

MORE BLUE PLAQUES REQUIRED?

Iain Wakeford 2015



In 1903 a young Irish artist by the name of Paul Henry married a young Scottish painter called Grace Mitchell, whom he had met a few years earlier whilst staying and studying in Paris.

According to his biographer, Dr Brian Kennedy, 'in about 1903 he moved to "White Cottage", Knap Hill, Surrey, and I understand taught art for some time at nearby Beaufort College' (see marriage certificate below).

Unfortunately I cannot find any reference to the college amongst educational establishments at that time, but as Dr Kennedy pointed out it might have been 'a small private school which did not survive long enough to make its mark'.

The only directories I have around that period are the Kelly's Directory for 1899 (which shows Beaufort House as belonging to a surgeon called John Hewetson Bertolacci), and the 1909 directory, by which time 'Beaufort' was the home of Mr F S A Fraser (and Paul Henry is listed as living at 'White Cottage, Knapp hill').

Dr Kennedy speculates that if Beaufort College

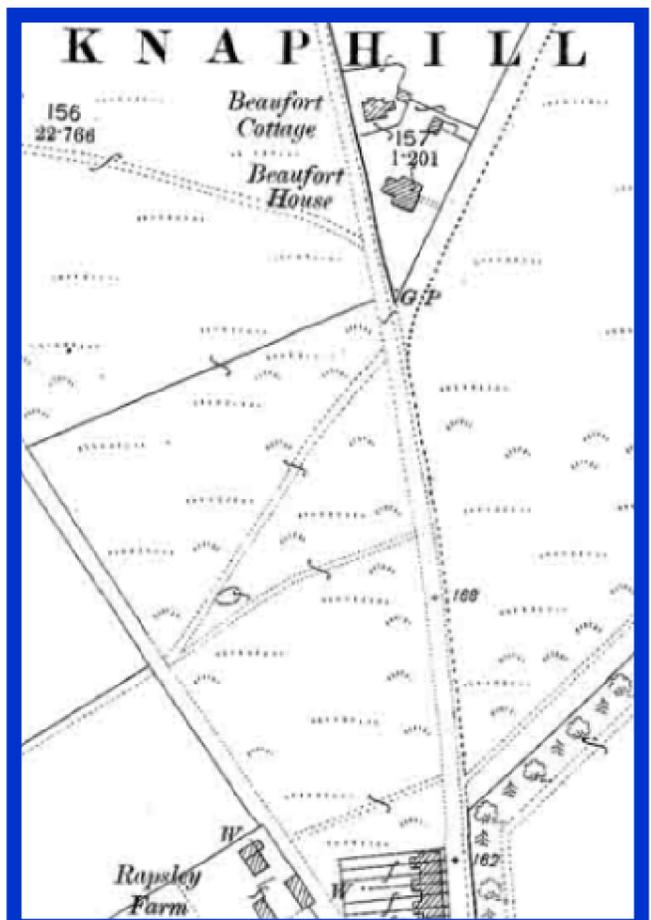
failed 'he might then have moved into the newly built (and smaller) White Cottage' but I wonder whether the minister at St Peter's Church in Notting Hill (where the ceremony took place), either misheard or misspelled the address as 'Beaufort College' when it should have been 'Beaufort Cottage'!

The electoral registers for 1906-10 list Paul Henry as living at 'Beaufort Cottage, Knaphill', and White Cottage is clearly marked as such on the 1896 Ordnance Survey map (right).

The other alternative is that Paul Henry, who was evidently attempting to set up a portrait studio and to teach art, came up with grandiose name of 'Beaufort College' in order to impress his possible clients.

In the Irish Art Review (Paul Henry: An Irish Portrait, 1989-90), Dr Kennedy wrote 'about the summer of 1908 (sic) Paul and Grace Henry and Robert Lynd went to live at Knapp Hill, near Guildford, in Surrey'.

Robert Lynd was an old school friend of Henry's from Belfast, who at the time was writing for



Column No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
307	Sept 17	Paul Henry	29	Bachelor	Artist	Beaufort College Knaphill	Robert Mitchell Henry	Clergyman
	18 903	Emily Grace Mitchell	Full	Spinster	—	112 Rensington Rd	John Mitchell	Clergyman

Married in the Purish Ch according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Ch of England by W. Chasdale or after banes by me,

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Paul Henry and Grace Mitchell in the Presence of us, Rev. Henry and W. Mitchell

Ladbroke Black was an indefatigable walker, and he and I went for many long rambles together. We would take the train to some place and then walk hard into the country, usually in Hertfordshire or Surrey, to some place that took us into the open. One of these jaunts took us to somewhere in the neighbourhood of Bagshot Heath not far from London. I had never walked in Surrey before and neither had Black. As we strode on (we were going over

Newlands Corner) I thought how nice it would be to live somewhere within easy reach of London. How potent some words can be! In this case 'Heath' was the evocative word. Although I had never done so, I had always felt that I would like to live in a remote spot, and the quiet of these hills appealed to me. Actually I fancy I had already made up my mind to leave London and work in the country, and it is just possible that my decision to do so at this period was ill founded and a wild adventure. I was, perhaps, not sufficiently established for such a move, but being impulsive and self-willed, I decided to follow my star wherever it led me. So I took a small cottage in Surrey. It was not an ideal place to live, because I was making the mistake of attempting to have the best of two worlds, of being within reach of Fleet Street and at the same time close to more or less open country, and my efforts to keep both lines of communication open, lost me much time and energy.

During the next few years I led a curious, but taking it by and large, not an unfruitful life. Spending two, or possibly three days in London, looking up publishers and editors, and for the rest making drawings, doing portraits, or giving lessons, the last of which I loathed. However, here too I made interesting friends such as that eccentric genius Sydney H. Syme. He had worked for several years, unknown to the outside world, on papers like *Chums*, and the *Boys' Own Paper*, serving his apprenticeship to journalism; but at the time I speak of he was producing a number of extraordinary cartoons for the press. Perhaps his best known works were the drawings he did for Lord Dunsany's *Time And The Gods*, and paintings for the same peer, and book illustrations for other writers. A brilliant caricaturist, he filled the walls of the Yorick Club with his inimitable drawings.

Travelling up and down between London and the country was a tiresome and expensive way of living and I soon found myself in very low water. In fact the tide was running out. I had two commissions for portraits on which I was counting, but in one day I had two letters, one from a man who had commissioned one of the portraits, to say that he could not give me any sittings for at least a month, and the other from a solicitor saying that my other prospective client had died! The tide was by then full out and looked as if it intended to stay there, but I have always found that it is at this

desperate moment that things are apt to happen. I had met Hugh Lane some time before this and he had told me that Lady Colin Campbell had seen a couple of my drawings and would be interested in seeing more of my work. I rang her up and made an appointment to go round to her with a few drawings. Some of these were large and the parcel was a bulky one, so that I would have to take a taxi, and I had exactly three-and-sixpence in the world. I never travelled in a slower taxi, and no gambler ever watched the fall of the cards with more anxiety than I watched the indicator on the dial. By the time I had reached Victoria and paid off my driver I had not one penny left.

Lady Colin Campbell had been a famous beauty but she was now crippled with rheumatism, and as I entered her drawing-room she touched a switch that floodlit her famous portrait by Boldini: one of her treasured possessions. After we had gone through the drawings we talked of Paris and the French artists we had both known. She laughed heartily when I told her of my taxi drive with my last tuppence, took several drawings from me, and I left her hoping that the tide had turned again. For all that, I still felt that my life was leading me nowhere, that I must settle down to some definite line of work and stop being blown about by every wandering wind of fancy. I had come to loathe the life I was living in Surrey, I felt I was getting into a rut and might stay there for the rest of my life, though I must admit that my difficulties were largely of my own creating and that I complicated them unnecessarily.

At this time Sickert had a studio which he shared with Spencer Gore and two or three other painters, and there, once a week they showed their latest paintings to prospective buyers. It was mainly intended as a sort of depot in which artists could show their work without the intervention of the dealer. I had often gone to these little informal gatherings, and one day Syme suggested that we might run a similar show. Syme was a plausible advocate and finally it was arranged that Lord Howard de Walden, Tom Mostyn, Syme and myself should take a studio in Fitzroy Street together, although, as it happened, I was the only one who ever used it. Here I showed my work, drawings in charcoal and rather Whistlerian oil paintings of the Thames, and sold quite a number. I also painted a few portraits at this time, and although the original idea of giving weekly exhibitions never materialised I have very pleasant memories of those days in Fitzroy Street, with Sickert, Syme, and a score of others; of the Yorick Club, Gow's Chop House in the Strand, and Tour Eiffel in Charlotte Street, The Café Royal, all of them places with blessed memories where we foregathered to talk.

An Irish Portrait, Paul Henry (Batsford) 1951, p44 - 47

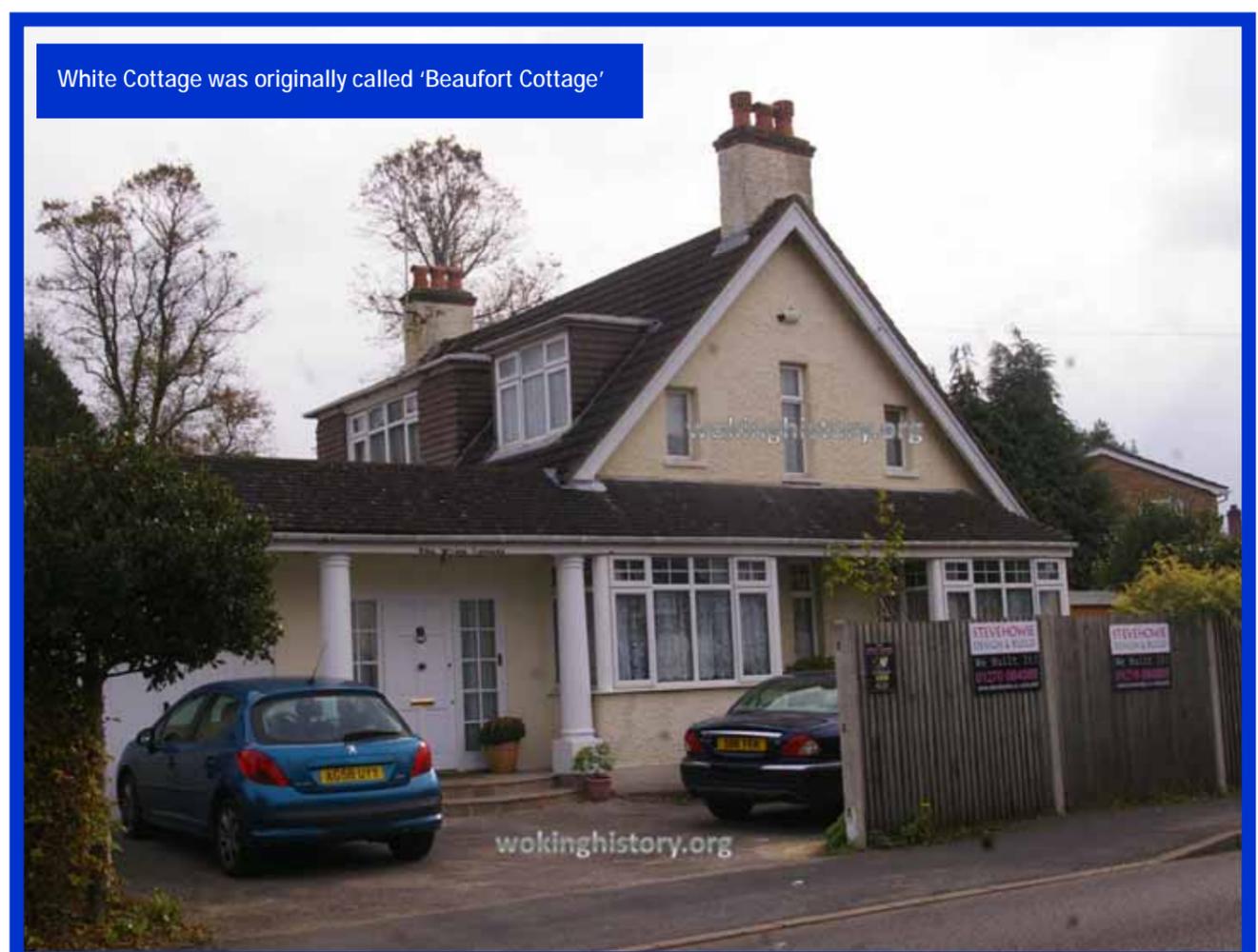
several London journals and newspapers. The two lived for a time together in London, where Paul Henry had first tried to set up his own school and portrait studio, whilst attempting to get work as an illustrator.

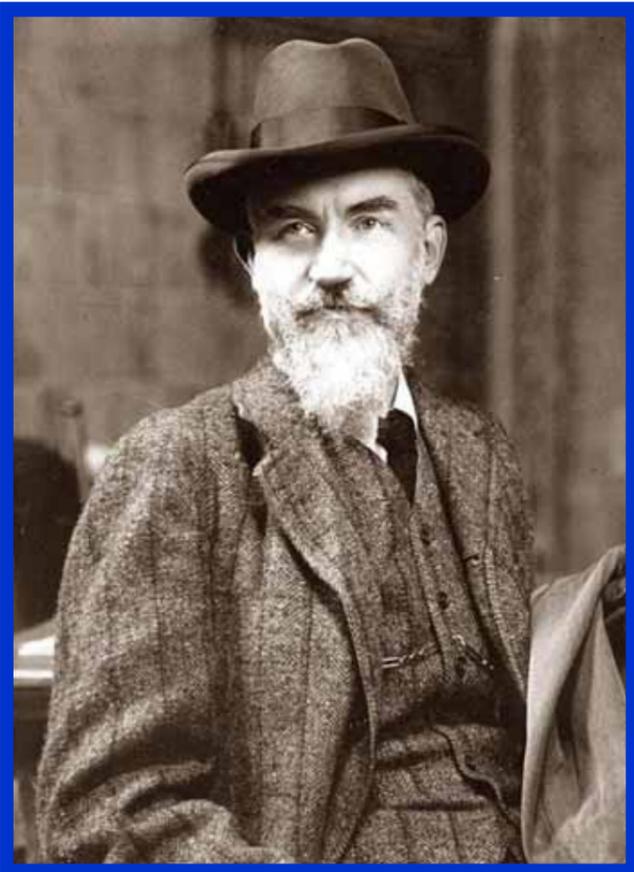
Things hadn't work out well and on a walk with another friend and colleague, Ladbroke Black, he discovered the wild beauty of the Surrey Heath lands. He recalled the events in his autobiography (published by Batsford in 1951) - the section on his stay here being reproduced above.

Again according to Dr Kennedy in the Irish Art Review it was here that 'Paul was inspired by the landscape, particularly with one area of bog land which he drew and painted time and time again. "Water Meadows", c1907-10, a charcoal drawing now in the Ulster Museum, was almost certainly done at that place and time'.

Sadly the water meadows that Paul Henry painted would not be recognisable to him now as the meadows have recently been decimated by the Brookwood Farm development.

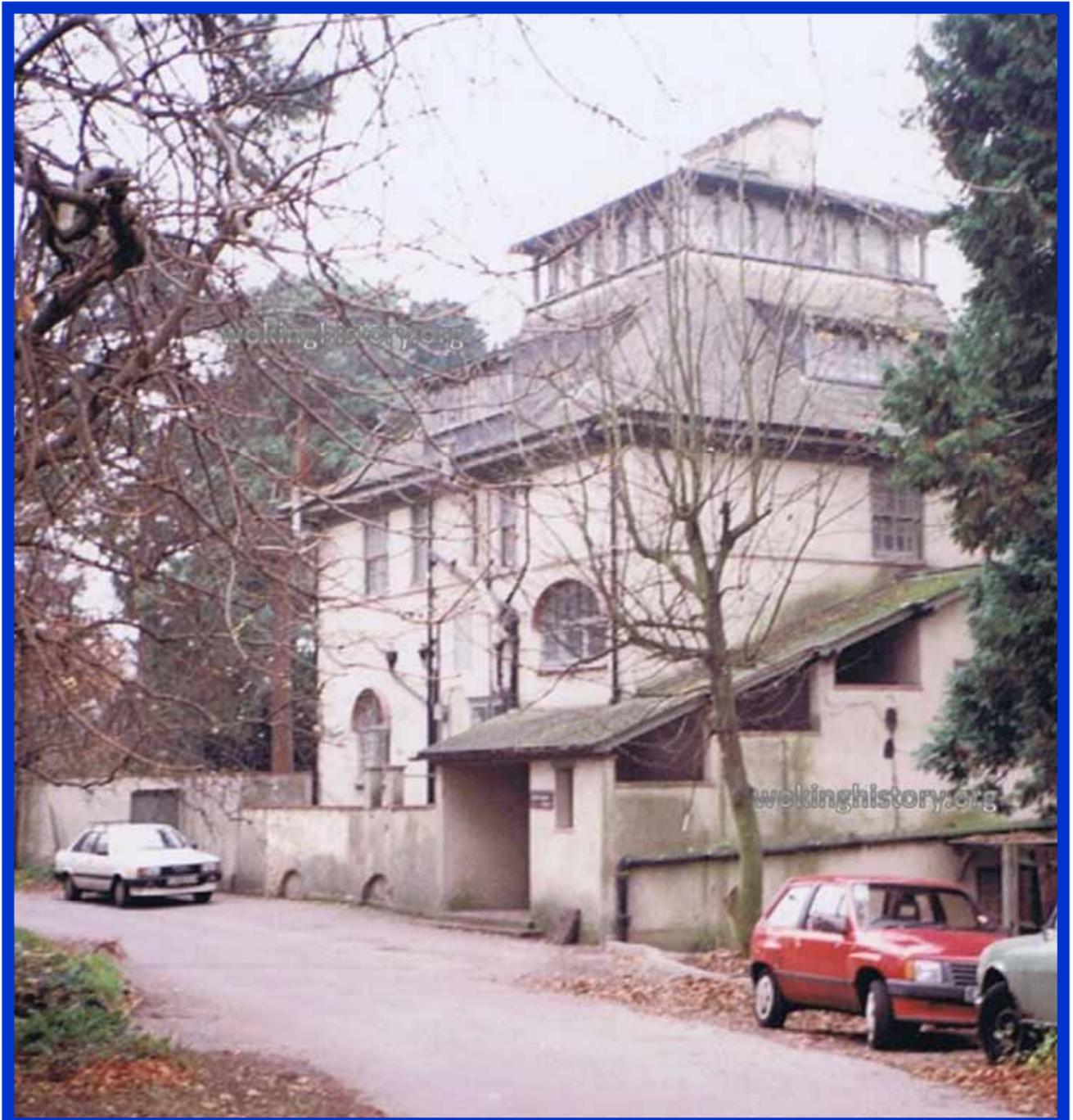
Nothing is known of Robert Lynd's stay at Knaphill. He married in 1909 and moved to Ireland, with the Henry's following shortly after.





Paul Henry was not the only Irishman to live in Woking at that time, as his more famous countryman (then and now), George Bernard Shaw, rented a house on Maybury Hill until 1904. It was called Maybury Knowle, a large house in The Ridge (since divided into apartments) where can be found a plaque commemorating his short stay.

Indeed his 'stay' at Woking was even shorter than the plaque suggests as for a lot of that time he was apparently on a tour of America and only 'lived' at Maybury Knowle for short periods. Nevertheless it is said that some of his



Maybury Knowle, from the garden side and from the road (above right) the home of George Bernard Shaw (above left).

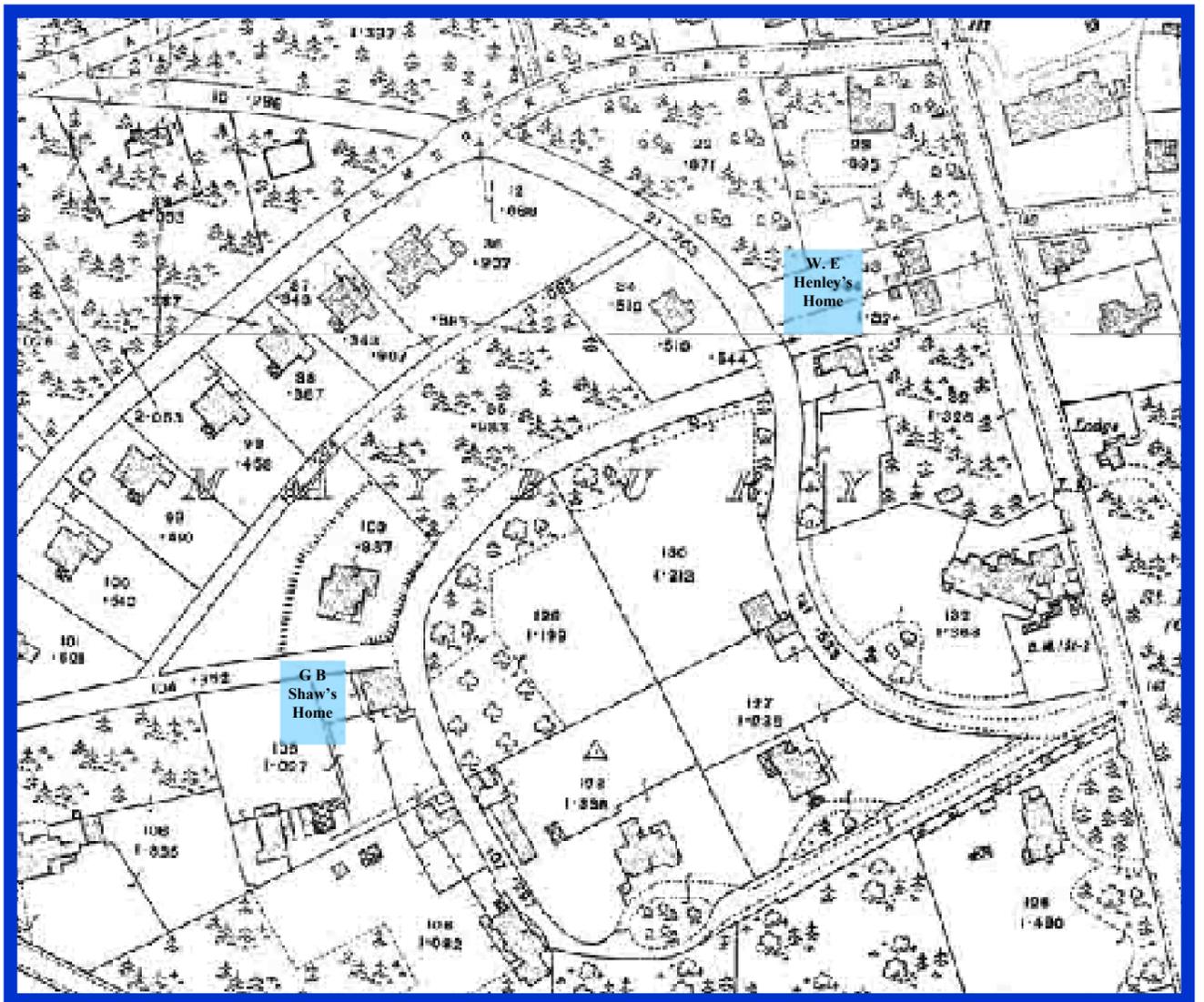


work 'Man & Superman' was written whilst he was staying in Woking, before he finally settled down at 'Shaw Corner' in Hertfordshire in 1906.

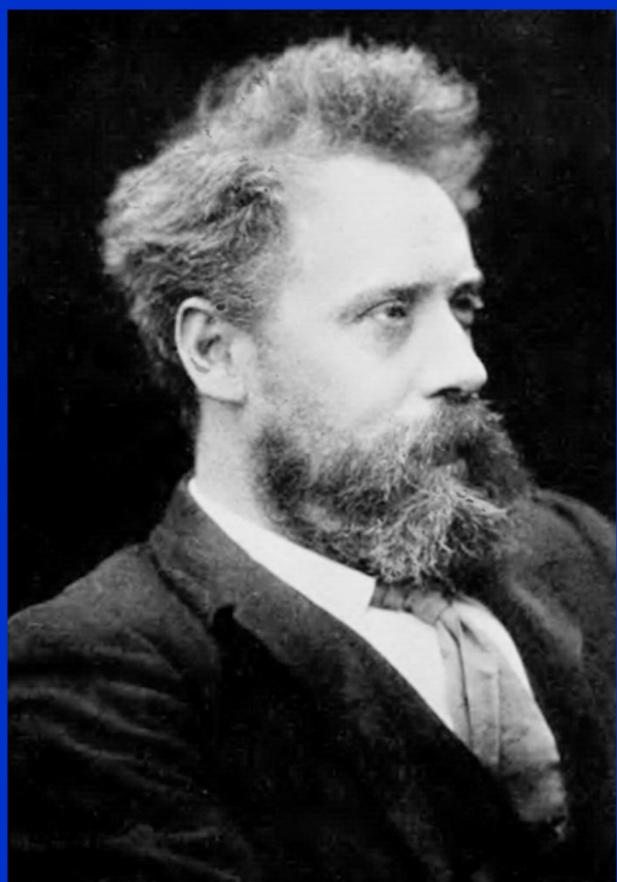
Funnily enough one of the last letters signed by Shaw from Maybury Knowle was to his friend and fellow Fabian, H.G. Wells, who as most people known once lived in Woking, writing *The War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man* amongst other novels and articles.

Some of those articles were for the publisher and poet, William Ernest Henley, who in 1901 moved to another house on Maybury Hill, almost opposite the junction with Lavender Road.

In his youth Henley suffered from tuberculosis of the bone that resulted in his left leg being amputated below the left knee – which according to his friend Robert Louis Stephenson, gave him the inspiration for his character Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*.



William Ernest Henley



It is also claimed that W E Henley's only daughter, Margaret, provided another friend of the family, J M Barrie, with the name (if not the character) of Wendy in his famous play and novel 'Peter Pan'.

Margaret was a sickly child and could not talk very well, apparently calling Mr Barrie her 'fwendy-wendy'. Apparently when he wrote the story, with the lost boys evidently based on the Davies family (who Barrie was a guardian of following the death of the boy's parents), the name 'Wendy' had never been recorded before.

Margaret died in 1894 aged just five, but evidently lived on in J M Barrie's memory.

It is probably as a poet that William Ernest Henley is best known now, with his poem

'Invictus' (with the line "my head is blooded, but unbowed"), being his most famous lines. Unfortunately like H G Wells and G B Shaw before him, W E Henley only stayed in Woking about eighteen months. But whereas Wells and Shaw (and indeed Paul Henry) went on to greater fame and fortune after they left Woking, poor Henley was not so lucky. It was whilst departing a train at Woking Station that W E Henley fell, dying soon after from his injuries at his home on Maybury Hill.

Sadly unlike Wells and Shaw neither Henley or Henry's former homes have plaques to inform the passer-by of their importance. Perhaps it is about time that Woking Council reviewed its list of sites to commemorate our famous former residents!

WISLEY IN WOKING

One place that Woking is perhaps most famous for is the Royal Horticultural Society's Gardens at Wisley – which is odd because Wisley Gardens are not actually in the borough (although postal-wise they are listed under Woking).

The gardens started out life in 1878 when George Fergusson Wilson, a scientist, inventor and wealthy businessman (founder of Price's Patent Candles Ltd), bought about sixty acres of farmland and wood for his real passion which of gardening. He soon established what he called the 'Oakwood experimental garden' where he planned to make 'difficult plants grow successfully' – especially lilies.

He was a former treasurer of the Royal Horticultural Society so it was perhaps appropriate that after his death in 1902 Oakwood, and the adjoining Glebe Farm, were purchased by Sir Thomas Hanbury (a wealthy Quaker businessman who had made his fortune in China) who then presented the estate in trust to the Society for their 'perpetual use'.

