

# SEXIST SIXTIES SCHOOLS

Iain Wakeford 2018

**T**he 1960's saw a number of new primary and junior school buildings in the western part of Woking, including in 1963 an extended Brookwood Primary School, to accommodate a further 150 children (mainly expected to come from the new married quarters then being built at nearby Pirbright Camp) - one of the last school buildings designed by the Surrey County Architect, John Harrison, before he retired that year.

New classrooms were also added in the mid 1960's at Knaphill; a new primary school at the Hermitage (1964); and the Roman Catholic St Hugh of Lincoln Primary School off Hermitage Hill; but as far as Secondary School provision was concerned it was not until the latter part of the decade that any progress was made on providing more places. Part of the reason appears to have been that it was thought that 'primary schoolchildren needed places near to where they lived, and they could not reasonably be sent to other schools elsewhere in town', so their construction was prioritised, as plans for the new Knaphill Secondary School slipped.

At one stage funding for the first stage of the new school was to be in the 1963-64 County Council estimates, and then 1964-5, before it was announced in May 1965 that work on the new site on Hermitage Hill would soon commence. It was to have room for 1,000



pupils (including a sixth-form of 180) and would cost £438,000, with completion due to be in time for the 1966-7 school year. By that stage it had been officially named the Winston Churchill School, but 'minor delays' meant that it was actually half-way through that school year before it could open - the first 570 pupils starting one-term overdue in January 1967.

'At the moment twenty-four classrooms, the library, kitchen, dining room, lavatories and ancillary buildings are ready for occupation' announced the local press in January 1967 'when the school is finished its features will include a 2,800 sq.ft gymnasium with showers for the boys and girls'.



Designed in 1963-64 by Raymond Ash, construction didn't start until the spring of 1965, with work taking about eighteen months to complete.



In the still sexist sixties it was revealed that 'a housecraft block will provide domestic science and needlework teaching for the girls, while a practical block for boys will have facilities for teaching woodworking, light engineering and technical drawing'.

The 6,000 sq. ft. sports hall was to include a floor of "bituturf", 'a compound of rubber and bitumen' (the first of its type in Surrey), where indoor sports such as five-a-side football, tennis and basket-ball could be played during wet weather, in the electrically lit, but unheated, covered area.

Designed by the new County Architect, Raymond Ash, in 1963-64, it was also pioneering in Surrey in the use of 'dry construction components', which according to Henry Chetwynd-Stapylton in his 1991 book 'A Celebration of Architecture', 'was of great value

in producing a simple rationalised building system for use in other secondary school projects' throughout the county.

It also, he claimed, demonstrated that 'in all other respects each new school was now appreciated as an individual requirement with its own site considerations. Any idea of a standard plan was rejected'.

Bridget Cherry, writing in the 1972 update of Pevsner & Nairn's 'Buildings of England - Surrey' (Penguin Books), noted it as 'very large for 900 children. Two long ranges in front with green and cream spandrels and shallow pitched roofs, linked by a lower range with assembly and dining halls to a neat four story classroom block behind'. The 'spandrels' have obviously changed since then!

In the end it appears that just £375,000 was spent on the building, although that was without the proposed six-form accommodation, which was quietly dropped in favour of the new Sixth-Form College eventually built at Kingfield.

As well as major alterations to the outside appearance of the school, changes have taken place inside - although some key features remain the same.

