



## Hereward

*James Wilde*

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## **Hereward** James Wilde

1062, a time many fear is the End of Days. With the English King Edward heirless and ailing, across the grey seas in Normandy the brutal William the Bastard waits for the moment when he can drown England in a tide of blood.

The ravens of war are gathering. But as the king's closest advisors scheme and squabble amongst themselves, hopes of resisting the naked ambition of the Norman duke come to rest with just one man: Hereward.

To some a ruthless warrior and master tactician, to others a devil in human form, Hereward is as adept in the art of slaughter as the foes that gather to claim England's throne. But in his country's hour of greatest need, his enemies at Court have made him outlaw. To stay alive - and a freeman - he must carve a bloody swathe from the frozen hills of Northumbria to Flanders' fields and the fenlands of East Anglia.

The tale of a man whose deeds will become the stuff of legend, this is also the story of two mismatched allies: Hereward the man of war, and Alric, a man of peace, a monk. One will risk everything to save the land he loves, the other to save his friend's soul.

James Wilde's thrilling, action-packed debut rescues a great English hero from the darkest of times and brings him to brutal and bloody life.

## **Hereward Details**

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Author : James Wilde

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## From Reader Review Hereward for online ebook

### Paula Lofting says

This book was a bit of a disappointment to me as I was attracted by the cover which had an awesome character on the front, Hereward, handsomely mad, monstrously rugged and deadly. You could see the devil in his eyes as he drew back the arrow from a bow that he was never portrayed as having fired in the book (as far as I remember). Anyway, the character turned out to be just a tad too inhuman at times (sinking his teeth into a wolf's throat and fighting a bear) and at other times a little too emotional. I suspect that the finished article ended where the next book will begin but I'm not sure I will want to read the sequel if there is one. I didn't like his portrayal of the grasping power-hungry King Harold and the inferral that Harold smothered Edward with a pillow. It is a fiction writer's prerogative to be creative with the evidence and facts but that was a step too far for me. Still, it was a reasonable read and one I'm sure that some will enjoy if you're not too bothered about facts being bent or discombobulated!

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### Helen White says

It's all grr arg stab kill. Hereward is like a more violent Robin Hood without the merry men, but he has almost got a friar Tuck. Not a bad tale but I won't be rushing straight into the next one.

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### S.J. Arnott says

'Drink,' he said. 'Let the juices of the toadstool fill you with the passion of our ancestors.' He passed the vessel of steaming urine to Ivar...

So much for budget caterers...

The above quote wasn't from the mouth of Hereward, but one of the many unsavoury adversaries he encounters throughout the book, most of whom swiftly get the chop. The action starts early with Hereward rising Rambo-like out of a pool of bloody water to dispatch a bunch of Viking mercenaries and, after skinning one of them, slaughtering an entire wolf pack single-handed (biting the throat out of the last of them when he drops his sword). The violence is fairly cartoonish at this stage and reminiscent of the antics you see in 'Norse Geezer' films such as *Hammer of the Gods* where the average human body has the consistency and sliceability of a boiled potato. If the book had continued in this vein I might have given up, but as the story developed I got drawn in and really started to enjoy it.

The tone is fairly melodramatic throughout, but packed with action, and the fast-moving plot and short chapters make this a fun, easy read.

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### Krista Baetiong Tungol says

This is a fictionalized account of Hereward the Wake, dubbed the last Englishman and one of the local leaders who openly resisted the Norman invasion of England in the 11th century. Normally this time period is a page-turner for me, but maybe it was just unfortunate that I read this book when I was sick with the flu

and my mind wasn't on a full-on reading mood these past weeks. It also didn't help to find Hereward's character a little angsty and too self-absorbed for a legendary hero, and I really, really dislike how Harold Godwinson was depicted here as a cruel and scheming scoundrel. This is not how I want the last Anglo-Saxon king of England to be epitomized.

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## **Andy says**

Didn't quite pan out as I expected..... I read the date involved & thought excellent a story about a Saxon Huscarl who goes against them Normans at the Battle of Hastings .....

What we get though is a different recount of the "good guys" and the "bad guys" amongst the Saxon court & Thegns as Harold Godwinson is portrayed as very different to how my history was taught to me, his brother Tostig too had a different character than I recognised through my history lessons. It's an interesting take on the events & persona of the time & one which I enjoyed reading about as it's very plausible in it's retelling & fits around our hero Hereward's motivations.

Yes..... all roads eventually lead to 1066

Both the major battles are covered albeit swiftly as we all know the history involved with them & the final outcomes so I'm not too miffed at that if i'm honest even though I expected a little more in the build-up to both in terms of strategy & politics.

By no means a perfect book for the time as some of the history felt (very) abridged which Harold Godwinson's & Tostig's story was..... In reality they played (minor) roles alongside that of our hero Hereward & his companions who come & go along the way. It felt a little patchy at times with our hero seeming to overstay his welcome jus about everywhere he stops & tries to settle in before..... the red mist descends & we're off again..... there's more in the series so I'm intrigued enough by it all & will read on

At the back of the book there's also a little history about the man who was a real character but for me I'd not heard of him, many haven't, says the author but he's spoken of in the same mythical terms as Arthur of The Britons & Robin Hood although there is a lot more reality written about him in history.

Easy enough read, likeable characters & not too taxing on the noodle in the summer heat so ideal for me.

As to the score, a four by virtue of a round-up

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## **Robin Carter says**

There have been a fair few novels set around this period of history lately, some have met mixed reviews. It really depends on what you are looking for from a historical fiction book?

EG: Conquest by Stewart Binns is a rousing tale that roars along with loads of blood and thunder action and has a heavy tilt towards nationality. While Shieldwall by Justin Hill is a slower more historically rich title that really educates the reader.

Hereward for me falls somewhere in-between, it has a fair bit of historical detail (i cant vouch for the accuracy its not my area of expertise) and also lashings of action. As another reviewer (Gareth) has written

there is a very Gemmellesque flavour to certain scenes and also characters, and there is in my opinion no higher accolade for a writer.

This is a great book and the fact that its a debut title means that we potentially have great things to come from this writer.

Highly recommended (Parm)

Product Description (From the back of the book)

1062, a time many fear is the End of Days. With the English King Edward heirless and ailing, across the grey seas in Normandy the brutal William the Bastard waits for the moment when he can drown England in a tide of blood.

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## Rebecca says

This is definitely one of several Hereward based historical novels I'd recommend. It has a movie style epic and gripping start and the characters are so rich in detail and depth and the plots so intricately woven together that even Shakespeare's plots seemed simple compared to the ones in this book.

It truly takes the reader into the reality of the anglo-saxon world complete with characters from simple peasant folk through monks and priests, warriors and hurscals, noble ladies and the cut-throat (literally) power-hungry men of court, including one Harold Godwinson portrayed in a light never before seen or considered but is based well within his historical context of an ailing King with no heir.

There is as no suprise a lot of death, battle, sword fights, murder and gore in this novel but it demonstrates that despite the mixed and developed culture of the anglo-saxons the sword and honour in the face of death was still a powerful rule in the hearts of men, like Hereward, in particularly so due his own crazed bloodlust frenzy that arises within him when he is forced to draw blood.

The story does cover a lot but it does it with great care and sadly it ends all too soon at the start of Hereward's famous rebellion against William the Conqueror. I can only hope a sequel is planned.

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## Sarah says

Okay. I finished it, but this book did not blow me away.

Here's the plot of the story: Two wrongly accused men, one moral and one amoral, develop a friendship as they attempt to clear their names during the period leading up to (and immediately following) the Norman Invasion.

It took my 150 page to realize what this book was about. Until that point, the book was a series of violent escapes during which violent men try to violently murder other violent men. Hereward violently violences the violent men while his monkish friend tries to save his soul only to be warned that Hereward is violent and dangerous. Did I mention violence?

Yeah.

The writing style is engaging. There's a lot of action in this book. People are plotting, violence is happening, danger is around the corner, more people are plotting...and Hereward is violent.

The problem is that the "action" is more like "motion" than "progress." As I said, it took me 150 pages to understand why the action was happening. Who were these characters? Why were they doing what they were doing? What is the overall motivating factors? When the "ah-ha" moment arrived, I even thought to myself "so THAT'S what this story is about." I even looked at the page number to make a mental note of how long it took.

Granted, I can be a sloppy reader. I tend to skim too much when I don't care about what's happening in a scene. If characters names are too similar, I can get them confused during my speed-reading. If I'm not 100% invested in the book, my eyes read, but my mind wanders elsewhere.

But still. 150 pages to "get it?"

Then, as other reviewers have said, this is the first book in a trilogy(?), and it suffers many of the "setting up a series" pitfalls that other books have set up before. This books takes so much time to establish that Hereward is violent that we're supposed to care when he isn't violent. It's supposed to be a character arc, I suppose. But I have invested so little emotion in this dangerous, possibly psychotic man that by the time the story reveals itself, I have a hard time caring. So much effort is spent setting up the conflict between England and Normandy that when the Battle of Hastings happens, it feels like a letdown. Then Hereward vows to do...something...and the book ends.

It felt like the author was so excited to write a sweeping story about the Norman Invasion that he forgot to write a story about his main character.

It's not a terrible book. I suppose. Many other people have liked it, and I get why. But for me, this book was a chore to get through and the payoff didn't seem worth it.

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## Jane says

I almost gave up reading this novel of Hereward, the English leader of the resistance to William the Conqueror, since the first part was so confusing. After he meets the monk and they travel together, I wondered what each of them had done to deserve outlawry; also what the plot and the conspiracy were. Nothing made sense but all fell together finally and I'm glad I did persist and finish. The novel tells of Hereward's wanderings as outlaw, fleeing to Flanders and his adventures there, then return to England and rebel leader in the fens of East Anglia.

The novel was worth reading for the last part--his return to England and his battle with Normans among the

fens. I did not like the author's conception of Harold Godwinson--his duplicity, greed, smothering of the king, then declaring himself the heir to the throne. It's almost as though Hastings [described in detail in the novel] seemed to be a comeuppance. I don't think I'll continue with any sequels.

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## **S.J.A. Turney says**

Hereward was something of an unknown for me as I went into it. With most historical fiction I read, I have some grounding in the subject or characters, but my knowledge of Hereward the Wake is limited to the fact that I knew the name, though I couldn't even have placed him in a century until I read this book. So there's something important that James Wilde has done: he has put a hitherto vague name on the map for a lot of people as a historical hero and placed him in a time period.

The book has upsides and downsides for me that swung my opinion wildly as I read, though I finished it with a solidly positive view.

I found the character of Hereward himself to be a little too familiar and stereotypical – bearing characteristics in common with Batman, the Hulk, and Conan the Barbarian among others. He is an anti-hero in a well-used vein, brooding and dark and moody, with a shadowy, unhappy past, interspersed with periodic berserk rages. I did get used to the character after a while, but the main supporting characters I thought were more original constructions. Saying this, the character, while a little jarring at the start, wore in very nicely by the end.

Easily counteracting any trouble I had with the main character was the writing itself. Wilde has a very visual writing style that makes his work a joy to read and, to be honest, he could write a bus timetable and I would find it gripping and effusive. Despite any issues I had during the book, I continued to pick it up and read it at every opportunity and finished it in three days (fairly quick for me.) Moreover, the book picked up pace and style toward the end and drew me ever further in, leaving me in the position where I would have been disappointed that it had finished, had I not the sequel standing by ready to go on to.

The other issue I had was with the two main battles handled within the book. There are only a few things that I do know about this period, but they generally revolve around the battle of Senlac Hill (Hastings) and the battle of Stamford Bridge (the latter having been fought not far from my home and therefore a matter of local interest). The accounts of both battles in the novel are sparsely and briefly treated, with Hastings being taken up suddenly towards the end of the battle and what has happened so far given as a brief retrospective. I was a little disappointed at that, given the import of the two battles not only on British history, but also on the characters in the novel. I felt that the battles should have been given much more detail and made more relevant, given their centrality to the plot. Also, the history of the battle of Stamford Bridge appears to have been slightly altered in the book (ref specifically the famous axeman on the bridge and the manner of his downfall.)

I do love the feel of the era as portrayed by James. This period has a tremendous mix, from pantheistic Vikings in the traditional sense, through Christianised Norsemen, Saxon Englishmen, knights of Flanders who would not seem out of place over a century later during Richard I's wars, to the Normans (who are only given a passing role in this book, but are satisfyingly portrayed as harsh and efficient former Norsemen themselves.) And kudos to James for his treatment of the much vaunted Harold Godwinson and his kin and the harepin bend he takes with their proud legend. Pleased at that, James.

Overall, I had a couple of issues, but nothing that prevented me thoroughly enjoying the book. The last quarter, in particular, I loved. I also like the fact that the story builds up from the introduction of a fates-battered anti-hero and ends with his rebirth as a true hero for England, leaving threads open and drawing the reader into the sequel.

## Chris says

Based on the character of Hereward the Wake and largely following the line of the Gesta Herewardi, I enjoyed the book pretty much, until I came to the part where Hereward goes to Flanders.

Wilde got the description of the landscape and the coast of Northern France, Flanders, the Zealand Isles, (especially Walcheren where I used to live) and the Dutch Coast and Scaldis estuary all wrong. There are no pebble beaches, and Walcheren - (quote) Hereward studied Walcheren. It looked like an upturned bowl floating on the grey waters, steep, tree covered slopes, rising from boulder strewn shores to the village of the summit (quote) Obviously Wilde, living in England, didn't bother to study the geography and topographics of the North-sea coast of his eastern Neighbours. No boulders, no tree covered slopes, it does not have a small rocky beach you can splash towards, it is not a really small bowl with currently 216 square kilometres, and was even much bigger at 1000 AD, had 3 ring forts to protect it against viking attacks, no tree covered slopes, and there are no cliffs on Walcheren that Hereward can fall off, like in the story. There's only Dunes, sandy beaches, salt water marches and mudflats over here.

I was really appalled by this ignorance and as a native this really spoiled all the fun of reading it. That's why I only rated it one star.

In the next part Hereward is off to England again, so Wilde hopefully will not be able to make this mistake again in the series. It could be a good read.

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## David says

Obviously the first in a planned series of novels on Hereward 'the Wake' (in this context, 'the Wake' means wary or watchful), who was a real Saxon who led the resistance against the Norman invaders of England in William the Conquerors time.

While largely forgotten by history, many of Hereward's exploits have later been subsumed into the many legends of Robin Hood - it is easy to see the parallels between the two characters and, as such, I thought that this could prove to be an interesting read.

Unfortunately, for me, much of the novel fell flat - I was never really drawn into it all that much; never really connected with any of the main characters. Starting in 1062, the novel takes place over a span of years (up to, and slightly beyond) The Battle of Hastings in 1066 with that battle (and Stamford bridge beforehand) largely glossed over - maybe only a chapter or two devoted to the both of them. Indeed, it was only in the last 70 pages or so - with the beginnings of the English resistance - that I began to be more drawn into the novel, by which stage it was too late.

While I may read the sequels, I'm not going to be looking for them.

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## Katy says

For a book where so many passing characters get brutally hacked about by axes, it was kind of dull! It had sat on my bedside reading pile for about a year, and when I finally picked it up, it took me about twice as long as I'd have expected to read. All but the last 50 pages seems like a prequel to the real story, which I assume starts in book 2 of the series, but given I've just discovered there are 5 books, the pacing of this one

could suggest that book 2 is still the prequel too. I don't feel anywhere near invested enough in the characters to find out, as despite only finishing the book an hour ago, I'm already forgetting the details. It's a shame, because I was actually keen to learn more about Hereward the Wake, given he's become so little known. Some historical fiction is well-written enough to give you a real insight into a time period, but none of this ever really rang true for me. I'm pretty certain there's a more scholarly book on Hereward in amongst my archaeology textbooks, so I'll be better off looking that one out.

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## **Beorn says**

I would initially be a little hesitant to freely give a book five stars but this is the first book I've read in a long time that hooked me right from the start.

I know it's probably because I'm a big fan of Bernard Cornwell, especially the saga centred on Uhtred Of Bebbanburg, but there are echoes of such great storytelling here. Hereward, told more in the third person, is a more visceral, bloodthirsty and angry story than that of Uhtred with a lot of the same high quality plot weaving, engrossing action and intrigue.

Although it was probably a little reckless to do so, you find yourself almost pulsating your way through the book hungry for just one more bite, helped by the almost cinematic like switch from chapter to chapter.

Overall this is one of the most rewarding books of recent memory and I can't wait to crack on with the sequel that I stumbled across in the library.

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## **Speesh says**

Superb. Nothing less.

Hereward gripped me and held me at sword-point from page one.

(That was my attempt at writing something they might want to use on a future Hereward book jacket).

I can't remember being so impressed by a historical novel for a long, long time. It really is that good.

Set in an interesting and - for me, at least - under discovered period; the years just before and just after the Norman invasion of 1066. We're in the death-throws of the Viking period, the old, 'real' England is struggling to come through and (re-) establish itself and (in this novel) the Normans are a dark and brooding presence who everyone knows are just waiting to strike.

Hereward is caught up in the maelstrom of Viking mercenaries, shifting alliances, half-truths and general jostling for position at what passes for the English Court. After being in the wrong place at the wrong time and hearing something he definitely shouldn't, is forced to flee north where he might find some safety and sanctuary. From there, he goes on to meet old adversaries, confront old ghosts, make new enemies and make progress towards finding out about his past. He returns to The Fens and begins to form and lead the English resistance to the Normans' seemingly un-stoppable dominance.

This has everything you could want in a historical novel; fighting, tension, fighting, suspense, fighting, love, fighting, intrigue - and fighting. I've seen that there is a number two ready for me to get to grips with, and I will be doing so as soon as possible.

Oh, and he's man of Mercia, like me.

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