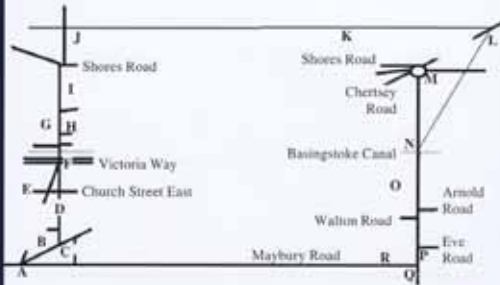


**H.G. WELLS, WOKING & THE 'REAL' WAR OF THE WORLDS
WOKING TOWN CENTRE & HORSELL COMMON**

- A - Woking Station
- B - Chertsey Road
- C - Wetherspoons
- D - Chobham Road, the 'cylinder' and the 'triped'

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- K - The Sandpits
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- G - The Wheatstief
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- I - Kettlewell Hill

- O - The Gasworks
- P - Oriental Terrace
- Q - Maybury Arch
- R - H.G. Wells' house

This cycle route should take up two hours (depending on your cycling ability) and although some of the paths across the common will be muddy in bad weather, the route should be accessible all year round. In the summer some of the paths may become overgrown with nettles, so wear suitable clothing. Please follow the Countryside Code, respect the privacy of the owners and occupiers of the properties listed and enjoy your ride.

For a copy of the current programme of guided Heritage Walks, please send a S.A.E. to the publisher, or e-mail heritage-walks@ntworld.com

**CYCLE
GUIDE No. 1**

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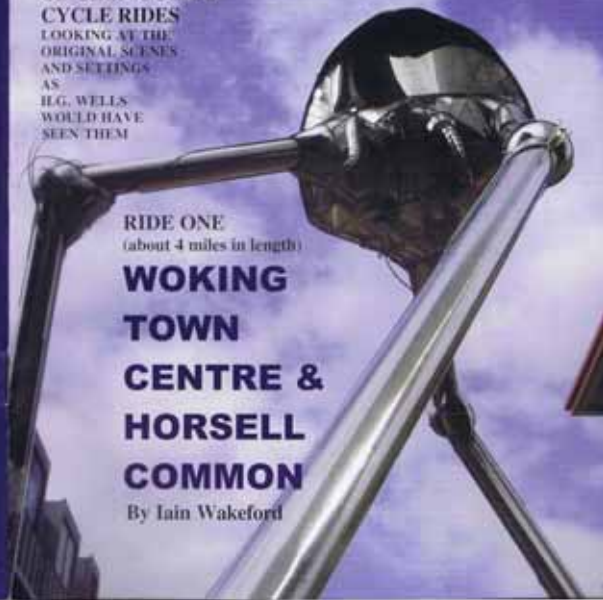
H.G. WELLS, WOKING & THE REAL WAR OF THE WORLDS

ONE OF A SERIES
OF SELF-GUIDED
CYCLE RIDES
LOOKING AT THE
ORIGINAL SCENES
AND SETTINGS
AS
H.G. WELLS
WOULD HAVE
SEEN THEM

RIDE ONE
(about 4 miles in length)

WOKING TOWN CENTRE & HORSELL COMMON

By Iain Wakeford



**H.G. WELLS, WOKING & THE 'REAL' WAR OF THE WORLDS
WOKING TOWN CENTRE & HORSELL COMMON**

Wells and Woking

H.G. Wells came to Woking in 1895 - at the start of his writing career. *The Time Machine* (his first great science-fiction novel) was published in that year. Whilst in Woking, Wells wrote not only *The War of the Worlds* but also *The Invisible Man* (as well as several articles and the book *Wheels of Chance*). Wells had recently married for the second time and had borrowed £100 from his new mother-in-law to help furnish a small, semi-detached villa in Maybury Road.

He lived there quite happily until the end of 1896, when he and his wife decided to move to a larger house at Worcester Park with room to look after his ailing mother-in-law.

By this stage, Wells was starting to make money from his writing. *The War of the Worlds* had already



H.G. Wells' house in Maybury Road. Look at the house next door for a better idea of how Wells would have seen his house.

been published as a series of articles in *Pearson's Magazine* and in 1898 it was released as a book. In his autobiography, Wells recalls how he had learnt to ride a bicycle in Woking and how he had travelled around the area noting down suitable people and places to be destroyed by his Martians.

It seems appropriate, therefore, that this guide should take the form of a cycle tour - although you can, of course, walk the route if you prefer. Indeed there are some parts where you will have to dismount. Please ride legally and carefully.



Woking Station in the late 1890's.

The Ride

This ride mainly covers events in the first seven chapters of the book, around the Woking Town Centre and Horsell Common areas. It starts from Woking Railway Station, but you could, of course, start from any point along the route.

Woking Railway Station

Wells mentions the station on several occasions in the book - the Narrator hearing the sound of 'shunting trains ringing and rumbling, softened almost into melody by the distance' on 'The Eye of the War'. It was here, too, that Ogilvy and Henderson headed when they ran into town to tell of 'The Falling Star'.

The route down Chertsey Road from the station.



'Henderson went into the railway station at once, in order to telegraph the news to London'. And the station was where, on 'Friday Night', 'A boy from town, trenching on Smith's monopoly, was selling papers with the afternoon's news.'

Just before you reach the station turn right into Chertsey Road.

Chertsey Road

In Wells' time this was one of the main shopping streets of the town, and it was along here, heading for the station, that Ogilvy and Henderson must have come on the morning of 'The Falling Star' -



The corner of the Broadway.

'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.'

It was here, too, on the 'Friday Night' that 'a few seconds after midnight the crowd in Chertsey

One of the original buildings in Chertsey Road.

Road, Woking, saw a star fall from heaven into the pine-wood to the north-west.' A few of the original buildings can still be found in Chertsey Road on both sides at the top of the street and beyond Pizza Hut on the right.



Chertsey Road at the junction with Chobham Road.

Turn left into Chobham Road and dismount (as this part of the town is a pedestrian area). If you wish, you can leave your bicycle in the racks opposite the Woking Visitor Information Centre and make a small detour on foot to Wetherspoons public house.



Wetherspoons.

Wetherspoons

A visit to Wetherspoons is recommended purely to view their collection of old photographs of the town, their 'Time Machine' clock (with quotes from *The War of the Worlds*) and the effigy of 'The Invisible Man' sitting in the window!

Chobham Road then and now.



Chobham Road in late Victorian times (above) and more or less the same view today with 'The Tripod' in the distance.



Wetherspoons is in Chertsey Road beyond the junction with Chobham Road, so return to Chertsey Road, turn left and the pub is 100 yards on the right. Return the same way to the Visitor Information Centre and Chobham Road.

Chobham Road

A whole chapter is devoted to 'The Heat-Ray in Chobham Road', and what happened to the 'shop people and so forth' from town, but one unfortunate trader featured earlier in the story 'On Horsell Common', when the Narrator returned to the common on the Friday afternoon to find a much larger crowd than the one he had witnessed earlier in the day.

'An enterprising sweetstuff dealer in the Chobham Road had sent up his son with a barrow-load of green apples and ginger-beer'.

In Wells' day there was only one 'sweetstuff dealer' in Chobham Road, and so we can be reasonably certain who this enterprising man was - he was Henry Flowerday. Whether his son had served Wells one day with a flat bottle of ginger beer or a rotten apple, we can not be certain, but his name almost certainly is one of the 'suitable people and places' Wells later recalled noting down for destruction by his Martians!

It is perhaps appropriate that this section of road

(right outside where Henry Flowerday li ved and worked) is dedicated to public art depicting the Martian's cylinder and tripod.

The cylinder.



The Tripod and Cylinder

The cylinder and tripod (together with the 'bacteria' embedded in the pavements of Crown Passage) were part of Woking's celebrations marking the centenary of the publication of the story in 1896/7 in Pearson's Magazine.

The cylinder weighs about 2000 kilos, whilst the tripod (designed by Michael Condron) stands seven metres tall with legs 17 cm. in diameter, each set at an angle to allow the tripod to move slightly in strong winds!

The Tripod.





Town Gate.

Return to The Tripod and Chobham Road, turning left (past Action Bikes) to the end of the road and the crossing of Victoria Way.

The route down Chobham Road from 'The Tripod'



From the Tripod it is possible to make another small diversion by turning left to the Town Gate (between Christ Church and Barclays Bank) which includes in its metalwork a depiction of the Martian Tripod and (perhaps easier to identify) the pine trees of Horsell Common.

The Victoria Way subway mural.



Unfortunately it is not possible to take your bicycles under the subway (as there is no ramp), but if you would like to lock up your bike at the racks to your right, you will be rewarded with a view of another piece of public art celebrating 'The War of the Worlds'.



The Victoria Way crossing.

After viewing the tile mural remount your bicycle and cross Victoria Way to Wheatsheaf Bridge (or Horsell Bridge, as Wells often refers to it in the book).

Wheatsheaf Bridge

'Horsell Bridge' is mentioned on a number of occasions in the chapters 'The Falling Star' and 'The Heat-Ray in the Chobham Road'.

In the latter chapter he describes what happens on the Friday night after the terrible killing of the 'Deputation'.

'In Woking the shops had closed when the tragedy happened, and a number of people, shop people and so forth, attracted by the stories they had heard, were walking over Horsell Bridge and along the road between the hedges that run out at last upon the common.'

The original Wheatsheaf Bridge.



Chobham Road area in 1895.

poor state, as in 1906 it had to be closed to traffic and replaced by a wider girder bridge just prior to the First World War. The canal, however, would have been recognisable to Wells. In his autobiography Wells mentions the Basingstoke Canal - 'a pretty and rarely used canal amidst pine woods, a woody canal upon which one could be happy for hours in a hired canoe.'

At the mini-roundabout just beyond the canal continue straight on, along Chobham Road, to the Wheatsheaf Hotel (on your left) and the Recreation Ground (on the right).

Go straight across the mini-roundabout.

The bridge in Wells' time was much different from today's wide thoroughfare. In those days there was very little traffic on the roads of Woking and the old brick arch bridge, built in the 1790s when the Basingstoke Canal was first constructed, was only 15 feet wide. By the time the Martians invaded 'early in the twentieth century' it would have been in a



The Wheatsheaf

Although Wells does not record *The Wheatsheaf* by name, it is clear that this is 'the public house by Horsell Bridge' where Ogilvy met the potman soon after discovering the Cylinder in 'The Falling Star'.

'The time then must have been somewhere about six o'clock. He met a waggoner and tried to make him understand, but the tale he told, and his appearance, were so wild - his hat had fallen off in the pit - 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 into 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.'

Henderson, the London Journalist, probably lived in one of these houses.



Henderson's house (with its wooden palings) was probably just back up the road from the hotel, near the junction with Ferndale Road. The houses of The Grove, Ferndale Road and this section of Chobham Road were begun in the mid-1890s when part of what had been Cobbett's Nursery was sold for development.

Wells probably saw the houses being built. Indeed it should be pointed out that, although the places Wells records now look like quaint Victorian villas, most of them were then

The Wheatsheaf Hotel in the early 20th century.



Some of the houses of Fernside Road were being built at the time that Wells was writing the story.



Chobham Road leading to Kettlewell Hill (in the background) in the late 1890s.



probably regarded as ugly modern monstrosities.

One cannot help wonder what buildings Wells would choose to have the Martians destroy if he was writing the book today (he would probably be spoilt for choice)!

Continue along Chobham Road, around the corner and up Kettlewell Hill.

Kettlewell Hill

As the road goes down the hill towards the junction with Shores

Road, it is easy to picture one of the more gruesome parts of the story in 'The Heat-Ray in Chobham Road'...

'Where the road grows narrow and black between the high banks, the crowd jammed and a desperate struggle occurred. All that crowd did not escape; three persons at least, two women and a little boy, were crushed and trampled there and left to die amidst the terror and the darkness.'



Go over the hill and at the mini-roundabout at the junction with Shores Road, turn right and then go straight across the spur of road from the left into the rough track into the woods of Horsell Common.



Turn right at the mini-roundabout and then left on the track across the common.

After a short while the track comes to a car park on the right. At the end of the car park is a sandy track (sometimes difficult to cycle along where the sand is very soft). Take this track towards the Sandpits.

The Common Car Park.



Kettlewell Hill.

Horsell Common and The Sandpits

Many people assume that the cylinder landed in the sand-pits, but in *The Falling Star*, Wells says that Ogilvy found the cylinder -

'soon after dawn, and not far from the sand-pits'.

Having said that, the sandpits are not quite as Wells would have known them, as more digging since Wells' time has extended the pits further north-eastward.

The pool on Horsell Common just before you get to the sandpits.



The 'real' sandpits, as Wells would have known them, is the area of pine trees to the right of the track almost immediately after the large pond. It is interesting to note that some of the best descriptions of Horsell Common in the late Victorian period can be found in *The War of the Worlds*. It was much more open than it is today, with less woodland and more heath.

The newer part of the Sandpits.



"The sand and gravel had been flung violently in every direction over the heath and heather, forming heaps visible a mile and a half away. The heather was on fire eastward, and a thin blue smoke rose against the dawn. The thing itself lay almost entirely buried in sand amidst the scattered splinters of a fir-tree it had shivered to fragments in its descent."

That was from the chapter on 'The Falling Star', but later in the story (when the Narrator returns to the common on the Friday evening) he gives more detail of the scene — as well as some of the most dramatic parts of the story!

As the cylinder opens and the Martian emerged, the Narrator turned 'and running madly, made for the first group of trees, perhaps a hundred yards away' — 'There, among some young pine-trees and furze-bushes, I stopped, panting, and awaited further developments.

The common round the sand-pits was dotted with people standing, like myself, in a half fascinated terror. 'Anyone coming along the road from Chobham or Woking would have been amazed at the sight - a dwindling multitude of perhaps 100 people or more standing in a great irregular circle, in ditches, behind bushes, behind gates and hedges - staring hard at a few heaps of sand.'

From the descriptions that follow, it is possible to work out more or less where the Narrator was in relation to the Martians' cylinder.

'I did not dare go back towards the pit, but I felt

a passionate longing to peer into it. I began walking, therefore, in a big curve, seeking some point of vantage.'

'Most of the spectators had gathered in one or two groups - one a little crowd towards Woking, the other a knot of people in the direction of Chobham.'



A place to take a break at The Sandpits.

The Narrator was obviously not part of these groups. There were some people near him, however, including a neighbour with whom he had a brief conversation.

'Then I shifted my position to a little knoll that gave me the advantage of a yard or more of elevation, and when I looked for him presently he was walking towards Woking. The Narrator appears to be to the east of the sandpits, near Anthony's. This is confirmed soon afterwards when he states... 'The crowd far away on the left, towards Woking seemed, to grow. 'The little knot of people towards Chobham dispersed.'

In order to see both these groups clearly, he would have to be on the opposite side of the sandpits to both Woking (to the south-west) and Chobham (in the north-west)!

'As the unseen shaft of heat passed over them, pine-trees burst into fire, and every dry furze-bush became with one dull thud that a mass of flames. And far away towards Knaphill I saw the flashes of trees and hedges and wooden buildings suddenly set alight.'

The track by the Sandpits heading towards the houses at Anthony's.



The route the Narrator took off of the common is unclear (although he obviously cut across the common towards the Six Crossroads), but our route is to continue along the track by the sandpits to the houses of Anthony's.

It would be impossible today to see Knaphill from any part of Horsell Common. In those days, however, the common was more open than it is today. Knaphill would have been as easy to see from Anthony's as are the trees of Horsell Common to anyone standing at the top of Knaphill today.



The Gate at Anthony's.

At the gate at the end of the track turn right and follow this track to the main Chertsey Road.



The footpath at The Bleak can be a little hard to find.

Be careful crossing the main road to The Bleak.

Turn right and cross the road at The Bleak House (an excellent point to break your journey), before taking

The Bleak House in the late 19th century.



the footpath from the pub car park across the common to Woodham Church and Woodham Lane. Here you can either turn right to the Six Crossroads and then take the first turning to Monument Bridge, or if you prefer, cross the road and take the footpath across the common to the bridge.



The Six Crossroads in the early 20th century.



Six Crossroads

The Narrator, when he was escaping from the cylinder on the Friday night, comes by the cross roads...

'I remember nothing of my flight except the stress of blundering against trees and stumbling through the heather.'

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

The original Monument Bridge.



Monument Bridge

Wells calls this bridge 'Ottershaw Bridge' in the early part of the book, but as he is escaping the common from the Martians' heat-ray he describes it as 'the bridge that crosses the canal by the gasworks. I fell and lay still'.

After a while he came to his senses.

'I rose and walked unsteadily up the steep incline of the bridge.'

'A head rose over the arch, and a figure of a workman carrying a basket appeared. Beside him ran a little boy.'

They wished the Narrator good night, but he was too exhausted to warn them of the Martians. He walked on.



'Over the Maybury arch a train - went flying south.'

Continue along Monument Road, through the sets of traffic lights to the houses opposite the junction with Maybury Road (on the right immediately before the arch).



Monument Bridge then and now.

Monument Road

This is where the Narrator met 'A dim group of people - in the gate of one of the houses in the pretty little row of gables that was called Oriental Terrace'.

These houses are still here, between Arnold Road and the Maybury Arch.

'There was a noise of business from the gasworks, and the electric lamps were all alight. I stopped at the group of people.'



The 'pretty little row of gables' of Oriental Terrace.



The Gas Works in Boundary Road in 1895.

The Gas Works

The gas works would have been very familiar to Wells, as the view of Horsell Common from the back of his house would have been obscured by the gas holders. Perhaps this is why the Narrator in the

story is 'moved' to a house on Maybury Hill, so that he can get a much better view of the action! **Turn right into Maybury Road and after the shops look out for the semi-detached house with the blue plaque on it.**



The entrance of Maybury Road by Maybury Arch.



Maybury Road as Wells would have known it, looking away from the town towards Maybury.

Maybury Road

When Wells came to Woking, the Maybury area was just beginning to be developed. His house was one of only three at the Maybury Arch end of the road and as such must have been one of the first places to be destroyed, as the Narrator describes the scene he sees 'At the Window' in the early hours of Sunday morning (after he returns from taking his wife to Leatherhead).

'There was a light down below the hill, on the railway, near the arch, and several of the houses along the Maybury Road and the streets near the station were glowing ruins.'

To reach Woking Station again, cycle west, along Maybury Road (away from Maybury Arch).

If you wish, however, you can link this ride to that in the second book in this series (starting at the Maybury Arch), which follows the action around the Maybury Hill area (about 2½ miles in length). The third book links with the second book at The Maybury Arms, allowing you to extend the route even more (another 8 miles), following the Narrator through Old Woking and Send, and then back to Maybury Hill via Ripley and Pyrford.

Safe Cycling

Where possible, this route has taken advantage of safe cycle routes and cycle paths, but unfortunately some of the route must be along main roads, whilst in other areas you will have to dismount, as the route goes through pedestrian areas or along footpaths. Please be careful and considerate of others, especially on Horsell Common where dog walkers and horse riders will probably be encountered.

The only hill on the route is Kettlewell Hill; otherwise the route is relatively flat and easy cycling.

In Woking Town Centre there are numerous places to lock up your bicycle and plenty of places to find refreshments (especially in the Chertsey Road area). Other hosteries on the route include The Wheatsheaf Hotel on Chobham Road, Horsell, and The Bleak House at Anthony's. Enjoy!

About the Author

Iain Wakeford has written numerous books, booklets and articles on the history of Woking and on its connection with H.G. Wells and 'The War of the Worlds'. He also gives illustrated talks on the story using his extensive collection of period photographs, contemporary maps and illustrations from Pearson's Magazine (in which 'The War of the Worlds' first appeared in serial form before being published as a book).

Iain conducts a series of three guided walks based on his research and has helped on numerous television programmes and documentaries about the story.

All Iain's Heritage Walks are free, although donations are welcome—a hat is passed around at the end of the walk. For more details, please contact Iain at 166 High Street, Old Woking, GU22 9JH, or e-mail heritage.walks@ntlworld.com.