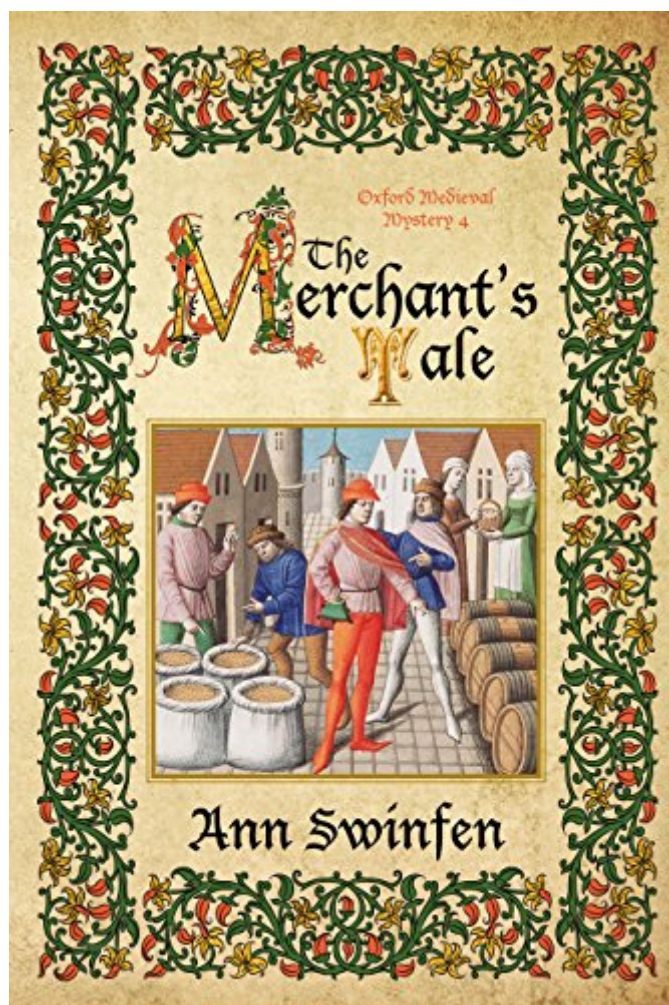


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The Merchant's Tale (Oxford Medieval Mysteries Book 4)



Synopsis

Oxford, Autumn 1353 St Frideswide's Fair is a great annual event in Oxford, bringing together merchants and buyers from all over England and Wales, and from as far away as Flanders and France. Yet the earnings from the fair, granted to the Priory of St Frideswide centuries before, are resented by the town, and resentment can turn to violence. Under the unscrupulous Prior de Hungerford, even more trouble is brewing. Nicholas Elyot is warned by intelligencer Alice Walsea that attendance at the fair may be used for something more sinister, and not all French merchants may be innocent. When a merchant from Flanders is attacked and an English traitor is murdered, can Nicholas disentangle the crimes hidden under cover of the fair?

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Customer Reviews

Anna Swinfen has a gift for bringing to life the lives of people in the past. She has done this for 16th century London in the Cristofer Alvarez series and now with 14th century Oxford and Nicolas Elyot. In this fourth book in the series, it is time for the St. Fridewide's Fair. Tempers are running high because the townspeople resent having to close their businesses during the Fair since by charter

the abbey gets all the profits from the commerce of the fair. French traders are also present at the fair along with Flemings and Germans. This causes unease since France and England have a truce for the moment and the townspeople are suspicious of the French. There are also other causes for concern. An intelligencer (secret agent) who met Nicholas in the previous book is at the Fair looking out for a spy. The Abbey is headed for the moment by an unscrupulous abbot who may be selling off Abbey treasures. An unpopular wine merchant is killed and an English merchant who has befriended Nicholas is attacked. Is the murder related to the French spy? To the problems at the Abbey? To the presence at the Abbey of the young prince Edward (the Black Prince)? Nicholas is drawn into the mystery which comes to a satisfying conclusion. Along the way the reader is immersed in the lives of ordinary people, primarily Nicholas' family and friends, as they prepare and sell goods at the Fair. There is also further development in the relationship between Nicholas and Emma and a possible future friendship with the merchant. A captivating novel.

My favorite outing of these characters so far.. the author continues to increase their depth, vitality and their exposure. I do love that they remain in the same group of friends and relatives so we do not have to relearn a lot. Peter Winchingham, merchant, is a new character and I hope a new volume is being worked on that includes him. I suspect it will be so as he bought a manor in Leighton, Nicholas' home community not very far from Oxford. The historical aspects of the St. Frideswide's fair and Priory are very important to me as a reader, as are all of Ann Swinfen's works. The inclusion of the Black Prince as a visitor to the Priory and Oxford was excellent. Does it presage more contacts between Nicholas and the Prince? This one was wonderful and the newer characters I feel point to more outings for this group. A tremendously good read.

This is the fourth book in the series, and I liked it very much. The characters and their lives progressed; the plot interested me, and the book is pretty much an enjoyable read. Other reviewers have gone into detail about the story. The problem I had with the book is that there were several typos and/or grammar mistakes which should have been caught before the book was published, and I felt they were a distraction, although a momentary one.

Every Swinfen novel I read makes me want more. More Elyot as in these tales. (Hopefully more Cristoval Alvarez, huh?) Now there's a new series but I'm not sure of the setting, but Elyot is a medieval mystery and I love those. This one is every bit up to the standards of the previous three.

The plot is perhaps a bit thinner than previous books in the series, but as a whole it is every bit as satisfying.

Ann Swinfen is my new mystery writer, loved the book. Kept me glued to the pages all day.

An enjoyable mystery.

Like the series.

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