

# Jerome K. Jerome

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**Jerome Klapka Jerome**




Jerome K. Jerome

**Born:** May 2, 1859  
✚ Staffordshire, England

**Died:** June 14, 1927 (aged 68)  
✚ Northampton, England

**Occupation:** Author

**Nationality:**  British

**Genres:** Humour

**Jerome Klapka Jerome** (May 2, 1859 – June 14, 1927) was an English author, best known for the

humorous travelogue *Three Men in a Boat*.

He was born at 1 Caldmore Road, on the corner of Bradford Street in Walsall, at that time part of the county of Staffordshire, where there is now a museum in his honour, and was brought up in poverty in London.

Other works include the essay collections *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow* and *Second Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*; *Three Men on the Bummel*, a sequel to *Three Men in a Boat*; and several other novels.

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## Early life

Jerome was the fourth child of Jerome Clapp (who later renamed himself Jerome Clapp Jerome), a lay preacher who dabbled in architecture, and Marguerite Jones. He had two sisters, Paulina and Blandina, and one brother, Milton, who died at an early age. Jerome was registered, like his father's amended name, as Jerome Clapp Jerome, and the K appears to be a later variation. Due to bad investments in the local mining industry, the family suffered poverty, and debt collectors often visited, an experience Jerome described vividly in his autobiography *My Life and Times*.

The young Jerome wished to go into politics or be a man of letters, but the death of both his parents in 1872, when he was 13 years old, forced him to quit his studies and find work to support himself. He was employed at the London and North Western Railway, initially collecting coal that fell along the railway, and remained there for four years.

## Acting career and early literary

## works

In 1877, inspired by his older sister Blandina's love for the theatre, Jerome had decided to try his hand at acting, under the stage name Harold Crichton. He joined a repertory troupe who tried to produce plays on a shoestring budget, often drawing on the meager resources of the actors themselves to purchase costumes and props.

Jerome had later comically reflected on this period in *On the Stage—and Off*, where it is apparent that he was penniless at the time. After three years on the road and with no evident success, a 21 year old Jerome decided he had had enough with stage life, and sought other occupations. He tried to become a journalist, writing essays, satires and short stories, but most of these were rejected. Over the next few years he was a school teacher, a packer, and a solicitor's clerk. Finally, in 1885, he had some success with *On the Stage—and Off*, a humorous book which publication had opened the door for more plays and essays. *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*, a collection of humorous essays, followed in 1886. On June 21, 1888, Jerome married Georgina Elizabeth Henrietta Stanley Marris (a.k.a. Ettie), nine days after she had divorced her first husband. She had a daughter from a previous, five-

year marriage, nicknamed Elsie (her actual name was also Georgina). The honeymoon took place on the Thames, a fact which was to have a significant influence on his next, and most important work, *Three Men in a Boat*.

## ***Three Men in a Boat* and later career**

Jerome sat down to write *Three Men in a Boat* as soon as the couple returned from their honeymoon. In the novel, his wife was replaced by his longtime friends George Wingrave (George) and Carl Henschel (Harris). This had allowed him to create comic (and non-sentimental) situations which were nonetheless intertwined with the history of the Thames region. The book, published in 1889, became an instant success and has remained in print until the present. Its popularity was such that the number of registered Thames boats went up fifty percent in the year following its publication, and it contributed significantly to the Thames becoming a tourist attraction. In its first twenty years alone, the book sold over a million copies worldwide. It has been adapted to movies, TV and radio shows, stage plays, and even a musical. Its writing style influenced many humorists and

satirists in England and elsewhere. Its endurance can probably be attributed to the style and choice of a relatively unchanged location, which prevents the work from appearing dated.

With the financial security the sales of the book provided, Jerome was able to dedicate all of his time to writing. He wrote a number of plays, essays and novels, but was never again able to recapture the success of *Three Men in a Boat*. In 1892 he was chosen by Robert Barr to edit *The Idler* (over Rudyard Kipling). The magazine was an illustrated satirical monthly catering to gentlemen (who, following the theme of the publication, appreciated idleness). In 1893 he founded *To-Day*, but had to withdraw from both publications due to financial difficulties and a libel suit.

In 1898, a short stay in Germany inspired *Three Men on the Bummel*, the sequel to *Three Men in a Boat*. While reintroducing the same characters in the setting of a foreign bicycle tour, the book was nonetheless unable to capture the life-force and historic roots of its predecessor, and the book enjoyed only a mild success. In 1902 he published the novel *Paul Kever*, which is widely regarded as autobiographical. His 1908 play *Passing of the*

*Third Floor Back* introduced a more somber Jerome, which the public was reluctant to accept.

## **World War I and last years**

Jerome volunteered to serve his country at the outbreak of the war but, being 56 years old, was rejected by the British Army. Eager to serve in some capacity, he volunteered as an ambulance driver for the French Army. The war experience was said to have dampened his spirit, as no doubt did the death in 1921 of his stepdaughter, Elsie.

In 1926, Jerome published his autobiography, *My Life and Times*. Shortly afterwards, the Borough of Walsall conferred on him the title Freeman of the Borough. In June 1927, on a motoring tour from Devon to London via Cheltenham and Northampton, Jerome suffered a paralytic stroke and a cerebral hemorrhage. He lay in Northampton General Hospital for two weeks before succumbing on June 14.<sup>[1]</sup> He was cremated at Golders Green and buried at St Mary's Church, Ewelme, Oxfordshire. Elsie, Ettie, and his sister Blandina are buried beside him. A museum dedicated to his life and works now exists at his birth home in Walsall.

## Notes

- There is a French graphic novel series named *Jerome K. Jerome Bloche* after the author.
- Jerome's middle name was allegedly in honour of a family friend, an exiled Hungarian general named George Klapka, who was a guest at their home at the time of Jerome's birth. However, the K was not adopted formally by Jerome until after 1871, when his middle initial is given as 'C' on the census.
- George Wingrave is described in *Three Men in A Boat* as a bank clerk. Later in his career he became a senior manager in Barclays Bank.
- The route down the Thames of *Three Men in a Boat* was reproduced in a 2005 BBC documentary by comedians Dara O'Briain, Rory McGrath and Griff Rhys Jones.
- Jerome was good friends with J. M. Barrie, H. G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas Hardy, and Israel Zangwill.



- *Three Men in a Boat* is well-known in India, Russia and Pakistan, because the book or excerpts from it had been required reading in public schools.
- Connie Willis's time-travel novel *To Say Nothing of the Dog* has the characters of *Three Men in a Boat* make a brief appearance while they were on their Thames trip.

## Bibliography

### Novels

- *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow* (1886)
- *Three Men in a Boat* (1889)
- *The Diary of a Pilgrimage* (1891)
- *Novel Notes* (1893)
- *Second Thoughts of an Idle Fellow* (1898)
- *Three Men on the Bummel* (aka *Three Men on Wheels*) (1900)
- *Paul Kever, a novel* (1902)
- *Tommy and Co* (1904)
- *They and I* (1909)
- *All Roads Lead to Calvary* (1919)
- *Anthony John* (1923)
- *The Love of Ulrich Nebendahl* (1909)

- *The Philosopher's Joke* (1909)

## **Collections**

- *Told After Supper* (1891)
- *John Ingerfield: And Other Stories* (1894)
- *Sketches in Lavender, Blue and Green* (1895)
- *The Observations of Henry* (1901)
- *The Angel and the Author and Others* (1904)
- *American Wives and Others* (1904)
- *The Passing of the Third Floor Back: And Other Stories* (1907)
- *Malvina of Brittany* (1916)
- *Three Men in a Boat and Three Men on the Bummel* (1974)
- *After Supper Ghost Stories: And Other Tales* (1985)

## **Autobiography**

- *My Life and Times* (1926)

## **Anthologies containing stories by Jerome K. Jerome**

- *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror 1st Series* (1928)

- *A Century of Humour* (1934)
- *The Mammoth Book of Thrillers, Ghosts and Mysteries* (1936)
- *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1957)
- *Famous Monster Tales* (1967)
- *The 5th Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories* (1969)
- *The Rivals of Frankenstein* (1975)
- *The 17th Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories* (1981)
- *Stories in the Dark* (1984)
- *Gaslit Nightmares* (1988)
- *Horror Stories* (1988)
- *100 Tiny Tales of Terror* (1996)
- *Knights of Madness: Further Comic Tales of Fantasy* (1998)
- *100 Hilarious Little Howlers* (1999)

## **Short stories**

- *The Haunted Mill* (1891)
- *The New Utopia* (1891)
- *The Dancing Partner* (1893)
- *Christmas Eve in the Blue Chamber*
- *Silhouettes*
- *The Skeleton*
- *The Snake*
- *The Woman of the Saeter*

## External links

- Works by Jerome K. Jerome at Project Gutenberg
- The Jerome K. Jerome Society
- Jerome K. Jerome Quotes subject-wise
- Jerome K. Jerome on Find-A-Grave
- Jerome K. Jerome in 1881

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