

# THE WOODSGATE SWIMMING POOL IN PEMBURY

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## OVERVIEW

The Woodsgate Swimming Pool opened in Pembury in 1934 . It was constructed on a large site located to the rear of the Woodsgate Hotel (now gone) just off what is now Woodhill Park with an address of 62 High Street.



Since the time of its opening it was described in the Courier in such glowing terms as “a wonderful facility”, “the finest pool in the district”.

Opening annually in May and closing for the season in the fall it was visited by thousands of adults and children looking for entertainment and relaxation in the pools chlorinated and heated waters, and was packed in the summer. In the evening one could swim by floodlight.

The facility came complete with a large fountain, grassed area, a spring board and diving boards with a café run by a woman where refreshments could be obtained and upstairs there was a sunbathing area. Regular bus service passing the pool entrance was available and many from the area, including those living in Tunbridge Wells ,took advantage of the service. There was also a free car park on the site.



Swimming lessons were given there by a qualified instructor. Tickets to use the facility varied in price for adults, children and spectators with reduced rates if you bought a season ticket. In 1936 unemployed persons could swim there, upon presentation of the unemployment card for 2d.

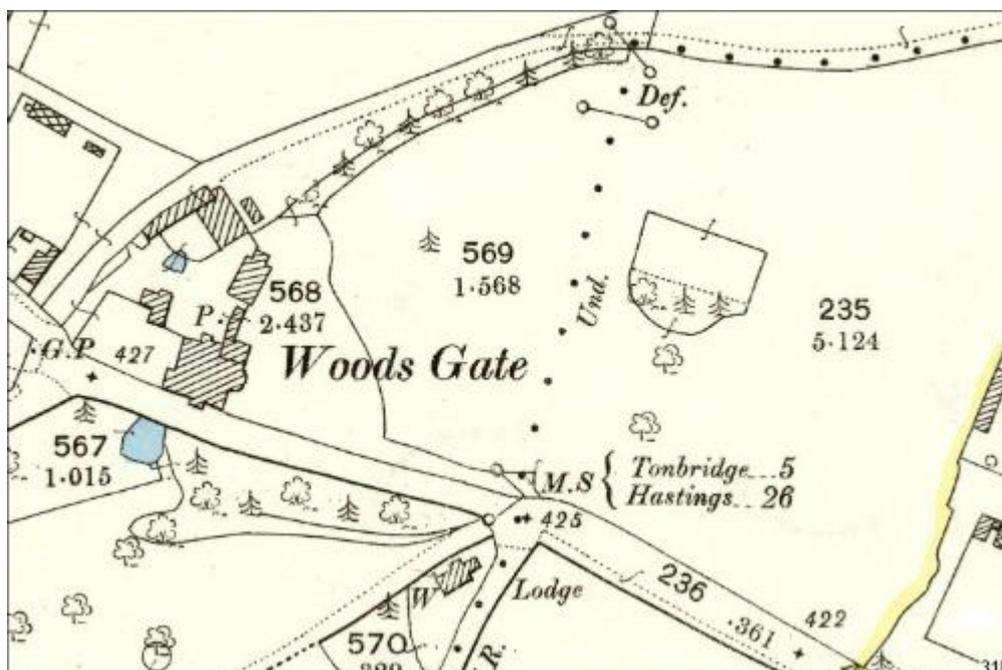
Many special events were held there such as musical entertainments, bathing beauty pagents and Grand Swimming Galas.

In 1948 concern was expressed by a report stating from tests of the water that it was unsafe, but this was rectified by remedial action on the part of the pools operators.

Part of the facility became a nightclub for several years before the pool complex closed in 1973 and the site was redeveloped into residential use. Shown above is a postcard view of the pool from the 1930's and below it is a photo from the Tunbridge Wells Museum.

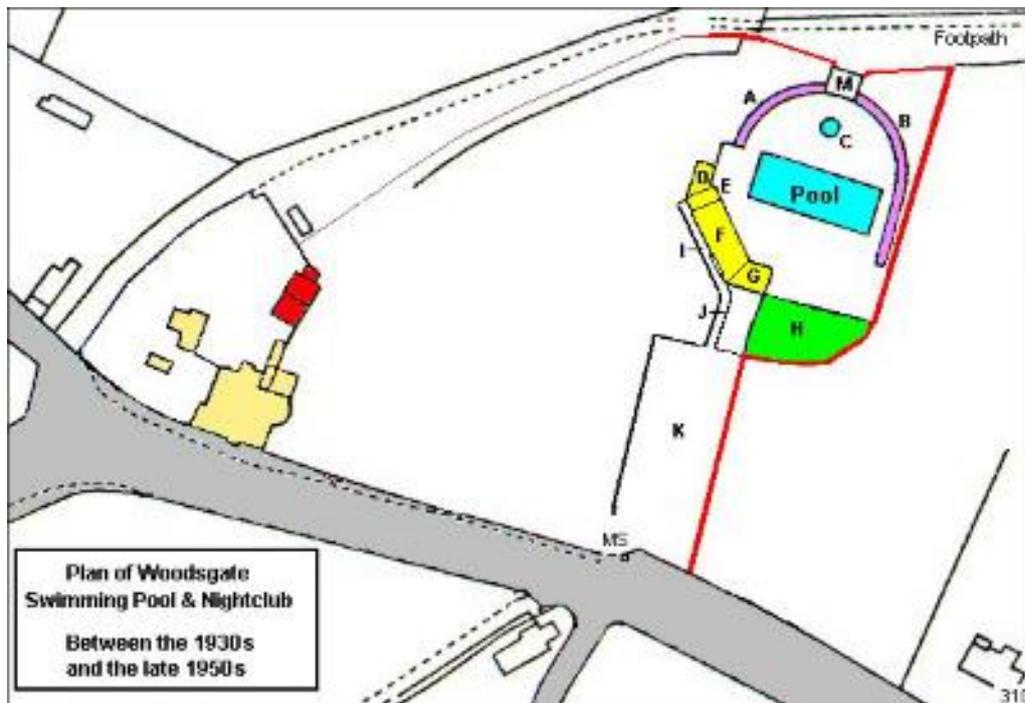
### LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The open air swimming pool and related buildings were located at 62 High Street to the rear of the rear of the old Woodsgate Hotel (now gone) and just off of what later became Woodhill Park, a road and residential development constructed on the site of the pool after it closed in 1973. Shown below is an aerial photograph dated 1940 showing the pool and beside is an enlargement.



Shown here from the Pembury History website is a map labelled 1892-1905 showing Woodsgate Corner and the Woodsgate Hotel. The site of the future swimming pool is shown beside plot 235 as an enclosure or a field. From that time until the pool facility was built in 1934 some new developments took place in the vicinity of the hotel.

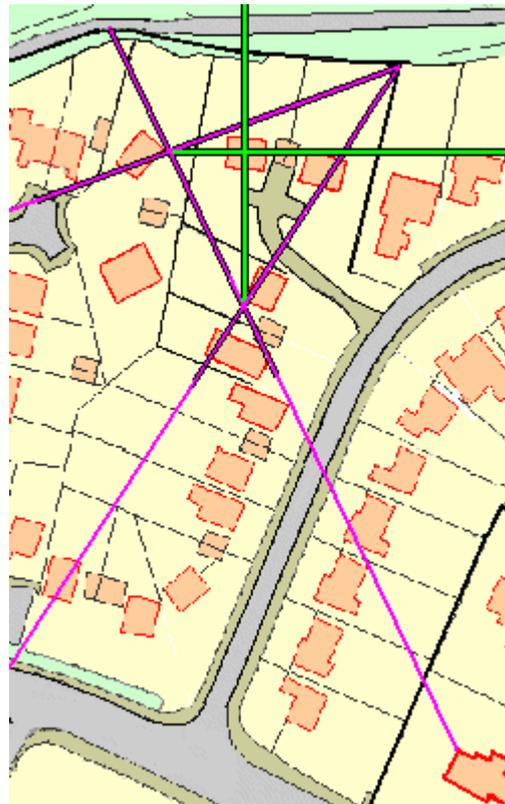
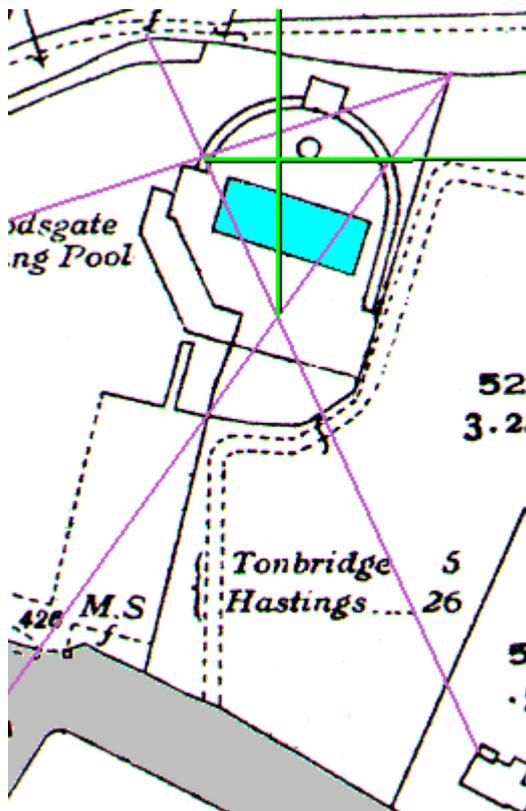
Shown below is a second map providing more detail about the parts of the facility over the period of the 1930's to 1950's. The 1936 map was modified to show greater detail of the swimming pool, cafe & nightclub. This reflects the assumed condition between the 1930s and the 1950s. Picture Postcards show tea gardens at the side of the main house. This is assumed to be the large blank area to the left of the pool and its car park. Given here is the index to the map.



- A Boys changing huts.
- B Girls changing huts.
- C Fountain.
- D Power and Pump House.
- E Entrance & Exit turnstiles to and from the pool area.
- F Cafe and social area. Entrance door at footpath. No entrance from pool area.
- G Bar for night-club use.
- E, F, G – roof terrace above ground floor rooms. Used for sunbathing.
- H Grassed area for sunbathing.
- I Pathway from steps to pool entrance.
- J Steps leading down from car park to path, pool entrance & cafe/nightclub entrance.
- K Car park for swimming pool.
- L (removed)
- M Arched portico with “Woodsgate Lido” above arch. Iron gates within arch. Toilets.

Fenced perimeter marked in red. Woodsgate Way did not exist at this time – shown for reference purpose only. Woodsgate House was demolished in 1960 and is shown here for reference only. Diving boards at the left side of the pool – the boys changing huts end.

The pool facility opened in 1934 as noted in the Courier of January 29, 1934 which gave "Swimming joys at Woodsgatge Pool. The "New" open air pool is proving the most popular spot in the district. Swimmers of all ages are taking advantage of the splendid facilities offered in this unique sylvan setting..." It is expected that the construction of the pool facility was commenced in the fall of 1933.



Shown here is a map referencing the before and after redevelopment details of the site. Other maps, all of which were made by Tony Nicholls, can be seen on the Pembury History website. In a recent email from Tony he states in part "Apparently it (the pool) was not destroyed (when the site was cleared for new homes) but just filled in with rubble and landscape as one of the houses has the buried pool in its garden".

## OWNERSHIP

Definitive information about the owner(s) of the pool is lacking and requires further research. Keith Isacc who was raised in Pembury and recalls in his recollections, posted to the Pembury History Website that he was born in 1947 and that his grandfather was William Hills who for many years operated a butchers shop at 23 High Street from about 1920 to 1953. He states that "Mother worked for Frank Holden? for a while, who owned the Woodsgate swimming pool and I enjoyed many, many days there, and in the Night Club which was still going in 1964/5 probably later, and encompassed all of the area under the sun terrace of the pool. Wasn't that terrace a fabulous venue for girl watching! But the tarred surface could get a but hot! I seem to remember that after the Square Deal Transport Café closed that Woodsgate pool opened their cafeteria to attract this trade and extended their car park. Could this have been the time that they opened the Night Club as that was definitely open all year and it would have made sense to have the café open for transport all year". Regarding the ownership of the pool Keith gave the following "Frank Holden in the 1960s; Mr Hemsley and then Mr Gervadi".

In another section of the Pembury History website, from a review of local directories and other sources the ownership was given as Frank Holden then Frank Hemsley then from 1959-1965 Finch & Hemsley(or Hamsley).

The Kent & Sussex Courier of August 22,1941 referred to a Mr West as the proprietor of the pool.

### USE AND DESCRIPTION

The pool was listed in local directories from 1934 to 1973 as the “Woodsgate Lido & Swimming Pool” 62 High Street. Shown opposite is a photograph dated 1935. Below in order of appearance is a photo taken of children at the pool in the 1950’s. This is followed by view of the pool complex during demolition.

I begin my description of the pool facility with the article below (by Hugh Boorman) from the Pembury News Spring 2013 and in this section I provide some interesting photographs of the pool.



“Unfortunately, there are not many people left in the village now who will remember and who will have enjoyed the facility of the open air swimming pool which used to be situated to the rear of the Old Woodsgate Hotel and just off what is now Woodhill Park. It was a wonderful facility with a large fountain, grassed areas, spring board and diving boards, a refreshment area for ice creams and pop etc., and an upstairs sunbathing area. This pool used to get packed in the summer and I can only think of one other such like facility which was at Hilden Manor, which I think eventually was sold like Woodsgate for housing development. Many people learnt to swim there and there was nothing better on a hot sunny afternoon than to just walk up the road and enjoy the pool. The facility I think was owned by a gentleman who also owned a shop in Tunbridge Wells. The local boys and girls used to go back up there after it had closed in the evenings, climb over the turnstiles and enjoy a free swim. I remember on one occasion the lights around the pool coming on and the owner appeared with the local policeman Mr Harry Edmondson. Part of the facility became a night club for several years before it was sold for development back in the fifties or sixties, not quite certain when. There was quite an uproar in the village when people realised this facility was going. I shall never forget that this was where I first saw a girl in a bikini, I was only about twelve at the time and WOW....! Does anyone recognise the people in the picture and have they any pictures that really show the features of the pool area and any detail of when it was built?”

A review of the Kent & Sussex Courier from 1900 to 1948 showed that the first articles about the pool began in 1934. A sample of a few of many articles during that period is given below.

June 8,1934.....Woodgates Pool Pembury opening on Saturday

July 13 and August 10 1934.....Have you visited the Woodsgate Swimming Pool? The electrical work was installed by A.t. Spurrell of Pembury who will be pleased to give his advise on your electrical needs”

September 12,1934..... “ Bathe by floodlight courtesy of purified and heated water. New sunroof café now open. Free car park”.

April 12.1935.....”Woodsgate Pool in Pembury is to be re-opened on Good Friday and for regular patrons special terms have been arranged. Through the season an expert instructor will be available for diving lessons...”

August 9,1935.....Article refers to open-air and indoor baths

May 1,1936.....”Swim your way to health at the Woodsgate Pool, Pembury. Re-opening Saturday May 2nd. Every facility to enjoy a swim, sunbathe or late hour under perfect conditions. Ideally situated in pleasant surroundings, purified and heated water, spacious sunbathing terraces”.

May 15,1936.....”Buy your tickets for the finest pool in the district for 1 pound a week with a special reduced rate of 20 pounds for the whole season”.

July 3,1936.....”For the present season unemployed persons resident in the Borough to be admitted to the pool at all hours of bathing for 2d per person under presentation of the unemployment cards”.

July 7,1937.....The Tunbridge Wells Acordian Band to play at the Woodsgate pool.

August 22,1941.....Pembury Swimming Gala in connection with Pembury’s Summer National Savings Camaign, a swimming gala proved a big success and attracted entries from a wide area on Wednesday. It was held at the Woodsgate Swimming Pool, kind permission of the proprietor Mr West.

May 22,1942.....” A capable women required to run the café at the pool. Apply to F. Drury, High Street”.

May 23,1947.....” Woodsgate Swimming Pool fully filtered and chlorinated water now open to the public seven days a week. Refreshments available...”

July 11,1947.....” Swimming pool ballet-A special attraction at the Woodsgate pool Pembury on July 16-19 will be an open air ballet by the Russian Ballet League”.

October 8,1948.....” Public swim baths water was unsafe” the headline read. “alarming report to Council.....wonderful facilities provided.

April 27,1949.....” Woodsgate pool now open for the public. Season tickets available at the office. Snacks, teas etc will be obtained in the restaurant. The County Club adjoins the swimming pool...”

