



City of Westminster

Cabinet Member Report

Decision Maker:	Cabinet Member for the Built Environment
Date:	2 February 2016
Classification:	For General Release
Title:	Commemorative Green Plaque for William Henry Hudson, 11 Leinster Square, W2
Wards Affected:	Bayswater
Key Decision:	State if report involves a Key Decision and whether an entry has been included in the Forward Plan of Key Decisions
Financial Summary:	The Green Plaque Scheme depends on sponsorship. Sponsorship has been secured for this plaque
Report of:	Strategic Director, Built Environment

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 William Henry Hudson author, naturalist and ornithologist lived at 11 Leinster Square. He is best known for his exotic romantic novels, particularly his masterpiece, *Green Mansions*. Hudson's later works helped foster the back-to-nature movement of the 1920s to 1930s.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the nomination for a Westminster Commemorative Green Plaque for William Henry Hudson at his London home at 11 Leinster Square, be approved, subject to sponsorship in full.

3. Reasons for decision

- 3.1 William Henry Hudson was a British author, naturalist, scholar and poet and Bayswater resident. In his works, set both in South America and the English countryside, he was able to combine his love and understanding of nature and human nature to create vivid and compelling stories. He challenged readers to rethink the relationship between mankind and nature and re-assess the beliefs that divide the cultures of the world.

4. Policy Context

- 4.1 The commemorative Green Plaques scheme complements a number of Council strategies: to improve the legibility and understanding of Westminster's heritage and social history; to provide information for Westminster's visitors; to provide imaginative and accessible educational tools to raise awareness and understanding of local areas, particularly for young people; to celebrate the richness and diversity of Westminster's former residents.

5. Background

William Henry Hudson (born 1841 – died 1922)

5.1 Early Life in Argentina

- 5.1.1 Hudson was born in the borough of Florencio Varela, in Buenos Aires Province, Argentina on August 8 1841. He was the son of Daniel Hudson and his wife Catherine née Kemble, settlers of English and Irish origin from New England. They had decided to settle in Argentina because of the milder climate. His father had moderate success as a sheep rancher, and young William spent the first fifteen years of his life in the romantic and rural surroundings of the pampas on what was then a lawless frontier, lovingly recalled in his book *Far Away and Long Ago* (1918).
- 5.1.2 He received his education through the efforts of his mother, and developed a love for books and reading at an early age. Now and then a visiting schoolteacher would be available for some formal education. His childhood was spent on two ranches where the observation of nature stimulated him toward the career of a naturalist and where he likewise formed many of his literary and philosophical ideas.
- 5.1.3 In 1856 his family suffered financial problems which required moving to a more modest home. Shortly thereafter, fifteen year-old Hudson was attacked by typhus, and before he recovered, he was stricken with rheumatic fever. His mother slowly nursed him back to health, but her constant devotion probably contributed to her own decline and her death in 1859. These illnesses, which

Hudson faced, caused in the youth a severe psychological and philosophical shock. His heart was permanently damaged, and he would never be able to lead a strenuous life. He spent much time alone, becoming an introspective and studious young man.

- 5.1.4 After his father's death in 1868, Hudson led a wandering life with excursions to Brazil, Uruguay and Patagonia, keeping detailed records of his travels and observations. The return of his brother, Edwin, from the United States, gave Hudson the chance to discover the works of Charles Darwin, which confirmed his own observations of the local flora and fauna. He published his ornithological work in *Proceedings of the Royal Zoological Society*, initially in an English mingled with Spanish idioms. Hudson's growing reputation as a naturalist attracted the attention of the director of the National Museum in Buenos Aires and the representative in Argentina of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. His investigations also became recognized in England, and Hudson now devoted his time to the study of the Stone Age Indians.

5.2 Hudson's arrival in London

- 5.2.1 In 1874, Hudson decided to leave Argentina and to reside permanently in England. His reports had won him some fame among scientists in his field, and he probably felt that he could achieve more success abroad. Moreover, his temperament and training had really been more British than South American so that he consequently regarded England as his spiritual home.
- 5.2.2 Two years after arriving in England, poverty and ill-health may have occasioned his marriage in 1876 to a woman much older than himself, Emily Wingrave, a former concert singer who had been his landlady at 11 Leinster Square around 1874-75. The couple lived at No 11 from 1876 to 1884. Their marriage, not particularly happy because of the couple's incompatibility, survived precariously on the proceeds of Emily's two boarding houses (11 and 16 Leinster Square), which nevertheless helped Hudson financially and gave him a stable social life.
- 5.2.3 In 1886 his wife inherited her sister's mortgaged house at 40 St Lukes Road, Bayswater, where Hudson was to spend most of the remainder of his life. It is here that in 1938 a bronze relief plaque was erected by Hudson's Friends Society of Buenos Aires and in 1991 a second plaque by the Argentine Ambassador and the Anglo-Argentine Society.
- 5.2.4 Here in England he published a series of ornithological studies including *Argentine Ornithology* (1888-1899) and *British Birds* (1895). He followed these with popular books set in the bucolic environment of the English countryside, including *Hampshire Days* (1903) *Afoot in England* (1909) and *A Shepherd's Life* (1910). Other works include *The Purple Land* (1885) (which Ernest Hemingway famously refers to in his novel *The Sun Also Rises*), *The Naturalist in La Plata* (1892), his best known non-fiction *Far Away and Long Ago* (1918), *A Hind in*

Richmond Park (1922), *A Crystal Age* (1887), *A Little Boy Lost* (1905), *Birds in Town and Village* (1919), *Dead Man's Plack and an Old Thorn* (1920), and *A Traveller in Little Things* (1921). Hudson also wrote short stories, *El Ombu* and *Marta Riquelme* being considered outstanding examples of the genre.

5.2.5 However, Hudson is best known for the now classic novel, *Green Mansions* (1904) which won him critical acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic and secured his reputation as a serious writer.

5.2.6 Hudson was an early and influential member of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The Society was formed in the late Victorian era from The Plumage League founded in 1889 as a protest group campaigning against the barbarous use of bird skins and feathers in women's hats. The group gained popularity and eventually amalgamated with the Fur and Feather League of Croydon, of which Hudson was a member, to form the RSPB. Hudson was Chairman of Committee in 1894.

5.3 Green Mansions

5.3.1 Hudson's most compelling and popular works *Green Mansions* is an exotic and tragic romance set in 1840, about a young man called Abel, a political exile from Venezuela. Surviving fever and hostile Indian attacks, failing at journal-keeping and gold hunting, he decides to live with an Indian tribe in Guyana, near a South American jungle forest, to while away his time. His new-found life is shaken when, he meets the "magical" forest-dweller, the beautiful bird-like human, Rima. He is moved by her story and travels through the jungle with her and her grandfather to find the answers about her past. But the presence of the young man has changed the Indian tribe forever, with vast and tragic consequences.

5.3.2 Hudson based Rima and her lost tribe on persistent rumours about a tribe of white people who lived in the mountains. Many authors of the time also recounted "lost worlds" and "lost tribes", the most successful being H. Rider Haggard, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Robert E. Howard. Hudson's book has endured as literature because of its evocative and lyrical prose, and his naturalist's keen vision of the jungle.

5.3.3 Rima also exemplifies the "natural man", a philosophical notion put forward by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and others that someone raised away from corrupting civilization would be naturally pure of heart and attuned to their environment. Tarzan, raised by apes, and Mowgli, raised by wolves, are Rima's literary cousins.

5.3.4 In 1959, the book was adapted into a Hollywood film, also entitled *Green Mansions*, starring Audrey Hepburn as Rima, with Anthony Perkins as Abel. The film, which was directed by Hepburn's husband, Mel Ferrer, was a critical and box office failure.

5.4 Recognition

- 5.4.1 His romances secured Hudson the friendship of many English men of letters, among them Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, Edward Garnett, and George Gissing. His books on ornithological studies brought recognition from the statesman Sir Edward Grey, who procured him a state pension in 1901 and Hudson became a British Citizen. He had finally achieved fame with his books on the English countryside by their detailed, imaginative descriptions, conveying the sensations of one who accepted nature in all its aspects. These works did much to foster the “back-to-nature” movement of the 1920s and 1930s but were subsequently little read.
- 5.4.2 Towards the end of his life, Hudson moved to Worthing in West Sussex. When he died on August 18, 1922. Morley Roberts, the novelist and short story writer, who witnessed his death, wrote: "I wished to take him out upon the open pampa, with a long wide view beyond the sight of man even on horseback, with the great clear sky above. So I would have “digged” a grave and put him there to rest in his blanket just as he had fallen asleep, without disturbing his attitude of quiet peace."
- 5.4.3 Hudson is buried in Worthing's Broadwater Cemetery. The epitaph on his gravestone reads: *“He Loved Birds and Green Places and the Wind on the Heath, and Saw Brightness of the Skirts of God.”*
- 5.4.4 In 1925 a statue of Rima, the heroine of *Green Mansions*, carved by Sir Jacob Epstein, was erected in Hudson’s memory in the bird sanctuary at Hyde Park in London. In Argentina, Hudson is considered to belong to the national literature of the country and is known as *Guillermo Enrique Hudson*. A town in Berazategui Partido and several other public places and institutions are named after him.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The cost of the plaque, its installation and Green Plaque Scheme administration costs will be borne by the sponsors, The Alchemi Group. There is no cost to Westminster City Council.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 The property, 11 Leinster Square where Hudson lived is listed Grade II. A Listed Building Consent application was submitted by the sponsors and Listed Building Consent has been granted for the proposed plaque.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 The owners of 11 Leinster Square support the nomination and Ward Members have been consulted and no objections have been raised.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact: Kim Patterson

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Location plan of 11 Leinster Square, W2, at 1:1250 scale

Appendix 2

Drawing showing proposed location of William Hudson plaque at 11 Leinster Square.

Appendix 3

Wording and layout of proposed William Hudson Plaque

For completion by the **Cabinet Member** for the Built Environment

Declaration of Interest

I have <no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed: _____ Date: _____

NAME: **Councillor Robert Davis MBE DL**

State nature of interest if any

.....
(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled **Commemorative Green Plaque for William Henry Hudson at 11 Leinster Square, W2.**

Signed

Cabinet Member for the Built Environment

Date

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:
.....
.....

If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Director of Law, City Treasurer and, if there are staffing resources implications, the Director of Human Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.

Other Implications

1. Resources Implications

1.1 There are no resources implications arising from this report

2. Business Plan Implications

2.1 There are no Business Plan implications arising from this report

3. Risk Management Implications

3.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report

4. Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment including Health and Safety Implications

4.1 There are no health and safety and wellbeing issues arising from this report

5. Crime and Disorder Implications

5.1 There are no crime and disorder issues arising from this report

6. Impact on the Environment

6.1 There are no environmental issues arising from this report

7. Equalities Implications

7.1 There are no equality issues arising from this report

8. Staffing Implications

8.1 There are no staffing issues arising from this report

9. Human Rights Implications

9.1 There are no issues relating to responsibilities under the Human Rights Act 1998 arising from this report

10. Energy Measure Implications

10.1 There are no energy measure issues arising from this report

11. Communications Implications

11.1 Should this report be approved and an unveiling ceremony arranged the Council's press section will be informed

Note to report authors: If there are particularly significant implications in any of the above categories these should be moved to the main body of the report.