

# Young Bert had a room with a view

**T**HERE is a room with a view in Essex Road, Rushden—a view of the houses opposite. Not very inspiring, perhaps, but it is a historic room. In it H. E. Bates wrote his first novel.

The house is Menton Cottage, and there during his formative years he lived with his mother and father, and Edna and Stanley, his sister and brother.

He went, a small, fair-haired, jerseyed figure, to Newton Road School, and in the evenings his father—a musician and a great reader—used to talk to him.

Then the house saw him going off with his satchel to Kettering Grammar School (he won a scholarship), to the Methodist Sunday School, where he was a teacher, to his first job as a reporter (which he didn't like), and then to a leather warehouse (which gave him time to start writing as he wished).

## House of memories

Today his mother still lives in Essex Road. Mr. Bates, senior, died four years ago and the children have married, but the house pulses with memories.

Mrs. Bates remembers Bert's determination at work and play. He trained for the Grammar School sports by going out in running shorts and vest at 6 a.m. and making a wide circuit of the outskirts of Rushden. It paid dividends—he brought back several "pots."

His speed took him into the K.G.S. football team, and he was in several school plays—"but not the chief parts."

## Spectacular spill

The author who has since graduated to a large, dignified, saloon, began his motoring career on a motor bike, but his enthusiasm for two wheels waned after a spectacular spill, en route for a cricket match.

When he began to write, he preferred walking. He would often walk to Sharnbrook to see the relative who, in time, inspired the creation of Uncle Silas.

So the days and nights of literary struggle in that little room with a view began—the struggle that led to fame.

H. E. Bates married, went to live in Kent, and won his way to the front rank of English writers.

In his boyhood home in Rushden his mother treasures among the family souvenirs photographs that mark every step of the way.



MRS. Bates, mother of famous novelist H. E. Bates, has many mementoes of him at her home in Essex Road, where, in an upstairs room set apart as a study, he

wrote his first novels. Here (top) she is with one of his later books. Bottom is a picture from her collection of photographs of her famous son. It shows him as a member of the football team at Kettering Grammar School, season 1921-2.



Bert as a baby, Bert in the school play, Bert and Madge on their wedding day, Bert playing cricket with his kiddies, Bert in "Flying Officer X" uniform, Bert in grey topper off to the Royal garden party.

And up in the little room—"it's a lumber room now"—still lie some of the things he used when he first began to write

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