



A Sealed Knot re-enactment soldier takes a meal on a break from laying siege

Seduced by the English Civil War

Lindsey Erith, a Cotswolds landowner and patron of classical music and opera, has published two novels set in the aftermath of the English Civil War. *Mary Florida* was published in 2023, and her latest novel, *Wanton Troopers*, was released in November 2024. Here Lindsey explains her fascination with this time period, and what drew her to writing

People often ask me: 'Why the Civil War, then?' It isn't so simple as to explain that I like men with long hair. I think a lost cause is irresistible. It has its own very powerful siren song. There are possibilities. As Sellar and Yeatman put it in their parody book, *1066 And All That: 'The Cavaliers are wrong but wromantic; the Roundheads are right but repulsive.'* Well,

what could be more appealing than that? The delight of it all traces to my being drawn like a magnet to Father's *Great Encyclopaedia of Universal Knowledge*.

I was seven or eight when my nose in the pages first discovered Prince Rupert, who fills my requirements rather well. I sat Common Entrance exams at 10 and was cross-questioned by my headmistress

afterwards as to which historical figure I had chosen to write about, as the paper demanded. At the time we were still grinding up through the Tudors. No one was expected to have any interest in history beyond the narrow curriculum. 'Prince Rupert? What?!'

I have the short sight of Marfans sufferers, with which I was born, and focal length being what it is, I never could read a blackboard.

Instead, I read books. I had joined three adult libraries by the age of 10, and read a book a night for a decade (in a somewhat unstructured fashion, admittedly). The country of the mind is freedom of all that.

I can't escape the physical nuisance with which I was born. I have had to learn to walk from scratch four times (so far). The mind's eye is the way out, thank goodness. A complete collapse in health (pain and mobility problems) after I grew to 6ft [*a characteristic of Marfans is to grow tall*], rather insisted that the window of escape came into its own. There wasn't a lot else. It seemed essential to persevere, so I went on reading. CV Wedgwood, illuminating all, remains a favourite to this day.

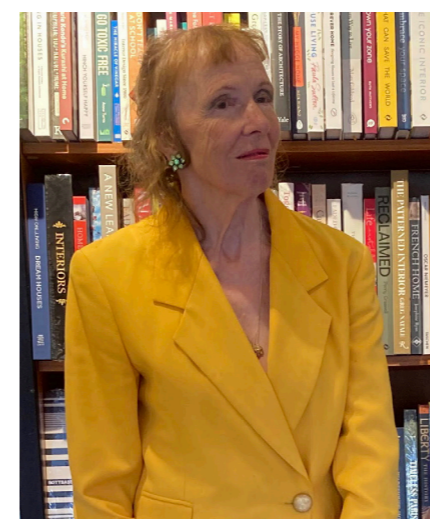
Trapped, I did know giving in would be worse. I eventually gained a graphics diploma which led to equine and human portrait work. I have such a fascination for likeness and character, all of which developed into my ultimate pleasure: a blank sheet of paper.

There it is. What determines us will remain the bedrock of our days. Lonely, painful and often isolated, this was my safe conduct to escape in spirit. So, once with the compelling sheet of lovely white paper, what to do? In any good story, the central character must engage attention, simple as that. Once conjured up, what will that man do? Will he survive in the circumstances of the day?

It is an enormous pleasure to discover. It isn't Jane Austen, where men (forgive me) are cardboard on the page, given to throwing themselves in the pond just to create interest in their wet shirt.

To research my Civil War setting I set out to the re-enactments by The King's Army and The Sealed Knot. I was so impressed by those I saw. They were never am-dram. Reality was a blink away when research and the working up of sub-plots actually marched by, yards from me and my sketch pad.

On one occasion I'd turned out for a re-enactment in Dyrham Park – much more



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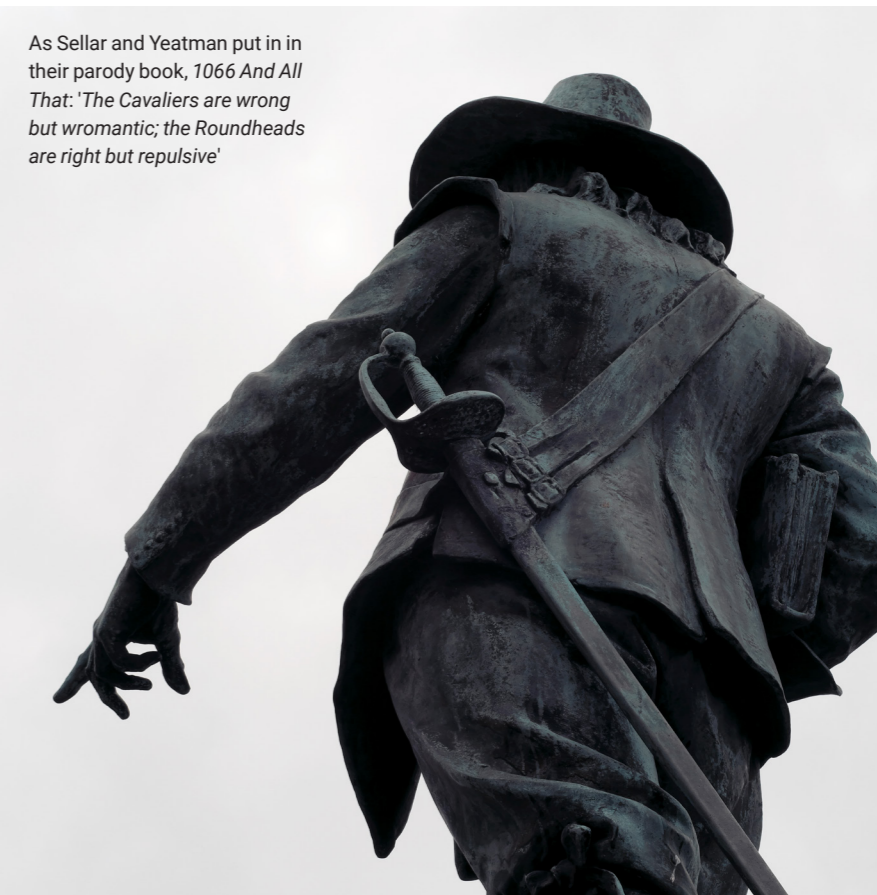


PHOTO: ADRIAN STOK

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exciting than visualising Cromwell and Ireton, his son-in-law, overnighting in Chavenage House, enjoying heavy prayers at bedtime candle-hour. I was watching a press of pikemen, all well drilled, when on a sudden downhill slope one of the men lost his steady footfall. He, pike and all, went charging off out of control, impaled himself in a tree and knocked himself out. Next could have been a scene from *Monty Python* as the St John's Ambulance went in under a white flag.

Mainly, the joy I find in of all this is that of involvement with brave men and sorrows, of love forbidden, and of survival.

So, I have filled pages with (I hope) enticements to read on, turn the pages.

But however did I get to the next stage, a lovely book in my nervous hand?

Things were about to change.

Aha, I had married my hero. Nervously, I asked if he would glance at *Mary Florida*. He took away the sheaf of paper, blank no longer.

Considerable time snailed by. He reappeared, advanced, and I received his rapier glance.

'Lindsey,' said he. 'It's excellent; it must be published.'

He gleamed at me, a life force about to give an opinion. It wasn't what I expected. 'We should enter the Bad Sex Awards,' he declared. 'We'll come third.'

My manuscript was accepted by the first publisher to read it. The rest is history, and evolving at this moment. ●

Lindsey Erith lives on a dairy farm in the Cotswolds. Her new book, *Wanton Troopers*, is the second title in the *Royalist Romances* series. It explores

the heights of love and longing in the tumultuous aftermath of the English Civil War. It was published recently, alongside the audio book read by award-winning actor Clive Hayward.

