

1899 - WOKING FIRE BRIGADE & THE COUNCIL OFFICE FIRE

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A couple of weeks ago we left the story of the Woking Volunteer Fire Brigade with a meeting in December 1897 demanding Woking Council provide them with a steam-powered fire engine. The council, you may recall, had mucked about ordering and then cancelling the engine several times, until eventually in November 1897 the captain of the brigade, Charles Sherlock, and seventeen of his men had resigned in protest. They were persuaded to return following the intervention of the Clerk to the Council, Robert Mossop, but upon their return the chairman of the Fire Brigade Committee issued a public reprimand with the result that the Knaphill section resigned again – this time permanently.

The council had recently invested a lot of rate-payers money on improving the districts roads and footpaths, on providing street lighting and on the new sewage works, but it was probably their refusal to spend about £400 on a fire engine when they proposed in January 1897 to build new council offices for themselves at a cost of £4,500, that was the straw that broke the camel's back!

The council had bought land in Commercial Road in February 1895 from the Peter Locke-King for £450, but following the protest meeting in December 1897 the council postponed their plans for the new council



The fire station, built in February 1899, on the plot of land that Woking Urban District Council bought in 1895 for their council offices.

Later, in the 1920's, the council built a new fire station on the land behind - on the corner of Church Street & Percy Street - originally occupied by St Dunstan's Church.



offices and decided instead to continue to rent the two small offices and a committee room above Ashby's Bank on the corner of Chertsey Road and The Broadway for £100 per annum.

In the elections in March 1898 several of the councillors who were against spending money on the fire engine were not re-elected, with the result that as soon as the new council met they ordered an engine, at a cost of just £430.

In February 1899 they also built a new fire-station at the back of their land in Commercial Road that originally been earmarked for the council offices, but because they had messed

around so long it seems that the manufacturers had already sold the original 'Woking' engine to Ipswich Corporation. The result was that the new steam-powered fire engine did not arrive until August 1899, a few weeks after a massive fire broke out in the town – when the council offices above Ashby's Bank burned down!

It was a lovely hot summer's day. There were no fires alight in any of the rooms. The bank below appears to have been largely undamaged by the fire. It was only the council offices that were destroyed as the poor local volunteer brigade were unable to tackle the flames!

In June 1899 the Council Offices caught fire and the Woking Brigade without their steam-powered fire engine could not (or would not) put out the flames.



Whether they would have been able to save the offices with the new engine may be debatable however, as in April 1900 their response to a fire at the Woking Laundry in Maybury Road sounds like a script from a Charlie Chaplin movie.

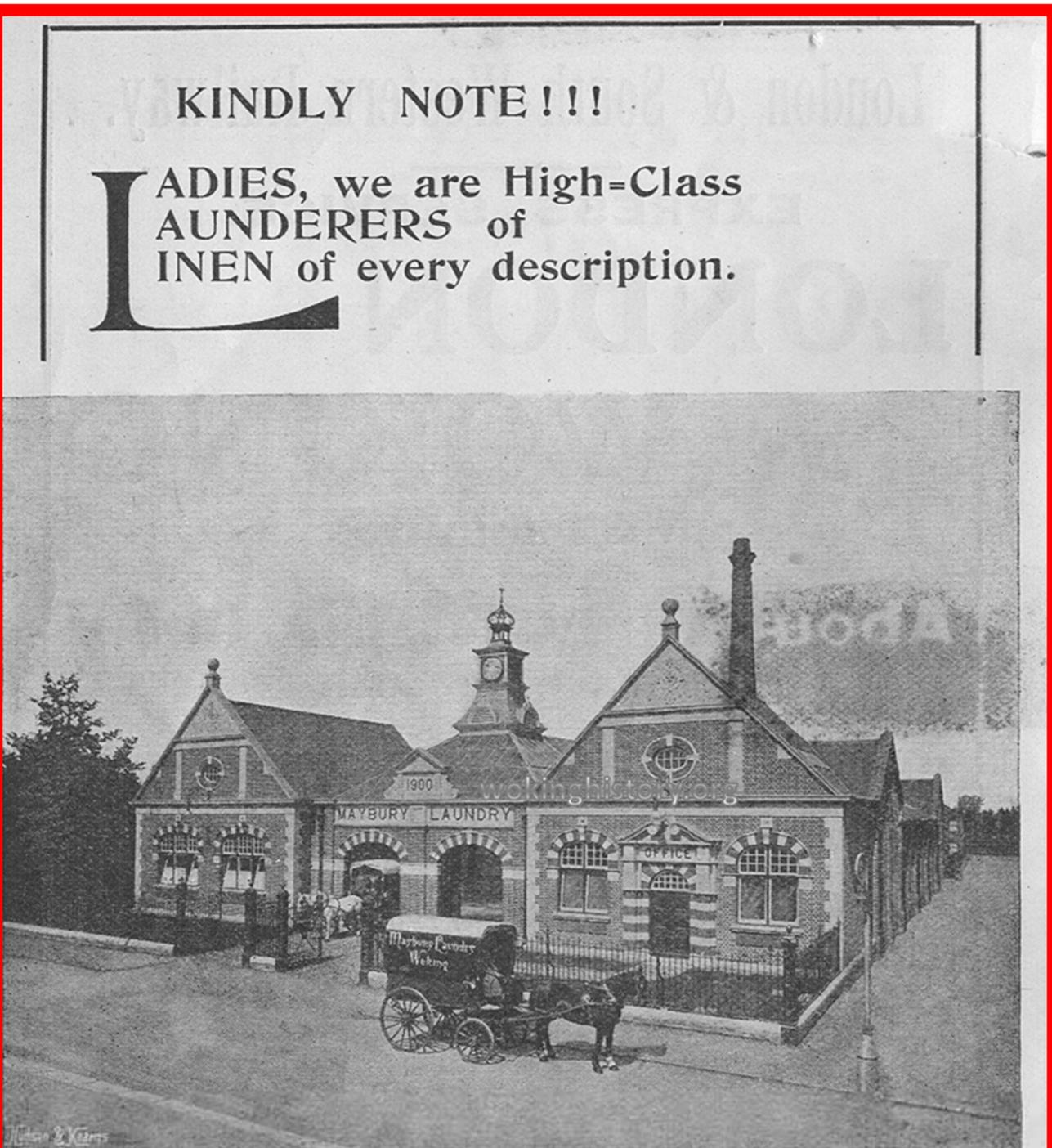
The brigade attended the fire with both their new steam-powered fire engine and the old handcart and pump. But a spark from their engine set the handcart and equipment on fire and in their haste to save their property (rather than the laundry), they apparently ran over and burst the hosepipes, cutting off the water supply!

The following year a fire at a timber yard where Dukes Court is now was only attended by the crew from Old Woking (with their handcart), as the Woking brigade (at the other end of Commercial Road) were apparently blissfully unaware that there was a fire on their doorstep. Communications, it seems, was not one of the Woking Fire Brigades best qualities.

Meanwhile the council moved into temporary accommodation above No.13 The Broadway before returning to the offices above the bank. There they stayed for a few years until eventually plans could be drawn up for the new offices in Commercial Road – right in front of the little new fire station.

If they couldn't guarantee that 'lightning wouldn't strike twice', they could at least ensure that if the new council offices did catch light, there would be no excuse this time for the fire brigade to be unaware (or unable) to put out the flames!

Both the bank (below) on the corner of The Broadway and Chertsey Road, and the Laundry (right) on the corner of Maybury Road and Kings Road, were rebuilt after their fires - although neither building has survived subsequent redevelopment.



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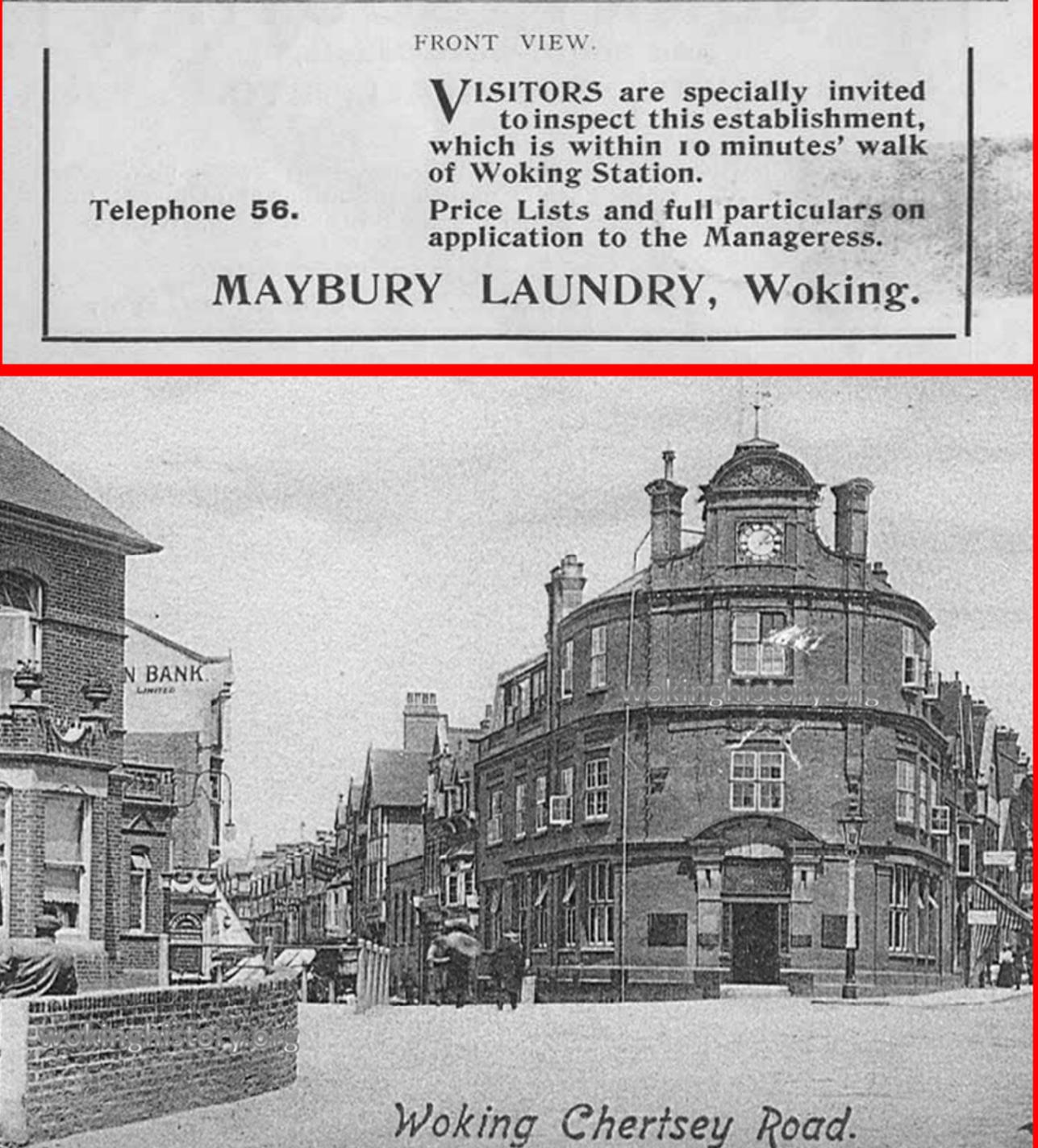
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1899 - THE BUILDING OF WOKING'S SEWAGE WORKS

Whilst Woking Council were debating spending £430 on a steam-powered fire engine, and delaying spending £4,500 on new offices for themselves, they were forging ahead with the £50,000 scheme to provide a new sewage system for the town.

Again you may recall from previous articles that the council had had some problems coming up with a suitable sewerage scheme. They had rejected the first prize winner of a competition for a works at Harelands in favour of the second placed scheme involving pumping the waste of Woking into neighbouring Horsell, but this too had eventually been rejected and the fourth place scheme of Messrs John Taylor & Santo Crimp approved (what happened to the third place scheme I do not know).

The Taylor & Crimp scheme was for a 'gravitational works' to be built near Woking Park Farm in Old Woking. The land was owned by the Earl of Onslow who, as you can imagine, was not too keen on the idea. He claimed if the works were built it would seriously reduce the value of his land overlooking the Hoe Valley, and prevent him from selling it for development. Without his consent the council was forced in February 1896 to seek powers under the Land Clause Act to compulsory purchase the site. Somehow the good Earl arrived too late at the House of Commons hearing into the case and his petition against the scheme was refused.

The Council immediately went ahead with the scheme, paying £8,250 for the forty-two acres site, although it was not until November 1899



Building the Woking Sewage Works in Carters Lane, Old Woking in 1899.

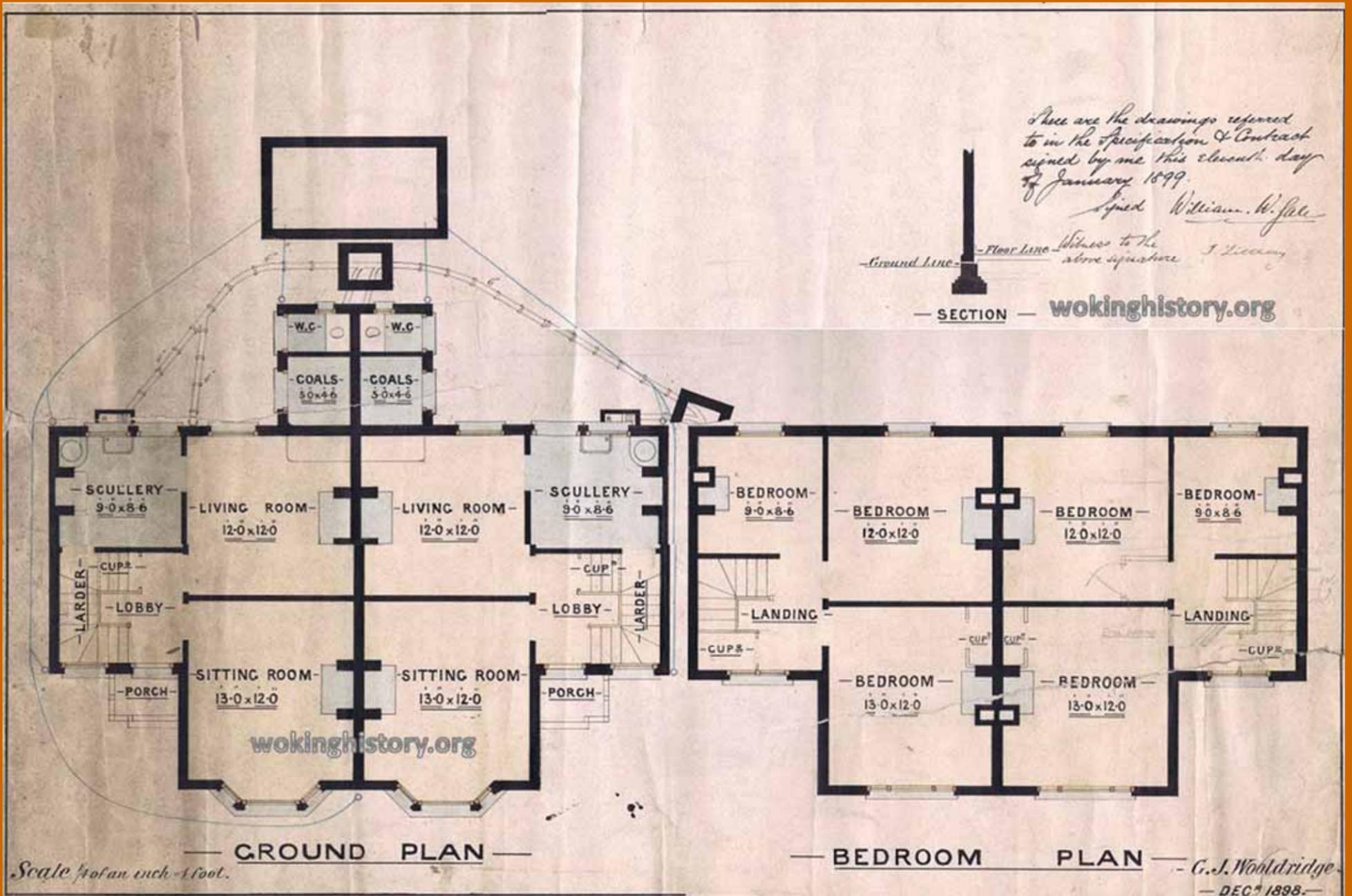
that the works and some 24½ miles of sewers were complete. The total cost was about £64,000, but in the end it was probably worth every penny as its position in one of the lowest lying parts of the district meant that most of the sewerage from the town could simply flow down to the site, without the need for too many expensive pumping stations.

By the autumn of 1900 almost every property in the Station and Maybury ward were connected to the new mains and already extensions to the original plan were being contemplated. That work would take over a decade to complete (and more than two times what the original scheme cost), but the fact

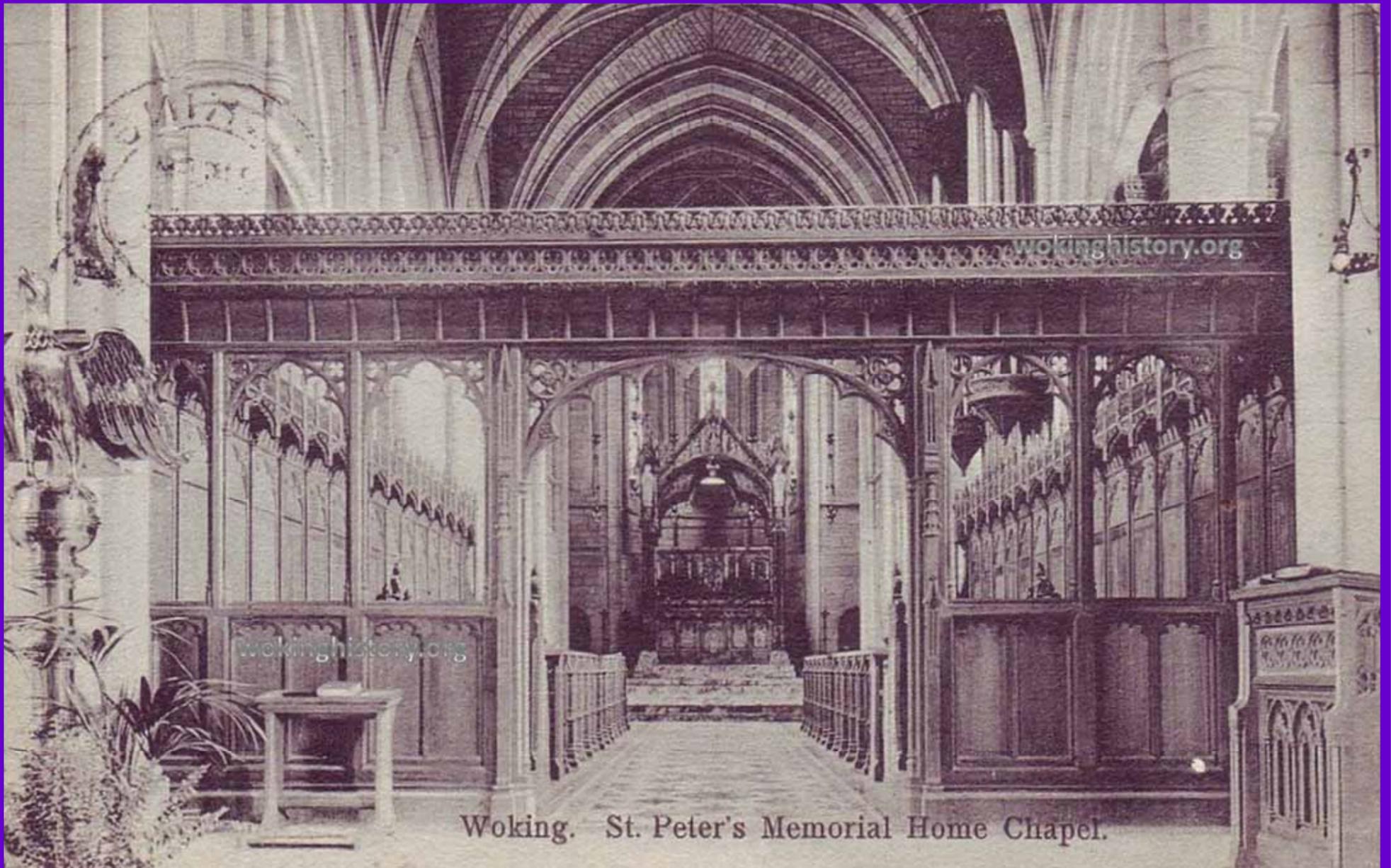
that the Old Woking site could be easily extended and the sewage from virtually the whole of the original Woking Urban District plus Horsell Parish accommodated, meant that it was far more economical than any of the previously proposed schemes would have been.

The fact that it may also have prevented the development of housing on what is now the Hoe Bridge Golf Course could be considered an added bonus.

Plans for the Sewage Works houses in 1898.



1899 - THE OPENING OF THE ST PETER'S MEMORIAL HOME CHAPEL AT MAYBURY



Woking. St. Peter's Memorial Home Chapel.

In previous weeks we have also looked at the building of the St Peter's Memorial Home and Convent at Maybury Hill (and its successor the St Columbus House retreat and conference centre).

The main building, built in 1883, was designed by John Loughborough Pearson (the architect of Truro Cathedral), and in 1897 he returned to the site to discuss with the Sisters their ideas for a new chapel on the Sandy Lane side of the site. He had to inform them that their ambitions were a little too big (for the site and their finances), but nevertheless his plans for the St Peter's Chapel were magnificent. Sadly in December that year Mr Pearson died, but his son Frank (another experienced architect) took on the project overseeing the building and designing much of the interior decoration himself.

The foundation stone was laid in July 1898, with the side chapel (St Andrew's) completed and opened on the 30th November 1899 and the main chapel ready for dedication on the following 30th June.

According to Elizabeth Cuthbert in her book *In St Peter's Shadow – The Life and Work of the Community of St Peter Woking* 'The Warden dedicated the high altar to St Peter and to the memory of the Founderess, Rosamira Lancaster, and said the first Mass there. Later the dedication of the whole chapel with High Mass followed, Sisters and Clergy processing into the Chapel and Dr Palmer played a small temporary organ. The service was followed by lunch for guests and Associates, numbering up to two-hundred, in a tent in the forecourt of the Home'.

