



Of Woodbridge and Hedgely: A Historical Fiction Novel Set in England's Regency Era

Thomas Smyth

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In 1820, in the binary country towns of Woodbridge and Hedgely, Gloucestershire, England, Thomas Winter, bachelor of independent means, had a problem. He was in love with a young woman from a prominent family in the area, thoroughly attached to her countryside, but he having always kept a rather itinerant life, working as an engineer about the country, had to prove to her kin that he could be a reliable and productive member of their society before a marriage proposal would be deemed proper. The industrious Mr. Winter therefore endeavored to increase the agricultural yields of the land surrounding these towns by applying the latest science and engineering of the day, yet to his surprise, he soon discovered a large faction of his neighbors, comprised of several of the towns' farmers, didn't believe in science! He found himself the target of a propaganda war, alongside his ally, parson Jonathan Moore, who had begun a lecture series focused on natural history, their antagonists motivated by religious ideology and, for the part of a handsome but dull landowner, romantic adversity. This is the story of how manufactured science denial can tear apart two neighborly towns, pitting brother against brother, and how just, right and scientific men do prevail over such.

Science topics explored in the novel: Early geology with an introduction to the grandfather of geology, James Hutton's 'Theory of the Earth', alongside popular competing theories; agricultural science, illuminating master chemist, Sir Humphry Davy and Sir John Sinclair's writings; and pre-Darwinian evolution, including an introduction to grandfather of Charles Darwin, Erasmus Darwin's views on evolution, and arguments against the mechanics of such by William Paley, in his book, Natural Theology.

Other themes and peculiarities in the novel: Subtle satire on climate change denial; Jane Austen inspired characters; sustainability, stewardship of the earth, ecology, Romantic Era style appreciation of nature; and science advocacy.

From the back of the (paperback) book:

Of Woodbridge and Hedgely is a literary examination of the phenomenon of science denial, set in the 1820's countryside of Gloucester, England. The Industrial Revolution has begun to saturate country, but there are still quaint and naïve pockets like these binary towns whose inhabitants are resistant to change. Alas, the enlightenment is brought before them when a young bachelor and engineer, Thomas Winter – the son of a wealthy industrialist – moves into the area with the intention of applying science to their fields to produce higher crop yields. Further, their local Anglican parson, Jonathan Moore, begins a series of science lectures dedicated to the memory of his recently departed brother, in which the subjects of deep time, uniformitarianism, and plutonism, formulated by pioneering geologist James Hutton, are introduced alongside pre-Darwinian evolution. Such is taken rather poorly by the towns' Particular Baptists, led by the preacher George Edwards and funded by the recently wealthy Henry Wyatt, who conspire against these scientific men by way of news propaganda, the latter motivated by romantic adversity.

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Marsha Bridges:

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