

In a series of guided Heritage Walks around Woking, and in these articles, we investigate the stories behind H G Wells' famous science-fiction novel 'The War of the Worlds'

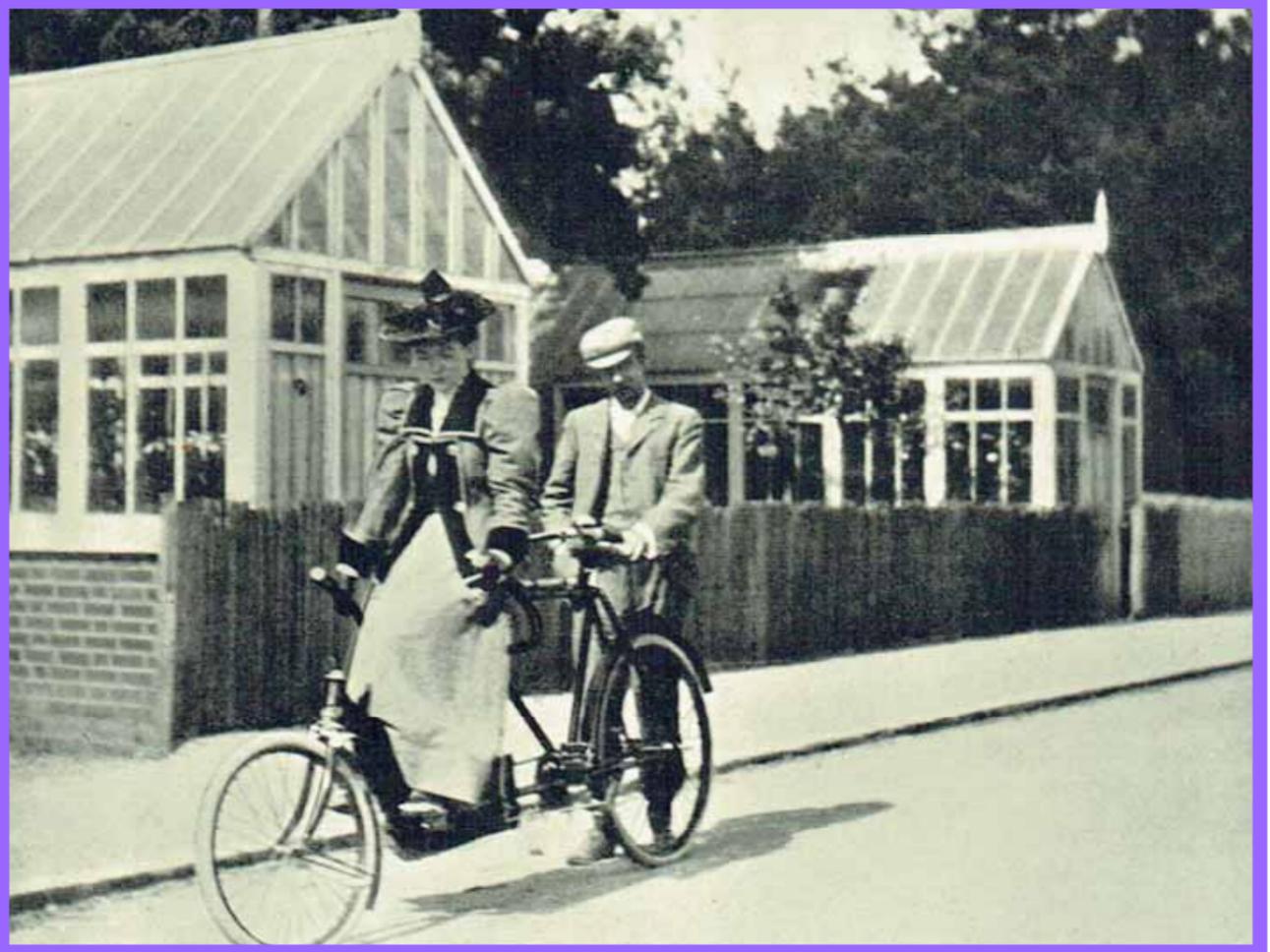
Iain Wakeford 2016

CHAPTER THREE - ON HORSELL COMMON

Having read of the Martian cylinder in his 'Daily Chronicle', the Narrator heads to Horsell Common where he finds the turf and gravel 'charred as if by a sudden explosion'.

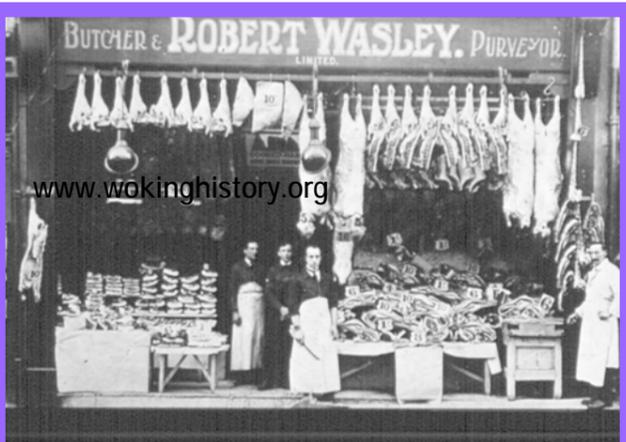
There was a group of bystanders including 'a couple of cyclists, a jobbing gardener I employed sometimes, a girl carrying a baby, Gregg the butcher and his little boy, and two or three loafers and golf caddies who were accustomed to hang around the railway station'.

Wells and his wife learned to ride a bicycle whilst in Woking, and it appears that he was quite keen on gardening, mentioning his little greenhouse with an illustration of the first marrow that he grew there, in his autobiography written in 1934 (below).

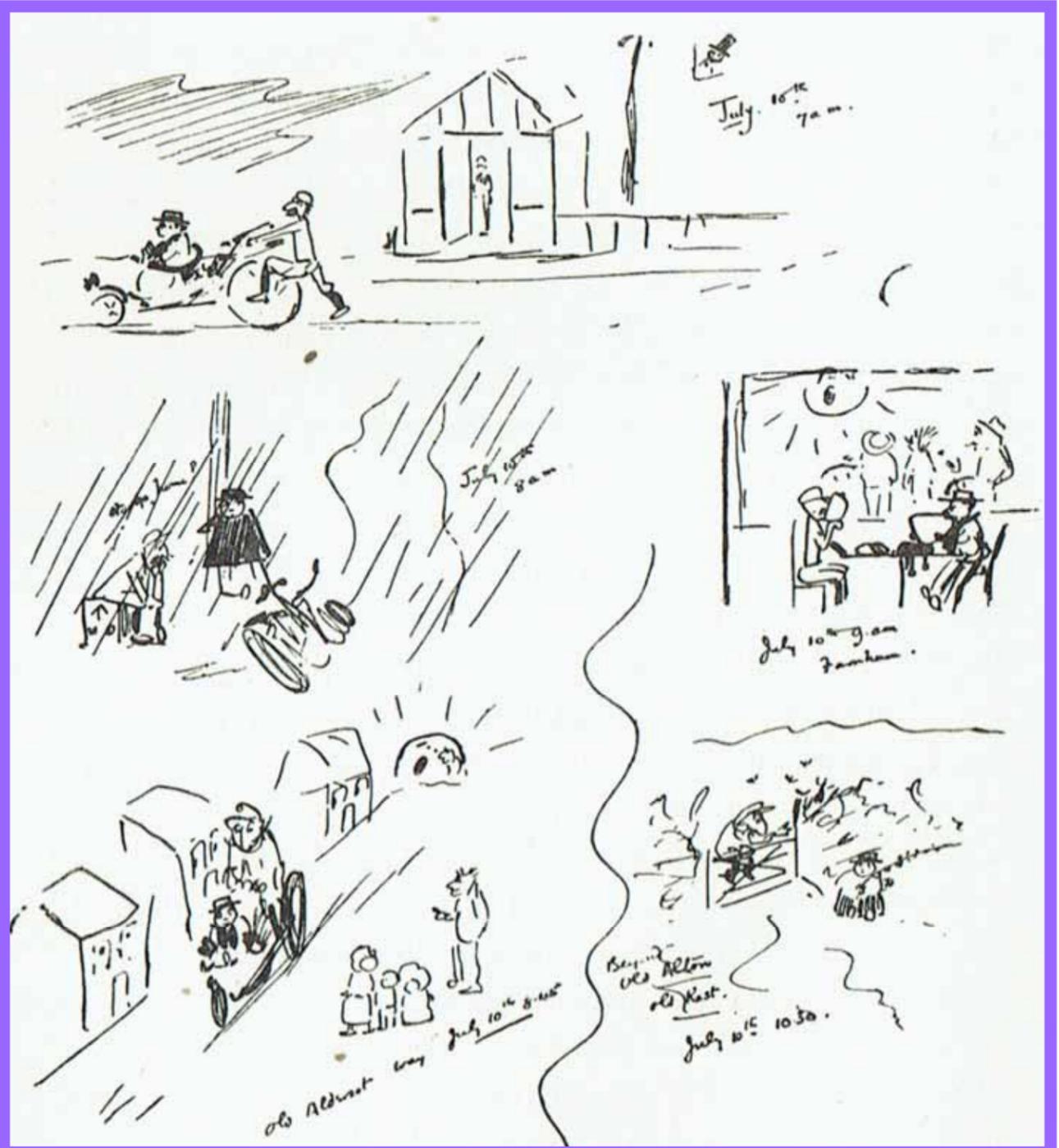


Who the girl carrying the baby or Gregg the butcher and his little boy were we do not know (there were many more butchers in Woking in 1895 than there are today), but I cannot help wonder whether these and the 'loafers and golf caddies' had upset Wells one day as he was wondering around Woking, and had therefore found their way into his 'little black book' to be later destroyed by his Martians!

The same could probably be said of those who were at the sandpits in the afternoon of that



There were numerous butcher's shops in Woking in Wells' day, most no doubt displaying their meat similar to that shown here at Robert Wasley's shop in Chertsey Road, Woking.





Henry Flowerday was the only sweet-stuff dealer in Chobham Road, Woking, in the mid 1890's.

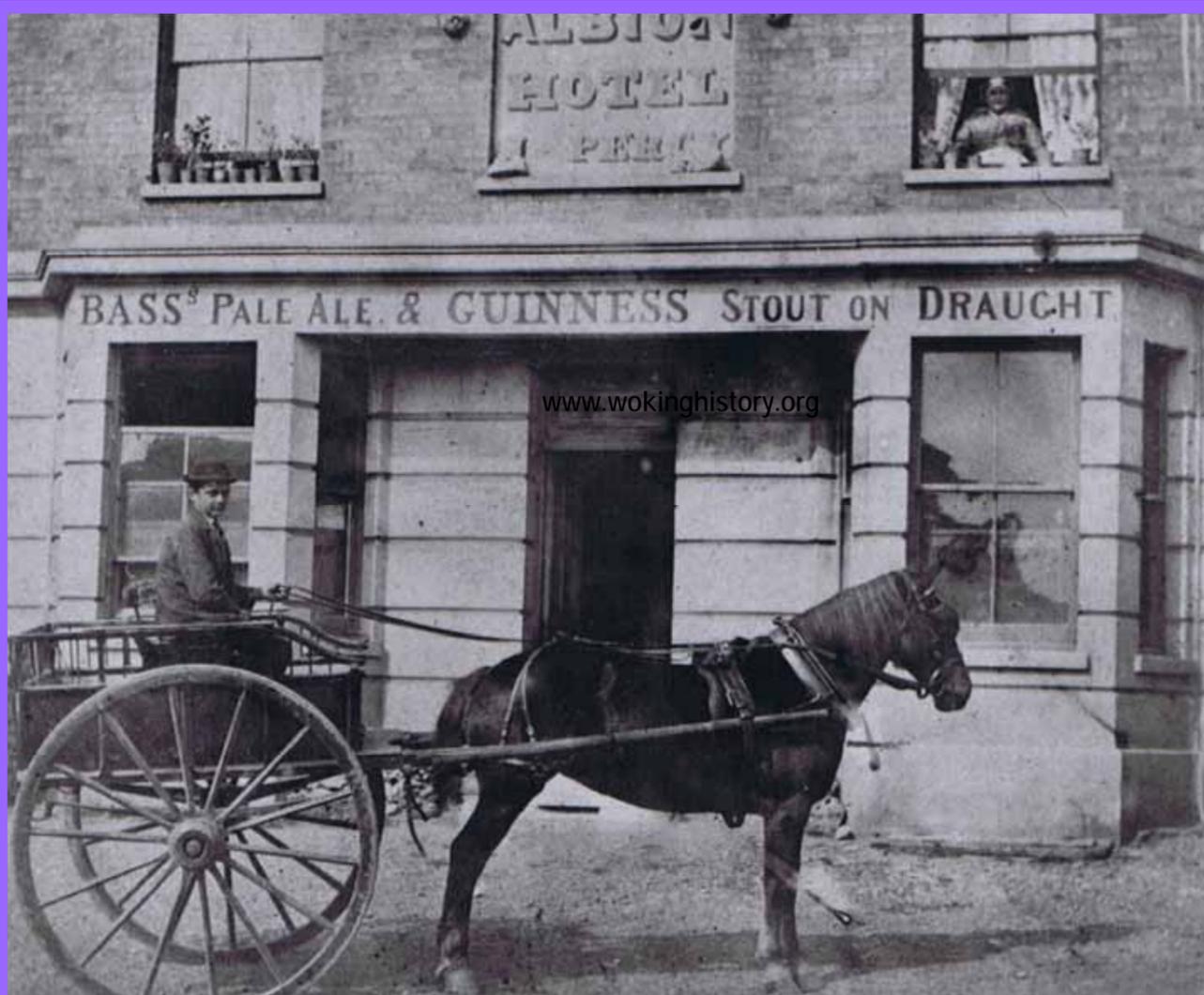
first Friday. *'There were half a dozen flies from the Woking station standing in the road by the sand-pits, a basket chaise from Chobham, and a rather lordly carriage. Besides that there were quite a heap of bicycles'*. Many had walked from Woking and Chertsey including *'an enterprising sweet-stuff dealer in the Chobham Road'* who had *'sent up his son with a barrow-load of green apples and ginger-beer'*. Had Wells nearly been run over one day by one of Edmund Water's carriages that were hired out from the stables of the Albion Hotel (*'flies, landaus, broughams, brakes and all kinds of carriage, always at hand'*) and had he bought an apple with a maggot in it, or a flat ginger-beer from Henry Flowerday, the only sweet-stuff dealer in the Chobham Road at that time (whose son, therefore, is probably one of the first victims of the Martians)!

By then the Astronomer Royal (who Wells calls *'Stent'* in the story) had joined Ogilvy and Henderson who with a group of workmen were trying to dig the cylinder out of the sand-pit. The Narrator was asked to visit *'Lord Hilton'*, the lord of the manor, for permission to put up a *'light railing'* so that the crowd could be held back.

Permission was required as although local people had a right to graze their animals on the common, they did not have a right to fence it as the land was still owned by the lord of the manor and technically required an Act of Parliament to *'enclose'* it – although a temporary enclosure would have been possible with the owners permission.

The lord of the manor at that time was the Earl of Onslow, but as he lived at Clandon Park, Wells moves *'Lord Hilton'* to a house much closer to Woking Station so that when he was *'told that he was expected from London by the six o'clock train from Waterloo; and it was then about a quarter past five'* he was able to go home, have some tea, and then walk back up to the station in time *'to waylay him'*.

The Narrator couldn't have walked from Clandon Park back to Maybury and then up to Woking Station in three-quarters of hour, so Wells must have moved him closer to town, and presumably into a much smaller residence (whilst as the Narrator he was moving himself to a much larger property on Maybury Hill).



By the mid 1890's Edmund Waters ran the Albion Hotel opposite Woking Station, hiring out horses and carriages of all kinds to guests and travellers.

Wells changes the name of the lord of the manor to *'Lord Hilton'* and moves him from the Earl of Onslow's seat at Clandon Park (below) to a house much closer to Woking Station.

