

Heritage house also literary monument

By Valerie Green

WHEN SIR JAMES M. Barrie wrote *A Window In Thrums* in 1889, a story set in his native village of Kirriemuir, Scotland, he could little have imagined that one day a house built thousands of kilometres away in Canada would be named in honor of his work.

Thrums was completed in 1911 and still stands today on Barrie Rd. in Gordon Head. Although somewhat hidden by tree branches, if you look very closely, high up under the peak of the roof, you will see that small special window depicted in Barrie's book: "The square foot of glass where Jess sat in her chair and looked down the brae . . ."

James Barrie, of course, was best known for *Peter Pan*, about a "little boy who never grew up." Perhaps, it was that mystic spirit of childlike wonder that travelled with Barrie's young cousin, George Watson, when he left Scotland and emigrated to Canada as a boy of 17.

After a short stay in Ontario, Watson came west to Victoria and established himself here as a qualified stonemason. It wasn't long before he met Elizabeth Grant, a young lady, also from Scotland,

who had come to Canada to join her two brothers, William and James. Watson's and Grant's mutual interest in music and choral work brought them together and eventually led to marriage.

In 1903, the Watsons moved from town out to Gordon Head. They had purchased land from Dr. John Ash, who had been provincial secretary from 1872 to 1874 to B.C.'s first legislature after confederation.

On his land, Dr. Ash had built a cottage, which he had named Jersey Hall in memory of his second wife, a daughter of Sir John de Veulle, High Sheriff of Jersey in the Channel Islands.

The Watsons bought Jersey Hall from Dr. Ash. They made it their first home in the Gordon Head countryside and came to love it as much as Dr. Ash (after whom Ash Rd. is named) had.

Like many Scots, the Watsons eventually decided they wanted a home built of stone, the material George Watson loved to work with. Construction, therefore, began on Thrums on their acreage in Gordon Head and the house was finally completed in 1911, when the Watsons and their three young daughters moved in.

The youngest of those daughters, now Mrs. Marjorie Goodwin, still lives in Thrums with her son, Barrie, named in honor of their famous family member. It is ironic the house also stands on Barrie Rd., but that connection is purely coincidental, for the road originally was part of Ash Rd., until that section of it was renamed.

Goodwin recalls the painstaking work that went into the building of Thrums and the meticulous craftsmanship employed by her father in its construction.

Obviously, for her, the old granite house is overflowing with memories, not only of its construction, when the Watson family lived at Jersey Hall (now referred to as "the barn") but also of those years when her father worked long and hard hours at his craft in and around Victoria.

The seven-kilometre trip to Victoria took an hour by horse and buggy or involved a long and arduous bicycle ride for her father. Some of George Watson's fine stonework is still visible around town today: the legislature blocks; the old post office building; the old public library; the stonework at the gates of what was once the Rithet Estate, Gisburn.

Years of working with the stone dust eventually effected Mr. Watson's health so he turned his attentions to farming.

His famous cherries and strawberries were much sought after in Victoria. He also planted many holly and arbutus trees on his Gordon Head property. One beautiful arbutus, which stands in front of the house today, sheds profusely.

The living room of Thrums is an elegantly panelled area divided from the front hall by two hand-turned polished pillars (each one having been made from a complete tree). All the carpentry work in the house was the work of Gordon Head pioneer Isaac Summers.

A focal point of the living room is the beautiful grand piano, around which memories again abound from the days when the Watsons frequently entertained choral and musical groups in their home. George Watson also conducted choirs at the old Calvary Baptist Church and at the First Presbyterian Church.

During the First World War, the Watsons' hospitality became something of a legend. Both were very active in community life and Mrs. Watson was long remembered for her Red Cross

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work. Elizabeth Watson was also prominent in the Gordon Head Women's Institute formed in 1914 and, in fact, became its first president. George Watson ran twice as a reeve in Saanich. His campaign slogan, "Watson and water", became very well known.

Their daughter has carried on the family tradition of music over the years. She taught for seven years (1927-34) at the original old Gordon Head Elementary School. During her tenure, the school won many prizes at music festivals for its choir work.

A few years ago, Mrs. Goodwin donated many of these awards back to the present Gordon Head Elementary School, which today stands on Kenmore Rd. She felt they should be part of the school's history.

In later years after her husband (Capt. Charles Goodwin) died, Mrs. Goodwin returned to the schoolroom and taught for 10 years at Quadra Primary, years she describes as pure joy. Many of her pupils from those early days are prominent citizens in Victoria today.

A fitting tribute to the great contribution Mrs. Goodwin must have made as a teacher is the beautiful arrangement of red roses that stands on a table in her living room. She says they were a birthday gift from one of her past students, who has sent such a bouquet each year, since the early days of their student/teacher relationship.

Thrums is a fine spacious house, consisting of living room, dining room,



Thrums, named for the title of a story by Scottish author Sir James M. Barrie, was built in Gordon Head in 1911.

large kitchen, four bedrooms and an enormous bathroom with an elegant pedestal bath, a reminder of days gone by. There is also a large front veranda, which was glassed in in later years by the late Mrs. Watson.

A small glass-walled room by the back door of Thrums served as the Gordon Head Post Office for 14 years, until it closed in 1920.

As you enter the house, the first thing you see in the panelled front hall is a picture of George Watson.

"Many people have suggested I change the panelling and perhaps replace the picture with a mirror," Mrs. Goodwin says. "Maybe they are right and it would lighten the hall. But, for as long as I live, my father's picture will hang there. This is still his house."

You get the feeling, however, that Thrums is more than just George Watson's house. It was, and is, his dream, too, a dream that travelled with him from his childhood days in far-away Scotland.

It would seem, over the years, many people have shown more than a passing interest in Thrums and would love to own it, should it ever be sold.

But that romantic, adventurous spirit George Watson brought with him from Scotland so long ago and with which he built his "house in the country", and the fine materials and loving care he put into it, make this particular heritage home something special.

As such, it should remain a family's bond of solidarity for many generations to come.