

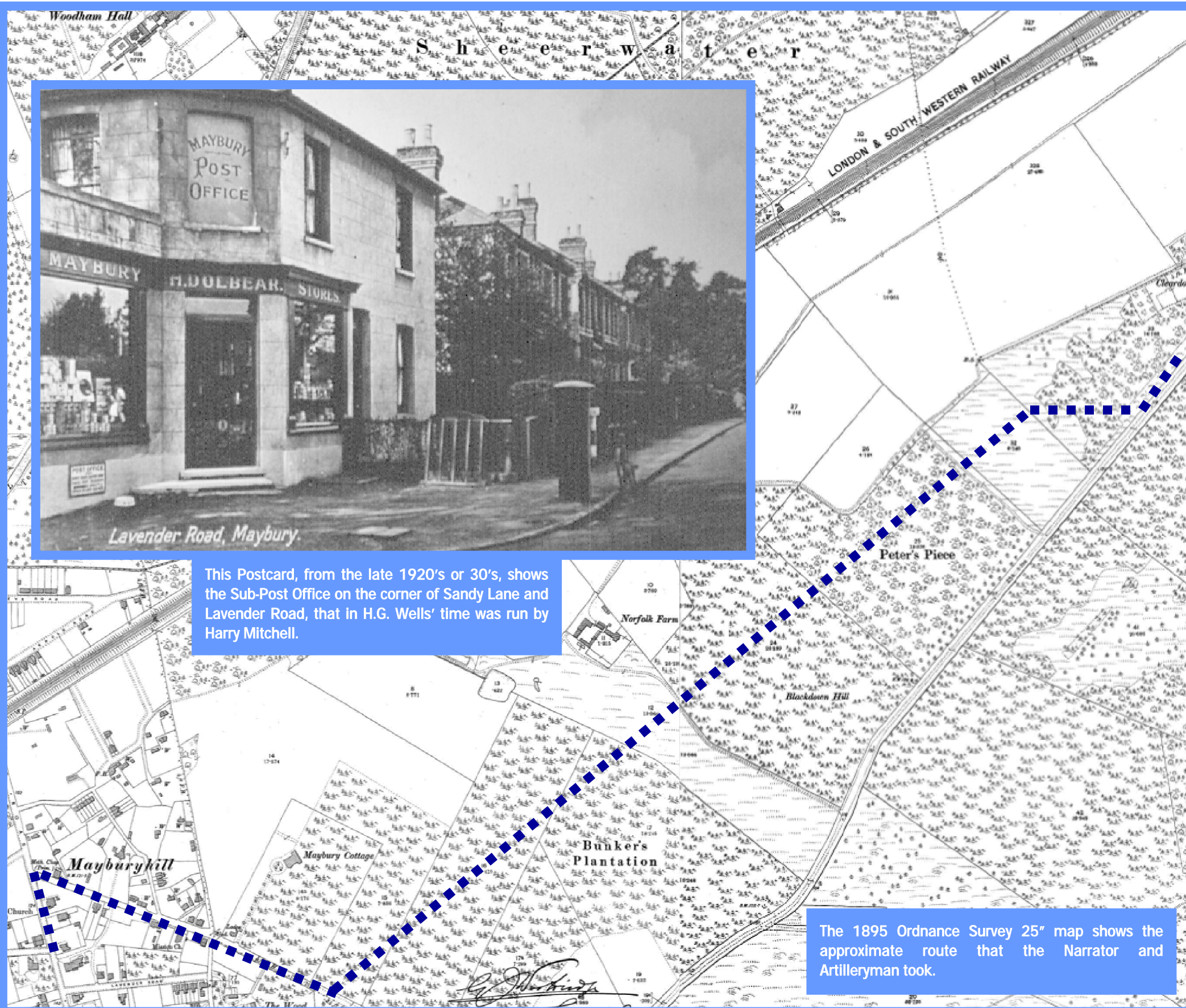
In a series of guided Heritage Walks around Woking,  
and in these articles, we investigate the stories  
behind H G Wells' famous science-fiction novel  
'The War of the Worlds'

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

# WHAT I SAW OF THE DESTRUCTION OF WEYBRIDGE & SHEPPERTON

(although this being 'wokinghistory.org' we are only going as far as Byfleet)



This Postcard, from the late 1920's or 30's, shows the Sub-Post Office on the corner of Sandy Lane and Lavender Road, that in H.G. Wells' time was run by Harry Mitchell.

The 1895 Ordnance Survey 25" map shows the approximate route that the Narrator and Artilleryman took.

The following morning the Narrator and Artilleryman decide to escape Woking and set off towards London.

*I agreed to go with him, under cover of the woods, northward as far as Street Cobham before I parted with him. Thence I would make a big detour by Epsom to reach Leatherhead.*

They gathered together food and drink, before setting off.

*Then we crept out of the house, and ran as quickly as we could down the ill-made road by which I had come overnight. The houses seemed deserted. In the road lay a group of three charred bodies close together, struck dead by the Heat-Ray; and here and there were things that people had dropped—a clock, a slipper, a silver spoon, and the like poor valuables. At the corner turning up towards the post office a little cart, filled with boxes and*

*furniture, and horseless, heeled over on a broken wheel. A cash box had been hastily smashed open and thrown under the debris.*

The corner, turning up towards the post office, was at the junction of College Road and Sandy Lane - the Post Office then being on the corner of Sandy Lane and Lavender Road (now converted into a house, although the pillar box is still on the pavement outside).





*Except the lodge at the Orphanage, which was still on fire, none of the houses had suffered very greatly here. The Heat-Ray had shaved the chimney tops and passed. Yet, save ourselves, there did not seem to be a living soul on Maybury Hill. The majority of the inhabitants had escaped, I suppose, by way of the Old Woking road--the road I had taken when I drove to Leatherhead--or they had hidden.*

The Orphanage (as has already been explained) was really the St Peter's Convent on the top of Maybury Hill. The Lodge that was on fire was probably the house that still stands at the entrance to Oldfield Wood (the name of the development built in the grounds and converted buildings of the convent).

*We went down the lane, by the body of the man in black, sodden now from the overnight hail, and broke into the woods at the foot of the hill. We pushed through these towards the railway without meeting a soul. The woods across the line were but the scarred and blackened ruins of woods; for the most part the trees had fallen, but a certain proportion still stood, dismal grey stems, with dark brown foliage instead of green.*

*On our side the fire had done no more than scorch the nearer trees; it had failed to secure its footing. In one place the woodmen had been at work on Saturday; trees, felled and freshly trimmed, lay in a clearing, with heaps of sawdust by the sawing-machine and its engine. Hard by was a temporary hut, deserted.*

The trees on the other side of the railway would be where the Sheerwater Estate is today, whilst

the woodmen had obviously been at work in the woods near Norfolk Farm and what is now the West Byfleet Golf Course.

It is said that Scots Pines were first planted in the Woking area in the early 17th century when James I visited one of his courtiers, Sir Edward Zouch, at Hoe Place in Old Woking. In the 18th or early 19th century the trees were planted in the Sheerwater Valley to help drain the lake that was once fed by a stream known as the Rive Ditch (which now runs in a culvert through the housing estate, originally developed on the

Maybury Hill from the air in the 1920's , with the completed St Peter's Convent (Wells' Orphanage) that in the 1890's was still under construction.

site in the 1950's by London County Council).

Despite extensive development in this part of Woking, many of the trees have survived the woodmen's axe.

*After a time we drew near the road, and as we did so we heard the clatter of hoofs and saw through the tree stems three cavalry soldiers riding slowly towards Woking.*





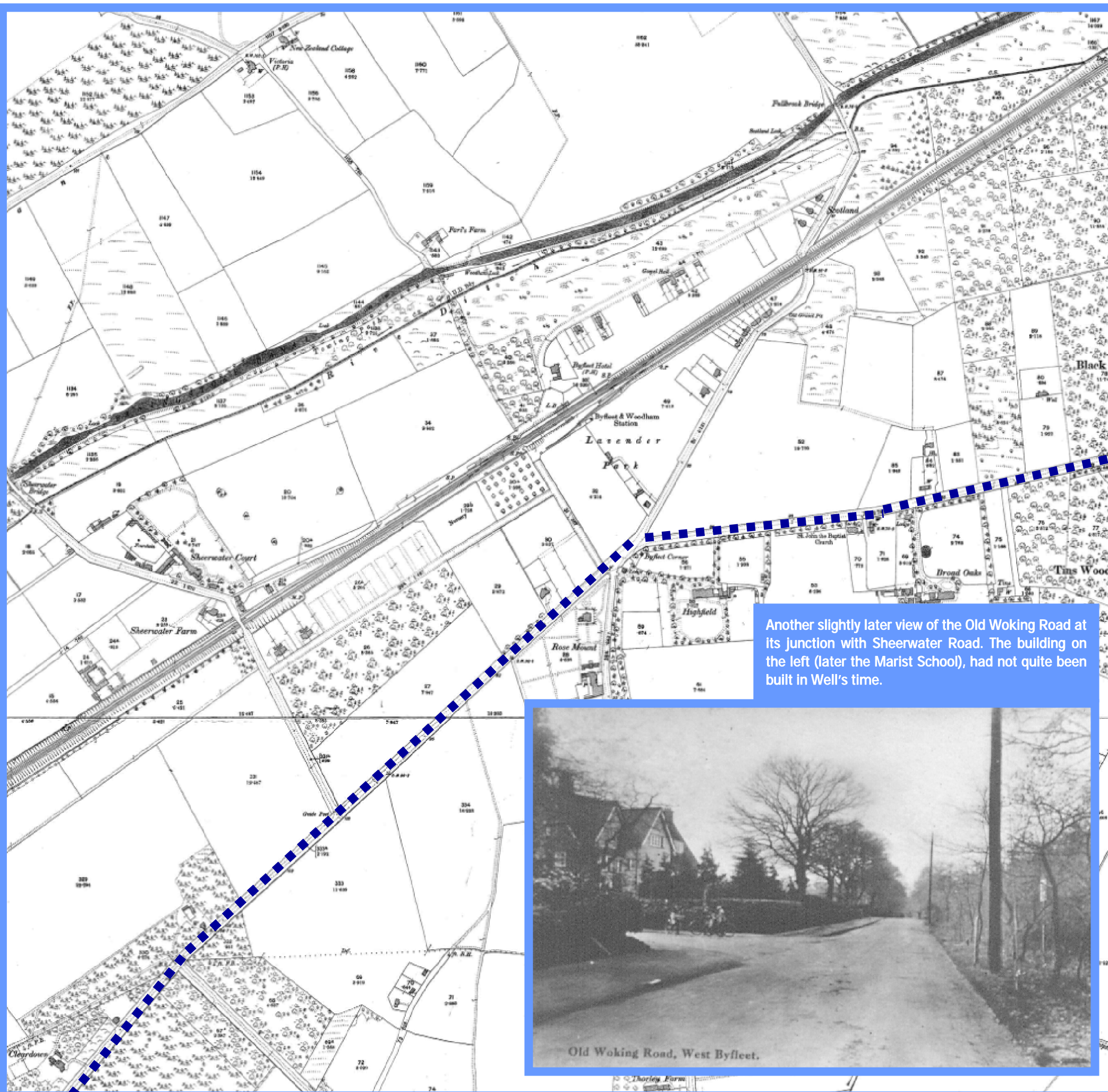
What looks like refugees escaping from Woking is in fact a family from the Maybury area heading for the grounds of Newark Priory with camping gear loaded onto their cart, so that they could enjoy their summer holidays.

They spoke with the soldiers (and warned them of the Martians) and the Artilleryman was told to report to Weybridge where he would be given more instructions.

*Further along we came upon a group of three women and two children in the road, busy clearing out a labourer's cottage. They had got hold of a little hand truck, and were piling it up with unclean-looking bundles and shabby furniture.*

The road is obviously the Old Woking Road, but where exactly they met the soldiers is not known, although the 'labourer's cottage' could have been the house marked on the map between Cleardown and the junction of Sheerwater Road.

*By Byfleet station we emerged from the pine trees, and found the country calm and peaceful*



Another slightly later view of the Old Woking Road at its junction with Sheerwater Road. The building on the left (later the Marist School), had not quite been built in Well's time.







*under the morning sunlight. We were far beyond the range of the Heat-Ray there, and had it not been for the silent desertion of some of the houses, the stirring movement of packing in others, and the knot of soldiers standing on the bridge over the railway and staring down the line towards Woking, the day would have seemed very like any other Sunday.*

Byfleet Station in those days was what we would now know as West Byfleet Station, the

station at Byfleet & New Haw not being built until 1927.

Apart from the Byfleet (or Station) Hotel on the other side of the station there were new commercial properties at this time and the name 'West Byfleet' had not come into existence.

*Several farm waggons and carts were moving creakily along the road to Addlestone, and*

*suddenly through the gate of a field we saw, across a stretch of flat meadow, six twelve-pounders standing neatly at equal distances pointing towards Woking.*

The road towards Addlestone would be Camphill Road with the 'flat meadows' what is now the West Byfleet Recreation Ground.

The two gentlemen quickly move on along Parvis Road towards Byfleet.



Another slightly later postcard showing the road towards Byfleet and Woodham Station from its junction with the Old Woking Road. The houses on the left (now replaced by the car park of Waitrose) had not quite been built in Wells' time.



The old Parvis Bridge as Wells would have recognised it, although the boat houses on either side of the waterway were not constructed until later.

*Further on towards Weybridge, just over the bridge, there were a number of men in white fatigue jackets throwing up a long rampart, and more guns behind.*

The bridge has to be Parvis Bridge over the Wey Navigation, making H G Wells' 'long rampart' an almost perfect description of the banking on either side of the M25!

*Byfleet was in a tumult; people packing, and a score of hussars, some of them dismounted, some on horseback, were hunting them about. Three or four black government waggons, with crosses in white circles, and an old omnibus, among other vehicles, were being loaded in the village street.*



The Plough public house and shops in the High Road.

The machinery used by the contractors on the M25 would have been alien to Wells and the soldiers constructed their 'long rampart', but the effect is almost the same.

*There were scores of people, most of them sufficiently sabbatical to have assumed their best clothes. The soldiers were having the greatest difficulty in making them realise the gravity of their position. We saw one shrivelled old fellow with a huge box and a score or more of flower pots containing orchids, angrily expostulating with the corporal who would leave them behind. I stopped and gripped his arm.*

*"Do you know what's over there?" I said, pointing at the pine tops that hid the Martians.*

*"Eh?" said he, turning. "I was explainin' these is vallyble."*

*"Death!" I shouted. "Death is coming! Death!"*





The old (possibly 17th century) Blue Anchor at Byfleet as Wells would have known it.

*and leaving him to digest that if he could, I hurried on after the artilleryman.*

I have not been able to identify an orchid growing villager in Byfleet, but I have no doubt that one must have existed in Wells' time, and probably upset the author in some way to have found himself noted in such a way.

*At the corner I looked back. The soldier had left him, and he was still standing by his box, with the pots of orchids on the lid of it, and staring vaguely over the trees.*

And with that the Narrator and the Artilleryman leave our area and head on to Weybridge where they eventually part company.



Plough Bridge, rebuilt in the early 20th century, was a simple wooden bridge with a ford still to the side for heavy vehicles to cross the River Wey.

Which of the numerous corners of the High Road the Narrator looked back from is impossible to know.

