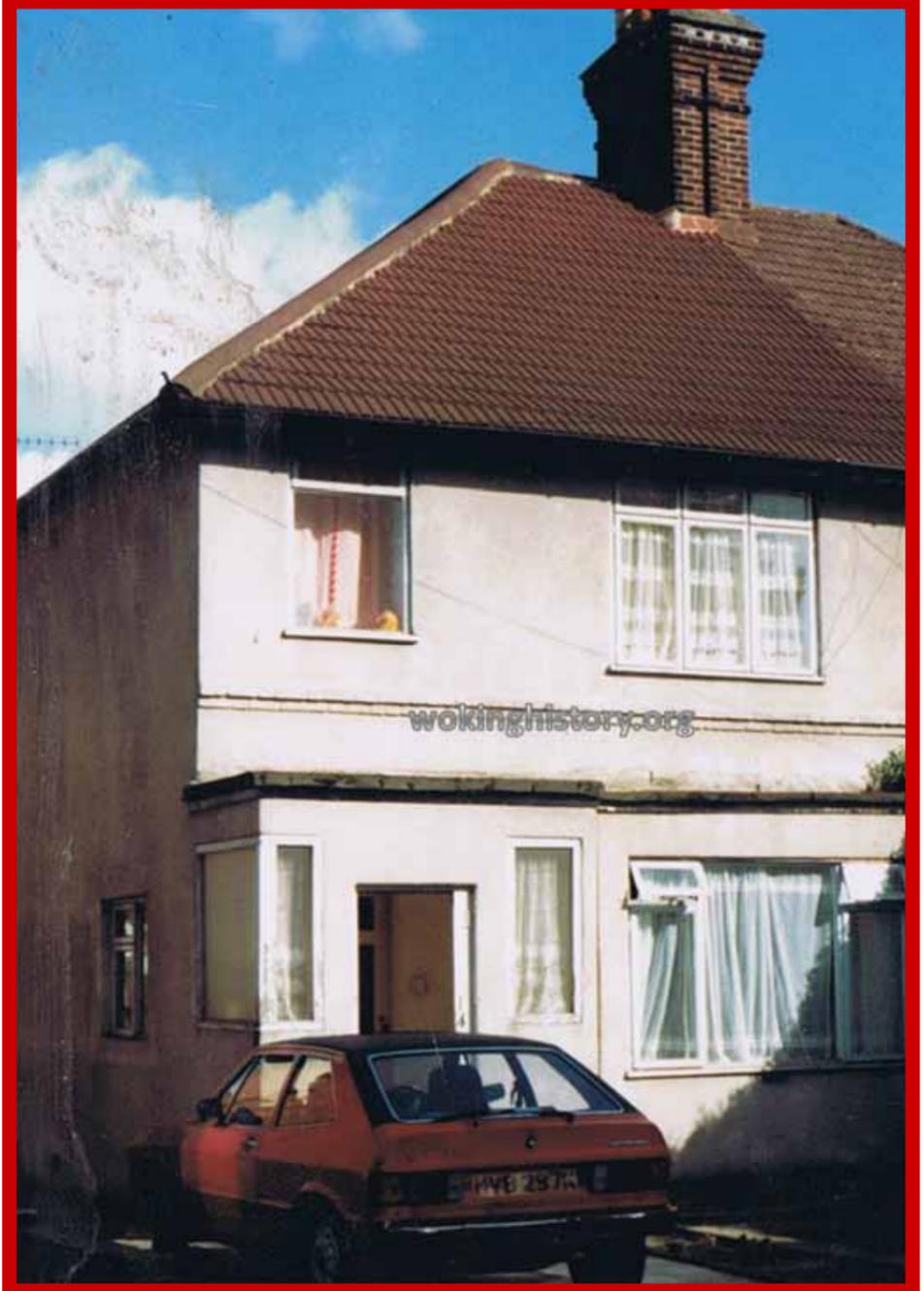


H. G. WELLS - WOKING'S GREAT SCIENCE-FICTION WRITER

Iain Wakeford 2015

Wells moved to Woking at the beginning of his writing career.



In 1895 a young writer by the name of Herbert George Wells moved into a house in Maybury Road. His first marriage to his cousin, Isabel, had ended in divorce and he had just married his second wife, Amy Catherine Robbins (later known as 'Jane'), borrowing £100 from his new mother-in-law to help furnish the small 'resolute semi-detached villa with a minute greenhouse in the Maybury Road facing the railway line, where all night long the goods trains shunted and bumped and clattered – without serious effect upon our slumbers'.

Few people had heard of him when he moved to Woking, although his book *The Time Machine* had just been published.

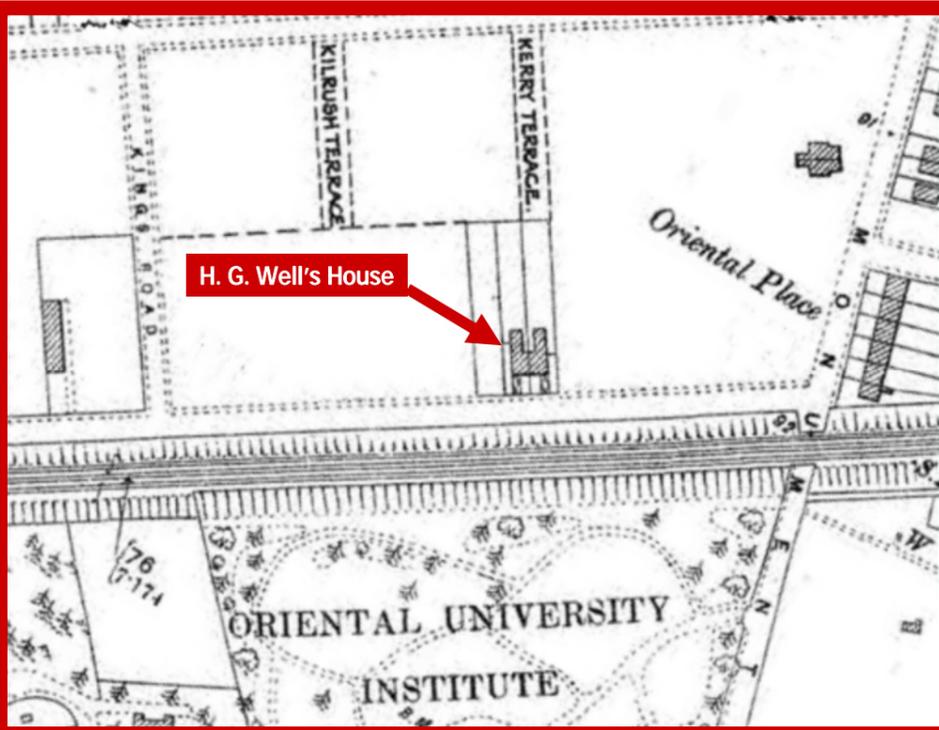
Wells later recorded in his autobiography that their move to Woking 'was a fairly cheerful adventure'.

'Close at hand in those days was a pretty and rarely used canal amidst pine woods, a weedy canal – upon which one could be happy for hours in a hired canoe, and in all directions stretched open and undeveloped heath land, so

Unfortunately his house, one of the first to be built in Maybury Road (see 1895 Ordnance Survey map below), was 'modernised' in the 1960's - although the glass porch (seen in the background of Jane on their tandem) was evidently removed some time before then.

that we could walk and presently learn to ride bicycles and restore our broken contact with the open air'.

Of course it was whilst living in Woking that Wells wrote perhaps his most famous science-fiction novel – *The War of the Worlds* – but he



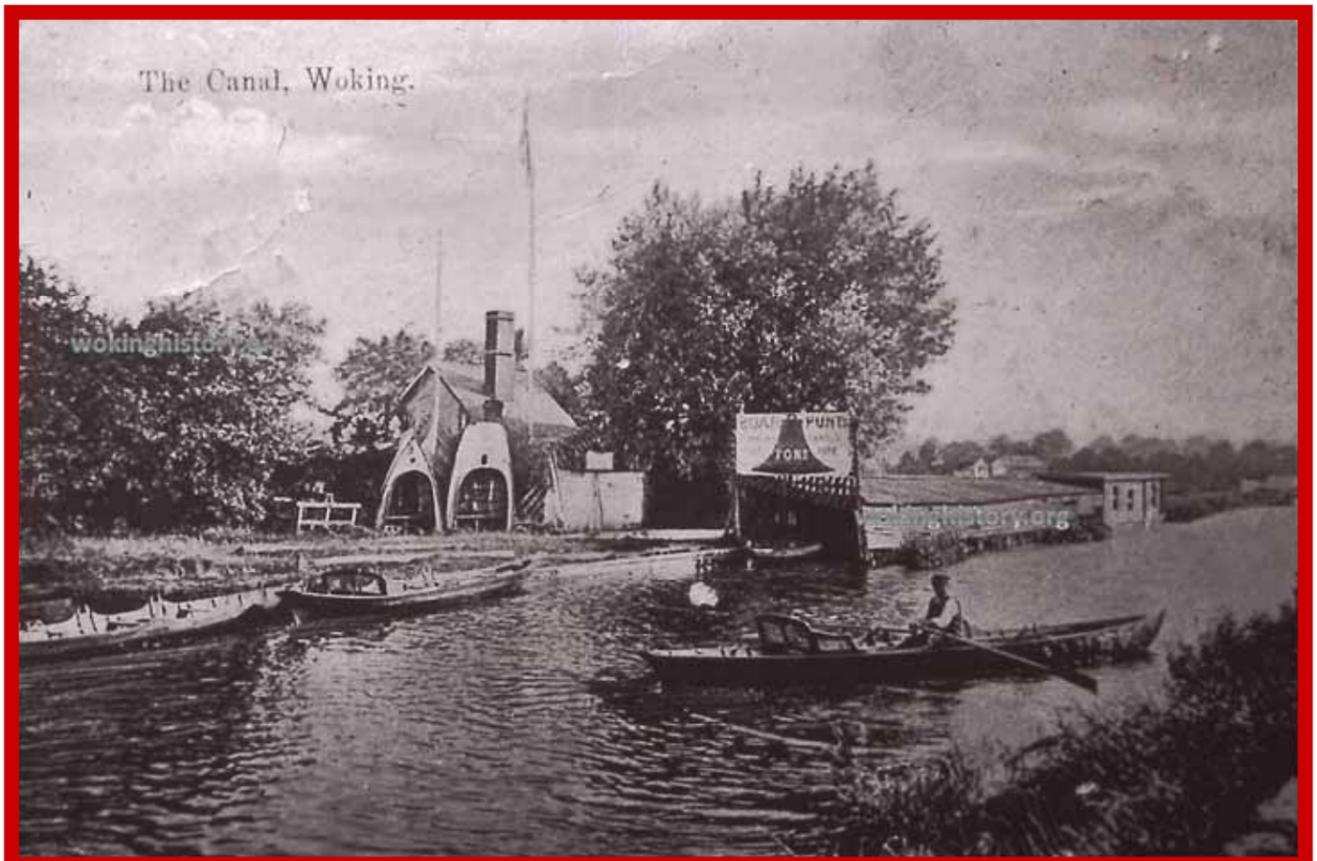
also wrote *The Invisible Man* whilst here and another lesser known romantic comedy called *The Wheels of Chance*. In the latter he describes the adventures of a young drapers' assistant from London who cycles down the Portsmouth Road through Ripley.

'I rode wherever Mr Hoopdriver rode in that story. Later on I wheeled about the district marking down suitable places and people for destruction by my Martians'.

Next year marks the 150th anniversary of H G Wells' birth, with a number of events taking place in Woking. I will be conducting some of my walks based on my research into the people and places he recorded in the story – such as Henry Flowerday the 'enterprising sweetstuff dealer' from the Chobham Road in Woking who in the book sent is son up to Horsell Common with a 'barrel load of green apples and ginger beer' to sell to the spectators massing around the Martian cylinder.

For me, when I first read *The War of the Worlds*, I didn't read it as a piece of science-fiction, but as a record of Woking in the mid 1890's. Woven into the story, as we saw last week, are references to the lighting (or lack thereof) of Woking's streets; mention of Inkerman Barracks (which in 1895 was being enlarged to include the buildings of the former female prison); the New Zealand Golf Course (which he calls the 'Byfleet' or 'Addlestone' Golf Links); and even the legend of the Pyrford Stone.

The 'legend' is really a story told by locals to catch out gullible newcomers, as it is said that



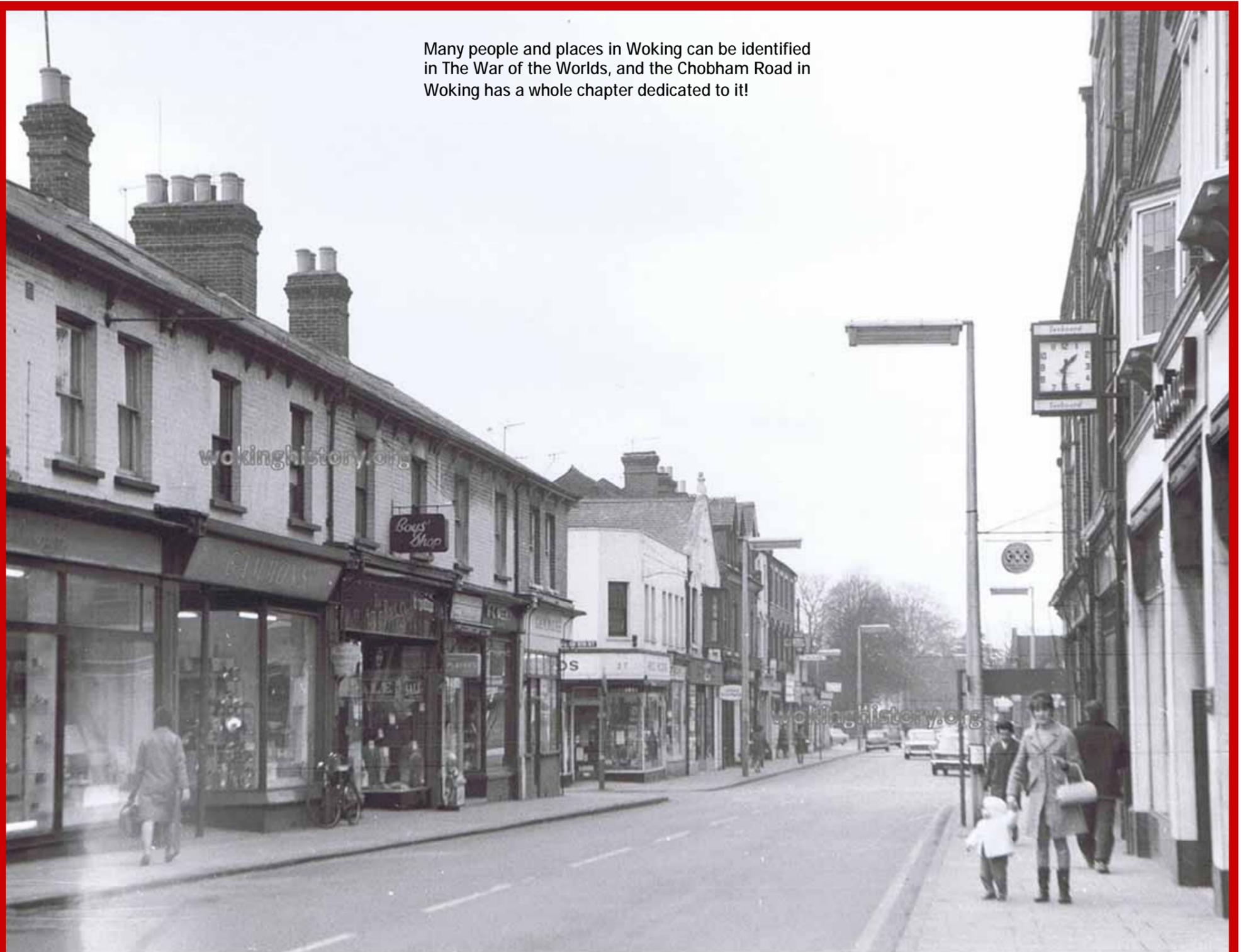
'if you stand by the ancient standing stone at midnight when the clock on Pyrford Church strikes twelve, the stone will turn and you will turn to stone'. In *The War of the Worlds*, as the Narrator 'ascends the little hill beyond Pyrford Church' he hears midnight peeling out from the church, just as the third Martian cylinder lands in the fields to his left.

Wells obviously found the legend of interest – otherwise why would he include it in his book?

The 'weedy' Basingstoke Canal upon which Wells could be 'happy for hours in a hired canoe'.

Of course some stuffy literary 'experts' think it pointless to look too closely at the stories that lay behind the story, but for me what makes *The War of the Worlds* (and a number of Wells' other stories) so believable is his inclusion of everyday people and places that he and his readers would have known.

Many people and places in Woking can be identified in *The War of the Worlds*, and the Chobham Road in Woking has a whole chapter dedicated to it!



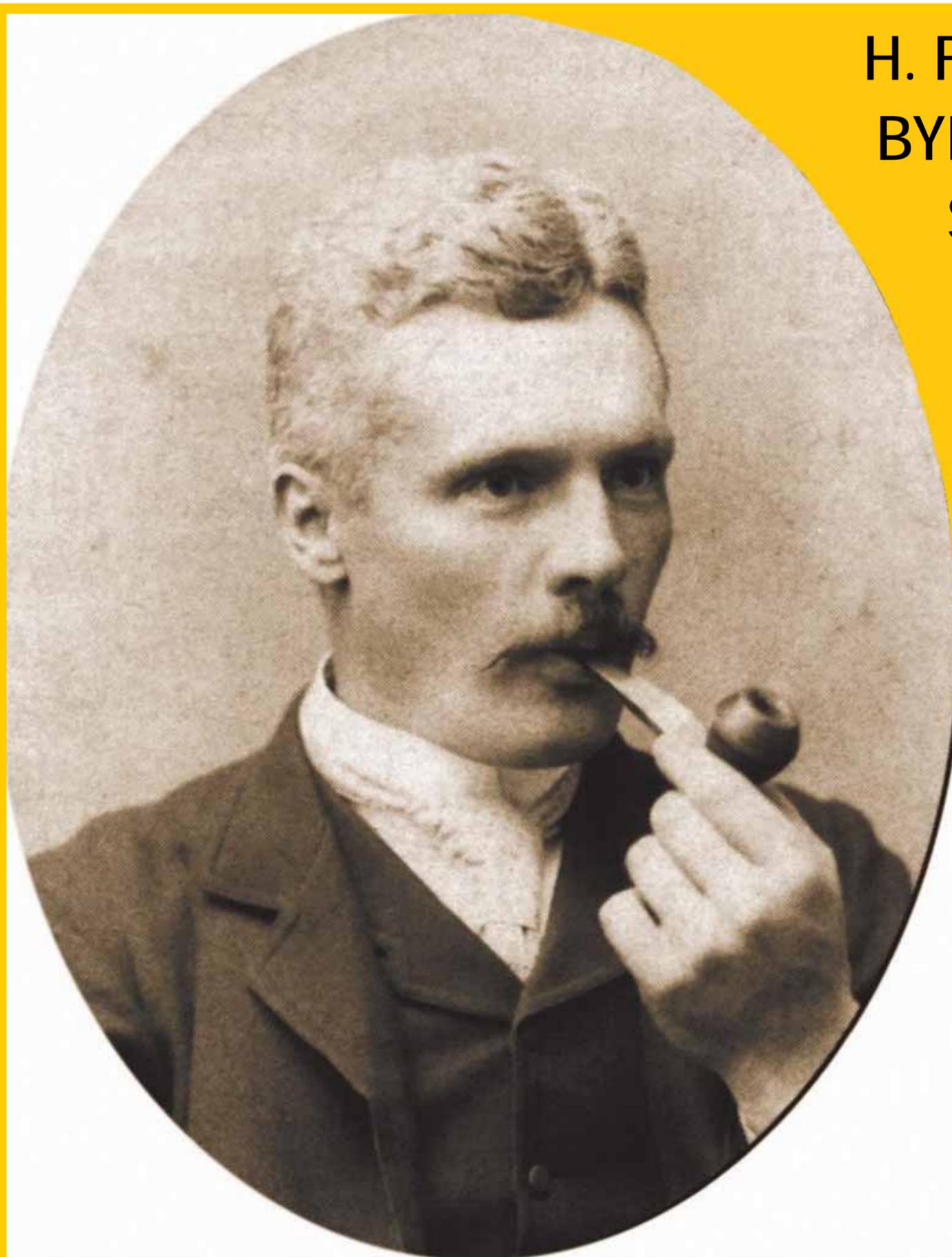
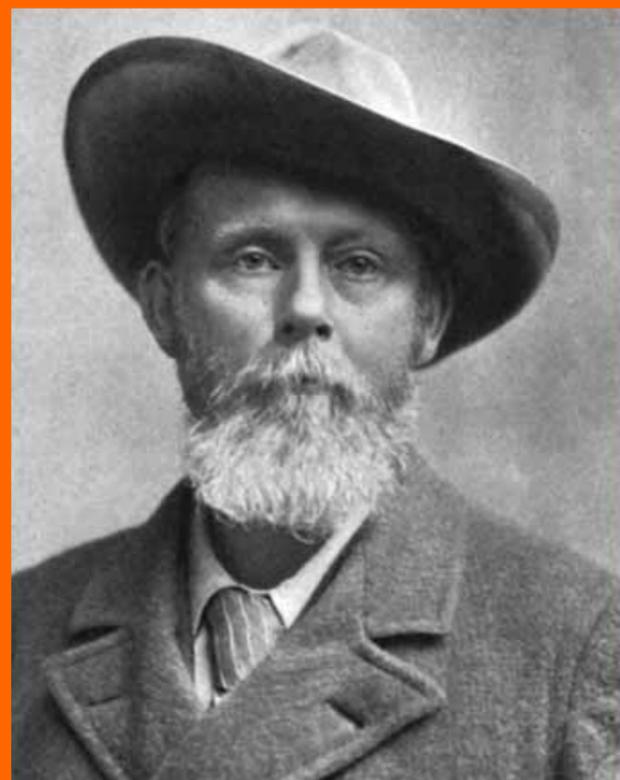
F. C. SELOUS - PIRBRIGHT'S BIG GAME HUNTER



In 1894 Frederick Courtney Selous married the daughter of a Gloucestershire Vicar and settled down in a house called Alpine Lodge at Fox Corner in Pirbright. He changed the name of the house to Heatherside and built a museum in the front garden to house his native African curiosities and 'remarkable collection of hunting spoils' – because for the past twenty years or more Selous was one of the best-known 'big game hunters' in the world.

Even after settling in Pirbright, he continued to lead hunting expeditions all over the world, donating specimens of animals and plants to the Natural History Museum (where I believe his museum collection later ended up).

He was still extremely active at the age of 64 when the First World War broke out and volunteered for the 25th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, fighting in his beloved Africa where tragically he was killed by a sniper in January 1917. The hunter had been hunted.



H. F. LOCKE-KING - BYFLEET'S GREAT SPORTSMEN & BENEFACTOR

In 1895 Hugh Fortescue Lock King of Brooklands House in Weybridge, decided to build a golf-course on some of his land at Woodham – but why was it called the New Zealand Golf Club? The truth is that nobody really knows for sure.

Some people say that the course, divided into two by Martyrs Lane, is in the shape of the North & South Islands of New Zealand, but the most likely explanation is the link the Lock-King family had with the Islands, where some of Hugh's ancestors were amongst the first colonists.

The New Zealand Golf Course was originally designed by a well-known amateur golfer of the day called Samuel Mure Fergusson, who then became the club's first Secretary. It was opened on the 25th May 1895, the first of three golf clubs in the area built by Locke-King - the second being the nine-hole 'Sheerwater Golf Club' built in 1898 (where Woodlands & Hollies Avenues are now) and the last being the Bleakdown Golf Club in 1906 - later renamed West Byfleet Golf Club.

By then, of course, Locke-King had taken an interest in other sports - as we shall discover in a later article!