

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

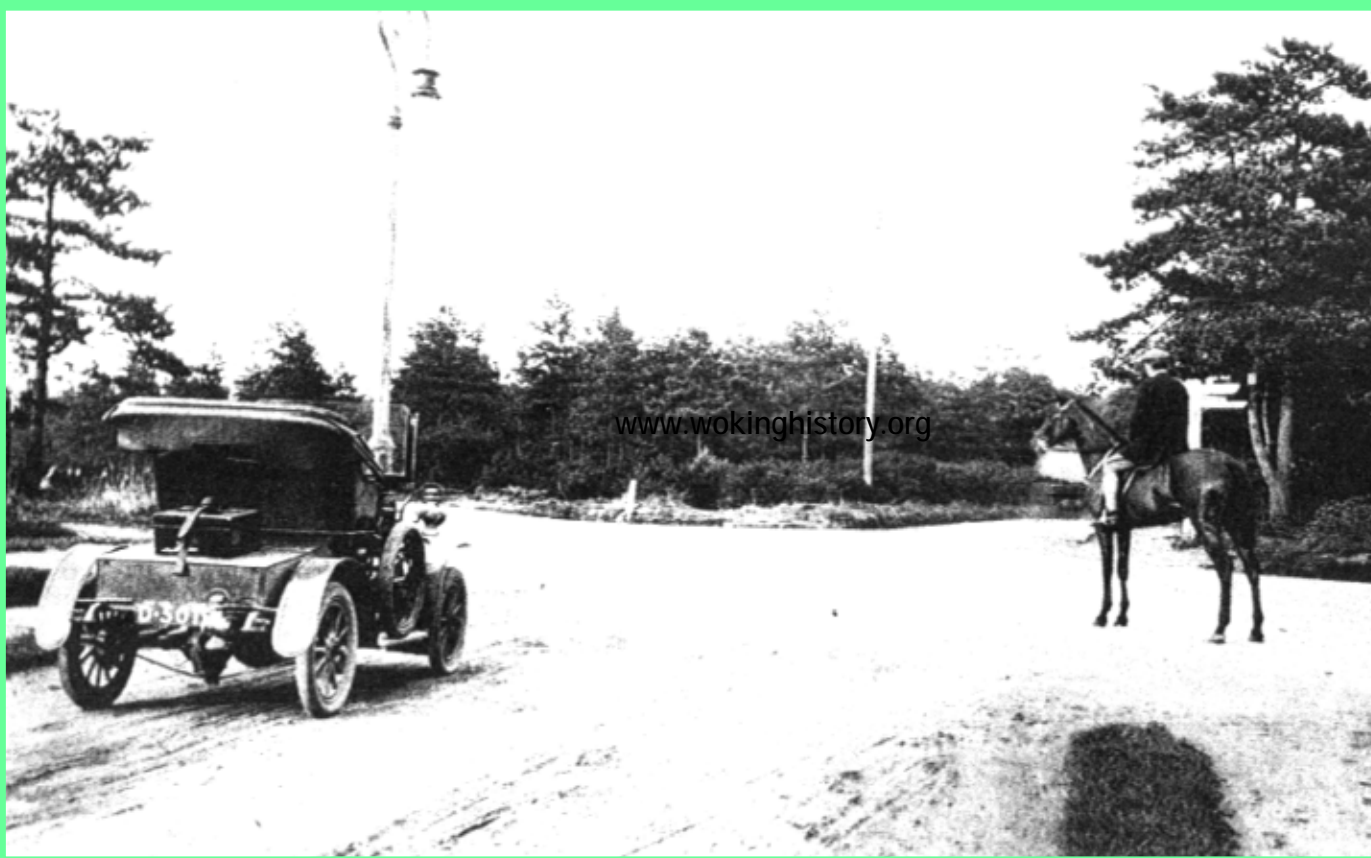
CHAPTER SEVEN

HOW I REACHED HOME

'For my own part 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 road to the cross-roads.'

The Crossroads is obviously what we now know as the Six Crossroads, making Shores Road or Woodham Road the road between it and Horsell.



'At last I could go no further; I was exhausted with the violence of my emotions and of my flight, and I staggered and fell by the wayside. That was near the bridge that crosses the canal by the gas-works. I fell and lay still.'

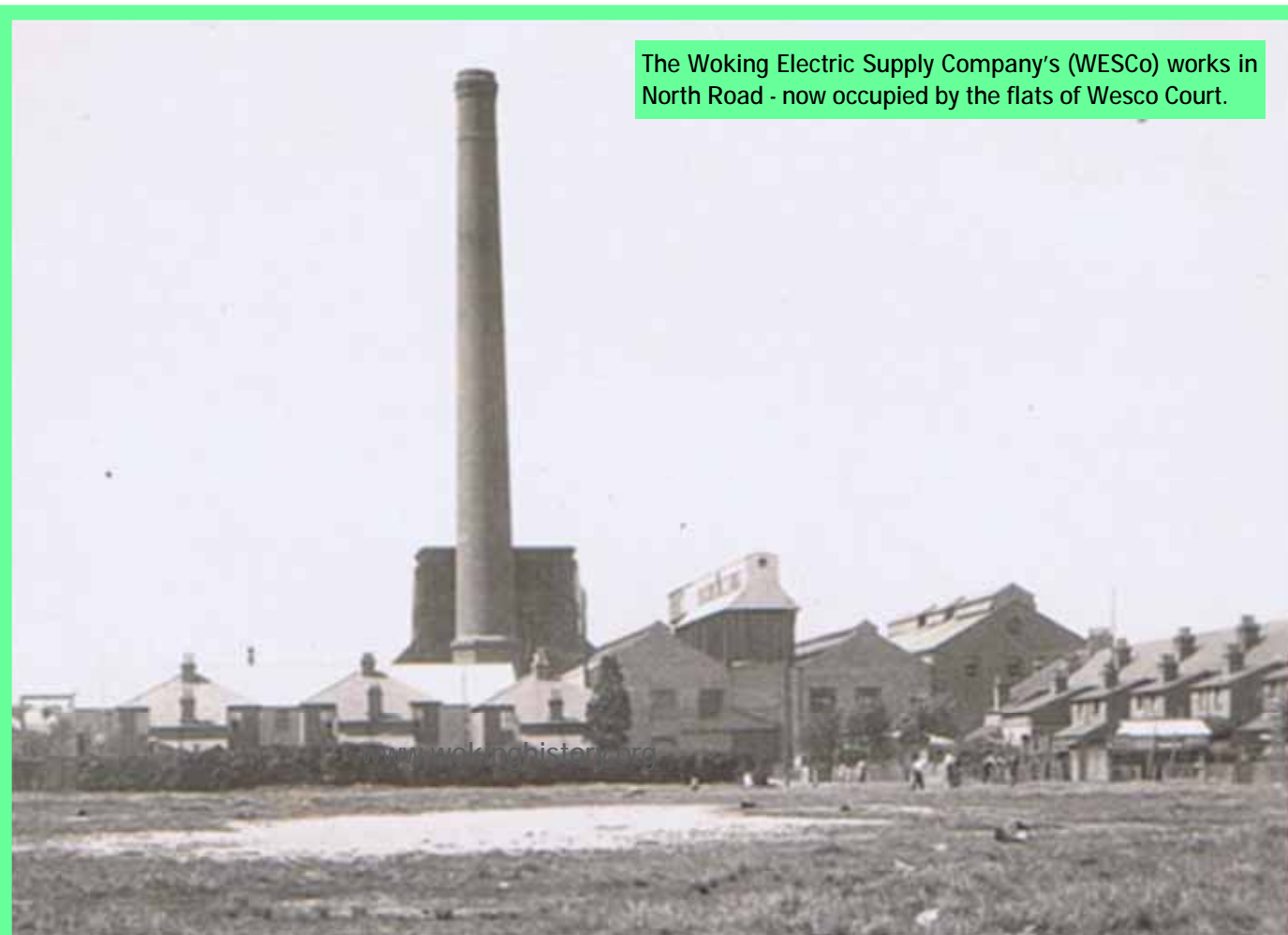
This is the bridge that earlier in the book Wells calls 'Ottershaw Bridge' (present-day Monument Bridge), but for some reason Wells wanted to emphasise the Gas Works - a feature that he would have been all too familiar with as the gas works would have directly obscured his own view of the common from his back-room windows.

The reason maybe becomes evident a few paragraphs later in the story when he mentions that *'there was a noise of business from the gas-works, and the electric lamps were all alight.'*



At the time that Wells was living in Woking there was a lot of controversy about the lighting of the streets of Woking. In November 1893 the Woking Local Board had asked both the local gas company and the Woking Electric Supply Company (WESCO) to quote for the erection, maintenance and lighting of one-hundred lamps throughout the town. WESCO's bid was cheaper so after brief trials in 1894 they were awarded the contract with the first lamps being lit towards the end of January 1895.

The lighting was only required in the winter (and from sunset to midnight), so at first everything appears to have gone quite smoothly, but in October 1895, when the lights were due to come back on again, it was discovered that



The old Monument Bridge looking towards Horsell Common

over a fifth of the lamps were not working (either through lack of maintenance or vandalism), so Wells' comment that 'the electric lamps were all alight' is clearly a dig at the local council - or at least at the Woking Electric Supply Co.

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

'Over the Maybury Arch a train, a billowing tumult of white firelit smoke, and a long

caterpillar of lighted windows went flying south.'

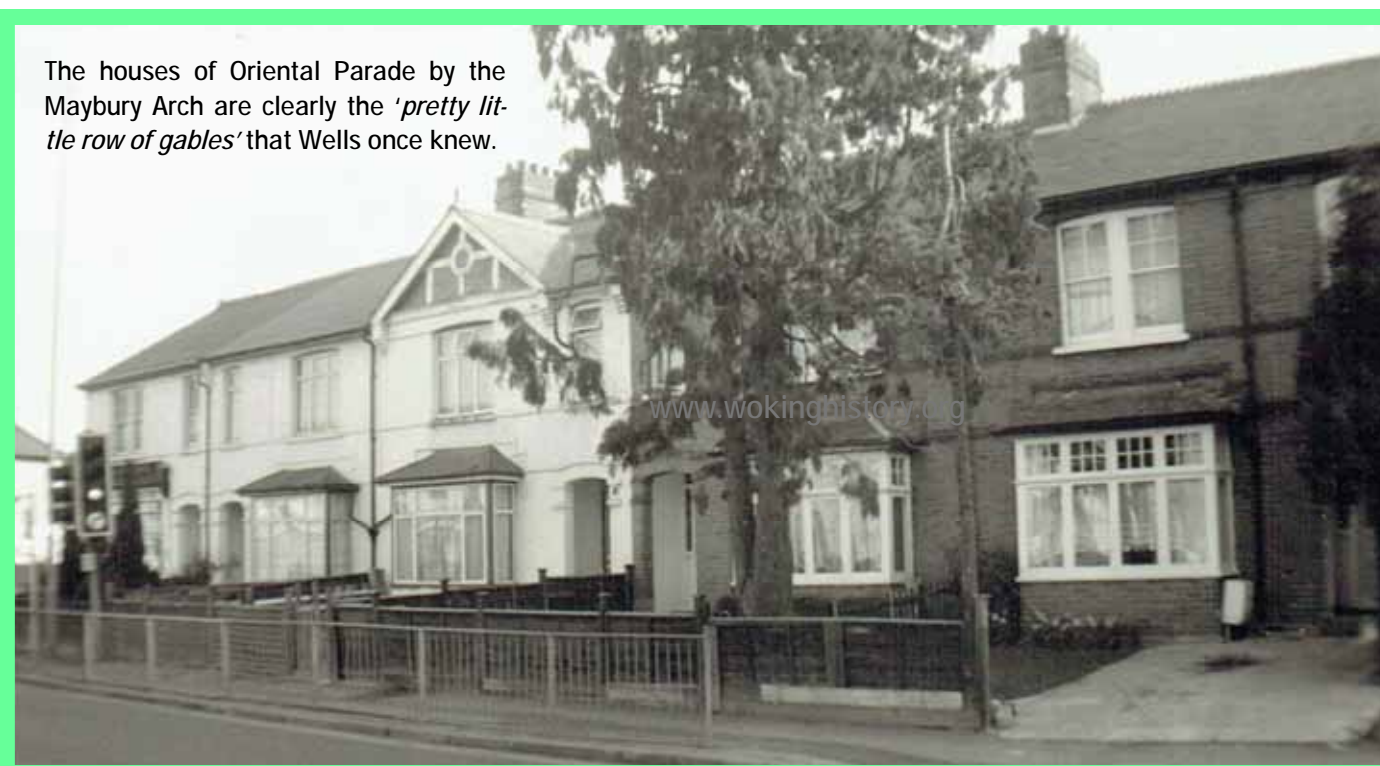
Even though Monument Bridge has been rebuilt and is not as steep as it was in Wells' time, you can still imagine walking over the brow of the arch to see a train (no longer billowing smoke) heading south towards Woking Station.

'A dim group of people talked in the gate of one of the houses in the pretty little row of gables that was called Oriental Terrace.'



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The houses of Oriental Parade by the Maybury Arch are clearly the 'pretty little row of gables' that Wells once knew.



The Ordnance Survey map shows the terrace as 'Oriental Place', but this is obviously where the 'dim group of people' were talking (although whether they can still be described as a 'pretty little row of gables', I will leave others to decide!

The Narrator carried on home to his house on Maybury Hill, whereas for Wells it would have been just a short walk down Maybury Road to his home.

'I startled my wife at the doorway, so haggard was I. I went into the dining room, sat down, drank some wine, and so soon as I could collect myself sufficiently I told her the things I had seen.'