**Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939)**

Ford was originally named ‘Ford Hermann Hueffer’. His father was the German émigré Wagnerian and music critic of the \_*Times\_*, Francis Hueffer; his mother, Catherine, was the daughter of Pre-Raphaelite painter Ford Madox Brown. But after the First World War Ford changed his name to ‘Ford Madox Ford’. He was born in Merton, and brought up in Hammersmith. But in 1894 he eloped with his childhood sweetheart Elsie Martindale, and they moved to the Romney Marsh, where Ford lived until they gradually separated from 1907-09.

Their first house in Kent was called Blomfield Villa, in Bonnington, by a spot called 'Hog Turd Green', and was the first of Ford's many houses to have little in the way of sanitation: there were no drains, and the drinking water had to be brought from a mile away. It was damp, because built over a stream. There was a well nearby into which Ford would lower their boots on a string to clean them, drying them afterwards in front of a fire. The Hueffers were in Bonnington from 1894. The house was later named 'Fir Trees Villa', and is just off the B2067, on the road between Priory Wood and Park Wood.

In \_*The Heart of the Country\_* (1906) and later in \_*Return to Yesterday\_* (1931) Ford wrote about the peasant men and women they befriended in Bonnington: Meary Walker and Meary Spratt, 'Ragged Ass Wilson', and the village idiot Shaking Ben, who was said to have been ‘ruined’ by the ‘bad gels or Rye’.

In 1896 they moved to the Pent, a red-brick and tiled farmhouse on the Pilgrim's Way near Postling. It was only a couple of miles from Sandling Junction. The Pent was to be their home for two years. But Elsie found it depressing, and in 1898 they moved to Limpsfield (in Surrey) to be near their friends Edward and Constance Garnett. Ford was introduced to [Joseph Conrad]( /19c/19c-conrad-biography) that year by Garnett. [Conrad] ]( /19c/19c-conrad-biography)was looking for a collaborator. Ford had drafted a novel about an Englishman tried for piracy in the 1820s. [Conrad] ]( /19c/19c-conrad-biography)’s knowledge of the sea made him the ideal person to help knock it into shape. They worked closely together over a decade, and eventually published three books together.

With his characteristic generosity to other writers and artists, Ford immediately handed over the Pent to the Conrads – though it effectively his second home until the Conrads left in 1907. Ford and Elsie moved back to Kent to be nearby, taking a house called Stocks Hill, a coast guard's cottage perched under Aldington Knoll (Aldington being the next village to Bonnington). Ford grandly renamed the house as ‘Stock’s Hall’. But it was primitive, and too small for a couple who now had two daughters. The house is no longer standing.

By now the Hueffers had been forgiven by Elsie’s parents. Dr Martindale, a celebrated London pharmacologist, was also Mayor of Winchelsea, in Sussex, they had a second home. The Martindales bought a house in Winchelsea for Ford and Elsie, ‘[The Bungalow](https://www.batchellermonkhouse.com/property/bat170175/)’, despite its name, a charming two-storey clapboard, shuttered house, which Ford said had been built in 1782 for General Prescott, the first Governor-General of Canada. The house is on Friars Road, Winchelsea, East Sussex, TN36.

Ford befriended a group of extraordinary writers in the area, whom he was the first to designate as Impressionists in literature: not just [Conrad] ]( /19c/19c-conrad-biography), but also [Henry James] (/19c/19c-jamesh-hever-castle), living in Rye, and his fellow American Stephen Crane, at Brede. [H. G. Wells] (/20c/20c-wellshg-biography), living at Sandgate, became another close friend. Ford wrote much about the area. His huge, playful topographical book \_*The Cinque Ports\_* came out in 1900. But he would continue to write about it not only in his many volumes of reminiscence – including his superb memoir \_*Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance\_* (1924), but also in his fiction: mostly notably in \_*Parade’s End\_* (1924-28), his sequence of four novels covering the years before, during and after the First World War. The first novel, \_*Some Do Not\_ . . .*, includes magical evocations of the Kent and Sussex countryside in which the hero and heroine meet, argue, and fall in love:

They had just run into a bank of solid fog that seemed to encounter them with a soft, ubiquitous blow. It was blinding; it was deadening to sounds; it was in a sense mournful; but it was happy, too, in its romantic unusualness. They couldn’t see the gleam of the lamps; they could hardly hear the step of the horse; the horse had fallen at once to a walk. They agreed that neither of them could be responsible for losing the way; in the circumstances that was impossible. Fortunately the horse would take them somewhere; it had belonged to a local higgler: a man that used the roads buying poultry for re-sale. . . . They agreed that they had no responsibilities; and after that went on for unmeasured hours in silence; the mist growing, but very, very gradually, more luminous. . . . Once or twice, at a rise in the road, they saw again the stars and the moon, but mistily. On the fourth occasion they had emerged into the silver lake; like mermen rising to the surface of a tropical sea. . . .[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Ford, \_*Some Do Not\_ . . .*, ed. Max Saunders (Manchester: Carcanet, 2010), 170-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)