

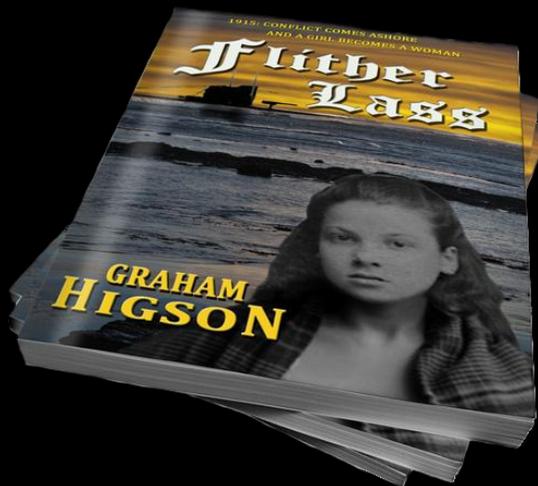
Interview with the author of Flither Lass

Quickly, give us the title and genre of your book and a 30-word or less tagline:

Flither Lass is a historical novel set in 1915. Young Amy Trott, ignored and derided by most of the villagers, discovers a German spy washed-up on the beach, and secretly keeps him for herself.

Who is your intended audience and why should they read your book?

This story is for adults of all ages. It's drama that is real history-based, with adventure. It takes readers into an arena that, so far as I know, has not been covered before: this is a remote fishing village on the English coast, it is 1915, Britain is at war with Germany. Times were so different then, with the poverty, hard lives, and the threat of invasion. People feared that their way of life would never be the same as before. There's some social history in there, almost like going back in time and seeing what life was like for those people.



How did you come up with the title of your book?

I got the title even before the story. I saw this girl on a Victorian magic lantern slide - well, she was a young woman, really - and wanted to write about her. More than anything, I think it was the look in her eyes that got me.

Tell us a little bit about your cover art. Who designed it? Why did you go with that particular image/artwork?

Like most cover art these days, it's a montage of images. The sky is from a photo I took where I live, although it was originally pink. The sea and scaur is from a photo I took on the east coast in December 2013. I drew the U-boat. The intention was to create a foreboding atmosphere, and to put a face to the flither lass herself. So who is she? The model is my wife's great-grandmother.

Who is your favourite character from your book and why?

I like Larry because he sees so much, and yet is blinded to the good that is in all people. He would rather fall out with the whole village than do any injustice to Amy, who he

understands and respects. Having said that, I think my vote would go to Orla, the woman who "sees to" the dead bodies. Such people were called "ligging-out" women. Why do I like her? Because she is an alluring, enigmatic character.

How about your least favourite character? What makes them less appealing to you?

Hilda, Amy's mother; there's no doubt about it. But, like any three-dimensional character, it's possible to see why she is how she is. A look into her past is enough to spot how her life has been affected by one wrong move many years before. Of course, even without any indiscretions she would never have been destined to become the wealthy wife of one of the landowners. But nevertheless, the source of her bitterness can be understood.

Are your characters based on real people?

Amy is based on the girl in the Victorian slide, but I have no idea of her real name, nor anything else about her apart from what she did for a living. All of the other characters are made up, although some are based on real *positions*, such as the coastguard, the young men at the marine lab (as explained in the Author's Note), the baker's delivery boy, and so on.



Did you plan your book or did it flow out free form?

Yes, it was planned and structured. I know that some authors say they just write and see where the story takes them, which I suppose must be an instinct thing, and that's fine if it's what works for them. But when I begin a story – even a short one – I ask myself sixteen crucial questions. Once these are answered, I have the story, the main characters, and also the major turning points. Of course, these things can be altered; we're using word processors, not carving the words in stone, so the options to make changes are always open.

How much research into a location or field of knowledge was required to give realism to the story?

A great deal! I ordered books and did a lot of reading. Examples include the design and lighting of street gas lamps, the design of fishing cobbles, the mating habits of limpets, the design and working of WW1 U-boats, the changes that were made to requisitioned fishing trawlers to enable them to hunt for German submarines and trawl for mines. Oh yes, and I became quite involved in the language and terminology of the time and the locale. But, especially when writing a historical novel, although it is fiction (and not a documentary), it's important to get the level of accuracy so that it *could* have happened. And that's a difficult balancing act. I just hope that I've managed it with this story.

When the book concluded, did you have trouble saying goodbye to the characters?

Yes, because Amy has been with me, on and off, for twelve years. I particularly miss Larry, Dan and Jack - and not forgetting Orla.

How hard was it to write? if you ever had writer's block, how did you work through that?

The hardest part was not knowing if what I was doing would work - I'm talking about the story, which *has* to work. It was originally intended as a two-part television drama, but writing it as a novel, where you're not limited, literally, to the number of script pages nor the overriding consideration of production costs and size of the cast, enabled me to go deeper and introduce more characters to make the story work. This made it easier to write.

As for writer's block, I just turn my attention to something else; it's as if the brain is processing in the background, and the idea will suddenly come to me. Then I write it on the wall (yes, really) before it gets lost.

What is the best/worst thing about being a writer?

The best is creating characters and making them work. You know when that happens because they suggest to you what they will do next. Then it's getting to the end of the second draft, knowing that, apart from what the beta-readers come up with, that's it; there's only the tidying up to do.

The worst part, these days, is the marketing and promotion. No one knows what works or how it works; it either does or it doesn't. It's time-consuming and worrying.

How long did it take you to write this book?

I first saw the flither girl slide in 2002, and began fleshing out the plot for the screenplay while doing my MA, and then finally got round to writing the novel in 2013, which took six months. By that time the story had been with me for twelve years.



What was one of the most surprising things you learned in creating your book? Give us an interesting fun fact that you discovered when writing your story.

Flithers (limpets) live inside conical shells, stuck to the rocks. They move away to find food, and then they return to the exact same spot, settling into the round circles that the edges of their shells have cut into the rock surface. Not a lot of people know this.

What do you think makes a good story?

Good, strong structure: a beginning, middle and end – and all in the right order. Believable characters. A twist at the end that doesn't stretch the credibility of the genre.

What can we expect from you in the future?

The next book will be another change of style (I've done modern novel and historical fiction). It's based on the magazine articles I wrote as an "insider" columnist. Hopefully, readers will find it amusing.

What can readers who enjoy your book do to help make it successful?

Recommend it to friends, use Twitter, mention it on Facebook, ask for it in bookshops and libraries, and suggest it to reading groups – there's a Reading Group Guide for *Flither Lass* at:

<http://www.grahamhigson.com/books/flither-lass/>