

# JAMES WALKER'S LION WORKS

Iain Wakeford 2016



**Y**ou cannot look at the history of Woking without mentioning one of the town's major employers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – James Walker & Co's Lion Works at Maybury. They moved to Woking in 1926, but already by the mid 1950's they were apparently employing something like eight percent of the workforce of the town!

James Walker was a Scottish engineer who in 1882 set up business in London's docklands selling oils and engineering accessories, including what became his famous 'Lion Brand High Pressure Steam Packing' - a new type of seal for the newly developed triple expansion engines. Walker's semi-metallic seal could cope with the higher pressures and temperatures involved much better than previous packings, so was an immediate success, especially in the railway engineering and shipbuilding industries.

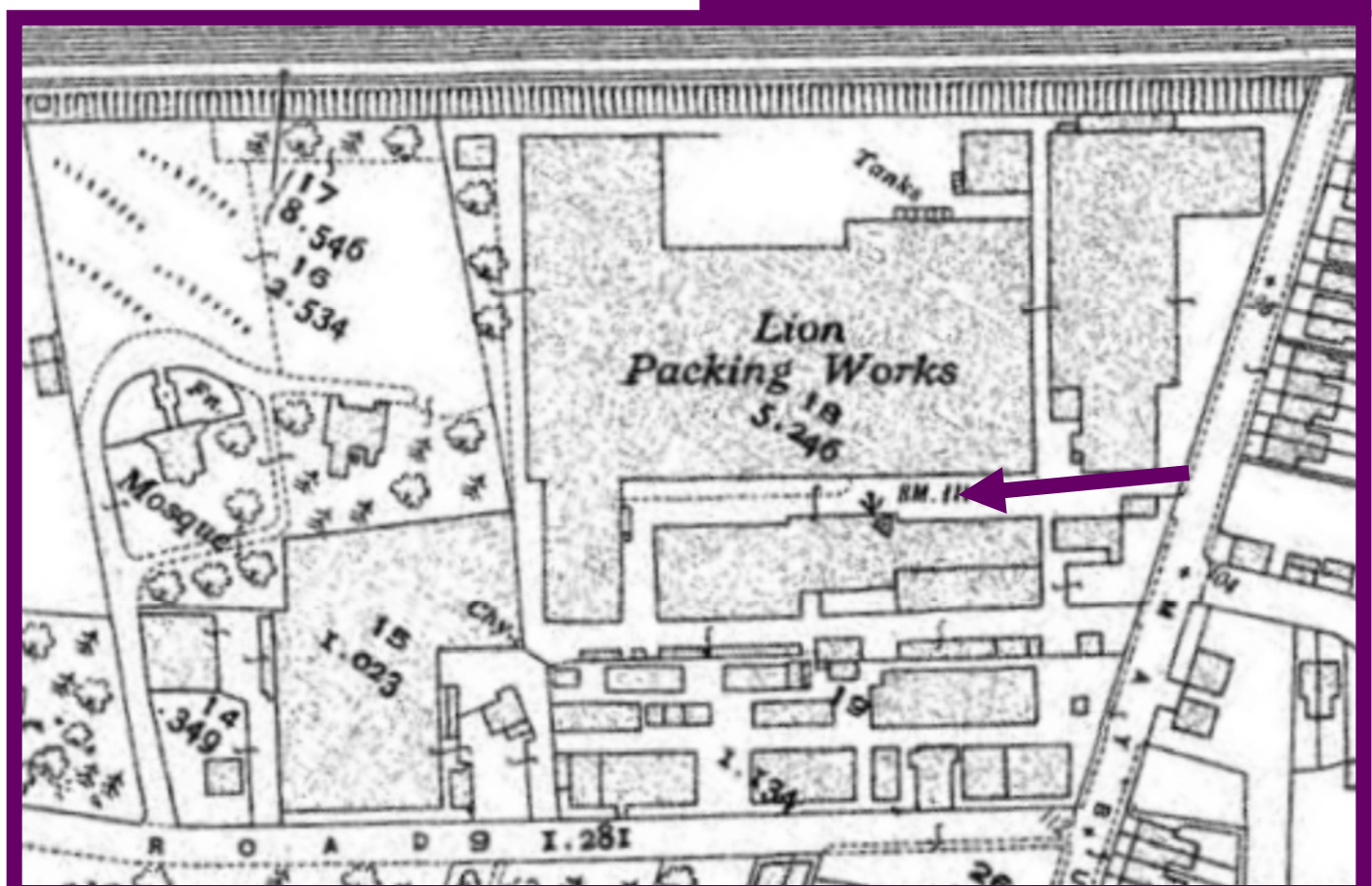
By 1898 'through sheer hard work and good business management' the company managed to purchase an old rope works in Poplar that became the company's first 'Lion Works', eventually expanding into a second factory on the opposite side of Garfield Street, E14.

The company went from strength to strength with a branch opened in Antwerp in 1910, and

another opening in New York in 1912 – as well as branches elsewhere in this country at Cardiff, Leeds, Leicester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Sheffield, Southampton and Swansea. During the Great War, despite Mr Walker's death in 1913, the company still managed to expand, supplying every branch of the armed forces

The buildings used to originally be the Royal Dramatic College before being converted into the Oriental Institute. The modern (1960's) offices that are still James Walker's Head Quarters on Oriental Road, can just be seen in the background.

The arrow on the map below shows the angle of the photograph above - taken from what was No.1 Gate on Maybury Hill





Gate 1 of the Lion Works was more or less where the pedestrian entrance to the Lion Retail Park off Maybury Hill is today (by the Pedestrian Crossing).

whilst famously managing to remain independent of government control 'by never defaulting on deliveries'.

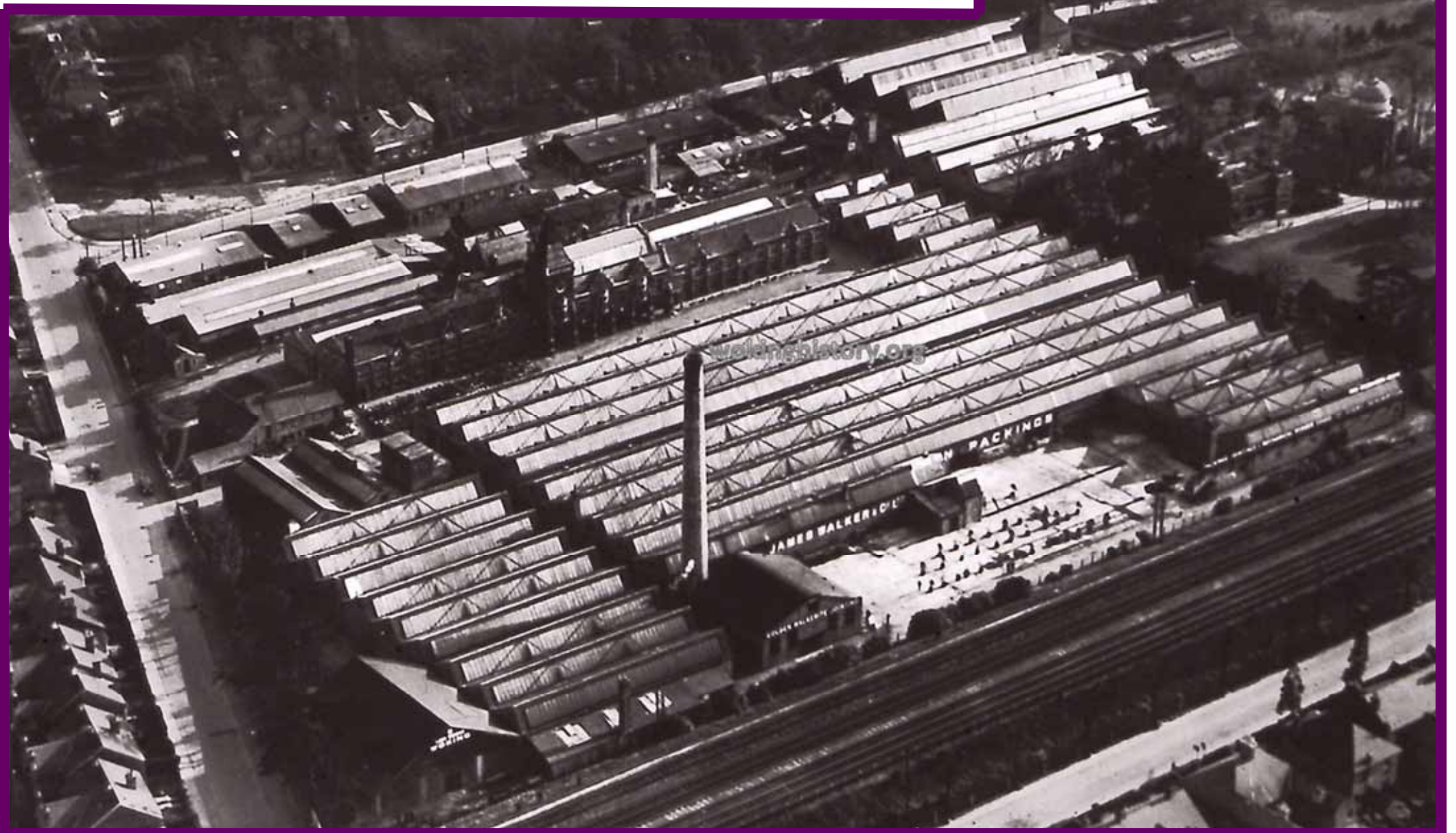
In 1900 a young lad called William Dixon had been taken on as a junior clerk (earning £1 a week), but in time he was to rise to the position of salesman, depot manager and personal assistant to George Cook, the Managing Director of the group of companies by the time they moved to Woking in 1926.

Dixon was later to become MD and Chairman himself, but it was George Cook who was responsible for finding their new site in Maybury, taking over the former Martinsyde Aircraft works in Oriental Road, which itself had taken over the Oriental Institute just before the First World War (which had replaced the original Royal Dramatic College on the site in 1884).

Martinsydes, with help from the Government, had massively expanded the site with new factory buildings, so that by 1918 they were apparently the third largest aircraft manufacturer in the country. But with the ending of plane production, coupled with a fire in 1923, the company went into liquidation, leaving Cook to discover what he described as 'a wilderness of a place' where the then workforce of 350 could move to and still have plenty of room for expansion.

Incidentally, in an earlier article about Martinsydes (published in March) I mentioned that one of their aircraft had ended up in an air museum in Finland, but I didn't know whether it

During the 1st World War the buildings were extended by the Government for Martinsydes Aircraft Company



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was still on display or not. I have since been reliably informed by Julian Temple at Brooklands Museum that it is still on show, with one of their members (Phil Lawton) visiting there two or three years ago.

As for James Walker & Co, they continued to rebuild and expand the new Lion Works site (as well as opening other branches of the business elsewhere in Woking), and although all production for the company has now moved

away from the town (to Devon and Cumbria), the Headquarters are still here in Oriental Road, where a memory of their old works is preserved in the name of its successor – the Lion Retail Park.



The central hall of the original Royal Dramatic College became the boardroom of James Walkers.

wokinghistory.org

# THE OLD ST DUNSTAN'S CHURCH



In 1923 the Catholic Church in Woking received a new parish priest – an energetic gentleman by the name of Father Plummer. It is claimed that he was not over enthusiastic about moving to Woking, considering the Presbytery that was then in Church Street (on the site later to become the fire station), as being 'totally unsuitable as it was riddled with damp'. The tin church next door was not really up to scratch either, so he set about trying to find a suitable site to build both a new church and a new priest's house, and quickly settled on a house in Onslow Crescent.



The original tin church in Percy Street (now Victoria Way)

Unfortunately he soon discovered that his new purchase, being away from the town centre and in a purely residential area, was not really suitable either, so he bought another house called Lavender Cottage in Heathside Crescent and quickly set about drawing up plans for the new St Dunstan's church in the grounds, adjoining White Rose Lane.



The foundation stone was laid on the 26th April 1925 with the partially complete church being opened eight months later - although it was not until the following year that the nave was completed and other features added, once more funds became available to complete the church to the design of Joseph Goldie and his



partner Geoffrey Ronald Gilbertson Topsham.

As for the 'unsuitable' site in Onslow Crescent, that was later used for St Dunstan's School – a stones-throw from the now evidently suitable site of the new St Dunstan's Church in Shaftesbury Road!



The site of the present St Dunstan's Church

The Heathside Crescent site where the new church was built in 1925-6

The Onslow Crescent site that was rejected, but later used for St Dunstan's school



# WOKING EX-SERVICEMEN'S CLUB



On the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1926 two foundation stones were laid for a new building in Maybury Road – The Woking Ex-Servicemen's Club. The building, like the ex-servicemen who built it, is no longer with us, but the stones have fortunately been preserved in the wall of a new apartment block on the site – Jarman Court.

Clarrie Jarman was an ordinary soldier – the eighteen year old son of Alfred and Annie Jarman, a grocer's assistant who lived in



Jarman Court has now replaced the Ex-Servicemen's Club, but the Memorial Tablets remain.

nearby Portugal Road when the war broke out. Young Clarence, like so many of his friends, volunteered for the local regiment – the Queen's (Royal West Surrey). On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 at the Somme his battalion was ordered 'over the top', but unlike so many of his colleagues Clarrie survived, although his leg was not lucky! It had to be amputated and after convalescence in the Beechcroft War Hospital in Heathside Road, he was finally discharged from the army in February 1918.

Clarrie Jarman was an ordinary soldier, but an extra-ordinary man. After the war he worked for the council as a school's attendance officer - well known by any truants until his retirement in the early 1960's.

Some developers don't care about the history of the area they redevelop – perhaps the developers of Jarman Court deserve a medal – Clarrie certainly did.

