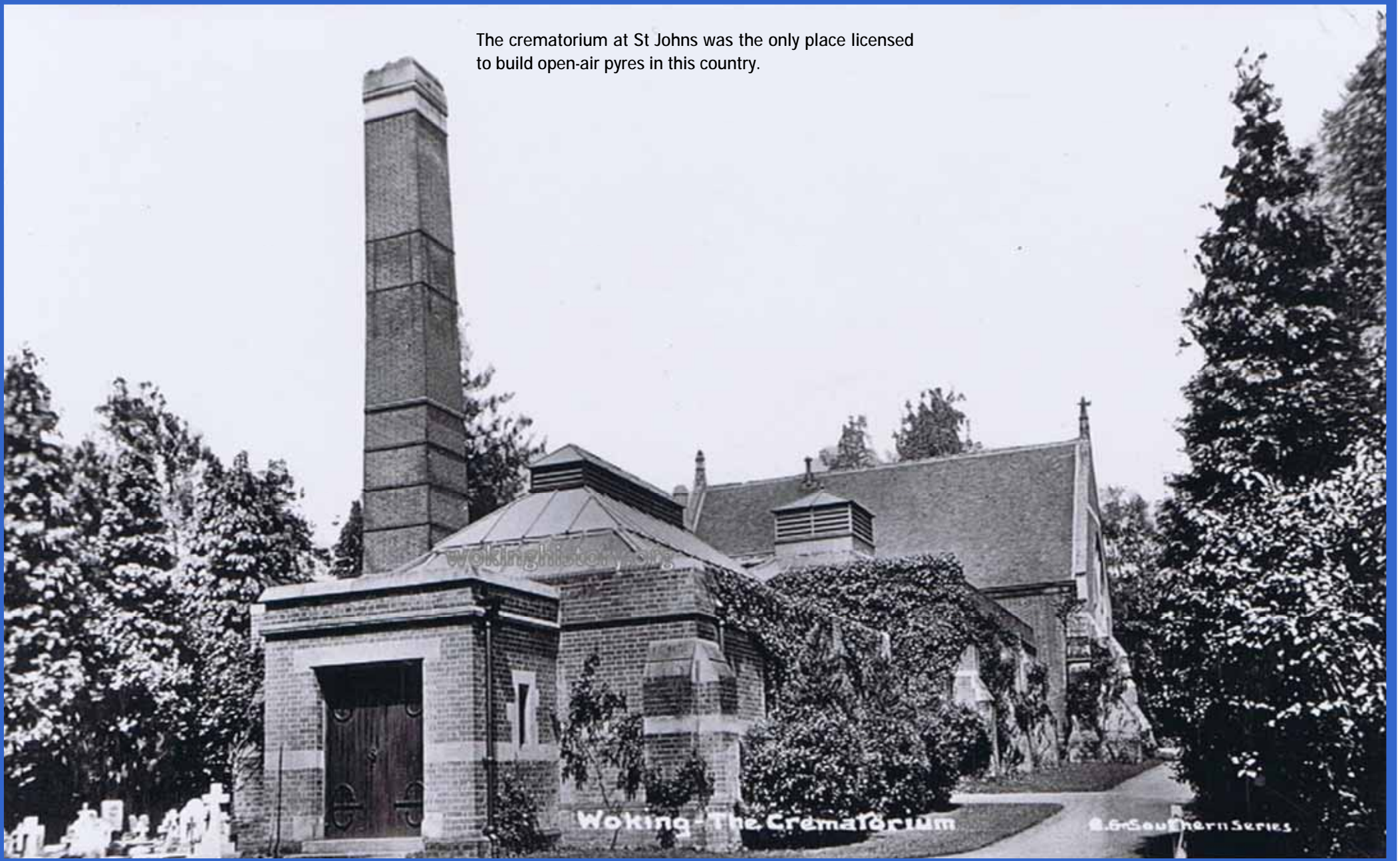


# THE SACRED WATERS OF THE BASINGSTOKE CANAL

Iain Wakeford 2016

The crematorium at St Johns was the only place licensed to build open-air pyres in this country.



In late May 1934 the Prime Minister of Nepal sent over his eldest son to London to become his country's first ambassador to the UK. He was accompanied by his wife, a Nepalese Princess called Chamsere Jung, who unfortunately on the passage over here became seriously ill – so much so that on the last part of their journey from Paris to London it was clear that she was very close to death. Her religion dictated that she should 'take her last breath beside a sacred piece of water' and it was traditional that within twenty-four hours the bodied should be cremated on an open pyre of sandalwood, camphor and oils, with the uncoffined body carrier by four Hindus on foot to the site of cremation. But where should such a cremation take place?

The answer was found at St Johns where in 1878 the Cremation Society of England had built the first crematorium in this country and where the nearby Basingstoke Canal could temporarily become England's River Ganges.

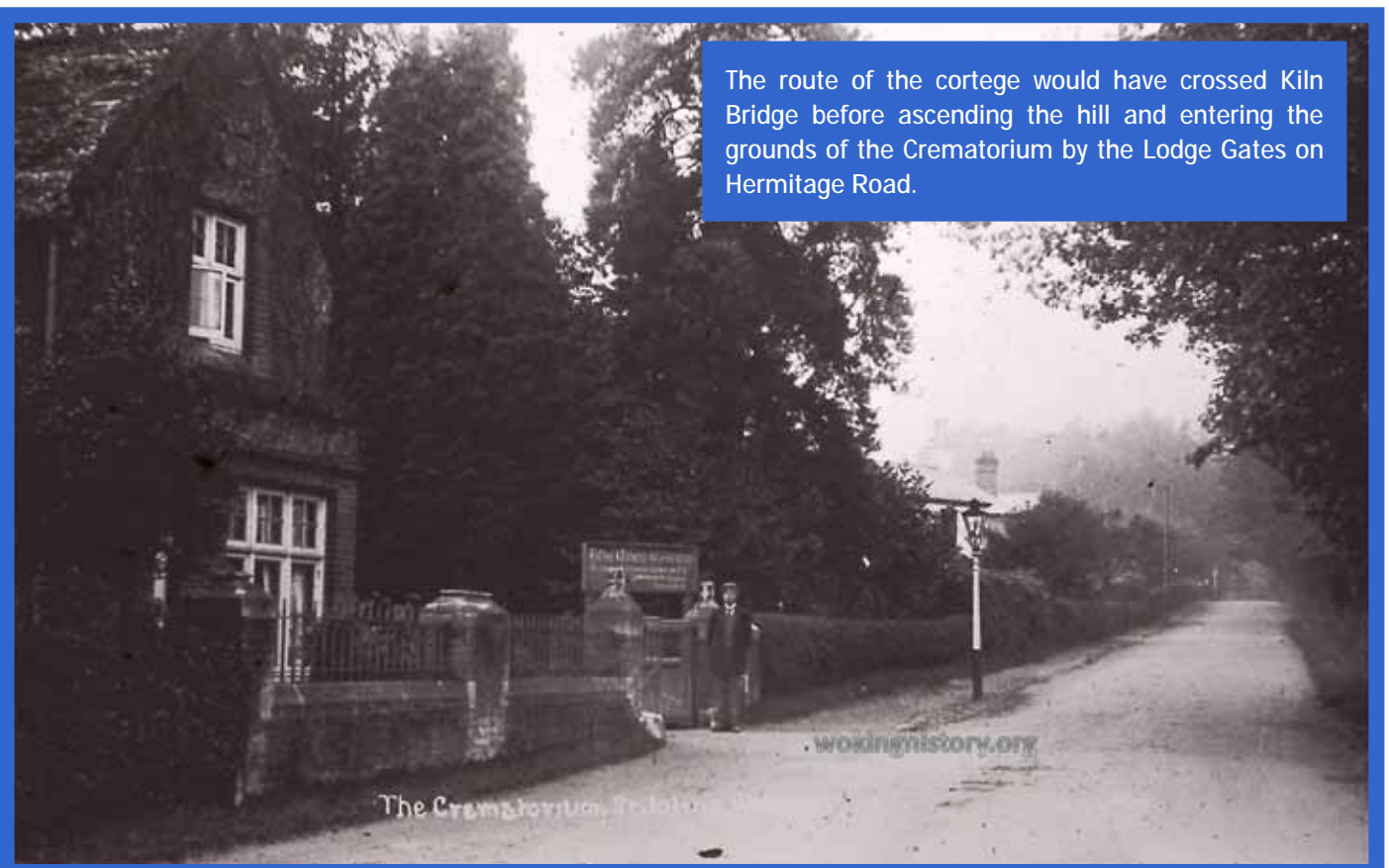
The Government rented a bungalow beside the canal on St Johns Lye known as 'The Chalet' where the Princess finally passed away, and the following day a new 'crematorium' was built in the grounds of the original one. A local resident, Miss Pole, recorded her memories of the event in 1975.

'Just before her death she was carried out to a wooden shed which they had erected in the

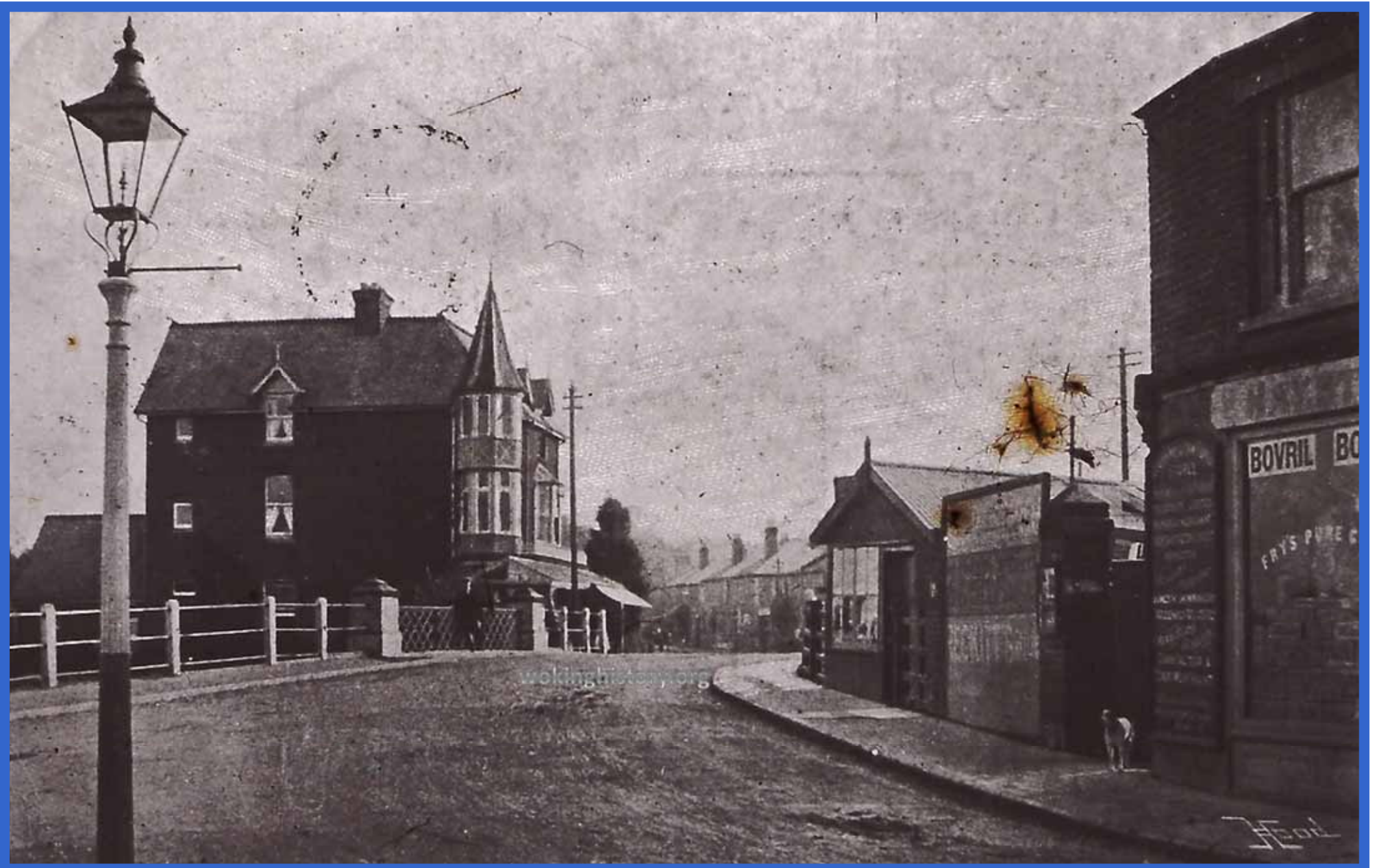
garden – local people were told that according to her countrymen's religion, the dying must be removed from their dwelling before their final passing and that the bearers of the body must cross water and must not be leather shod. In this case the passing over Kiln Bridge satisfied the first condition, but the ground was so rough the bearers were in danger of falling over. However, a local character who dealt in jumble of all kinds was able to accommodate them with rubber plimsoles.'

Again according to Miss Pole 'As the cortege travelled to the funeral pyre, money was scattered on the ground by the mourners' almost immediately collected by the scores of children from the village following the cortege. The ceremony was supposed to be secret, being enclosed by a high fence, but a young lad with a camera climbed a nearby tree and sold the resulting picture to the 'Daily Mail'.

Sadly I have not been able to trace a decent enough copy of that photograph to reproduce



The route of the cortege would have crossed Kiln Bridge before ascending the hill and entering the grounds of the Crematorium by the Lodge Gates on Hermitage Road.

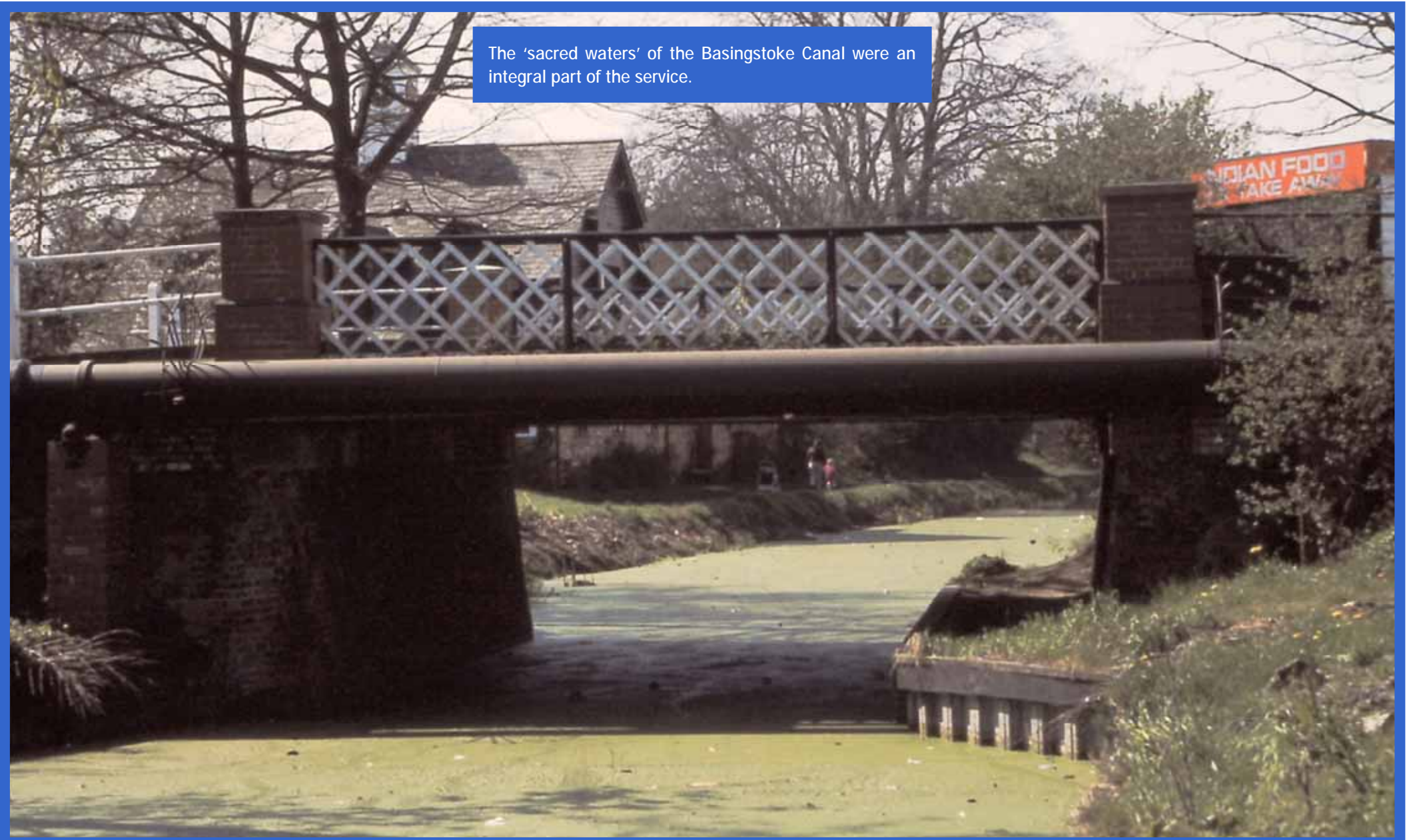


here – although I have seen a badly sellotaped up copy.

There were two later open-air cremations at St. Johns, in December 1935 when 23 year old male cook Dadi Lal was cremated and on 26th February 1937 when Hasta Bahadur, a 24 year old valet with the Nepalese legation died at 'The Chalet'.

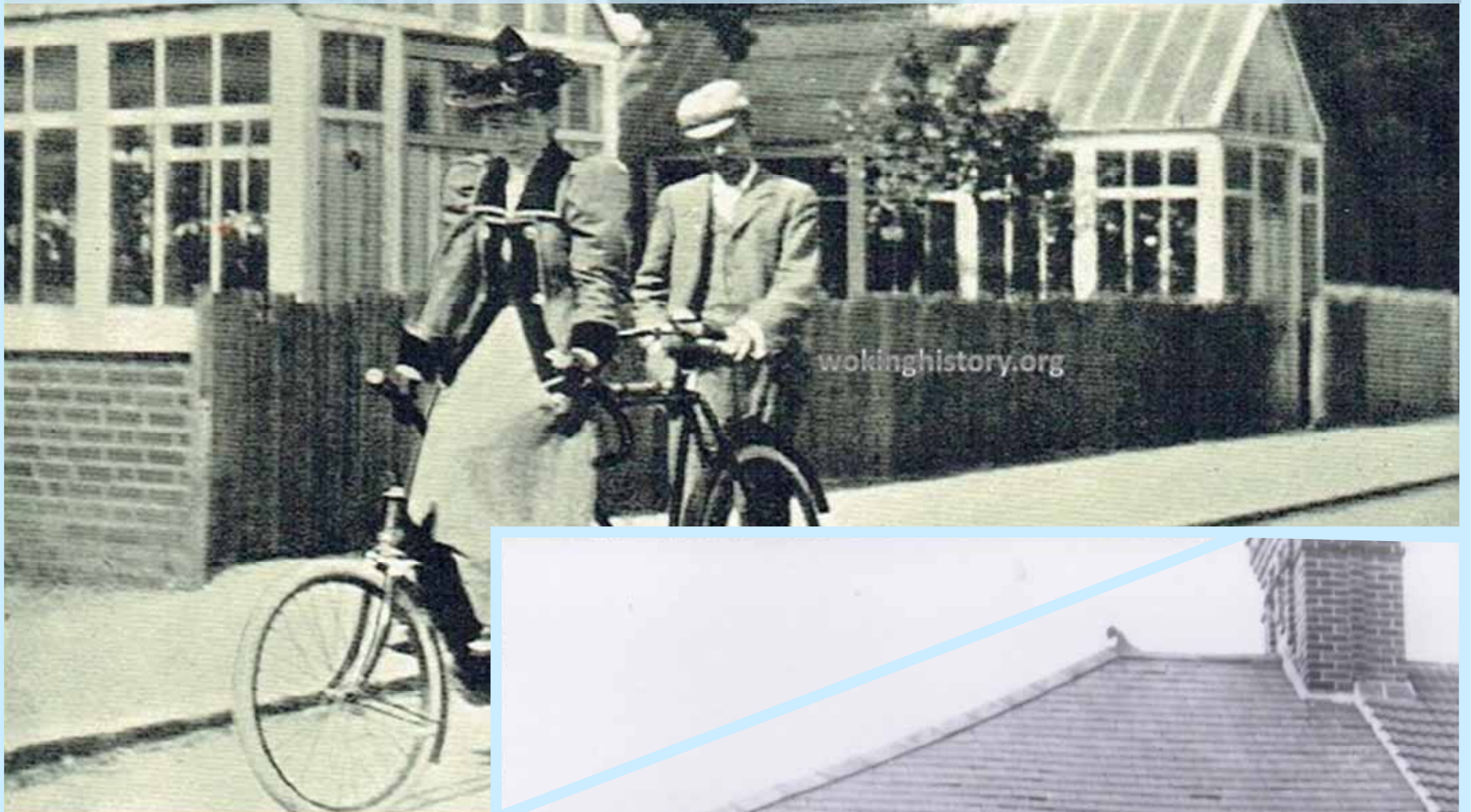
That was the last open-air cremation to take place at St. Johns, and as far as I can tell the only place in the country that legally had the right to hold open-air Hindu cremations. I do not know what would happen now if a similar situation arose again as the building of the Hermitage Estate has prevented more 'new' crematoria being built on that site.

In 1946 the Necropolis Company obtained permission to build a crematorium in the grounds of Brookwood Cemetery. I wonder if the new owners of the site would resurrect the plans to include an 'open-air crematoria' with maybe a house and shed on Sheets Heath so that High-Caste Hindus can still cross the sacred waters of the Basingstoke Canal!



The 'sacred waters' of the Basingstoke Canal were an integral part of the service.

# WELLS' RECOLLECTIONS OF WOKING



In 1934 the two part 'Experiment in Autobiography' by H G Wells was published in which the author recalled his move to Woking in 1895. This year, of course, marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, but also the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death so that next year I imagine there will be a flurry of 'copyright free' Wells features in film and TV and radio. Woking has been celebrating all this year (myself included), but at the risk of repeating myself I wanted to note here what he had to say specifically about our town.

'Our withdrawal to Woking was a fairly cheerful adventure. Woking was the site of the first crematorium but few of our friends made more than five of six jokes about that. We borrowed a hundred pounds by a mortgage on Mrs Robbins' house in Putney and with that hundred punts, believe it or not, we furnished a 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 healthy slumbers. Close at hand in those days was a pretty and rarely used canal, amidst pine woods, a weedy canal, beset with loosestrife, spirea, forget-me-nots and yellow water lilies upon which one could be happy for hours in a hired canoe and in all directions stretched open and undeveloped heath land so that we could walk and presently learn to ride bicycles and restore our broken contact with the open air.'

Within eighteen months Wells had moved on to Worcester Park, but from the above it seems that his time in our area was a happy one – even though some of it was spent cycling about the district 'marking down suitable places and people for destruction by my Martians'.



# CANON PARES LEAVES HORSELL



## FOOTBALL. ASSOCIATION CHALLENGE CUP (FINAL TIE).— OLD ETONIANS v. CLAPHAM ROVERS.

On Saturday the present season's competition for the Challenge Cup reached its last stage with the match between the above clubs at Kennington Oval. Having won the toss, the Clapham Rovers elected to start with the wind at their backs, and at 3 27 Goodhart set the ball in motion. During the first 20 minutes the play was of a very even character and mostly in the centre of the ground; but then the Rovers assumed the aggressive, and it required all the well-known powers of Bury and Kinnaird to keep the enemy out of their quarters. With the change of ends Eton were favoured by the wind, but the Rovers succeeded in holding their own for some time, despite most strenuous exertions on the part of Beaufoy, Clarke, Whitfeld, Clerke, and Goodhart. During this stage Field, Ogilvie, Prinsep, Bailey, Rawson, and Scott played up vigorously, and due principally to their efforts the ball was once more to be found at the Etonian end of the ground. The Old Etonians now rallied, and Goodhart, getting the ball under his control, ran it right down on the left, finishing up with a capital centre. A sharp scrimmage close in goal was brought to an end by Clerke, whose shot planted the ball safely between the Rovers' posts and gained the only goal scored during the match. The back play of Eton kept the game principally in the centre, and, as the Rovers' energies began presently to flag, Eton had much the best of the game during the remaining portion of time. The Light Blues were, however, unable to score any further advantage, and at the expiration of an hour and a half retired winners of an evenly-contested game by one goal to none. Sides as follow:—Old Etonians.—Hon. A. F. Kinnaird (captain) and E. Lubbock (half backs), L. Bury and E. Christian (backs), H. Whitfeld, N. Pears, H. C. Goodhart, J. B. T. Chevallier, H. Beaufoy, C. J. Clerke, and J. B. Hawtrey (goal-keeper). Clapham Rovers.—R. A. Ogilvie and E. Field (backs), N. C. Bailey and J. F. M. Prinsep (half backs), F. L. Rawson, A. J. Stanley, S. W. Scott, H. S. Bevington, E. F. Growse, C. Keith-Falconer, and R. H. Birkett (goal keeper). Results of the final ties played in previous years are appended:—1872, Wanderers beat Royal Engineers by one goal to none; 1873, Wanderers beat Oxford University by two goals to none; 1874, Oxford University beat Royal Engineers by two goals to none; 1875, Royal Engineers beat Oxford University by one goal to none; 1876, Wanderers beat Old Etonians by three goals to none; 1877, Wanderers beat Oxford University by two goals to none; 1878, Wanderers beat Royal Engineers by three goals to one.

In 1935 the village of Horsell lost a great friend when Canon Norman Pares retired as Vicar of St Mary's. He came to the village in 1897 replacing the Rev Back and continued his uncle's great works in the village, being responsible for the building of the Village Hall in 1907 (seen here in the background with the Rev Pares in the centre), and the restoration of the church itself.

Apparently in his youth he was a great sportsman, playing for the Old Etonian's football team in the final of the FA Cup in 1879 at the Oval, where he is said to have played a 'prominent part' in their victory over Clapham Rovers, 1-0. The story is all the more remarkable as Norman Pares

originally attended the game as a spectator, but finding his team a player down (and having previously turned out for them in an earlier round) he was pulled from the crowd, given a borrowed kit, and sent on to the pitch, the only spectator ever to have won a cup winners medal.

Sadly a year after retiring from Horsell, Canon Pares died, but his name lives on in the close of flats built behind the Village Hall, off of Wilson Way (which is named after his nephew).

The Old Etonian's Winning Team and the report in *The Times* from the 31st March 1879.

