

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 FIVE - THE HEAT RAY

In the previous chapter we left the Narrator on Horsell Common just as the Martians started to emerge from their cylinder.

'I remained standing knee-deep in the heather, staring at the mound that hid them. I was a battle-ground of fear and curiosity'

'I did not dare to 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 and continually looking at the sand-heaps that hid these new-comers to our earth'.

From his position to the south-west of the sandpits, he was obviously skirting around to the west and north-west towards Anthonys. This is confirmed by the next line where he states that...

'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.' He was obviously not part of these two groups.'

'There were a few near me. One man I approached—he was, I perceived, a neighbour of mine, though I did not know his name—and accosted. But it was scarcely a time for articulate conversation'.

Woking was virtually a 'new town' at that time, so it is not surprising that most people, Wells included, would not immediately know all their neighbours' names.

'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 crowd far away on the left, towards Woking seemed to grow, and I heard now a faint murmur from it. The little knot of people towards Chobham dispersed.'

This again confirms the Narrator's position, and as *'the dusk came on, slow, intermittent movement upon the sand-pits began'*. — *'I too, on my side began to move towards the pit'.*



The 'Deputation' with their white flag as illustrated in Pearson's Magazine

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'Then within thirty yards of the pits, advancing from the direction of Horsell, I noted a little black knot of men, the foremost of whom was waving a white flag'.

This was the 'Deputation' here to show the Martians (who would obviously have known the correct etiquette) that 'we too were intelligent'.

'Slowly a humped shape rose out of the pit, and the ghost of a beam of light seemed to flicker out from it'.

At this point the Martian's heat-ray struck and *'by the light of their own destruction, I saw them staggering and falling, and their supporters turning to run'.*

'And as the unseen shaft of heat passed over them, pine trees 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'.

You cannot see Knaphill from Horsell Common today - there are too many tall trees, but you can clearly see the common from the top of Knaphill, giving you an insight into how far Wells envisaged his 'heat-ray' to be able to travel.

'Something fell with a crash far away on the left where the road from Woking station opens out on the common'.

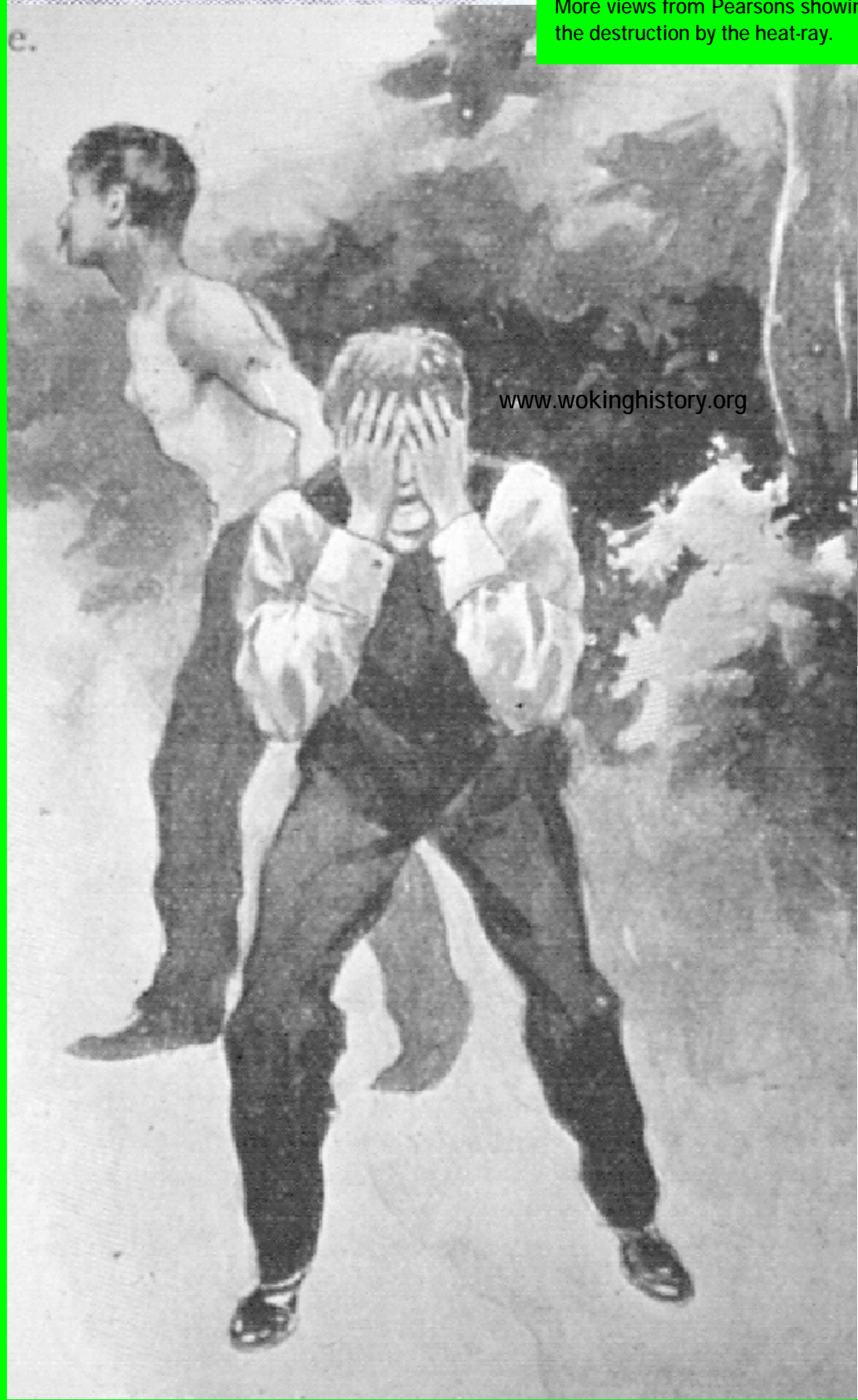
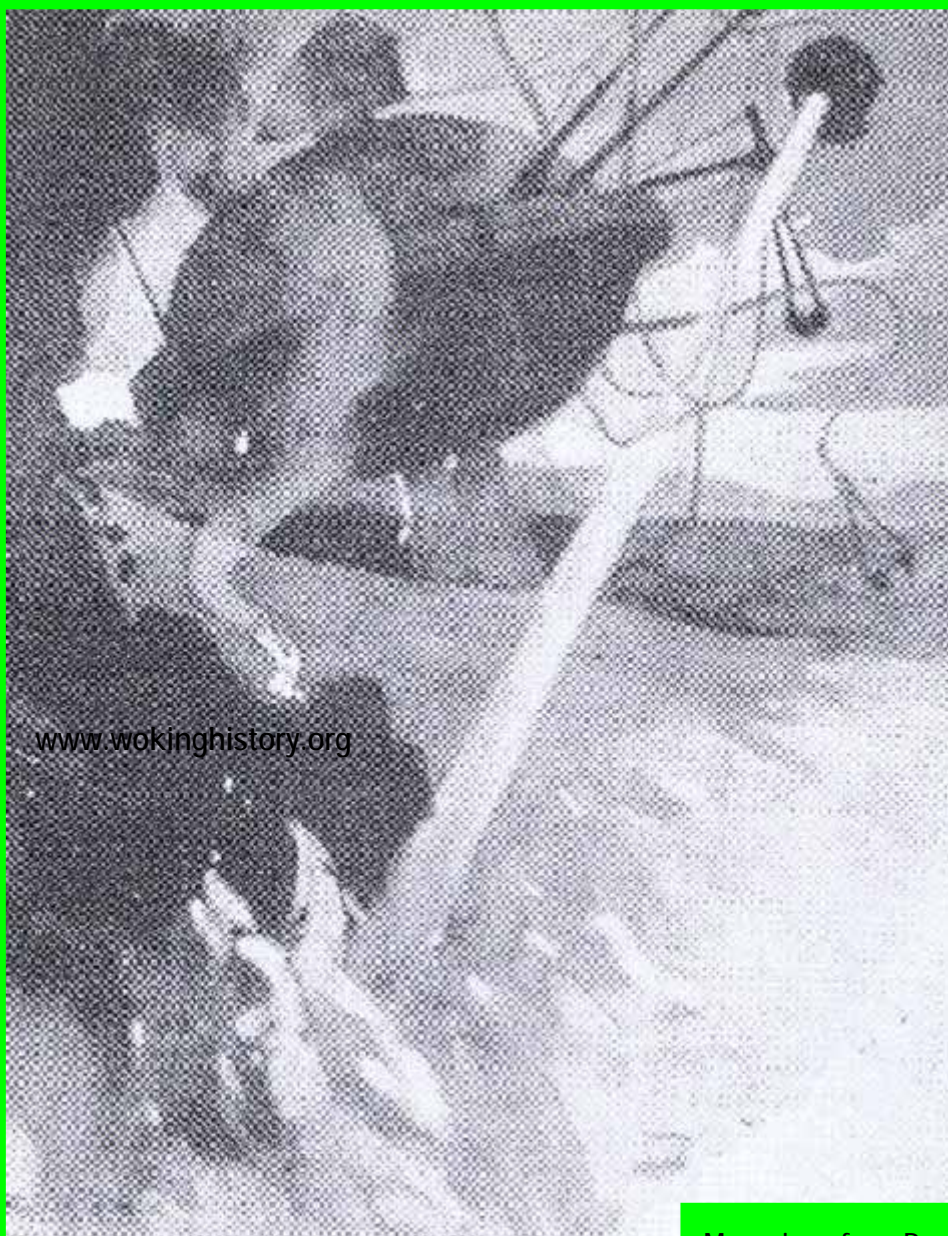
'All this had happened with such swiftness that I had stood motionless, dumbfounded and dazzled by

The view from Knaphill towards Horsell Common.



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VIEW FROM ANCHOR HILL, KNAPPHILL



More views from Pearsons showing the destruction by the heat-ray.



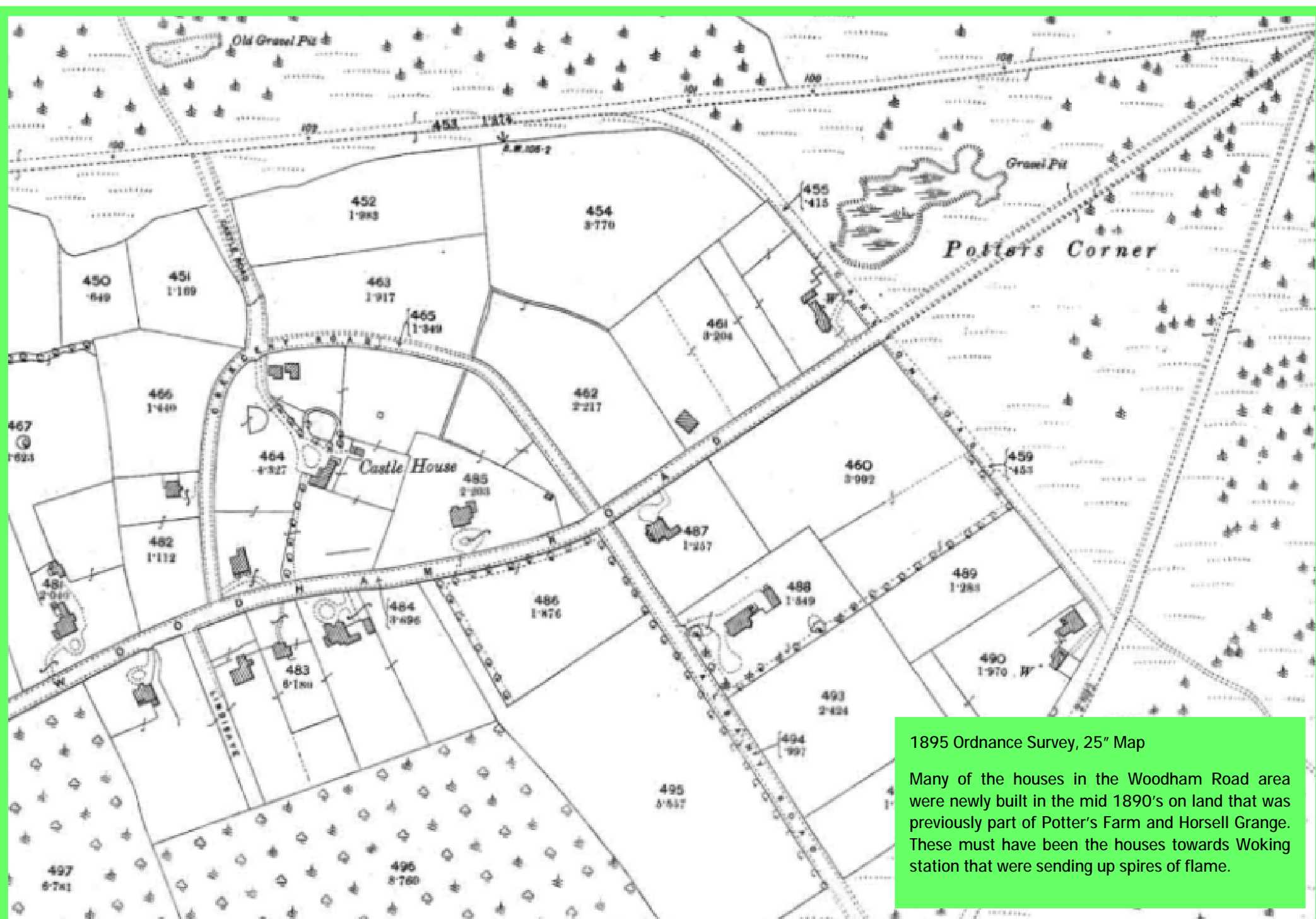


The 'western afterglow' would have picked out the houses of Cheapside on the edge of Horsell Common.

the flashes of light. Had that death swept through a full circle, it must inevitably have slain me in my surprise. But it passed and spared me, and left the night about me suddenly dark and unfamiliar'.

'The tops of the pine-trees and the roofs of Horsell came out sharp and black against the western afterglow'
'Patches of bush and isolated trees here and there smoked and glowed still, and the houses

towards Woking station were sending up spires of flame into the stillness of the evening air'.
'With an effort I turned and began a stumbling run through the heather.'



1895 Ordnance Survey, 25" Map
 Many of the houses in the Woodham Road area were newly built in the mid 1890's on land that was previously part of Potter's Farm and Horsell Grange. These must have been the houses towards Woking station that were sending up spires of flame.