



Ten of the Best Stories set in Tudor times

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Ten of the Best

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Janet Fisher selects novels with a Tudor background.

Stories set in Tudor times

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In this year of 2009, the five hundredth anniversary of the accession of Henry VIII, **Janet Fisher** selects ten of the best children's novels set in Tudor times. Interestingly Henry himself does not 'star' in these books, but his wives do, as do his daughters Elizabeth and Mary, and Mary, Queen of Scots, who made Elizabeth's life so difficult. The effects of Henry's dissolution of the monasteries and the break with the Church of Rome upon ordinary people are written of, including life in the more remote parts of the kingdom. Listed in chronological order of reign, these titles are suitable for readers of 10-14 and upwards. The selection includes recent publications and some old favourites currently out of print but usually available from www.abebooks.com [3] or www.amazon.co.uk [4].

[image:Anne Boleyn.jpg:left]

Anne Boleyn and Me: The Diary of Elinor Valjean, London 1525-1536

Alison Prince, Scholastic 'My Story', 256pp, 978 0 439 978675 0, £5.99 pbk

Anne Boleyn's rise and fall and its consequences are told in diary form by Elinor whose mother is one of Catherine of Aragon's ladies in waiting. The reader glimpses what Henry VIII was like as a young king, and watches through Elinor's eyes his infatuation with Anne, her cleverness at keeping him waiting amid the power struggle at court and with Rome. The plight of Tudor women, pawns in a man's world, is brought savagely home to this generation with Anne's execution. The diary form adds to the reader's sense of being a powerless observer.

[image:A Cold Wind is Blowing.jpg:left]

A Cold Wind Blowing

Barbara Willard, Kestrel, 176pp, 978 0 7226 5855 0, hbk (o/p), Puffin, 978 0 14 030726 9 (also o/p)

One of the matchless Mantlemass series of novels, set in Ashdown Forest, Sussex, this book tells the tragic story of Piers Medley who swears to look after a young woman whom his uncle, a monk on the run, gives his life to save. The effect of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries is felt even in this rural setting when Piers' friend Robin comes to hunt down priests or monks who have married nuns in an effort to escape execution. Priests may marry, but nuns have to stick to their vow of chastity, and even Piers' love cannot save Isabella from the fear of her fate. First published in 1972.

[image:Stars of Fortune.jpg:left]

Stars of Fortune

Cynthia Harnett, Jane Nissen Books, 240pp, 978 1 903252 24 6, £7.99 pbk

Tudor monarchs seem to have attracted plots and intrigue and the Lady Elizabeth was no exception while her sister Mary was on the throne. Based on the real Washington family, ancestors of George, Cynthia Harnett describes a fictitious plot to rescue the Lady Elizabeth from Woodstock where she is held captive. Filled with the minutiae of everyday life and enhanced by the author's drawings, the excitement builds, capturing the fever of the time. But at the heart of the story is a warm and loving family whose older boys are swept up in the plot while their younger brother battles with his inability to keep a secret. First published in 1956.

[image:Cue for Treason.jpg:left]

Cue for Treason

Geoffrey Trease, Puffin Modern Classic, 208pp, 978 0 14 132570 5, £7.99 pbk

Peter Brownrigg has to flee his Cumbrian home after falling foul of the local lord and, along with another fugitive, hides in a chest belonging to a group of play actors travelling to London. The fugitives join the company and act in plays at the Globe Theatre, Kit being a particular hit as Juliet. While looking for a lost manuscript the two 'boys' uncover a plot to kill Elizabeth I at a theatrical performance and are asked to spy for Robert Cecil. They ride north with one of Cecil's men, no mean journey at this time, and return after he is killed, hotly pursued by the plotters. First published in 1940, this is Geoffrey Trease at his very best with a fast paced plot, a heroine disguised as a boy, and an exciting journey.

[image:Raider's Tide.jpg:left]

Raider's Tide

Maggie Prince, Collins, 208pp, 978 0 00 712403 9, pbk (o/p)

Beatrice and her family live in a peel tower surrounded by beacons ready to be lit to warn of an imminent raid by the Scots from across the border. One such raid leads to all that Beatrice has lived with being turned upside down when she shelters a wounded Scot instead of giving him up. Her hate for the raiders turns to love for this particular enemy as she nurses him back to health and helps him to escape. Full of the details of life in this remote countryside, the reliance on neighbours, the herbs used in medicine and, even here, the effects of the changes of religion brought about by Tudor monarchs, in this case Elizabeth, this is an exciting historical adventure with a touch of romance.

[image:Gunner's Boy.jpg:left]

Gunner's Boy

Ann Turnbull, A & C Black 'Tudor Flashbacks', 96pp, 978 0 7136 6198 9, £4.99 pbk

John, aged 12, enlists in the navy to fight the Spanish to avenge his father's death. Life is rough and hard and he encounters a bully, Luke, but then both boys and their ship are part of the fleet that defeats the Spanish Armada. In short staccato sentences, there are vivid descriptions of the battles, the harshness of life at sea in a Tudor warship, amid the noise and violence of battle. At the end John discovers that vengeance was not what he was seeking, finding compassion for the enemy. This is one of the very few sea stories set in this period. (One of the best, Ronald Welch's **The Hawk** (1967) is long out of print.)

[image:At House of Magician.jpg:left]

At the House of the Magician

Mary Hooper, Bloomsbury, 240pp, 978 0 7475 8886 3, £6.99 pbk

By chance Lucy becomes nursemaid in Dr John Dee's household. John Dee is Elizabeth I's court magician and Lucy becomes involved in his dealings with the occult when she agrees to impersonate the dead daughter of a Lord. When she says more than she means to, she finds a chance to become a lady in waiting and a spy for Walsingham. There is a vivid description of an audience held by Elizabeth giving the people a chance to petition her and Mary Hooper has found the secret of making the speech sound Elizabethan without 'pritheeing' all over the place. Peopled with real as well as fictitious characters and full of detail of life at the time, the story paints a good picture of Elizabethan life.

[image:Traitor!.jpg:left]

Traitor!

John Pilkington, Usborne 'Elizabethan Mysteries', 224pp, 978 0 7460 8711 4, £5.99 pbk

In the second of the 'Elizabethan Mysteries', Ben's company are invited to play at the Rose Theatre and then to perform a new play for Elizabeth I, but things go wrong and he and Matt determine to find the culprits aiming to sabotage their performances after a series of incidents culminating in a stabbing on stage. This is a fast paced adventure full of the lower side of Elizabethan life, set in the theatre world but not exclusively so, showing the uncertain life of the apprentice, the somewhat precarious fate of the theatre owners and players, with the boys criss-crossing the Thames in their pursuit of the culprits.

[image:You Never Knew Her As I Did.jpg:left]

You Never Knew Her As I Did

Mollie Hunter, Hamish Hamilton, 216pp, 978 0 241 10643 3, hbk (o/p)

The fabled charm of Mary, Queen of Scots, which binds her followers, male and female, to her, seeps from the pages of Mollie Hunter's novel telling of her attempted escapes from Lochleven Castle. Will Douglas, longing for excitement, finds more than he bargained for when Mary is held by his father's family in their island castle. Gradually most of the inhabitants fall under her spell and letters are smuggled in and out. One attempt fails and Mary's tragic dignity is poignantly described. Mary, while never centre stage, dominates the story with her beauty, grace and love of intrigue and her desperate wish to see her son and taste freedom again. First published in 1981.

[image:Traveller in Time.jpg:left]

A Traveller in Time

Alison Uttley, ill. Faith Jaques, Jane Nissen Books, 288pp, 978 1 903252 27 7, £6.99 pbk

While visiting relations in the Derbyshire countryside in the early twentieth century, Penelope finds herself back in the time of one of the Babington plots to free Mary, Queen of Scots, via a tunnel to their farmhouse, Thackers, from Wingfield Manor, where Mary is held prisoner. Penelope, of course, knows Mary's fate but is helpless to stop Anthony Babington from his hopeless quest to free his beloved Queen. The reader observes all this while enjoying the descriptions of Penelope's double life, as she moves seamlessly from her world to the Babingtons', being absorbed into their lives without question. First published in 1939, this magical, timeless story does not fail to entrance.

[image:Janet Fisher.jpg:left]

Janet Fisher is a children's literature consultant.



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