



The Allotment Girls

Kate Thompson

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During the Second World War, life in the iconic Bryant & May match factory is grimy and tough. Annie, Rose, Pearl and Millie carry on making matches for the British Army, with bombs raining down around them.

Inspired by the Dig for Victory campaign, Annie persuades the owners to start Bryant & May allotment in the factory grounds. With plenty of sweat and toil, the girls eventually carve out a corner of the yard into a green plot full of life and colour.

In the darkest of times, the girls find their allotment a tranquil, happy escape. Using pierced dustbin lids to sieve through the shrapnel and debris, they bring about a powerful change, not just in the factory, but their own lives.

As the war rages on, the garden becomes a place of community, friendship – and deceit. As the garden thrives and grows, so do the girls' secrets . . .

***The Allotment Girls* is an inspiring and heartwarming novel of wartime hardship, friendship and fortitude from Kate Thompson, author of the *Secrets of the Sewing Bee*.**

The Allotment Girls Details

Date : Published February 22nd 2018 by Pan

ISBN :

Author : Kate Thompson

Format : Kindle Edition 355 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, War

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From Reader Review The Allotment Girls for online ebook

Gillian says

Millie Brown was abruptly woken by her husband Curly Razor Brown on her 21st birthday. That's when she noticed the diaphragm in his hand it must have fallen out of her bag when she got home from the air raid shelter, it was around 4 am she should have been more careful.

Due to her brother's irresponsible actions her family had forced her to marry Curly he demanded she gave him plenty of children. Millie hated this man she was not going to bring his children into this world and now he had found her diaphragm he was in a rage and was slashing it.

Why hadn't she said yes when Frankie Butler had asked her to marry him truth is she thought she could do better, now look at her.

Each morning Millie met friends Annie and Rose on their way to work at Bryant and May the match factory. Curly hated Millie working but as war had broken out in Germany and the factory were making matches for the British Army Millie explained she was doing her bit for the war.

Most of the men including her hapless brother had left to go fight for their country but not cowardly Curly he had managed to get a fake doctor's note from a fake doctor.

Millie went home at lunchtime and heard noises thinking maybe a bird had gotten into the house she went upstairs and when she opened the bedroom door Curly was having a good old time under the covers with Betty Connor an usherette from the Old Ford Picture Palace.

Inspired by the Dig For Victory campaign Annie manages to persuade the factory bosses to allow the girls to dig an allotment in the factory grounds. The girls worked really hard digging out the allotment and finally they had their corner plot this became an escape for not only the factory girls but the community as well. Times were getting darker but the allotment became their escape it gave the girls confidence not only in work but outside as well it held their secrets and their lies.

I absolutely loved this book it took me right back to when I was a small child my mum, aunt and their friend always spoke about their days on the fields and the things they got up to the fun they had also the hard work. Although that was over forty years ago and I was a small child I remember all the times the kids would sit and listen to the stories of the olden days. Great times. An Amazing book thank you so much Kate it was a lovely gesture sending me a copy with a beautiful inscription inside I will treasure it forever. Also Thank you to Helen.

Kelly says

I am a massive fan of historical fiction and I love to garden so this book jumped at me instantly. The characters in this brilliant story are a variety of ages and experiences which helps to bring the story alive.

The closeness of the community and their feisty spirit in war ravaged London comes across throughout this story alongside the tranquility and escape of creating the allotment. The productiveness and sense of purpose demonstrates the true guts of the girls and each of them takes away something different from the experience.

A memorable book that draws you in and makes you want to keep reading, I really enjoyed this book and the lovely characters that were so brilliantly brought to life.

Debs says

Love love love this book. The way the author writes and keeps you captivated just makes for a wonderful read - the only problem is I've now ordered all Kates books - ah well!

Kaisha (The Writing Garnet) says

All reviews can be found on my blog at <https://thewritinggarnet.wordpress.com>

'The Allotment Girls' had me hooked straight away when the story begins with a jaw dropping situation which, if you're into history, you will find that it is actually based on a real life event. Considering the nature of said circumstance, because I knew it was based on an event which happened many years ago, I found my heart hurting just that little bit more.

If you think this book is just about sowing seeds and tending to carrots, I would think again quite quickly. Whilst it is clear that several characters wish to sow their own 'seeds', there is a lot more to this storyline than fertiliser and potatoes. Set during the Second World War in a match factory, the author tells the story of the lives of four girls, Annie, Millie, Rose and Pearl. All girls with such different outlooks on life, yet all connected by one incredibly important thing - friendship. During the war, rationing was incredibly important, which meant that growing your own crops to help feed other families worse off than your own, became the focus of a lot of businesses around London at that time. How can growing your own crops change your life? Well, when it becomes the middle man between eating or starving, you would probably find that you would do anything for food. Or, in the four girls' case, doing anything for friendship.

Out of all of them, I found myself warming to Millie a lot quicker than the others, as I am a lot like her in terms of her loose mouth! I couldn't help but feel sorry for Rose and, once you read the book, you'll understand why. As for Annie, I found her a lot more guarded than the other characters, yet she came across as the one with more common sense. Millie's situation made me feel nauseous, I won't lie! Then there's Pearl - a character who I am having to sit on the fence for!

When I was reading this book, I became incredibly invested in all of the 'minor' details, allowing myself to be transported back to such a memorable moment in history. Because of those 'minor' details, when the book nearly finished I couldn't help but wonder what happened to a certain item in the storyline. I have no idea why I thought about that particular item, but I did and I knew I wouldn't rest until I had found out what happened. Thankfully, when all of the loose ends were tied up in the story, the item turned up which left me with a huge smile on my face. Even though it was such a small detail in the big scheme of things, it was a detail which brought such warmth to my soul when it became apparent what had happened to it. Very, very clever.

I honestly thought that Kate Thompson couldn't outdo her previous novel, 'The Wedding Girls', with this book, but you know what? She absolutely did. The attention to detail throughout the entire storyline was absolutely incredible - I felt like I could smell what the characters were smelling. I felt like I could see the allotment where the girls had been working. I felt like I could sense the terror amongst the families, wondering whether their houses would get bombed in the night. There were times throughout the book where I felt that I could have cut the tension with a knife, and rightly so! A lot of this story was heartbreaking to read - I couldn't even begin to imagine what those people went through during the war, yet Kate Thompson keeps the memory alive without making a mockery of it.

'The Allotment Girls', in my eyes, is exactly how books in this genre should be written. Full of intense situations, emotional moments, flashbacks to the past whilst hoping for the future, Kate Thompson has completely outdone herself where this book is concerned. I am so tempted to plant something in my garden,

just so that I can watch it blossom like the author has blossomed in front of my very own eyes.

'The Allotment Girls' is a phenomenal portrayal of lives once lost, futures being crafted, and memories living on. Beautiful, poignant, heart-breaking yet exceptionally written, this book is by far one of my most favourite books of all time.

And you know what? I would give Kate Thompson a big hug if I could, but most importantly, I would give her the most beautiful packet of seeds....just because.

Shirley Revill says

I love books set in this era and this one didn't disappoint. Loved the characters, loved the story. Truly wonderful book that you can't put down. Highly recommended.

Heather Copping says

I really loved this book it was my favourite genre (wartime saga). I was drawn into the story right from the very first few pages and was soon engrossed in the stories of the East End girls during World War two. Set around the Bryant and May match factory it follows the life's and loves of a group of women, Millie with her cheating husband Curly and her relationship with an RAF pilot Samuel, Pearl who was originally from Liverpool and you are wondering why did she leave Liverpool and her mum and dad. Annie and her nan Elsie, what is the story behind these two, and Rose, there is a big secret here, her mum Maureen is so nasty to Rose, the thread to all their lives runs through the story. Not forgetting Pip an adorable Jack Russell. The girls join together to take part in the dig for victory campaign and persuade the factory owners to let them dig two allotments in the grounds of the factory. It's not just the vegetables that grow well, it's the friendships that flourish not forgetting the strong community spirit that is very evident. I have read all of Kate Thompson's books and have loved them all, if you love wartime sagas you will love this book too.

Emma Crowley says

The Allotment Girls is the fourth book by Kate Thompson and in my mind her best. Initially, it did take me a few chapters to become fully immersed in the story and the lives of the characters who work at the Bryant and May match factory in East London during World War Two. But once all the introductions of the various characters had been made along with snippets as to their backgrounds, I found the story really got going and I thoroughly enjoyed it. In fact it seemed to be a very quick read and before I knew it I had reached the end of the book, I would have loved for it to have gone on for longer and it's not often that I say that.

The Allotment Girls was different from any other wartime saga book I have read as it focused on Bow in the East End of London and how one group of girls took the advice of 'Digging for Victory' to heart. The author had clearly undertaken detailed research into the area and the time and also as to how allotments became so important that almost any spare patch of ground, window sill or roof was turned over to the production of vegetables of some sort. The book opens with very wise words from the gardening correspondent of the Listener in February of 1940 'The very essence of gardening consists of rooting out and destroying all the evil things, and cultivating and developing all that is good and beautiful in life'. Never was a truer word said and these words could almost be used as a comparison between what was going on in the war as the evil of

Hitler needed to be rooted to with the utmost of urgency and what the group of women were doing in the grounds of the match factory.

The opening chapters introduce us to the characters that we will come to know, love and root for. Pearl has lost her job in Liverpool in the Byrant and May match factory, the iconic building has been bombed. But for Pearl this loss is a new beginning, why she needs this new start we do not know. She disappears to London hoping people will think she has been killed in the bombing. Pearl then seemed to be forgotten about for ages until she eventually meets the group of women who will become firm friends. She lands a job in the London branch of the factory and soon acclimatises to her new life but she is forever looking over her shoulders. With Pearl, there was always a wariness and a reluctance to reveal everything. I had minute inklings as to what could have happened to her but when the truth finally emerged it was very shocking. I never in the slightest blamed her for her actions in the later chapters of the book as in this case it was brilliant to see someone get their just deserts.

Pearl was brave to make the decision she did and then stick with it, uprooting herself from her life especially during war time when all anyone wants around then is love and security. Luckily she was welcomed into the warm embrace of Elsie and the girls and they quickly treated her as one of their own. There was never any pressure on her to explain her situation or share her a confidence. It's clear people living at the time going through experiences that were far from the norm on a daily basis led people to expect others for what they were. Constant questioning of Pearl wouldn't have made her confess so I was glad Annie, Rose, Millie and Elsie just let her be but yet when Pearl needed help they were all there for her in an instant.

Millie Brown aged only 21 is still very young but yet she is already married to Curly Brown. Curly is a gangster through and through and I couldn't see why Millie was with him unless it had been a forced marriage of some sort. Curly is coarse, rough, aggressive and a menace. Millie lives under a cloud of sadness and fear of retribution. She puts on a strong front to all her friends at the match factory and dresses to impress as she steps outside her front door but this bravado does not extend behind closed doors. How can she possibly get herself out of the desperate situation she finds herself in? But it was encouraging to see a brighter spark develop in Millie as we journeyed with the girls. A chance encounter sees her putting her marriage woes to one side and again like Pearl I didn't blame her for wanting some sort of happiness given the power Curly constantly exerted. Times were tough enough anyway without always experiencing anguish and desperation at home. I was delighted to see Millie seeking and finding some solace and comfort although I think she did get a lot more than she bargained for but how she handled everything was more than admirable. Millie always had high hopes for her future but Curly put paid to that but maybe she can have different dreams and aspirations which will help her through the most challenging years of the war.

Annie lives in Bow in East London. She alongside her younger sisters, who have been evacuated, have been raised by her Nan Elsie since the death of her mother. Her father is now a prisoner of war but Annie and Elsie must keep the home fires burning and remain strong and confident that good will win out over the evil seemingly determined on permeating all walks of life and corners of the world. The East End is such a changed place since the outbreak of war with countless buildings lying in rubble, no children safely playing on the streets and no flowers dotted around only vegetables occupying every available spot of ground. Night after night of bombing has left the area a shell of what it once was. But despite the Blitz raging on the people of the East End have spirit and determination and life will go on as best it can. Annie feels a deep love for the place she calls home and also a loyalty and protectiveness. For her these buildings and structures are more than just bricks and mortar, it is where she truly belongs.

Elsie was the matriarch of the story a community leader full of spirit, love and support, and all the girls looked to her for advice. She was a stalwart in the toughest of times and had such ingenuity about her. One thing though was I couldn't understand her fierce opposition to Annie and Rose working at the match factory. I know the work was dangerous but surely every bit of money that entered the house was needed and by working Annie did feel she was doing her bit for her country. I had hoped if and when the reasons for Elsie's

stance were explained that I would feel they were worthwhile and justifiable.

Rose is the final member of the group who come to mean so much to each other. A group where they can enjoy each other's company as they work on the factory floor but also when necessary problems and issues can be shared. Rose, not dissimilar to the other girls, does have a very tough life apart from the rigours that the war brings. She lives next door to Annie and Elsie and was adopted by Maureen as a young baby. Maureen was an absolute horror whom I couldn't warm to at all, she treated Rose with such disrespect that it almost verged on hatred. Unconditional love was certainly never offered from her. Never was a kind word uttered only constant put downs issued. She was rude and obnoxious and a bully of the highest order. Rose should not have had to endure this and there were several times I thought she was on the verge of breaking free from the constraints and shackles that surrounded her. But she never had that courage of the final conviction to go through with it or else her loyalty to her mother was just too strong. I understand the love Rose had for her mother but really should a grown woman have to experience such malice at every corner. I couldn't understand how nice Elsie was to Maureen either. If it had been me I would have left her on her own to manage after all she clearly didn't have Rose's best intentions at heart where as her close friends did.

What did strike me was that the work the girls partook in making and packing the matches must have been so monotonous. How could they have done such tedious work hour after hour, day after day and continue to demonstrate such camaraderie and spirit. It just shows how these women wanted to do their bit for the greater war effort and keep up the sense of pride they have in their country. I enjoyed reading of all various girls problems but its when Rose gets permission to construct an allotment in the grounds of the factory that the story took on another level and all the little mini plots working away in the background began to come to fruition.

Pride in the girls neighbourhood began to come to the fore and their love and compassion for growing vegetables and nurturing things from beginning to end with the goal of alleviating some stress on the ships coming into the country with goods. There was a real sense of everyone working together with one common aim and at the same time the same thing was happening in the girls lives. The allotment was set up as a place to escape the daily onslaughts of war but in time it offered a sense of purpose, a bolt hole but then things get all too much as personal traumas and events make their way on site. The question is are the women strong enough to weather the storms ahead or will everything just get too much and they fall, suffer and crumble?

Throughout the story Millie and co always put on their best face despite all their trials and tribulations and that sense of friendship and unity is what makes this a very special read and one which will stay with the reader for a long time once you have finished. How the prologue and ending connect was just so beautiful if very sad to read about, it was poignant but also fitting and did bring a tear to me eye. If you love wartime sagas then this is definitely the book for you.

Magdalena says

What a beautiful book! Fantastic writing, captivating story, great characters, I was drawn in from the very first page and just couldn't put it down.

Kate Thompson wrote an engaging story of friendship and secrets but most of all a story of the strength of human spirit in times of hardship and war.

Using Dig For Victory campaign as her inspiration Thompson brought to life a story of four friends, Annie, Millie, Rose and Pearl who despite the dark times of Second World War manage to keep their friendship strong and community spirit high.

The Allotment Girls is a beautiful and poignant story and I highly recommend it!

Lin says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The background of the second world war is authentic and thrilling, giving a real feel of life during the blitz. The history is skilfully woven into the story, as we follow a group of friends as they cope with life, war and working together to set up an allotment to support the Dig for Victory campaign.

This was easy to read, hard to put down and I'll definitely be looking for more by this author.

Sue says

My rating says it all as I very rarely give 5 stars!

This was my first Kate Thompson book and it will not be my last. I admit I was a little reluctant to read this book as I had given up reading books set in WWII as I had read so many they had started to blur into one! I am so glad that I chose this one as it is written in a fresh and interesting way, the war is a big part of the story but does not overpower the tale of the 4 girls that are the main characters. I loved the fact that there is a thread of actual happenings running through the whole book as it helps the whole story come alive and sets it firmly in its time and place.

beverley ann says

A must read

Bow eastend London, the story starts with annie,rose and Millie. Working in the top matchroom for Bryant & May plan on starting an allotment in the grounds of the factory with the help of pearl, firemen and pip the dog with the help of funds from the chairman the hardwork starts digging for victory. What a book to get your teeth into, the details by this author are spot on, page after page you learn more and more about the war. Incredible research is told from the heart. Gusty girls all come together as one. And things definitely got hot in the potting shed"an all" i loved it recommend to any book reader

Mary Wood says

Wartime East End brought to life

A novel that captures you and takes you back in time. To when the blitz destroyed much, but couldn't, destroy the spirit that was the heartbeat of the East End of London - the strong women, the 'look after our own' mentality, and 'we're all in this together' comradeship. THE ALLOTMENT GIRLS has all of these elements and more. And who better than to bring it to us than an author who has a genuine love of the area and its folk. And an understanding of what makes them tick. A compelling, gritty read. Highly recommend.

Alba says

Originally published on: <http://www.albainbookland.com/2018/03...>

This is Kate Thompson's fourth book and having read and loved her previous three, I knew what to expect from her: a touching story, well researched with generous descriptions and historic details, and above all, full of heart. And The Allotment Girls had all these ingredients and more.

Set in the East End, in Bow to be exact, during WWII, The Allotment Girls tells the story of four friends. They all work tirelessly in a match factory and support each other and their community as much as they can. Actually, their friendship is one of the key elements of the story and one that I enjoyed immensely. These girls were really made of stronger stuff and their loyalty knew no boundaries.

The other key element of the story was, of course, the allotments. Following the "Dig for Victory" campaign from the government, Annie convinced her friends and the company to create two allotments in the factory grounds. These allotments changed the life of these girls completely and I loved how both the girls and the gardens grew together and faced new challenges and obstacles.

Each character had her own story and secrets, which made the story very interesting and with plenty of unexpected turns. I warmed especially to Millie, this fierce woman was such an inspiration, she was a fighter and was ready to go to any lengths for her loved ones. But I have to say that I liked reading about all of them, by the end of the book I felt like I was one more in the gang.

I am always fascinated by Kate Thompson's stories, they open a window to our recent past and paint such a clear picture of how life was back then. The Allotment Girls is a very compelling story with a lot of heart.

Rating: 4.5

Amanda says

I think this was the author's best, although I've enjoyed two out of the other three. I felt involved in the characters and I'm sure the true story behind one of them will stay with me for a long time.

moira manson says

Matchgirls /allotment girls

What a truly fabulous story Annie, Millie, Rose, Pearl.

They all had a hard life but they also had the love of Elsie who kept them going a really fantastic book and I enjoyed reading about the original family who suffered such a devastating tragedy . It's definitely a 5 STARS for a fab read from kate .
