

Famous people of Great Britain

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Agatha Christie (15 September 1890 – 12 January 1976)



Agatha Mary Clarissa Christie was an English crime novelist, short story writer, and playwright. She is best known for her 66 detective novels and 14 short story collections, particularly those revolving around her fictional detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple.

She was initially an unsuccessful writer with six rejections, but this changed when *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, featuring Hercule Poirot, was published in 1920. During the Second World War she worked as a pharmacy assistant at University College Hospital, London, during the Blitz and acquired a good knowledge of poisons which featured in many of her novels.



Guinness World Records lists Christie as the best-selling novelist of all time. Her novels have sold roughly 2 billion copies, and her estate claims that her works come third in the rankings of the world's most-widely published books, behind only Shakespeare's works and the Bible. According to Index Translationum, she remains the most-translated individual author – having been translated into at least 103 languages.



In 1955, Christie was the first recipient of the Mystery Writers of America's highest honour, the Grand Master Award. Later the same year, *Witness for the Prosecution* received an Edgar Award by the MWA for Best Play. In 2013, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was voted the best crime novel ever by 600 fellow writers of the Crime Writers' Association. On 15 September 2015, coinciding with her 125th birthday, *And Then There Were None* was named the "World's Favourite Christie" in a vote sponsored by the author's estate

Childhood and adolescence (1890–1910)



Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller was born on 15 September 1890, into a wealthy upper middle-class family in Ashfield, Torquay, Devon.

Christie described her childhood as "very happy". She was surrounded by a series of strong and independent women from an early age.

Agatha was raised in a household with various esoteric beliefs and, like her siblings, believed that her mother Clara was a psychic with the ability of second sight.



Among her earliest memories were those of reading the children's books written by Mrs Molesworth, including *The Adventures of Herr Baby*, *Christmas Tree Land*, and *The Magic Nuts*. She also read the work of Edith Nesbit, including *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, *The Phoenix and the Carpet*, and *The Railway Children*. In April 1901 she wrote her first poem "The cowslip". In 1902, Agatha was sent to receive a formal education at Miss Guyer's Girls School in Torquay, but found it difficult to adjust to the disciplined atmosphere. In 1905, she was sent to Paris where she was educated in three pensions – Mademoiselle Cabernet's, Les Marroniers, and then Miss Dryden's – the last of which served primarily as a finishing school

First novels and Poirot (1919–1923)



Christie had long been a fan of detective novels. She wrote her own detective novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, featuring Hercule Poirot, a former Belgian police officer noted for his twirly large "magnificent moustaches" and egg-shaped head. Poirot had taken refuge in Britain after Germany invaded Belgium. Christie's inspiration for the character stemmed from real Belgian refugees who were living in Torquay and the Belgian soldiers whom she helped treat as a volunteer nurse in Torquay during the First World War.



Christie's second novel, *The Secret Adversary* (1922), featured a new detective couple Tommy and Tuppence, again published by The Bodley Head. A third novel again featured Poirot, *Murder on the Links* (1923), as did short stories commissioned by Bruce Ingram, editor of *The Sketch* magazine. In order to tour the world promoting the British Empire Exhibition, the couple left their daughter Rosalind with Agatha's mother and sister. They travelled to South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii. They learned to surf prone in South Africa; then, in Waikiki, they were among the first Britons to surf standing up.

Disappearance

THE DAILY MIRROR, Tuesday, December 7, 1926

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Daily Mirror

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No. 7,199 TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1926 [24 PAGES] One Penny

MYSTERY OF WOMAN NOVELIST'S DISAPPEARANCE

Miss Agatha Christie, the missing woman, pictured with her daughter.

A thorough search is the work near the spot where Mrs. Christie's car was found.

Jack Bull at the place where he found the car abandoned.

Following an important clue received yesterday a special search will be made today for Mrs. Agatha Christie, the novelist wife of Colonel Archibald Christie, R.A.F.C., who disappeared after leaving her home at Sunningdale, Berks, in her motorcar. The car was found abandoned near Newlands Corner, Surrey. (Daily Mirror photographs.)

EARL'S DAUGHTER TAKES THE AIR IN A CAGE

The infant daughter of Karl and Consoline De la Warr, sitting in her penitentiary inside a garreted iron cage which her parents, countess and lord, found outside the front of their home near York. This station her father took the car without cash. (Daily Mirror.)

In late 1926, Agatha's husband Archie asked her for a divorce. He was in love with Nancy Neele. On 3 December 1926, the Christies quarrelled, and Archie left their house, Styles, in Sunningdale, Berkshire, to spend the weekend with his mistress at Godalming, Surrey. That same evening, around 9:45 pm, Christie disappeared from her home, leaving behind a letter for her secretary saying that she was going to Yorkshire. Her car, a Morris Cowley, was later found at Newlands Corner, perched above a chalk quarry, with an expired driving licence and clothes.



Her disappearance caused an outcry from the public. Over a thousand police officers, 15,000 volunteers, and several aeroplanes scoured the rural landscape. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle even gave a spirit medium one of Christie's gloves to find the missing woman. Dorothy L. Sayers visited the house in Surrey, later using the scenario in her book *Unnatural Death*.

Christie's disappearance was featured on the front page of *The New York Times*. Despite the extensive manhunt, she was not found for 10 days. On 14 December 1926, she was found at the Swan Hydropathic Hotel (now the Old Swan Hotel) in Harrogate, Yorkshire, registered as Mrs Teresa Neele from Cape Town.

Death



Agatha Christie died on 12 January 1976 at age 85 from natural causes at her home in Winterbrook, Cholsey, Oxfordshire. She is buried in the nearby churchyard of St Mary's, Cholsey, having chosen the plot for their final resting place with her husband Sir Max some ten years before she died. The simple funeral service was attended by about 20 newspaper and TV reporters. Thirty wreaths adorned Agatha's grave, including one from the cast of her long-running play *The Mousetrap* and one sent 'on behalf of the multitude of grateful readers' by the Ulverscroft Large Print Book Publishers.

She was survived by her only child, Rosalind Hicks, and only grandson, Mathew Prichard. Her husband, Max, died in 1978, aged 74.

After Christie's death in 1976, her remaining 36% share of the company was inherited by her daughter, Rosalind Hicks, who passionately preserved her mother's works, image, and legacy until her own death 28 years later. The family's share of the company allowed them to appoint 50% of the board and the chairman, and thereby to retain a veto over new treatments, updated versions, and re-publications of her works.