



Ashenden: A Novel

By Elizabeth Wilhide

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A beautifully atmospheric debut about 240 years in the life of an English country house, “this book is a sparkling jewel: full of fascinating detail, high drama, and sly wit” (Amanda Foreman, author of *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*).

THE HOUSE CONTAINS TIME. ITS WALLS HOLD STORIES. . . .

When brother and sister Charlie and Ros discover that they have inherited Ashenden, the beautiful eighteenth-century English country house steeped in their family history, they face an important decision: Do they try to keep it or do they sell it?

In a beguiling narrative spanning two and a half centuries, we meet those who have built the house, lived in it, loved it, and those who would subvert it to their own ends. The walls of Ashenden echo with the lives of the architect who directs the building of the house in 1775, the wealthy Henderson family in their heyday, the maid who is tempted to solve her problems by stealing a trinket, the Jazz Age speculator who hosts a fabulous treasure hunt, the prisoners held there during World War II, and the young couple who lovingly restore it in the 1950s.

With upstairs and downstairs storylines intertwining to form a rich tapestry, *Ashenden* is an evocative portrait of a house that is a character as compelling as the people who inhabit it.

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

This is the story of a house. When British siblings Charlie and Ros learn they have inherited Ashenden, one of the finest late Palladian houses in the country, from their aunt, they are faced with a dilemma. Repair and upkeep would be prohibitively expensive, and the National Trust isn't interested, having shifted its priorities. What to do? Following this preamble, Wilhide leads the reader back more than 230 years to the arrival by barge of the fine Bath stone that will be used to renovate an old manor house in Berkshire. Succeeding chapters trace the house's history as the fortunes of its different owners rise and fall. As Wilhide notes in her acknowledgments, Ashenden is modeled on a real house (used in a recent Jane Austen film adaptation), which, instead of staying in the same family for generations, mirrored the times through its ups and downs. Continuity comes from the fact Ashenden endures. Readers intrigued by English country houses will enjoy this stately home tour, given from a variety of perspectives, both upstairs and down. --Mary Ellen Quinn

Review

"This beautifully written debut novel takes us on a moving pilgrimage through the ups and downs of human nature, all within the walls of a historic English mansion. . . . With its top-notch writing, strong character development, and excellent plot, this will be on the . . . list of *Downton Abbey* fans, historical fiction readers, and family saga buffs." (*Library Journal*, starred review)

"Engaging . . . A carefully crafted, touching historical that achieves exactly the right note of rewarding readability." (*Kirkus Reviews*)

"Delightful . . . The beauty of *Ashenden* lies in the interwoven tales that move us carefully through the years at irregular intervals, giving us intimate glimpses into not only the people who occupied the house but inside the heart of the very building itself . . . well-written and vivid . . . thoroughly engrossing." (*Historical Novels Review*, Editor's Choice)

"Memorable, affecting . . . as beautifully constructed and lovingly adorned as its stately namesake." (*Romantic Times*)

"We are reminded of *Brideshead Revisited* . . . well observed." (*Times Literary Supplement*)

"*Ashenden* is an engrossing debut by one of Britain's leading writers on design and interiors. This book is a sparkling jewel: full of fascinating detail, high drama and sly wit." (Amanda Foreman, author of *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* and *A World on Fire*)

"I adored this book; I saw it as a sort of love letter to a vanished way of life, and a slice of English history at the same time, tracing as it does the lives of all the people who lived in Ashenden, a beautiful English country house, for over two hundred years. It's very touching and very compelling." (Penny Vincenzi, author of *Another Woman*)

"A pleasurably subtle web of connections . . . a beguilingly effortless read." (*Daily Mail*)

"An affecting, intelligent debut." (*The Guardian*)

"Rich and absorbing . . . personalities are sharpened by Wilhide's fine ear for dialogue and her wry sense of

humor. The novel's real value lies in its detail, the patches of finely embroidered description, and in its subtle observation of behavior and tastes." (*Financial Times*)

"A panoramic view of family life . . . any reader who loves history and houses will enjoy this verbal magic lantern show." (Charlotte Moore, author of *Hancox: A House and a Family*)

"A mixture of short stories about the people who admired the grand house, found love and heartbreak inside its walls, and recovered in the green expanse that was part of the property. . . . Elizabeth Wilhide smoothly moves the story along while it remains in place at the same time. It's a very effective way to tell the story of the house and make it more than simply a structure of bricks, glass, and wood. It becomes a living part of the story and, in fact, the story itself . . . a lovely story and a satisfying read." (*Bookreporter.com*)

About the Author

Elizabeth Wilhide is the author of more than twenty books on interior design, decoration, and architecture and a coauthor and contributor of many more. Born in the United States, she moved to Britain in 1967, where she lives with her husband.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Heather Goodson:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity with regard to spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a walk, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or even read a book called *Ashenden: A Novel*? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time with the favorite's book, you can better than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have some other opinion?

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