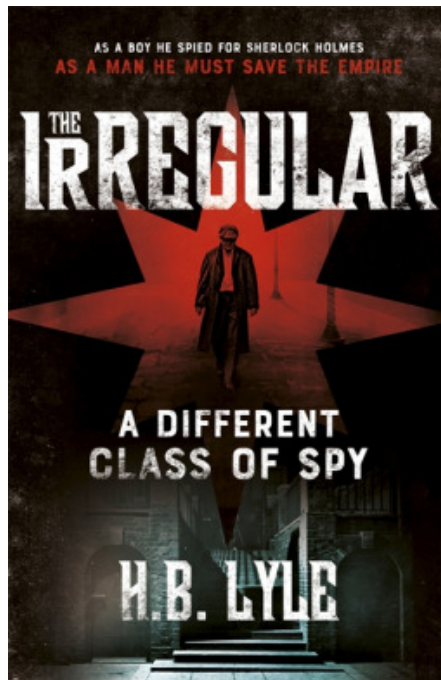




The Irregular

H.B. Lyle

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London 1909: The British Empire seems invulnerable. But Captain Vernon Kell, head of counter-intelligence at the War Office, knows better. In Russia, revolution; in Germany, an arms race; in London, the streets are alive with foreign terrorists. Kell wants to set up a Secret Service, but to convince his political masters he needs proof of a threat - and to find that, he needs an agent he can trust. The playing fields of Eton may produce good officers, but not men who can work undercover in a munitions factory that appears to be leaking secrets to the Germans.

Kell needs Wiggins. Trained as a child by Kell's old friend Sherlock Holmes - he led a gang of urchin investigators known as the Baker Street Irregulars - Wiggins is an ex-soldier with an expert line in deduction and the cunning of a born street fighter. 'The best', says Holmes.

Wiggins turns down the job - he 'don't do official'. But when his best friend is killed by Russian anarchists, Wiggins sees that the role of secret agent could take him towards his sworn revenge.

Tracking the Russian gang, Wiggins meets a mysterious beauty called Bela, who saves his life. Working for Kell, he begins to unravel a conspiracy that reaches far beyond the munitions factory.

The Irregular Details

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From Reader Review The Irregular for online ebook

Samuel Tyler says

With Sherlock Holmes out of copyright there are more spin offs from the series than crimes in his casebook. Not only are there further Sherlock adventures to read about, but stories from Watson or the ladies in Sherlock's life. 'The Irregular' takes another character from the original tales and expands the universe. Wiggins was the leader of The Irregulars, a group of street children that Holmes would use to gather intel or follow suspects, but what ever happened to him? H. B. Lyle is around to tell you and it may not surprise you to know that his work touches on solving a crime or two.

The year is 1909 and London is an ever modernising city. Wiggins find himself home from the Boer War struggling to make a living when one of his best friends is killed. Armed with the skills taught to him by his mentor Sherlock Holmes, Wiggins sets out to find the killer, but also becomes entangled with His Majesty's Government. Not in terms of jail time, but his unusual skill set has come to attention of a man who is setting up an agency to keep an eye on some suspicious looking Germans.

I have read quite a bit of post Conan-Doyle Holmes fiction in my time and a lot of it suffers from feeling like Holmes-lite. Either it uses Holmes and Watson, and they are not as well written, or it uses another similar character who uses analytical skills – a poor man's Holmes. 'Irregular' fits into the second camp, but Lyle has intelligently made Wiggins his own man. There are similarities between Wiggins and Holmes, but at no point does Lyle suggest that the former street child is up to the level of the great detective. Instead Wiggins is observant, but also impulsive, violent, surly and sometimes drunk. He is his own man and this gives the book its own distinct flavour.

The case itself is twofold; a spy thriller and a revenge thriller. Wiggins finds himself entangled in both and is intelligent enough to cope. However, the fact that he is flawed also leave plenty of room for mistakes and surprises along the way. The story itself is solid, but there are some issues with the time-lapse structure. To develop the characters Lyle will on occasion jump back in time to their childhood or how they came to England. This is a good way of fleshing out the various people in the book, but some of the jumps are sudden and take a while for you to figure out that you are in the past once more.

It is not the story that stands out in the book, but Lyle's ability to evoke 1909 London, from the sooty streets, the move from horse to automation, to the all-boys club in the Ministry. Lyle layers the tale with the sights and sounds of the era that really gives the book an earthiness. The narrative may stumble once or twice, but what holds steady is an excellent sense of time and place, for this alone the book offers something a little different and is fun to read.

Charles Green says

On paper the The Irregular sounds like a winner; former leader of Sherlock Holmes' Baker Street Irregulars, now grown up, is recruited to spy for the British Government newly formed intelligence agency in the run up to the First World War. It seems to promise old fashioned, escapist espionage adventure, along the lines of the 39 Steps, with plenty of action and intrigue.

Instead what we get is book that doesn't seem to know what it wants to be. At times it seems to be a piece of escapist adventure, with Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson in walk on parts, the fate of the Empire

potentially at stake and a hero with almost superhuman powers of observation and deduction. At others it becomes a serious drama, based around real events and featuring real people such as Winston Churchill, with flawed, human characters motivated by often prosaic concerns.

The constant switching between these two identities leaves the book feeling disjointed and lacking a clear identity, making it hard to fully engage with. This is a shame, because there are some good things on offer. Wiggins, the eponymous Irregular, is a promising lead character, and his boss Kell is allowed to be more than the typical stiff backed CO doling out orders and displeasure in equal measure. Action, when it occurs, is well written and punchy. The espionage elements of the plot involving attempts by the other Great Powers to steal British military technology provide the requisite intrigue, even if they are slightly undercooked. The period setting, and especially London itself, provide plenty of atmosphere.

What's less successful are what I would describe as the more serious, 'soapier' parts of the story. The romantic subplot for example, never fully convinces, feeling too manufactured for the sake of the plot, with its ultimate conclusion entirely predictable from some way out. Equally the attempts to shoehorn in real events, or at least variations on them, don't fit entirely comfortably with the more escapist parts of the plot. When in the final pages of the book the author suddenly sets up links to another well-known but entirely fictional British spy, the disconnect between this side of the book and the parts set amongst the real life slums of East End London in the early 20th century could not be starker.

Had Lyle crafted a more streamlined story with a more consistent identity I suspect that The Irregular would have been a far more satisfying read. Instead what we have here is an origin tale that seems in search of the right tone and focus, finding both only sporadically. As the opening episode of an ongoing series it probably does enough to make some readers come back for more, but the next instalment really needs to lock down a clear identity for the ongoing adventures of The Irregular.

I received prepublication copies of The Irregular via both The Amazon Vine Programme and NetGalley in exchange for an unbiased review.

Unseen Library says

I received a copy of The Irregular from Hachette Australia to review.

I did a short review of this book in the Canberra Weekly:
<https://unseenlibrary.com/2018/11/29/...>

Originally reviewed back in June 2017, I have re-published this review on my blog as part of my Throwback Thursday series.

Click the link below to see my reiew of the sequel of this book, The Red Ribbon:
<https://unseenlibrary.com/2018/10/18/...>

For other interesting reviews, visit my blog at:
<https://unseenlibrary.com/>

Yorky Caz says

Sooo good - its very hard these days to find a Sherlock Holmes new angle that hasn't been written about yet but this ticks the box. Wiggins the leader of the Baker Street Irregulars is now grown up and off on his own. Fantastically written and with the rare joy of a last page that actually made me cheer out loud!! Highly recommend.

Clare says

This review was originally posted at Dual Reads
Copy received for an honest review

What Worked:

The concept of a Baker Street Boy all grown up was obviously a big draw for me! And I did really enjoy Wiggins' character for the most part. Holmes himself even makes a brief appearance which was interesting. Bela was a side character I really enjoyed. I loved her whole story and background. She was interesting from the moment she first appeared and the more I learned about her, the more I loved her. London. I was born in London and grew up there (though I now live in Sunny Devon) so I love when books properly represent London, the grittiness and the greatness. And that was definitely so here. London felt very well realised which was a joy to read. The mysteries were compelling although at times didn't fully grab my attention. And yeah, mysteries. Which didn't super work for me.

What Didn't Work:

As I said there were two mysteries running alongside each other. Sometimes I love this. Here I did not. I kept getting the two mysteries confused (which may be my own stupidity) and would sometimes forget which one Wiggins was investigating at any one time. The problem was that the antagonists and the method of investigation were just too similar and it was easy for my mind to slip. I didn't like the majority of the characters. Wiggins and Bela were good but I often found myself frustrated or bored with the rest of the characters. Kell especially wasn't my cup of tea (although his wife was pretty awesome actually). The writing style bugged me a lot. The story often slipped into the past with no warning so it would sometimes take me a paragraph or two to realise that actually we were reading about child-Wiggins now. Part of this was due to the fact there was no break between current-Wiggins and past-Wiggins but part of it was because there wasn't much differentiation in character either. They thought and acted the same.

Overall Thoughts:

This wasn't an outstanding read and I doubt I will be re-reading it but I may pick up future books in the series depending on their plot. I do think this is a book that deserves to be mentioned more and it shows promise for the future but it didn't quite work for me.

Tracy B says

Enjoyable - Worth A Read

I was drawn to this book following the authors article, in the Guardian, bemoaning a lack of working class characters in spy novels. A quick read, I found it to be an enjoyable romp set in the period of The 39 Steps. For me, the book flows

well, however, the main character is not as rounded as Deighton's Harry Palmer or a Callan. It's main danger is that of becoming a cliché of the Sharpe Novels, rough working class hero, falls for female whilst fighting villains etc. I hope this does not happen. That said I have preordered the second novel and recommend this one.

Bob Mobley says

H.B. Lyle has written a superb mystery novel that is engaging, exciting, and absolutely holds your attention as a reader. It's his first novel and promises to be a very entertaining and exciting series, much in the tradition of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Set in London in 1909, Lyle captures the feeling, the energy, the complexities and the cultural divides that were such a part of this imperial capital at the beginning of the 20th century. It is an interesting and enjoyable ride through the beginnings of what becomes British intelligence, both MI5 and MI6. His hero, Wiggins, is captivating, and Lyle draws his Edwardian back streets in a convincing color and flavor. Fans of Arthur Conan Doyle's stories will remember that the young Wiggins was a leader of the Baker Street Irregulars, which formed such an important part of Sherlock Holmes' intelligence gathering system.

The Irregular is a compelling book and should definitely added to one's reading list if you enjoy historical fiction, combined with intrigue, murder, and political power moves by government agencies. In many ways, Lyle's book may be a mirror on our own times and what's going on in so many countries around the globe.

Gloria Feit says

It's not easy for an author to come up with an original idea for a novel, much less a plot involving Sherlock Holmes. But that is just what H.B. Lyle has done, albeit the great detective here only playing a minor cameo role, offstage, as it was. Instead, he has grasped an historical development, the forerunners of Britain's MI5 and MI6 in 1909 and using the "best" of the Baker Street Irregulars, Wiggins, as a protagonist. Not only Holmes, but no less a personage than Winston Churchill plays a minor role in the plot.

The story revolves around Vernon Kell, who apparently headed up the original efforts to establish a counter-intelligence operation in Great Britain, hindered by his inability to find good agents until his friend, Holmes, suggested Higgins. A substantial portion of the novel recounts Higgins' exploits and a good deal of background on how the Baker Street Irregulars came to be. And, of course, we learn a great deal about the conspiracies pre-dating World War I and espionage efforts by Germany and others not only to obtain secrets but also to sow discontent and confusion in London.

The novel is exciting, interesting and fast-moving. It is an historical mystery, the beginning of what is promised to be a new series, and a welcome one. The author captures the atmosphere of 1909 London with sharp observations and dialogue. We look forward to its sequel with great anticipation.

Recommended.

Gram says

A fast moving spy thriller centred on the creation of Britain's Secret Service, set in the 1st decade of the 20th Century. The story features characters both real and fictitious. The "hero" is Wiggins - the original leader of "The Baker Street Irregulars" - street kids who were employed by Sherlock Holmes as his eyes and ears on the streets of London. Now, a grown man, Wiggins is recruited by Captain Vernon Kell, head of counter-intelligence at the War Office, who is desperately trying to alert the British Government to the existence of German agents stealing the country's military secrets.

At first, Wiggins turns down the job, but after his policeman friend is killed during a botched payroll robbery - and at the urging of Sherlock Holmes - he agrees to sign up with Kell who sends him to work in the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich, a huge munitions and military research site. During his investigation, Wiggins becomes involved with a criminal gang which includes the infamous "Peter The Painter" (another real character). At the behest of an unknown spy, Peter and his gang of Eastern European immigrants are also fomenting riots and revolution in Britain's capital. Wiggins also encounters a fascinating young Latvian woman, Bela, who has a dark, secretive past. This is a truly rattling good yarn and seems set for a series. The main characters are well sketched out and the action will leave the reader breathless.

Elaine Tomasso says

I would like to thank Netgalley and Hodder and Stoughton for an advance copy of of The Irregular: A Different Class of Spy, the first in a new series of pre-WW1 spy stories which weaves real people and events into a fictional narrative.

Britain is in turmoil with Russian anarchists causing mayhem and a war with Germany looming, not that most politicians believe it. Captain Vernon Kell of military intelligence has a problem. He believes that there are German industrial spies stealing Britain's latest technology but he can't prove it although the murder of his his two best agents adds to his suspicions. He is in a catch 22 situation as with no proof he can't get the funds to do a proper investigation. On the advice of Sherlock Holmes he takes a radical approach and tries to recruit Wiggins, not at all their usual employee. As a child Wiggins used to be a Baker Street Irregular working for Sherlock Holmes but he grew up, joined the army and now, in 1909, he is down on his luck working as a debt collector. He turns them down flat until it suits him and then he brings his own style to "the game".

I thoroughly enjoyed The Irregular with its unusual premise, clever plotting and action. It is an interesting and unusual approach to have a working class spy and protagonist in that era when it was all about the right schools and connections. It works really well and brings a freshness and different slant to the historical detail, some of which I was aware of and some of it new. The plotting is clever, plausible and has plenty of twists and turns. I got really caught up in it all and couldn't turn the pages fast enough to see what was coming. The last few lines of the novel are amazing in their cleverness and I couldn't help laughing as I read them. They leave a positive vibe.

The Irregular is not a novel for the faint hearted. It has a fair amount of violence and bad language, none of it offensive or gratuitous, rather a reflection of the rough setting of the novel. I only make this point as most of the historical crime novels set around this period that I have read tend towards cosiness.

Wiggins is an interesting character and a good protagonist. He is confident in himself and a bit of socialist so he's not one for tugging his forelock and sees himself as an equal of any man. This makes for some interesting encounters with Captain Kell. His patriotism and ability to do his job are not in doubt and most of

the action comes from this as he uncovers more than one nest of vipers. On a more light hearted note he has Sherlock Holmes's ability to analyse people through observation.

On the whole the author is good on the period detail but every so often some modern sensibilities slip in like Captain Kell's reluctance to break the law.

I thoroughly enjoyed The Irregular and look forward to reading more in the series so I have no hesitation in recommending it as a good read.

The Tattooed Book Geek (Drew). says

As always this review can also be found on my blog The Tattooed Book Geek:
<https://thetattooedbookgeek.wordpress...>

I received a free copy of this book courtesy of the publisher through bookbridgr in exchange for an honest review.

The Irregular takes place in Edwardian London in 1909 and tells the story of Wiggins. Just about managing to get by, Wiggins is employed as a bailiff and is struggling to get by, it's a rough life, a harsh time and it's even harder to make an honest living. Approached by Captain Vernon Kell to aid the Empire and become an agent for him Wiggins initially declines the offer (Kell wants Wiggins due to his lower class upbringing, he'll be able to fit in where the high-class gentry can't).

While out with his friend, tragedy then befalls Wiggins, trying to do the right thing and stop an armed robbery perpetrated by the Russian anarchist movement, his friend is shot and dies. Vowing revenge for his murdered friend Wiggins soon comes to realise that on his own and with no resources he won't be able to get very far and so he searches out Captain Kell. With the offer accepted Wiggins is recruited as an agent, going undercover in a munitions factory that is leaking secrets to the Germans, this job then gives Wiggins the means to look into his friend's death (on the side and unofficial). What follows is a tale of espionage and terrorism as secrets are unravelled and deceit is revealed as Wiggins delves ever deeper in his attempts to find his friends killers, whilst simultaneously trying to gather the proof of a threat that Kell requires to set up the Secret Service.

Wiggins is a great main character to base the book around, Lyle has taken someone who was a secondary character from one of the best fictional canon's created and brought him to life. The young street urchin who was the leader of the Baker Street Irregulars is now a grown man and thanks to Lyle the star of his own book and series. Wiggins isn't part of the gentry, ex-army, he's street savvy and life has been tough for him. Due to his association with Holmes, Wiggins has himself picked up some of the great Detective's traits, he's a dab hand at deduction, a likeable everyman sort of fellow that you can really get behind and root for, he's a character that you want to succeed in both his mission and his quest for revenge.

The secondary characters are also used to great effect to draw you in, from the hulking, brooding and menacing form of Yakov, the charismatic Peter with a penchant for sweets, both Russian anarchists, Captain Vernon Kell and his wife Constance, Vincas (you want to see him get what's coming to him, every book has that one character you hate above others) to Bela who strikes up a friendship with Wiggins after saving his life, she is a character who has her secrets, I can't tell you what role she plays, spoilers! But her back story is a bleak one.

We see both Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson in flashbacks from Wiggins youth as we learn about the

formation of the Baker Street Irregulars and there are also a couple of fleeting cameos from the pair in the main present day story. While these appearances within the main story add nothing overall to the tale, they are nonetheless nice little additions, nods to two classic literary characters and for me personally, I found it a pleasure that they both briefly appeared.

Lyle does a great job of bringing the metropolis of Edwardian London to life, the bustling city streets, the train stations, the squalor, filth and deprivation of the time, the dark and dank alleys, the divide between the rich and the poor, it's a tough place for the poor while the rich live in luxury, all this and more make the setting come alive on the pages.

The pacing in The Irregular is near perfect, the chapters always move the storylines nicely along, the occasional flashbacks never outstay their welcome and add additional detail to the back story, all in all it's a fast paced and action packed read with violence, emotion, some poignant moments and plenty of twists and turns that thanks to Lyle's writing, really pulls you into the story he is telling, keeping you invested from the first page to the last.

The Irregular is the first book in the series and the TV rights have already been acquired. While it's not a genre I often frequent (I'm a fantasy fan, it's nice to read something different on occasion). Going on how much I personally enjoyed the book, I can't wait to read more in the series and I also think that it will make for a damn good period drama TV show.

There is a lot to like in The Irregular, it's definitely a book that I'd highly suggest to fans of historical fiction, crime, spy and thriller readers alike.

The Irregular merges together actual events and real-life persons with fictional characters and storyline to form an origin story for the secret service. Added together these aspects make for a rip-roaring page-turner of a book and a rollicking good read.

Recommended.

Liz Barnsley says

Really enjoyed this! Full review to follow.

Ed says

A protege of the now elderly Sherlock Holmes, Wiggins rose from a street orphan to soldier in the Boar War to find himself working for Vernon Kell. Captain Kell has been given the responsibility of uncovering foreign spy's at the Woolwich Armory in London before they can sabotage British armament in the run up to the Great War. Sherlock Holmes has only one undercover operative in mind for Kell's position; the "Captain" of his "Baker Street Irregular's" Wiggins!

This is a big sprawling adventure that touches on the life and times of London in the early 20th century and the wonderful characters that give life to it's lively prose in unique and entertaining ways. I am almost tempted to reread it on the off chance I missed something interesting along the way. A great novel to start the year that I enthusiastically recommend.

Jean Kolinofsky says

I would like to thank NetGalley for the opportunity to review this book. Sherlock Holmes was assisted by a group of orphaned children called the Baker Street Irregulars, led by a boy named Wiggins. He has now grown, served in the military and is trying to support himself.

With a recommendation from Holmes, Wiggins is approached by Vernon Kell from the Home Office, who has been tasked with finding evidence of German spying. Kell's operatives have all been gentlemen who stood out against the workers in the munitions factory that they have been observing, resulting in their discovery and death. Wiggins, who was raised on the streets, has the ability to fit in. While he refuses at first, he realizes that this position would also allow him to look into the death of a close friend.

These are the early days of the Secret Service and Wiggins' employment was a step in acknowledging the need to adapt. With political instability in Europe and Russian dissidents urging revolution in England, Kell recognizes the importance of his office.

This is also Wiggins' story. H.B. Lyle takes the reader from the orphanage in his early years to his meeting with Holmes and the formation of the Baker Street Irregulars. This book should appeal to fans of Sherlock Holmes as well as those of Anne Perry. Hopefully, this is only the beginning of a new series.

Jessica Bronder says

It is 1909 and Captain Vernon Kell has the feeling that things are going to go south fast. He wants to start a Secret Service but his superiors don't see the need for one. So, Kell goes out on his own and finds Wiggins and offers him a job. Wiggins is the leader of the Baker Street Irregulars and trained by infamous Sherlock Holmes. Wiggins does not agree at first but when a close friend is killed, he hunts Kell down and joins.

While in Germany, investigating a munitions factory, Wiggins learns of British military secrets being leaked to the Germans. He meets several character for both sides and continues to pursue the man that killed his friend. This is the proof that Kell need to start the Secret Service, if Wiggins can survive long enough to get the information to him.

This is a great spy story with some great classic characters and real life people mixed together. I love the nod to Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. This is a great continuation of Wiggins' story. There is lots of action and close calls to keep you on the edge of your seat. Bela is a great character with a rough past and I enjoyed her role in this story. This is a great start to a new series.

If you like turn of the century thrillers with war and espionage, look no further. You will love this book.

I received The Irregular from Quercus for free. This has in no way influenced my opinion of this book.
