

way that he weaves the history together through the biographies of various characters and through descriptions of the museums and country houses he visits during his travels. Sometimes he tells the story of a whole family and the changes that befell it over a series of generations. Sometimes he switches between the present and the past by comparing the lives of the ancient barons with the lives of the people he meets along the way. He gives us fairy-tale dukes and imperial adventurers alongside tortured novelists, resistance heroes and Holocaust survivors. When he gets it right it is like looking at all of history at once. But on other occasions the snippets of random conversations and the frequent leaps back and forth in time can be tiring and hard to follow.

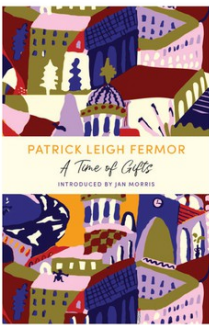

From a historian's point of view there are some other problems with this approach. By mixing the modern with the

old, and by showing us the past as seen through popular stories and memory, we are sometimes left with a view of the past that is decidedly unhistorical. Estonian and Latvian nationalists like to mythologise their past as 'seven hundred years of slavery', by which they mean not only the slavery of ordinary people but also of Estonia and Latvia themselves. This melancholy sense of national martyrdom infuses many of Egremont's stories. At one point he compares the downtrodden Latvians to the downtrodden Irish; and at other points he quotes various strangers who lament the 'long cruel history' of 'rule by foreign colonisers'. But while such sentiments might feel real to people today, they would not have felt so real to people centuries ago. Latvia and Estonia were never clear geographical entities in the way that Ireland was; and while the medieval barons who ruled this place may have

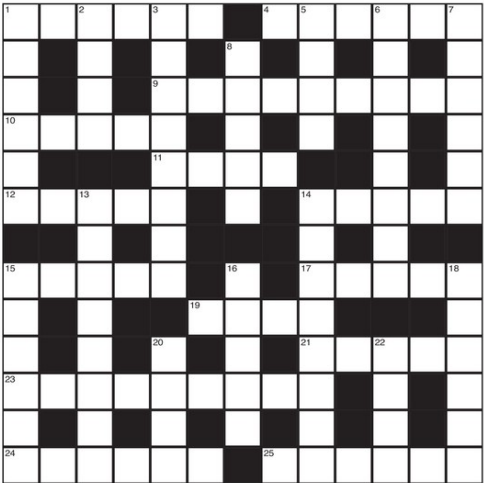
spoken German, they were not considered 'German' in the modern sense, because there was no such country as 'Germany' at the time. Before the 19th century they would probably not even have been considered outsiders: this was a time of empires, not nations.

The atmosphere in this flawed but beautiful book is always dark and brooding. It is telling that the emblematic life stories that Egremont shows us all seem to end in tragedy or disappointment. Even when the author comes across the vibrant atmosphere in Riga's picturesque town centre on a summer night, he can't resist comparing it to Hamelin in Germany, 'where the Pied Piper might appear followed by a cavalcade of laughing, doomed children'. There is indeed no escaping history in this part of the world. It oozes out of the cracks between the ancient cobblestones, whether we like it or not.

PRIZE

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Film director, finally failing, took place in the ranks (4,2)
- 4 American Indian swiftly lassoes horse (6)
- 9 Time planning cover for house (9)
- 10 Sign in book store missing lines (5)
- 11 No approval for retreat (4)
- 12 Green ties making a comeback (5)
- 14 Tango group in Herts town (5)
- 15 Damage after cold spell (5)
- 17 Frenzied anger from mad king's daughter (5)
- 19 Father, eastern church leader (4)
- 21 Line taken by a king that was shot at Hastings (5)
- 23 The King's residence to honour with presence and light (9)
- 24 Conductor heard German songs (6)
- 25 Son in hunter's prayer (6)

DOWN

- 1 Excellent, the French myths (6)
- 2 Follower of Mary and Caroline who loved Byron (4)
- 3 Manned it at sea, together (2,6)
- 5 Spirit in goblet raised by king (4)
- 6 Former currency leader dismissed? That's frightening (8)
- 7 For instance, award's put up for drink (6)
- 8 Short story being broadcast - it could be gripping! (5)
- 13 Water may be a barrier to transaction (5,3)
- 14 Giving out order to a bullfighter (8)
- 15 Something to ruminate on when getting leg-up into club (6)
- 16 Supporting flanks of army in attack (5)
- 18 Scientist reveals small weight trapped by gas (6)
- 20 Study Eastern valley (4)
- 22 Fish to breed we hear (4)

This month's prize crossword is kindly sponsored by **John Murray**, who are offering five copies of their new edition of Patrick Leigh Fermor's classic, *A Time of Gifts*. The beloved first book in Fermor's epic trilogy, *A Time of Gifts* recounts his 'great trudge' from the Hook of Holland to Istanbul, which began in 1933 when he was eighteen. This new edition, published as part of the John Murray Journeys collection, includes the late Jan Morris's 2005 introduction. Send your completed entries, along with a postal address, to lrcrossword@gmail.com by **21 July**.

The winners of the June competition, who will each receive a copy of *The King's Painter: The Life and Times of Hans Holbein* by Franny Moyle, are Bill Acker in Tunbridge Wells, Karen Bloom in Maidstone, Ann Lee in Great Budworth, David Sawyer in Woking and Steve Taylor in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

ACROSS: 1 Hundred, 5 Aswan, 8 Locum, 9 Rioja, 10 Padre, 14 Marlowe, 16 Sonar, 17 Usher, 18 Impasse, 22 Gamin, 25 Oxide, 26 Elemi, 27 Olive, 28 Tendril **DOWN:** 1 Helium, 2 Neck, 3 Ramp, 4 Dandie Dinmont, 5 Acre, 6 Wood, 7 Noah, 11 Blues, 12 Topaz, 13 Mars, 15 Apse, 19 Espial, 20 Dojo, 21 Mini, 22 Gene, 23 Neon, 24 Beer