

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 EIGHT FRIDAY NIGHT

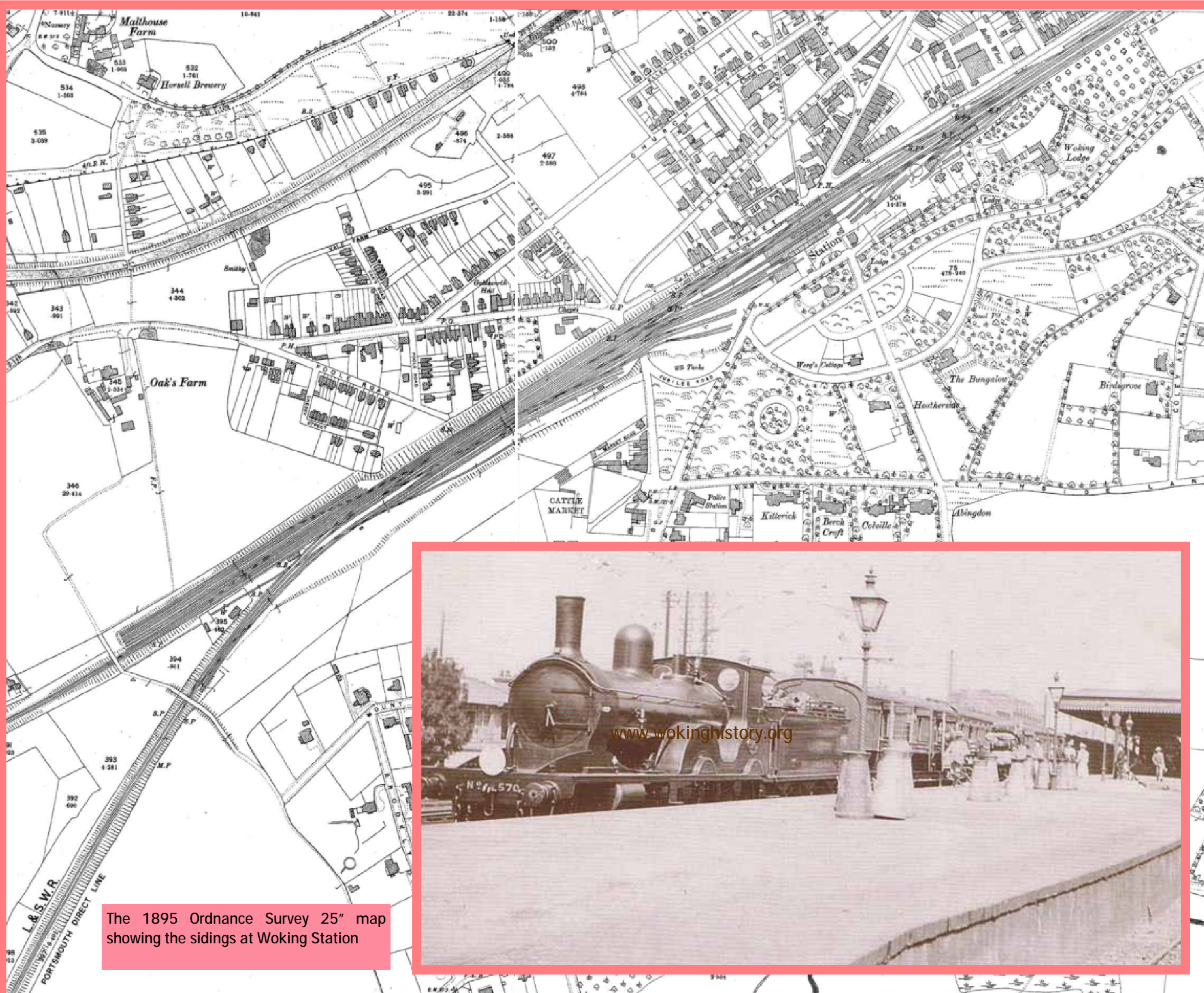
'In Woking Junction, until a late hour, trains were stopping and going on, others were shunting on the sidings, passengers were alighting and waiting, and everything was proceeding in a most ordinary way. A boy from town, trenching on Smith's monopoly, was selling papers with the afternoon's news. The ringing impact of trucks, the sharp whistle of the engines from the junction, mingled with their shouts of 'Men from Mars!'



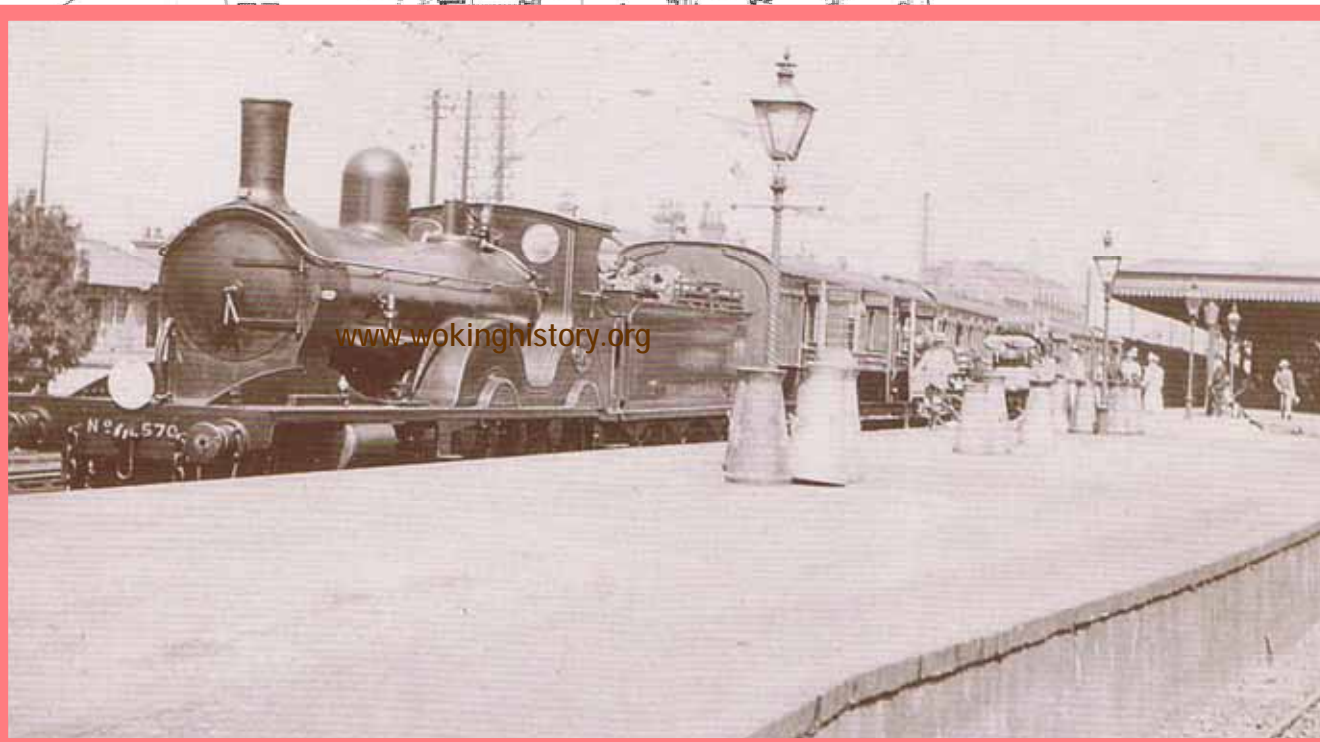
The sidings at Woking station in Wells day were not quite so extensive as they later would be, with a small goods yard to the east of the Station-Master's house on the south (down) side of the station. Others were to the west of the station's south entrance (where the 'Centrium' apartments are today), and to the north-west of the main Southampton line at Goldsworth.

'People rattling Londonwards peered into the darkness outside the carriage windows and saw only a rare, flickering, vanishing spark dance up from the direction of Horsell - and thought that nothing more serious than a heath fire was happening.'

Fires on Horsell Common were probably as common then as they are now. Woking's volunteer fire brigade were in their infancy in the mid 1890's and it is surprising that Wells doesn't mention them. All they had was a manual pump on a handcart, a few lengths of hose and a ladder, so they would have been quite ineffective against a large common fire.



The 1895 Ordnance Survey 25" map showing the sidings at Woking Station



'There were half a dozen villas burning on the Woking border. There were lights in all the houses on the common side of the three villages, and the people there kept awake till dawn.'

The 'half a dozen villas' on the Woking border would probably have been the houses of Boundary Road, some of which bear the date stones 1895 and 1896 (when Wells was researching the story). Other houses would have been in the Woodham Road and Kettlewell Hill areas of Horsell, along Cheapside and near Mimbridge at Chobham.

'A curious crowd lingered restlessly, people coming and going but the crowd remaining, both on the Chobham and Horsell bridges.'

As has already been mentioned 'Horsell Bridge' would be what we now called 'Wheatsheaf Bridge', with 'Chobham Bridge' obviously being Mimbridge on the road towards Chobham.

The houses of Boundary Road (seen here from the old Chertsey Road Bridge) could be the half a dozen villas burning on the Woking border.



'Here and there was a burning bush or tree.'

'About eleven a company of soldiers came through Horsell and deployed along the edge of the common to form a cordon. Later a second company marched through Chobham to deploy on the north side of the common. Several officers from the Inkerman barracks had been on the common earlier in the day and one, Major Eden, was reported to be missing.'

Again we have seen how Inkerman was in the news when Wells was living in Woking - although who 'Major Eden' was I am afraid I have not been able to find out.

'A few seconds after midnight the crowd in the Chertsey Road, Woking, saw a star fall from heaven into the pine woods to the north west.' 'This was the second cylinder.'

I suspect that the crowds on a Friday night in Chertsey Road today are not quite the same as those that Wells would have known!

Chertsey Road looking north-west in the direction of Horsell Common from the junction with Chobham Road

