Although throughout his life Galsworthy could write in any setting, spending most of his mornings with a J-nib pen and paper wherever he was, the increasing concomitants of success, rehearsals, meetings and social engagements, led him to seek a frequent refuge outside London. For several years after 1906, the Galsworthys spent many long weekends or weeks, especially in winter, at Littlehampton, a resort town, no longer fashionable, on the West Sussex coast. Dorothy Ivens, who visited the Galsworthys there a number of times, has described it: “A small place then, in the off season, moribund, in fact the quietest little seaside town imaginable. An esplanade, bare and empty, boarding houses close shuttered and just one comfortable hotel housing perhaps a solitary old lady.”¹ There were no facilities for swimming, no public buildings of any size and the only recreation consisted of long walks along the sands. At Easter, for several weeks, and once or twice in the late summer or autumn, they would travel further and stay at Wingstone. After they secured the long lease on the guest portion of the house, they stayed for weeks or months at a time and occasionally lent it to friends and relatives when they were away. From the village of Manaton, at that time consisting of a church, a pub and ten or twelve other cottages, the lane to Wingstone, lined by yews, leads directly into the farmyard, full of dogs, chickens and a pen for sheep. In the Galsworthys’ time, a drive branched off before the farmyard and led around to the wide veranda with long French windows facing the moor across a grassy and rocky field called the “paddock” where sheep often grazed. The Galsworthys’ rooms were off the veranda on the ground and first floors.²

Galsworthy often mentioned, in his correspondence, how
thoroughly comfortable he felt at Wingstone, enjoying the views of the rocky moors, the harvests of apples, pears and potatoes, and the active farm on which he noticed "an abundance of good feeling between master and men". In a letter to Lady Ponsonby, written after they had been living there for a number of years, he described Wingstone extensively:

I must say that I believe we have an absolutely unique existence here – richly sunk in all kinds of human and animal and bird life without any of the disgusting feeling that attaches to ownership. No servants – done for by the farmer’s wife and niece and daughter – horses groomed by the farmer’s step-son . . . no dogs of our own, but all the farm dogs running in and out as they like. All our food (nearly) grown on the spot. And all the time extraordinary good-will; and the wonderful serene beauty; and air that has moor in it, a savour of the sea, and generally the crowning scent of wood smoke. Garden beds, too, that have no wretched regularity, so that from day to day you don’t know what’s coming up, but which manage to be always pretty full. . . . As you know, there’s a peculiar brand of Devonshire humour – dry, and fond of the grotesque, and perhaps a little sardonic. I think there’s an exceptionally independent turn to the folk on the borders of the moor, which have never been Squire- and parson-ridden. Here there is no large resident landowner (except perhaps one, who’s a good simple fellow farming his own land), and the parson is an unhappy bird, who gets on with no one, except ourselves a little, poor man. He used to bombard me with fiery tracts, about it being better for a millstone to be hanged about my neck for not going to church; but he has given it up at last.³

Ada often enjoyed Wingstone almost as much as he, joining him in long rides and hikes over the moors to the famous rocky outcroppings or the prehistoric Dartmoor encampments. When they established themselves there, in 1908, she wrote to Ralph Mottram: "Jack writes and I potter and type and pretend to play on my dear little cottage Bechstein, which is our great new joy."⁴ She shaped and tended an extensive flower bed next to the most shaven part of the lawn in the "paddock". Over the Hills and Far Away recalled nostalgically the long rides and hikes and bird songs, the rhythms of farm life in lambing, sheep-shearing,