

THE CLOSURE OF INKERMAN BARRACKS

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Built as prisons in the 1860's, the buildings were converted into Inkerman Barracks in the late 1890's.

Last week we looked at the investigation into the supposed 'tunnels' at the Hermitage in St Johns, and noted the unlikely stories that they were created either for the original 14th century Hermit so he could have a clandestine affair with a nun in Guildford (or a monk at Newark), or as an escape tunnel for highwaymen or former invalid convicts from

the prison across the road. In the 1890's the latter was converted into Inkerman Barracks, which as it happens was also in the news in 1964 as the Royal Military Police (who had been stationed there since just after the Second World War) announced that by the end of February that year they would be moving to a new depot and training establishment at Chichester – leaving the old site ripe for redevelopment.

Part of the site was earmarked for married quarters but other suggested uses were for an ordnance depot or for the Fighting Vehicle Research and Development Establishment (the 'Tank Factory') at Chobham – again possibly using some of the land for much needed staff housing.

Inkerman Barracks in its heyday, when the Military Police were stationed there.





The closure of Inkerman had been in the pipeline for several years and the site's original use as a prison had not gone unnoticed, especially by the villagers of nearby Bisley. At that time they were fighting against plans to demolish the old Shaftesbury Home in their village and replace it with a High Security Prison (Coldingley).

The Shaftesbury Home, and the nearby Farm School, were established in the village in the 1860's as educational facilities for destitute children, mainly from London. They had been taken over by Surrey County Council after the Second World War, with the Shaftesbury Home being converted into a Secondary School and the Farm School being used for younger children.

The closure in the late 1950's of the Bisley Schools must have put more pressure on the nearby Knaphill Secondary Modern School, which by the early 1960's was already planned to be replaced by a new school on part of the old Inkerman Barracks site – part of the parade ground facing Hermitage Road.

The irony of using part of a former prison site for a school, whilst demolishing a former school to provide land for a prison, was not lost on the folk at Bisley, but it appears to have been completely ignored by the various government bodies involved.

The following year the proposed new school was also facing controversy when one prospective pupil took it upon himself to write to the widow of Winston Churchill asking for permission to suggest to the authorities naming



the new building after her late husband. Lady Churchill appears to have misunderstood the request, apparently writing back that she was delighted they had decided to name the new school 'Winston Churchill'!

The local Conservative controlled Education Department were delighted, but some of the Socialist Councillors (and local residents) were not so pleased, and the local newspapers were inundated by angry letters (on both sides) suggesting that politics should be kept out of education.

Meanwhile whilst the school was slowly taking shape on Hermitage Road, behind it the old

The original 'Farm' School (above) and the later Shaftesbury School at Bisley, were taken over by Surrey County Council after the Second World War and closed in the late 1950's.

Ironically the site of the Shaftesbury School was used as the site of the new Coldingley High Security Prison in the 1960's, whilst part of the site of Woking's former prisons at Inkerman (below) was used for the new Knaphill Secondary Modern School - inadvertently named after Sir Winston Churchill.

barracks were quietly being demolished, although the 'condemned cell' of the old prison was apparently left until last – partially out of respect, but mostly because the man in charge of the demolition appears to have been afraid of the 'ghosts' said to haunt it!







Some say it was Constance Kent, who was imprisoned at Woking in 1865 for killing her four year old brother, whilst others have claimed the infamous Florence Maybrick

haunts the site. Both are unlikely to have wanted to return to haunt Woking, as Constance was released from prison in 1885, dying in 1944, and Florence died just three

years earlier in her native America, having been released from Aylesbury Prison (where she was detained after Woking closed) in 1904.





