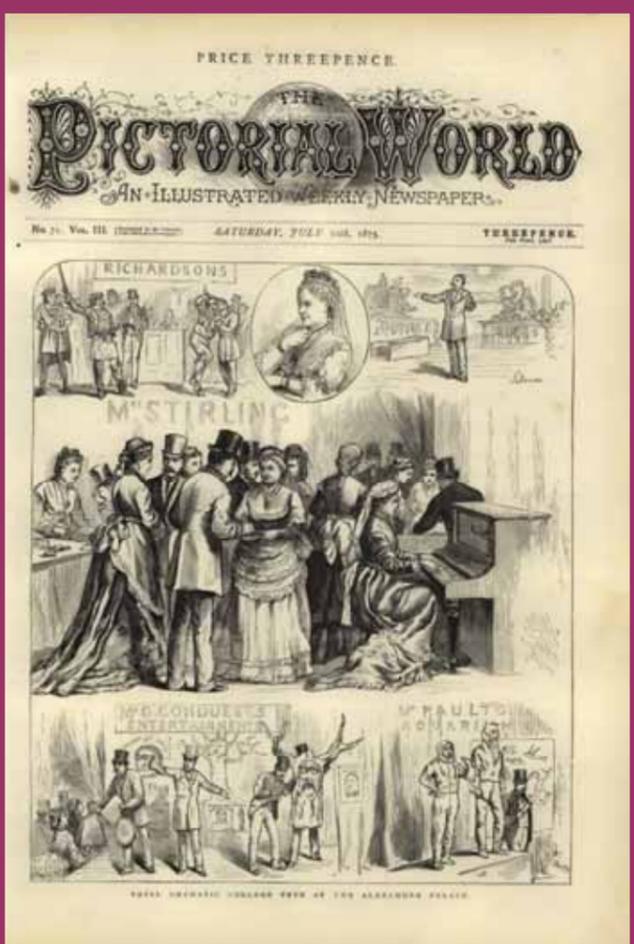
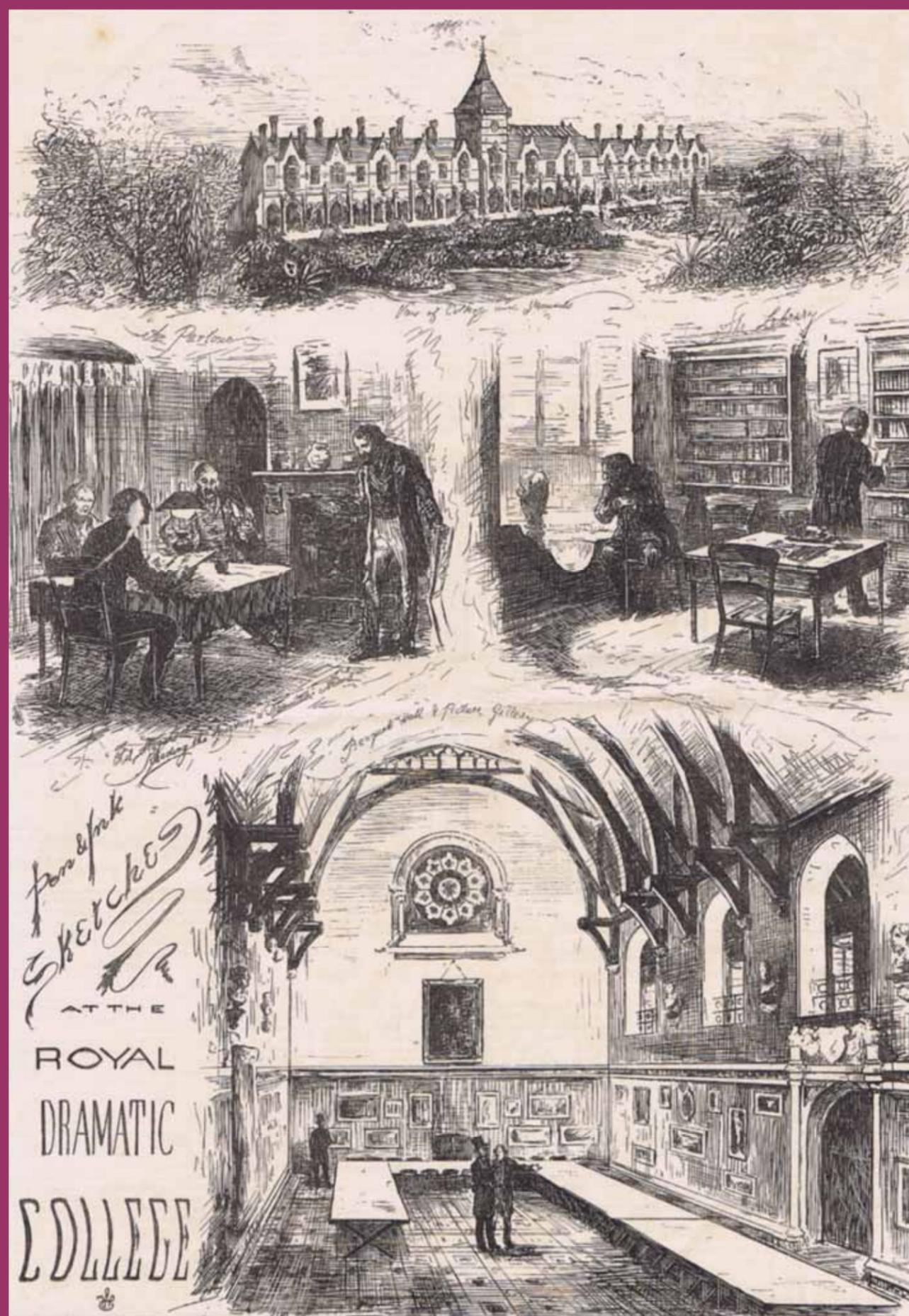
The banqueting hall and gallery (at the base of the sketch) were in the centre of the complex with the parlour and library to one side where the inmates could read books and newspapers, or sit and chat (either to each other or in the

case of the poor gentleman on the right, to the bust of what appears to be William Shakespeare!)

Until his death in 1870 Charles Dickens had been one of the trustees, but by the mid 1870's things appear to have started to go downhill, and within a couple of years of these pen and ink drawings being published, the college was forced to close.

Even the attraction of holding the summer fete at the newly rebuilt 'People Palace' - Alexandra Palace (which had only opened in May this year following the fire a couple of years previously) - didn't seem to appeal, and fundraising concerts at various London Theatres to raise money and awareness of the institution 'out in the countryside at Woking', were becoming less popular.

The Pictorial World (below) from Saturday 10th July 1875, showing some of the entertainment on show at Alexandra Palace in support of the Royal Dramatic College Funds.



The Illustrating Sporting and Dramatic News (left) chose to show the inmates at the college, rather than the entertainment on show at the 'People's Palace' - a more sombre depiction of the institution that The Times had described as 'a home for decaying actors and actresses'!

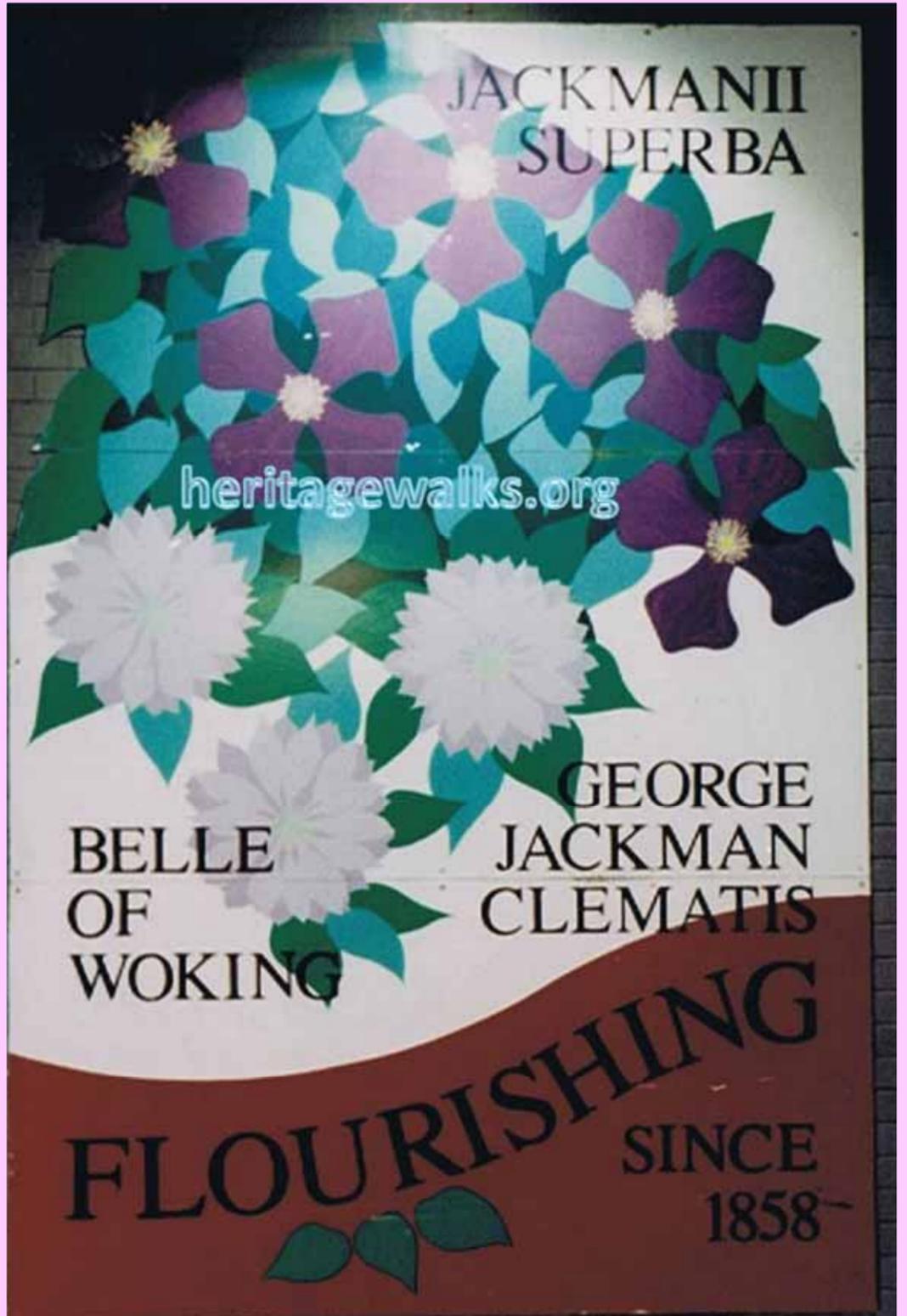
# BELLE OF WOKING WAS 'BORN' IN 1875



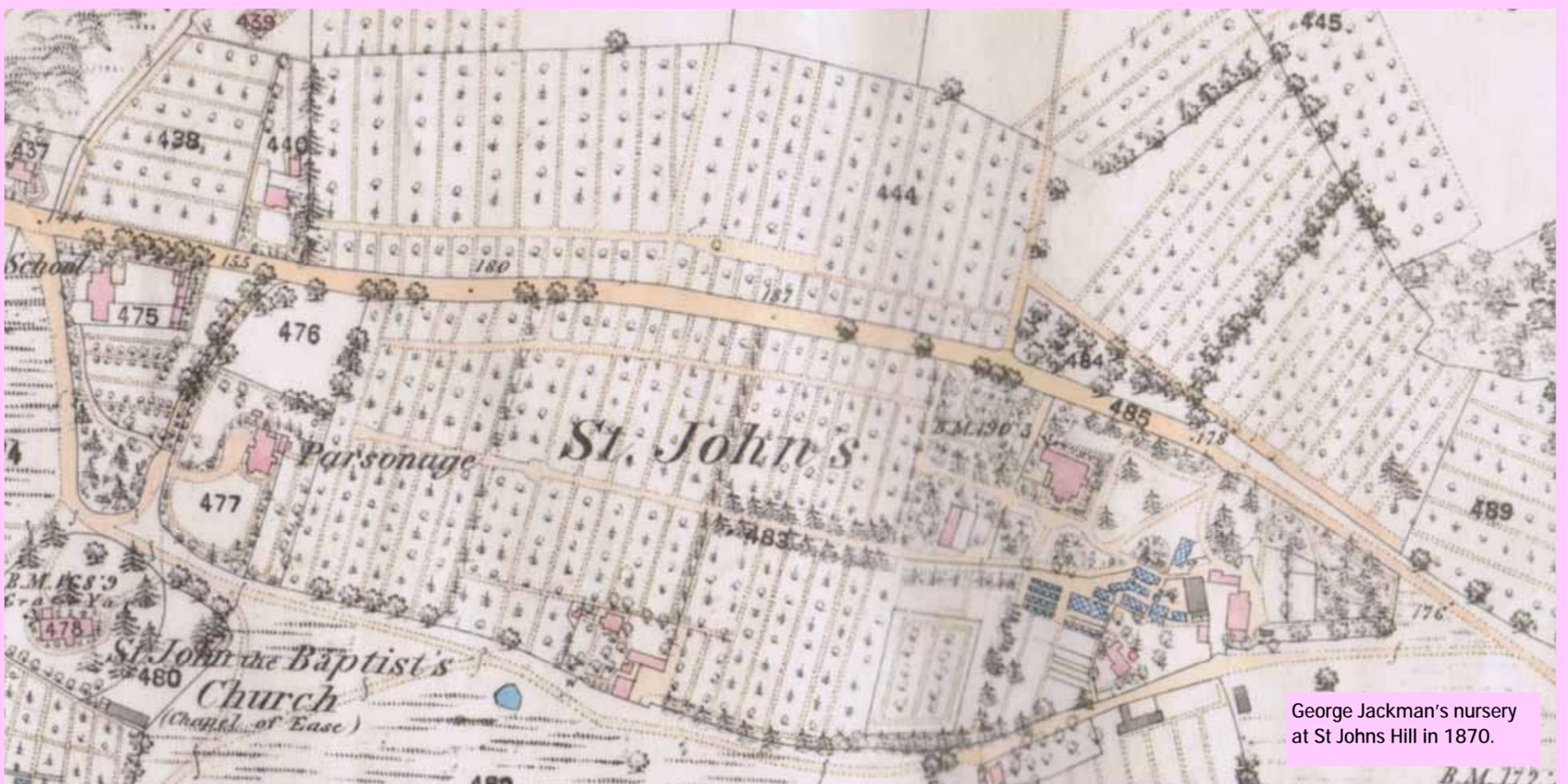
On a brighter note, at St Johns, the Jackman family were busy propagating new varieties of Clematis in 1875, with 'Belle of Woking' being produced in this year. It is often described as one of the most beautiful clematis of all, with its light mauve coloured double flowers fading to white in the sun from May to July.

It was grown by George Jackman II who had taken over the 300 acres nursery centred on St Johns Hill in 1869 when his father (George I) died, and by the early 1870's he was employing fifty men and boys.

They grew all sorts of plants but clematis seems to have been his passion and in 1872, together with Thomas Moore the curator of the Physic Garden at Chelsea (and co-editor of the *Gardeners' Chronicle*) he wrote the first book on the plant 'The Clematis as a Garden Flower'. The book, and the plants, were an immediate success with Princess Mary, Duchess of Teck, being a great supporter (the second volume of the book being dedicated to her in 1877) – but quite whom the 'Belle of Woking' was I am afraid I do not know.



A few years ago the clematis of George Jackman were celebrated on one of the panels under Victoria Arch.



George Jackman's nursery at St Johns Hill in 1870.