


2 May 1859 – 14 June 1927



JEROME KLAPKA JEROME
THE GREATEST ENGLISH WRITER

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General information

- **Jerome Klapka Jerome** (2 May 1859 – 14 June 1927) was an English writer and humorist, best known for the comic travelogue *Three Men in a Boat* (1889).
- Other works include the essay collections *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow* (1886) 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 of Jerome Jerome

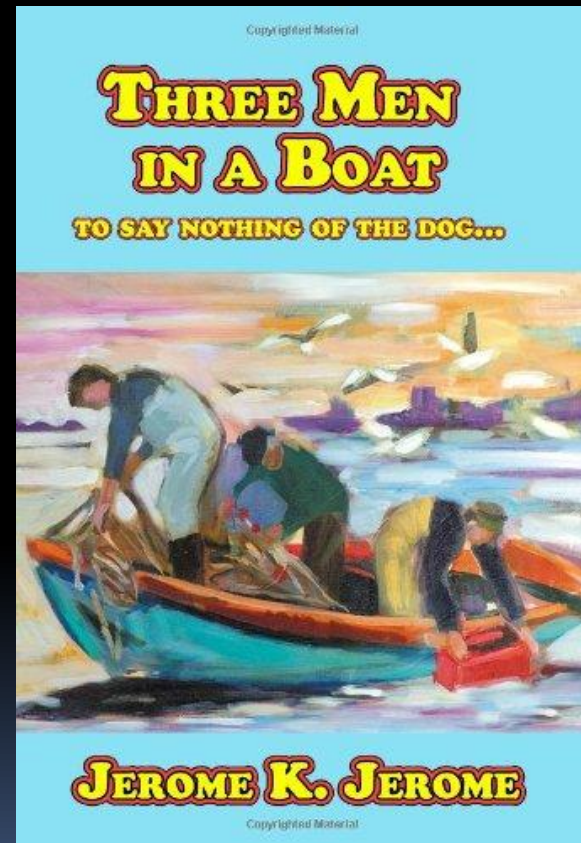
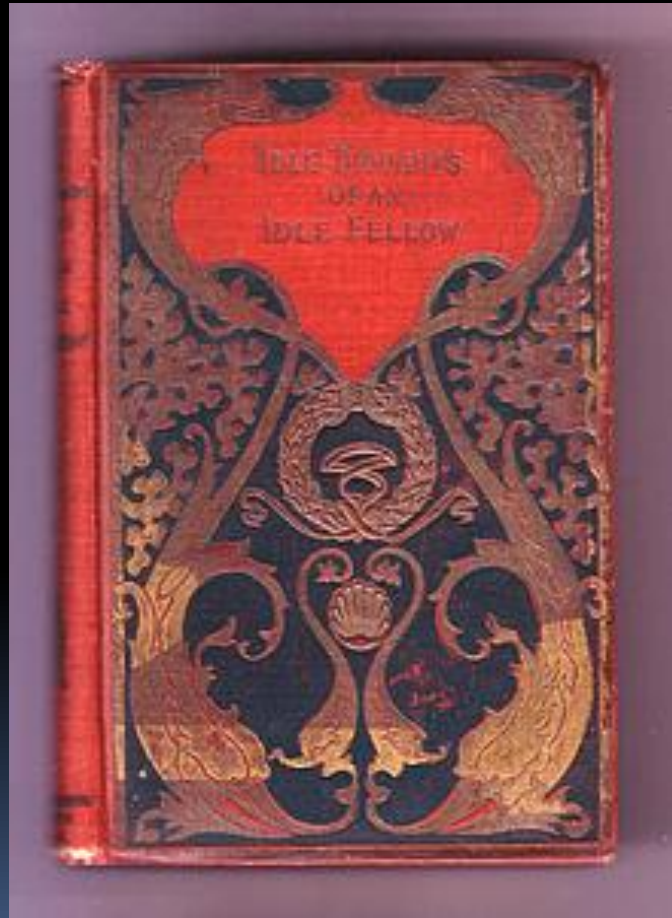
- Jerome was born in [Caldmore, Walsall](#), England. He was the fourth child of Marguerite Jones and Jerome Clapp (who later renamed himself Jerome Clapp Jerome), an ironmonger and lay preacher who dabbled in architecture. He had two sisters, Paulina and Blandina, and one brother, Milton, who died at an early age. Jerome was registered as Jerome Clapp Jerome, like his father's amended name, and the Klapka appears to be a later variation (after the exiled Hungarian general [György Klapka](#)). The family fell into poverty owing to bad investments in the local mining industry, and debt collectors visited often, an experience that Jerome described vividly in his autobiography *My Life and Times* (1926).^[1]
- The young Jerome attended [St Marylebone Grammar School](#). He wished to go into politics or be a [man of letters](#), but the death of his father when Jerome was 13 and of his mother when he was 15 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 he remained there for four years.



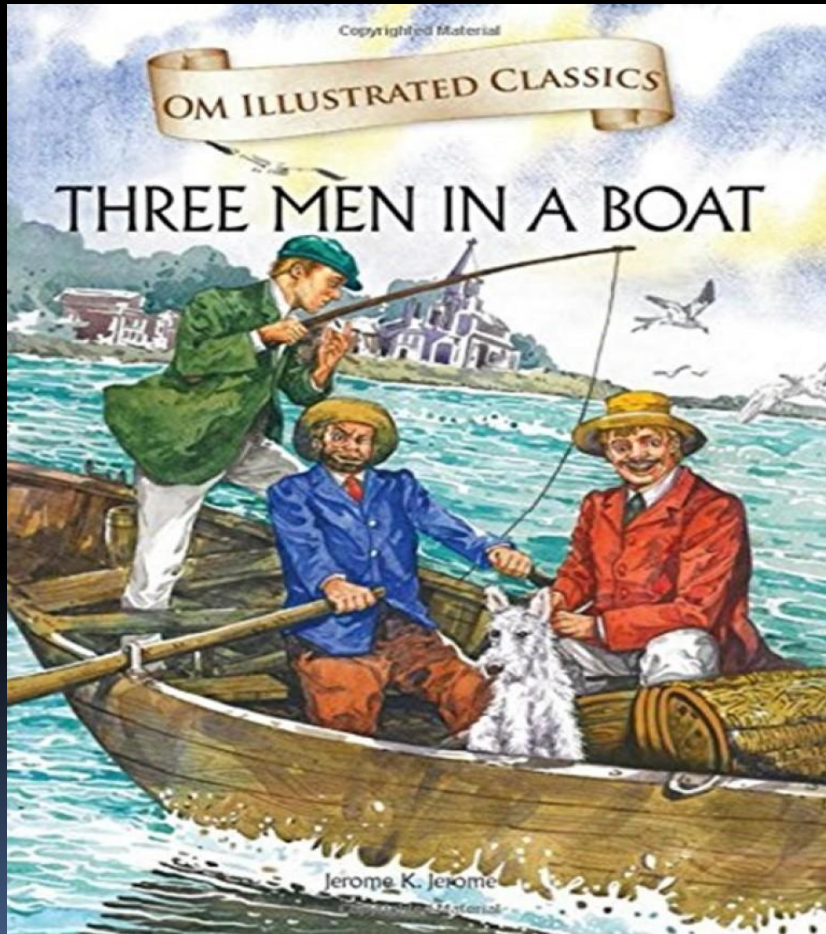
Acting career and early literary works

- Jerome was inspired by his older sister Blandina's love for the theatre, and he decided to try his hand at acting in 1877, under the stage name Harold Crichton. He joined a [repertory](#) troupe that produced plays on a shoestring budget, often drawing on the actors' own meagre resources – Jerome was penniless at the time – to purchase costumes and props. After three years on the road with no evident success, the 21-year-old Jerome decided that he had enough of 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](#) (1885), a comic memoir of his experiences with the acting troupe, followed by [Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow](#) (1886), a collection of humorous essays which had previously appeared in the newly founded magazine, [Home Chimes](#),^[2] the same magazine that would later serialise *Three Men in a Boat*.^[2]
- On 21 June 1888, Jerome married Georgina Elizabeth Henrietta Stanley Marris ("Ettie"), nine days after she divorced her first husband. She had a daughter from her previous, five-year marriage nicknamed Elsie (her actual name was also Georgina). The honeymoon took place on the [Thames](#) "in a little boat,"^[3] a fact that was to have a significant influence on his next and most important work, *Three Men in a Boat*.

Literary works



Three Men in a Boat and later career



Three men in a Boat is the most known literary work of Jerome Klapka Jerome.

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 Hentschel (Harris). This 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 never been out of print. 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 films, TV and radio shows, stage plays, and a musical. Its writing style influenced many humorists and satirists in England and elsewhere.

With the financial security that 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 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 because of 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*, 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 it enjoyed only a mild success. In 1902, he published the novel *Paul Kelver*, which is widely regarded as autobiographical. His 1908 play *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* introduced a more sombre and religious Jerome. The main character was played by one of the leading actors of the time, [Johnston Forbes-Robertson](#), and the play was a tremendous commercial success. It was twice made into film, in 1918 and in 1935. However, the play was condemned by critics – [Max Beerhohn](#) described it as "vilely stupid" and as written by a "tenth-rate writer"



Legacy

- There is a French graphic novel series named Jérôme K. Jérôme Bloche after the author.
- A museum was opened in Walsall, his birthplace, in his honour in 1984.^[6] (closed 2008).
- A sculpture of a boat and a mosaic of a dog commemorate his book *Three Men in a Boat* on the Millennium Green in New Southgate, London, where he lived as a child.
- There is an English Heritage blue plaque which reads 'Jerome K. Jerome 1859-1927 Author Wrote 'Three Men in a Boat' while living here at flat 104' at 104 Chelsea Gardens, Chelsea Bridge Road, London, United Kingdom. It was erected in 1989.^[7]
- There is a beer company named Cerveza Jerome in Mendoza, Argentina. Its founder was a fan of *Three Men in a Boat*.^[8]
- A building at Walsall Campus, University of Wolverhampton is named after him.





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.
- 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](#). During these last years, Jerome spent more time at his farmhouse Gould's Grove southeast of [Ewelme](#) near [Wallingford](#).
- Jerome suffered a paralytic stroke and a [cerebral haemorrhage](#) in June 1927, on a motoring tour from [Devon](#) to London via [Cheltenham](#) and [Northampton](#). He lay in Northampton General Hospital for two weeks before dying on 14 June.^[5] He was cremated at [Golders Green](#) and his ashes buried at St Mary's Church, [Ewelme](#), Oxfordshire. Elsie, Ettie, and his sister Blandina are buried beside him. His gravestone reads "For we are labourers together with God". A small museum dedicated to his life and works was opened in 1984 at his birth home in Walsall, but it closed in 2008, and the contents were returned to [Walsall Museum](#).

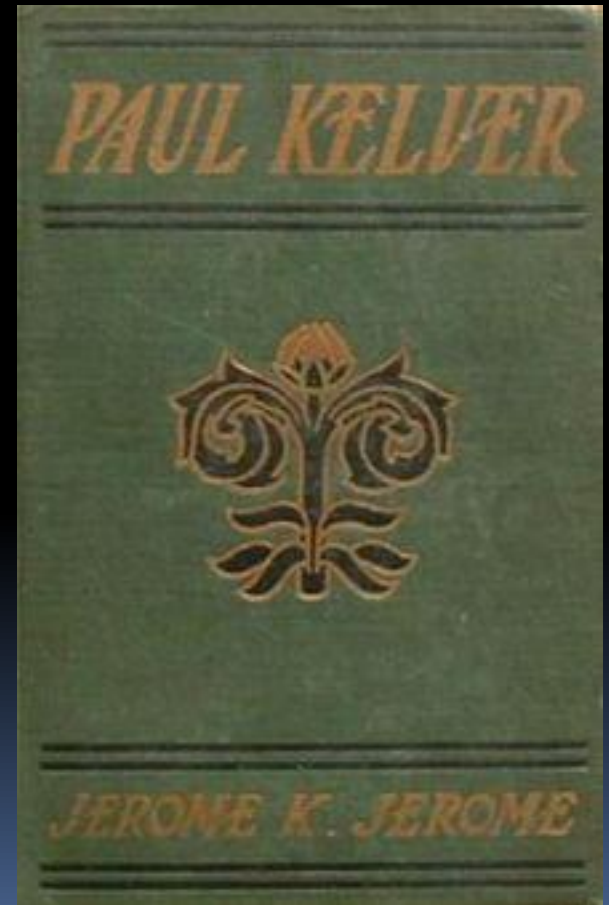


Grave of Jerome Klapka Jerome



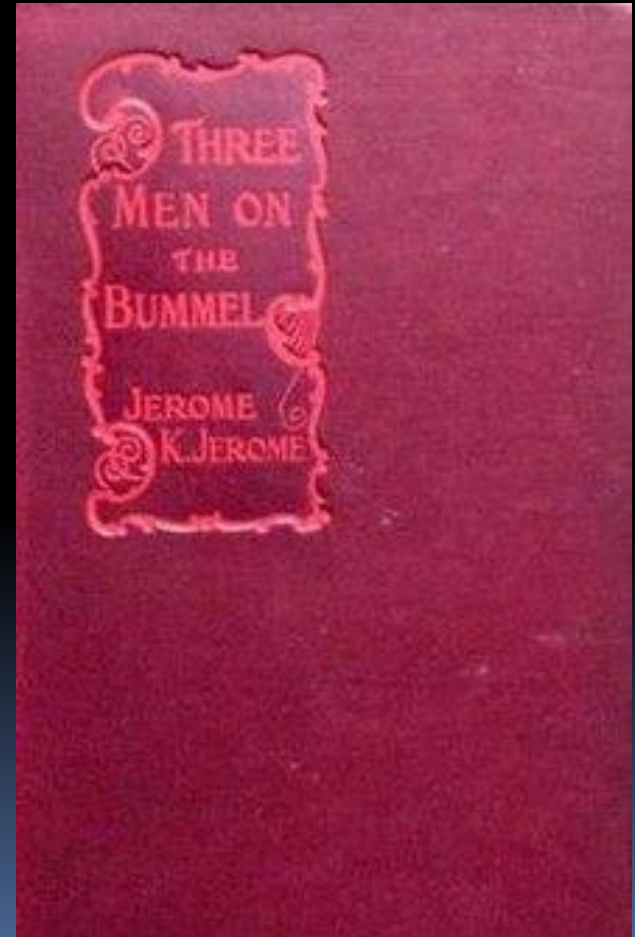
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- A building at Walsall Campus, University of Wolverhampton is named after him.
- Bibliography[[edit](#)]
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- *Weeds: A Story in Seven Chapters* (1892)
- *Novel Notes* (1893)
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- *They and I* (1909)
- *All Roads Lead to Calvary* (1919)
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- [*The New Utopia*](#)^[9] (1891)
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Autobiography

JEROME K.
JEROME



MY LIFE
& TIMES



Video

