

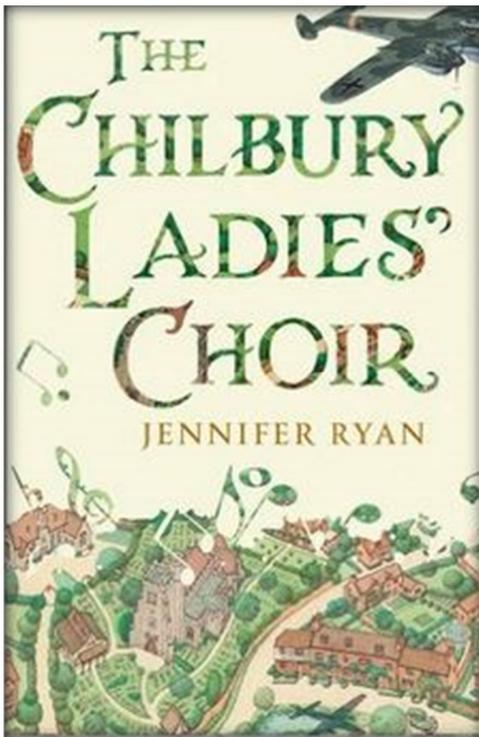


Helping you choose  
your next book

**HARPER**

## LoveReading Reader reviews of **The Chilbury Ladies Choir** by Jennifer Ryan

**Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.**



**Allison Batten**

*Touching WW2 story that I looked forward to reading each day. A gem of a book, highly enjoyable and moving.*

*This is a lovely, warm read.*

*Set in a small English village during WW2, The ladies of the newly formed church choir tell their stories through letters, diaries and journals.*

*There is drama, romance and humour galore in the book and I really enjoyed getting to know each character as their individual stories unfolded.*

*I think Jennifer Ryan is a good storyteller and writes in an easy to read style.*

*I loved it and look forward to reading more from this author.*

**Lesley Hart**

***A romp through a village during WWII and the determination of its lady choir not to be dictated to, when their menfolk go to war. Told through letters and diary notes, it is a wonderful uplifting story.***

*I thoroughly enjoyed this book of relationships brought together and developed during World War II. Of the ladies of Chilbury who go to choir practice hoping to seek solace from familiar routines, after their menfolk have gone to war, to find a notice on the door stating that the choir would close because there were no male voices. The ladies determinedly decide to 'carry on regardless' and reform as a ladies choir with the help of the delightfully refreshing Primrose*

Trent.

*This story is told through the members of the choir and Jennifer Ryan has done well to make their voices so individual of their characters and of the time. During the letters and diary notes we see black marketeers and spies and the way the village copes after bombs are dropped on the village on a bombers way back from a raid, both with the devastation and death that are outcomes.*

*A fantastic debut from Jennifer Ryan that I thoroughly recommend.*

### **Sarah Hamid**

***A heart-warming novel, told cleverly through diary entries and letters.***

*This is a story about the people who live in a small English village, during World War II, and some of the events that happen to them. After a slow start for me, I enjoyed the twists and turns of this long novel, and soon started to care about the characters. I wasn't sure, to start with, if I was going to like this book, as the plot involving the midwife initially left me cold. I also found the structure of the book confusing - probably not helped by the fact that I was reading it late at night in bed. However, as soon as the format and the characters began to take shape, I was hooked.*

*I particularly liked the diary entries of Kitty Winthrop, age 13, as they are written with the honesty and innocence of a young teenager (before the age of social media and ""growing up fast""). Some of her sections of the book have the excitement of a children's adventure story.*

*This is a cleverly constructed novel, with plenty going on and a neat tying up of all the loose ends. I think it will be popular with women readers who enjoy Joanna Trollope. I look forward to Jennifer Ryan's next novel.*

### **Celia Cohen**

***I loved this book.*** *Having been born in 1944 I thankfully remember nothing about the war but this book illustrates just how the women of this country coped and kept things going at home while the men were away fighting. Each of the characters in their own way did their bit and I found myself drawn to each of them and couldn't wait to read what was going to happen next. The book **is a mixture of fun, sadness, intrigue and tragedy and is so skilfully written that you will not be able to put it down.** A wonderful book*

*portraying the courage of the women of this country during the war.*

### **Catherine Jenkins**

*By presenting well-researched insights into the lives of the women left behind during the Second World War, this novel makes for an informative read as well as being highly entertaining - hinging, as it does, on the interesting question of how a society for which men were previously integral can continue when its most dominant voices (not least its tenors and basses!) are removed from the equation. The multiple perspectives through which this story is told add further layers and depth, and are used to great effect in ensuring that what could have been a straightforward tale of female sovereignty is instead much more **nuanced and unpredictable, with plenty of intrigue. Fans of Downton Abbey will find much to enjoy here.***

### **Melanie Chadwick**

***Filled with humour and a great cast of female characters, 'The Chilbury Ladies Choir' is uplifting and warming like an old-fashioned sing-song.***

*WW2 threatens the traditional order and way of life in the sleepy village of Chilbury. The church choir is closed as there are no men to sing in it. Close on the heels of this shock announcement comes the even more shocking idea of an all-female choir started up by the WW2 equivalent of Gareth Malone - newcomer Prim Trent. Reeling from such huge changes, the village then has to deal with bombing, baby scandals, black-marketeering, refugee children, billeted officers and German spies. As the women of Chilbury take on more responsibilities their predictable lives change for ever as they learn to stand firm against male tyranny, begin to recognise and use their own strengths and talents and start to live for themselves and not just for their families and husbands. Very amusing in parts, with plenty of intrigue and some great characters especially the scheming midwife Edwina Paltry who is determined to make as much money as possible by whatever dubious means. The story is told via a series of letters and journal entries by various women and girls of the village. It's a testament to the hard work and courage of the women on the home front during the war, and the power of music to bring people together.*

### **Angela Rhodes**

*Chilbury Village, Kent, 1940, all the men have gone to war, leaving the women at home, and thanks to the Vicar's closure of the Choir, now that the male singers are no longer there. Mrs Tilling is not happy with this and has decided that the Choir will resurrect as 'The Chilbury Ladies Choir', and this she does, with the help of Kitty Winthrop, the precocious youngest daughter of Chilbury Manor, who has set her heart on Henry, who loves Venetia Kitty's glamorous sister, who is just playing with his heart. Midwife Edwina Paltry has a way to make herself rich, and all she needs is time..*

***This is a book so full of life and great characters, you will not want the book to end, and will long for a sequel.***

### **Christine Waddington**

*I enjoyed this book about how the women of Chilbury cope with the changes wrought by World War 2. The book shows the strength of ordinary women in difficult times and how they support each other. The Ladies` Choir was a brilliant idea, not only bringing the women together and helping them forget their individual worries but also enabling Chilbury to still have a choir when all the menfolk were away. It also shows how music unites people on all levels and helps them find a way through their personal grief.*

*I liked the way the story was told through different people and that there were many strands of stories. There are plenty of sub-plots to keep the momentum going and **I found it a very entertaining read and look forward to reading more from this author.***

### **Pam Woodburn**

***This is a charming book with a wealth of engaging characters.*** *The story is set towards the beginning of World War 2 and tells the story of how the women of Chilbury, a small village in East Anglia, who are left behind when the men of the village are obliged to go and fight for their country, manage to cope with the stresses and sometimes overwhelming problems of an almost all-female village society.*

*The main story concerns the forming of a morale-boosting female choir. Despite bombing raids, espionage and deception amongst the village, the choir grows in strength and is appreciated by the local community and also by others further afield.*

*Being set at the time of World War 2, tragedy and heartache abound. Nevertheless, the indomitable spirit of the village women and their efforts to make life better is very impressive.*

### **Edel Waugh**

*This is a story about small village life and all the eccentric inhabitants at the start of the war.*

*The story is primarily told in journal and letter form by a number of people, each documenting their lives in this small town where a remarkable amount of devious things are happening.*

*The choir is at the centre of village life and is needed now more than ever to bolster spirits, but quite a few of the members have their own troubles.*

***This felt like reading juicy gossip and it was fabulous! There was all kinds of love being thrown about with abandon, lies, danger and hopes and dreams too.***

*Just about everything you could hope for from a story set at that time. The plot galloped along, but there was a few times I had to pause in reading as I had a lump in my throat, the story does pull at the heartstrings. I recommend this to all fans of war time stories or life in small villages.*

### **Jan Kirkcaldy**

*Never be put off by a rather thick book that doesn't look particularly inviting to you! 'The Chilbury Ladies' Choir' soon proved me very wrong. Set in a fairly typical village in Kent during the early part of WW2 and centred on the singing ladies, it was much more entertaining than first thought. Every known character to that sort of environment featured somewhere and there are too many to single out. From all walks of life and being drawn into the effects of at first what seemed a phoney war, the choir becomes central to many lives.*

*Told mostly in a series of letters and individual thoughts of the residents, it provides probably an unreal overview and yet it all seemed possible with similar happenings around the country at the time. **Birth, death, romance, intrigue and German bombs came to Chilbury to create a great story of a village at its best and worst. It was a joy to read. I loved it.***

## **Hannah Brittlebank**

***This is the very light, readable story of a group of women in a small Kent village, set during the summer of 1940 and told through their letters and diary entries.***

*The setting and quite a few of the characters reminded me very strongly of Agatha Christie and I was expecting a terrible murder and a little grey haired lady to arrive at any minute.*

*Although some of the themes were very serious they were covered very quickly and lightly and I was left wondering whether this was a choice by the author not to make the story darker by examining these areas in any depth or whether it was meant to demonstrate the way people at the time genuinely brushed over death and separation. It would have been nice to hear in more depth how the lady with the son away fighting felt or how the returning injured soldier was coping (or not).*

*I also felt the method of using the letters and diary entries wasn't always successful. The letters in particular did not read like letters at all.*

*This is a very easy to read, competent, lightweight book that, for me, had the potential to be so much more.*

## **Sharon Lowe**

*Everything you could want is between the covers of this writing, set in 1940. Sometimes funny, sometimes sad, sometimes surprising, how she managed to pack in so much..... Well done.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed this novel by new writer Jennifer worth, I just could not put it down. It had everything in it. But were to start? It was set in the summer of 1940, taking in Dunkirk, we had two diaries one of a young girl boarding on her transition in to being a young lady, her sister who felt she was a cut above everyone else and god's gift to the males of the village, a young mum, lord of the manor, spies, a midwife, a choir, bombing, a refugee who was Jewish,*

***It was funny, sad, thought provoking, and a thriller all wrapped up in one novel.***

*It's a must read for all ladies of every age and I look forward to reading more novels from this new author. Would like a sequel as I want to what happens next.*

## **Sandra Rabiasz**

***Set in 1940, this is a story of the home front, told with charm and appeal through the eyes of the Chilbury Ladies Choir.***

*'The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society' crossed with ITV's 'Home Fires' is the quickest way to sum up 'The Chilbury Ladies Choir'.*

*Set in the lushly described Kent countryside of early 1940, the story of the choir members is told via the diary entries and letters of the main characters, primarily - the genteel, middle class widow Mrs Tilling, the shady, conniving Miss Paltry and the Winthrop sisters - thirteen year old Kitty and the beautiful, flirtatious Venetia. Although this device generally works well I did have a bit of a problem with the voice given to Kitty. It frequently didn't feel authentic and, initially, had me double checking her age. The cast of characters really held no surprises and neither did the plot, however, having said all this, it was a really enjoyable read. It may not be especially original but the book has a certain charm and it successfully evoked the feel of a rural 1940's village with all its social divisions, rivalries and sense of community. I'm sure it will be a great success and potentially the beginning of a whole wartime series which will see Kitty grow in to her voice!*

## **Carolyn Huckfield**

***This is a beautiful and self-assured first novel.*** *We are in a Kent village in 1940. The war is beginning to bite with the first death of a local serving officer. The story starts with a funeral and ends with a very unexpected wedding. When the vicar wants the ladies to concentrate just on war work so the choir is disbanded. The arrival of a spirited music teacher changes all that and the new choir unites the village women. The story is told through the journals, letters and diaries of four very different local women. It takes up time for Mrs Tilling who worries about her serving son. Venetia and her sister couldn't be more different and their stories are both humorous and enjoyable. Edwina Parry is offered an enormous amount of money to commit an evil act around the birth of three local children. Does she succeed; does Venetia grab the most handsome man in the village? There is tragedy round the village as the war begins to affect everyone. There must be a sequel to this because we really need to follow these women through the dark years to come.*

## **Ann**

***An entertaining story set in a Kent village in WW2 about a group of ladies who form a choir and learn to rely on their own strengths.***

*This story takes place during World War II. Most of the male church choir has been recruited to the armed forces and the vicar will not countenance a female choir to replace it but undeterred the ladies of Chilbury form their own choir.*

*It is made up of disparate characters. Amongst them are the reserved pregnant teacher, Hattie, whose husband is in the navy, widowed Mrs Tilling, a nurse whose son soon goes to war, Venetia one of the brigadier's daughters and her young sister, Kitty, who has ambitions to become a singer. Mrs B is a bombastic female accustomed, through sheer force of character, to getting her own way in everything and Mrs Quail whose son is killed in the war. Prim, with a musical background, enters the scene and becomes the conductor. She coaches Kitty in singing.*

*Tragedy hits the Kent village and lives become entangled. Individuals are not completely as they once appeared to be. Venetia, who has flirted with every male in the village, falls in love. The cruel brigadier is blackmailed by the rather dubious midwife, Edwina Paltry and Mrs Tilling finds happiness.*

*The story is told through journal entries and letters and the author tells us it has basis in stories she was told by her grandmother about the happenings in the wartime village she lived in.*

*It is an easy and entertaining read. Some of the events seem rather far-fetched but that is not to say they could not have happened. I did not find it was a story that gripped me but it did entertain me.*

## **Joy Bosworth**

***Slow and then breathtakingly fast.***

*The cover and premise of this book are intriguing, but I found the first part was a series of stereotypes and caricatures. Edwina Paltry is drawn as a pantomime baddie and the varying good and the earnest are as extreme – and refer to themselves in the exaggerated way. This applies to Venetia who begins the book as a good time girl.*

*However, at around the halfway point it turns into a gripping story of struggling human beings. It is well re-researched and, barring the odd grating 21st century phrasing, is really well done.*

*I wish the poorer start could be ironed out because it will lose readers before the story takes a turn for the better. If you are on the point of giving up, find a bit more patience and let it get much better.*