

# Crowborough history

The leafy town of Crowborough is situated on a hilltop and provides spectacular views out across the Ashdown Forest and towards the South Downs. At nearly 800 feet above sea level, is one of the highest points in the South East.

Crowborough is a very 'leafy' town (apart from the centre) and must be one of the most wooded towns in the country. From the recreation ground there are amazing views northwards across miles of typical Wealden landscape.

There is a street map of Crowborough provided in the cottage.

## History

---

Crowborough is not a particularly historic town, it is made up of bits of three parishes. The town only really developed in the Victorian times when the railway arrived.

In Edwardian times it was regarded as a health resort due to the good quality of its air and several grand hotels that were built (now all demolished). People also often stayed in Crowborough so that they could explore the nearby Ashdown Forest.

Before the railway opened up the area the heathland was inhabited by pretty rough and ready country folk. They made their living as charcoal burners, woodmen and farm labourers. The odd smuggler and highwayman were also known to pass through the area.

The map below shows how rural the area was in 1609. In those days it was known as Crowburrow Hill. The following quote comes from a traveller Jeremiah Milles who was travelling through Sussex at the time.

*"I came to a great heath which is part of Ashdown forest, and ascending very gently for near a mile came to the summit of the hill, called Crowburrow Hill.*

*From hence there is a most glorious prospect every way, eastward over the Weald of Sussex into Kent, southward as far as the sea, westward as far as Lewes and the downs about it, and northward of the forests of Ashdown and Waterdown and into Surrey."*



The area between Crowborough and Tunbridge Wells used to be a hop growing area with most fields devoted to hop production - today only a few hop fields remain.

Not far from the cottage, on the corner of School Lane and St Johns Road, there is a rare Edward the V111 postbox. Edward abdicated after only 11 months on the throne in the 1930's so few Edward V111 postboxes were erected. After his abdication they were all supposed to be removed, but this one got overlooked.

## **A famous resident - Sir Arthur Conan Doyle**

---

In 1909 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle moved into Crowborough. Famous for the Sherlock Holmes novels, he built Windlesham Manor a large house in which he wrote more novels.

Conan Doyle died at Windlesham in 1930, aged 71. He was found lying in the garden, one hand clutching his heart, the other holding a single white snowdrop. Windlesham Manor is now a nursing home.

### **The inspiration for Sherlock Holmes**

Many people believe that Sherlock Holmes was based on one of Arthur Doyle's teachers from medical school in Edinburgh. The teacher Dr. Joseph Bell was described by Arthur Doyle as a:

*"Thin wiry, dark man, with a high-nosed acute face, penetrating grey eyes, angular shoulders."*

*Dr. Bell "would sit in his receiving room with a face like a Red Indian, and diagnose the people as they came in, before they even opened their mouths. He would tell them details of their past life; and hardly would he ever make a mistake."*

The doctor left an indelible impression upon the young student.

