

MENSTON 2025 HERITAGE GROUP

Eric Knight and 'Lassie'

Eric Knight sits with the first "Lassie", called Pal, on the MGM movie set.

Eric Knight was born April 10, 1897 in Menston. His father was a diamond merchant who, when Eric was two years old, was killed during the Boer War. His mother then moved to St. Petersburg, Imperial Russia, to work as a governess for the imperial family. In 1912 the family settled in Philadelphia in the United States and Knight was brought up by an uncle and aunt.

In WW1 Knight joined the Princess Pat Regiment in Toronto, Canada to fight for his beloved Yorkshire in 1917. His only two brothers enlisted in the 110th Pennsylvania National Guard. They were killed on the same day in 1918.

Knight worked as a reporter and a screenwriter, he helped co-author the film, *Battle of Britain* in the "Why we Fight" Series under the direction of Frank Capra. He was involved in many more Hollywood movies between the wars.

His novel *Lassie Come - Home* was published in 1940, expanded from a short story published in 1938 in *The Saturday Evening Post*, it is no coincidence that he and his wife raised collie dogs on their farm in Pennsylvania.

The film of the book *Lassie Come - Home*, directed by Fred Wilcox came out in 1943, it starred Roddy Mc Dowell and among others, Elizabeth Taylor in her second film role. The film was a huge success and other sequels followed. The story of a loyal dog owned by a humble Yorkshire family, defeating all odds to remain with them has tugged the heart strings of readers and film fans over decades.

One of Knight's last books was *Sam Small Flies Again*, republished as *The Flying Yorkshireman*. On the back of *The Flying Yorkshireman*, this blurb appeared:

England's answer to America's James Thurber or Thorne Smith, Knight created the character Sam Small, a villager from Yorkshire whose stock in trade was an endless parade of outrageous tarradiddles and tall tales. Sam's adventures are chronicled in the ten stories of this vintage volume, originally published as *Sam Small Flies Again*. That's right, Sam can literally fly, which puts him into all sorts of mischief'. "An immensely funny book."

– *The New York Times*

In 1943 whilst serving in the US army as a major, Eric Knight was killed in an air accident in Suriname.

Despite the short period of his life Knight spent in Menston, the experience was to provide him with inspiration for the rest of his life.

