

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'

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# CHAPTER ELEVEN AT THE WINDOW



The houses of Maybury Road, and the streets about the station (such as Chertsey Road, below), were destroyed by the Martian's Heat-Rays.

Having returned to his house in the early hours of Sunday morning, the Narrator describes what he can see of the destruction of Woking, supplemented, when he encounters the Artilleryman, by his experience of the Martian Heat-Ray's effects on the town.

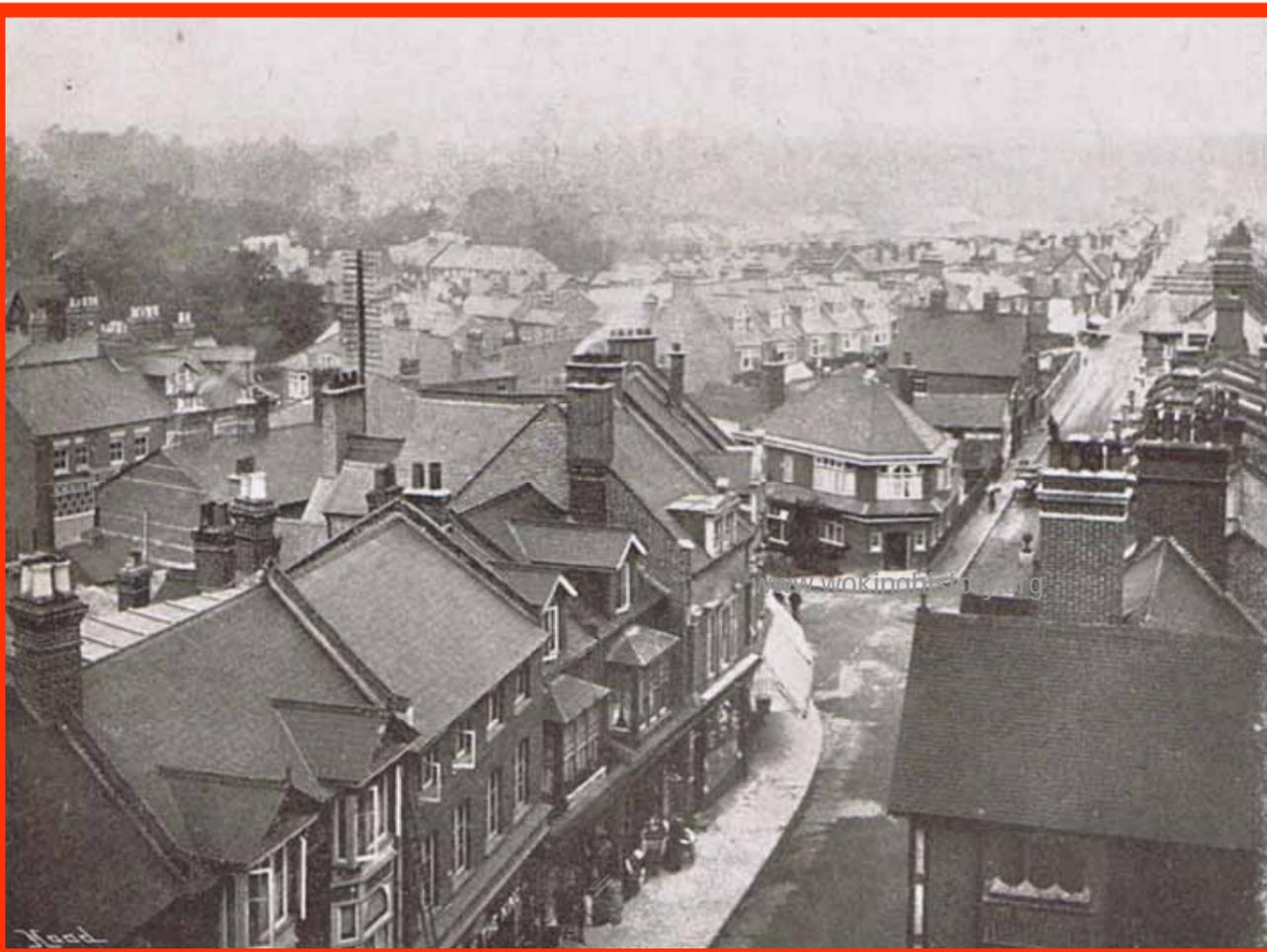
*'The window of my study looks over the trees and the railway towards Horsell Common.'*

*'The towers of the Oriental College and the pine trees about it had gone, and far away, lit by a vivid red glare, the common about the sandpits was visible.'*



*'I closed the door noiselessly and crept towards the window. As I did so the view opened out until on the one hand it reached to the houses about Woking station, and on the other to the charred and blackened pine-woods of Byfleet. 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.'*

Was Wells' own house in Maybury Road (above) one of those 'glowing ruins'?

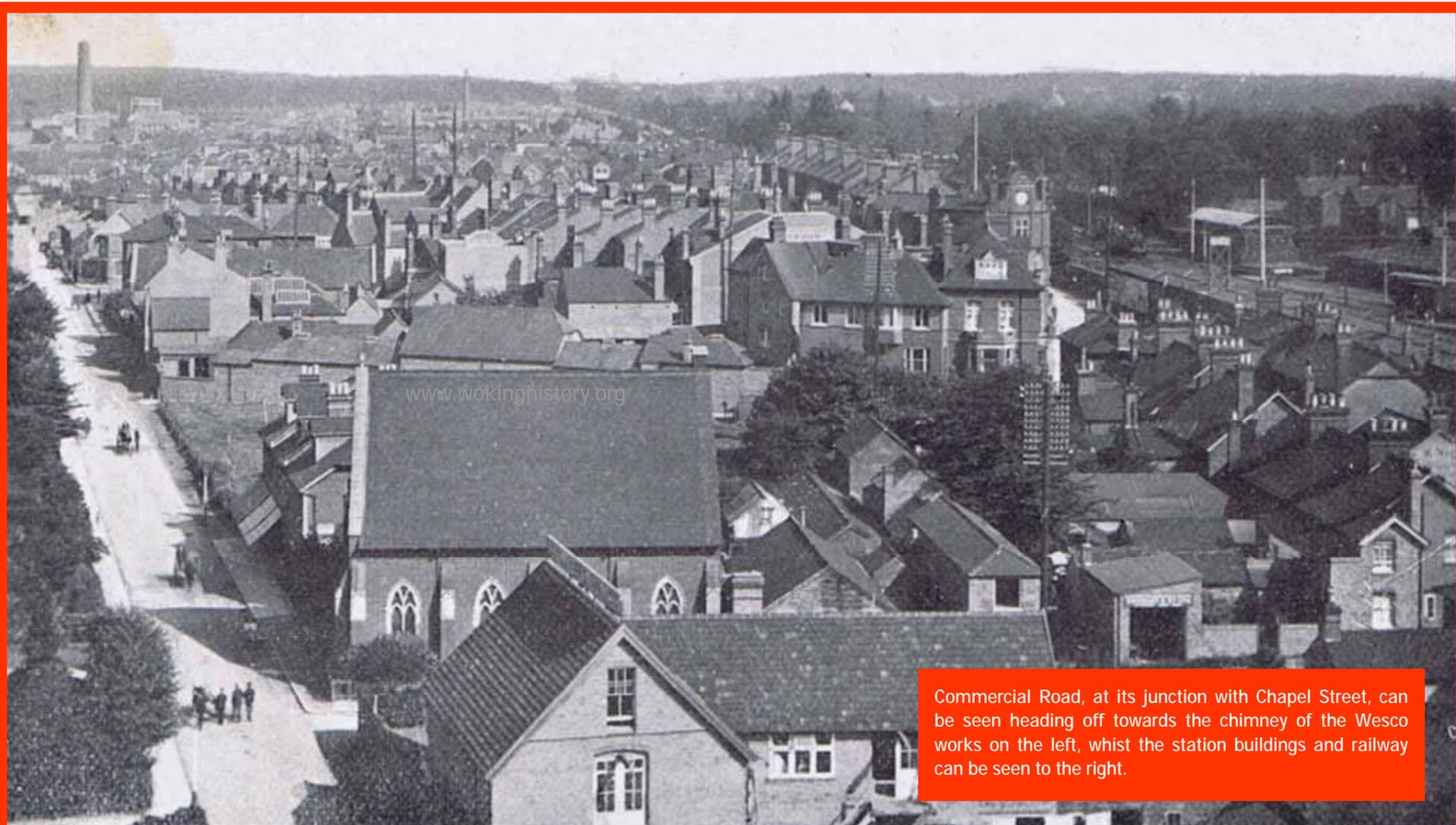




*'The light upon the railway puzzled me at first; there were a black heap and a vivid glare, and to the right of that a row of yellow oblongs. Then I perceived this was a wrecked train, the fore-part smashed and on fire, the hinder carriages still upon the rails.'*

There had been numerous train crashes on the London & South Western Railway since it first opened from Nine Elms (Vauxhall) to Southampton in 1840, although fortunately none in the Woking area at the time Wells was living here.

*'Between these three main centres of light, the houses, the train, and the burning country towards Chobham, stretched irregular patches of dark country, broken here and there by intervals of dimly glowing and smoking ground.'*



Commercial Road, at its junction with Chapel Street, can be seen heading off towards the chimney of the Wesco works on the left, whilst the station buildings and railway can be seen to the right.



W. A. Elton, Woking.

Horsell Common as viewed from the bridge over the Basingstoke Canal at Chertsey Road



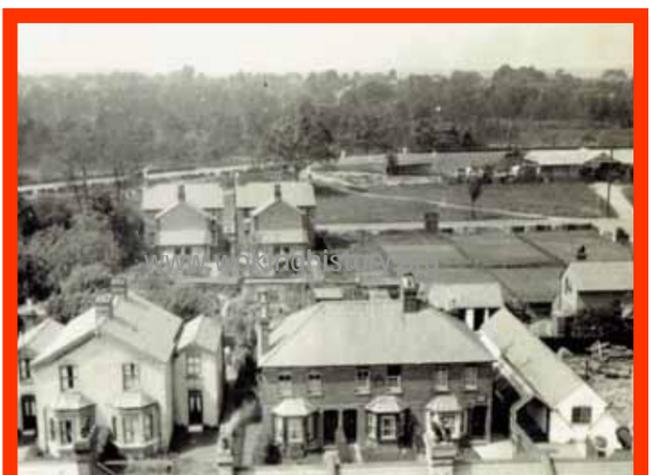
*'Later I saw against the light of Woking station a number of black figures hurrying one after another across the line.'*

One of these may have been the Artilleryman whom later the Narrator saw clambering over his palings into his garden. He let him into the house and after a while heard his story.

*'He was a driver in the artillery and had only come into action about seven.'*

*'The gun he drove had been unlimbered near Horsell, in order to command the sandpits. - As the limber gunner went to the rear, his horse trod in a rabbit-hole and came down, throwing him into a depression of the ground. At the same time the gun exploded behind him, the ammunition blew up, there was fire all about him and dead horses.'*

*'In a few minutes there was, so far as the soldier could see, not a living thing left upon the common, and every bush and tree upon it that was not already a blackened skeleton was burning.'*



The houses of Board School Road and Boundary Road with Horsell Common in the background



*'The giant saved Woking station and its cluster of houses until last; then in a moment the Heat-Ray was brought to bear and the town became a heap of fiery ruins.'*

*'The artilleryman began to crawl very cautiously across the hot heather ash towards Horsell. He managed to get alive into the ditch by the side of the road, and so escape to Woking.'*

The road with the ditch could have been Chertsey Road with the houses of Boundary Road and Board School Road being some of the 'cluster of houses' destroyed by the Heat Ray.

*'The place was impassable. It seems there were a few people alive there, frantic for the most part and many burned and scalded. He was turned aside by the fire and hid amongst some almost scorching heaps of broken wall as one of the Martian giants returned. He saw this one pursue a man, catch him up in one of its steely tentacles, and knock his head against the trunk of a pine-tree.'*

*'At last after nightfall the artilleryman made a rush for it and got over the railway embankment.'*

This must have been somewhere along the Maybury Road.

*'Since then he had been skulking along towards Maybury in the hope of getting out of danger Londonward. People were hiding in trenches and cellars, and many of the survivors had made off towards Woking Village and Send. He had been consumed with thirst until he found one of the water mains near the railway arch smashed and the water bubbling out like a spring upon the road.'*

*'That was the story I got from him bit by bit'.*

The burst water main by the arch would have been the responsibility of the Woking Water Company, whose offices were on the corner of Commercial Road and Percy Street (below left).

Roadworks in the Maybury Road - perhaps as much a feature in Wells' day as they seem to be today, with the Woking Water Company, the Woking Electric Supply Company and the Woking Gas Company all laying their mains in the area.



The offices of the Woking Water Company on the corner of Commercial Road and Percy Street.

