

Kenneth Grahame

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Kenneth Grahame



Born: March 8, 1859
Edinburgh, Scotland

Died: July 6, 1932
Pangbourne, Berkshire, England

Occupation: Novelist

Genres: Fiction

Kenneth Grahame (March 8, 1859 – July 6, 1932) was a British writer, mainly of the sort of fiction and fantasy written for children but enjoyed equally if not more by adults. He is most famous for *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), one of the classics of children's literature. He also wrote *The Reluctant Dragon*, which was much later adapted into a Disney movie.

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Life

Grahame was born in Edinburgh, Scotland but in early childhood, after being orphaned, moved to live with his grandmother on the banks of the River Thames in southern England. He was an outstanding pupil at St Edward's School in Oxford and wanted to attend Oxford University but was not allowed to do so by his guardian on grounds of cost. Instead he was sent to work at the Bank of

England in 1879, and rose through the ranks until retiring as its Secretary in 1907 due to ill health. He was shot during an unsuccessful bank robbery a few years earlier, which may have precipitated his retirement.

Grahame's marriage to Elspeth Thomson was an unhappy one. They had only one child, a boy named Alastair, who was born blind in one eye and was plagued by health problems throughout his short life. Alastair eventually committed suicide on a railway track while an undergraduate at Oxford University, two days before his 20th birthday. Out of respect for Kenneth's feelings, Alastair's demise was recorded as an accidental death.

Kenneth Grahame died in Pangbourne, Berkshire in 1932. He is buried in Holywell Cemetery, Oxford, near the grave of the American expatriate author James Blish. Grahame's cousin Anthony Hope wrote his epitaph, which reads: "To the beautiful memory of Kenneth Grahame, husband of Elspeth and father of Alastair, who passed the River on the 6 July 1932, leaving childhood and literature through him the more blest for all time".

[1]

Works

While still a young man, Grahame began to publish light stories in London periodicals such as the *St. James Gazette*. Some of these stories were collected and published as

Pagan Papers in

1893, and, two years later, *The Golden Age*. These were followed by *Dream Days* in 1898, which contains *The Reluctant Dragon*. There is a parallel here to the great comic writer P.G. Wodehouse a generation later, also forced to work in a bank through lack of funds to go to university, also turning his hand to writing for amusement, also still in print and much loved a century later.

There is a ten-year gap between Grahame's penultimate book and the publication of his triumph, *The Wind in the Willows*. During this



Kenneth Grahame's grave stone.

decade Grahame became a father. The wayward headstrong nature he saw in his little son he transformed into the swaggering Toad of Toad Hall, one of its four principal characters. Despite its success, he never attempted a sequel. Others, years after his death, have done that for him. The book was a hit and is still enjoyed by adults and children today, whether in book form or in the films.

References

1. ^ Carpenter, Humphrey; Mari Prichard (1991). *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 216-219. ISBN 0-19-211582-0.

Bibliography

- *Pagan Papers* (1893)
- *The Golden Age* (1895)
- *Dream Days* (1898)
- *The Headswoman* (1898)
- *The Wind in the Willows* (1908)

External links

- Works by Kenneth Grahame at Project Gutenberg (Including all of the above four books)
- An online literary society focusing on the life and works of Kenneth Grahame is at www.kennethgrahamesociety.net
- Spoken voice version of Wind in the Willows is at [1]

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**British Children's
and Young Adults' Literature (1900-1949)**

Authors

Representative Titles

Illustrators

Magazines and Annuals

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