

WOKING GRANGE

HISTORY

WOKING HOMES Southern Railway Servant's Orphanage 1885 - 1988

Oriental Road is situated at the Front of Woking Railway Station on the opposite side to the town and shopping complex. Even then - all those years ago - town planners got it wrong and the town as most people know it 'sprang up' in the back yard. For those of you who know the station - it explains the sweeping car park and entrance hall by platforms 4 & 5, whilst the townside at platform 1 just tumbles down a few steps into 'The Broadway' and into the main shopping area. If this puts the homes in their place in railway history...they are situated a mile away from the front entrance to the train station for a major London bound route and all routes to the South West. In spite of many changes the Homes are still there and were originally known as the London & South Western Railway Servants Orphanage. This was the time when the London & South Western Railway Company ran it and it was necessary to include the word 'Servants' in order that it was clearly understood that the staff - not the managers were running it. The founder was the Reverend Canon Allen Edwards - the Railway Chaplain who was also vicar of All Saints Church in Lambeth. In 1885 Canon Edwards rented No. 76, a large terrace house in Jeffreys Road Clapham to house 10 fatherless girls from railway families. In 1886 the Board of Managers took their courage in both hands and bought the freehold so that by 1884 when the numbers had swelled to 50 they bought the next door house. Then in 1895 the late Sir Charles Scotter - General Manager of the London & South Western Railway Company - contributed £500 to perpetuate the memory of his wife who had taken a keen interest in the work of the homes during her lifetime and a 3rd house was purchased in order to house 26 boys. This was followed by the London & South Western Railway directors contributing 500 guineas for the board of management to buy a large house in nearby Guildford Road Clapham in 1900. This house subsequently became the girls' home and the boys spread out through the Jeffreys Road properties. Eventually numbers grew to a point where a decision was made to purchase land in the country - so 7½ acres were bought from the London Necropolis Company for £2,800 to erect a purpose built home. When completed and furnished it had cost a total of £30,000 and in 1909 the migration to Woking was completed - but it was to be many years before the board of management was able to clear the debt. In 1923 the name was changed to the Southern Railway Servant's Orphanage and in 1935 the wing which faced Oriental Road was added - blocking in the original 'E' shaped building. At that point there was room for 200 children, in addition to which there was a site hospital to cater for minor illnesses and operations, complete with a resident nursing sister. There was also a fully equipped gymnasium, workshops and stables. In 1937 when local buildings began getting closer to the site it was decided to purchase a further 2½ acres as an additional playing field for the girls, and a large house across the road which became the nursery known as Brantwood. During the 2nd World War that Homes were taken over by St.Thomas' Hospital and the children all evacuated. Soon after the war when the children were all back in the fold - the board of managers decided to extend the care to cater for retired railwaymen and / or their widows. So in 1947 Wynberg was opened along with Missenden and so the Railwaymen's Home for Children and Old People was born. The 'big' house as it was often referred to by the Old Boys & Girls incorporated a fully equipped library - with complete sets of Encyclopaedia Britannica / hard bound National Geographics / Audubon Society books of Tress, Plants & Birds. Also sets of Dickens, Shakespeare and all the children's classics - all donated by various Railwaymen's Committees. There was a fully equipped laundry that would enthrall any museum today with its very efficient but antiquated equipment -although in its day ... the top of the range latest gadgets. The resident cobbler took care of the children's footwear and in his spare moments taught the children who showed an interest how to make or mend boots and shoes. All the children had 2 pairs of leather laced school shoes; a pair of indoor

andals; gym plimsolls and school plimsolls and wellington boots. Also sports shoes..... The residents of Woking used to depend on the old home for their morning alarm call when the day began with the bell ringing at 07.00 a.m. On the odd occasions when the bell was out of commission for cleaning purposes the Principal would be highly amused at the letters of complaint - that they weren't making a noise. (Although one wonders how they felt about a wake up call on Sundays) The home in its hey day was run much on the lines of the upper class boarding schools and was highly regarded by the Home Office Inspectorate who kept regular checks on management run institutions. Three quarters of the funds needed for the homes were raised from staff payroll and all railway staff were encouraged to pay 2 or 3 pence each week out of their wages. Funds were also raised from excursions run by the 16 committees for the Southern Region. Additional to which the Railway 'Dog Team' was used with collection boxes on trains and stations and were on the Railway payroll. Each dog received a medal for each year's service to the homes, added to which (a final insult some may feel) they were stuffed and mounted to continue collecting on their home stations after their eventual demise. A parallel venture was set up by the London & North Eastern Railway Company and a smaller similarly designed home - St.Christopher's - was opened in Derby. Sports days and competitions between the two homes were encouraged during the 1950's and 60's. The athletics and gymnastic teams often included children who ran at County Sport levels. Children were kept in mixed groups through the nursery and up to about 5 or 6 years of age, then divided into groups of 17 to 20 children through the following years at the home. The girls were split into Junior; Lower Senior and Senior girls. The boys into Junior; Intermediate (known as Inters); Lower Senior & Senior boys. Provisions for the children were the best possible for the time and each child had new clothes for 'Sunday best' to wear to church. This set included best frock & blazer for the summer / coat for winter for the girls and lightweight trousers & blazer for the boys with a winter coat. Sunday clothes when they were grown out of became Saturday clothes and handed down to the next group - AGE ORDER RULED - after being Saturday clothes items were then reduced to play clothes. Every child had 3 sets of school clothes with another blazer and raincoat and separate PE kit, as against the gym kit for use in the home's gymnasium. (Anyone who has clothed children to get them through school will realise that, materially, these were very privileged young people. The daily routine was strict but fair. Discipline was metered out around the religious teachings and values deemed necessary to keep that number of children on the straight and narrow. Each member of staff had their own ways of reprimanding and organising their particular group. After being woken by the bell at 07.00 Breakfast was at 07.30 - by which time the children would all have stripped the beds and folded their blankets into a pile on the upturned mattress. Queued for a strip wash and dressed ready for school. Prayers were said at 07.55 which one of the commandments would be chanted by the children in unison. The younger ones learning through repetition and copying the older ones. After prayers a job of some sort had to be undertaken by the children, either by washing up breakfast dishes, washing their section's cutlery or sweeping their dayroom. All this in addition to making their own beds - before lining up in the 'crocodile' to be walked about 1½ miles to Maybury School up to the age of 11 years. Smaller children stayed at school for school dinners but the secondary school children who attended Monument Hill (if they hadn't passed their 11+ exam) went back to the homes for lunch and had to take turns to assist with the dishes before returning to afternoon school. After the mid 1960's - when Monument Hill was demolished to make space for a housing estate - the children were transferred to Sheerwater School on the London 'over-spill' council estate. At the end of the day tea was served at 4.30p.m. followed by homework by 6p.m. As the children became more involved with their own interests they were encouraged to meet people from 'outside' to attend various clubs or organisations. Brownies, Guides, Cubs & Scouts were readily encouraged. All the children were expected to attend gym classes in the gym' at least once a week, but those in the teams who represented the homes went up to 3 times weekly. All the children were taught to swim by an instructor who visited the homes through the summer months. The same man taught ballroom / modern dancing to the senior girls & boys on Friday evenings. This was a high spot in the week for the senior boys and girls in that it was the only time when they were encouraged to physically connect! Birthdays were special days in that it was the only day in the year when children were permitted post at the breakfast table (it was usually given out when jobs were finished before going to school). The children then had a tea

arty in the section dayroom away from the main dining hall after school & were permitted two guests from school in addition to any family who were resident in the home too. The only other occasions when family members shared a meal was at Christmas or on monthly visiting days when parents (or surrogate families in the case of true orphans) visited. Unless same sex children ere close in age and therefore in the same section, boys & girls were kept very much apart. During the 1950's & 60's when divorce became more prevalent the intake was not exclusively orphans - as in the early days - although many of the children were newly bereaved having had one or other parent die prior to their admission. The assorted railway committees arranged various trips to places of interest throughout the year for the children with the result that at a particular age, in a particular section, it was a regular occurrence for certain groups to be taken out. The Senior sections went on an annual trip to St. George's Dry Docks at Southampton to tour whichever 'Queen' was in for servicing, and then were entertained to lunch on a Cunard Liner. The 8-9 year olds were taken on an annual trip to Huntley & Palmer's biscuit factory in Reading and all age groups had the option of Christmas pantomimes of the Ice Show. At Christmas the Salvation Army visited for a Carol Service on Christmas Eve and each child was given a Christmas stocking for the end of their bed, to wake up to filled - provided by the committees. On Christmas morning those children who had not gone home for the holiday would be taken to church after the older children had done the rounds of the old people's homes singing carols before breakfast. After church all brothers and sisters were sat together around the tables in the dining room for Christmas dinner, followed by which the male staff would parade in fancy dress to bring in the Christmas Pudding. Then all the family presents would be distributed among the children and the remainder of the afternoon would be spent writing thank you letters. Later into the afternoon was the annual Christmas party where Father Christmas gave each child a gift (supplied by the committees). At Whitsun all the children were taken by train from Woking via Havant for a camping holiday to Elmer Sands near Bognor. At Easter - Thornton's chocolate donated 3 or 4 of their huge demonstration Easter eggs made with 2 inch thick chocolate to be broken up and shared. The committees also arranged for trips to places like Bournemouth - which included a boat trip around the bay and tea with the Mayor / visits to Osbourne House on the Isle of Wight and other places of interest. The Railway Dramatic Society would perform their dress rehearsals for any production due to be shown and the Welsh Male Voice Choirs would perform their repertoire prior to their competitions. All in all the children were given a thorough all round education. The committees endowed beds complete with ornamental quilts and plaques as new beds were required- and on the days when the committees brought their families to visit the homes - the children were encouraged to play 'host' to the visitors and show them around the 'big house'. All the dormitories were 'kitted' out with a basket beneath each bed with a slip mat beside. During the day each child was encouraged to leave their nightclothes & dressing gown tidily in the basket so and night their clothes - so that in the event of fire drills (or an actual fire) it was possible to have 250 children outside complete with a set of day clothes. Anyone reading this who has children - will realise this was no mean feat! The older children's dormitories were divided by partitions into cubicles that contained a small dressing table and bedside chair in addition to the mat and basket. All Seniors were expected to thoroughly spring clean this space on Friday evening prior to the dance classes. Each evening after school the children had to clean their shoes before tea. Every Friday a sack of shoes was delivered from the Cobbler's shop with the 2nd pair of school shoes - so that each pair was evenly worn. During the 1960's & early 70's there was one television set between 240 children so they were allocated three hours viewing time of which half an hour had to be educational. It was about the mid 1960's when the word Orphanage was taken from the Home's name and it became known as Woking Grange. (It was very nearly called 'Primrose Hall !!!)

However on the advertising and throughout the railways it was known as the Southern Railwaymen's Homes for Children and Old People During the 1980's the ratio of staff to children required by Social Services became too prohibitive for the system to support and so regrettably the children's part of the homes was forced into closure. Even though 'The Foxes' (named by the then resident children because of the foxes on the building site) was built to house 12 children. The building included a teenager's flat for use as 'an independent person' prior to leaving long term care had been built on part of the site of what was the girl's field. It is now used for convalescent rail staff or provides B&B for local business staff. However the

elderly resident's part of the homes has flourished and there is now provision for 50 elderly residents most of which are retired railway or other transport staff. In Grace Groom House (named after the Children's Home matron) all 29 rooms are en suite and form the major part of the elderly care home altered from the old hospital buildings of the original children's home. The Board Rooms above the old hospital have been extensively renovated and are now leased out for conferences, or meeting / training rooms for local businesses. The extension includes 13 small flatlets as 'sheltered housing' - Canon Edwards House - for the more independent residents (& where Miss Kerridge - one of the children's home staff - now lives). More recently a swimming Pool has been added for the resident's use and the reception office which was housed in the former Principal's house has now moved across into the entrance of Canon Edwards House.

Plans for the former Principal's house have yet to be released.