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The view from Bun Hill: H G Wells, Kent and the Male Romance
 (Dedicated to the memory of Bob Watkins¹)

H G Wells was, as the recent BBC2 "Bookmark" documentary described, a Bromley boy, born there while Bromley was a market town in Kent and not a London Borough, and his home at 47 High Street was called Atlas House. Perhaps we should expect that a writer and visionary born in Atlas House would have a natural inclination towards globalism, cosmopolitanism and world citizenship, and a divided attitude towards his native country. If, like me, you also grew up in Kent and read and enjoyed Wells at a young age, he certainly had a special appeal; but was this something essentially Wellsian or merely an effect of what George Pondervo in *Tono-Bungay* calls the "Accident of Birth"? (5). Just how important were local loyalties such as those to Bromley and Kent for Wells?

My own earliest distinct Wellsian memory is of being away at boarding school and reading in the school library a copy of *The Food of the Gods*, until I reached the passage where "a cyclist riding, feet up, down the hill between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge, very narrowly missed running over" the giant wasp that was crawling across the roadway in front of him. "His bicycle jumped the footpath in the emotion of the moment and when he could look back, the wasp was soaring away above the woods towards Westerham." (35). It was quite an emotional moment to come across that passage as a thirteen or fourteen year old boy whose home was in the direction of the woods towards Westerham and who had occasionally cycled down River Hill, the long hill on the old A21 south of Sevenoaks, where Wells's cyclist saw the giant wasp. In retrospect, I suppose I had "found my author".

John Hammond in his *H G Wells Companion* observes that though Wells was unquestionably a regional novelist of London and the southern Home Counties, "References to Bromley and the surrounding area are comparatively few in his fiction" (160). Those few

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references are, in fact, highly significant, as Hammond concedes and as I shall attempt to show in some detail. But Wells never brings his readers into such an intimate relationship with the Kent countryside as, say, Dickens does when he invoked his part of Kent in the early chapters of *Great Expectations*, beginning with words "Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea". Wells's Kent doesn't haunt us in the way that Dickens's Rochester, Cliffe Marshes and Cooling churchyard do (and Dickens was not even born in Kent, but in Portsmouth, though he spent part of his boyhood in Chatham). Yet Dickens and Wells resemble one another in that they portray the scenes of their Kentish boyhoods not in their first novels, but in later novels - in Dickens's case most fully in *Great Expectations* and *Edwin Drood*, though admittedly there are brief Kentish scenes in earlier books such as *The Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield*. And, where Dickens's imaginative return to Kent in some of his later novels was linked to his purchase of Gad's Hill and to his holiday home at Broadstairs, Wells only really uses Kent as a setting during what I shall call his Sandgate period, from 1898 when he began building Spade House on the cliffs near Folkestone, to 1909 when he moved to Church Row in Hampstead. Very late in his life he seems to have returned to thoughts of his native county, celebrating the fact that "Socialism dawned in Kent" in his strange "Contemporary Memoir" '42 to '44, a book in which he calls himself a "Cosmopolitan patriot" (30) and which is dedicated "To the Eternal Memory of John Ball", the Kentish priest. But so far as his fiction goes, it is with the novels of the Sandgate period, from *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) to *The New Machiavelli* (1911), that I shall be concerned.

Before moving to his fiction, I shall mention a very little-known item of Wellsiana that I picked up for the grand price of one shilling many years ago. This A.A. Thomson's book *Great Men of Kent*, published in 1955 in a series called "Men of the Counties". (And they are all men, at least in the volume on Kent, though the series description suggest that in some of the other books there may have been a Great Woman or two.) *Great Men of Kent* has the country crest on the cover, with *Invicta* and the white horse, and below it a picture of General Wolfe commanding his troops at the Battle of Quebec. It deals with five men in all, Wolfe, Sir Philip Sidney, the younger Pitt, H.G. Wells, and the cricketer Frank Woolley. Since every Kentish person knows that Kent is divided into two by the Medway and that Men of Kent come from east of the Medway - the rest being mere Kentish men - A.A. Thomson's title is a little misleading. All his Great Men of Kent are, strictly speaking, Kentish Men, since Sidney, (like Wells's father, to whom we shall come shortly) was born at Penhurst; Wolfe at Westerham; Pitt at Hayes House near

Bromley and Wolley at Tonbridge.² They all come from one tiny (though in Modern times the most thickly populated) corner of the county. Thomson's introduction implies that Wells gets into the book not only as a writer of science fiction, but as a kind of token radical, his presence making up for the absence of such Men of Kent as John Ball, Jack Cade and Wat Tyler (the leaders of the Peasants' Revolt), Christopher Marlowe, Charles Dickens and possibly the greatest Kentish innovator of all, the printer William Caxton who was born at Tenterden.

We have seen that conventionally Kent is divided by the Medway. Its historical capital, Canterbury, lies to the East, and its administrative centre, Maidstone, is on the river itself. But Wellsian Kent falls into two very distinct small regions - the North West centering on Bromley and Sevenoaks which he uses as a setting in *The Food of The Gods*, *The War in The Air* and *The New Machiavelli*, and the Southern Kent Coast from Folkestone to Romney Marsh and Dungeness which features in *The First Men in The Moon*, *The Sea Lady* and *Kipps*. The other major novel which beings in Kent is of course *Tono-Bungay*, where Bladesover house is set high on the Downs in mid-Kent, seventeen miles south of Chatham and commanding "in theory at least a view of either sea, of the Channel southward and the Thames to the North-East" (9). But the Bladesover of *Tono-Bungay* is really Uppark in Sussex, as Wells admits in his *Autobiography*, and Chatham where George Ponderevo goes to live with his non-conformist cousin, Nicodemus Frapp, is almost certainly Portsmouth, so , on the whole, I would not consider *Tono-Bungay* a Kentish novel at all. Probably it had to be set in Kent rather than in Sussex because Kent is the Garden of England and Bladesover, as the name suggests, is a kind of Garden of Eden from which the hero gets himself promptly expelled. But in other respects, it is quite unlike Wells's Kentish novels. George Ponderevo has no father, and the first chapter of *Tono-Bungay* is primarily maternal in its orientation: "Of Bladesover House and my Mother; and the Constitution of Society". Wells's Kentish novels with the partial exception of *Kipps* and *The Sea Lady* are among the most exclusively male-centered of all his writings. Why is this? The answer is that for Wells Kent was strongly identified with his Father, and Sussex with his Mother.

Joseph Wells was a Kentish man in every sense. He was born in Kent, as were several earlier generations of his family; he not only came from the Garden of England, but began life as a professional gardener; and above all - and his youngest son was demonstrably

² Tonbridge, admittedly, is cut in two by the Medway. The river also runs through Penshurst, but the Sidney's home at Penhurst Place is to the west of it.

proud of this - he had played cricket for his county.³ But Joseph Wells, unlike his wife Sarah, did not leave any diary or written record and so he has been slighted by Wells's biographers. Everyone knows that Joseph Wells left his name in the annals of cricket by being the first bowler to take four wickets in four balls in a county match - but from that point, the accounts differ. The match, fittingly enough, was the local derby between Kent and Sussex. It may not be as well known as the Roses match between Lancashire and Yorkshire once was, but Kent and Sussex have been playing one another since 1728, and if you were a Kentish boy dreaming of taking four wickets in four balls in a county match then if at all possible you would want to do it against Sussex. Above all Joseph Wells would have wanted it, Sussex being the native county of his much-complaining (or should we say long-suffering?) wife; and not only Sarah's home - she was born in Midhurst - but that of her much-loved former employer at Uppark. (Why had she ever succumbed to Joe and found herself moving from Uppark to Bromley? Sarah was constantly asking herself). But to get back to cricket for a moment - which was what Joe was always doing - we know that he took his four wickets in four balls at an away match on 26 June 1862.⁴ According to Wells's biographer David Smith, the match took place at the Oval - which is clearly mistaken; according to Geoffrey West it was at Brighton, and according to the Mackenzies it was at Hove. But, remarkably enough, none of the more recent biographers tells us exactly how Joseph Wells got his wickets and what sort of bowler he was. Wells in his autobiography, (I 62), claims that the Sussex batsmen were all clean bowled. Writing in 1930 and doubtless prompted by the novelist himself, Geoffrey West says that Joseph Wells was an "extraordinary fast round-arm bowler. Not uncommonly, he would smash the stumps and send the pieces flying" (19). Anthony West on the other hand claims that his grandfather bowled "deadly slow spinners" (175). The idea that you could bowl out four batsmen in four balls with deadly slow spinners is utterly ridiculous. A copy of the scoresheet for the match "At T Box's Royal Brunswick Ground, at Brighton", supplied by the Local Studies collection of Bromley Public Library, shows that altogether Joseph Wells took six wickets for thirty five runs in the Sussex first innings, and that all his victims were

³ Wells is a common family name, with several hundred entries in the London telephone directory so it is unlikely that many readers would have connected H G Wells with the cricketer Joseph Wells had it not been for the author's own promptings. We find him boasting about his father's sporting achievements to an interviewer as early as 1897. see Arthur H Lawrence: "The Romance of the Scientist," in J R Hammond (ed.), *H G Wells: Interviews and Recollections* 1980) p.3.

⁴ Though in a sense all Kent vs. Sussex matches are or were away matches, the Neville ground at Tunbridge Wells, which was the regular venue for the Kent home match, lies just over the county boundary in Sussex.

clean bowled. Joseph, who was already in his mid-thirties, only played two seasons for Kent (1862 and 1863), though he also founded and led the Bromley Cricket Club and played for West Kent, Penshurst, Bickley Park, and Chiselhurst. He must have been an extremely fast bowler, though whether he really used to smash the stumps - and how many new stumps were needed during his first-innings spell at Brighton - is not recorded.

Kent vs. Sussex. If in Wells's life that would have signified the perennial battle between his father and his mother, then at first the victories clearly went to Sussex and his mother. Not only did Sussex provide his mother means of escape from Bromley - for she separated from Joe and returned to Uppark as housekeeper in 1880 - but it was H.G.'s escape route as well. He laid the foundations of his future career during holidays at Uppark and then during his time at the Grammar School at Midhurst. "Midhurst has always been a happy place for me," he wrote in his *Autobiography* (I 171). He could never have said this about Bromley. Among his first scientific romances, *The Time Machine*, and *The War of the Worlds* are largely set in West Surrey, but perhaps his most intimate and affectionate portrayals of pastoral England appear in the two early romances (*The Wonderful Visit* and *The Invisible Man*) set in the villages around Midhurst. They have a very different feeling from the harder, though no less comic, romances of the Sandgate period, *The Food of The Gods* and *The War in The Air*, to which I shall now turn. *The War in The Air* begins at Bun Hill which, like the Bromstead of *The New Machiavelli* is a fictionalised version of Bromley. There are no significant female characters (with the exception of a giant princess) in either of the two romances. The lives of Redwood's giant son and the young Cossars in *The Food of The Gods* are dominated by their fathers. In *The War in The Air*, Bert Smallways has no mother, only an aged father who would "sit over the fire mumbling of the greatness of other days". *The New Machiavelli* begins with a chapter, "Bromstead and my Father", which reverses *Tono-Bungay*'s tribute to the figure of the mother. The landscape of these Kentish novels all involve a kind of implied tribute to Wells's father.

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, the name Kent comes from a Celtic word meaning borderland or coastal district. It seems appropriate to speak of Kentish identity in Wells by means of a series of conflicts or contrasts, since Wells's Kent too is invariably a border county. I have already referred to Kent vs. Sussex, but the most evident contrast in the Sandgate period novels is between Kent and London. Bromley, and hence Bun Hill and Bromstead, is quintessentially a frontier town in this respect. When Wells was in his teens, Bromley was being rebuilt, the old market town with its river meadows being swallowed up in suburbia. The river Ravensbourne was drained

and a working-class housing estate took the place of the water meadows. Wells was deeply moved by this and he wrote of the loss of the stream and the meadows many times, firstly in his *Pall Mall Gazette* article "The Degeneration of the Ravensbourne" in 1894 and later in *The War in The Air* (where the stream, is called the Otterbourne), in *The New Machiavelli* (where it becomes the Ravensbrook) and finally in his *Autobiography*. I will quote the passage from *The War in The Air*:

The Crystal Palace was six miles away from Bun Hill, a great facade that glittered in the morning and was a clear blue outline against the sky in the afternoon, and at night a source of gratuitous fireworks for all the population of Bun Hill. And then had come the railway, and then villas and villas, and then the gas-works and the water-works and a great ugly sea of workmen's houses and then drainage and the water vanished out of the Otterbourne and left it a dreadful ditch, and then a second railway station, Bun Hill South, and more houses and more, more shops, more competition, plate-glass shops, a board-school, rates, omnibuses, tramcars - going right away into London itself - bicycles, motor cars, and then more motor cars, a Carnegie library. (3)

Bert Smallways' aged father can remember Bun Hill as an "idyllic Kentish village" (3), and Wells, as is evident, was never an admirer of modern, metropolitan Bromley.⁵ His *Pall Mall Gazette* article concluded on a wry and submissive note - "but I suppose one must not put one's private tastes in the way of local improvements" (3) --- but the later accounts are much fiercer, as we shall see. He continued to feel a link to the past of Bromley through his father, who, as he says, in one of the most affectionate passages in his *Autobiography*, "managed to see and make me see a hundred aspects of the old order of things, a wagtail, a tit's nest, a kingfisher, an indisputable trout under a bridge, sun dew in a swampy place near Keston, the pollen of pine trees drifting like a mist [....] He had the knack of reviving the countryside amidst the deluge of suburbanism" (I 194-95). Joseph, who had been a remote figure during Wells's childhood in Bromley, became much closer to him on his occasional visits to Bromley as an adolescent, when they took long walks together in the countryside. But even Joe Wells was defeated by Bromley in the end. Increasingly dirty and shabby, a commercial failure, his cricketering career long over, he eventually allowed his son to buy him a retirement cottage in the country village on the Sussex-Hampshire border, where Sarah Wells joined him after she was sacked from the housekeeper's job. Here he died in 1910, the year in which H G Wells completed *The New Machiavelli*.

⁵ In the 1970s the old library and most of the southern end of the High Street were torn down and rebuilt, and the High Street became a pedestrian precinct. Even the metropolitan Bromley that Wells describes is now almost unrecognisable.

In *The War in The Air*, Bert Smallways and his partner Grubb make the sudden decision to abandon their small cycle shop in Bun Hill as a way of escaping their creditors. Joseph Wells must often have felt similarly tempted. H G Wells's walks with his father are directly reflected in Remington's narrative in *The New Machiavelli* and indirectly in *The Food of The Gods*, where the experimental farm at which Herakleophorbia is loosed on the world is set somewhere in the North Downs near Sevenoaks.⁶ This book contains some of Wells's most evocative descriptions of Kent and Sussex downland. Here is Mr Bensington discovering the deserted property where he and Redwood will carry out their experiment:

He found the place he seemed in need of at Hicklebrow, near Urshot, in Kent. It was a little queer isolated place, in a dell surrounded by old pine woods that were black and forbidding at night. A humped shoulder of down cut it off from the sunset and a gaunt well with a shattered penthouse dwarfed the dwelling. The little house was creeperless, several windows were broken, and the cart shed had a black shadow at midday. It was a mile and a half from the end house of the village and its loneliness was very doubtfully relieved by an ambiguous family of echoes.

The place impressed Bensington as being eminently adapted to the requirements of scientific research. (21)

The irony of the last sentence is soon evident, but the Experimental Farm is certainly adapted to the purpose of a novel in the *Frankenstein* tradition about lone inventors inadvertently wreaking havoc on the world. Before long, the engineer Cossar leads a quasi-military expedition, "like a Yankee party trekking west in the good old Indian days" (71) to put down the giant wasps and rats infecting the countryside, and to burn the Experimental Farm to the ground. The Farm's caretakers, Mr and Mrs Skinner, have taken to their heels. Mrs Skinner going to earth in the village of Cheasing Eyebright which lies even deeper in the Kent Countryside, and her husband disappearing without trace into what Wells called the "Incognito" (52). Bensington and Redwood realise that their unthinking, careless experiments have created a new world: Bensington feels that "he had come into a world of new immensities" (79) and Redwood that "'We have made a new world, and it isn't ours. It isn't even - sympathetic'" (277). And this gives us our third opposition: Kent vs. Sussex, Kent vs. London and now the known world versus the unknown. Kent vs. the Incognito, or what Wells in *The Food of The Gods* (and the same theme is taken up in *The War in The Air* and *Tono-Bungay*) calls the "Mystery of Change" (179).

⁶ The link between Wells's walks with his father and the landscape of *The Food of the Gods*, has been noted by Kenneth V Bailey. "The Road to Cheasing Eyebright" (50). The whole of Bailey's very suggestive discussion of *The Food of the Gods* (45-50) is relevant here.

Change in *The Food of The Gods* brings to Kent a new race of giant children reared on Herakleophorbia, which is Bensington and Redwood's mystery substance. One of the giants grows up in Cheasing Eyebright, but eventually the surviving giants gather a huge fortified encampment built around the Cossar family home in North Downs: "the whole area of that great bay of hills just north of Sevenoaks had been scarred to gigantic ends" (189). (Today the location of this encampment might seem uncomfortably prophetic, since the area now contains both a secret defence establishment and the gigantic scarring of the M25 motorway). The giants in their steelbound fortress are opposed by the forces of the "little people", led by the charismatic Caterham, who is determined to wipe them out. His base is in London and the ending of the novel with the League of Giants ranged against the forces of the Earth can be seen as a kind of Peasants' Revolt in reverse, with the Kentish giants standing for change and future, and opposed by the reactionary populist armies of modern democracy. It is a deeply ambivalent novel, resembling *The War in The Air* (published four years later) in that Wells sees the near future in terms of both apocalyptic destruction and of a kind of revenge against the modern metropolis, a dramatic turning of the tables in the unequal conflict between London and Kent.

Like Bromstead in *The New Machiavelli*, Bun Hill in *The War in The Air* is Bromley very thinly disguised. The former Kentish village of Bun Hill is set on the London to Brighton road, and Bromstead on the London to Dover road --- Bromley is on the road to Hastings --- but apart from that, their identity and geographical location are mistakable. However, in *The War in The Air*, Bromley is mentioned separately as well, in a passage describing the world as it is once Bert Smallways' peregrinations are over. In this romance of the near future, the roads and railways of the nineteenth century have given way to monorails and flying machines, though Bert himself still gets around on a pedal cycle and rather dodgy motor cycle. Bert's brother Tom is a greengrocer and a market gardener working "the last patch of country in a district flooded by new and urban things"; he represents "horticulture under notice to quit" (2), the Garden of England apparently at its last gasp, while Bert is the "progressive Smallways" (4). No sooner has Bert shaken the dust of Bun Hill off his bicycle wheels that Wells has him carried off by accident from Dymchurch beach in a balloon which takes him top Germany where he stows away among the Kaiser's air fleet and witnesses the outbreak of world war with the bombing of New York. Eventually he returns to Bun Hill and a countryside ravaged by war, starvation and the Purple Death - a scenario that was to be closely repeated in Wells's film *Things to Come* nearly thirty years later. The Epilogue to *The War in The Air*, which shows old Tom

Smallways (still a horticulturist) and his son out on a walk "to look for a missing hen through the ruins of Bun Hill and out towards the splintered pinnacles of Crystal Palace" (370), suggests that, after the war and famine and pestilence, Kent has got its revenge on London and suburbanism. Bun Hill High Street is a "narrow muddy ditch of cow droppings" (376) once again. London, Tom explains to his son is:

"All empty now and left alone. All day it's left alone. You don't find 'ardly a man, you won't find nothing but dogs and cats after the rats until you get round by Bromley and Beckenham, and there you find the Kentish men herding swine. (Nice rough lot they are too!) I tell you so long as the sun is up it's as still as the grave." (376-7)

And what about after dark? Old Tom doesn't know because he always keeps indoors after sundown. But he does tell the story of a Beckenham swineherd who got drunk amid the ruins of London, lost his way and found himself after dark in Piccadilly surrounded by terrifying crowds of ghostly revellers. Luckily he remembered to say his prayers, whereupon a cock crowed and they all vanished. It sounds like an age-old folk tale of the countryman adrift in the wicked city. This is Wells's pessimistic alternative to the future represented in *The Food of The Gods*. Either the nineteenth century suburban sprawl will become a desolate land of swineherds once again or it will be taken over by the gospel of progress symbolised by the giants. Whichever future is ordained, destruction must come first.

The New Machiavelli is a realistic political move, not a futuristic romance, but it contains much the same diagnosis of life on the borderland between the countryside and the metropolis, even if the conclusions are necessarily different. Remington, Wells's hero, puts the destruction of the old Bromstead down, not to urban development in itself, but to the unplanned, ugly, haphazard development produced by private property and speculative housing. He describes not only the draining of the Ravensbrook but the "universal notice boards [...] promising sites, proffering houses to be sold or let, abusing and intimidating passers-by for fancied trespass, and protecting rights of way". "The outskirts of Bromstead were a maze of exploitation roads that led nowhere", he recalls (44). Bromstead today, Remington says is "a dull useless boiling-up of human activities, an immense clustering of futilities" (46). The trouble is that Remington is a politician and this passage itself turns into political rhetoric, a diatribe against Victorianism and a vague, pompous affirmation of a better future for Bromstead under socialist planning (though Remington like New Labour doesn't actually use the word socialist): "Failure is not failure nor waste wasted if it sweeps away illusion and lights the road to a plan" (46), he grandly and vacuously insists.

John Carey in *The Intellectuals and the Masses* quotes the description of Bromstead in *The New Machiavelli* and suggests that Wells's hostility to suburbanism was not aimed at avoidable ugliness or uncontrolled free enterprise, but rather at people as such: like most of his intellectual contemporaries, Carey argues, Wells was terrified of the effects of overpopulation, and being Wells he imagined violent remedies for it. Carey's chapter, which mixes together the fiction and non-fiction indiscriminately, has the deliberately sensational title "H G Wells Getting Rid of People".⁷ It's true that by selective quotation one could easily establish that Wells's hostility to the new Bromley working-class who occupied that "great ugly sea of workmen's houses (*The War in The Air* 3) where the meadows had once been, and indeed in his *Autobiography*, Wells says of his childhood that "so far as the masses went I was entirely of my mother's way of thinking: I was middle-class --- pretty bourgeois as the Marxists have it" (1.94) - though Wells was equally scathing about the rich and this passage should be read in the light of his conflict of loyalties between his father and his mother to which I referred earlier. But the issues are more complicated than Carey makes out, as becomes clear at the end of *The Intellectuals and the Masses* when he carefully avoids stating his own attitude to the problem of over population. (213-14).

What Wells testifies to is the uncomfortable truth that whenever we try to imagine a better world we imagine a less crowded world, a world which still has a countryside as distinct from suburbia, in which London certainly survives but Kent does too. A brave new world, but with fewer people in it. So we come to the question of Kent versus the new world, the known versus the unknown. As Well's narrator says after introducing us to Bladesover and the prospect of Kent in *Tono-Bungay*, "The ideas of democracy, of equality and above all of promiscuous fraternity have certainly never really entered into the English mind. But what *is* coming into it?" (12). Among the Kentish novels of Wells's Sandgate period *The Food of The Gods* and *The War in The Air* directly address the question of what is coming, and in a harder, more ruthless and less idealistic way than Wells's utopian novels such as *In The Days of The Comet* and *The World Set Free*.⁸ Perhaps this is because, like *The New Machiavelli*, *The Food of The Gods* and *The War in The Air* evoke some unresolved bitterness in Wells about Bromley and the conflicts and unfulfilled

⁷ See particularly ch. 6, pp. 118-19.

⁸ *Kipps*, though technically a "Kentish novel", contains very little that is relevant to the archetypal Wellsian question "What is coming?". *Kipps* himself is an orphan and the novel's New Romney and Folkestone settings seem to me to convey a comparatively weak sense of place. Shalford's Drapery Emporium at Folkestone draws heavily on Hyde's Emporium at Southsea, the Hampshire seaside resort where Wells himself worked as a draper's apprentice.

possibilities of his childhood. Just what he was escaping from at home for the loss of the Ravensbourne to make such a devastating impact on him, we might ask? Taking account of the mother's absence in *The War in The Air* and of the virtual absence of Remington's mother in the Bromstead section of *The New Machiavelli* - the two novels which deal directly with the suburbanism of Bromley - the destruction of the river and the water meadows may seem to symbolise Wells's loss of his childhood home and his mother's protection.⁹

But there is another aspect to Wells's feelings because not only is Kent threatened by the new world of suburbia, but something new is always being born in the Kent of Wells's imagination, just as the giants in *The Food of The Gods* are born in it, and just as H G himself was. In '42 to '44 he was to remember the magnificent sermon by "the mad priest of Kent", John Ball. "It was in Kent" Wells says, "that the idea of a warless equalitarian communism first found clear expression" (27,28). There are other, more homely images of the new thing being born in and coming out of Kent, such as *The War in The Air*'s progressive Bert Smallways and, even more quintessentially Wellsian, the small boy at Littlestone-on-Sea last seen wheeling his bicycle towards the place on the beach where Bedford, in *The First Men in The Moon*, has parked his Cavorite sphere. As the returned lunar traveller is gorging himself on boiled eggs in the Littlestone hotel, he suddenly hears a sound of "Phoo--Whizz! like a tremendous rocket" (165), and the sphere has gone. "Of course," Bedford reflects, "it was quite clear to me what had happened to the boy. He had crawled into the sphere, meddled with the studs, shut the windows, and gone up" (167). Here is yet another embryonic Great Man of Kent setting off on a voyage from the known to the unknown. Surely, there is something of the spirit of H G Wells in this little boy who, like Remington, but unlike Kipps and Bert Smallways, never comes back?

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⁹ In the *Autobiography* (1.194), Wells says that he was fifteen or sixteen when "that brown and babbling Ravensbourne between its overhanging trees was suddenly swallowed up by a new drainage system."

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Sylvia Hardy

A Feminist Perspective on H.G. Wells

As I began revising this paper, which originated as a contribution to last year's Weekend Conference, "Reappraising H.G. Wells," it occurred to me that in that same year, 1996, I became the first female Chairman of the H.G. Wells Society. The fact that current language usage