Reviews by Prof Peter J. Beck

Peter J. Beck, is Emeritus Professor of History at Kingston University and has lived in **Horsell, Woking**, for over 40 years. His most recent book is *Presenting History: Past and Present* (Macmillan, 2012). In September 2016 Bloomsbury Academic is publishing his latest book *The War of the Worlds: from H.G. Wells to Orson Welles, Jeff Wayne, and Steven Spielberg and beyond.* Originating as a local history project focused upon Wells and his residence in Woking (1895-96), this study expanded gradually into a biography of *The War of the Worlds* as a book, that is its writing and afterlife as a film, radio programme, music stage show and so on. Even so, the local history element remains, albeit evolving increasingly into a focus upon Woking's Wellsian literary heritage dimension.

The Time Machine: an Invention (1895)

Relating a visit to the Time Traveller's house in Richmond upon Thames, the narrator reports his story about a recent journey into the far future on a time machine. Expecting to find a more advanced civilisation, the Time Traveller discovered that in evolutionary terms by the year 802,701, humanity will have degenerated, not progressed. Subsequently he went on another journey but failed to return.

The Time Machine, Wells's first book of fiction, was published in May 1895, soon after he moved to Maybury Road, Woking. The book's success launched his career as a writer, and enabled him to switch increasingly from journalism to authorship.

Highlighting Wells's ability to link literature and science and his Darwinian mindset, the book is central to claims that he was the founder of science fiction, especially as his time machine has figured in numerous literary works, comics, Hollywood films &etc. And, of course, don't forget, Dr. Who, Wells's Time Traveller writ large.

The Wheels of Chance (1896)

Set during the late Victorian 'cycling craze', *The Wheels of Chance* is set around a long bicycle ride beginning at Putney. Passing through Surrey *en route* to the Sussex coast and Hampshire, the story, which included a fictional heroine resident in Surbiton, offers readers charming portrayals of the

Surrey countryside, most notably of places like Ripley and Guildford. Wells, a keen cyclist and a former draper's apprentice, represented the appeal of cycling through the trials and tribulations of Hoopdriver, an apprentice draper on holiday. For more thoughtful readers, *The Wheels of Chance* illuminated broader themes concerning, say, personal liberty, the oppressive nature of retail apprenticeships, class and personal relationships, and the controversial issue of women cyclists.

Generally regarded as the first cycling novel *The Wheels of Chance* was written and published while Wells was living in Woking, and hence reinforces the town's cycling heritage, even if Hoopdriver's route avoided the town.

The War of the Worlds (1898)

Published during the late Victorian period, *The War of the Worlds* tells the story of an abortive Martian invasion of Earth set in the near future. Woking, and particularly Horsell Common, figure prominently as the places where the Martians first land; build their encampment; show the power of their weaponry, the Heat Rays and all that; fight the first-ever interplanetary battle; and destroy the town *en route* to attack London. In the end, the Martians are defeated, but only because of their lack of immunity to terrestrial bacteria.

Like *The Time Machine*, this book is a key part of the case for Wells as both the founder of sci-fi, especially for alien invasion stories, and the principal inspiration for films like the Steven Spielberg/Tom Cruise movie released in 2005. Apart from proving a page-turning story, *The War of the Worlds* illuminated also major elements in Wells' thinking, such as its darwinian and anti-imperialism character.

The serialised version published in Britain and the USA in 1897 was wholly written in Woking during 1895-96. The book includes additional material written following Wells move to Worcester Park.