



# Q&A with Elen Caldecott on The Mystery of Wickworth Manor

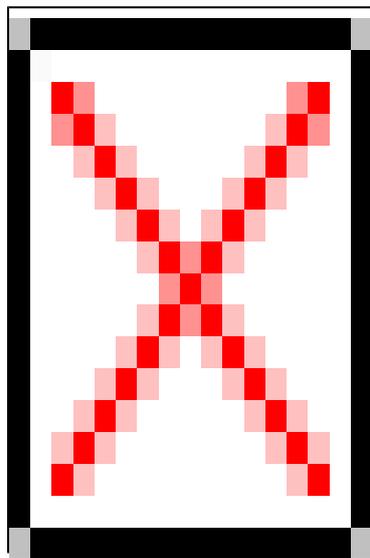
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Byline:

Elen Caldecott talks about her latest book **The Mystery of Wickworth Manor**.



**The Mystery of Wickworth Manor** is your fourth book for children. Have you always wanted to write for children in particular?

No, not always. I used to write angsty poetry as a teenager. I dabbled with an adult novel for a while (it was rubbish). But the stories that I gravitated towards seemed to be for children. The more I wrote, the clearer that relationship became.

**The Mystery of Wickworth Manor** sounds like it could be an Enid Blyton adventure! Was that deliberate?

Actually that wasn't its title for most of its development. It had a number of working titles over the months I spent writing it. One of them got as far as having a cover design done. It was that design that made us realise that we hadn't found the right title ? it was too dark and gloomy. So, we chose something that had those adventure connotations. I do owe a debt to Enid Blyton!

What do you hope children will enjoy most in the book?

I hope they enjoy it all! But, having said that, my favourite element is Paige and Curtis' relationship. They are the main characters and, when the story begins, they think they will hate each other. As the story goes on, they are forced to see things from the other's perspective. I think you can be friends with pretty much anyone, if you try to understand them.

Tell us about the painting that inspired the book.

Actually, not much is known about the real painting that inspired the book. It hangs in Erddig Hall in North Wales. It dates to the first half of the 18th century and depicts a young, black boy in red livery. A poem was added some 50 years later. We don't even know if the boy was a real person, or painted from the artist's imagination. So, my research had to

focus on the accounts of and by black people in 18th century Britain. I used those to invent a story.

Is it important to you that your books have quite complex themes as well as being fast-moving adventures?

I just write what I like to read. I enjoy the mixture of humour and reflection that comes about when you have lots of ingredients in the same book. I hope that for a lot of readers, they'll just have fun, but others will notice the ideas and think about them.

You are a graduate of the MA course in Writing for Young People at Bath Spa University. What do you think was the most useful thing the course taught you?

There are two strands to the course that were both really helpful. Workshops helped me to critique my work so that my writing improved. Visiting speakers from the world of children's publishing come to teach students about the industry. That meant that a student leaves the course armed with the knowledge they need to build a career. For me, it was a fast-track to becoming an author.

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**Source URL (retrieved on Jan '20):** <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/194/childrens-books/articles/qa-with-elen-caldecott-on-the-mystery-of-wickworth-manor>

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