



Launch of Archer @ Kenilworth Castle: 24th August 2010

On the day that youngsters all over the country were getting their GCSE results, there was a very different event with teenagers in mind. A Coventry author, Jacky Gray, launched the first in a series of novels featuring the achievements of teenage boys.

‘Archer is good at sports like many other 16-year-old boys,’ says the author, ‘but instead of football or athletics, he excels with a sword and lance and is unbeatable with a bow and arrow.’ She added that although it has the feel of an historical novel, it is set in modern day. ‘Archer and his friends live in an alternate world that co-exists with ours. People in Archer’s world live in harmony with nature so it is not being destroyed by inventions like electricity, plastic and global travel.’

The book has the fast pace of an adventure film with all the action taking place during May Day. It opens with a joust and closes with a thrilling scene involving Archer’s scheming enemy Edlyn and a dangerous enchantress at the Beltane bonfire. In between there are sporting and dramatic contests, a gang of fierce outlaws, a charismatic Celtic drummer band, dancing and plenty of kisses.

The event was held at Kenilworth castle where Jacky and several people who helped bring the book to life gathered to launch it. They did not look out of place to the youngsters who were immersing themselves in the activities led by a group of enthusiastic characters who brought to life the clothes and lifestyles of a bygone age. The castle manager, Holly Woodward, is pleased with the popularity of the Time Travellers activity days. She said, ‘Children of all ages are keen to learn the skills required to become a highwayman. They love hearing stories with the props and sound effects making it more exciting.’ The Hengist books are another way children can connect with the past as they give a flavour of what it could be like to live in a world with no electricity, getting up with sun and living by the seasons.



Jacky (50) was keen to emphasise the support of her advisors. ‘Although you can find out a lot from researching on the internet, there is no substitute for actual experience. I could not have achieved this without the expertise of people who really know what they are talking about and I am very grateful to Kevin, Kerry and Karl for all their help.’

Kevin Hicks has all the skills of a medieval archer after devoting his life to the art. Kevin’s company History Squad brings history to life through performances and workshops in schools, castles, museums and shows all over the country. Jacky said, ‘He is so steeped in the lifestyles of these people that you can believe he knows exactly how they dressed and behaved, even the sort of language they used and foods they ate. I am privileged to have followed in Bernard Cornwall’s footsteps in consulting Kevin’s expertise in medieval weaponry. But for me Kevin is the spirit of Archer and the inspiration for the original adult character.’ Kevin added that he thought Jacky had nailed the character of an archer and that there was just the right level of technical detail.’

Kevin's son Josh posed for the poster artwork; he has been following in his father's footsteps since he was five and regularly attends events in full costume. Jacky was thrilled with the way it had worked. 'I was happy when Kevin said he had a son of about the right age who was a skilled archer. But I was not prepared for how perfectly he fits my image of Archer – not just the blond good looks and heroic stance, but so much more. Josh embodies the courage and modest competence that makes Archer such an endearing character, along with the sensitivity and quiet humour that makes him appealing to the fairer sex.'



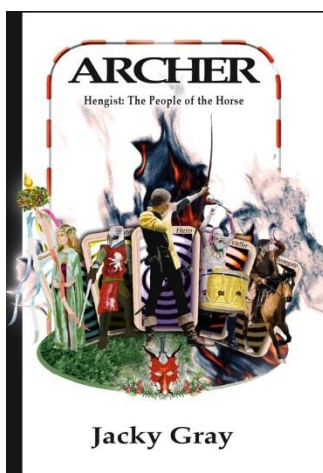
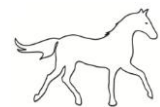
Kerry Tosh brought a touch of glamour to the proceedings in her period black dress with fine embroidery and a laced bodice. She runs the sort of stall that makes you glad you went to Coventry market. It has all manner of exquisite, enticing and eccentric artefacts along with a host of Angels, crystals, oils and incense. Jacky was enthusiastic about it. 'Kerry's stall is not just about selling the weird and wonderful, it is a gathering place for many people who are beginning



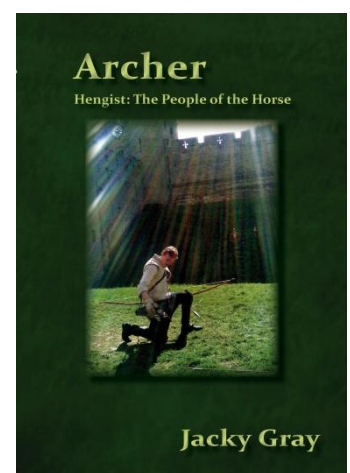
to realise there is more to life than material possessions. Kerry offers spiritual guidance and advice for those who flock to who stall without really knowing why, but they always come away feeling better. She has a wealth of knowledge about many ancient rituals and is a skilled healer, using many different techniques.' Kerry is impressed with the message in the books. 'I am keen to see anything that teaches youngsters about taking responsibility for their actions and showing respect for the world around them.'

Karl Ude-Martinez runs an International Equestrian Centre on the outskirts of Warwick which is the base for the Knights of Middle England Jousting Team who compete in shows and displays all over the UK and Europe. They have been hosting jousting events for many years including shows, unique corporate events, hen and stag parties and even weddings. Jacky has been to the equestrian centre to absorb the atmosphere. 'I was able to witness first-hand the children's excitement as they prepared for an activity day – it teaches them about old fashioned values like courtesy and respect that are missing in today's age where rudeness is revered.' Karl could not attend the event but was happy to add a comment. 'We are seeing our jousting school become more popular and we are on a mission to bring this magnificent sport back into the 21st century. After watching films like "A knight's tale" and reading books like Archer, more people want to have a go themselves. They always enjoy the experience and usually discover sides of themselves they never knew existed.'

Hengist: The People of the horse



Archer is the first novel in the series Hengist: The people of the horse and is available via the link on the website or directly from Lulu and Amazon from £5.99. E-books are available for Kindle and Nook (Barnes and Noble) from 99p. It will soon be available on Waterstones and other book stores. Jacky will be signing copies at Warwick Books on 11th September at 10am where her entourage will cause quite a stir on market day. The second book in the series, Rory will be launched sometime in September.



www.hengistarcher.co.uk/

<http://hengistpeoplehorse.blogspot.co.uk/>