

Great Rides

A NOVEL ADVENTURE

HG Wells's *The Wheels of Chance* describes a fictional cycle tour through Victorian England. **Tristam Newey** set out to replicate the journey



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“You are, I perceive, cycling through this delightful country?” asked the clergyman. “Touring,” explained Mr Hoopdriver.

“I can imagine,” said the clergyman, “that, with a properly oiled machine, there can be no easier nor pleasanter way of seeing the country.”

“No,” said Mr Hoopdriver, “it isn’t half a bad way of getting about.”

It was at this point in HG Wells’s 1896 novel *The Wheels of Chance* that I decided to try to follow the route taken by Hoopdriver, the story’s protagonist. The book is fiction but the places and views described are real. Author HG Wells (*The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and so on) was a very active cyclist, roaming widely around the south of England where the novel is set. I wondered: could you ride the same

route today? And if so, how would it compare?

So it was that I found myself on Putney High Street on a July morning, contemplating the rush hour traffic. I’d researched the route carefully using contemporary maps and the excellent cycle.travel website to waypoint the places named in the story. Some of the novel’s byways are now A-roads and 70mph dual carriageways, but in most cases there’s cycle infrastructure alongside. I would never be far from Hoopdriver’s route.

THE RIDING FORTH OF MR HOOPDRIVER

Setting off from Putney I soon left the heavy traffic behind, and from Putney Heath a series of cycleways took me towards Kingston upon Thames. Along the way I stopped at several places that feature in the book, although the quiet lanes Hoopdriver wobbles