

The Blue Plaque

George Orwell

Nick Rennison

Eric Blair was born in India, where his father was a civil servant, in 1903 and brought to England by his mother when he was a year old. Educated at Eton, to which he had won a scholarship, he was unable to go on to university and instead joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma, serving as an officer for several years before resigning and travelling back to England.

He returned from Burma, disgusted by colonialism and eventually began a precarious career as a freelance writer, taking the pen name George Orwell. George seemed to him an unpretentious English name and the River Orwell ran through a part of the Suffolk countryside which he particularly loved.

Books in the thirties such as *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia* gave him a reputation as a writer of bluntly honest prose but did not provide him with an adequate income. He took other jobs, including working at a Hampstead bookshop, and wrote quantities of journalism. During the war he worked for *The Observer* and at the BBC, which he memorably described as having an atmosphere ‘something halfway between a girls’ school and a lunatic asylum.’

After the war his fortune was made by his two most famous novels, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, but Orwell was already a sick man and he died of tuberculosis in 1950, the year after the publication of *1984*. He was only forty-six years old.

Orwell was an unashamedly political writer and Cyril Connolly, who had been at school with him, once wrote that, ‘He would not blow his nose without moralising on conditions in the handkerchief industry.’

The blue plaque to George Orwell is on a house in Lawford Road, Kentish Town where he had a flat in the 1930s.



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