

HORSELL'S EXPANDING SHOPPING CENTRE

Iain Wakeford 2018



A hundred years ago Horsell didn't really have a 'shopping centre', just a few scattered shops in what was then called Horsell Street

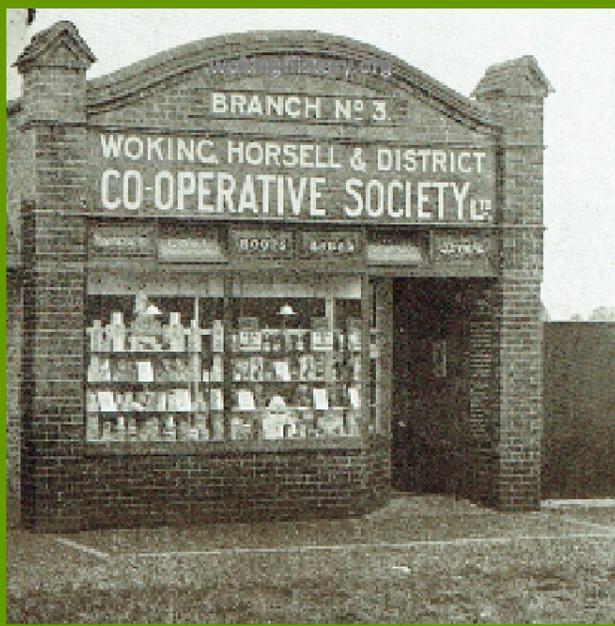
Early in 1968 an advertising feature in a local newspaper noted the 'structural changes' taking place in Horsell village centre, as modern new buildings were being constructed in the High Street. New shops in the 'attractive Maple Court with its big forecourt, a new bank and businesses about to move either away altogether or into different homes within the village', meant that at last Horsell was gaining a proper 'shopping centre' – rather than the scattered collection of corner shops it had once had.

A hundred years ago in the High Street (then known as Horsell Street) you would have found just a few little local businesses – Brownjohn's general stores (officially listed as a 'grocer, pork butcher, glass and earthenware dealer') next to the Crown; the Post Office and drapery run by Miss Spooner (where Archie Benstead would later establish his cycle shop and garage); Hart's the butcher's almost opposite; The Model Dairy of J Holmes & Son (in the shop by the path to Manor Road), with Vokes' bakers & confectioners across the road in the little shop

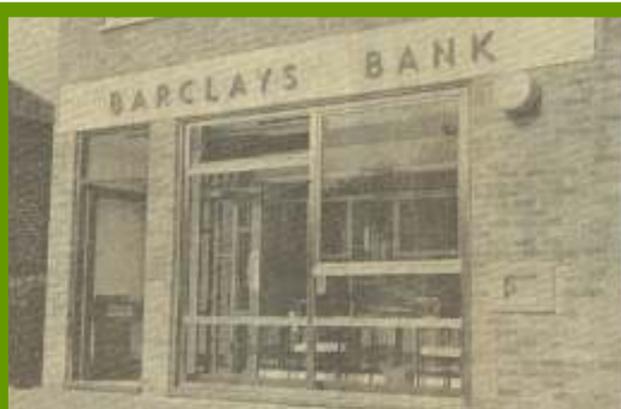
next to Escairs. There were other 'corner shops' elsewhere (notably the Woking, Horsell & District Co-operative Society's store in Well Lane), but there was no real 'centre' to the village.

That began to change in the mid 20th century with the building of the seven new shops by the entrance to Meadway Drive (and the conversion of some of the old houses opposite into businesses), but it was in the late 1960's that Horsell really began to establish itself as a shopping centre.

The most significant shop was probably in Well Lane, where the Woking & District Co-operative Society established their third 'village' branch.



By the 1960's Horsell was starting to get a proper village centre, with the shops near the corner with Meadway Drive and the converted houses opposite.



The construction of Barclays Bank in 1967 and Maple Court in 1968 marked the beginning of the development of Horsell's new shopping centre.

Perhaps the first major indication of the village's new status was the opening in September 1967 of Barclays Bank at number 109 High Street.

I don't know how the Woking Advertiser would nowadays report on a bank opening, but back then the report sounded more like an item from the cat-walk.

'Situated in the main shopping area, the branch has a modern appearance, being constructed of glass and stainless steel in faced brickwork'. 'Inside, simplicity of design is the keynote. The counter, which provides positions for three tills, is constructed of Australian walnut, faced with panels against an ebonised background. The cashiers' cabinets are emphasised by turquoise vynide and black linoleum covers the counter top'. 'To reduce noise level to a minimum white acoustic Travertone ceiling tiles are suspended over the whole of the banking hall. Recessed fluorescent lighting in the ceiling highlights the walls, which are of white emulsion paint, with one short length of mustard and the main flanking wall in dark green Canotex cloth. Silver birch vinyl flooring covers the floor'.

I could go on and tell you about the 'Norse blue fitted carpet' and other decoration in the Managers office (they did in 1967), but from my point of view it was not so much how it was built, but who built it, that matters, as once again (as in the Skeet & Jeffe's building mentioned last week), a number of local firms

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- 10 LP Records, "Music for Pleasure" at 12/6 each

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In 1969 the new Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society supermarket (now the Pet shop) opened opposite Maple Court (which can be seen in the background).

were involved in the construction and fitting out, including Skeet's, W.L. Sirman (lighting and electrical work) of Goldsworth Road and the main contractor, G Loveland Ltd of Chertsey Road, Woking.

Across the road one of the first to open in the new shops of Maple Court were W.L. Mead's hairdressers, which had started sixty years previously as a newsagents on the corner of the High Street and Thornash Road, before the Hair salon was added in 1945. They were joined by Horsell Hardware, a completely new venture in the village, the Silver Spring laundrette and more controversially, Horsell's first betting shop.

At the time there was controversy about a proposed new supermarket to be built for the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society opposite Maple Court - which many thought was too large for the village - whilst for others the problem of parking was the cause for most concern.