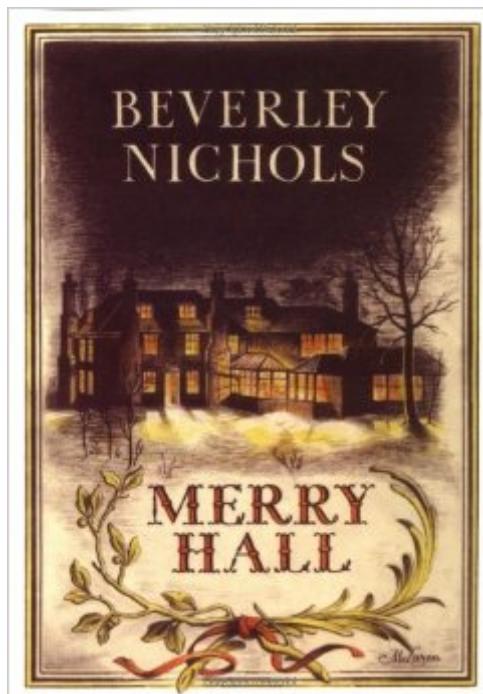


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Merry Hall (Beverley Nichols Trilogy Book 1)



Synopsis

First in a trilogy, *Merry Hall* is the account of the restoration of a house and garden in post-war England. Though Mr. Nichols's horticultural undertaking is serious, his writing is high-spirited, riotously funny, and, at times, deliciously malicious.

Book Information

Series: Beverley Nichols Trilogy

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Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars See all reviews (27 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

Beverly Nichols, author of *MERRY HALL* says the love of gardening involves the love of art, the love of love, and the love of death. Following his experiences in WWII, Nichols retired to the English countryside to restore himself mentally, physically, and spiritually. He doesn't inform the reader directly of his background (I know this from having read some biographical material from other sources), but he had another life before he bought the house and grounds describes in his trilogy beginning with *MERRY HALL*. He was a journalist and writer, and during WWII he spent some time abroad in His Majesty's Service. To the unknowing, Nichols narrative may seem a bit too cheerful, frivolous, or shallow, but his book is intended to entertain the reader--this is gardening mind you not the aftermath of war. To the extent he able to do so, Nichols kept the events in the *DAILY MAIL* out of his gardening books. As a result, some readers today can mistakenly think him an English prig who had no concern for life outside his own back yard. *MERRY HALL* begins one afternoon when Nichols and his 'man' Gaskin stumble across a derelict Georgian manor house and it's grounds. Nichols is overcome with a desire to restore the house and rebuild the grounds. He has been living

in London and until that fateful day was more or less settled, but now he wants to "move beyond the Tudor world" and into the world of the Georgian Manor House. He buys Merry Hall and thus begins his adventure. *MERRY HALL* was written about six years into the project. By that time Nichols had undertaken the restoration of the foul smelling pond just off the music room and won the support of the able Oldfield, the gardener who came with the house and grounds.

The first volume of a trilogy about the author's time at Merry Hall, this book is more humorous garden writing than strict autobiography. We know (primarily from the dust jacket) that Beverley Nichols was a widely-travelled journalist and prolific author, but aside from the occasional mention that he needs to keep working (hard) to pay the (very high) bills, Nichols doesn't mention his life outside of Merry Hall or, more specifically, its garden. The book begins after WWII, when Mr. Nichols returns from "a job" in India to a ravaged London and develops an overwhelming urge to move to the country and get back to nature in the form of a hopefully large and preferably derelict garden that he can "rescue". After a daunting (and amusingly described) search he miraculously finds what he considers to be a dream property - a Georgian manor house on 5 acres of truly hideous landscaping. With wry wit Nichols tells the story of acquiring the property against the better judgement of friends, and of what is involved in making a run-down manor house habitable, and in dismantling, re-ordering and re-planting 5 acres of gardens. Along the way we meet Oldfield, the very talented but taciturn and somewhat difficult gardener; Gaskin, the long-standing and nearly superhuman manservant; Miss Emily and Our Rose, nosy and perpetually disapproving neighbors; and the beloved cats One and Four. Although avid gardeners will no doubt love this book as they mentally compare notes with the author, one need not have ever dirtied one's hands with compost to enjoy reading it. The narrative meanders like a leisurely stroll in the garden, and Mr. Nichols' faith in the therapeutic powers of gardening is reminiscent of that in *The Secret Garden* (Frances Hodgson Burnett).

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