

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 FOUR - THE CYLINDER OPENS

The Narrator returns to Horsell Common just as the sun was setting. He found about a couple of hundred people standing around the sandpits looking at the cylinder that was now slowly 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'.

Whether this was Henry Flowerday's lad, or some other shop assistant in town who had upset Wells one day, I do not know.

'The end of the cylinder was being scewed out from within'.

'I turned, and as I did so the screw must have come out, for the lid of the cylinder fell upon the gravel with a ringing concussion' - 'For a moment the circular cavity seemed perfectly black. I had the sunset in my eyes'.

With the sunset in his eyes the Narrator must have been to the east or south-east of the sandpits, towards Anthonys or the Six Crossroads.

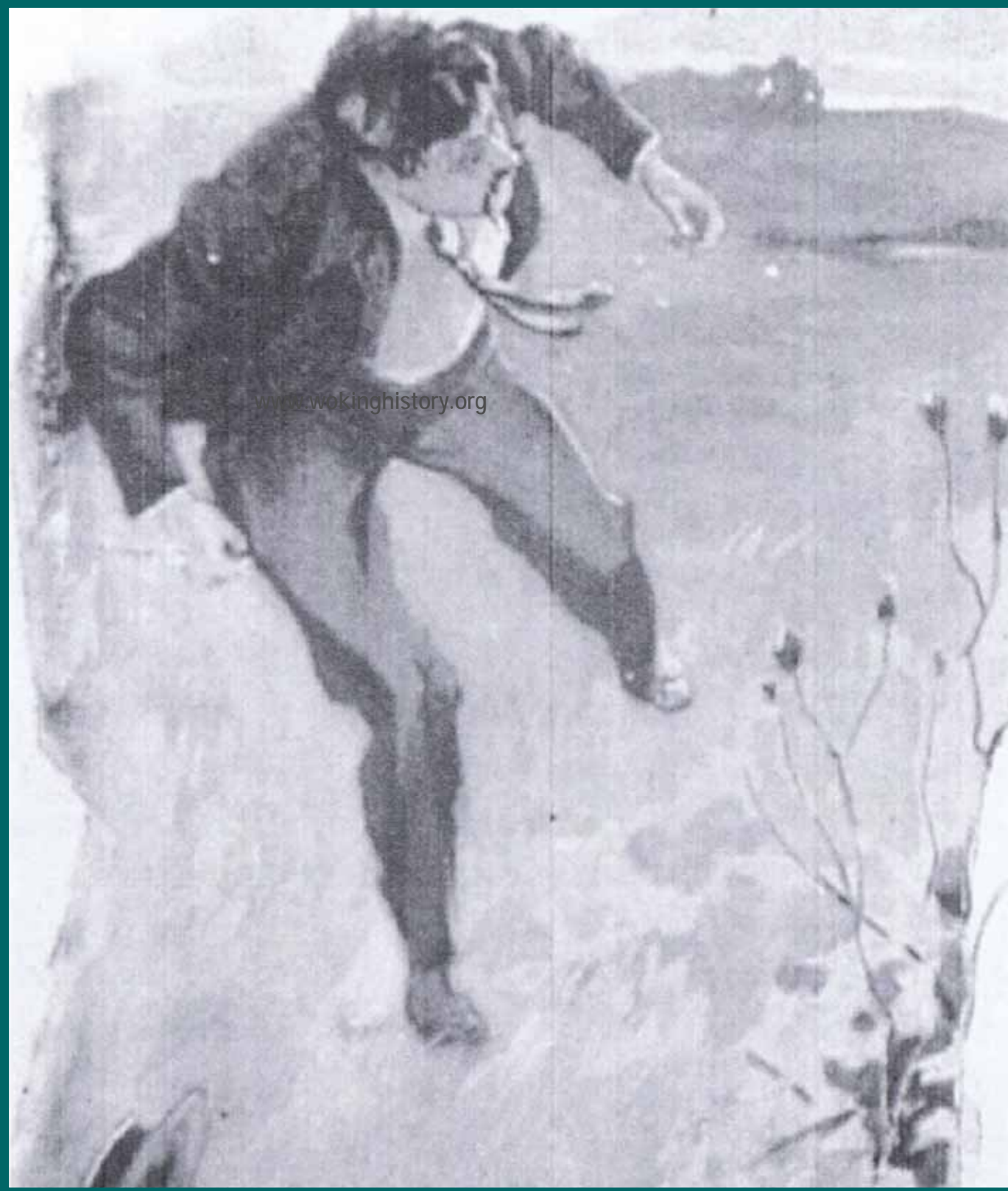
'I saw the shopman struggling still on the edge of the pit, I found myself alone, and saw the people on the other side of the pit running off, Stent among them. I looked again at the cylinder, and ungovernable terror gripped me. I stood petrified and staring.'

At this point the Martian emerged - *'a big greyish rounded bulk, the size, perhaps, of a bear'*

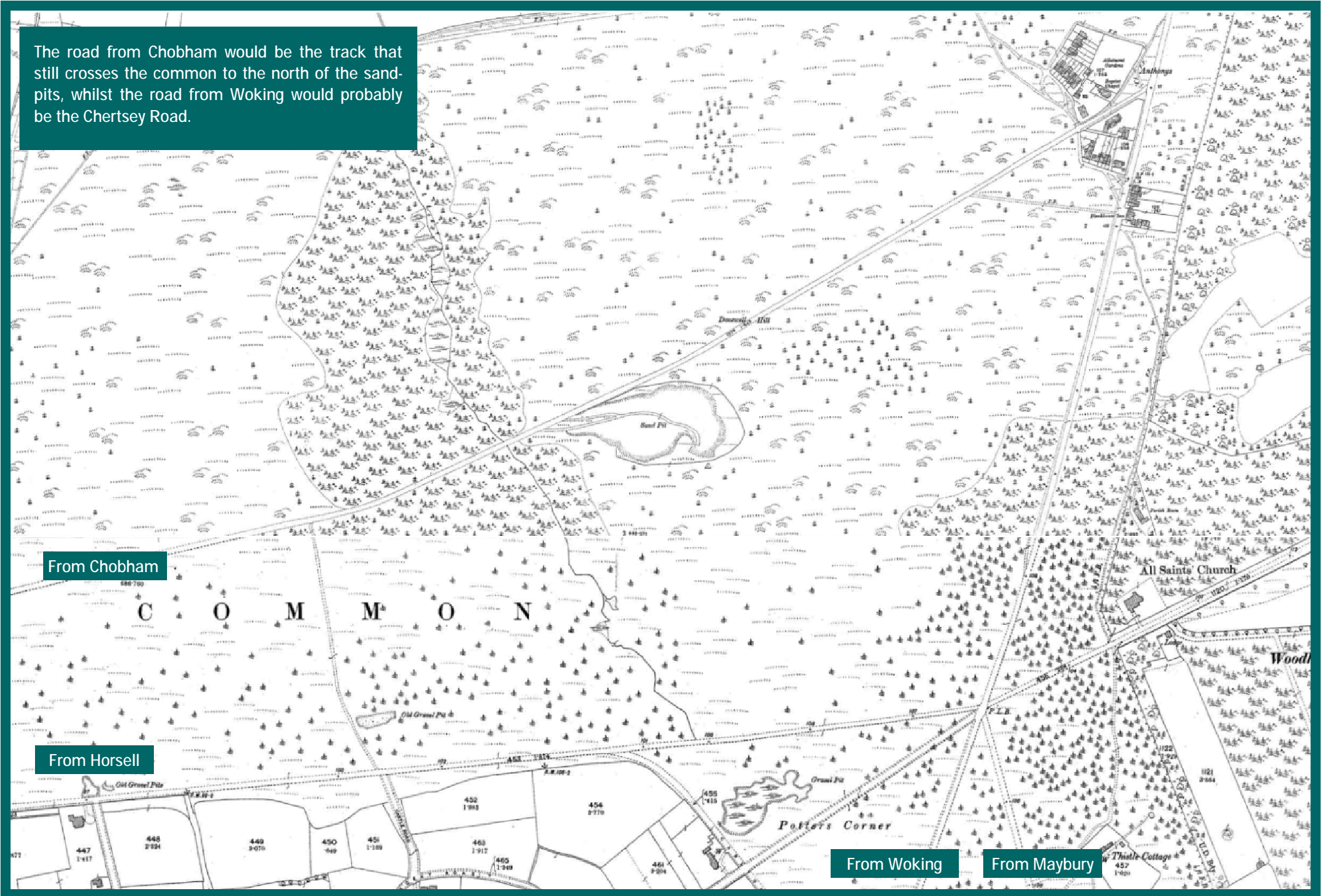
'I turned and, running madly, made for the first group of trees, perhaps a hundred yards away; but I ran slantingly and stumbling, for I could not avert my face from these things'.

'There among some young pine-trees and furze-bushes, I stopped, panting, and waited further developments'.

The young pine-trees are no longer young and it would be less than a few feet, rather than yards that you would have to run from the sandpits now to get cover.



Two illustrations from Pearsons Magazine showing the Narrator as he is fleeing from the common, 'funning madly' for the first group of trees, perhaps a hundred yards away', whilst the poor shop assistant is shown being grabbed by the Martian's tentacles and being dragged back into the pit.



'Anyone coming along the road from Chobham or Woking would have been amazed at the sight - a dwindling multitude of perhaps a hundred people or more standing in a great irregular circle, in ditches, behind bushes, behind gates and hedges' - 'staring at a few heaps of sand'.

'The barrow of ginger-beer stood, a queer derelict, black against the burning sky, and in the sand-pits was a row of deserted vehicles with their horses feeding out of nose-bags or pawing the ground'

All the 'roads' in those days were dirt tracks, so

that the 'road from Chobham' is probably the track to the north of the sandpits, with the Chertsey Road the road from Woking. The 'gates and hedges' would probably be of the houses of Anthonys and The Bleak House, the nearest group of properties to the Sandpits.

