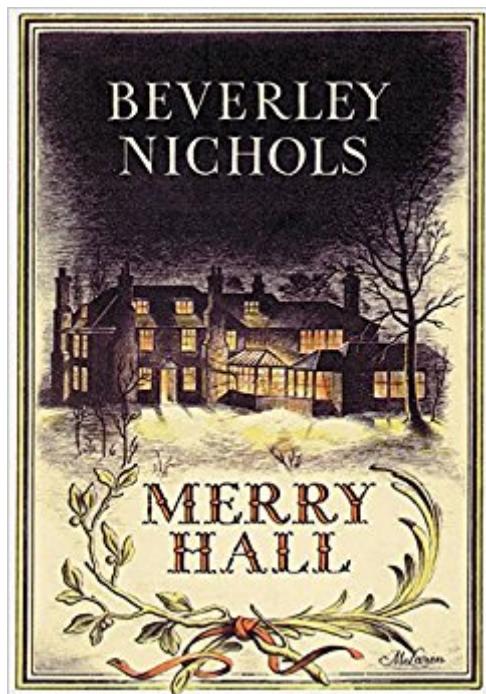


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# Merry Hall



## **Synopsis**

First in a trilogy, *Merry Hall* is the account of the restoration of a house and garden in post-war England. Though Mr. Nichols's horticultural undertaking is serious, his writing is high-spirited, riotously funny, and, at times, deliciously malicious.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 342 pages

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## **Customer Reviews**

Published in 1951, this example of "garden literature" relates how author Nichols constructed a massive garden on a run-down estate. Not a straight "how-to," Nichols's text also includes humorous portraits of the locals who both assist and frustrate his efforts. The text is buttressed with numerous black-and-white drawings. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Though written half a century ago, "Merry Hall" captures that longing for the garden and a patch of land to call one's own. Nichols's wit and silly adventures ... add a bit of welcome hilarity to the all-too-serious literature of gardening." Anne Raver, "New York Times," February 27, 2000"

Rather than reviewing each Nichols book separately, I will just say I have LOVED all of his books about gardening in England. Continuing to laugh out loud is my reward for reading each book several times. I gave *Merry Hall* to a new neighbor, editorial director, and Master Gardener, who was overwhelmed by the money-pit feeling of being a first-time home owner of a truly charming

house built in the 1930s. She thought he was hilarious.

I read this several years ago and it was a must to add to my personal library. It's gardens, it's cats, it's houses, it's England. Love it!

This book is part of a trilogy by Beverley Nichols. Beverley Nichols is one of my favorite authors and I have read this trilogy many times. It never grows old. He has a great sense of humor and these are an easy and fun read.

One of the book catalogs that I occasionally get in the mail has been singing the praises of the late Beverley Nichols. Besides writing mystery novels, he also wrote about his adventures in renovating and resurrecting a home in the suburbs of London just after WWII. First published as a collection of magazine columns, he would later on assemble them into a trilogy of books. The first of the trilogy, *Merry Hall* details his search, at times frustrating, for the perfect house and garden. Very soon he became aware of what land agents (realtors for us Yanks) really meant in their ads, and he started to see his hopes plummet as his hopes were continually dashed. But one listing caught his eye, and with a good friend, he took the journey out of London to look the place over. The estate, spreading over five acres are a compendium of every gardening mistake. Ghastly ornaments litter the grounds -- the previous owner was very fond of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs). And the house, a lovely Georgian mansion, isn't much better. While it hasn't fallen down yet, there are 'additions' that are ugly and inappropriate, and decorating choices of colours that can be best left to the imagination. Not to mention the holly hedges, a stagnant stinking pond of unimaginable depths, and dire warnings from his friend that Nichols is about to step into a money pit that will sap his life and savings. Undeterred by such gloomy words, Nichols falls head over heels in love with his find, especially when he discovers the kitchen garden. Not only is it beautifully kept, but along one wall is a collection of exquisite lilies. Soon, he discovers why there is such order in the midst of such chaos. For along with the house and land comes Oldfield, an ancient gardener of superb talents. Smitten, Nichols signs for the house on the spot, and soon starts on that most dreaded adventure that most home owners endure -- renovations. With his 'valet,' Gaskin, and two cats, 'One' and 'Four' Nichols moves into *Merry Hall*, and starts the work with a great deal of gusto, and soon finds out that in his own little Eden, there's a few problems. For one, there are the neighbors, Miss Emily and Our Rose, forever scheming to get something out his prized gardens. And Oldfield, is quite another problem altogether. There are towering elm trees and their suckers, the dattled holly hedge (the

solution to that one is not one that I would recommend!), and the question of what would you do if you could dream -- and dream big? I loved reading this book. I found myself entranced with Nichols writing about everyday life, the perils and delights of gardening, and living with cats. At times I was helplessly laughing at Nichols' searing wit and lofty views on post-War taste in Britain. He, quite frankly, doesn't give a hoot as to what people will think of him (save Oldfield, for very sensible reasons). Where this story shines, however, is not just in the language and Nichols' skills at writing. It's in his loving, vivid descriptions of flowers and plants, and I found my mouth watering, and desperate looks out at my own wilderness, wondering Could I do it too? The antics of his cats had me in nodding agreement, and plucking at my partner's sleeve and crying out, Listen to this --! Along with Nichols' wonderful prose, there are illustrations by William McLaren in black and white, along with several photographs of Beverley Nichols (including one with 'Four' in his arms). For this new edition, there is also a forward by Ann Lovejoy and an index of all of the plants by Roy C. Dicks. The book itself is a facsimile of the original edition published by Jonathan Cape in 1951. This new edition, only available in hardbound, is published by Timber Press books, and they can be reached at [...] for more reprints of Beverley Nichols books. In short, this is a book to delight any gardener, bibliophile or cat lover's soul. It's funny, at times sorrowful (I cried over 'Two' and 'Three's stories), and came away with a wistful hope that one day too, I would have a wee garden of my own. If you can't purchase this, do try to get your hands on this one at your local library. It is simply too good to miss. Five stars overall, recommended.

Just as Trollope passed the literary torch to Angela Thirkell, so did E. F. Benson pass his to this good fellow! Mr. Nichols' trilogy about Merry Hall is so entertaining, even though at times he comes across as a bit "twee". As you get to know him and his neighbors through the books, you come to realize that yes, some things are more important in your own blinkered surroundings than in the big wide world. I would recommend these books to anyone who loves gardening (on a grand scale), gossip, and the minutiae of life.

After reading about Beverley Nichols in a gardening blog I borrowed the first book from the library. Enjoyed it so much, that I bought the whole series. Very charming books, with many laugh out loud moments. I give this series of books to friends that anyone gardening, and love cats.

Nichols is wonderful, witty, irreverent, and devious...I loved this book.

Delightful recounting of the creation of a garden just after World War II. I doubt many are doing things on such a grand scale anymore, but he is an enjoyable writer with a very different take.

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