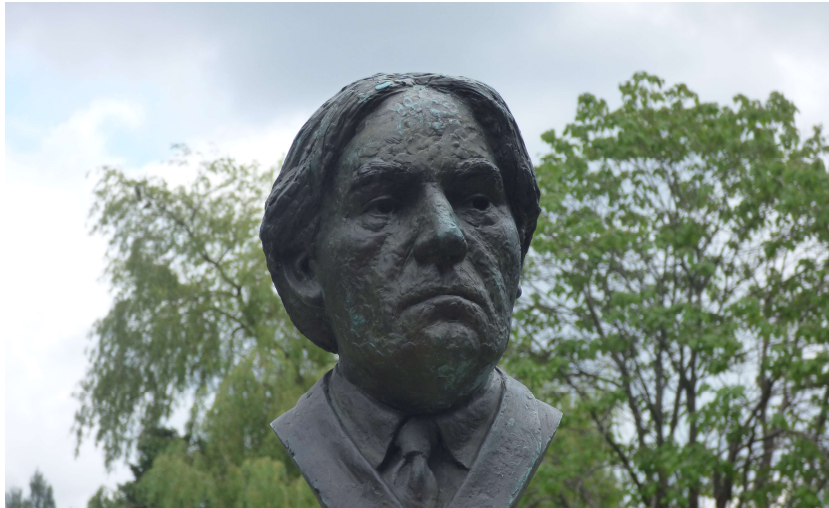


Jerome K Jerome

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After a 25 year campaign to honour Jerome Klapka Jerome, in 2016 the Jerome K Jerome Society unveiled a bronze bust of the author in Walsall Arboretum, Walsall being the town of his birth in 1859.



Bust of Jerome K Jerome in Walsall

Jerome's grave in Ewelme churchyard regularly attracts a steady stream of universal admirers of the humourist, famous for his 1889 book 'Three Men in a Boat', the philosophical comedic story of young men (plus a dog), rowing leisurely up the Thames in a skiff. Following the success of 'Three Men in a Boat' Jerome wrote prolifically, publishing at least a novel or a play every year until his death 38 years later. His love of the river stemmed from his honeymoon when, in blazer and boater, he would row his wife from Kingston.



Grave of Jerome K Jerome in Ewelme Churchyard

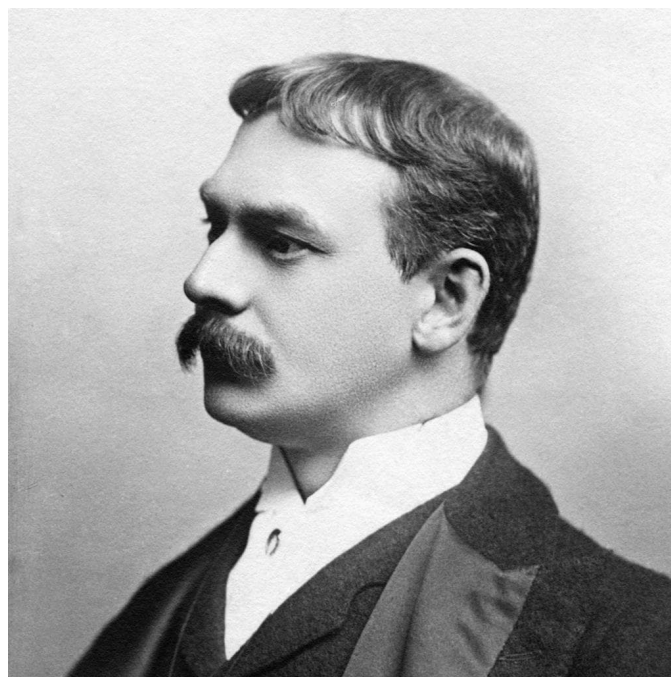
So popular was his book, that in the year after publication, the registering of Thames boats went up 50%, contributing to the river becoming a tourist attraction.

Jerome was a versatile man, working as a journalist, actor and schoolmaster before he turned his hand to writing. He volunteered for the British Army in the first war, but as he was 56 years old was rejected. Undeterred, he joined the French Army working as an ambulance driver, so the bust unveiling ceremony was timed to commemorate his service of 100 years ago at Verdun, on the Western Front.

Jerome leased 'Troy' at Goulds Grove, a large house on the outskirts of Ewelme from where he entertained other famous writers and built a small theatre in an old barn to stage his works. He enjoyed playing on Ewelme's small golf course at the end of the Common, although he complained there were *'too many bunkers!'* He was often seen around the village, and in 1909 he donated a prize to the Fete to raise money to build the Reading Room. Local historian Miss Prister Cruttwell wrote of him – *'He was a very quiet man in society, but one felt that his little twinkling blue eyes missed nothing, and that he was storing up incidents for his next book.'*

Quiet he may have seemed, but in 1906, a local newspaper described him as having 'more than a passing fancy for politics' and said that he had addressed 'various meetings in the radical cause.' Essentially, he was a fan of the simple things in life, writing *'Let your boat in life be light, packed with only what you need - a homely home and simple pleasures, one or two friends, worth the name, someone to love and someone to love you, a cat, a dog, and a pipe or two, enough to eat and enough to wear, and a little more than enough to drink; for thirst is a dangerous thing.'*

He edited two journals and as an editor his integrity was tested when a diamond speculator and associate of Cecil Rhodes, Barney Barnato, returned to England from South Africa. He took exception to a newspaper story written about him and approached the editor, Jerome, with some handwritten notes for a second article - 'just putting things right', along with a handsome cheque. Jerome threw the notes into a wastepaper basket and returned the cheque. Barnato immediately doubled the amount, which was likewise rejected. Surprised, he asked Jerome how much he wanted. Jerome wrote later - *"I explained to him it wasn't done - not in London."* His editorial integrity was not for sale.



Jerome Klapka Jerome

Jerome died in Northampton on 14th June 1927 two weeks after suffering a stroke and cerebral haemorrhage whilst on a tour from Devon to London. He was cremated at Golder's Green and his ashes were brought back to Ewelme. It was a very quiet funeral on the 30th June, conducted by Rector A T Humphreys, with no flowers and only his widow Ettie and four other family mourners present.



Troy House, the home of Jerome K Jerome

Jerome's brother Milton died at 6 years of age, and in 2009 the Jerome K Jerome Society brought his memorial to lay alongside the Jerome family graves, so joining his brother and older sister Blandina Jerome. This small stone memorial was fortunately rescued from a Walsall cemetery, due to be converted to a car park!

The Jerome K Jerome Society is small but active. A museum was opened in Jerome's honour in Walsall in 1984, but closed in 2008 due to lack of funding, which makes the bronze sculpture even more notable. Devotees are now able to visit the Walsall bust, the Ewelme graves, see an English Heritage blue plaque erected in 1989 on 104 Chelsea Gardens, Chelsea Bridge Road, London where he wrote his most famous novel, and on the Millennium Green in New Southgate, London where he lived as a boy, there is a sculpture of a boat with a mosaic of a dog.

Ewelme Village Archive