



A Gathering of Ghosts

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Pagans tackle the Knights of St John with terrible consequences in the new medieval thriller by Queen of the Dark Ages, Karen Maitland. Set on the wilds of Dartmoor, this is a ghostly tale for fans of *The Essex Serpent* or C. J. Sansom's *Shardlake* series.

'A dark read... fear and hysteria are portrayed with claustrophobic skill' *The Times* on *THE PLAGUE CHARMER*

The year is 1316 and high on the wilds of Dartmoor, hidden by the mist, stands the isolated Priory of St Mary, owned by the Sisters of the Knights of St John. People travel from far and wide in search of healing at the ancient holy well that lies beneath the chapel.

But the locals believe the well was theirs long before Christianity arrived and there are those who would do anything to reclaim their sacred spring... As plagues of frogs cascade from the well and the water turns to blood, is there witchcraft afoot? Or is the Old World fighting back at last?

A Gathering of Ghosts Details

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From Reader Review A Gathering of Ghosts for online ebook

Angela Smith says

I have read a few Karen Maitland novels and I am always interested in books set in the Medieval times are hers are. This for me is one of her most enjoyable books since I read Company of Liars. The story has a rich cast of characters from the holy sisters of the Priory of St Mary to the locals all set in the backdrop of the wilds of Dartmoor. What I also liked about the book is that there is a fairly large bit at the back giving extra information about the time and it's historical context as well as a glossary of terms etc. that give a fuller explanation if you are interested in knowing more.

A well written tale with lots of superstition and the harshness of the times and living conditions for many who were at the bottom of the rung and life was disposable. The story centers around the Priory of St Mary and an ancient well that was built around by the priory and the anger of the ancient gods as they have been pushed aside. Many still subscribe to the gods of the old times as does a girl who has fled from home. Sorrel has found herself at a mining camp. With very few choices in life and a deformed arm, she ends up at the camp where life is harsh. She has a connection to Morwen. She is a local girl and the daughters of a seer/wise woman. Together they find out what the old goddess Brigid wants of them.

The appearance of a strange child by the well has the sisters of the priory mystified and a blind priest terrified. The boy is seemingly blind and deaf and cold as ice. Things start to happen that cannot be explained and The two Knights of the Order of St John who are sent to the priory are determined to root out the thievery and corruption they are convinced is going on at the priory and the plagues that seem to keep appearing are only confirmation to Brother Nicholas that the place is rife with sorcery too.

A very enjoyable read with a supernatural theme.

Peter says

Retribution

Every time I read a new Karen Maitland book I have this fear that the spell is going to be broken – well not this time. For me, Karen is the master of the medieval thriller with a twist of supernatural menace. England in the 14th century sits on the edge between religious belief and pagan superstition, nowhere is this more prevalent than on wild expanses of Dartmoor, or previously known as Dertemora (Moor in the Dart valley). *A Gathering of Ghosts* is a brilliant book full of atmosphere that takes you into an eerie, foreboding, superstitious world where legends and myths are all too close. Karen's writing pulls at every physical sense that captivates and keeps teasing with demonic forces that are terrifyingly close.

The central location of the story is the Hospitaller's Priory of St Mary, in a remote location in Dartmoor and its surrounding area.

"Other side of that priory stands the most accursed hill on the whole moor. Old 'uns called it Fire Tor, but some call it Ghost Tor. You can hear the dead whispering among the rocks."

In the surrounding area, camps of 'tinnerns' are ferociously mining the landscape for tin to provide King Edward II with the materials he needs to build weapons for his wars.

"The King's decreed that any man has the right to look for tin on anyone's land as he pleases, without let or hindrance."

This scenery is vividly brought to life and the weather-beaten conditions create a dark and dreary rain-soaked landscape, adding to the overall sense of damnation.

The Priory, run by Prioress Johanne, houses an ancient well that the church is built on and they have dedicated it to St Bridget, although the locals originally know it as Bryde's Well. Various unconnected characters have apparitions of a blood-drenched scene and are drawn to the Priory – for what, they do not know. One of these visions is seen by Sister Fina, the sister responsible for managing the well and the pilgrims that attend it. Flustered and terrified she leaves the underground well to find a deaf-mute boy standing alone in the church. Feeling he is abandoned they take him in, and by way of discovering more, take him to the blind priest in the hope he may connect better. The priest's response is alarming in that he warns them all that if the boy stays he'll bring down a curse on all their heads. Next morning the priest is dead. Prioress Johanne must keep the superstitions and fears at bay as the priory is visited by Knight Brother Nicholas and his groom, Brother Alban, on a mission to investigate possible pilfering of priory's monies. She has her own secrets to hide and the game of cat and mouse with Nicholas is full of suspense.

The other blood-scene apparitions are experienced by Sorrel, a poor girl disfigured at birth with a deformed arm, and Morwen the daughter of Kendra, the former keeper of the well. Kendra is someone that communicates directly with the spirits and conjures charms and spells. She will pass her gift to one of her daughters but Morwen is not expected to be the one. Morwen is, however, growing in supernatural strength as she can feel the spirits and can sense the power within Kendra fading. All these characters are really well depicted and play a wonderful part in creating a totally immersive story of secrets, threats, superstition, and retribution from the Earth and the ancient world.

The history of the order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, also known as the Hospitaller Knights Brothers and Sisters, is really interesting and although aligned with the Templar Knights, is not as well-known. Originally founded as a hospital in Jerusalem in 1080 they provided care and refuge for the poor, sick and injured pilgrims in the Holy Lands. Today St John Ambulance takes its name from the Hospitaller Knights.

Karen Maitland undertakes deep research in the background to her books but doesn't allow it to consume or distract from her story. As a way of providing insight into those details, she includes historical notes and a glossary of terms at the back of the book, that I find adds fantastic value to the whole experience. I simply find Karen Maitland's stories totally mesmeric and full of clever suspense.

I would like to thank Headline Publishing and NetGalley, for an ARC version of the book in return for an honest review.

An interview with Karen Maitland has been added to our website <http://thereadingdesk.com/interview-w...>

Stephen Collins says

Set in 1316 this set around tin miners in Dartmoor with greed & slave labour, witchcraft, the Knights Templar 's shadow & religion.

Egurdouce a sauce never to forget deep fried lard for all meats then fried onions in more lard, fried currants

yes You guessed it in more lard, red Wine, vinegar, sugar, pepper, cinnamon, salt, thickened with yes Its lard & eggs then pour it over rotten meat if the fat doesn't kill you the vegetarian nightmare will done it lard but Remember that that's full fat suet not your modern white lard.

What makes these books is that the author includes both list of all the main charterers, an anthology & in depth funny almost Horrible History style index of all things you never new & often after reading wished you didn't like lard meal.

This another dark creepy period that is hardly know because so few records exist

This Egyptian frog style plague & no union workers both stories entrapping you in each other's arms like a dead lover's eternal embrace.

Here we have real "villains ". Knights Hospitaller the order of St John Of Jerusalem who took over from the Knights Templar who the Pope accused of been sodomizing each other.

They Knights Templar who are Richard the Lion lot who started killing Muslims in. 11th & 12th century proving that some Muslims have very long memories.

But funny thing is the Knights Hospitaller who followed could by rule of the Pope in the name of Christ toucher the Templars.

They now are one of are hero's in DHS they are more familiar known today as St John Ambulance Association which of course is very funny.

Blood & murders as razor wit cuts into 14century but this good but not as brilliant as Company of Liars. But once again it is book of female voices perhaps this why lot females enjoy her books but don't see why get more women then men reading her books .But then I have never been the sort of reader that conforms to the stereo type.

The best part of this book is that you often feel sick because the descriptions are so gloried & revoltingly but it is all true this is sort of sick madness which leaves you wonder how the fuck did we ever become the people we are today?

Hitler would loved the middle ages.

Mairead Hearne (swirlandthread.com) says

My Rating 4.5*

'You'll need more than a sword to protect you up there. Other side of that priory stands the most accursed hill on the whole moor. You can hear the dead whispering among those rocks. Hungry ghosts, they are. There's many has heard them talking, and some even followed the voices into the caves up there. Followed them in, Brothers, but never came out....'

In A Gathering of Ghosts, *'Pagans tackle the Knights of St John with terrible consequences'*

This is a dark and gothic novel folks, set in 1316, a time when Europe was in the midst of a terrifying famine.

I knew in picking up **A Gathering of Ghosts**, from the cover alone, that here was a book that was going to unnerve me...and it did!

As I turned the pages of **A Gathering of Ghosts** and read the very powerful descriptions, my stomach churned on more than one occasion. Karen Maitland is rightly described as the Queen of the Dark Ages. It's as though she has witnessed for herself the horrendous conditions of the time and experienced first-hand the fears and superstitions of the local people...in 1316!

A Gathering of Ghosts is set against the backdrop of the moors, with the desolation vividly evident among the tors and mires of Dartmoor, a place that always conjures up images of old myths and dark haunting stories. The Priory of St Mary is an isolated convent, home to a very small group of Sisters who belong to the Knights of St John, a medieval Catholic Military Order. The Priory is built over a holy well that was there long before the Knights arrived. Originally in the care of locals, who had strong pagan beliefs, the Sisters have never been fully welcomed by the inhabitants of Dartmoor. Folk come from far and wide to avail of the healing powers that they believe the well bestows, with many still believing that the well and all the lands of Dartmoor is theirs. The people of Dartmoor were there long before Christianity darkened their doorstep and many would be very pleased to see the Sisters permanently removed from the Priory.

As the Great Famine continues it's hold over Europe, the population of Dartmoor suffers terribly. With crops depleted and starvation rife, many turn to the Sisters for help. What limited supplies they have are divided out among the throngs who come to their gate. But, even with the food shortages and the harshness of life on the moors, there are still those who hold on strongly to their pagan beliefs and are convinced that the Sisters are a problem.

When a young boy mysteriously makes an appearance within the grounds of the Priory, an immediate sense of doom is evident. He is blind. He is mute. He is alone. The Sisters take on the responsibility of caring for him but simultaneously there is some very strange stirrings among other folks. With their superstitious nature, they fear that this boy carries evil in his soul. The arrival of a senior Knight, sent on a mission to assist the Sisters and to search their accounts for irregularities causes further upset among the residents of the convent.

Karen Maitland also takes us out into the moors, where many broke their backs daily tinning, in the hope of earning a crust to stay alive. The ramshackle and filthy squalor of their dwellings was just criminal. Treated worse than any animal, I could almost smell the rank and disgusting odors emanating from unwashed bodies trying to survive alongside free-flowing sewage. In conditions that were inhumane, Karen Maitland just brings it all alive. It really felt like I was walking back in time.

Events start to amalgamate causing mayhem and suspicion to be prevalent. The Sisters do their best to control the situation and to keep some semblance of calm but the moors will not be silenced.

Haunting, mesmeric and dark, **A Gathering of Ghosts** is an almost claustrophobic read. Filled with imagery of hungry hounds roaming the moors at night baying for blood, of a frightened cloister battling to survive, of a people reduced to eating the grass on the side of the roads and of the very, very dark rituals of those who are very angered by the arrival of Christianity on the moors. The smells invoked, the despair of a society left to rot and the constant and persistent floods of rain all contribute to making **A Gathering of Ghosts** a very fascinating read.

Compelling. Atmospheric. Chilling. Dark. Frightening. Intriguing. Eerie...

I could go on..

Jo Barton says

The year of our lord, 1316 and a great famine sweeps the land. In an isolated refuge in the wilds of

Dartmoor, the holy sisters of the Hospitallers' Priory of St Mary care for the poor, the diseased and those troubled in spirit. Taking the waters at the Holy Well, once known locally as Brydes Well and dedicated to the Goddess Brigid, offers a sliver of mercy and hope of redemption. However, some pilgrims believe more in the old gods and goddesses, pagan deities who controlled thoughts and prayers long before Christianity, and it would seem that the old gods are, once again, demanding their own sense of appeasement. The delicate green moss which decorates the wall to the Holy Well, once a sight of wonder, now becomes a shimmering mass of deep ruby-red as the walls start to run with blood.

Visceral and filled with a primitive desolation, *A Gathering of Ghosts* is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a delicate story. It's dark and dirty, alive with fear and superstition, and so eerily creepy it makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. Tense with menace from the start, there is never a moment when the sense of medieval history doesn't come gloriously alive.

Beautifully told in several story strands we are led through the dangerous reality of living life in constant fear of starvation and the undeniable dread of being in the wrong place, at the wrong time. There is much to take in; from the inner workings of daily life at the priory, with all its squabbles and petty jealousies, to the mysterious portent of the arrival of a blind child, and the unexpected visit from Knight Brother Nicholas, a warrior monk and Knight of St John, all of which deeply disturbs the equilibrium of life at St Mary's. Out on the windswept moor itself, we have Kendra, the blood charmer and her daughter, Morwen, a young woman on the cusp of her power as a cunning woman. But I think it was in the story of Sorrel, a pitiful young woman who in escaping her father's cruelty runs straight into another nightmare, who really tugged at my imagination.

This is not the pretty history of romantic novels; it's harsh and brutal, showering the page with the vicious reality of medieval life. It's also another wonderfully atmospheric story from the queen of medieval fiction, there's not a word wasted, an emotion unexpressed or a terror unexplored. *A Gathering of Ghosts* kept me awake at night, and when I finally put the book down and slept, I had nightmare visions of churning snakes and the glistening gold-green of hundreds of frogs as they swarmed from the holy well.

Debra says

I have been a fan of Karen Maitland's books for a while now having read several. I was so pleased when the opportunity arose to read this one.

Set in 14th century Dartmoor, we see the clash between the Church and the old ways. The sisters of the Knights of St John have taken over the pagan well & dedicated it to St Lucia. Pilgrims come from far & wide to take its water & look for healing. On the moor Morwen, her sisters and her Mother abide by the old ways & continue to call for help from the spirits of the moor. On the other side of the moor it is being torn apart by the tinnars. A famine is across the land & everyone is starving - regardless of their beliefs. Who are the strangers who arrive & what influence will they have with the pagan or Christian beliefs.

One of the big draws of Karen Maitland's books is the extensive historical research. Her use of language and attention to detail is brilliant throughout the book and there are interesting historical appendices at the back.

This book does become very mystical with much centering around the pagan beliefs and the calling of the pagan spirits. Towards the end this got really rather confusing and wild & I lost track of it all. The threads did all come together at the end and story was completed well but there was definite wobble for me - the

night was dark, various people were stumbling around the moors, spirits were being raised, hounds were barking, there was a storm & it was all a little confusing.

This is not a cheery period of history so readers shouldn't be surprised by the lack of light relief throughout the books. The characters are well portrayed with detailed personalities but little in the way of light heartedness - life is a struggle everyday.

This is not my favourite book by Karen Maitland although I did still enjoy it. I shall be on the lookout for any future books & keen to read them.

I received a free copy of this book via Netgalley.

Cathy says

I read my first Karen Maitland book – The Vanishing Witch – in 2016 and immediately upon finishing it added all her other medieval thrillers to my wishlist on Goodreads. I actually have a copy of The Plague Charmer sitting on my bookshelf unread (which is a crime in itself). My abiding impression of The Vanishing Witch was of the author's skill in creating an intense atmosphere and sense of the supernatural, all combined with an intriguing mystery. I'm pleased to say this is equally evident in A Gathering of Ghosts which has atmosphere and elements of the supernatural by the bucket load!

The Dartmoor of the book is not a place for the casual sightseer but a wild place of wind and rain, and bogs waiting to trap the unwary traveller. It's certainly not somewhere you want to venture late at night when it takes on a nightmarish quality and, as some of the locals believe, the spirits of the netherworld hold sway. As one visitor to the Priory observes, '...both sisters and servants had babbled about rampaging tinnerns and murderous outlaws, as if Dartmoor was to be found on the edge of the world among the isles of the dog-headed men rather than in the civilised realm of fair England.'

Set largely in the isolated Priory of St. Mary, cut off for months at a time due to winter storms and autumn rains, the author creates a unsettlingly claustrophobic atmosphere that seems to affect some of the Sisters more than others. (Shades of Black Narcissus here.) The arrival of one small boy creates an even more unnerving atmosphere, for reasons the reader will soon discover.

The presence of an ancient holy well beneath the priory chapel, now dedicated to St. Lucia but believed by the locals to belong to the pagan goddess, Brigid, is just one of the many oppositions explored in the book: religious belief versus superstition, pagan versus Christian, good versus evil. Whatever their beliefs, though, their adherents seem to share a similar conviction that, if they only make their appeals fervently enough, their wishes will be granted. On occasions, this doesn't happen exactly in the way they were expecting. Another opposition in the book is male versus female but, happily, the men don't always escape punishment for their actions and, in some ways, the female characters are seen as possessing if not superior power in this world, then the ability to call on superior power from the spirit world or from God.

The book contains some fascinating detail about the tin mines found on Dartmoor at the time and the so-

called 'stannary' law that applied to their operation. For some, the tin mines are a vital source of employment and food in a time of famine or a refuge. Others see the excavations as a wounding of the land, upsetting the balance of nature. For some, the threat the tanners pose is more commercial. As one of the book's narrators, Sorrel, finds out they certainly weren't pleasant places to be, particularly for a woman. 'But as we breasted the rise, the noise that burst in my ears made me stagger backwards: iron hammers smashing granite, stones crashing into buckets, the whinnying of packhorses, the shouts of men, the bellows of women and the yells of children... It was as if the ground had yawned wide before me and I was starting down into the pit of Hell.'

Readers who like a good dose of the supernatural in their historical mysteries will love *A Gathering of Ghosts*. Readers who like a strong sense of period atmosphere will likewise be more than happy. And all will no doubt appreciate the extent of the author's research, as evidenced by the fascinating Historical Notes and extensive Glossary at the end of the book.

I received an advance review copy courtesy of publishers, Headline, and NetGalley in return for an honest and unbiased review.

Beadyjan says

Karen Maitland smashes the bar again with another fabulous, bewitching medieval masterpiece.

She populates her latest book with a cast of superbly memorable characters.

A group of holy sisters in an isolated Priory, ruled by the indomitable Prioress Johanne assisted by a group of sisters including the wonderful sister Basilia (I must confess I instantly pictured her as the wonderful actress Patsy Byrne - most famous for her role of Nursie in *Blackadder*, and wonder if the author had this character in mind when she created her?)

Knights of St John, tanners working on Dartmoor living in impoverishment I shudder to imagine, and some wonderful mystical and magical pagan women.

The whole story is woven around survival, the battle between pagan beliefs versus Christianity, magic, ancient lore, the wisdom and fortitude of women from different walks of life entwined with the occult. Combine this with a stunningly believable storyline and strange happenings and you have a winner.

If you like your historical fiction to be scrupulously researched, scintillatingly imaginative and deeply engaging look no further. I was wowed by this latest book by one of my favourite historical authors.

Cphe says

Unable to rate this as highly as other reviewers. When I initially read the synopsis it ticked so many of my reading "likes" that I'm left feeling a tad deflated. I did enjoy the bleak and claustrophobic atmosphere, the

isolation, the setting of Dartmoor. I also enjoyed the rituals of the "Old Ways" when paganism ruled across the land.

However, this was a very slow read, the "build up" was in simmer mode until very much the end of the novel. Found it difficult to empathise with the main characters here due to the fact that the story is again told from several differing points of view. I've enjoyed this type of delivery in the past but it didn't quite work here. For this reader it was the secondary characters that were the most interesting, Eva and the tortured Sebastian.

Susan says

I have been a fan of Karen Maitland since her first novel and enjoyed this, her latest, very much indeed. It is 1316 and the Hospitaller's Priory of St Mary, sits, isolated on Dartmoor. Prioress Johanne rules her domain with efficiency, but her authority is challenged with the arrival of Knight Brother Nicholas, who arrives one wet and windy night, with the news that the Lord Prior of England has put him in charge.

The Priory is built over an old well, which those locals, who worship the 'Old Ways,' still knows as 'Bryde's Well.' Sister Fina is there to look after the well and spends each evening fishing out dedications which are pagan, rather than Christian. One evening, at the start of this novel, she discovers a young boy in the darkness, but he is not welcomed by all within the Priory walls.

Those familiar with Karen Maitland's work will know that she combines historical accuracy with a good dose of the supernatural. This is basically a story of women, of folk-lore, of how many locals were forced to adopt an outward belief in Christianity, while adhering to their old ways, of the real struggles of those times. We have not just the power struggle within the walls of the Priory, but the very real struggle of survival going on outside, with famine and discontent threatening to cause upheaval. This is wonderfully written and meticulously researched – a great novel for those who like realistic historical fiction.

Paromjit says

Karen Maitland has carried out meticulous and indepth research for this piece of medieval historical fiction set in 1316 in Dertemora, or Dartmoor. The dark, visceral and claustrophobic action takes place amidst the background of the ravaging great famine, widespread starvation and King Edward II's contentious decree that allows tanners to dig on anyone's land with impunity to fuel his war efforts. Prioress Johanne, a woman with secrets, heads St Mary's Hospitaller's Priory, built around the ancient Bryde's well, but now overseen by the Christian St Lucia. Tensions exist with the locals who still believe in the older gods such as Brigid and Old Crockern. Johanne's rule is threatened with the arrival of the Knight Brother of St. John, Nicholas, and his groom, Alban, suspecting corruption and more.

The strange arrival of a blind and mute young boy triggers fear and sows strife with the death of the elderly blind Father Guthlac, who believed the boy was cursed and a danger to all. Johanne names the boy Cosmas and is dedicated to looking after him, her call to others to not heed the old superstitions is disregarded by many. Amidst the ceaseless rain and cold, the priory is deluged by the huge desperate skeletal masses in search of any morsel of food, including the forceful communities of tanners who push aside locals. The

situation is exacerbated by trouble at the holy well, with its plague of frogs, flies, blood, and dries up completely, threatening a source of income from pilgrims. Ancient sacred sites are abused by tanners, whilst vast swathes of moorland is churned over, turning into mud in their search for tin. Practitioners of the old ways, such as Kendra, peddle their healing, charms and spells, whilst her daughter, Morwen, with powers of her own, is forced to operate below the radar. Sorrel, afflicted with a useless arm since birth, leaves home after hearing the call of an inner voice. The old gods clash with the newer religion as hunting horns presaging the spectral packs of marauding howling and yelping hounds roam the moors at night.

Maitland brings this period of dark history vibrantly alive with her rich descriptions. The clash of the gods as the old gods battle with the newer beliefs, is captured in the characters. The fearful and paranoid Brother Nicholas is terrified of the boy, feeling the need to hunt for his bezoar for protection. Death is everywhere, with the old folk walking away to die so that the younger ones will get any odd scraps of food. Serf hunters search for any runaways from the uncompromising feudal system, looking to make an example of them, seeking freedom really is a deadly crime as we see with Todde. Many are politically labelled heretics in a period of time that the Templar Knights are persecuted. The position of women made my stomach churn again and again with horror throughout the novel. This was a hugely compelling read that proves to be knowledgeable and informative of this time in medieval history. Highly recommended. Many thanks to Headline for an ARC.

Lavender says

Karen Maitland proved again that she can create wonderful creepy historic fiction. I like her dark and atmospheric stories. "The Gathering of Ghosts" is about a clash of the old pagan and the Christian beliefs. The story is character driven. We see the story through the eyes of several characters. Actually, there is not much activity going on in the story. It is more about the situation, and the strong rules religions demand.

The book is settled during the Great Famine in England between 1315 and 1317. Due to extreme wet and cold weather Europe suffered from starvation. There are different narrators and it took some time until you get to know what binds them together.

The book captivated with its creepy atmosphere. But I have to say the book lacks a bit of a real story which leads us to somewhere. Most of the things are happening in the heads of the characters. There is not a huge development, not some kind of mystery to reveal. Well, the book says there is one but it is not really a big surprise. The book shows us how unimaginable horrible these times of starvation must have been. It shows us also how old pagan beliefs stayed alive right under the nose of Christianity. As always in Maitland's books, there is a supernatural thing involved.

"Gathering of Ghosts" is a nice and entertaining read for lovers of historical fiction with a creepy touch.

3,5 Stars

I received an ARC from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review

Beata says

When I started reading the latest novel by Karen Maitland, I knew I wouldn't be disappointed. Now, I can honestly admit that *A Gathering of Ghosts* is a terrific read, which deserves all praise it has received from critics and reviewers. Brilliant medieval mystery, set at the Priory of St Mary in Dartmoor in 1316, where the old beliefs meet still relatively new religion. Maitland masterfully builds the intrigue around a sacred well under the Priory chapel, and as always in her books, the atmosphere and details of the period are superb!! In a nutshell, I loved it!

Bookread2day says

Karen Maitland has added some very knowledgeable paragraphs of Historical notes at the back of this book. There is so much information that I didn't once know about.

Emma says

A Gathering of Ghosts is set against the backdrop of a terrible famine which caused widespread poverty, desperation and displacement of thousands of ordinary people as they were forced to travel across Europe in search of food or better conditions elsewhere.

The well or spring sited at the Priory is central to the story representing the battle between Pagan and religious beliefs at the time. The characters of the story are bogged down in their beliefs, but for me the central character is Dartmoor itself: it's rage about being destroyed by tinners. I found this element of the story very interesting. Edward II needed tin for armour and weapons and passed laws to allow access to any land to mine for tin, where it could be found. The process of tinning was not a kind one to the land.

The glowing moss which lined the rocks of the well does exist.

Medieval historical fiction at its best.
