



The Night Raid

Clare Harvey, author, seen here in the Malvern Gazette, 17th Nov 2017, with her novel "Night Raid". Her book is set in Malvern during the 2nd World War and features the real-life artist Dame Laura Knight.

Below is a review of the book, written by Gwyn Klee, our Treasurer and Vice Chair - enjoy.

Review of 'The Night Raid' Clare Harvey

Some readers will enjoy this tale, a rollicking run through the set pieces of war reporting with which we have become familiar – the food shortages, the rigours of public transport: trains still have that faded glamour that wartime images instilled, the hell of air raids, the casual sexual congress together with its aftermath. There is a romance, nicely paced, with a sad ending, authentically tragic.

Some readers will enjoy the narrative tapestry, sometimes so closely woven that the stitches of the story are hard to pick out. The prose is purple; skies are mother-of-pearl, bays are curling crescents, hawthorns are wind-gnarled, sweeping waves are sequined, coves are a translucent sweep, light is liquid; there's more, those are within a few lines on one page. Some may think that the thread of an illegitimate child of Harold fairly preposterous and too near to artist's licentiousness; some may think that the fate of the Ruby Loftus painting is far-fetched. What balances these flights of fancy is the author's treatment of the working class, authentic and revealing of their hardships, made harder by war-time conditions, attitudes to babies born 'out-of-wedlock' and the rigours of war-work in factories. No glamour of a smart uniform here.

For myself, I found the Mills and Boon treatment hard to follow, sometimes feeling like the snake captured by the stare of Rikki-Tikki, unable to look away.

The surprise was the portrait of Laura Knight. Little of what she said or did in this book was, as far as we can know, out of character. Her outspokenness, the bubbles of resentment at Harold's negative attitude to her work schedule, driven, in part, by the in-bred anxiety of lack of cash, her sensual approach to female flesh, her toughness and determination to succeed. Of all the characters in this book, Laura is the most rounded and though it hardly compensates for plodding through the novel, allows a different approach to a woman of, sometimes incorrigible, plurality.