

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 TEN IN THE STORM

*'We got to Leatherhead without misadventure about nine o'clock, and the horse had an hour's rest while I took supper with my cousins and commended my wife to their care.'*

*'Had it not been for my promise to the innkeeper, she would, I think, have urged me to stay in Leatherhead that night'.*

*'For my own part, I had been feverishly excited all day. Something very like the war-fever that occasionally runs through a civilised community had got into my blood, and in my heart I was not so very sorry that I had to return to Maybury that night'.*

*'It was nearly eleven when I started to return'.*

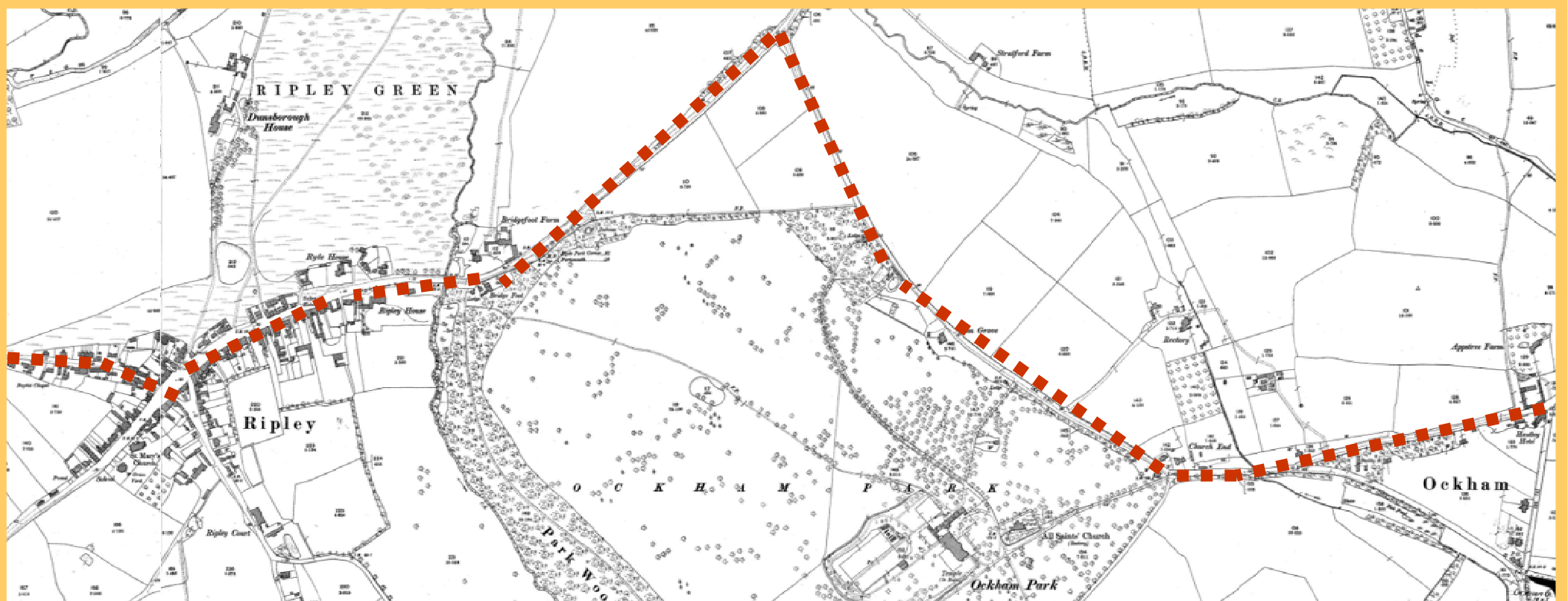
*'As I came through Ockham (for that was the way I returned and not through Send and Old Woking) I saw along the western horizon a blood-red glow, which, as I drew nearer, crept up the sky. The driving clouds of the gathering thunderstorm mingled there with masses of black and red smoke.'*



His route to Leatherhead through Old Woking and Send (along what is now the A247 through West Clandon and then the A246 passed the Horsleys to Leatherhead) was longer but probably a better road even in Wells' time. The return route via Ockham and Ripley would have been familiar to Wells as in his novel *'Wheels of Chance'* (also written whilst he was living in Woking) he tells the story of a cyclist travelling down the Ripley road - a popular pastime in the Victorian era with the Anchor Hotel at Ripley being a famous stopping place for cyclists from London.

*'Ripley Street was deserted, and except for a lighted window or so the village showed not a sign of life; but I narrowly escaped an accident at the corner of the road to Pyrford, where a knot of people stood with their backs to me.'*

The 'corner of the road to Pyrford' has not altered all that much since Wells' time - Newark Lane still being extremely narrow at this point, so that it is easy to imagine the possibility of an





accident if a knot of people had gathered there.

*'From Ripley until I came through Pyrford I was in the valley of the Wey, and the red glare was hidden from me. As I ascended the little hill beyond Pyrford Church the glare came into view again, and the trees about me shivered with the first intimation of the storm that was upon me. Then I heard midnight pealing out from Pyrford Church behind me, and then came the silhouette of Maybury Hill, with its tree-tops and roofs black and sharp against the red.'*

This, for me, is one of the most remarkable

passages in The War of the Worlds. Those that know Pyrford Church will know that it doesn't have a clock tower or bells that are able to peal midnight. But they may know (as undoubtedly Wells did) about the legend of the Pyrford Stone - a possibly prehistoric boundary maker that now stands at the entrance to Pyrford Court, but which in Wells' day stood at the junction of Church Hill, Upshot Lane and Pyrford Common Road. The legend states that "if you stand by the Pyrford Stone at midnight when the church clock strikes midnight, the stone will turn and you will be turned to stone". Those from

Pyrford, of course, would know that that was impossible, so that it was a sort of local joke, told to catch out newcomers. By noting that the Narrator heard *'midnight pealing out from Pyrford Church'* as he *'ascended the little hill'* beyond it - exactly where the Pyrford Stone was situated - it is obvious that Wells intended to include this ancient local legend in his science-fiction book.

Was he once caught out by a local telling him the legend, or was he just playing along with the joke himself?





*'Even as I beheld this a lurid green glare lit the road about me and showed the distant woods towards Addlestone. I felt a tug at the reins. I saw that the driving clouds had been pierced as it were by a thread of fire, suddenly lighting their confusion and falling into the field on my left. It was the Third Falling Star.'*

The field on the left would be where the grounds of Pyrford Court are today (Fox Hill on the map below).

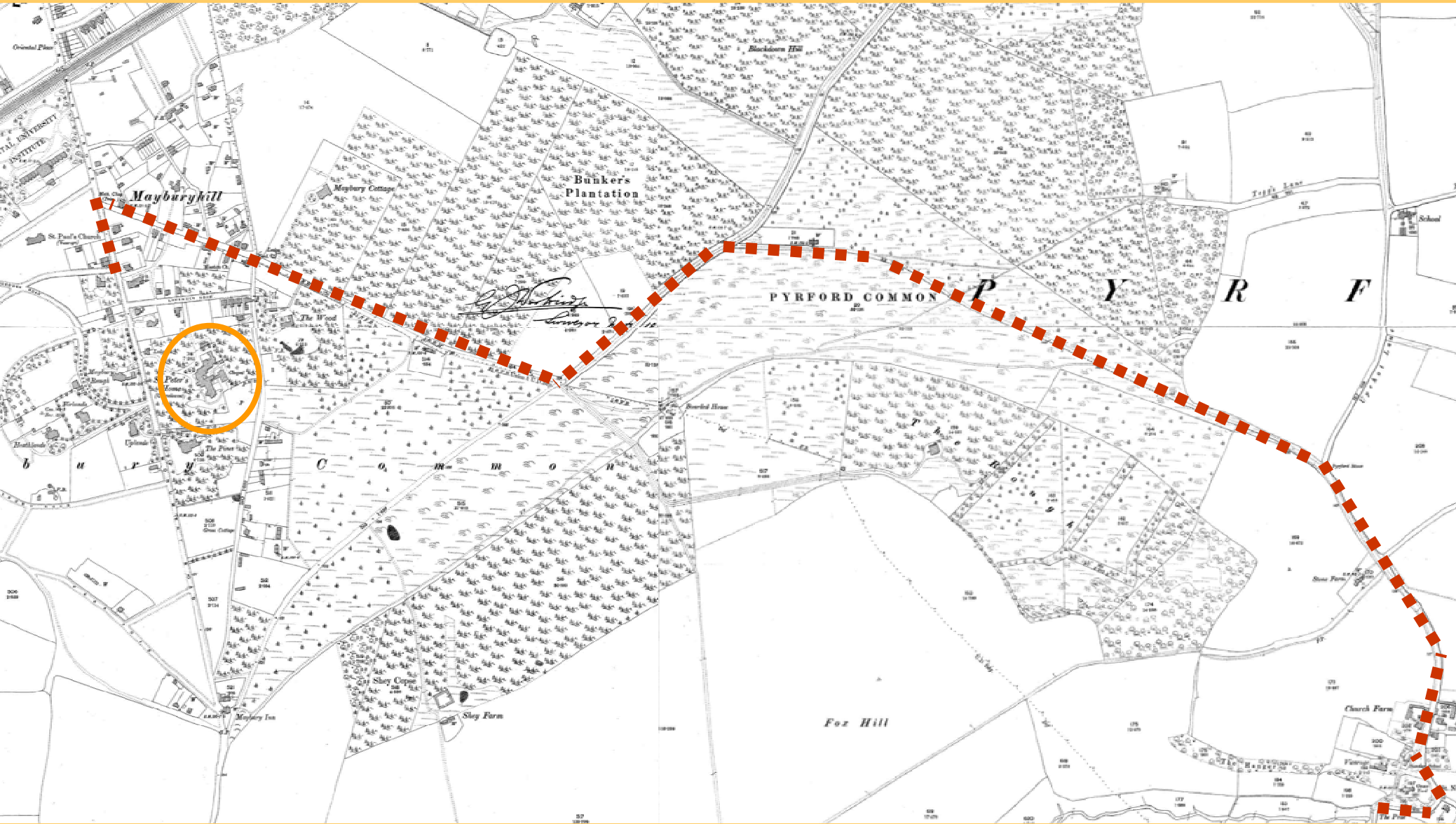
*'A moderate incline runs towards the foot of Maybury Hill and down this we clattered.'*

*'At first I regarded little but the road before me, and then abruptly my attention was arrested by something that was moving rapidly down the opposite slope of Maybury Hill. At first I took it for a wet roof of a house, but one flash followed another showed it to be in swift rolling movement.'*

The Narrator is heading down Pyrford Common Road to its junction with the Old Woking Road, looking across the common to the slopes of Maybury Hill.

*'Then in a flash like daylight, the red masses of the Orphanage near the crest of the hill, the green tops of the pine-trees and this problematical object came out clear and sharp and bright'.*

This passage may have been confusing for anyone who knew of the Southern Railwaymen's Orphanage that used to be in Oriental Road (almost next to the mosque) - "how could the Narrator see the red masses of that building from the foot of Maybury Hill?" The answer is that he couldn't, because the Orphanage wasn't built until 1909. The place Wells calls the orphanage is really the building on the top of the hill that used to be the St Peter's Convent (circled below) - most of which has now been converted into the apartments of Oldfield Wood. That can still be seen from the Old Woking Road across the playing fields of the school, with some of the pine-trees (now much higher than in Wells' day) round the convent tower and the chapel to the right.





*'And this thing I saw! How can I describe it! A monstrous tripod, higher than many houses, striding over the young pine trees, and smashing them aside in its career.'*

*'Then suddenly the trees in the pine-wood ahead of me were parted, as brittle reeds are parted by a man thrusting through them.'*



Michael Condrón (above) putting the finishing touches to the 'The Woking Martian' in 1998, with the tripod in Crown Square (Chobham Road) lit up on the opening night (right) and the commemorative plaque (below).

The Martian's fighting machines as depicted in Pearson's Magazine are shown below right.



Michael Condrón's interpretation of the 'Walking Engine of Glittering Metal' (erected in Crown Square, Woking in 1998 to celebrate the centenary of the publication of the book) looks dwarfed by the tall office buildings that surround it, and is clearly not quite as tall as those that originally illustrated the story in Pearson's Magazine in the 1890's, but it gives a magnificent impression of what the Narrator would have first seen at the foot of Maybury Hill in the opening hour of the Sunday morning in the story.





*'Not stopping to look again, I wrenched the horse's head hard round to the right and in another moment the dog-cart had heeled over upon the horse; the shafts smashed noisily and I was flung sideways and fell heavily into a shallow pool of water.'*

*'I crawled out almost immediately, and crouched, my feet still in the water, under a clump of furze. The horse lay motionless (his neck was broken, poor brute!) and by the lightening flashes I saw the black bulk of the overturned dog-cart and the silhouette of the wheel still spinning slowly. In another moment the colossal mechanism went striding by me, and passed uphill towards Pyrford.'*

*'Not far from me was a little one-roomed squatters hut of wood, surrounded by a patch of potato-garden, I struggled to my feet at last and crouching and making use of every chance of cover, I made a run for this. I hammered at the door, but I could not make the people hear (if there were any people inside) and after a time I desisted and availing myself of a ditch for the greater part of the way, succeeded in crawling unobserved by these monstrous machines, into the pine-woods towards Maybury.'*

The squatters hut is obviously on the edge of the common - probably similar to the 'Gamekeepers Cottage' (above right) that used to be at Brookwood and possibly the property marked '514' on the 1896 published Ordnance Survey map below (on what would now be East Hill, but which was then just a dirt track across Maybury Common - pictured right).







*'I staggered through the trees, fell into a ditch and bruised my knee against a plank, and finally splashed out into the lane that ran down from the College Arms.'*

The mention of the College Arms (above) confirms that the Narrator must have borrowed the dog-cart from William Brown, the landlord of the Princess of Wales. There were only ever three public houses in the Maybury area - the Princess, the Maybury Inn and the College Arms. Wells mentions both the *Maybury Inn* and the *College Arms* by their real names, making it obvious to anyone local that the *Spotted Dog* must have been Princess. What happens next in the story probably explains why he changed the name!

*'I went close up to the fence on the left and worked my way along its palings.'*

*'Near the top I stumbled upon something soft, and by a flash of lightening saw between my feet a heap of black broadcloth and a pair of boots.'*

*'I stood over him awaiting for the next flash. When it came I saw that he was a sturdy man, cheaply but not shabbily dressed; his head was bent under his body, and lay crumpled up close to the fence, as though he had been flung violently against it.'*

*'I stopped and turned him over to feel for his heart. He was quite dead. Apparently his neck had been broken. The lightning flashed for a third time and his face leaped upon me. I sprang to my feet. It was the landlord of the Spotted Dog whose conveyance I had taken.'*

*'I stepped over him gingerly and pushed on up the hill. I made my way by the police-station and the College Arms towards my own home.'*

The 'police-station' is a slight exaggeration as it was really only a house that was occupied by a police constable at that time - although to be fair to Wells even the Census of 1891 lists the house as a 'police station' occupied at that stage by a man called Edgar Brookes and his family (succeeded by Harry Fuller and his family by 1901 when it is listed as simply 'Poplar Cottage', College Road). Which of those two gentlemen (if either) was at the 'police station' when Wells was in town I do not know, although I do know that Edgar's daughter, Mabel, was baptised at St Paul's Church on the 23rd July 1895, so it seems that it was most probably Constable Brookes, rather than Fuller.

The main police station was on the corner of Guildford Road and Heathside Road (opposite the Railway Hotel - now the Sovereigns - on the other corner of Heathside Road to its present location).

*'So far as I could see by the flashes the houses about me were mostly uninjured. By the College Arms a dark heap lay in the road.'*

*'Down the road towards the Maybury Bridge there were voices and the sound of feet, but I had not the courage to shout or to go to them. I let myself in with my latch-key, closed, locked and bolted the door.'*

