

Introduction

'When I had started building the Time Machine, I had had the stupid idea that the people of the future would certainly be far ahead of us in all their inventions.'

The most important person in this book – we know him only as the Time Traveller – has built his own time machine and has gone forwards into the future, to the year 802,701. He expects to find a world with more intelligent people, better machines and a much better way of living. Perhaps we expect this too, because most books and films about time travel show the future in this way.

Instead, he discovers a world where people live simple lives. They play and dance in the sunshine. They sleep in groups in large ruined buildings from an earlier time. They eat nothing except fruit and own nothing except the clothes they wear. At first this is only inconvenient for the Time Traveller, because he has come badly-prepared for a world like this. He has brought only a box of matches. He has no camera, no medicine, not even anything to smoke. To us, a world without meat or tobacco may seem better, or at least healthier, than the modern world, but HG Wells wrote this book at the end of the nineteenth century. At that time people ate meat if they could afford it, and most men smoked, and very few people really questioned these habits.

During the 1800s, the lives of people in Britain had changed more than they ever had before. A hundred years earlier, most had worked on the land and had lived very similar lives to the lives of their parents. By 1895, when *The Time Machine* appeared, millions had moved to the growing cities and were working in factories. The richer people were able to enjoy the things that the new machines produced. But life for the ordinary workers and their families was difficult, dirty and often dangerous.