

Inca Author Information Page

James Court

Currently living in: Biggin Hill, on top of the North Downs straddling the boundary between Kent and London.

Main works: Strudwick's Successor and the sequel, Mulligan's Revenge. I'm currently drafting a third making a trilogy of humorous novels set in 1960s Peckham. Other works include a two part chronicle of life in an isolated rural hamlet, and a book of short stories set in agricultural 18th century England.

I started writing because: I've always written, from my earliest memory. As a child I spent a lot of time in hospital and it was a brilliant place to watch adults being somewhat less than adult. I remember one piece I wrote, I must have been about 12 at the time, which the home tutor rejected as being too farfetched. I considered resubmitting it with the true names of the characters involved inserted instead of pseudonyms. Later life and the need to support a family got in the way of writing for fun, until I retired and was asked to co-write a pantomime. Ideas wandered around in my head until I could not contain them any longer and had to get them down on paper.

My main writing interests are: I have two passions, to bring humour into people's lives and to document those aspects of rural social history that others have forgotten.

My sources of research and information are: Family albums, distant conversations with grandparents and life in general. The web browser is a great place to check precise facts: but there is no substitute for the smell of ammonia at five o'clock in the morning as you help make ready a team of eight shires for a long day hauling a fallen elm from a river to the distant road.

My inspiration comes from: Canteen gossip, boring motorway journeys and people watching with my daughter whilst waiting for cafe lunches.

My stories are planned like this: Generally I think about a main character for a while and then start jotting one line ideas down in a file. Then when I've worked out a beginning and an end I begin serious writing. Sub-plots just fall into place as I type, and I ignore spelling and grammar in the first run through as it interrupts the chain of thought. After a chunk of about five chapters I go back and tidy up. Often at this stage new cameos slip in and reported speech turns into dialogue. I'm a pretty fair programmer in a number of languages and look on blocks of text much like sub-routines, taking information in from elsewhere and returning other bits for use later on. If in chapter six the canteen employs an attractive new assistant then you can bet your life that in chapter twelve she will elope with the porter from chapter two.

I have written a series of books based on: The Whitedown Chronicles told of the highs and lows of life in an isolated community. The events and frustrations came from life in the fifties, but the location was pure invention. It's as isolated as the fever hospital on the South Downs where I spent my fifth birthday, yet vaguely close to Sevenoaks and with a landscape from the edge of the Fens. The books start with great poverty brought about by isolation, and over time the lot of the villagers is improved. However progress is not always without disadvantage, and life should never be taken too seriously.

My future plans are to: After completing the Peckham trilogy I have no plans. No doubt a few hours spent waiting for dinner while the world mills around me will bring something to mind.

My own favourite character is: That has to be Tracey Mulligan. Almost all my other characters are fairly obvious after a paragraph or two, but Tracey still has surprises for the reader in the third book. She is the sort of person that every red blooded male regrets not meeting in their early teens. However Patch, the collie from *The Whitedown Chronicles*, runs her a close second in my and my reader's affections.

I sometimes find myself thinking like: The one legged Major Albert (Bertie) Wilkinson, who ignores his own adversity to improve the quality of life for those around him.

My advice to new writers would be: I'm not sure that I qualify to give advice, other than to read as much quality writing as possible and to get a solid grounding in the rules of spelling, punctuation and grammar. It might seem an obvious thing to say, but recently I've seen a lot of works where the writer has not learnt these basic skills, and is seemingly unaware of their deficiencies.

Writing has its ups and downs: The highs are definitely when someone says, 'I'm enjoying this'. The downs are when you get half way through a book and realise that the ending is far too close.

When I'm not writing: I'm Chairman of the Biggin Hill Society and run a programme of social events. Beyond that just the normal retired person things; gardening, DIY and looking after a lively two year old grandson.

For copy editing and proofreading: My wife worked in college administration, and is a brilliant first proof-reader, but she is not imaginative. My daughter, when she gets time, is excellent at both detail and ideas.

I accept criticism from: I like to read some of a critic's own work before I judge its value. If they write well, and are publicly accepted then their criticism is worth taking note of.

My experiences with self-publishing: Not got there yet.

My favourite mainstream authors are: I was brought up on Thomas Hardy. His blend of detailed physical scenes and subtle moral dilemmas are as true today as they were then. Conan Doyle wrote some excellent historical fiction and PG Wodehouse some superb nonsense. However Terry Pratchett equals Lewis Carroll for entertaining nonsense.

I am currently reading: I keep dipping into Jasper FForde's Thursday series. They are both funny and grammatically thought provoking.

I prefer to read books in: I use my netbook with FBReader, or a decent pair of glasses and my smartphone when waiting about in doctor's surgeries. Not sure other patients think there is much to laugh about when I get lost in a Tom Holt and forget where I am.

A bit about my other interests: I'm not odd, even during basic drill training when I was right marker it was the rest of the squad that were out of step. I read a lot, and have a keen interest in UK wildlife. I've converted a front lawn back to a typical downland meadow with the help of seed that lay dormant in the soil for decades. I used to think nothing of commuting seventy miles a day by bicycle and am a keen environmentalist.

My most unattainable ambition is: I wish to die of a heart attack at the age of 110 while being chased down the road by an irate husband. I don't want to be guilty of anything, just thought still capable.

Last thoughts before we go down the pub/club/library/boot-sale/exercise yard: Books should either educate you to make your life better, or else amuse you to make your plight more bearable. If you can do both at the same time then you should have a winner.

Author Links

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