

James Matthew Barrie

(1860-1937)

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James Matthew Barrie was born on May 9, 1860, in Kirriemuir, Forfarshire, Scotland. After graduating from Edinburgh University in 1882, Barrie worked as a journalist.

He published his first novel, *Better Dead*, in 1887. Barrie soon had a string of popular novels set in Scotland, including *A Window in Thrums* (1889).

After having some success with fiction, Barrie began writing plays in 1890s. His play *Walker London* was warmly received. The comedy poked fun at the institution of marriage. He got married himself in 1894 to actress Mary Ansell, but it didn't turn out to be a happy union; the couple later divorced. Perhaps to escape his difficult home life, Barrie took to going out for long walks in London's

Kensington Gardens where he met the five Llewelyn Davies brothers in the late 1890s. He found inspiration for his best-known work—*Peter Pan*—in his friendship with the Davies family. Barrie would later become the boys' guardian after the death of their parents.

The famous character of Peter Pan first appeared in the 1902 book *The Little White Bird*. Two years later, his play *Peter Pan* premiered on the London stage and became a great success. Audiences were drawn in the fantastical tale of the flying boy who never grew up and his adventures in Neverland with the Darling children. Barrie also wrote a book based on the play called *Peter and Wendy*, which was published in 1911. The book earned raves from critics.

After *Peter Pan*, Barrie continued writing, mostly plays aimed at adults. Several of his later works had a dark element to them. The *Twelve-Pound Look* (1910) offers a glimpse inside an unhappy marriage and *Half an Hour* (1913) follows a woman who plans on leaving her husband for another man, but she decides she must stay when her husband gets severely injured in a bus accident. His last major play, *Mary Rose*, was produced in 1920 and centered on a son visited by his mother's ghost.

J. M. Barrie died on June 19, 1937, in London, England. As a part of his will, he gave the copyright to *Peter Pan* to a children's hospital in London. After his death, Barrie's beloved characters were transformed into animated figures in the Disney classic *Peter Pan* (1953). The story was also the basis for the 1991 film *Hook*. And a live-action version of the story, *Peter Pan*, was released in 2003.

Through the years, numerous stage productions of Peter Pan have produced and have starred such actresses as Mary Martin and Kathy Rigby. Barrie's most famous play continues to be a favorite with young and old alike.²

¹ "Case Study: J. M. Barrie", **Trace your Ancestors with the 1911 Census**, www.uk1911census.com/casestudy.php

² "J. M. Barrie: Biography", **Biography.com**, www.biography.com/people/jm-barrie-9200058

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