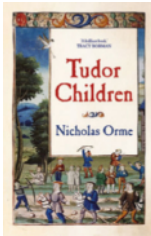




# Children both seen and heard



**Tudor Children**  
Nicholas Orme  
(Yale, £20)

**I**N May 1520, the civic authorities in York were obliged to put a stop

to children going about the city with rattles on the days before Easter. The church bells were silent on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, so children had traditionally been engaged to use rattles, or 'clappers', to summon people to worship. Just like today, however, it seems that some of these children, or youths, were taking things too far, evidently making a nuisance of themselves.

**‘Childhood was certainly recognised in Tudor England. Children occupied their own space in the world’**

This small, but delightful, insight into the relations between adults and children in the 16th century is somehow typical of the material drawn together in Nicholas Orme's new volume. Not only is the content endlessly eye-opening, but one is also left astonished at the amount of research and reading that was necessary to come upon so many precise and colourful details on children from all walks of life. Ultimately, this rich and compelling study reveals that, although society at the time was clearly very different from today, we can readily see much of ourselves in the parents and children of the Tudor era.

It is, for instance, easy for us to see how a collection of sometimes



Author Nicholas Orme reveals parallels between childhood in Tudor times and the present day

racy stories, intended to steer high-born girls to a life of virtue, might equally have had the adverse effect. Indeed, in a 1534 commentary on *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, John Fitzherbert observed this would teach its readers 'more vices, subtlety, and craft than they would ever have known without reading it'. How different, we may ask, would be a commentary on the dangers of social media today?

Following hot on the heels of Yale's acclaimed new history of Tudor England (*Review*, October 5, 2022), *Tudor Children* comes with an impeccable pedigree. The author, who is Emeritus Professor of History at Exeter University, is exceptionally prolific, having penned more than 30 books, many of them covering children, childhood, schools and schooling. Here, in a volume he believes to be the first general study of childhood in this period (1485–1603), his approach understandably mirrors, quite closely, his earlier volume on *Medieval Children* (2001). Thus, he begins with a chapter on birth and infancy, moving

onto the home and family, to play, religion and then school. The section on speech, songs and stories cuts marginally across an otherwise primarily chronological narrative, until we come to a last chapter entitled 'growing up'.

Prof Orme has something of a phlegmatic or matter-of-fact style, to the point where we are told that when boys dressed for the outdoors, 'caps were worn on heads'. At the same time, he deals extremely well with sensitive areas, such as the sorrow felt by parents on the death of a child or the tragic circumstances that might lead a mother to infanticide. In far brighter mode, the chapter on play offers a vibrant glimpse into Tudor girls and boys growing up, whether they be playing with dolls, pewter toys or a hobby horse. We are introduced to games, such as the knife-throwing 'Mumble-the-peg' and to rhymes and songs that remain familiar today. Of course, this was the age when printed books and pamphlets brought general reading within reach of far more people, including children. Boys

may have been especially drawn to the comic-book nature of *The Friar and the Boy*, in which young Jack is finally able to thumb his nose at the adult world.

The author readily acknowledges that the source material on all aspects of Tudor childhood is at best patchy and undoubtedly weighted in favour of those children of the nobility and gentry. He does his level best to cover the experiences of girls, although, once again, one has to acknowledge that a bias exists in available source material, not least with regard to grammar schools, for instance.

For all this, Prof Orme succeeds in presenting us with an entirely convincing case to show that childhood was most certainly recognised in Tudor England. Children occupied their own space in the world, with a distinct set of needs, stretching from the cradle to puberty and beyond. In short, through the inclusion of children, we undoubtedly gain a much richer understanding of Tudor society at large.

David Robinson





**West: Tales of the Lost Lands**  
**Martin Wall**

(Amberley, £20)

**M**A R T I N  
W A L L

came west for work. Rescued from the 'ghetto' of a Nottingham tower block, the would-be author's new role with psychiatric emergency services in Worcestershire placed him in the Clent Hills. Crossing those surroundings by foot and bus, he pops into 'the land of the Red Dragon' and walks to St Kenelm's Well, experiencing a Damascene moment south of Dudley. Ancestral voices had called him home, to the land of his childhood and beyond.

The earliest passages of the book recall a tricky infancy in south Staffordshire, but, despite manifest hardships and a Dickensian headmistress, Mr Wall's roots on this dividing line between old west and east, the ancient Welsh and the not-so-ancient English, cultivate his love of time travel. Exploring ley lines and legends,

he revives that past in prose. *West* brims with semi-historical and mythological characters, including Boudica, the songful princess Heledd and newer, more private muses. But it is a landscape where poetry and struggle sit side by side, with skeletons wedged in wych elms and young heirs tethered to drains. Charting the politics of the Mercians, the Cumbrians and the Welsh, Mr Wall details countless divisions and battles, 'the end of Celtic resistance in the lowlands' and the ghosts that endure.

Loosely structured, at the author's admittance, the book also embraces Simon Evans, Cleobury Mortimer's postman bard, and the alcoholic autobiographer Archie Hill. It protests today's failing rural infrastructure, the lack of ethnic diversity in the countryside and the degradation of Britain's pubs, the BBC and the Glastonbury Festival. However, alongside its many soap boxes, *West* is a commonplace book, so loaded with quotation and allusion that the final two



**The Stiperstones in the 'lost lands' near the England/Wales border**

pages of notes and a 'select' bibliography belie the library on which it feeds. Journeying along A. E. Housman's highways or through the Shire of Tolkien's imagination, Mr Wall has Bruce Chatwin brushing shoulders with the priestly poet of *Onward*, *Christian Soldiers*, Carl Jung and the lead singer of Led Zeppelin (who provides the elliptical foreword).

It's all delivered with a goodly dose of the psychogeographer's

dialect: liminal, palimpsest and the like. Luckily, there is richness enough in Mr Wall's own writing. Chatty and haughty, self-conscious and unstintingly personal, it flits like a butterfly, challenging the reader with its enthusiasm for a proudly worn knowledge. When the author finally settles, gazes at the landscape he loves and trusts his inner voice, *West* can reveal both wonder and wisdom.  
*Gavin Plumley*



**Uproar!**  
**Satire, Scandal & Printmakers in Georgian London**

**Alice Loxton**

(Icon, £25)

**U**PROAR! is an irreverent gallop through the scandalous streets of Georgian London. We are propelled into the printmaking world of Thomas Rowlandson, James Gillray and Isaac Cruikshank and watch as they sharpen their caricatural skills, capturing history as it is being made. Alice Loxton's vivacious prose brings to life the competitive, combative climate for their satirical sketches that would be placed in the windows of rival print shops around Covent Garden. Crowds would jostle to see the latest jibes: the corpulent society hostess Albinia Hobart engraved as a perfect sphere; the Prince of Wales as a sated



**'We can smell the ink and are swept along by the stories of the day'**

**Causing uproar: James Gillray's A Bravura Air. Mandane, 1801**

glutton, a whisker from bursting his breeches; John Bull feasting on British roast beef as the skeletal French *sans-culottes* ate turnip tops to survive.

At times, the writer can play a little fast and loose with the details—she has us follow 15-year-old Rowlandson through London's backstreets on his way

to his first day at the Royal Academy Schools, where he sketches a model. The reality would have been months of sketching plaster casts before he was allowed to step foot into the life room. However, the historian conjures the world of printmaking with such energy and verve that we can smell the ink and are swept along by the breaking stories of the day. She peppers the book with contemporary references—to Simon Cowell, anti-vaxxers, *Big Brother*—as she splices past and present to bring history to life. 'Would Gillray be a good running partner?' she muses as she runs around St James's Park. 'He wouldn't talk much, which would suit me just fine. Rowlandson would probably turn up late, nursing a hangover, but would run with vigour, gossiping all the way. Cruikshank would be wearing Lycra and a Fitbit, still jogging at the traffic lights.'  
*Charlotte Mullins*