

# Daphne du Maurier

## The author and her work



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**D**aphne du Maurier was born in London on 13th May 1907. Her father, Sir Gerald du Maurier, was a well-known actor and theatre manager. Her mother, Muriel had acted too. Her grandfather, George du Maurier, had been a famous novelist. *Tilby*, his novel about the lives of artists in Paris, was extremely popular at the end of the nineteenth century.

Gerald du Maurier loved his three daughters, but he wanted a son. Daphne knew this, and when she was a child, she wanted to be a boy. She liked to dress in boys' clothes because she hated being a girl. Daphne du Maurier was a very pretty girl, with fair hair and beautiful blue eyes. But she was shy – she found it difficult to talk to people. Daphne liked writing and she liked to be alone. By the time she was fourteen years old, she was writing a book about a boy called Maurice.

The du Maurier family had many friends who were writers – for example Edgar Wallace, the author of crime thriller stories, and J.M. Barrie, the author of *Peter Pan*. These writers often visited the du Mauriers' house when Daphne was a child and she got to know them. One of Daphne's

uncles edited a magazine and it was he who published her first story when she was a teenager. He also found a literary agent for her. The literary agent helped Daphne to sell her work to publishers.

Daphne went to school in London and then in Paris. Her parents were very rich and they allowed her to do what she wanted. She travelled to Europe with friends and she enjoyed sailing small boats on the rivers, and around the coast of southern England. She sold her first novel, *The Loving Spirit*, to a famous publisher when she was in her early twenties. It was published in 1931.

### Cornwall

Daphne went on writing for the rest of her life and she wrote many books. Most of her stories are mysteries or historical novels. She also wrote biographies – books about the lives of famous people. She wrote several books about the county of Cornwall. She loved this county in the southwest of England and she lived there for a large part of her life. Quite early in her life, she saw a house called Menabilly in southern Cornwall and fell in love with it. She wanted to live there very much. Seventeen years later, she was able to rent Menabilly, and the happiest days of her life were spent there. When Daphne wrote about the house, Manderley, in her famous story *Rebecca*, she was thinking about Menabilly.

It is probably true that the Daphne du Maurier novels and stories which people remember best are those which were made into movies. The great movie director Alfred Hitchcock filmed some of du Maurier's stories. His versions of the novel *Rebecca* (US, 1963. Starring Laurence Olivier, Joan Fontaine, George Sanders, Gladys Cooper) and the short story, *The Birds* (US, 1969. Starring Rod Taylor, Tippi Hedren, Suzanne Pleshette) are famous and still very popular. The film versions of: *Jamaica Inn* (UK, 1939. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Starring Charles Laughton, Maureen O'Hara, Leslie Banks); *Frenchman's Creek* (US, 1944. Directed by Mitchell Leisen. Starring Joan Fontaine, Basil Rathbone, Arturo de Cordova); *My Cousin Rachel* (US, 1952. Directed by Henry Koster. Starring Richard Burton and Olivia de Havilland)

and *Don't Look Now* (UK, 1973. Directed by Nicholas Roeg. Starring Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland) are still enjoyed today.

In 1932, Daphne married Frederick Arthur Browning. Frederick – who was known to his friends by the name ‘Boy’ Browning – was a colonel in the British Army at that time. He later became a general. Browning was given a knighthood for his leadership during World War II. He became Sir Frederick Browning. The couple were happily married and had three children. They were together until Browning’s death in 1965. However during their long marriage, Daphne had a very close loving

relationship with the famous actress Gertrude Lawrence. After Browning was knighted, Daphne’s name became Lady Browning, although she always used her family name when she wrote her books. In 1969 Queen Elizabeth II gave Daphne the title, Dame Daphne du Maurier, to thank her for her literary work. Daphne died on 19th April 1989.

Since Daphne du Maurier’s death, two well-known British writers – Susan Hill and Sally Beauman – have written novels which try to guess what happened to the characters after the end of the story, *Rebecca*. They imagine the truth about Rebecca’s murder.



Cornwall, England.

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### A selection of works by Daphne Du Maurier

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|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1936 <i>Jamaica Inn</i>             | 1952 <i>The Apple Tree</i>          |
| 1938 <i>Rebecca</i>                 | 1957 <i>The Scapegoat</i>           |
| 1941 <i>Come Wind, Come Weather</i> | 1959 <i>Breaking Point</i>          |
| 1941 <i>Frenchman's Creek</i>       | 1963 <i>The Glass Blowers</i>       |
| 1944 <i>Spring Picture</i>          | 1967 <i>Vanishing Cornwall</i>      |
| 1946 <i>The King's General</i>      | 1969 <i>The House on the Strand</i> |
| 1949 <i>September Tide</i>          | 1971 <i>Not After Midnight</i>      |
| 1951 <i>My Cousin Rachel</i>        |                                     |

(For a list of Daphne du Maurier’s stories that have been simplified for the Macmillan Guided Readers Series, see a copy of the current Readers catalogue.)