

REBEL HEART

ALLY SHERRICK



SYNOPSIS

England, 1645.

Merriweather Pryce is the daughter of a nobleman fighting for King Charles I in a war that divides the country.

When her family home is besieged by Cromwell's army, Merri sets out to get help.

But in a land filled with enemy soldiers, turncoats and spies, who can she really trust?

THEMES

- Family and friendship
- Loyalty
- Truth and courage
- The effects of war on people and places

ANOTHER BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN LIFE-AND-DEATH QUEST, PACKED WITH HISTORY AND ADVENTURE FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF BLACK POWDER.

WHAT THE PUBLISHER SAYS . . .

'When I was young, I loved stories of children caught up in the struggles between the Roundheads and Cavaliers in old England – it must have been the costumes, food, swords and fiery language of that tricky time in our history. Ally takes us behind the scenes in this exciting civil war adventure, showing that the question of loyalty is never clear-cut, especially in times of huge change and turmoil. Fascinating, thought-provoking stuff!'

Barry Cunningham

Publisher - Chicken House

AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Ally was born and grew up in Surrey. She graduated with a BA in Medieval History, English and French from the University of Newcastle in 1987 and, in 2011, with distinction from the Writing for Children MA course at the University of Winchester. After a short spell working as a trainee editor, she has spent most of her professional career in public relations and marketing working on a host of projects from the promotion of Britain to overseas visitors to science festivals, Olympics celebrations and the development and delivery of an oral history project. Her debut children's novel, *Black Powder*, won the Historical Association's Young Quills Award, the North Somerset Teachers' Book Award and was shortlisted for eight others. Her other books for Chicken House include *The Buried Crown*, a wartime adventure of Nazi treasure thievery linked to the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial discovery, *The Queen's Fool*, about an orphan-girl with learning disabilities plunged into the heart of a treasonous plot at the Tudor court and *Vita and the Gladiator* about a young girl's fight for justice – and her life – after the murder of her beloved father.

Ally is married and lives with her husband and assorted garden wildlife in South West Surrey.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

'I first studied what used to be known as the English Civil War on my A-level history course half a lifetime ago. We learnt about the political and religious causes of the war, the main personalities and the key battles and events culminating in the execution of the King. But I don't recall learning much about the common soldier's experience or how the conflict affected ordinary people's lives – more particularly the women and girls forced to live through those tumultuous times.

In spite of its pivotal role in shaping our modern democracy, it's a time in our history many don't seem to know too much about. But the traces of what most historians now call the British Civil Wars lie all around us. From battlefield sites to collections of armour, weaponry and other artefacts, and from church walls peppered with musket-ball holes, to the ruins of great houses and castles, destroyed in the many sieges.

It was on a recent visit to one of these ruins – Corfe Castle in Dorset – that the spark for the story that became *Rebel Heart* was first lit. I was fascinated to discover that the person defending the castle against the besieging Parliamentary forces was a woman – Lady Mary Bankes, wife of the Royalist and king's minister, Sir John Bankes.

Further research revealed plenty more such redoubtable women defenders on both sides, and some daring young girls who acted as message-carriers. Armed with this new and exciting knowledge, it didn't take long for my imagination to conjure up the character of Merriweather Pryce, a brave young Royalist's daughter, determined to save her own family home when it comes under siege by the Roundheads.'

Ally Sherrick



WRITING STYLE

Rebel Heart is written in the third person, past tense, and sticks closely to the perspective of main character, Merri. The author's straightforward but immersive storytelling style is typical of historical fiction, allowing her to weave in period details effortlessly while remaining emotionally engaged with the characters. 337 pages, age 9+

An 'About the Book' section at the back gives more information about the author's inspirations and the historical background to the period, plus recommended further reading and places to visit connected with the history of the Civil Wars.

PUPIL ACTIVITY

WRITING PROMPTS/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) Picking sides

"And now here I am fighting a war in my own country ... The politics of it all is bad enough – the arguments about religion too ..." (Page 112)

Captain Flint gives his views on the reasons for the war and why he has chosen to take the side of Parliament when he and Merri sit by the campfire together. Imagine you are either the captain or else one of the other characters listed below. Using evidence from the story, give your reasons for picking the side you have.

- Sir Richard Pryce
- Lady Ellinor Pryce
- Corporal Abenazar Shine
- Samuel Jeames
- Ned Woodruff

Now choose another character on the opposite side and do the same.

Which of the two characters do you agree with most? Or perhaps you don't agree with either of them! Give your reasons.

Before doing this activity, you might want to read Ally's explanation about the main causes of the war at the back of the book. (Pages 316-317)

2) Surrender or fight?

'In such a situation a true Pryce would never accept their fate. They would do everything they could to fight back ...' (Page 35)

After Merri accuses her stepmother of wanting to surrender to the enemy, she makes the decision to leave her home and family and go for help. Do you think she is right to do this, or should she have stayed to support Lady Ellinor, whether she decided to hand Compton Blaize to the Roundhead army or not? If you were Merriweather, what would you have done and why? And what do you think Lady Ellinor's reaction was when she found Merri had gone?

3) Home is where the heart is

'It's home an' family that matters most.' (Page 301)

Ned tells Merriweather this near the very end of the story. Why do you think he says this? Does Merri agree? What evidence can you find in the story that she does?

Friends are very important in Rebel Heart too, especially when there are so many enemies, turncoats and spies about! Give an example of a friendship between two characters in the book and say why you think each one likes the other, even though they might annoy each other sometimes too. The friends don't all have to be human!

4) Twisting the truth

"It is you who are the liar! A thief and a murderer too ..." (Page 151)

During the course of the story, Abenazar Shine is accused of being a liar by several of the other characters besides Merri. Are she and the others right to do so? Why? Do you think Shine deserves what happens to him in the end? Give your reasons.

5) 'Fearless and True'

The Pryce family motto is an important theme which is repeated several times in the story. What do you think it means?

Towards the end of the story, Merriweather isn't convinced that she has 'always managed to be both, or even either of those things ...' (Page 308/9) during her adventures. Do you agree with her? Why? If you don't agree, explain why not. How fearless and true have some of the other main characters been. For example Ned, Lady Ellinor, Captain Jack Flint, Abenazar Shine, Merlin the jackdaw and Hazel the pony?

What's the most fearless and true thing you've ever done? And – if you're prepared to confess it – what's the most cowardly? If you had your chance again, would you do things differently? Why – or why not?