

He eventually completed his degree externally and immediately began his writing career, turning out fiction and political studies. He travelled widely, met world leaders and became an important influence wherever he went.

MIDHURST STORIES

Wells never forgot Sussex and in his *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934) wrote: "The broadening out, backing up and confirmation of my mind at Uppark and Midhurst were immensely important in my development." He made use of these experiences in his writings, many of which contain enchanting vignettes of our area.



Tono-Bungay (1909) is perhaps his finest novel, for which he drew on his life in a large country house and his time at Mr Cowap's. The strange title is the name of a patent medicine.

Midhurst is renamed Wimplehurst, Uppark becomes Bladesover and South Harting is Ropedean.

Love and Mr Lewisham (1900), another autobiographical tale, charts George Lewisham's progress from assistant school master in 'Whortley' to the Normal School of Science and his life thereafter.

Midhurst is the background of several of Wells' short stories. It appears as Sussexville in *Mr Marshall's Doppelganger*, *The Plattner Story* and *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*. Holmwood in *The Apple* is probably Midhurst.



There are mentions of the chemist's shop and the Grammar School in *The Dream* (1924). Stedham (named as Iping) is the setting for *The Invisible Man* (1897), South Harting as Siddermorton forms the location of *The Wonderful Visit* (1895), while Uppark appears briefly in *The World of William Clissold* (1926), *In the Days of the Comet* (1906) and *The Passionate Friends* (1913).

THE END

Wells died a few weeks short of his 80th birthday. His obituaries praised his gifts as a writer of genius and an interpreter of science before his time, but condemned his racial and religious intolerance.



We remember him as a lover of Midhurst.



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H.G. WELLS & MIDHURST



Herbert George Wells (1866-1946), world famous novelist and political thinker, had boyhood links with Midhurst and with Uppark, now a National Trust property. He is commemorated here in Midhurst by three blue plaques: in North Street outside the Grammar School that he attended and on his lodgings over a sweet shop, and in Church Hill at the former chemist's (now a dentist) which inspired *Tono-Bungay*.

Midhurst was the town that always remained in his heart.

HIS EARLY LIFE

Wells (known as Bertie) was the fourth and last child of ill-educated parents who had met in 1850 at Uppark where his mother was a maid and her future husband a gardener. After marriage they moved to Bromley to open a china shop which eventually went bankrupt. H.G. was born in Kent and at 13, because of family poverty, was sent to work for a draper in Windsor. After two months he was delighted to be dismissed and went back to live with his mother, Sarah, who had now returned to Uppark as the housekeeper. He spent Christmas 1880 there, glorying in its library, before he was shipped off to be a pupil teacher at his uncle's school in Somerset, but after only a few months the establishment was closed by government inspectors and Wells was back at Uppark, reading voraciously.



Uppark c.1905

IN MIDHURST

His mother, frantic for him to learn a respectable trade, apprenticed him, in January 1881, to Samuel Cowap, a chemist in Midhurst's Church Street (now Church Hill). Although young H.G. enjoyed it, he lacked



Church Street (Church Hill), Midhurst 1910

the smattering of Latin that was needed to handle prescriptions. His employer therefore asked the headmaster of the Grammar School, Horace Byatt, to give him lessons in the evenings at his own home near South Pond. Wells found it all too much, working by day in the shop and having coaching at night, so he left after only a month and for the third time went back to Uppark. By now its owner had lost patience with the housekeeper's shiftless son and forbade him the house.

Unemployed and homeless, H.G. sought help from Horace Byatt who accepted him as a full-time student and allowed him to live in his home. Six weeks later, however, Sarah, unable to afford the school fees, decided that he should be apprenticed at the Southsea Drapery Emporium—the basis for *The History of Mr Polly* (1910). The two years that Wells spent there were the low point of his boyhood. He was intensely unhappy and thought he had left the world of books forever.

Eventually he wrote to Mr Byatt asking if there were any possibility of going back to school and was told that he could return as

an unpaid assistant teacher. Wells confronted his mother with the news, but she was loath to forfeit his £50 apprenticeship fee, particularly since she could not afford his keep at Midhurst. H.G. wrote to Byatt again and was now offered a salary of £20 for the first year and £40 annually thereafter. Sarah was won over and H.G. returned to the Grammar School in September 1883, lodging with another teacher over a sweet shop next to the Angel Hotel in North Street.

He was now in heaven. He enjoyed teaching and in his spare time soaked up new knowledge at a prodigious rate. He laid down a course of study for himself, giving up sleep and recreation to meet his own timetable. He won prizes for the school and Byatt encouraged his hunger for learning.

The Government at this time was trying to attract high-flyers to be science teachers and Wells won a scholarship of a guinea a week (and a railway ticket) to the Normal School of Science—now Imperial College—in South Kensington.

IN LONDON

His studies began in September 1884 and his tutor was the famous Professor Thomas Huxley, who expounded the theory of evolution devised by his friend Charles Darwin. Wells idolised Huxley and passed the examinations brilliantly until his tutor retired the following year. H.G. then lost all enthusiasm for science: he was never going to be a teacher. He absented himself from lectures, becoming fascinated with socialism, literature and the intellectual life of London. He failed his finals in 1887 and left college with no qualifications.