

# THE MYSTERY OF THE NUTHURST MURDER

Iain Wakeford 2016



Nuthurst on Robin Hood Road was the scene of Mr Rougier's murder in August 1926.

Last month we looked at what was probably Woking's most famous murder-case – the Blue Anchor Murder of 1924 – investigated by the local superintendent of police, Ernest Boshier and the great forensic scientist Sir Bernard Spilsby. But it was not the only case that these two gentlemen worked on, and in the late 1920's the press would be back in Woking reporting on the 'Nuthurst Murder' at Knaphill.

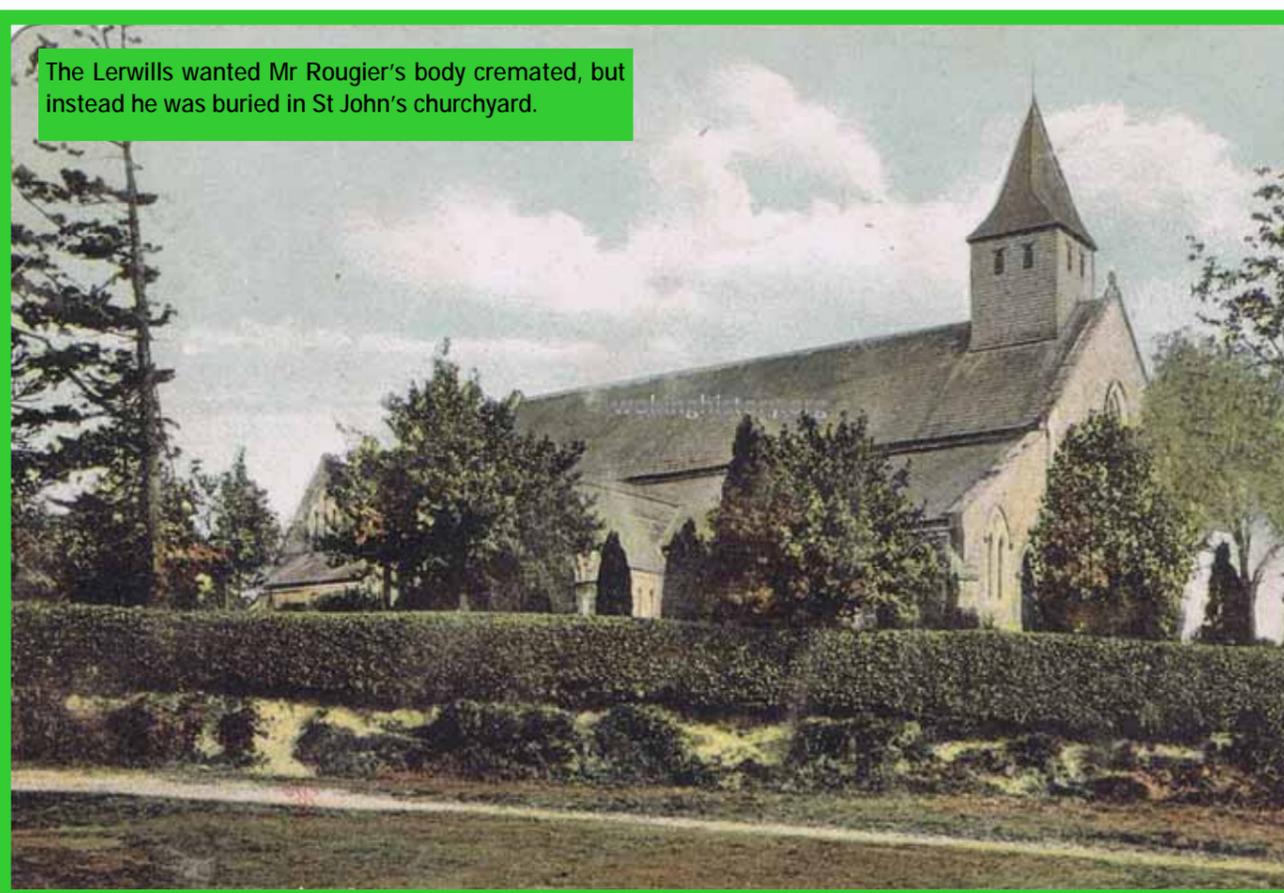
On the 14<sup>th</sup> August 1926 Mr Hilary Rougier, a gentleman from Guernsey lodging with Mr & Mrs Lerwill at Nuthurst on Robin Hood Road in Knaphill, died at the age of 77. He had been unwell almost since he first came to Woking and the local doctor, Dr Brewer, apparently did not suspect foul-play, noting that he died of a severe cerebral haemorrhage. If the death was not immediately suspicious the actions of the Lerwills was although fortunately the cremation that they wanted to take place immediately was not allowed and the body was instead buried in St John's Churchyard where it actually remained for a couple of years.

In the meantime Mr Rougier's will, which had been drawn up in 1919, was read. In it he left £6,000 to his sister and niece, but when it came to paying out his inheritance it was found that there was only £80 left in his account. In the couple of months between coming to stay in Knaphill and his death payments of between £40 and £950 had apparently been made out to the Lerwills – gifts they said, although it soon turned out that the cheques had been forged.

Mr Rougier's body was exhumed and examined by Sir Bernard Spilsby. He found small traces of morphine in all his organs, and concluded that he must have been poisoned. Nuthurst had been the home of the wonderfully named 'Dr Hope', with Mrs Lerwill, his daughter, now looking after it. The good doctor had kept medicines, including morphine in a locked cupboard and although the key was allegedly 'lost' it was soon found that it was easy to gain access by means of undoing the screws on the hinge!

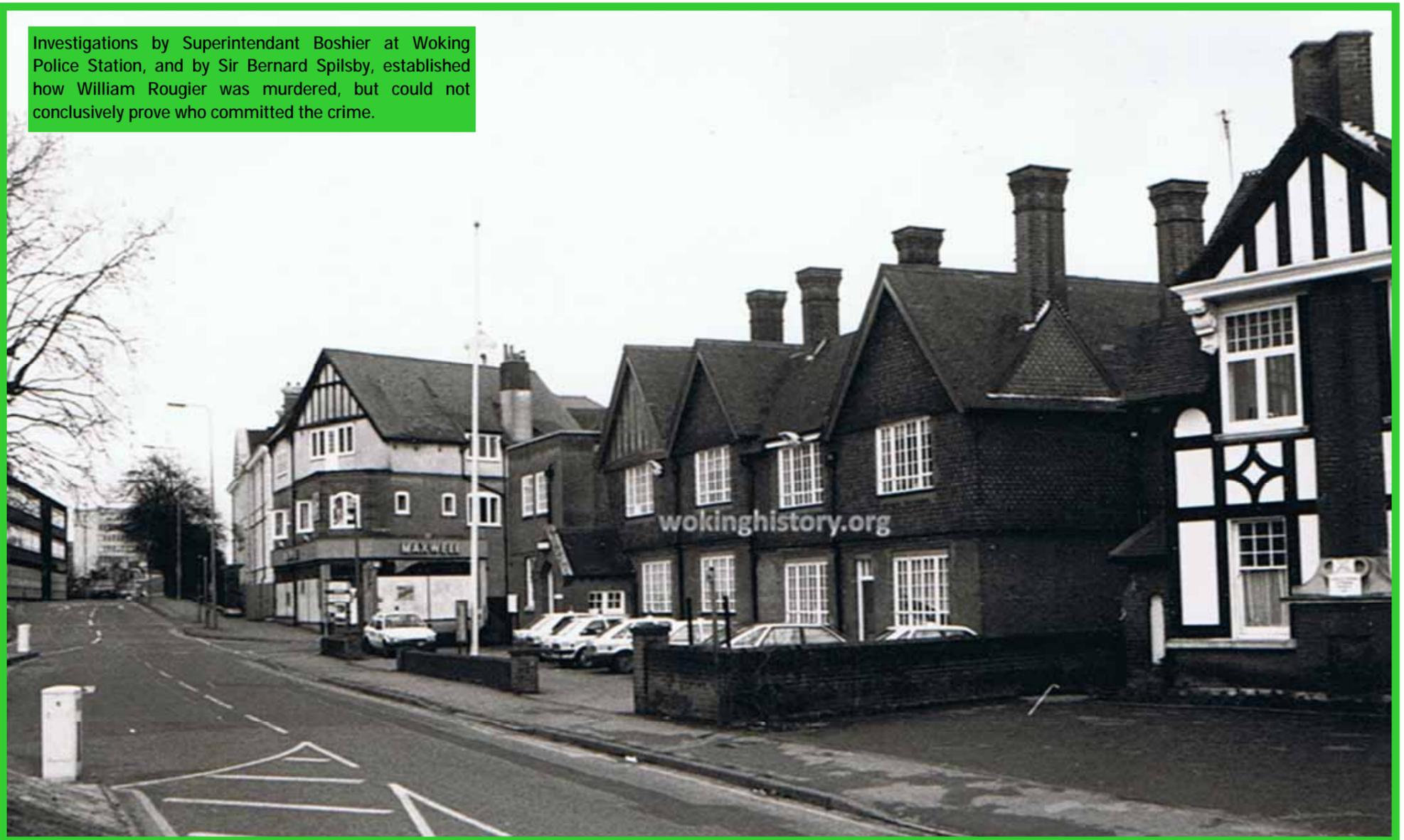
A jury returned a verdict of unlawful death on Hilary Rougier, but crucially the Lerwills were never tried or convicted and when a couple of national newspapers suggested that the Lerwills were involved in the murder, William Lerwill sued them for £5,000 for libel – a not inconsiderable sum in the late 1920's.

Superintendent Boshier, who investigated the case retired in April 1930, having been given the 'King's Police Medal for Meritorious Service' in connection with this and the Blue Anchor



The Lerwills wanted Mr Rougier's body cremated, but instead he was buried in St John's churchyard.

Investigations by Superintendent Boshier at Woking Police Station, and by Sir Bernard Spilsby, established how William Rougier was murdered, but could not conclusively prove who committed the crime.

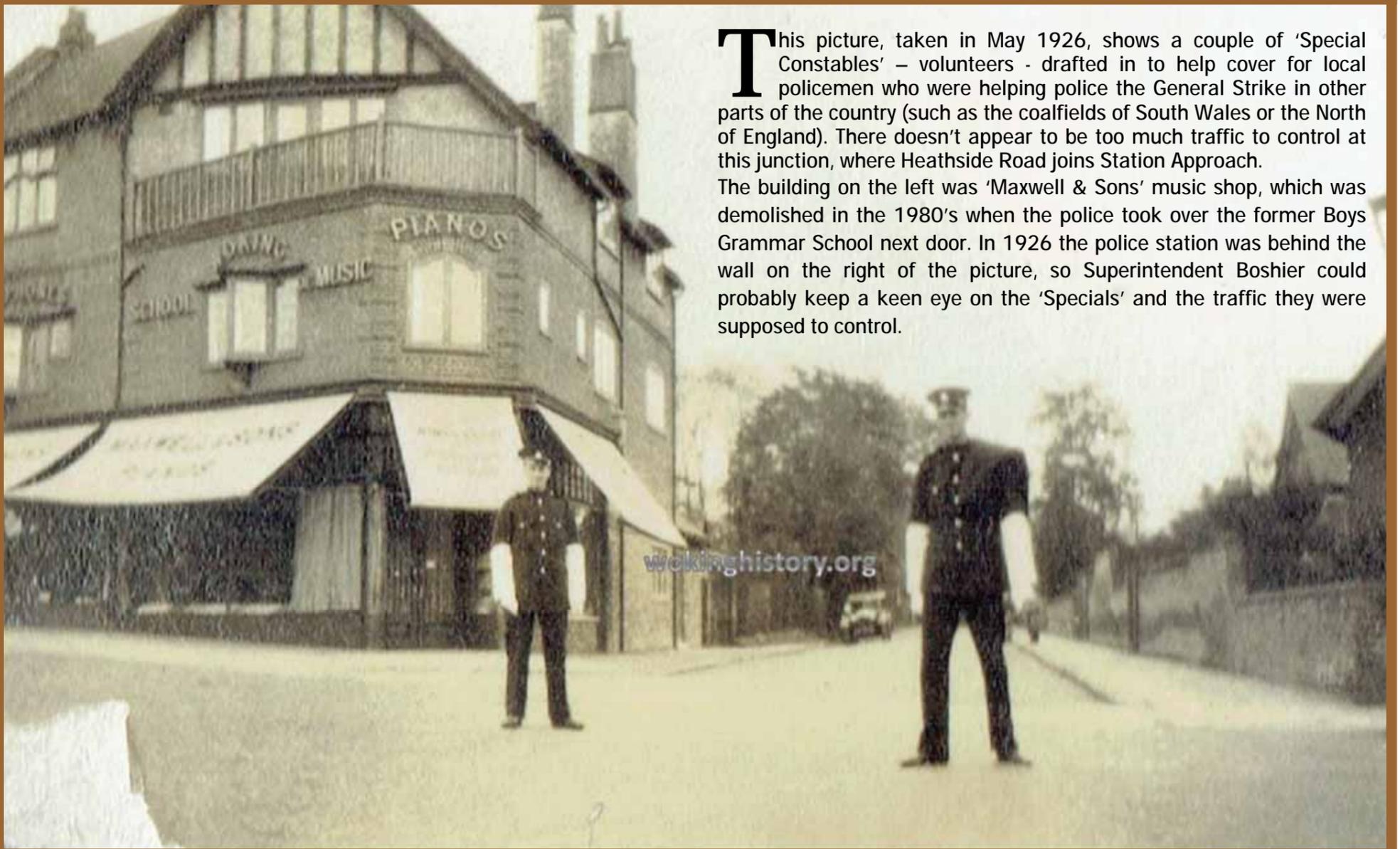


Murder cases, with a cheque from the townsfolk of Woking to the value of £250 and a silver plate and teapot from the local magistrates in gratitude for his long service in the town.

Having secured his libel money from the newspapers, William Lerwill left his wife and child and moved to Canada, but in 1933 he returned almost penniless. He was arrested in Devon for a series of frauds, allegedly forging

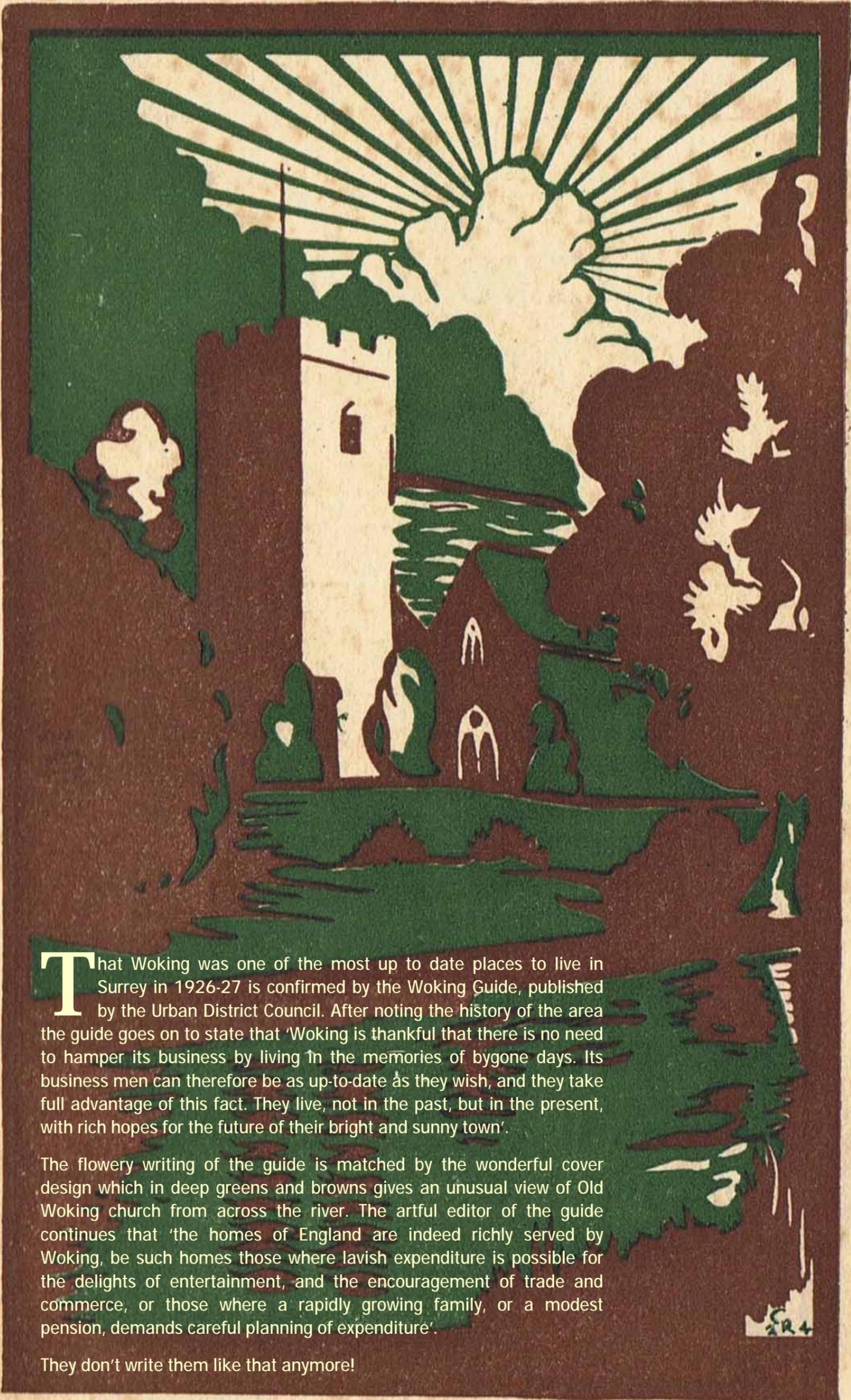
signatures on cheques, but again he was not convicted, although this time it was because he killed himself (with poison) in March 1934 whilst awaiting trial!

## SPECIALS DURING THE GENERAL STRIKE



**T**his picture, taken in May 1926, shows a couple of 'Special Constables' – volunteers - drafted in to help cover for local policemen who were helping police the General Strike in other parts of the country (such as the coalfields of South Wales or the North of England). There doesn't appear to be too much traffic to control at this junction, where Heathside Road joins Station Approach.

The building on the left was 'Maxwell & Sons' music shop, which was demolished in the 1980's when the police took over the former Boys Grammar School next door. In 1926 the police station was behind the wall on the right of the picture, so Superintendent Boshier could probably keep a keen eye on the 'Specials' and the traffic they were supposed to control.



**T**hat Woking was one of the most up to date places to live in Surrey in 1926-27 is confirmed by the Woking Guide, published by the Urban District Council. After noting the history of the area the guide goes on to state that 'Woking is thankful that there is no need to hamper its business by living in the memories of bygone days. Its business men can therefore be as up-to-date as they wish, and they take full advantage of this fact. They live, not in the past, but in the present, with rich hopes for the future of their bright and sunny town'.

The flowery writing of the guide is matched by the wonderful cover design which in deep greens and browns gives an unusual view of Old Woking church from across the river. The artful editor of the guide continues that 'the homes of England are indeed richly served by Woking, be such homes those where lavish expenditure is possible for the delights of entertainment, and the encouragement of trade and commerce, or those where a rapidly growing family, or a modest pension, demands careful planning of expenditure'.

They don't write them like that anymore!

# WOKING