



The Streets

Anthony Quinn

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In 1882, David Wildeblood, a 21-year-old from rural Norfolk, arrives in London to start work at the offices of a famous man. As an 'inspector' for Henry Marchmont's hugely successful weekly *The Labouring Classes* of London, his job is to investigate the notorious slum of Somers Town, near the new St Pancras Station, recording house by house the number of inhabitants, their occupations and standard of living. By mapping the streets in this way, Marchmont intends to show the world the stark realities of poverty in its greatest city.

Befriended by Jo, a young coster, and his sister Roma, David comes to learn the slang of the hawkers and traders, sharpers and scavengers, magsmen and mobsmen, who throng the teeming byways of Somers Town. It is a place of Darwinian struggle for survival. And the deeper he penetrates the everyday squalor and destitution the more appalled he is by mounting evidence that someone is making a profit from people's suffering.

A dinner at the Kensington home of his godfather Sir Martin Elder introduces him to Kitty, Elder's only daughter, and to a cabal of prominent citizens who have been plotting a radical solution to the problem of London's poor. David belatedly realises that a conspiracy is afoot. Passionate but reckless in his urge to uncover it he finds his life in danger, sustained only by the faithfulness of a friend and, ultimately, the love of a woman.

In *The Streets* Anthony Quinn reconstructs an unforgettable picture of Victorian London, encompassing the extremes of privilege and privation, from the baronial mansions of the rich to the 'whited tombs' of the slums. With shocking poignancy and pin-sharp detail he brings to life a world of terrible degradation, yet one redeemed by dark comedy, profound fellow-feeling and the enduring possibility of love.

The Streets Details

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From Reader Review *The Streets* for online ebook

Barb says

David Wildeblood comes to London to work as an investigator, a reporter of sorts, for Henry Marchmont owner of 'The Laboring Classes of London', a successful newspaper that focused on the plight of the poor and downtrodden. Assigned to the poor neighborhood of Somers Town, obviously an outsider and a bit of a country bumpkin, the people he's been assigned to interview shy away from him, thinking he's a charity worker or a spy for the police. Once he learns a bit of the local language and figures out how to navigate the city he discovers he has a passion for his work. When he uncovers a corrupt housing scheme, making certain details public, he makes himself the enemy of powerful men.

I enjoyed this story and the characters the author created. The period was well done with details describing both ends of the social order, the wealthy and the destitute. I especially liked the relationships between David, his friend Jo and Jo's sister Roma. I enjoyed the character's back stories and wished the author had fleshed them out a bit more. While the mystery surrounding the housing corruption was interesting I found the character driven portions of the story more engaging.

The author was able to conjure real people, surrounded by a city alive with greed and corruption as well as kindness, his characters were flawed and human and the dialogue was realistic and convincing. There were a few anachronisms, the word Trilby was only slightly out of time having been coined in 1894, while the majority of this story takes place in 1881. David's sensibilities regarding one aspect of the fairer sex were distinctly modern. But neither issue prevented me from enjoying this novel and wishing it had been a bit longer with a more fully fleshed out past for each of the main characters.

Veronica says

I was a bit disappointed with this, having thoroughly enjoyed *Curtain Call* a while ago. He lays on the Dickensian atmosphere with a trowel, but the plot is flimsy, slow-moving, and rather too coincidence laden towards the end. I couldn't really get excited about the outcome, and David Wildeblood is not a particularly attractive character. So, meh.

P.D.R. Lindsay says

I shall be looking for more of Quinn's novels. He's a good writer and gives the reader plenty to think about.

I ended this novel wondering about hypocrisy. We always dub the Victorians as shocking hypocrites but in fact if I changed the names of the evil landlords, newspapermen and wealthy givers to charity for those in my own or any other country today it becomes obvious that we don't see our own hypocrisy.

'The Streets' tackles Victorian slums and the people trying or avoiding to do something about them. I found it a hard read at first because the 1st POV and the MC's voice, tone and use of language were not what I found comfortable. I persevered because I know my own historical novels take - so my crit readers say - a while to get into the language and tone. I am glad I did for the novel is a good exciting read and well worth the effort.

Not a book for a quick light read, but one to leave you thinking as well as having enjoyed the story.

Stephen says

interesting and enjoyable read based in late victorian era in somers town area of london the slums where the hero of the novel comes from norfolk and works as an inspector observing and interviewing people but unwittingly becomes involved and discovered a plot to clear the slums and start a social engineering scheme and draws himself into danger.. well worth reading and the author brings the hussle and bustle of late 19th century somers town to life

David Lowther says

Anthony Quinn is a writer of some versatility. His first novel, *The Rescue Man*, was set in the Liverpool Blitz, the second, *Half the Human Race* had a background of the suffragette movement and cricket in the early 20th. century and this, his latest, is all about poverty in late Victorian London.

As far as I'm concerned, *The Streets* completes a hat-trick of exceptionally well-written and interesting novels. It's the kind of tale that gets you feeling very angry as an idealistic young man from the country (not unlike Roger Martin in *The Blue Pencil*) feels moved tackle the scandal of the Somers Town slums. He comes up against corrupt politicians, priests and businessmen. Two women of considerable differences in backgrounds both play significant roles in the plot. Quinn paints a desperate picture of the slums but, despite this, people do manage to survive there, some decent and others immersed in a life of crime.

The picture of Victorian London is extremely well-painted and must have been completed after a great deal of painstaking research. All of the varied cast of characters are fascinating and I'm sure the dialogue is authentic. Great stuff.

David Lowther. Author of *The Blue Pencil* (www.thebluepencil.co.uk)
davidlowtherblog.wordpress.com

Louise Jones says

i enjoyed it on the whole a good mixture of story and histoy but is it really historical fiction kept thinking this is supposed to be set in the 1800s but some of it was quite scary and thinking of todays situation of how the poor seem to be priced outof LONDON I have been in the area of LONDON he talks about so the pictures were quite vivid in my head !!! i also kept on remembering a programe about houses in streets from past centuries and what kind of people lived in them !!!

th eir was a slight mystery between the characters which was a bit predictable and i must admit preferred his other book i have read the rescue man

Damaskcat says

David Wildeblood moves from Norfolk to a job in London on a weekly newspaper owned by Henry Marchmont, 'The Labouring Classes of London.' Marchmont's journalists are known as 'Inspectors' and their job is to go out about in the poorer parts of London seeing how people live and work and writing reports for the newspaper. David is very naïve when he first arrives in London and he is robbed more than once before he learns the rules which will keep him safe.

David owes his job to his godfather, Sir Martin Elder, and he is invited to a dinner at his house where he finds himself in a totally different world from the lives of the people in the slums. But then he sees and hears one or two things which cause him to question people's motives and to wonder what exactly is going on with the slum landlords and who these shadowy figures are.

The book is interesting in its portrait of life in the slums but I found it didn't really hold my attention. I didn't warm to David as a character and found I wasn't that interested in what happened to him. Others may enjoy the book, but it didn't do it for me.

Jo-anne Atkinson says

David Wildeblood is the disgraced son of a middle class family who has been employed as a researcher/journalist looking at the slums of Somers Town in London. He makes both friends and enemies amongst the people he meets in the course of the working day. David also comes into the social circle of his Godfather, a rich and important man of business with some connection to Somers Town. David uncovers a social experiment which will remove the poor from the streets and also enrich the developers who want to realise the potential of the area. This leads him into danger.

It took me a while to get into this book but once I'd got through the first third I became completely hooked. The slum life of North London in the 1880s is carefully realised and there are some well-drawn characters. David is a bit of an insipid hero at first, the innocent abroad and easily duped. However by the end of the book the compromise conclusion makes complete sense.

As a social history this is a little light, as an exciting thriller it is a little weak, as a combination of the two it works very well and therefore is an enjoyable read.

Ian Mapp says

There's always one book that you think is going to be the "Book of the Year". And this is it for me.

I am still in late 19th Century London. This time, I have a thrilling story based on historical fact. It all centres around the poor map of London - an activity carried out in real life to chart the working classes.

David Wildeblood is the naive young man up from Norfolk who works for Henry Marchmont's paper

carrying out the survey. He gets Sommers Town - the badlands around Kings Cross.

In a superb tale he makes friends with a couple from the underclass, learns the language of the streets - meets the upper classes and uncovers a conspiracy which drives the book along at a frenetic pace.

Loved it from the get-go. Superb historical detail, realism and a cracking story that puts many thriller writers to shame.

Excellent book - looking forward to more of his work.

Poppy99 says

Although I enjoyed the story and the way he writes, I was not as engaged with this as I thought I would be. I know the area well, and I was very interested in the subject matter, but it all felt a bit flimsy. This would have benefitted from being about a third more in length. I always learn new words with this author.

Catherine Jeffrey says

Victorian themed plot with interesting twists and turns.

Rupert says

I am thoroughly enjoying working through Anthony Quinn's books. This is set further back than others, but shares the same combination of great characters, a fast-moving, engrossing, plot and a wonderful sense of place and time. At times the history and descriptions become little laboured or expository (Bond villain monologue explaining things) but the setting and history are so good I can forgive that. Recommended

Jennifer says

Once past my wariness of historical novels and tiny print, I quickly found this an engaging and refreshingly different period mystery. David finds employment as a journalist-cum-researcher into 'the condition of the working classes' in 19th century London, and this proves a neat way into vividly describing the complex web of social status and relationships. I thought the balance between the elements: thriller, crime, history and character was very successful and avoided stereotypes.

Meera says

A little bit Dickensian, this historical novel is told through the eyes of the young country bumpkin, David,

who comes to London and gets a job profiling the poor in the slum area of Somers Town for a small newspaper. I loved the detailed descriptions of Somers Town in this time as I work just around the corner, but I felt that many of the characters were simply caricatures or pastiches of a Dickensian character and the big 'reveal' in the end isn't that surprising.

John says

This is the first of the five Anthony Quinn novels I've read that I struggled with. Maybe that's because I've always enjoyed the way he writes women and *The Streets* comes solely from the perspective of a man. A really annoying man. Despite everything he puts the reader through, David Wildeblood barely learns anything and ruins the lives of everyone he meets whilst being really pious. I did not like him or the convenience-riddled plot, but as ever Quinn evokes the time and place nicely and peoples the story with intriguing side characters.
