



Unhallowed Ground

Melvin R. Starr

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Another brilliant slice of medieval crime fiction Thomas atte Bridge, a man no one likes, is found hanging from a tree near Cowleys Corner. All assume he has taken his own life, but Master Hugh and Kate find evidence that this may not be so.

Many of the town had been harmed by Thomas, and Hugh is not eager to send one of them to the gallows. Then he discovers that the priest John Kellet, atte Bridge's partner in crime in *A Corpse at St. Andrew's Chapel*, was covertly in Bampton at the time atte Bridge died.

Master Hugh is convinced that Kellet has murdered atte Bridge--one rogue slaughtering another. He sets out for Exeter, where Kellet now works. But there he discovers that the priest is an emaciated skeleton of a man, who mourns the folly of his past life. Hugh must return to Bampton and discover which of his friends has murdered his enemy.

Unhallowed Ground Details

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From Reader Review Unhallowed Ground for online ebook

Theresa says

Unhallowed Ground is the fourth book in the "Chronicles of Hugh de Singleton, Surgeon", however it is easily read as a stand-alone. This is the first of the series I have read, and I found no problems with starting at this point. There is enough information and character development that I could easily connect and not feel lost.

Taking place in 14th Century Bampton, England, Unhallowed Ground centers around Master Hugh de Singleton who is both a surgeon and bailiff to Sir Gilbert. Master Hugh is a walking contradiction because he's looked at with suspicion because of his job as bailiff and revered because of being a good surgeon. This makes for a very interesting protagonist.

Written in first person and being able to see through the eyes of Master Hugh was fascinating and made for a captivating and unforgettable story. When he sees Thomas atte Bridge hanging from the tree and studies him, he discovers that the apparent suicide is possibly not a suicide at all. As he continues his investigation, he discovers not only was Thomas atte Bridge a despicable man (worse than he originally knew), but he wrestles with the thought of possibly arresting a neighbor or "good" person who was involved in the murder.

Master Hugh is newly married and discusses this information with his wife, Kate. She is an intelligent woman who also noticed from the beginning that Thomas atte Bridge's death was not as it seemed. With each dead end Master Hugh would hit, Kate would be there as a sounding board and help him decide if it was worth continuing the investigation.

This book was an amazing read! I am so taken with the writing style of Mr. Starr, that I really want to read all the books in this series. He is truly a brilliant writer who seems to effortlessly bring to life 14th Century England. His prose and ability to describe in detail day-to-day life transports the reader back in time and allows on to actually feel like they are a part of that time period.

This book comes HIGHLY recommended!

Victor Gentile says

Mel Starr in his new book, "Unhallowed Ground" Book Four in the Hugh de Singleton, Surgeon series published by Monarch Books returns us to Oxford in 1366 for another mystery involving the intrepid bailiff and surgeon.

From the back cover: Thomas atte Bridge, a man no one likes, is found hanging from a tree near Cowleys Corner. All assume he has taken his own life, but Master Hugh and Kate find evidence that this may not be so.

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When I was a child I fell in love with the works of Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes but, unfortunately, there are a finite number of Sherlock Holmes mysteries. Mel Starr to the rescue. While Hugh de Singleton, Surgeon is not the great brain that Holmes is he is up there and Mel Starr gives him quite a workout in this book.

I think Mel Starr is an extremely talented writer who really knows how to tell a story that will grab you and keep you flipping pages until you find out who did it. Not only do de Singleton and his fiance, Kate go down blind alleys in their efforts to find the murderer they also becomes targets of the murderer themselves. “Unhallowed Ground” is a very exciting book that will keep you engrossed in the characters as well as life in England in the 1300’s. This is a wonderful series and I am glad I discovered Mel Starr and his wonderful hero. I recommend this book highly.

If you would like to listen to interviews with other authors and professionals please go to www.kingdomhighlights.org where they are available On Demand.

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Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from Monarch Books. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission’s 16 CFR, Part 255 : “Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising.”

John Lee says

My 4th in the very readable series centred on the life of Hugh-de-Singleton , surgeon and bailiff to Lord Gilbert.

Hugh is now married and it seems that his wife , Kate, has a sharp eye too for they find a couple of clues at the site of a death that convince them that the verdict of suicide given on the town's rogue and bully was incorrect.

As bailiff it is Hugh's duty to uncover the murderer even though most in the town are pleased by the death and many have serious personal grievances against the dead man. This is the problem for Hugh as he comes to realise that the townsfolk with the best motives are his friends. Then it gets personal.

The finger of suspicion points many ways as one by one the suspects are eliminated until.....

Well drawn characters and scenes sway me upwards from my initial mark of 3.5 . Fortunately I see the next in the series is already waiting in my library.

Christian Fiction Addiction says

Hugh de Singleton, surgeon and bailiff of Bampton in the year 1366, believes that Thomas, a man found hanging from a tree, has been murdered. All others, with the exception of his wife, believe that Thomas took his own life. As Hugh sets out to uncover the truth, he begins to uncover more and more evidence supporting his belief Thomas was murdered, but soon finds himself in a dilemma of having to investigate his friends for the murder of a man who was once his enemy.

This is the first chronicle of the Hugh de Singleton series that I have read, and I find myself wishing I had been able to read the first three! This novel was easy to get into despite not having read the others in the series, and Hugh is a fascinating medieval character, from his role as bailiff to his unique skills as a surgeon. Scenes such as the one where he removes a cataract added a unique flavour to the story as I considered the state of medicine in the 1300s. Overall, I greatly appreciated the rich historical detail in the book, such as learning of the "childwite", a fine for having a child out of wedlock. I cannot imagine such a fine today - seemingly half of all parents out there would be paying such a fee! The mystery itself was finely orchestrated and kept the pages madly turning, and the book is chock-full of godly wisdom. My favorite quote is "What is justice but truth with its sleeves rolled up, ready for labor?".

Mel Starr is a gifted writer, with excellent pacing, interesting dialogue, and strong characterization. All in all, I greatly enjoyed this book and will be looking for future works from this talented author. I highly recommend Unhallowed Ground to those who love historical mysteries, and give it 5 out of 5 stars.

Book provided courtesy of the publisher, Monach Books & Kregel, for the purposes of this unbiased review.

dOnnabud lewis says

The Hugh de Singleton series is one of my favorites. Not only does Mel Starr effectively weave intrigue and characters with depth into his plot, he also reveals fascinating insights into Medieval English life. His period-specific perspectives on medicine and surgical techniques, social mores and religion, gender and class are mind-expanding.

Nate LaClaire says

In Mel Starr's fourth tale of Hugh de Singleton, medieval surgeon, Unhallowed Ground, we find our protagonist investigating the murder of one Thomas atte Bridge after this unlikable fellow is found hanging from a tree. While Master Hugh would like to believe the popular opinion that the victim took his own life, his finding of evidence to the contrary requires him to investigate his friends and neighbors to determine who took the life of their common enemy.

I enjoyed this book immensely. The story, which is written in the first person, pulled me in and helped me to understand the culture through the eyes of one of its inhabitants. A thorough glossary is included in the front

of the book for assistance in understanding some of the more archaic terms that are used throughout the book. That is to say, the book is not only enjoyable but also educational. The story is also aided by a map in the front of the book that shows where locations in the book are in relation to each other.

One of the things that I enjoyed about the book was seeing the author's own modern-day thoughts expressed through the Master Hugh. Numerous times in the book the narrator explains a religious or other practice or belief and then offers his disagreement with the practice or belief. It is fascinating to see some aspects of the culture of 1366 and these comments helped to remind me that it is unrealistic to believe that the entire population agreed with all of what we would now consider primitive ideas.

Among other things, the book shows that Christ can change our hearts and that we must not assume that this fact applies only to ourselves. Master Hugh learns this lesson when he takes a long journey to find the man he is certain committed the murder only to find someone else entirely.

I was afraid that a book about a medieval surgeon would include descriptions of medical practices that I would rather not know about (or be reminded of), but this was not the case. While it did describe some medical procedures, I found the descriptions non-nightmare-inducing.

This is an excellent book and I encourage you to read it if you like mysteries and/or historical fiction.

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Deb Jones says

Although I've enjoyed each of the first three books in the Hugh de Singleton series, I found this one to be my favorite so far. Singleton finds himself facing a moral dilemma in his role as Bampton's bailiff.

Sarah Bailey says

I had the privilege of having read Mel Starr's A Trail of Ink and as much as I enjoyed that one I'd have to say I've enjoyed Unhallowed Ground just as much or maybe more. This is the fourth chronicle of a surgeon by the name of Hugh de Singleton who is living and working in the 1300's and as one will start realizing as they read, you will be taken fully back into that time with the language as well as how operations are performed – I found the performance of the couching surgery for cataracts quite interesting. The author has provided a glossary at the beginning so that unfamiliar terms can be understood at a glance but it's not really hard to figure out what certain terms mean, although figuring out the holidays celebrated then does take some calculation.

This is written by de Singleton, it's his journal of his daily life as he goes about his life being a bailiff, surgeon, newly married and soon-to-be father. This book isn't being written about him but rather by him so if you don't want to read a book that is detailing events by the main character then you may want to pass this up. Yes we are told what he has for breakfast several times as well as other dining details, but I found it to be

the mundane parts of the book that had me more relating to the characters.

Some parts really struck me, such as how Hugh de Singleton struggles with not believing everything the Church teaches or the current medical ideas of the day, such as back in the day Galen (I had to google this man) taught that a woman who was raped couldn't become pregnant during said assault unless she was a willing participant – this mind set occurs in one of de Singleton's cases that must be dealt with while he is investigating what most believe is a suicide when he believes otherwise.

The historical accounts are what draws me in, since I enjoy history this book really intrigued me as I read about certain beliefs, including those of the Church, that some physicians of the day were questioning but couldn't say much out loud for fear of reprisals. Hugh de Singleton mentions a few times how he fears that something he writes could be found by a Priest or Bishop but questions whether they'd concern themselves with him. I almost forgot I was reading a book by a real, living author because I got so wrapped up in Hugh's life in this book that he became almost real and it felt like I was truly reading his account. A book to be truly enjoyed and savored.

**I was provided a copy of this book from Kregel Publications in exchange for my honest opinion, no other compensation was given.

Annet says

Mel Starr always give a great view of medieval times, combined with a crime story, where Hugh de Singleton, medieval surgeon and detective, goes on a hunt for the killer and usually gets pursued himself by the bad guys out there. Enjoy these books and the details of the times, but this one was a bit less interesting than the previous ones. Therefore.... 3 stars.

English says

I only recently discovered 'The Chronicles of Hugh de Singleton', which attracted me for a number of reasons. As a fan of the Cadfael series a Medieval Crime Mystery series seemed interesting, as a lover of Medieval History the setting attracted me, and as a Christian the religious aspects and the fact that novels in this genre tend to be 'cleaner' than others also seemed a plus.

By way of a brief introduction the series is set in the late 1300s (14th century) and the protagonist Hugh de Singleton is the younger son of a knight who trained as a surgeon (different from a physician) who was appointed Bailiff of the Oxfordshire Village of Bampton on the Weald after treating the Local Lord. Bampton is a real village a short distance from Oxford, and most of Hugh's sleuthing and medical work takes place in and around the region. John Wycliffe the controversial theologian also makes an appearance as a secondary character in a number of the stories, as a friend and mentor of Hugh, who adheres to some of his teachings and doctrines which went against the mainstream teaching of the Catholic Church.

With this particular instalment, the fourth in the series, I was generally satisfied. The crime itself is not described in graphic detail, nor does the author seem to delight in gory descriptions of brutal acts, and the aspects of social history are interesting. Some of the descriptions of medieval surgery and medical practice are also fascinating, as well as the everyday lives of ordinary folk. The historical elements seem to be well

done, plausible and authentic- and appear to be well researched for the most part. The glossary is useful for the more unfamiliar terms.

Yet the novel does seem to drag a little towards the middle. The main reason for this seems to have been that Hugh just did not have much to do, and so his daily life and routine just seems to have become part of the plot, and, whilst this work for a while, it cannot always hold one's interest. Admittedly, it would not be much of a mystery novel if the case was solved easily or quickly, and the process of investigation is as important as the resolution, yet the story just seemed slow and plodding in parts.

Hugh's moral dilemma is worked into the story well, and adds a somewhat deeper element. He must investigate the murder of a hugely unpopular member of the community whom almost everyone seems to have had motive to slay and at first is convinced that a corrupt and murderous clergyman who had previously been complicit in another crime must the culprit, despite the fact that all who know him insist that he is a changed man.

When he goes to confront the man, he must in some way confront his own unpleasant prejudice to find that his prime suspect could not be guilty. Gradually, as the suspects become fewer it becomes apparent that one of his friends may be responsible.

As this becomes apparent, Hugh is torn between pursuing the felon as his role and justice demands, and abandoning investigation because of the possibility of having to send one of his friends to the gallows if he does discover a murderer amongst them.

Yet the conclusion of this moral dilemma (and the solving of the murder) is distinctly unsatisfactory, as well as morally questionable, which is the main reason why I gave this novel a lower rating than I perhaps would have done.

On a moral level, I much prefer the married Hugh in this Novel to Hugh the Bachelor in previous novels who was in the habit of ogling a particular teenage scullery maid, as well as any other pretty face who could turn his head, or distract his attention. He is, in my view a far more appealing character when he is not occupied by thoughts of women and fantasising about the benefits of marriage as in the second novel which I hope soon to finish.

Overall, 'Unhallowed Ground' was an enjoyable and pleasant read, likely to satisfy lovers of historical fiction if their expectations are not too high. Those who expect the High Drama of political intrigue will be disappointed, but those who prefer 'cosy' rural settings may take to it more. As murder mystery it is good, though perhaps not the best, the most intriguing element may the protagonist belonging to a much misunderstood and underrated profession which the author has clearly taken trouble to acquaint himself with.

Lisa Johnson says

A man who commits suicide or was he murdered? Buried where? Why? The year is 1360 something in an unfamiliar land and unique sounding words describe people, positions, and responsibilities. Never before has such a novel attracted my attention...until now.

Mel Starr has written "chronicles" of a character named Hugh de Singleton. This character has more than one job in his village. What the name of the village is, I can't say. What is this character's occupation? I can't spoil the book and reveal what he does.

He is caught in a web of intriguing mystery that twists many times almost like a rope. Maybe that is why there is a picture of that on the cover. It sure grabs one's attention doesn't it? In the language of the setting, it seems like one is transported to a time where words such as almoner, farthing, bailiff and Cow-ley were ordinary words.

When I first looked at the book and read the words and definitions, I was thinking I bit off more than I could chew. Would I understand the story or not? Would I be able to follow the characters while trying to figure out the plot? After the first few pages of chapter 1, I was hooked. I had to know how this medieval novel ended. I kept reading as I was carried away to Bampton, following the actions of priests, sires, bishops, and carpenters. There are many more fascinating people in this story who travel to other lands to seek answers. Sometimes when one reads a novel the characters seem so unreal; however, Mel Starr has done a superb job of helping his readers "feel" the human part of mankind in the story. Never before have I read a book where the setting has taken place in medieval times. Prior to Unhallowed Ground, I would have just looked past the book to genres I am more familiar and comfortable with reading.

I cannot recommend the *Chronicles of Hugh de Singleton* enough. If Mel Starr wrote his past and future novels with the same brilliance as he did this one, he has found a loyal fan indeed! Most novels are based on some known, unknown or little before known fact in history; Mel Starr's writings are no different. There are other books in this series of chronicles, though each one stands alone, and are titled: *The Unquiet Bones*, *a Corpse at St. Andrews Chapel*; *A Trail of Ink* and then the forthcoming book, *The Tainted Coin*.

These are stories you will surely read more than once, maybe even getting them for family members, friends or coworkers who love a good mystery. I don't want to spoil the suspense felt as the book is read so I won't let the preverbal "cat out of the bag" by saying more. Get the book, curl up, turn off the noise, and get lost for a while in *Unhallowed Ground*. You will never regret it!

Note: I received a complimentary copy as a blog tour participant for Kregel Publications.

Susan in NC says

3.5 stars, as in I really liked it despite slow pacing in the first quarter or so. I have enjoyed each entry in this mystery series about 14th-century bailiff/surgeon Hugh de Singleton, and this was no exception, although the pacing dragged a bit for me in the middle. I think it was largely because Hugh was trying to solve the possible murder of a truly horrible person - always hard to care when the world seems better off without the deceased!

I was delighted to see Hugh and Kate settling into Bampton as newlyweds, although I missed the humorous and enlightened presence of Master Wyclif after he played such a prevalent role in Hugh's previous adventure, "A Trail of Ink". I do like how Starr has recurring characters, good and bad, from previous books - just like real life. Here, the evil and disliked Thomas atte Bridge is found hanging from a tree one morning, and the relieved villagers hastily settle on a verdict of suicide; he is quickly buried in unhallowed ground, typical fate of a suicide. Hugh and Kate see what look like drag marks in the dirt road that match the back of Thomas' shoes, however, and suspect murder...

As with all of Hugh's previous investigations the pace is slow, befitting the time and his other responsibilities as a bailiff and surgeon. Weeks go by as he struggles to find justice for the despised murdered man, and the story becomes more complicated as Hugh and Kate are threatened. I find it slow going at times but very realistic; the rhythm of life is so much influenced by nature and the seasons and the Church calendar. I wouldn't want to go back to a time when life was often "nasty, brutish and short", but I do enjoy these

characters and reading about their lives and a time so different from our own. Recommended for fans of well-written historical mysteries.

Karen Brooks says

Once I started reading this series featuring Hugh de Singleton by Melvin R Starr, I couldn't stop. Searching for historical fiction that really captured a specific era (I was looking for the late 1300s, early 1400s) but was tight, well written and engaging proved harder than I initially thought – in that, I had already read so many good novels, it was hard to find new material. That was, until I stumbled upon Starr's series.

The fourth book in the Hugh de Singleton series, the surgeon who becomes a bailiff to Lord Gilbert Talbot (he of the arching brow), *Unhallowed Ground* is probably grimmer and darker than the other books in one way and yet, in another, also has a delightful and quite charming parallel narrative as Hugh is no longer a bachelor and early in the book he receives some wonderful news that will change his and Kate's lives.

The tale commences with the death of a character we've come to know and loathe from an earlier book, the violent and manipulative Thomas Atte Bridge. Discovered hanging from a tree at the crossroads, it's first believed that the man committed suicide, only, Hugh and Thomas' poor wife, don't believe that to be the case.

But when Hugh's investigation uncovers a ream of suspects, all of whom not only had good reason to do away with Atte Bridge, but are decent upstanding citizens as well, Hugh finds himself facing a serious moral dilemma. When his investigation uncovers a criminal prepared to harm more than a villain, but Hugh and his wife, the bailiff's anger is roused and he stops at nothing to find out who's the culprit and why they're prepared to go to such lengths to stop him discovering their identity. Only this time, the answers are not what Hugh expects...

Against the backdrop of the investigation, life at the manor and within the surrounding village is gently drawn. The reader follows Hugh on his investigations and intellectual peregrinations as he tries to fathom who the most likely culprit might be. In this book, we are also given a peek into married life and the role of a new wife and doting husband – and it's utterly charming but realistically drawn as well. Likewise, the travels that Hugh undertakes as he seeks the killer, the insights into professional roles and respect for skills, medical, surgical, carpentry, horsemanship etc. are also lightly but accurately drawn.

These books are like a time capsule into a world and time past, but as I say repeatedly in my reviews, without sacrificing story. The pace can be slow, but the writing is always elegant and the characters beautifully drawn. Another delightful read.

Anietta says

A more tightly-written addition to the series. Master Hugh must wrestle with his conscience when seeking a killer among those who were grievously wronged by the murdered man and, in certain cases, denied justice and effectively abandoned by the law. The bailiff has reason also to fall under suspicion himself by others and must ensure he is not seen to be accusing another to save himself. And, at what cost could discovering the guilty person have upon the community. These were all explored in a fine, sympathetic and interesting manner.

Susanne says

This fourth book (and the second one I've read) starts with the mysterious hanging of the much-disliked Thomas atte Bridge. Master Hugh de Singleton, surgeon and bailiff to Lord Gilbert, is soon convinced that this death was no suicide; it was murder. He is charged by the grieving widow to discover the murderer. Yet with Thomas atte Bridge being universally hated throughout the village, there are too many suspects to consider. Master Hugh is also newly married, and he and his wife of three months are settled in a lovely home gifted to them by Lord Gilbert.

But with so many suspects Master Hugh must pursue, it soon gets out that he believes a murderer is loose in the town, and Hugh and his bride soon find their home and their lives in danger.

So much must be discovered amidst the usual rhythm of medieval village life in this area of England outside of Oxford.

The details of medieval life and society, of the lives of ordinary people, is shown realistically yet gently--the travails of life are accepted as God's will, and theology is also discussed as Master Hugh counts Oxford reformer John Wycliffe among his mentors. These mysteries move slowly, as medieval life most certainly did, yet there is a tone of comfort here, of normality, of reality, yet all tempered by the goodness (and evil) of humanity as seen through the non-judgmental eyes of Master Hugh.

A wonderful series! I am ordering more from the library, and my rector already has added the series to his reading list.
