

30. See Anthony West, *H.G. Wells: Aspects of a Life*, pp.143-146.
31. H.G. Wells, *The Passionate Friends*, (London: Macmillan, 1913), p.105.
32. H.G. Wells, *The Research Magnificent*, Essex edn., (London: Ernest Benn, 1927), pp.258-259. The final suspension points are Wells's own.
33. *Ibid.*, p.262.
34. H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, (London: Cassell, 1920), pp.601-608.
35. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, p.369.
36. Wells, *The Future in America*, p.21.
37. *Ibid.*, pp.358, 359.
38. T.S. Eliot 'Wells as Journalist,' in *H.G. Wells: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Patrick Parrinder, (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p.320.
39. H.G. Wells, *A Year of Prophesying*, (New York: Macmillan, 1925), p.351.

Iain Wakeford

Wells, Woking and *The War of the Worlds*

Editor's Note:

As Patrick Parrinder observes in his essay 'New Worlds for Old,' much of the power of *The War of the Worlds* comes from the vividness with which it integrates its fantastic story into a closely-observed picture of the Home Counties and the suburbs around London. The story has since been transplanted to several more exotic locations, which it has laid waste with comparable success, but readers of Wells's book naturally continue to wonder about the original setting. Exactly how true to life was it? What alterations did Wells make to the landscape, and why? And how much of what the Martians destroyed in fiction survives today as fact?

Some academics will dismiss such questions as marginal to an appreciation of the narrative. Here at the *Wellsian* we take a different view. Literature is, among other things, a form of

communication through which individuals share and develop their experience of the world. It is a coming to terms - reflecting and reflecting on, simplifying and amplifying, celebrating and cursing, the places, people and passions which have been part of its author's life. Bearing all this in mind, we are pleased to reprint from the *Woking History Journal* the following topographical guide to *The War of the Worlds*. In order to help bridge fiction and history, the anonymous narrator of the story is referred to simply as "Wells," which as its author said elsewhere (*First Men in the Moon*, Ch.20) "seemed to me to be a thoroughly respectable sort of name" for such a purpose.

M.D.

One night, before the Martians landed, Wells went for a walk with his wife.

"From the railway-station in the distance came the sound of shunting trains, ringing and rumbling, softened almost into melody by the distance - It seemed so safe and tranquil."

Woking Station at that time was an important railway junction with its own goods yard. The sound of the trains was very familiar to him as his real home was in Maybury Road, opposite the railway. In the book, however, he elevates himself up on Maybury Hill so that he has a clearer view of the action (and a much larger house).

Many believe that the house Wells modelled his home on was Maybury Knolle, which has a clear view across to Horsell Common and Ottershaw. But that house is believed to have been built by W.F. Unsworth in about 1897-8 - so Wells could not have used it as the model for his book. The fact that Wells's friend George Bernard Shaw lived at Maybury Knolle a few years later has helped some people to jump to the wrong conclusion. There are other large Victorian houses on Maybury Hill which were in existence in Wells's time, and one closer to Maybury Hill Road would fit better with later descriptions, as we shall see.

On the night of the first cylinder landing, he was at home in his study. Although Wells saw nothing of the falling star, his friend Ogilvy the astronomer did, and thinking that a meteorite lay somewhere between Horsell, Ottershaw and Woking, rose early to find it. "Find it he did, soon after dawn, and not far from the sand-pits."

Realising that somebody was inside he tried to help, but the heat forced him back. He decided to run to Woking for help.

"He met a waggoner and tried to make him understand, but the tale he told, and his appearance were so wild, that the man simply drove on. He was equally unsuccessful with the potman who was just unlocking the doors of the public house by Horsell Bridge. The fellow thought he was a lunatic at large, and made an unsuccessful attempt to shut him in to the tap-room. That sobered him a little, and when he saw Henderson, the London journalist, in his garden, he called over the palings and made himself understood."

The route Ogilvy took from the sand-pits, must have been across the Common to Chobham Road, where he met the waggoner. Most of the houses off Woodham Road would not have been built, it would have been nurseries, farmland and orchards. The potman was outside the Wheatsheaf Hotel and Henderson's house (with its wooden palings) was probably just down the road towards Wheatsheaf Bridge. The houses of Ferndale Road, The Grove and Chobham Road, were begun in the mid 1890s when part of Cobbett's Nursery was sold for development. Wells may have seen the houses being built.

The reference to the lunatic at large is probably based on an incident at Brookwood Hospital, then the Surrey County Pauper Lunatic Asylum.

Ogilvy returned to the sand-pits with Henderson, but still unable to help they decided to go back to Woking to tell of their discovery.

"One can imagine them, covered with sand, excited and disordered, running up the little street in the bright sunlight, just as the shop folks were taking down their shutters and people were opening their bedroom windows. Henderson went to the railway-station at once, in order to telegraph the news to London....I heard of it first from my newspaper boy - and lost no time in going out and across Ottershaw bridge to the sand-pits."

Whether they came into town over Chobham Road or Chertsey Road Bridge is not stated, but the "little street" could have been either, as both had shops (adorned with shutters) and houses where the inhabitants could be opening their bedroom windows. The Telegraph Office was just opposite the station, in the Broadway (then called Maybury Road), behind the Post Office (built 1895) which was in Chertsey Road where Robinsons is today. Ottershaw Bridge was Monument Bridge.

At the sand-pits Wells found a crowd of bystanders. There were

"a couple of cyclists, a jobbing gardener I employed some times, a girl carrying a baby, Gregg the butcher and his little boy, and two or three loafers and golf caddies who were accustomed to stand about the railway-station."

Most were disappointed at what they found, and even to Wells the cylinder looked "like a rusty gas-float half buried" in the sand. At eleven, as nothing was happening, he walked home to his house in Maybury.

The Woking Gas works were not far from his house in Maybury Road. There may even have been a rusty old gas-float on the common which gave Wells the idea for the Martian's machine. Who Gregg the butcher was we do not know. There were many butchers in the town in those days, and the same applied to jobbing gardeners. The chance of Wells employing a gardener in real life is unlikely. His garden was too small, and he probably couldn't afford such a luxury at that time. The 'loafers and caddies' certainly did congregate at the station, but there were not as many golf courses in the area as there are today. Only Woking Golf Club, built in 1893, and New Zealand, in 1895, were known to Wells.

By the afternoon, when news had reached London,

"there were half a dozens flys or more from Woking station standing in the road by the sand-pits, a basket chaise from Chobham, and a rather lordly carriage. Besides that there was quite a heap of bicycles."

The 'flys' from Woking Station could have belonged to any number of fly and carriage proprietors in the town, although Edmund James Waters ("broughams, brakes & all kinds of carriage always at hand"), of the London & South Western Railway Stables, seems the most likely supplier.

Wells, himself, had just learnt to ride a bicycle, and used it extensively to ride about the district "marking down suitable places and people for destruction by my Martians." His cycling experiences were also used in his book *The Wheels of Chance*.

Wells was spotted by Ogilvy, who had returned with several workmen to try to uncover the cylinder. The crowds were becoming a nuisance and Ogilvy asked him to find Lord Hilton, the Lord of the Manor, to get permission to put up light railings to keep the crowds back.

"I failed to find Lord Hilton at his house, but I was told he was expected from London by the six o'clock train from Waterloo."

As the owner of Horsell Common at that time, Lord Onslow is obviously Lord Hilton, but as he lived at Clandon (too far for Wells

to walk to), Wells moved him closer to town. As the sun started to set, Wells returned to the Common to discover that the cylinder was unscrewing.

"I saw a young man, a shop assistant in Woking I believe he was, standing on the cylinder and trying to scramble out of the hole again. The crowd had pushed him in."

Wells narrowly missed falling in himself, but as he turned to save himself the cylinder finally opened and after a while the Martian emerged "a big greyish, rounded bulk, the size perhaps of a bear."

The crowds of spectators had by now split into two distinct groups "one a little crowd towards Woking, the other a knot of people in the direction of Chobham."

Wells was obviously nearer to Anthony's, a small squatter settlement on the road to Chertsey.

From the direction of Horsell came a deputation waving a white flag to show the Martians, "that we, too, were intelligent." A laser-beam (as we would now call it) caught the deputation,

"pinetrees burst into fire, and every dry furze-bush became with one dull thud a mass of flames. And far away towards Knaphill I saw the flashes of trees and hedges and wooden buildings suddenly set alight."

The heat-ray spared Wells by not going full circle, but the "roofs of Horsell came out sharp and black against the western afterglow, and the houses towards Woking Station were sending up spires of flame."

In fear he turned and ran across the common towards Maybury.

The houses and hovels of Cheapside in Horsell would have been hit by the flames, and the few villas then being built along Woodham Road must have been the houses "sending up spires of flames".

"As yet, of course, few people in Woking even knew that the cylinder had opened, though poor Henderson had sent a messenger on a bicycle to the post-office with a special wire to an evening paper."

"Stent and Ogilvy, anticipating some possibilities of a collision, had telegraphed from Horsell to the barracks as soon as the Martians emerged, for the help of a company of soldiers to protect these strange creatures from violence."

Horsell's Post Office, run by Miss Sarah Spooner (from where Benstead's Garage used to be), did not have a telegraph office at that time - so how they managed to telegraph the Barracks is not known. The nearest telegraph office was at Woking.

The Barracks were Inkerman Barracks which were very much 'in the news' in 1895. The former women's prison at Knaphill was being

transferred to the War Department from the Home Office and converted into part of the barracks - the Male Invalid Convict Prison having been converted six years earlier.

The crowd in Chobham Road had a narrower escape than Wells. The Heat-ray

"swung close over their heads lighting the tops of the beech-trees that line the road, and splitting the bricks, smashing the windows, firing the window-frames, and bringing down in crumbling ruin a portion of the gable of the house nearest the corner."

The crowd turned and ran towards Woking.

"Where the road grows narrow and black between the high banks the crowd jammed and a desperate struggle occurred....Two women and a little boy, were crushed and trampled there and left to die amidst the terror and the darkness."

This spot must have been on Kettlewell Hill, where the road still narrows and goes between high banks. The house with the gable would have been on the edge of the common - possibly the house now converted into the Nuffield Hospital on the corner of Grange Road.

"I came into the road between the cross-roads and Horsell, and ran along this to the cross-roads."

Exhausted, he could go no further.

"That was near the bridge that crosses the canal by the gasworks. I fell and lay still."

The road he ran along was Shores Road, to the Six Crossroads and then along Monument Road to the bridge. Monument Bridge, like all the canal bridges at that time, was the original steep brick arch, built in the 1790s for horse-drawn carriages. The present bridge was built in the late 1930s.

"I rose and walked unsteadily up the steep incline of the bridge....Over the Maybury arch a train, a billowing tumult of white, firelit smoke, and a long caterpillar of lighted windows, went flying south....A dim group of people talked in the gate of one of the houses in the pretty little row of gables that was called Oriental Terrace....There was a noise of business from the gasworks, and the electric lamps were all alight."

He stopped at the group of people and tried to make them realise what had happened on the common, but they just laughed.

The "pretty little row of gables" of Oriental Terrace must have been Oriental Place, the row of houses opposite the end of Maybury Road, next to the arch. The other row of gabled houses in Monument Road, Guildford Terrace, was not built until 1902.

Both the gas works and the electric works were in Maybury, not far from Wells's home. Both Companies had competed for the contract to light Woking's streets, but it was the Electric Company

that won. The first electric street light in Woking was alight on the 28th January 1895 - just as Wells was writing the book, although from contemporary reports it seems unlikely that they were "all alight".

The service apparently was not very good and kept failing!

"In Woking Junction, until a late hour, trains were stopping and going on, others were shunting in the sidings, passengers were alighting and waiting, and everything was proceeding in the most ordinary way. A boy from town, trenching on Smith's monopoly, was selling papers with the afternoon's news. The ringing impact of trucks, the sharp whistle of the engines from the junction, mingled with his shouts of 'Men from Mars!'"

The Manager at W.H. Smith's on Woking Station, William Sherlock, would not have been pleased.

"A few seconds after midnight the crowd in the Chertsey road, Woking, saw a star fall from heaven into the pinewoods to the north west. This was the second cylinder."

It had landed in the trees near the New Zealand Golf Course.

"After breakfast, instead of working, I decided to walk down towards the common. Under the railway-bridge I found a group of soldiers - sappers, I think...They told me no one was allowed over the canal."

"I did not succeed in getting a glimpse of the common, for even Horsell and Chobham church towers were in the hands of the military authorities."

Having found his way blocked to the common, he went into town. "I found people in the town quite secure again in the presence of the military, and I heard for the first time from Marshall, the tobacconist, that his son was among the dead on the common. The soldiers had made the people on the outskirts of Horsell lock-up and leave their houses."

There were a number of tobacconists in the area at that time, but only three in the town itself. Herbert Boswell in Church Street, George Chandler and Albert Pocock in Chertsey Road. 'Marshall' must have been one of those three.

"About six in the evening, as I sat at tea with my wife in the summer-house talking vigorously about the battle that was lowering upon us, I heard a muffled detonation from the common, and immediately after a gust of firing. Close on the heels of that came a violent, rattling crash, quite close to us, that shook the ground; and, starting out upon the lawn, I saw the tops of the trees about the Oriental College burst into smoky red flame, and the tower of the little church beside it slide down into ruin. The pinnacle of the mosque had vanished, and the roof-line of the college itself looked as if a hundred-ton gun had been at work upon it.

I and my wife stood amazed, then I realized that the crest of Maybury Hill must be within range of the Martians' Heat-Ray now that the college was cleared out of the way."

The Oriental College (or Institute) was on the site of James Walker's factory, and its buildings can still be seen from No. 1 Gate. The Mosque was built in 1889 to accompany the Institute.

The 'little church' with its 'tower', is St. Paul's church, built in 1895 - with a spire not a tower.

Having realised that their home was no longer safe from attack, they decide to leave for Leatherhead, where his cousin lives. He goes off to get transport.

"I started off at once for the Spotted Dog, for I knew the landlord had a horse and dogcart. I ran, for I perceived that in a moment everyone upon this side of the hill would be moving. I found him in his bar, quite unaware of what was going on behind his house."

There are three public houses in the Maybury Area. The Maybury Arms, the College Arms, and the Princess of Wales. In view of the gruesome way the landlord is murdered (as you will see later), it is not surprising that Wells had to change the name to avoid making it obvious which landlord he wished to 'kill'. However, he did not make it impossible to find out as he later mentions both the Maybury and the College Arms public houses. So the Spotted Dog must be the Princess of Wales, and the unlucky landlord (who presumably must have upset Wells on some occasion) was William Brown. But why the 'Spotted Dog'? One theory is that William Brown had a Dalmatian dog - hence the connection - although this has yet to be proved.

Having secured the dog-cart on the promise that he would return it as soon as possible, he rushed home. As he loaded the cart a soldier came running up the hill knocking on everyone's doors.

"He turned, stared, bawled something about 'crawling out of the thing like a dish cover', and ran on to the gate of the house on the crest."

This clearly places Wells's house on the slope of Maybury Hill Road, below Maybury Rough which is the house on the crest. Pookes Hill, now divided into flats, would seem to fit the bill!

"In another moment we were clear of the smoke and noise, and spanking down the opposite slope of Maybury Hill towards Old Woking.

In front was a quiet sunny landscape, a wheatfield ahead on either side of the road, and the Maybury Inn with its swinging sign. I saw the doctor's cart ahead of me. At the bottom of the hill I turned my head to look at the hillside I was leaving...The smoke already extended far away to the east and west - to Byfleet pinewoods eastward, and Woking on the west."

The wheatfields would occupy the land about Sandy Lane, Park

Road and the Hockering Estate. The Maybury Inn is obviously the Maybury Arms.

"When I looked back again the second hill had hidden the black smoke. I slashed the horse with the whip, and gave him a loose rein until Woking and Send lay between us and that quivering tumult. I overtook and passed the doctor between Woking and Send."

The second hill was Monument Hill, where the Hoe Bridge Golf Course is now, and the doctor was overtaken on Broadmead Road.

"Leatherhead is about twelve miles from Maybury Hill. The scent of hay was in the air through the lush meadows beyond Pyrford, and the hedges on either side were sweet and gay with multitudes of dog roses.

We got to Leatherhead without misadventure about nine o'clock. It was nearly eleven when I started to return.

As I came through Ockham (for that was the way I returned, and not through Send and Old Woking) I saw along the western horizon a blood-red glow, which, as I drew nearer, crept slowly up the sky. The driving clouds of the gathering thunderstorm mingled there with masses of black and red smoke.

Ripley Street was deserted, and except for a lighted window or so the village showed no sign of life; but I narrowly escaped an accident at the corner of the road to Pyrford, where a knot of people stood with their backs to me."

From the above description it seems probable that his outward journey was through Send and West Clandon to the main Guildford-Leatherhead Road, and that on his return he either went north to Cobham and then down through Ockham or south through Bookham and Effingham to Ockham and Ripley.

"From Ripley until I came through Pyrford I was in the valley of the Wey, and the red glare was hidden from me. As I ascended the little hill beyond Pyrford Church the glare came into view again, and the trees about me shivered with the first intimation of the storm that was upon me. Then I heard midnight pealing out from Pyrford Church behind me, and then came the silhouette of Maybury Hill, with its tree-tops and roofs black and sharp against the red....A lurid green glare lit the road about me, and showed the distant woods towards Addlestone."

From Ripley he took the road over the River Wey and passed Newark Mill and Priory to Pyrford Church. His reference to the church pealing twelve echoes the local legend of the Pyrford Stone. The legend records that when the church clock strikes twelve the stone turns. The only problem being that Pyrford Church has never had a clock! The pine trees towards Addlestone would have been the Blackdown woods, whilst those towards Maybury would have been where East Hill and the Maybury Estate are today.

"A moderate incline runs down towards the foot of Maybury Hill, and

down this we clattered....At first I regarded little but the road before me - and then, in a flash like daylight, the red masses of the Orphanage near the crest of the hill, the green tops of the pine-trees, and this problematical object came out clear and sharp and bright.

And this thing I saw! How can I describe it? A monstrous tripod, higher than many houses, striding over the young pine-trees, and smashing them aside in its career."

This short paragraph has fooled many. The Orphanage that used to be in Oriental Road is nowhere near the crest of Maybury Hill and was not visible from the Old Woking Road where Wells was obviously travelling. In fact it was not visible to Wells at all, as it was not built until 1909! The building Wells described was not an Orphanage, but was the old St. Peter's Memorial Home. Wells was again playing safe, probably hiding its identity, so that the nuns who ran it would not be upset.

Through the trees a second tripod came towards him. He pulled on the reins and the dog-cart keeled over. Wells fell into a puddle and lay motionless for a few moments.

"Not far from me was a little one-roomed squatter's hut of wood, surrounded by a patch of potato-garden. I struggled to my feet at last, and, crouching and making use of every chance of cover, I made a run for this. I hammered at the door, but I could not make the people hear (if there were any people inside), and after a time I desisted, and availing myself of a ditch for the greater part of the way, succeeded in crawling, unobserved by these monstrous machines, into the pine-wood towards Maybury."

The squatter hut, typical of its type, must have been beside the Old Woking Road.

"I staggered through the trees, fell into a ditch and bruised my knees against a plank, and finally splashed out into the lane that ran down from the College Arms. I say splashed, for the storm water was sweeping the sand down the hill in a muddy torrent. There in the darkness a man blundered into me and sent me reeling back."

East Hill, at the turn of the century, was a narrow sandy lane that often turned to mud when the rains came. There is no doubt that this was the lane Wells splashed into.

"Near the top I stumbled upon something soft, and, by a flash of lightning, saw between my feet a heap of black broadcloth and a pair of boots...I stood over him waiting for the next flash. When it came, I saw that he was a sturdy man, cheaply but not shabbily dressed; his head was bent under his body, and he lay crumpled up close to the fence, as though he had been flung violently against it. I stopped and turned him over to feel for his heart. He was quite dead. The lightning flashed for a third time, and his face leapt upon me. I sprang to my feet. It was the landlord of the Spotted Dog, whose conveyance I had taken.

I stepped over him gingerly and pushed on up the hill. I made my way by the police-station and the College Arms towards my own house."

Now you can see why he changed the name of the Princess of Wales public house! William Brown would not have been pleased.

The Police Station was actually in Woking, where it is today (September 1989, not in the former Boys Grammar School as it will be shortly), but at least one constable was stationed in Maybury and presumably Wells was referring to his house in College Road.

"So far as I could see by the flashes, the houses about me were mostly uninjured. By the College Arms a dark heap lay in the road.

Down the road towards Maybury Bridge there were voices and the sound of feet, but I had not the courage to shout or go to them. I let myself in with my latch-key.

The towers of the Oriental college and the pine trees about it had gone. There was a light down below the hill, on the railway, near the arch, and several of the houses along Maybury Road and the streets near the station were glowing ruins."

His real house along Maybury Road, and those of his neighbours, may well have been the glowing ruins.

A while later he heard a noise down below in his garden. It was an artilleryman who had escaped the destruction. Wells let him in, gave him food and drink, and listened to his story.

At dawn, Wells and the artilleryman decided to leave the house, Wells to go to Leatherhead, the artilleryman towards London.

"We crept out of the house and ran as quickly as we could down the ill-made road by which I had come overnight. The houses seemed deserted. At the corner turning up towards the post-office a little cart, filled with boxes and furniture, and horseless, heeled over on a broken wheel. Except the lodge of the Orphanage, which was still on fire, none of the houses had suffered very greatly here."

The Orphanage Lodge would be the lodge to the Home, whilst the Post-Office was on the corner with Lavender Road and Sandy Lane. It was run by Harry Mitchell in Wells's time.

They went through the woods by the railway line.

"In one place the woodman had been at work on Saturday; trees, felled and freshly trimmed, lay in a clearing, with heaps of sawdust, by the sawing machine and its engine. Hard by was a temporary hut, deserted."

These woods, where the West Byfleet Golf Club is now, would have been mature pine-woods even in the 1890s. The trees of Sheerwater (across the railway) had been planted in the early 1800s to help drain the Sheerwater Lake (where the L.C.C. Estate is), and

photographs of Blackdown, Pyrford, show tall pine trees in the early part of this century.

The road must have been Camphill Road going out towards New Haw, as 'Byfleet Station' was in fact West Byfleet Station (opened as Byfleet & Woodham in 1887). Byfleet & New Haw station was not built until 1927.

Wells leaves the Woking area and moves on to Weybridge and Shepperton. Woking is mentioned only a few times after that, until the end when he returns to find his wife at Maybury.

The Martians were destroyed and everything returned to normal. Woking was presumably rebuilt but not, I suspect, in quite the same way as it was really rebuilt during the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

The genius of Wells is shown in his prediction of chemical warfare and laser beams long before they happened. But he also predicted the total destruction of Woking, for the Woking he knew has been destroyed, not by Martians, but by the town planners.

One cannot help wondering what he would have made of the town of the 1990s, and what, or who, he would have had the Martians destroy now, if they were to return for the War of the Worlds II.

[This article is an abridgement of one which appeared, with illustrations, in Vol.2 of the *Woking History Journal* (Spring 1990). Photocopies of the original article are available at a cost of £1.50 each, excluding postage; from 166 High Street, Old Woking, Surrey GU22 9JH, England. The author also conducts guided tours of the places mentioned in *The War of the Worlds*, and gives illustrated lectures on them, using photographs from the 1890s. Enquiries should be sent c/o the above address.]

A. Langley Searles Concerning 'The Country of the Blind'

Although H.G. Wells' short fantasy 'The Country of the Blind' has been reprinted frequently since its original appearance early in the century, few readers are apparently aware of the fact that there are