

H.B. MARRIOTT WATSON – ENGLISH NOVELIST

TIME TO REMEMBER HIM

(1863-1921)

by

Reg. A. Watson



Henry Brereton Marriott Watson (H.B. Marriott Watson) was a prolific author. His novels and collections of short stories gained him a reputation as one of the better and best-known writers of his time. He occasionally turned his hand to the supernatural, the Gothic, and the horrific, which in some cases are now being re-discovered and republished. However, he is now largely forgotten; perhaps it is time to reflect on his contribution to English literature.

This man who lived most of his life in England was born in Victoria, Australia with Tasmanian connections. His ancestors were from London and before that Ireland and previously county Rutland. England descending from the Watsons of Rockingham Castle.

H.B. was born 20th December 1863 at Caulfield in the colony of Victoria. His father was an Anglican priest, the Rev. Henry Crocker Marriott Watson, (1839-1901) who was born in Sorell, Tasmania (then called Van Diemen's Land). The Rev. Henry was also an author writing futuristic fantasies. The name "Marriott:" was a family name taken from Angelina Marriott, daughter of the Rev. George Marriott and niece to Sir James Marriott J.P. and Judge of the Admiralty. Angelina married James Watson of London and they had a son, Brereton, hence the additional name of our subject. First name, Henry, was obviously after his father.

The Christian name Brereton was originally a surname when Mary Brereton of Ireland married John Watson of *Brookwatson* of Ireland in 1765 (Watson previously arriving from Rutland England).

From Victoria, the family moved to New Zealand where H.B. was educated at Christ's College, Christchurch and Canterbury College, graduating in 1883. Two years later he travelled to London where he took up journalism and became a protégé of William Ernest Henley.

H.B. writes in his "Reminiscences" that his literary life began in London. Of this period H.B. wrote: *"It was there that, outside certain newspaper articles I first appeared in Punch (the magazine). The occasion was memorable to me, a youth of two and twenty. I discharged various sets of verses of a light character at the editor of Punch and these had come back to with civil and mainly unreadable notes."* And *"I lived in the traditional garret; that is to say I lodged in a bed sitting room in Alfred Place off the Tottenham Court Road."* He gained a living by occasionally contributing to such papers as were open to "outsiders". A close friend to be, J.M. Barrie, was in 1887, stated H.B., contributing also to "outsiders" such as the St James Gazette and the Pall Mall Gazette magazines.

He continues, *"In those my early days I lived in the traditional garret, that is to say, I lodged in bed-sitting room in Alfred place off the Tottenham Court Road – a place which, I believe, is now converted into highly respectable flats."*

"I maintained myself preciously by occasional contribution to such papers as were open to 'outsiders' (these were precious few and by work as a London correspondent and for some colonial journalist. The later work I hated; it was not only ill paid, but it involved what appeared to my young and eager spirit as undignified and servile work."

By the turn of the century he was a published author and had developed a character called "Galloping Dick" who was an adventurous romantic, suave and brave highwayman of the previous century. This series was a great success together with another adventure series called "The Princess Zenia" and he was churning out books every year. By now he was a literary celebrity together with his friends including, Thomas Hardy, H.G. Wells, Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, Bernard Shaw, Conan Doyle and J.M. Barrie. He was described by Lewis Hind as being *"the sweetest gentlest of creatures, never angry, usually amused and had no sympathy with any kind of violence"* adding *"He was tall, young, blonde, good looking something exotic, foreign in the good looks that I put down to New Zealand, not as quite as truculent in talk as in print, more inclined to fight with a smile."* H.B. also turned his hand to playwriting, although not successfully. In 1891 he wrote with J.M. Barrie late 1888, a play called "Richard Savage", who was an English poet and satirist more than 150 years before. The play was first presented at an afternoon performance at London's Criterion Theatre but it was short-lived.

Fellow author, Lewis C. Hind, who lived with H.B. at St John 's Wood, wrote of the opening of the play at the Criterion Theatre in April 1891 as he was at the first performance. He writes, *"they were called before the curtain by their friends, one so tall and shaggy, the other so small and wan. Barrie and Marriott-Watson taking the call after the performance of Richard Savage, so shy, so unnerved in taking calls."*

Barrie later wrote of the collaboration, *"My recollection is that I wrote bits in Scotland and Marriott wrote bits in London and then we rewrote each other's bits"*

H.B. was also a member of Barrie's Recreational Cricket Team. He was a founding member of the Allahackbarries Team.* H.B. was also Secretary and Treasurer of the team. Friend Arthur Conan Doyle occasionally played with the team and while it has been asserted that H.G. Wells did there is no record of him doing so.

His close friend, J.M. Barrie, creator of "Peter Pan" and he, were often seen together and were quite a contrast as Barrie was but 5'1" while H.B. was a good 6' and it is said H.B. *"had a good crop of hair"* As was the custom in Edwardian times long walks were popular and they accompanied each other on long walks outside of London often with fellow author, Thomas Lennox Gilmour. The team played against the country folk of Shere, travelling by train from London. Eventually Marriott-Watson would live in Shere. It was here that H.B. opened the batting but the Shere Fire Brigade won quiet easily, apparently because the visitors were two men short.

Yet it appears that he and Barrie had a falling out but they were reconciled when Barrie organised another cricket match with the old crowd. Authoress Linda K. Hughes writes, *"Bygones had gone by on both sides"*. To continue, *"Aided by old fondness, Marriott's public standing and the passage of time Barrie could now 'forget' that 'Mrs Watson' had ever been named anything else."* It would appear then that Barrie may have questioned their joint position.

H.B.'s life, however, was to see stormy times with the coming of Graham R'; his future common-law wife. They never did marry.



H.B. and Rosamund

Graham R whose real name was Rosamund, was beautiful and independently minded. She was a successful authoress in her own right, being a gifted poet and a writer on gardening matters. By 1884 she had published volumes of poetry including *Tares*, *Summer Night* and *After Sunset*. She was also a novelist when in 1900, *An Island Rose* was published, her works selling as far afield as the USA. She was a friend with the Oscar Wilde family and to Andrew Lang, a premier poet of the day. By the time of her meeting with H.B. she had already been married twice, first to George Armytage a fellow poet, whom she left to wed the artist Arthur Graham Thomson. That she had done so was a scandal and with her poems being of an aesthetic nature and occasionally avant-garde she ruffled the Victorian sensibilities. She was to scandalise polite London society further, when after falling in love with H.B. they had an affair that everyone chose to ignore. Bernard Shaw in writing to her referred her as "*Mrs Marriott Watson*" even though they were unmarried. They had now moved in together, which was risky business. Having divorced from her second husband, they finally eloped going to Lands End staying at an inn. It was here that H.B. came dangerously ill with typhoid. The scandal that surrounded Oscar Wilde soon pushed aside to some degree the gossip surrounding the Marriott Watsons.



Rosamund

Rosamund had children in her own right and became a grandmother when her youngest daughter, Daphne gave birth to John Henry Mockford in 1908 although there is no record that they ever met.

Returning to London they faced severe financial restraints. H.B. was fortunate that he was able to contribute new tales to the magazine, "New Review", edited by his friend Henley from 1895-97. Henley's first novel to be serialised was H.G. Wells's "Time Machine". H.B. was also to take the position of literary editor of the "Pall Mall Gazette".

While their union was a happy and full one, it did affect H.B.'s career. Despite the continual successes of his Galloping Dick and Princess Zenia series and other fictional volumes, he was to experience continual financial difficulties. His sales were affected because some of the public had turned their back on him, especially as he wrote on such subjects as adultery, illegitimate children and prostitution.

Nonetheless, their relationship was a fulfilling one for them both, but sadly Rosamund Marriott died of cancer in 1911. Being a truly sensitive man and loving her greatly H.B. fretted enormously. Their son and only child, Richard Brereton Marriott Watson (Dick) was 16 years old at the time. So remorse was H.B. that he could not bring himself to attend her funeral nor it is believed ever visited her grave. In the following year he published a volume of Rosamund's collected poems with the introduction being written by him. Times were hard and sadly for H.B. in an effort to keep the creditors at bay and to survive, he resorted to selling furniture, books and anything else of value. More on one occasion he turned to his friend H.G. Wells for money, to which Wells always obliged.

Sadly as time has progressed Rosamund as a poet is virtually forgotten.

Their son, Richard, was a comely youth, 6' 3" in height, who was a spitting image of his mother. He followed her footsteps into writing poetry. When war was declared in August 1914 he enlisted with the Royal West Surrey Regiment. Later he was wounded and although he was released, his hospital report stated that he "*complained about being jumpy and easily tired.*" He requested a transfer to the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles and served as 2nd Lieutenant. He was wounded once again and was suffering from trench fever. H.B. managed to visit Dick at this time (he was also suffering from Shell Shock). H.B. wrote: "*He is all I have left, my dear Euphemia, and I am often frightened.*" Dick was safe while repairing and had received the Military Cross from the king. Promoted to Lieutenant he was sent back to the front 4th November 1917. He was killed in action 24th March 1918 in the retreat from St Quentin, during the battle of the Somme. Knowing the danger, H.B. wrote to Lady Harland "*I am in deep anxiety about my boy, who is in the thick of this awful fighting*". . On Dick's file, it is written "*This man became known as a poet*".

It is apt to print a moving poem from his hand:

"And a bullet comes droning, whining by

To the heart of a sentry close to me.

For some go early and some go late

(a dying scream on the evening air)

And who is there that believes in Fate

As a soul goes out in the sunset flare?

The loss of Richard was devastating to his father. H.G. Wells wrote to him, "*You must be lonely indeed without Dick and it made me very sad to hear that he had gone. The world is left very empty to many. I have a man staying with me just now who has had three brothers killed and he himself badly wounded nine times. One of my boys was killed which made a difference to me too. If they had only been dead for the duration of the war.*"



Richard in his WWI uniform.

At the time of his son's death he was living at "Vachery" Hook Lane, Shere, Surrey. Richard is commemorated on the village war memorial plaque in St James Church and in the Shere Museum along with other men from the village (see pics below).



"Vachery" 2018. Pic: Shere Museum.

The closeness between father and son is highlighted in a New York Times report (May 6 1905). It states "H.B.'s 'Hurricane Island' inscription: *'To Richard Marriott Watson my keen, yet appreciative critic.'*"

H.B. did try to write again, but not successfully. Fretting from the loss of his dear ones, experiencing money worries, life was no longer a pleasure for him and he never recovered. He took to drink and died of cirrhosis of the liver, 30th October 1921. The Times wrote (4th

November 1921) *"He was not always wise for himself; but none of his friends who knew him could fail to love him."*

In desperation, he had turned to a medium, named Mrs Norman, who convinced this grieving man that she made contact with both Rosamund and Richard.

Lewis C. Hind states (see foot notes) that H.B's pastimes were gardening and taking long walks with his dog. One on occasion Lewis and his wife Belinda were near Shere in Surrey where the Marriott-Watsons lived and decided to call upon them. Immediately Lewis saw H.B. walking his dog and asked him why he was so far from home. H.B. replied, *"Oh, I'm thinking about a plot. I can do it much better when walking."* They then left him and continued to their house where they found Rosamund who was shelling peas in the garden.

Lewis concludes, *"Those are my pictorial memories of these two. He, striding across the heather, thinking out a plot; she sitting in her garden shelling peas and composing a poem"*.

Rosamund describes Shere as the loveliest part of Surrey. They moved there because of Rosamund's health and H.B. use to commute to London. It was in the village that he became a local celebrity. He was involved with the local rifle club and was a member of the cricket club as was son Richard (Dick) to whom he dedicated his book, *Hurricane Island*. It was quite apparent at this time that Rosamund was not well and her influence in Dick's life decreased.

The dedication reads:

To
RICHARD BRERETON MARRIOTT WATSON

My keen yet appreciative critic,

Who pleaded

On behalf of the villains,

This tale of adventure by sea

Is dedicated with love by

Its author and his.

6 October 1904.

Clearly he and Rosamund loved their son deeply. Dick would have only been nine years at the time.

It is a tragedy H.B's Will stated that all letters between him, Rosamund and son Richard were to be burnt. Thus a great deal more of his life literally went up in flames.

Both Rosamund and H.B. are buried in the Shere cemetery next to the village's Anglican Church. There is a marker there for Richard.



Plaque in the St James's Church, Surrey, includes Richard.



Plaque includes Richard's name, Shere Museum, Surrey.

Pics: Both thanks to Shere Museum

So what type of person was H.B.? By all accounts he was a romantic, sensitive and kind. He was a gentle man, somewhat reserved. I don't think he was political or religious. Writing was his life and with it, came the ups and downs, the tragedies, the successes, the disappointments and the burdens. During his day he was well known, although not as famous as his colleagues, such as Barrie, Doyle or Wells. Since his death and again, unlike many of his colleagues, he gradually was forgotten. His writing style was very much of the Edwardian era which has simply not been carried through, unlike Stevenson or Ballamantyne. Perhaps it has to do more with his subject matter than style. Ballantyne's "Coral Island" and his other works are timeless as are Stevenson's and then of course there is Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Barrie's Peter Pan.

I do not believe H.B. was the type of man to court controversy but he certainly attracted it. Rosamund who had previously been married twice before, lived with H.B. but they were never married. They clearly were devoted to each other and she was known as Mrs Marriott-Watson who used the pen-name of Graham R. In Edwardian times this was a subject of gossip beside the fact he dealt with the subjects of prostitution and adultery.

As a Tasmanian writer I can sympathise with a number of his struggles and it grieves me to learn of this financial demise and embarrassment. It is never easy, unless one is truly successful as (again) were a number of his colleagues. Your financial success is only as good as your previous work. One must constantly create to have income. No one employs you. True, as I have been, H.B. was employed by various magazines, but these can be temporary and sometimes not very secure.

H.B. did live in the golden era of the novelists....before movies, radio, television and of course towards the end of the twentieth century mass technological development, such as the internet, videos and social media. There were great opportunities during his life time to make a 'go' of it as the few forms of entertainment, particularly outside the theatre, were books and magazines.

I can't help thinking too, that the taste of the public has changed dramatically over all these years. Even the classic works of some of his colleagues would not be able to find a publisher today. Thanks goodness they were published when they were. I often wonder whether Dickens could find a publisher these days. It was good therefore, H.B. lived when he did, but then again, if he lived today, he would write in the style suitable for today. Yet such a sensitive man would have found the crassness and the cold business environment of late, perhaps not to his liking. That is of course, only guess work on my part.

FOOT NOTES:

- Kevin Telfer in his "Peter Pan's XI" wrongly describes H.B. as coming from New Zealand. However, it is an excellent read. (Hodder & Stoughton 1988).

- Personal and information concerning H.B.'s career is contained in Lewis C. Hind's book, "More authors and I" in which he describes H.B. as a "romantic".
- Refer to the book: "Graham R. Rosamund Marriott Watson, Woman of Letters" by Linda K. Hughes.
- See following family tree chart of H.B.(for full family tree, "Family History of the Watsons" by Reg. A. Watson...request copy)

*Allahakbarries is formed from what is apparently "African" for "Heaven help us" joining with "barriers" Although Alla habar is more Islamic meaning "God is Great".

THANKS TO:

Shere Musuem, Surrey, England in particular Andrew Baker.

OTHER REFERENCES:

"The 2ns Royal Irish Rifles in the Great War" by James W. Taylor...mentions Richard Marriott Watson

AUTHOR.



Reg. A. Watson, a Tasmanian historian and author, lives in Tasmania and is 6th generation. H.B. is his great grandfather brother's son.

www.regwatson.com

Follows: H.B. family line.

IRSH, ENGLISH, TASMANIAN, AUSTRALIAN DIRECT LINE OF

H.B. MARRIOTT-WATSON

(Prior to the Irish Line, H.B. claimed a Wentworth connection which arose from the name of Watson-Wentworth who was the Earl of Malton in the Irish peerage. The two Marquises of Rockingham (Rutland) descend from the son of Lord Malton)

EDWARD WATSON = MARGARET FELTHAM

(m 1642)

FELTHAM WATSON = MARGARET O'BRIEN.

Marriage date unknown

GEORGE WATSON = DOROTHY GASON

(m. 1743)

JOHN WATSON = MARY BRERETON

(m 1765)

JAMES (JOHN) WATSON = ANGELINA MARRIOTT

London connection

cannot locate marriage date

BRERETON R.R. P.P. WATSON = CATHERINE WADE

Tasmanian connection

(m. 1827)

HENRY CROCKER WATSON = ANNE McDONALD WRIGHT

Victorian connection

(m. 1863)

H.B. MARRIOTT WATSON = GRAHAM R

(not married)

RICHARD MARRIOTT WATSON.

(no issue)

