

# THE FIRST PURPOSE BUILT MOSQUE IN BRITAIN (BEAT THAT LONDON & CARDIFF & LIVERPOOL)

Iain Wakeford 2015

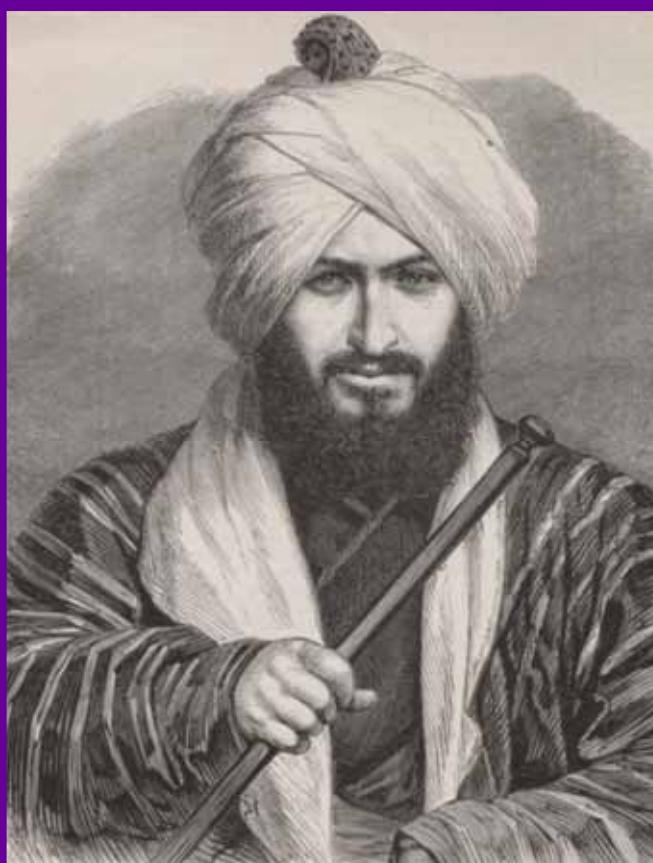
Sometimes Local History can be just that – purely local, the opening of a new school, the building of a chapel or church – but other times it can have a national or even international angle. This week, as we reach the year 1889, there are at least three pieces of local history that meet that criteria, making Woking known the world over in Victorian Times (even if it is forgotten in some places now)!



You may recall from earlier articles that in 1877 the Royal Dramatic College at Maybury closed and the buildings were sold to a property developer called Alfred Chabot. With plenty of undeveloped land still for sale nearby he soon found that the buildings were something of a 'white elephant', with his only solution to try to find another institution to take over the site. In 1884 he struck lucky when the Hungarian born, Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner purchased the site for his new 'Oriental Institute'.

As a child Leitner had shown a remarkable ability to learn and by the age of ten was apparently able to speak fluent Turkish and Arabic, as well as most European languages. When he was fifteen the British Commissariat in Crimea employed him as an interpreter (first class), giving him the rank of colonel, and when the war was over he went to King's Collage, London, where he became a lecturer (at the age of nineteen) in Arabic, Turkish and Modern Greek. By twenty-three he was a Professor in Arabic and Mohammedan Law and just three years later was appointed Principal of the Government College at Lahore which he quickly

Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner, founder of the Oriental Institute in Woking - Surrey's First University.



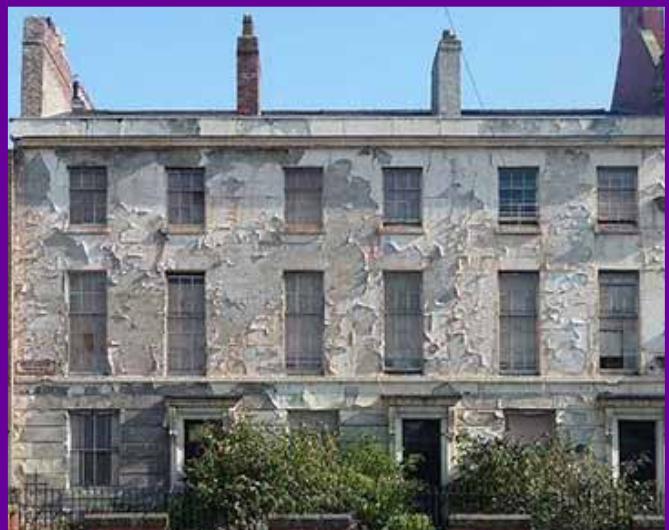
enhanced in status to become the University of the Punjab! He founded schools, libraries, literary associations and journals in India, but in the late 1870's decided to return to Europe to carry out research at Heidelberg University and to do work for the Prussian, Austrian and British Governments. It was probably about this time that he thought about setting up an 'Oriental Institute' – somewhere for Europeans to study oriental language and culture before they travelled to the east, and somewhere where those from the orient could stay and feel at home whilst studying here. He returned to England in 1881 and in 1883 apparently discovered 'Chabot's Folly' which he bought the follow year.

He turned the old buildings into his Oriental Institute – eventually an institution that was to award degrees in association with his old University in India (making Woking Surrey's first University Town). It was furnished with items he had collected from all over the Indian sub-continent, and he even set up a small museum, but it was the building of the Mosque, sponsored by the Shah Jehan, that most people remember him for now.



The al-Manar Centre - NOT founded in 1860 and NOT a purpose-built mosque, but a converted house.

I hope that everyone in Woking knows that our Mosque was the first purpose-built mosque in this country. The term 'purpose built' is important, as it was not actually the first mosque to be established in Britain. A mosque is known to have existed in Campden Hill Road in Notting Hill in 1886, but that was in a converted house. The city of Cardiff has also laid claim to an earlier mosque in the form of its al-Manar Centre (in the Cathays District of the city), but again that was in a converted building and the date of 1860 is now thought to be merely an error in the register of religious sites, rather than the true date of foundation. But there is another persistent claim for the honour of the possessing the first mosque in this country and that is for the Muslim Institute in Liverpool.



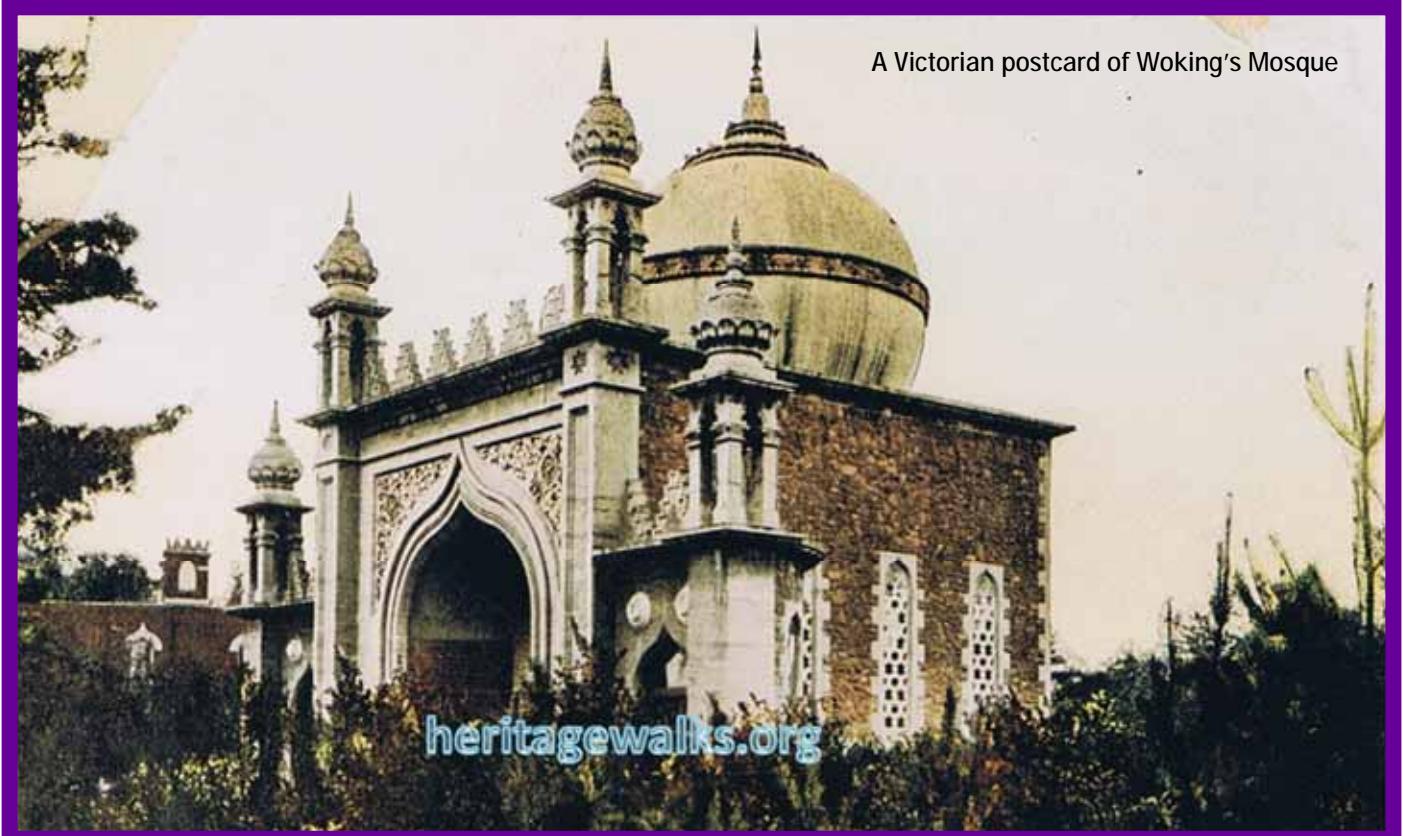
The Liverpool Muslim Mission (before restoration). Opened in a converted house at least two months AFTER Woking's Mosque.

How the Liverpudlian's can possibly think that theirs is the 'first', however, I do not know, as all the documentary evidence I have seen (some supplied or supported by Scoucers themselves) claim their building to have opened in December 1889 – at least two months AFTER the opening of Woking's Mosque – and again the Institute in Liverpool was not 'purpose built', but merely another converted house!

Woking really must reiterate its claim and put an end to the argument – Woking is the true home of Islam in this country and we should be proud of that.

Incidentally the gentleman that founded the Muslim Institute in Liverpool, William H Quilliam, who changed his name to Abdullah when he converted to Islam in 1887, is buried in Brookwood Cemetery!

I rest my case.



A Victorian postcard of Woking's Mosque



Another Victorian postcard showing the interior of the Shah Jehan Mosque.

THE INTERIOR VIEW.  
THE SHAH JEHAN MOSQUE, WOKING.

# FLORENCE MAYBRICK - ANOTHER LIVERPOOL LINK (WITH INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS) IN 1889

In the Woking Advertiser this was one of my shorter articles, but I have expanded it here to include much more of Florence Maybrick's insightful observations of life in Woking Female Prison.



**F**lorence Elizabeth Maybrick (nee Chandler) was born in Mobile, Alabama, in 1862 and died in obscurity in Connecticut in 1941, but in between, in 1889, she was probably the most famous person in the world.

In 1881 whilst travelling to England, Florence met James Maybrick a wealthy cotton broker from Liverpool. The two married and had two children, but the marriage was not a happy one for Florence with her husband having several affairs and, perhaps more crucially, Florence having at least one affair herself – with one of her husband's business-partners, a man called Alfred Brierley.

When her husband died in April 1889 under suspicious circumstances, Florence (already hated by her husband's family) was arrested for his murder and eventually convicted by Justice James Fitzjames Stevens (who we have already come across in 1885 in connection with the legalisation of Cremation).

So where does Woking come into all of this?

Fortunately for Florence her mother had friends in high places and they persuaded the Home Secretary to commute her death sentence to life imprisonment – a large part of which she served at the Female Prison in Woking.

Her time at Woking, as you can probably imagine, was not a happy one as she recorded in her book '*Mrs Maybrick's Own Story: My Fifteen Lost Years*' (1904).

*'As the train drew up at the station a crowd assembled. Outside stood a cab, to which I was at once conducted, and we drove through lovely woods; the scent of flowers was wafted by the breeze into what seemed to be a hearse which was bearing me on toward my living tomb. As we approached the prison the great iron gate swung open and the cab drove silently into the yard.'*

*'I was led across a near-by yard to a building*

*which stood some-what apart from the others, and is known as the infirmary.' 'In the grasp of what seemed to me a horrible nightmare, I found myself in a cell with barred windows, a bed and a chair.' 'I remained there perhaps half an hour when the door opened and I was commanded by a wardress to follow her. In a daze, I obeyed mechanically. We crossed the same yard again, and enter a door that led into a room containing only a fireplace, a table and a bath. Here I was told to take off my clothes, as those I had travelled in had to be sent back to the prison at Liverpool, where they belonged.'*

*'When I was dressed in the uniform to which the greatest stigma and disgrace is attached I was told to sit down. The wardress then stepped quickly forward, and with a pair of scissors cut off my hair at the nape of my neck. This act seemed above all others, to bring me a sense of my degradation, my utter helplessness.'*

After that Florence was returned to her cell in the infirmary where '*in an adjoining cell an insane woman was raving and weeping throughout the night, and I wondered whether in the years to come I should become like her'*.

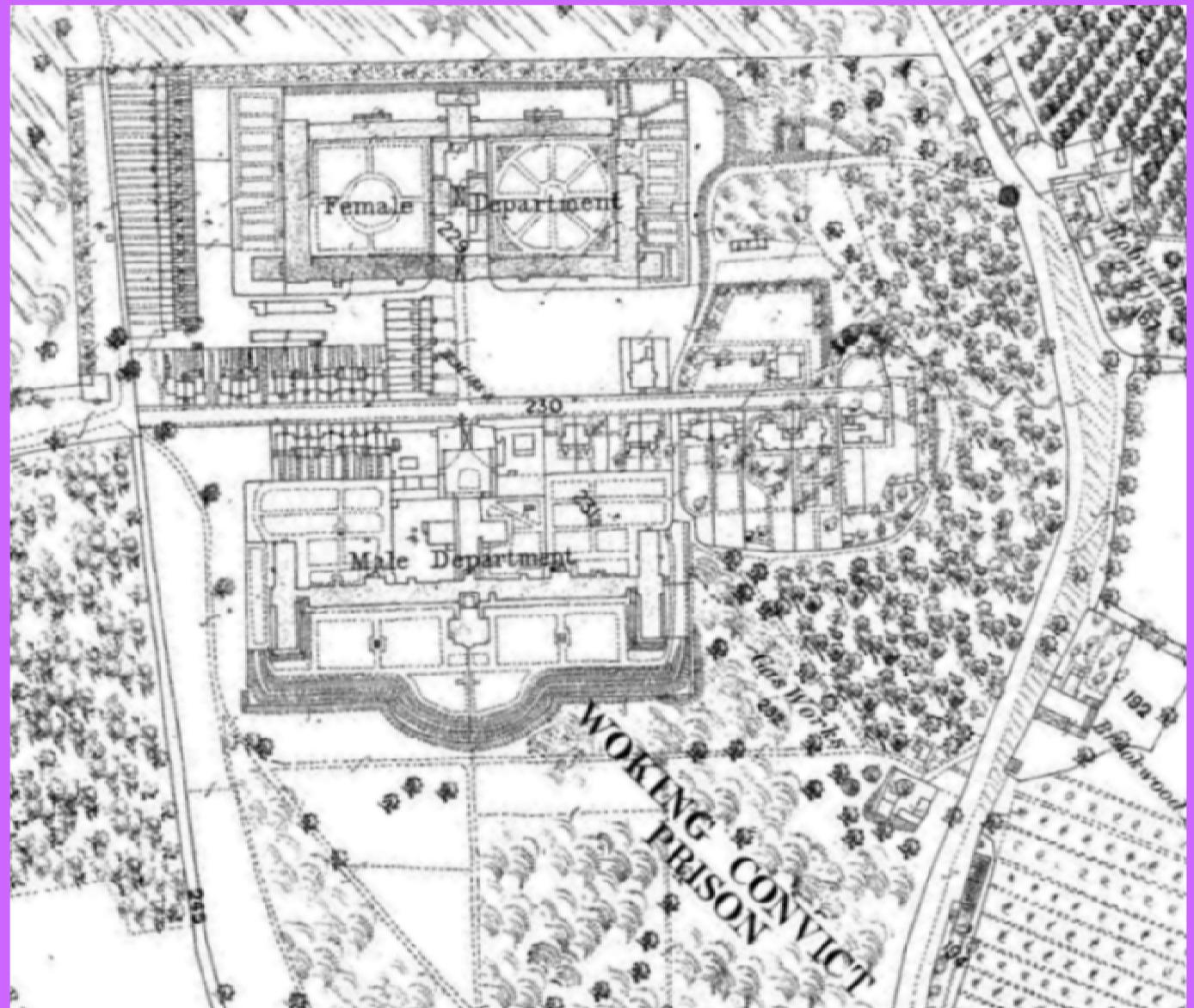
After a few nights in the infirmary wing she was taken into the main prison proper.

*'Once more I was led across the big yard'. 'Outside the sun was shining and the birds were singing. Without, picture a vast outline of frowning masonry. Within, when I had passed*

*the double outer gates and had been locked out and in in succession, I found myself in a central hall, from which ran cagelike galleries divided into tiers and landings, with a row of small cells on either side. The floors are of stone, the landings of slate, the railings of steel and the stairs of iron. Wire netting is stretched over the lowest tier to prevent prisoners from throwing themselves over in one of those frenzies of rage and despair of which every prison has its record'.*

She was taken to a door '*not more than three feet in width*' through which she could see '*by the dim light of a small window that was never cleaned, a cell six feet by four*' into which she was pushed by the wardress. '*There was nothing to sit upon but the cold, slate floor*'. That was to be her home, in solitary confinement, for nine months. '*My cell contained only a hammock rolled up in a corner, and three shelves let into the wall – no table nor stool. For a seat I was compelled to sit on the bedclothes*'.

After nine months in solitary she moved on to nine months in probation. '*I was taken from Hall G to Hall A*'. There were seven halls separated by two barred doors and a narrow passage and each hall had three wards. '*I looked around with a sense of intense relief. The cell was as large again as the one I had left. The floor was of wood instead of slate. It contained a camp bedstead on which was placed a so-called mattress, consisting of a sack the length of the bed, stuffed with coir, the fibre of the cocoanut. There were also*



*provided two coarse sheets, two blankets and a red counterpane. In a corner where three iron shelves let in the wall one above the other. On the top shelf was folded a cape, and on top of this there was a small, coarse straw bonnet. The second shelf contained a tin cup, a tin plate, a wooden spoon and a salt cellar. The third shelf was given up to a slate, on which might be written complaints or requests to the governor'. There was also a Bible, a prayer-book and hymn-book, and a book from the library. Near the door stood a log of wood, upright, fastened to the floor, and this was the only seat in the cell. It is immovable, and so placed that the prisoner may always be in view of the wardress. Near it, let into the wall, was a piece of deal board, which answered for a table. Through and almost opaque piece of square glass light shimered from the hall, the only means of lighting the cell at night; facing this, high up, was a barred window admitting light from the outside.*

The prison was not heated and Florence mentions '*the deadly chill creeps into one's bones; the bitter days of winter and the still bitter nights were torture – my hands and feet were covered in chilblains*'. On the halls there were a couple of fireplaces and a stove which was apparently constantly alight, but the solid doors of the cells mean that even if outside it was warm, inside it was still '*icy cold*'. It was particularly bad in winter when the water in the cells frequently froze.

Her book gives many insights into the layout and running of Woking Female Prison. In each cell was a bell by which the prisoner could summon a warden if she was ill at night. '*The moment it is set in motion it causes a black iron slab to project from the outer wall of her cell in the gallery*'. On the slab is the prisoner's number so that the warden can immediately tell who is in need. If required the doctor will be called and medicine given, or if required the prisoner taken to the infirmary.

Florence also describes the next phase of imprisonment – hard labour (or labor, as she is American)!

Florence's detailed description of prison life at Woking also includes notes on what happens to visitors.

'*A prisoner is allowed to receive a visit from her friends at intervals of six, four and two months according to her stage of service*'.

'*A visit may be forfeited by bad conduct, or delayed through a loss of marks. When a prisoner is entitled to receive a visitor she applies to the governor for permission to have the permit sent to the person she names; but if the police report concerning the designated visitor is unfavourable the request is not granted. When a prisoner's friends – three being the maximum – arrive at the prison gates they ring a bell. The gatekeeper views them through a grille and inquires their business. They show their permit; whereupon he notifies the chief matron, who in turn notifies the officer in charge of the prisoner.*'

'*Whenever my mother's visit was announced, accompanied by a matron I passed into a small, oblong room. There a gridded screen confronted me; a yard or two beyond is a second barrier identical in form and structure, and behind it I could see the form of my mother, and sitting in the space between the grilles, this additionally separating us, was a prison matron*'.

**I**n her book, Florence describes her days in solitary confinement.

*'It is six o'clock; I arise and dress in the darkness; I put up my hammock, and await breakfast. I hear the ward officer in the gallery without. I take a tin plate and a tin mug in my hands and stand before the cell door. Presently the door opens; a brown, whole-meal, six ounce load is placed upon the plate, the tin mug is taken and three-quarters of a pint of gruel is measured in my presence, then the mug is handed back in silence, and the door is closed and locked. After I have taken a few mouthfuls of bread I commence to scrub my cell. A bell rings, and my door is again unlocked. No word is spoken, because I know exactly what to do. I leave my cell and fall into single file, three paces in the rear of my nearest fellow-convict. All of us are alike in knowing what we have to do, and we march away silently to Divine service. We are criminals being punished, and our keepers march is like dumb cattle to the worship of God. To me the twenty minutes of its duration was as an oasis in a weary desert. When it was at an end I felt comforted and always a little more resigned to my fate. Chapel over, I filed back to my cell, for I am in solitary confinement, and may not enjoy the privilege of working in the company with my prison companions.'*

*Work I must, but I must work alone. Needlework and knitting fall to my lot. My task for the day is handed to me, and I sit in my cell plying my needle, with the consciousness that I must not indulge in an idle moment, for an unaccomplished task means loss of marks, and loss of marks means loss of letters and visits. As chapel beings at 8.30 I am back in my cell soon after nine, and the requirement is that I shall make one shirt a day – certainly not less than five shirts a week.'*

Only if she was ill, and certified as such by the doctor, would she be allowed to make just three or four shirts a week, otherwise she would be confined to her cell for twenty-four hours or put on a bread and water diet.

'*Then comes ten o'clock, and with it the governor with his escort. He inspects each cell, and if all is not as it should be the prisoner will hear of it*'.

'*With the coming and going of the governor the*

*'I entered upon the third stage, hard labor, when I was permitted to leave my cell to assist in carrying meals from the kitchen, and to sit at my door and converse with the prisoners in the adjoining cells for two hours daily.'*

*'At six o'clock the bell rings to rise. Half an hour later a second bell signifies to the officers that it is time to come on duty' 'At the order "unlock" she lets out the prisoners to empty their slops. This done, they are once more locked in, with the exception of three women who go down to the kitchens to fetch the cans of tea and loaves of bread which make up the prisoners' breakfast. At Woking the breakfast was of cocoa and coarse meal bread, while at Aylesbury (where Florence was later moved to) the breakfast consisted of tea and white bread'. 'The can is carried by two women up two or three flights of stairs, according to the location of her ward, and the bread by one woman only. Each can contains fourteen*

*monotony returned for a while to stagnation. Presently, however, the prison bell rings again. I know what the clangor means, and mechanically lay down my work. It is the hour for exercise and I put on my bonnet and cape. One by one the cell doors of the ward are opened. One by one we come out from our cells and fall into single file. Then, with a ward officer in charge, we march into the exercise yard.'*

*'This yard is perhaps forty feet square and there are thirty-five of us to expand its "freedom". The inclosure is oppressively repulsive. Stone-flagged, hemmed within ugly walls, it gives one a hideous feeling of compression. It seems more like a bearpit than an airing ground for human beings'.*

*'When the one hour for exercise is over, in a file as before, we tramp back to our cells and our work. Confined as we are in our narrow, gloomy cells, this exercise hour, dull as it is, is our only opportunity for a glimpse of the sky and for a taste of outdoor life, and was some relief to an otherwise almost unbearable day.'*

Of course the exercise took place in all weathers and as Florence later said '*on rainy days I would come in with my shoes and stockings wet through, and as I possessed only one pair of shoes and one pair of stockings, I had to keep them on, wet as they were.*'

*'At noon the midday meal. The first sign of its approach is the sound of the fatigue party of prisoners bringing the food from the kitchen into the ward. I hear the ward officer passing with the weary group from cell to cell, and presently she will reach my door. My food is handed to me, then the door is closed and double locked. In the following two hours, having finished my meal, I can work or read. At two o'clock the fatigue party again goes on its mechanical rounds; the cell door is again unlocked, this time for the collection of dinner cans'. 'Work is then resumed until five o'clock, when gruel is again served as at breakfast, with half an hour for its disposal. From that time on until seven o'clock, more work, when again is heard the clang of the prison bell, and with it the end of our monotonous day. I take down my hammock and once more await the opening of the door' 'With the opening of our cells we go forward and each places her broom outside the door. So shall be known that we each have been visited in our cells before the locking of our doors and gates for the night.'*

quarts of tea and the bread-basket holds thirty pounds or more of bread. To a prisoner with strong muscles it may cause no distress, but in the case of myself and others equally frail the physical strain was far beyond our strength, and left us utterly exhausted after the task.

The breakfast was served at seven o'clock, when the officers returned to their messroom to take theirs. At 7.30 a bell rang again and the officer returned to their respective wards. At ten minutes to eight the order was given to "Unlock". Once more the doors were opened. Then followed the order "Chapel" and each women stood at her door with Bible, payer-book and hymn-book in her hand. At the words "Pass-on" they file one behind the other into the chapel where a wardress from each ward sits with her back to the altar that she may be able the better to watch those under her charge, and see that they do not speak. After a service of twenty minutes the prisoners file

*back to their cells, place their books on the lower shelf, and with a drab cape and a white straw hat stand in readiness for the next order, "To your doors". This given they descend into the hall and pass out to their respective places of work.'*

*'The work for the first offenders, who are called the 'Star Class' consists of labor in the kitchen, the mess and the officers' quarters. Six months after I entered upon the third stage I was put to work in the kitchen. My duties were as follows: to wash ten cans, each holding four quarts; to scrub one table, twenty feet in length, two dressers, twelve feet in length; to wash five hundred dinner tins; to clean knives; to wash a sack of potatoes; to assist in serving the dinners, and to scrub a piece of floor twenty by ten feet. Besides myself there were eight other women on hard labor in the kitchen. Our day commenced at 5.30 am and continues until 5.30 pm. A half hour at breakfast-time, twenty minutes at chapel, one hour and a half at midday meal, and half an hour after tea, summed up our leisure. The work was hard and rough. The combined heat of the coppers, the stove and*

*Because of her health Florence occasionally ended up in the infirmary.*

*'The infirmary stands a little detached from the prison grounds. It has several wards containing from six to fifteen beds and several cells for cases that require isolation. The beds are placed on each side of the room, and are covered with blue and white counterpane. At the head of each is a shelf on which stand two cups, a plate and a diet card. In the middle of each room is a long deal table. On the walls are a few Scriptural pictures.*

*'which was the only day a change of any kind of underwear could be obtained, no matter in what condition it might be. Therefore, the majority of the inmates in the winter-time seldom had dry feet, if there was much rain or snow'*

*'There are four stages, each of nine months' duration: first solitary confinement; second probation; while the third and fourth stages are not specially designated. During the first two stages the prisoner is clothed in brown, at the third stage in green and the fourth in navy blue. Every article worn by the prisoner, or in use by her, is stamped with a "brown arrow", the convict's crest'.*

Florence Maybrick was at Woking Women's Prison for just over seven years before being transferred to Aylesbury and eventually released in 1904. Her story has been the subject of numerous books and documentaries – most modern ones concentrating on allegations that James Maybrick could have been 'Jack the Ripper' – but her time in Woking has been largely forgotten. It shouldn't be.

## SAMUEL MORTON PETO - WOKING'S FORGOTTEN SON



**O**n the 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1889, one of Woking's most famous sons died – he was Samuel Morton Peto.

I know, he is not all that well-known now (even a supposedly all-embracing on-line encyclopaedia doesn't list him amongst Woking's famous), but I bet you are familiar with at least some of his work!

Peto was born in 1809 at Whitmoor House in Sutton Green and baptised in St Peter's Church, Old Woking. In his teens he was apprenticed to his uncle Henry Peto who ran a building contracting firm in London, which at the age of twenty-one Samuel inherited along with his cousin Thomas Grissell. The two went on to build numerous buildings in London including Hungerford Market (1832), The Lyseum (1834), The Reform Club (1836), Nelson's Column (1843) and some of the early work on the new Houses of Parliament

(hopefully not the bits that are now going to cost billions to repair)!

In the early 1840's Peto moved to Suffolk purchasing Somerleyton Hall near Lowestoft – a town that he helped make into a seaside resort and major port with the reconstruction of the harbour.

With his brother-in-law, Edward Betts, he also worked on the emerging railways, building a section of the Great Western Railway, a large part of the South Eastern Railway, constructing Curzon Street Station in Birmingham, and at the outbreak of the Crimean War joining forces with the well-known railway engineer Thomas Brassey to build the Grand Crimean Central Railway from Balaklava to Sevastopol.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> December 1854 the first shipment of materials and equipment left Liverpool for Crimea and by the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1855 the line

was opened to the main camp – an incredible feat of engineering.

By then he was an eminent Liberal M.P. representing Norwich (where his bust can be found at the station), but he had to resign his seat to work on the Crimean Railway even though the construction was carried out 'at cost' with no profit accruing to him or his company.

As well as the railways mentioned above, Peto with various partners also constructed railways in Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Norway, Russia and South America, but in 1866 his bankers – Overend Gurney & Co (who had invested heavily in the railways) went into liquidation and Peto was forced to declare himself bankrupt.

Woking should be proud of Samuel Morton Peto and what he achieved. Perhaps it is time for a memorial to be erected here.