VINTAGE

CAPTIVATED

PIERS DUDGEON

Contents

Part IV: 1894–1910
Sylvia, the Lost Boys and Uncle Jim: the *Peter Pan* Inheritance

Part V: 1910–1921
Michael, Daphne and Uncle Jim: 'An Awfully Big Adventure'

Part VI: 1921–1989
Uncle Jim and Daphne: the *Rebecca* Inheritance

About the Book

J. M. Barrie has long been a controversial figure; as D. H Lawrence wrote, the writer ‘has a fatal touch for those he loves. They die’ and this was certainly true of the Llewellyn Davies boys, who provided the inspiration for Peter Pan; George was killed in action, Michael drowned whilst at Oxford and Peter, plagued by his life-long identification as ‘the real Peter Pan’ and other personal troubles, committed suicide.

However, what is less well known is Barrie’s relationship with the Du Maurier family, particularly with George du Maurier, the creator of Svengali, who showed how it was possible to gain control over the mind of another; and Daphne du Maurier, his enigmatic granddaughter, cousin to the Llewellyn Davies boys, and author of *Rebecca*. In Piers Dudgeon’s fascinating book Barrie emerges as a Svengali without conscience, driven by a compulsion to dominate and destroy.

About the Author

Piers Dudgeon knew Daphne Du Maurier and worked with her in the 1980s. When he discovered that she had put a moratorium on publication of her adolescent diaries until fifty years after her death, he was prompted to begin his researches into her background. What was the mystery that Daphne had been so keen to suppress?

He is the author of many works of non-fiction. He worked for ten years as an editor in London before starting his own company producing books with authors as diverse as John Fowles, Catherine Cookson, Peter Ackroyd, Daphne du Maurier, Shirley Conran and Ted Hughes. Subsequently, he left London for Yorkshire where he wrote a number of biographies as well as illustrated books evocative of the spirit of the place.

‘Piers Dudgeon’s book thrillingly investigates the cruelty and madness lurking within *Peter Pan* – and the fabrications of Hollywood’s *Finding Neverland* are neatly overturned’

Daily Express

‘A rattling grisly read … “May God blast anyone who writes a biography of me,” Barrie warned and his curse was surely aimed at Dudgeon, who goes further than any other biographer … I defy you not to be captivated’

Frances Wilson, *Sunday Times*

‘Dudgeon’s portrait of Barrie – as a man who filled the vacuum of his own sexual impotence by a compulsive desire to possess the family who inspired his most famous creation, *Peter Pan* … will be of interest to anyone, like me, who has followed the twists of the du Maurier family history’

Justine Picardie, *Sunday Telegraph*

‘Piers Dudgeon, who worked with Daphne du Maurier in the 1980s, and who has worked with such other deeply autobiographical authors as John Fowles, Ted Hughes and Catherine Cookson, has negotiated the dark back-tracks and by-ways of Barrie’s chilling Neverland. Daphne du Maurier is the impressive survivor … He tells a terrible story without sentimentality, without sensationalism and without undue psychologising … What remains here would leave a bad taste in the mouth if it were not so intelligently and feelingly done’

Brian Morton, *Sunday Herald*

‘*Captivated* is a riveting joy: I was literally captivated by it. Poor scintillating du Mauriers. Poor boys … I felt as if I was living it’

Nina Auerbach, Professor of English at Pennsylvania University and author of *Daphne du Maurier: Haunted Heiress*

‘Meticulous and highly provocative … Dudgeon knows what he’s doing and builds his case with precision and coolness … It was when both Daphne du Maurier and her cousin Peter Llewellyn Davies finally understood what good old Uncle Jim had been doing to them all these years, that she had her nervous breakdown and he killed himself … It’s a gripping read that exposes the dark side to two seemingly innocent activities, writing and loving children … Dudgeon has exposed, in quite a magnificent way, the power and potential for abuse in both’

Scotsman

List of Illustrations

In the text

First section of plates

Carry. *Courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*

'*Moscheles, or Mephistopheles? which*'. Cartoon of Felix Moscheles as a devilish hypnotist. *Sketch by George du Maurier*. In Bohemia with George du Maurier *by Felix Moscheles* (1896)

George du Maurier and his wife Emma, with their daughter May, photographed in September 1874 by Julia Margaret Cameron. *Royal Photographic Society Collection/at the NMeM/SSPL*

George du Maurier in London, 1880s. *Photograph by courtesy of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London*

Henry James. © *Getty Images*

Sketch by George du Maurier of his daughter, Sylvia. *Courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*

Dolly with her parents Hubert and Maude Parry. *By kind permission of Laura Ponsonby and Kate Russell*

Sylvia du Maurier. *Courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*

Arthur Llewelyn Davies. *Photograph by courtesy of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London*

Sylvia with George, the eldest of her five sons. *Courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*

Jamie Barrie, when a student at Edinburgh University, 1882. *Courtesy of Andrew Birkin*

Arthur Conan Doyle. *Photo by Herbert Barraud/National Portrait Gallery*

Barrie's spinster sister, Jane Ann, and his redoubtable mother, Margaret Ogilvy. J. M. Barrie *by Janet Dunbar (1970)*

Jim Barrie with his St Bernard dog, Porthos. *Courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*

Mary Ansell, Barrie's actress wife. *Photograph by J.M. Barrie. The Walter Beinecke Jnr Collection, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University*
Nanny to Sylvia's five boys. *Photograph of Mary Hodgson by courtesy of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London*

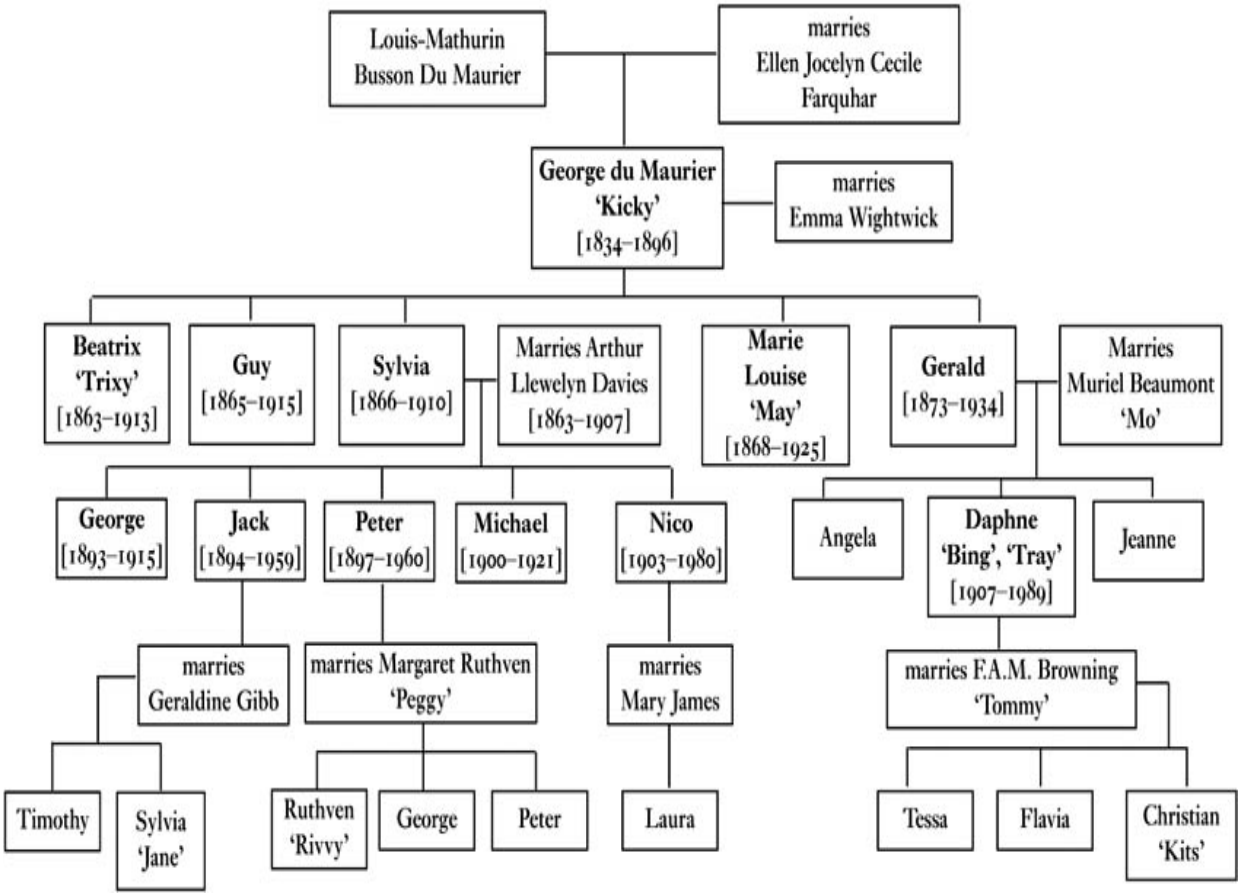
Second section of plates
Sylvia with her eldest son, George. *Photograph by J.M. Barrie, courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*
Sylvia with her third son, Peter. *Photograph by J.M. Barrie, by kind permission of Laura Ponsonby and Kate Russell*
Black Lake Cottage, Mary Barrie's holiday house, where Jim Barrie encouraged the Llewelyn Davies boys to play fantasy games of redskins and pirates. *Photograph by courtesy of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London*
'*We set out to be wrecked*.' George, Jack and Peter at Black Lake Cottage. *Photograph by J.M. Barrie. The Walter Beinecke Jnr Collection, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University*
J. M. Barrie drawing further and further into the wood. *Courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*
No. 4 boy. *Photograph of Michael Llewelyn Davies, courtesy of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London*
Michael Llewelyn Davies. *Photograph by J.M. Barrie, courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*
George Llewelyn Davies. *Photograph by J.M. Barrie, courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*
J.M. Barrie in 1904, at the time that *Peter Pan* was first staged. *Photograph by courtesy of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London*

Sylvia, after her husband, Arthur Llewelyn Davies, died aged 44. *Photograph by J.M. Barrie, courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*
Sylvia, in her final illness, also aged 44. *Photograph by J.M. Barrie, courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*
Sylvia's Will. *Courtesy of Andrew Birkin and The Walter Beinecke Jnr Collection, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University*
The Llewelyn Davies boys fly fishing. *Photograph by courtesy of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London*
Barrie in his penthouse flat at Adelphi Terrace House. J. M. Barrie *by Janet Dunbar (1970)*
Gerald du Maurier. It's Only the Sister *by Angela du Maurier (1951)*
Gerald's wife, Muriel du Maurier. It's Only the Sister *by Angela du Maurier (1951)*
Captain Scott. *© Getty Images*
Lady Cynthia Asquith. J. M. Barrie *by Janet Dunbar (1970)*

Third section of plates
Daphne du Maurier as a small child. *Courtesy of Christian Browning*
Drawing of the artists' model, Trilby. *Illustration by George du Maurier for his novel*, Trilby *(1894)*
Daphne with Trilby hair-cut. *Courtesy of Christian Browning*
Daphne dressed like Marty, character from George du Maurier's novel, *The Martian. Courtesy of Christian Browning*
George, Jack and Peter Llewelyn Davies. J. M. Barrie *by Janet Dunbar (1970)*
Angela, Jeanne and Daphne du Maurier with their mother. *Courtesy of Christian Browning*

Michael at Oxford. *Photograph by courtesy of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London*
Nico at Eton. J. M. Barrie *by Janet Dunbar (1970)*
Michael and Nico with Uncle Jim on holiday in Scotland. *Photograph by courtesy of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London*
Robert Boothby with Michael and friends, at Oxford. *Photograph by courtesy of the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London*
Sandford Pool, where Michael drowned. *Author*
Jim in 1920, before Michael's death. J. M. Barrie *by W. A. Darlington (1938)*
Jim, in trilby, after Michael's death. *By courtesy of the du Maurier Archive, Special Collections, University of Exeter*
Jim in 1930. *Photograph by courtesy of the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London*
Daphne with her father, Gerald, in 1925. She referred to her relationship with him as her 'Daddy complex'. *Mander & Mitchenson Theatre Collection, London*
Daphne rowing to Ferryside. *Courtesy of Christian Browning*
Daphne's husband, Frederick Browning. *Courtesy of Christian Browning*
Daphne, in 1932, photographed by Compton Collier. *Courtesy of Christian Browning*
Daphne dreaming in her 'writing hut' at Menabilly. *Photograph by Tom Blau/Camera Press*
Daphne in the Aldwych Theatre with Gertrude Lawrence, 1948. *Mander & Mitchenson Theatre Collection, London*
Daphne in old age, photographed by Bob Collins. *National Portrait Gallery*

FAMILY TREE


Louis-Mathurin Busson Du Maurier
marries Ellen Jocelyn Cecile Farquhar
George du Maurier 'Kicky' [1834–1896]
marries Emma Wightwick
Beatrix 'Trixy' [1863–1913]
Guy [1865–1915]
Sylvia [1866–1910]
Marries Arthur Llewelyn Davies [1863–1907]
Marie Louise 'May' [1868–1925]
Gerald [1873–1934]
Marries Muriel Beaumont 'Mo'
George [1893–1915]
Jack [1894–1959]
Peter [1897–1960]
Michael [1900–1921]
Nico [1903–1980]
Angela
Daphne 'Bing', 'Tray' [1907–1989]
Jeanne
marries Geraldine Gibb
marries Margaret Ruthven 'Peggy'
marries Mary James
marries F.A.M. Browning 'Tommy'
Timothy
Sylvia 'Jane'
Ruthven 'Rivvy'
George
Peter
Laura
Tessa
Flavia
Christian 'Kits'

PIERS DUDGEON

Captivated

J.M. Barrie, Daphne Du Maurier and the Dark Side of Neverland

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

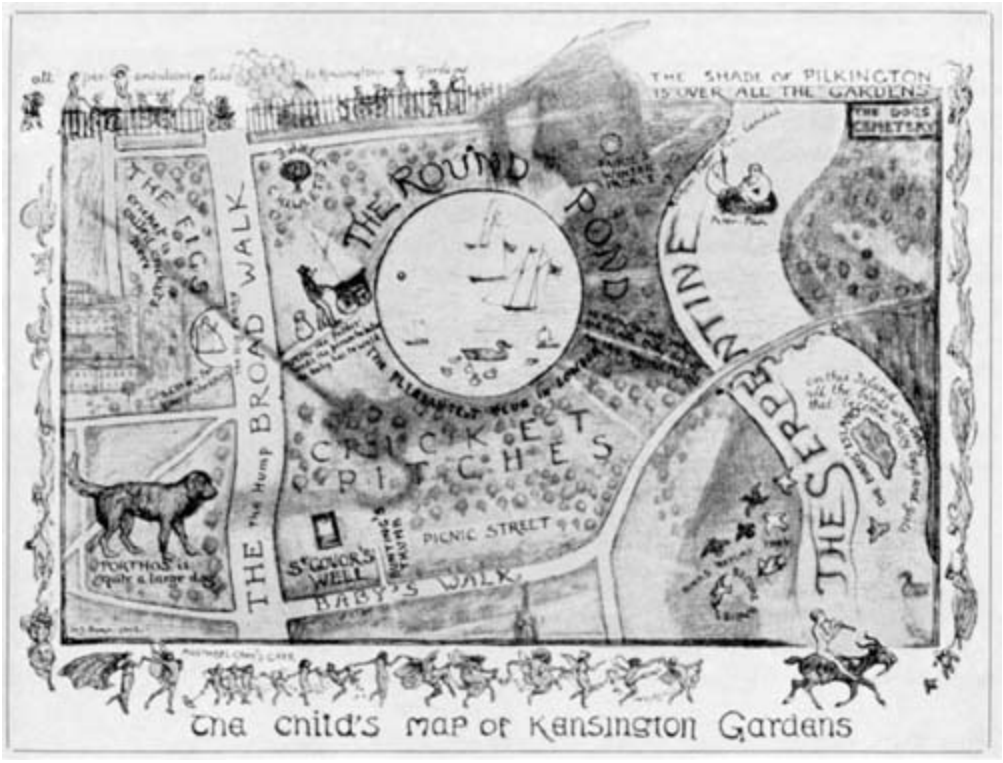
‘Now we are again at our wits’ end, where you mortals lightly slip over into madness. Why dost thou seek community with us if thou canst not carry it through?’

Mephistopheles in *Faust* by Goethe

PART I

1945–1960

The Lost Boys and Daphne



‘The child’s map of Kensington Gardens’

CHAPTER ONE

Peter’s suicide: a case to answer

London, 1960. Tuesday, 5 April: 9 a.m. *In the restaurant of the Royal Court Hotel, Sloane Square, a melancholy man in his early sixties takes breakfast alone. Some time later he walks out of the hotel, telling no one where he is going. He is not seen again until a little before 5 p.m., when he crosses the square and enters the Underground station. He buys a ticket, moves past the little sentry box with its attendant, and turns sharp right down the steps to the platform, where, absorbed in his thoughts, he trudges up and down, up and down, staring at the ground, as if not part of this world. A train arrives, leaves, then another, but the man gives no sign that he is either about to depart or is expecting to meet someone. Then comes the rattle in the darkness and the echo of sound in the tunnel of the train he chooses. Suddenly, and with immaculate timing, he points his body towards it and hurls himself forward, just as it emerges into the light.*

The death of Peter Llewelyn Davies, 63-year-old chairman of respected book publisher Peter Davies Ltd, provoked wide press coverage and speculation, perhaps because some reporters remembered that he had been one of the ‘lost boys’ of *Peter Pan*, and noted that the tragedy more or less coincided with the centenary of the birth of J. M. Barrie.

There was no question that the death was suicide. An inquest opened on Friday, 8 April 1960, and concluded the following Tuesday that Peter Llewelyn Davies had taken his own life while the balance of his mind was disturbed. Cause of death was certified on Wednesday the 13th as 'multiple injuries (legs and skull). Threw himself in front of an Underground train. Killed himself.'

Peter's brother Nicholas (known as Nico) accepted the inquest's verdict: 'Peter's death – I shan't forget while I have any faculties left – it was indeed suicide,' he wrote to Andrew Birkin.[f1] 'After hours, days? of walking up and down the platform of Sloane Square Underground station he jumped in front of the train. Terrible for the driver – terrible from most points of view.'

Geraldine (Gerrie), Peter's sister-in-law, commented: 'Peter went out after breakfast, and as far as I know, nobody knew what he did all day until five in the evening, when he jumped in front of this train. So where he spent the whole day, God alone knows … They'd moved out of the flat they were in then. They had stored their furniture and they had gone to the Royal Court Hotel and Peter was ill and P wasn't the right kind of wife, she couldn't cope … hopeless … He realised he was going to get worse and apparently he thought of sleeping pills and then he thought of how dreadful it would be if they pulled him round. That was apparently his reasoning, I have been told. What it really was I don't know, but I can't think of a more grim way.'[1]

'P' was Peter's wife Peggy, the Hon. Margaret Leslie Hore-Ruthven, one of four daughters of the 9th Baron Ruthven (pronounced 'Riven'). She and her twin sister Alison often dressed alike and came to be known in London society as 'A and P'. Peggy and Peter had been living on the opposite side of Sloane Square to the Underground station, at 20 Cadogan Court, before packing up their furniture and

moving to the Royal Court Hotel, *en route* to Gibraltar and retirement.

Peter's childhood has been so sentimentalised as to turn it into a myth almost as famous as that of Peter Pan.

The story goes that in 1892 beautiful and enigmatic Sylvia du Maurier, the daughter of famous *Punch* magazine illustrator and bestselling author George du Maurier, married handsome young barrister Arthur Llewelyn Davies, son of a chaplain to Queen Victoria. She was 26, he 29. They settled at number 18 Craven Terrace, Lancaster Gate, on the north side of Kensington Gardens, and between 1893 and 1903 produced five sons: George, Jack, Peter, Michael and Nico.

In 1897, the year Peter was born, he was out in his pram in Kensington Gardens with his nanny, Mary Hodgson, and his elder brothers George (4) and Jack (3), when they met toast-of-the-town playwright and novelist J. M. Barrie, with his St Bernard dog.

Mr Barrie, who lived with his pretty actress wife Mary Ansell on the south side of the Gardens, at 133 Gloucester Road, was well known in the park for his antics with this dog. Once let off its leash, the huge animal would be up on its hind legs wrestling his master. Barrie stood five feet three and a half inches (the half was terribly important to him), but seemed to grow strong in the unlikely contest, which children loved to watch. When the show came to an end he would start talking to his young audience, take one or two of them aside and captivate them with stories of fairies and make-believe woods, or do sleight-of-hand magic tricks, or pretend to hypnotise them with his eyebrows, for he had an unusual ability to elevate and lower his eyebrows separately, while gazing intently with his large, morose, staring eyes, set in a peculiarly large head, out of scale with his boyish body.

A child, who knew him then, said:

> He was a tiny man, he had a pale face and large eyes and shadows round them … He looked fragile, but he was strong when he wrestled with Porthos, his St Bernard dog. Mr Barrie talked a great deal about cricket, but the next moment he was telling us about fairies, as though he knew all about them. He was made of silences, but we did not find these strange, they were so much part of him … his silences spoke loudly.[2]

For the three Davies boys, meeting Barrie in the park became a regular event, the cheeky but imaginative George building a particular rapport with him. In Barrie's company the Gardens took on their own geography and mythology: the Figs, the Broad Walk, the Hump, the Baby Walk, St Govor's Well, the cricket pitches, the Round Pond and Serpentine were all discovered, explored, mapped, and made their secret domain, each district 'freighted' with its own stories to be recalled in bed at night, and later to be made part of a book called *The Little White Bird*,[f2] in which Peter Pan made his first appearance. Peter Pan was supposed to have flown out of the window of his nursery to join the fairies and birds in Kensington Gardens and live with old Solomon Caw on Birds' Island on the Serpentine, a lake well known to the boys, but never the same again after Mr Barrie spoke of it:

> The Serpentine … is a lovely lake, and there is a drowned forest at the bottom of it. If you peer over the edge you can see the trees all growing upside down, and they say at night there are also drowned stars in it. If so, Peter Pan sees them when he is sailing across the lake in the Thrush's Nest. A small part only of the Serpentine is in the Gardens, for soon it passes beneath a bridge too far away where the island is on which all the birds are born that become baby boys and girls. No one who is human, except Peter Pan (and he is only half human) can land on the island, but you may write what you want (boy or girl, dark or fair) on a piece of paper, and then twist it into the shape of a boat and slip it into the water, and it reaches Peter Pan's island after dark.

On New Year's Eve, the last day of 1897, J. M. Barrie met the parents of the three boys at a dinner party given by society hosts Sir George and Lady Lewis, after which Sylvia and Arthur Llewelyn Davies began to see a great deal of James and Mary Barrie.

Barrie and his wife would walk the boys home from the park almost every day, Mary befriending Sylvia while Barrie continued his fun and games with the boys upstairs in the nursery. So close did the two families become that in 1899 Barrie and his wife thought nothing of showing up uninvited when the boys were on holiday with their parents in Rustington-on-Sea, which had been the Davieses' south coast holiday retreat for some five years. The boys had been thrilled to see Mr Barrie, as they called him then – it was some time before they called him 'Uncle Jim' (George would do it first). Barrie turned out to be quite the little photographer, taking pictures which had a dreamy fairy-like quality about them.

Then, in 1900, the Barries bought Black Lake Cottage, a simple house in a pretty garden across the road from a lake set in a pine forest in the shadow of the twelfth-century ruins of Waverley Abbey, at Tilford in Surrey. For the next three summers the Llewelyn Davies family joined them there.

The boys were off with Barrie every day. In the magical company of their friend, the black lake that gave the cottage its name became a South Seas lagoon, the pine wood a tropical forest where all kinds of danger lurked. With complete abandon Mr Barrie presided over games of derring-do and redskins and desert islands, heroic adventures in which he played the pirate Captain Swarthy and the boys survived his attentions and once even strung Swarthy up, while the St Bernard, Porthos, played the pirate's dog or a tiger in a papier-mâché mask.

Nothing could have been more fun or more natural. 'That strange and terrible summer', Barrie took scores of photographs, thirty-five of which were turned into a book, professionally bound. Two copies were made and entitled *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island, Being a record of the terrible adventures of the brothers Davies in the*

summer of 1901. Peter, though only four, was named on the front cover as its author.

Many of the scenes enacted over the years at Black Lake Cottage were incorporated into *Peter Pan*, which was first staged in 1904. 'The play of Peter,' wrote Barrie in the Dedication to the first published edition, 'is streaky with you still, though none may see this save ourselves … As for myself, I suppose I always knew that I made Peter Pan by rubbing the five of you violently together, as savages with two sticks produce a flame.'

But in 1906, tragedy struck. The boys' father, Arthur, contracted cancer of the face and the following year, aged 44, he died a horrible death.

Barrie, by then a very rich man – within two years *Peter Pan* had grossed over half a million pounds, a fabulous amount in those days – offered to help Sylvia and the boys, and they were housed at 23 Campden Hill Square, with Barrie a frequent visitor.

Then, in 1910, tragedy struck again. Sylvia died, also from cancer, again aged only 44. And Barrie made the boys his own.

But the deaths continued. In 1915, the eldest brother, George, was killed in the First World War in France, and in 1921 Michael drowned – many believed in a suicide pact with another boy. Almost forty years later, Peter committed suicide. Jack endured depression and ill health and died shortly before Peter. By 1960 Nico, the youngest, was the only surviving brother.

When Nico first heard of Peter's death, he felt comforted that at long last Peter's 'cares were over', for he had been in a terrible state for some time. Nico wrote to Nanny Hodgson the very next day, on 6 April: 'His health – mental even more than physical I would say – had deteriorated so that he was a real melancholic: he would have lived with

hardly a smile.' He suggested that 'the 1914 War ditched Peter, really.' Peter had joined up at 17 in 1914, poised between Eton and Cambridge. Barrie's official biographer, Denis Mackail,[3] wrote that on Peter's demobilisation in February 1919, 'what was left of him was for a long time little more than a ghost'.

But even in letters to Barrie from the Front, Peter comes across as unemotional, stable, composed, intelligent. According to Nico he was the 'least athletic' of the brothers, and in Nanny's eyes, 'the delicate one', but he was bright, the only scholar among the Davies boys. He emerged from the war a gentleman, reserved certainly but standing tall, with an independent streak and a very attractive self-possession, something of a loner, but quite the urbane Londoner, with plenty of friends; and, as Nico conceded, he was 'a superbly witty and funny talker – few days now go by without either Mary [Nico's wife] or I remembering some wonderfully funny remark of Peter's.'

In 1917, while back in England on leave, Peter had fallen in love with a woman much older than himself, Vera Willoughby. After the war he and Vera lived together, a unit independent of Barrie, who disapproved. Defying Uncle Jim was not the action of a man unable to cope with his own life.

Six years later, the affair over, Peter was tempted back into the fold by a plan to set him up as a publisher. Barrie organised and paid for Peter's training, first with Walter Blaikie in Edinburgh and then in London with his publisher, Hodder and Stoughton, before setting him up with an imprint of his own, Peter Davies Ltd.

Thereafter, over a period of three decades, largely through his own personality and acumen, as well as the efforts of employees including Nico, who worked for the firm as an editor, Peter made it a success, respected throughout the industry. In fact, Peter Davies Ltd still existed in the 1970s as part of Sir Sidney Bernstein's

Granada Publishing Group. Does this sound like the career of a man who was ‘ditched by the War’?

Another line of enquiry into the suicide is triggered by a remark made by Peter’s secretary at the Queen Street, Mayfair, offices of Peter Davies Ltd.[4] She said: ‘He didn’t care for the suggestion that he was Peter Pan.’

Peter was seven in 1904 when *Peter Pan* first opened at the Duke of York’s Theatre in London’s West End. Fairies were all the rage, thanks to actor/writer Seymour Hicks’s huge Christmas hit, *Bluebell in Fairyland*, in which Hicks and his actress wife, Ellaline (Ella) Terriss, starred, and which ran at the Vaudeville for some 300 performances from 1901.

Bluebell in Fairyland took London’s children by storm, and the Davies boys were no exception. Barrie took them to see it and re-enacted bits of it with them in the nursery at home, taking the role of the terrifying ‘Sleepy King’ to overwhelming effect. It was always their number one favourite play, even after *Peter Pan* came out. When it was revived in December 1905, Barrie wrote to Ella Terriss: ‘I was talking about Peter [Pan] to the little boys the other day & in the middle of my remarks one of them said “Is it true that Bluebell is coming back?” You will see us all there.’[5]

Hicks and his wife were huge celebrities to thousands of children at that time. They had long been friends of Barrie. Hicks had played opposite Barrie’s wife Mary Ansell in Barrie’s first play, *Walker, London*, ten years earlier, and he had been earmarked for Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*, and Ella for Wendy, but they had pulled out when Ella became pregnant.

These celebrities were a significant part of the boys’ lives. In October 1903, when Ella had to call off a date with them to watch a performance of Barrie’s hit play *Quality Street*, George, Jack and Peter were so fed up that Barrie had to occupy them in the theatre by paying them

twopence every time the audience laughed. The play passed them by. ‘They were mostly occupied in counting the laughs,’ he lamented.

Living such a life, with one foot behind stage as it were, the boys were no doubt the envy of their friends at school. And one can easily imagine that Peter was ragged for having the same name as Peter Pan, and that his embarrassment deepened when it became known that the play was based on adventures he and his brothers had had with J. M. Barrie.

But why did it rankle for so long? It was in the late 1940s that Peter wrote:

> What’s in a name! My God what isn’t? If that perennially juvenile lead, if that boy so fatally committed to an arrestation of his development, had only been dubbed George, or Jack, or Michael, or Nicholas, what miseries would have been spared me![6]

Peter’s eldest son Ruthven (known as Rivvy and in his twenty-seventh year at Peter’s death) believed he had the answer:

> From the moment I was old enough I was aware that my father had been exploited by Barrie and was very bitter … He didn’t really like him. He resented the fact that he wasn’t well off and that Barrie had to support him. But when he was cut out of the will, he was livid and tremendously disappointed … and he started drinking heavily. My first memory of my father was with a gin bottle tipped up at his mouth. He was virtually a down-and-out by the time he died … My father hoped to inherit Barrie’s money but at the last minute he changed his will. Our lifestyle was reasonable until then.[7]

Barrie died in 1937, and there is no doubt that Peter did have money worries, but the only recorded threat to the family’s relatively comfortable lifestyle came in 1953, when there was some difficulty in paying school fees. Peter wrote to Nanny: ‘We are so hard up that I can’t do anything to amuse the boys in their holidays, and we have got to leave our pleasant home near Eton for something cheaper!’ Peter did indeed move house, but there was no danger of

bankruptcy. We know from Nico that in 1954 Peter Davies Ltd, which Peter had by that time sold for a tidy sum to a bigger publisher, William Heinemann, was in ‘quite a healthy state of affairs’. What’s more, Peter was kept on by Heinemann as chairman, and all the time his family was growing up and becoming less of a financial burden. Also, Cadogan Court SW3 was not an address that suggested poverty.

However, poverty is a relative term, and it is true that Peter did feel he had lost out in Barrie’s will. *Peter Pan* had made Barrie fabulously wealthy, and although he cared little for money and gave much of his wealth away, there was still a net amount in the pot at his death – after £40,475 had been paid as duty – of £167,694 16s. 7d.

Out of that, Peter was left the second largest legacy – £6,000 – still a decent sum in 1937. But he had always expected that as the family publisher he would husband the artistic rights in Barrie’s works after his death, and he was tricked out of them at the eleventh hour by Lady Cynthia Asquith, daughter-in-law of the Liberal Prime Minister. Barrie’s secretary for the last twenty years of his life, she was a woman who looked after her own interests as a priority, and one of very few people who ever got the better of him.

Barrie had excellent relations with his doctor and had been on daily doses of heroin for some time before his death. The narcotic, originally prescribed to help him sleep, was soon being taken for the dramatic rush it gave him. Cynthia described Barrie as in ‘a state of ecstasy and inspiration’ while under the influence of it.

According to Nico, it was in a heroin-induced stupor that he finally yielded to Cynthia’s representations that he should sign a new will, leaving her £30,000 and all the rights in his plays and books (other than *Peter Pan*, already the property of the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children). Peter had been present in the room when the

fatal dose was administered at Cynthia's suggestion. 'When Uncle Jim got really ill,' Nico told Andrew Birkin, 'and was not expected to last the night, Peter made the Greatest Mistake of his Life and telephoned [Cynthia] down in Devon or Cornwall. She hired a car and motored through the night. Meanwhile, Peter, I and General Freyberg [a war hero and loyal friend of Barrie] went on watch – 8 to 12, 12 to 4, 4 to 8 am – each of us expecting to see JMB die. Cynthia arrived towards the end of Bernard Freyberg's watch … still alive … got hold of surgeon Horder and solicitor Poole with the will … Horder gave an injection, and sufficient energy was pumped into Uncle Jim so that he could put his name to the will that Poole laid before him.

'When Peter and I … were cut out from the will[f3] we talked and thought and eventually went to consult a leading solicitor, Theodore Goddard. What did he advise? If, he said, we would get 1. Freyberg to state in Court how unconscious JMB was etc etc, and 2. Frank Thurston[f4] to agree with the repeated manoeuvres of Cynthia [what Nico referred to as Cynthia 'crying her woes: talking of her oldest (dotty) son and her poverty etc etc etc'] then we couldn't fail – in his opinion – to win the case. We did get Bernard and Frank to say they would back us up; but then we each thought how horrid the whole thing was going to be, and we decided not to sue.'[8]

Peter's feud with Cynthia continued and was well known to the family. As fate would have it, the antagonists died within a few days of one another, Cynthia on the Thursday before Peter. But he had long given up the fight for control of the Barrie Estate, and was indeed on the point of retirement. Barrie's will had been published twenty-three years before Peter stepped under the train at Sloane Square. It would surely not, on its own, have driven him to take his life. In any case, Peter had no reason to feel that Barrie had exploited him financially. On the contrary, from 1910 Barrie generously financed Peter's upbringing,

including his schooling at Eton, and he founded the publishing firm of Peter Davies Ltd for him. If Peter continued to agonise over Barrie's will, Cynthia was to blame, not Barrie, and her all too human greed was surely not enough to persuade a man like Peter to commit suicide.

Neither the legacy of the Great War nor the association with *Peter Pan* nor Cynthia's actions were sufficient alone to topple Peter into depression. Stronger by far was the shock of investigating his family background, a project which had obsessed him for fifteen years before his death. After the Second World War, Peter began to research and write a family history, making use of the thousands of letters he had inherited from Barrie, along with 'pencilled notes of conversations' with Arthur who had been unable to talk after an operation to remove his upper jaw. A six-part history, not for publication, was originally envisaged and in 1946, to extend his primary source material, Peter began consulting family friends and personal witnesses, including Nanny Hodgson.

The first part, dealing with the coming together of his father and mother, had gone well, a snapshot of late Victorian grace, charm and dignity; but, wrote Peter to Nanny, 'The entry on the scene of JMB introduces a strange and unavoidably controversial element into this compilation.'

That this was understatement was clear by December 1946, when Peter was admitting to Nanny that his work on it was 'melancholy and sad enough', and by April 1949: 'Alas, the more one learns of those sad days, the sadder the tale becomes.' So depressed did the research make him that he took to calling the history *The Morgue*, and eventually had to bring it to an early end.

One of the questions that first troubled Peter, who had with equanimity published the 'lives' of so many other people, concerned Arthur's apparent reluctance when Sylvia

welcomed Barrie into their lives, and almost daily into their home when Arthur was out at work.

Peter was shocked for example to discover that his mother and father had begun to take separate holidays only a few years into their marriage.

‘It was, I think, during the Easter holidays of this year [1905, when Peter was 8] that S. [Sylvia] with Jack and Michael went to Normandy with JMB and Mary B [Barrie’s wife], while G [George] and I went with A [Arthur] to Kirkby. It has always seemed to me, looking back, that this arrangement can hardly have been come to without a good deal of argument and protest … I have no letters referring to the episode.’

On 25 November 1946, Peter wrote to Nanny: ‘I am going to ask you one or two questions which you may not care to answer. If you don’t want to, that’s all right of course. If you find you can, I shall be grateful to you.’ Beneath each of the questions he asked Nanny, Peter wrote the word ‘Answer’ and left a space for her to fill in her response.

There was no love lost between Barrie and Nanny Hodgson, who resented his intrusion on her territory and disliked what she regarded as his subversive way with the boys. Barrie admitted there were ‘many coldnesses and even bickerings between us … We were rivals.’[f5] Still fiercely loyal to her employers forty years after their deaths, and still protective towards Peter, her answers are nevertheless fair – even diplomatic. But the truth shines through.

> Q. Did JMB’s entry into the scheme of things occasionally cause ill-feeling or quarrelling between father and mother?
>
> A. What was of value to the One had little or no value to the Other.

On the question of whether there was argument over Sylvia going with Barrie to France, she wrote: