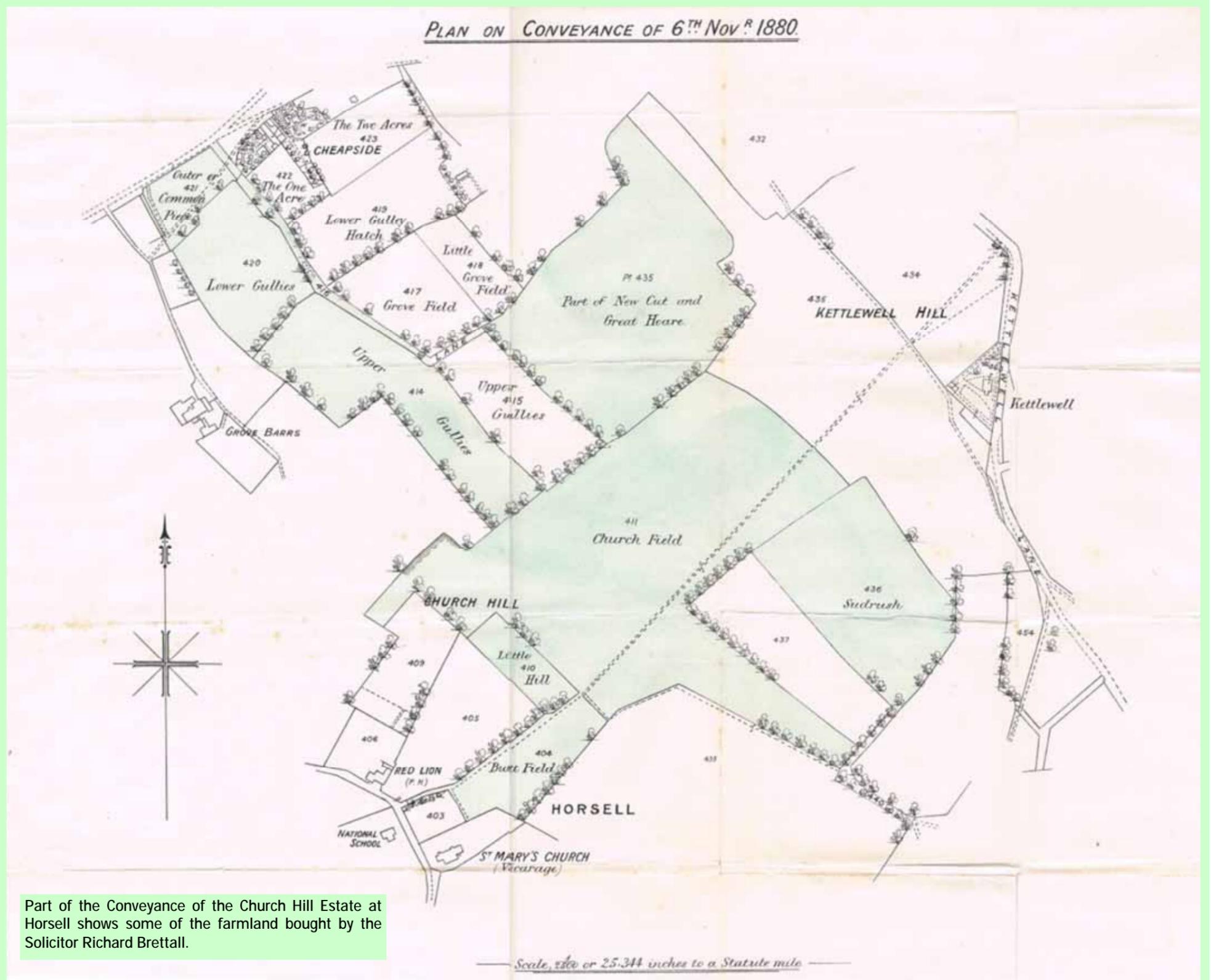


# BUSINESSMEN FARMERS

Iain Wakeford 2015



Part of the Conveyance of the Church Hill Estate at Horsell shows some of the farmland bought by the Solicitor Richard Brettall.

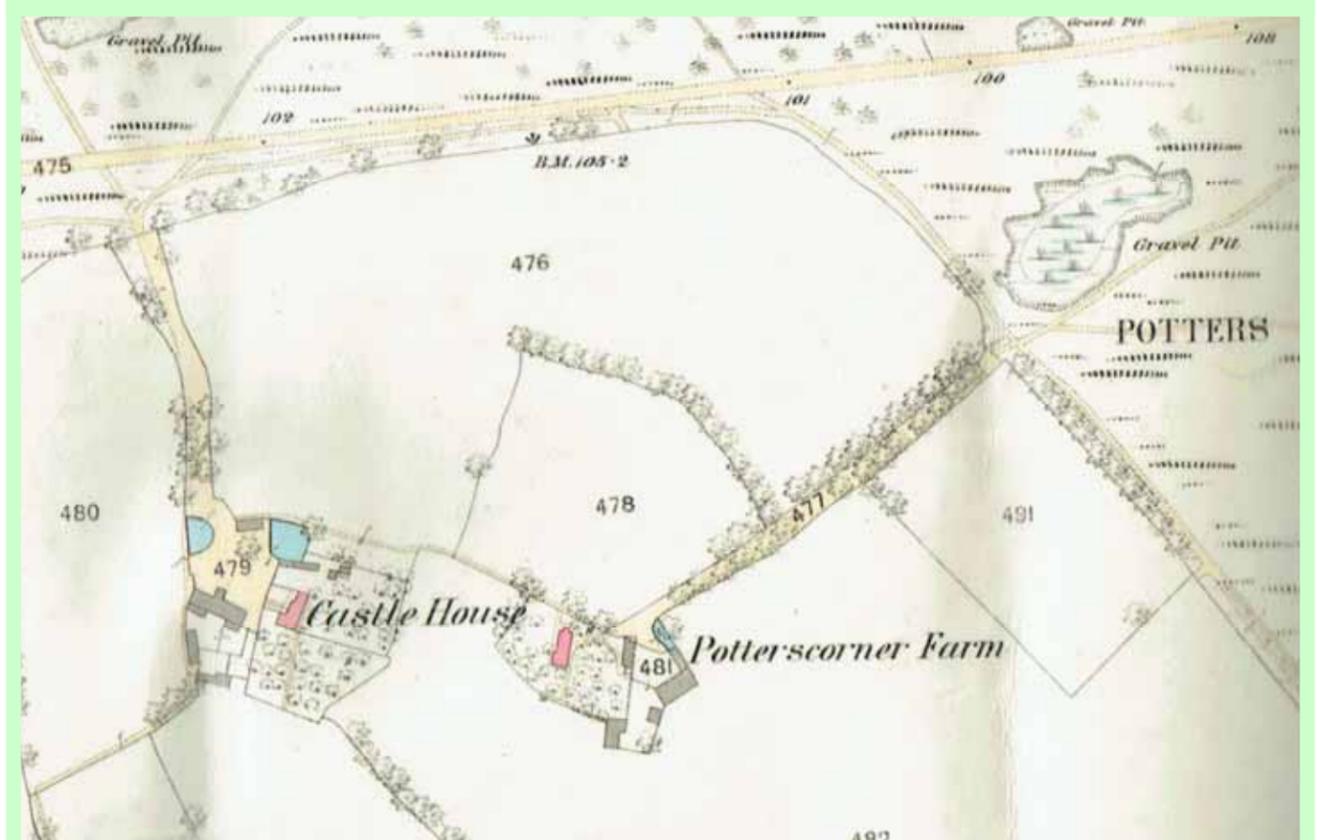
The end of the 1870's, and start of the 80's, saw a flurry of land sales and building work in and around Woking.

In recent weeks we have seen how wealthy businessmen bought up depressed local land; from Lawford's Farm at Bridley in the west, to Sheppard's Farm at Byfleet Corner in the east.

Broadoaks, built for the barrister Charles Seth-Smith on the site of Sheppard's Farm was just the latest of a number of large country houses that would grace the area, with Sheerwater Court (where Woodlands and Hollies Avenue are today) being sold in 1880 to William Edward Gibb, another wealthy businessman, who continuing another recent theme of ecclesiastical philanthropy would later go on to donate the bells at Christ Church, Ottershaw.

Richard Brettall, the solicitor from Chertsey who we came across a few weeks ago when he bought Cheapside and Kettlewell Farms in Horsell, added to his landholdings in the area in 1879 with the purchase of the adjoining Potters Corner Farm and Castle House – the latter the home of Jonah Roake, whose family had farmed in the Horsell area for centuries.

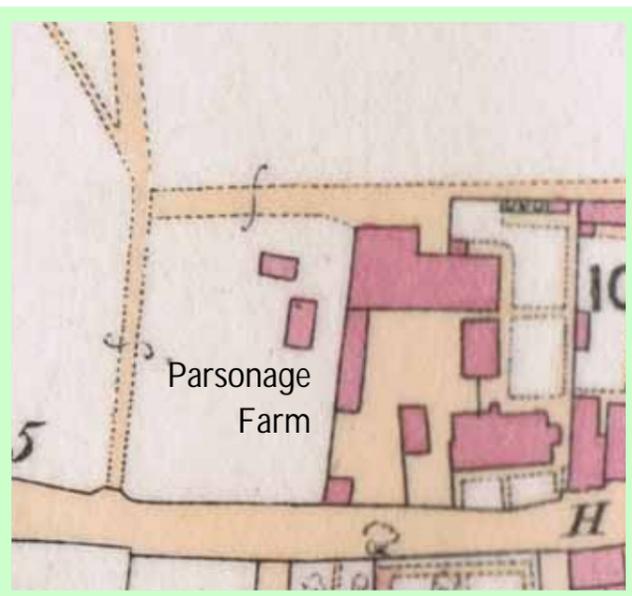
Bought by Richard Brettall in 1879, Castle House (in Castle Road, off of Shores Road) still survives, but Potterscorner Farm (off of what would now be called Woodham Road) has not.



And in Old Woking, Edward Ryde (who we also encountered recently in these pages paying for the stained glass at St Peter's Church in Old Woking), was also dabbling in farming by taking on in 1880 the lease of Parsonage Farm in Old Woking High Street (beside the Old Manor House).

Ryde's main business remained as a land surveyor, a fact emphasised on a sheet of paper at the back of his diary for 1881 (evidently referring to that year's census) which noted 'Mr Ryde, although not a farmer, occupies about 100 acres of land, and has a bailiff, cowman, carter, under carter and three labourers employed on his farm'.

According to the census he also employed at least five female domestic servants at his house – farm labourers and house servants still being one of the main occupations for local people at this time.



Another local farmer and businessman was George Samllpiece, again a solicitor and land agent, who owned Kingfield Farm. He was a director of the newly formed Woking Water and Gas Company that was incorporated by Act of Parliament in 1881 with the idea of building a gasworks for the town on two acres of his farmland at Tinkers Lane (more or less where the Leisure Centre is today). It was not the best piece of farmland, being low lying and liable to flood, but it was also not the best site for a gasworks, so it is not surprising that that part of the venture failed - although within a year the water side of the new business was flourishing with the opening of a well at West Clandon to supply fresh water to the town.

It would be another decade before a new company provided gas to the public of Woking, but in 1881 the prospect of fresh water no doubt gave a boost to new buildings in the town.

Already houses were being built along the new streets laid out by the Necropolis Company to the east of the town centre, such as Walton Road and Board School Road; to the west in the Goldsworth area; and south of the railway in Heathside and Maybury where the emphasis was on large, expensive, homes (bringing in large profits), but the areas north of the railway were not so profitable, and here smaller villas and terraces of houses predominated.

Walton Villa's (in Walton Road) were erected in 1876, whilst in the following year, Flora Cottages (now almost doubled in size) were built on the corner of Board School Road and Portugal Road.

1881 saw the formation of the Woking Water & Gas Company (whose offices were later built in Commercial Road).



Built in 1876, Walton Villa's in Walton Road would originally have been served by a well in their garden, with oil lamps for lighting as it would be over a decade



There was some small scale development in the outlying areas of Woking at this time also - such as the rebuilding of the old Bird in Hand public house at Mayford in 1880 - but most redevelopment was restricted to the former common land, especially around Knaphill & St Johns where the influence of the institutions (the asylum and prisons) was strong.

In Maybury, however, the old Royal Dramatic College which had closed through lack of support in 1877 remained empty even after the property speculator Alfred Chabot bought the buildings in June 1880. Despite several attempts to find a suitable buyer, the abundance of cheap local land for sale by the Necropolis Company (and others) probably depressed its value as a building site. It would be another few years before he could see a return on his investment – but that is a story for another week!

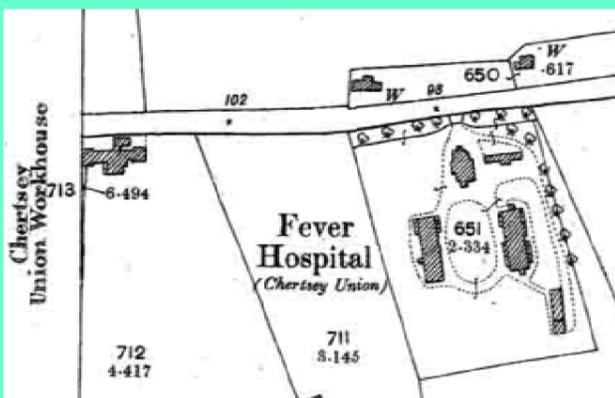


# HOSPITAL CARE IN THE EARLY 1880'S

By the early 1880's more ways of entertaining the patients and no doubt the staff at Brookwood Asylum were being tried. The cricket field was laid out in 1879 and indoor entertainment laid on in the winter, such as the Fancy Dress Ball illustrated here in 1881.

Meanwhile at Ottershaw another hospital was being built in 1881- the Isolation Hospital where those with infectious diseases could be detained away from the general population. Not that it was too 'isolated' as the site chosen was next door to the Chertsey Union Workhouse in Murray Road (named after Mr R H Murray of West Hall in Byfleet, a guardian of the workhouse who had paid for the construction of the chapel there in the 1860's)!

The Isolation Hospital was built by the Poor Law Guardians, with thirty-eight beds in three small wards (two of which were apparently usually filled with cases of scarlet fever) with a separate iron hut being provided for the smallpox cases.

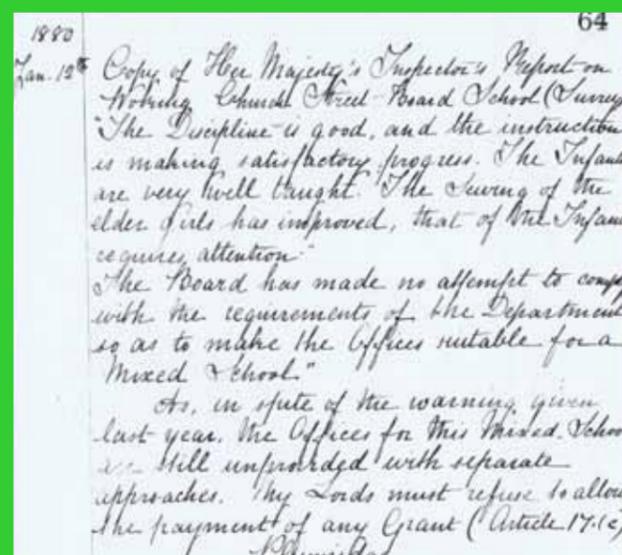


## WOKING SCHOOL BOARD REPORT - 'COULD TRY HARDER'

Work was also being carried out at some local schools in the early 1880's, although much more work was evidently still required, judging by the Log Book for Church Street School in Old Woking.

In 1880 the headmistress (Mrs Emily Plumridge) dutifully copied Her Majesty's Inspector's Report on the 12<sup>th</sup> January that year, recording that 'The discipline is good and the instruction is making satisfactory progress'.

The inspector also noted that 'The Infants are very well taught. The sewing of the elder girls has improved, that of the Infants requires attention', but she then noted (rather ominously



for the School Board), that 'the Board has made no attempt to comply with the requirements of the Department so as to make the offices suitable for a mixed school' and as a result, the grant this year was going to be withheld!

The previous year they had been given warning that the school should have 'separate approaches' but these had not been provided and it would be another three years before work extending Church Street School was carried out - although 1880 did see extensions added to the schools at Knaphill, St Johns and Maybury Board Schools.