

## CRIME SCENE EAST MIDLANDS

### Introduction

- Storytelling
- History of crime fiction (very brief)

Crime fiction is perhaps the most popular form of fiction in Britain today, and there are many excellent writers. Crime Scene East Midlands is a promotion seeking to highlight those writers with strong East Midlands connections, and my talk today will encompass the whole of the Midlands from Nottingham to Northampton, The Peak District to Rutland Water.

In all crime fiction the setting is vitally important. Sometimes it is a place you know, sometimes somewhere you have been, or would like to go. Writers often write about a place that they know, and then lead you, the reader, into the darker recesses of areas that they know well – whether areas of the mind or areas of the country.

### **DERBYSHIRE**

David Bell Originally a teacher, David Bell is now the local convenor for the Crime Writers Association. His speciality is true crime, and he has written about murders old and new throughout Leicestershire and Derbyshire. He specialises in Victorian stories, so if you enjoyed *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher* you will enjoy these.

Stephen Booth Formerly a Journalist (not the last one to be mentioned today – though unusually he was a sports journalist) Stephen Booth moved into crime fiction in the late nineties. He writes cleverly plotted stories and his books could be described as rural police procedurals. His first novel *Black Dog* was an immediate success – a bleak, dark story set in the heart of the Peak District featuring two very different police officers – DC Ben Cooper & DS Diane Fry. Fry and Cooper quickly became established as characters to watch – the plodding, methodical Cooper, with his countryman's knowledge of the world around him, and the edgy, abrasive Fry, a City girl all at sea in the area that Cooper knows so well. Booth based his stories in and around the fictional town of Edendale, which is loosely based on Buxton. The stories are always well plotted, and the characters well drawn. Apart from their police work, Fry and Cooper have very human difficulties in their outside lives. Fry has a sister who has gone somewhat off the rails, and tends to turn- up when not wanted on her sister's doorstep. Meanwhile Ben Cooper has a mother with alzheimers, and a brother who is a hard-pressed local farmer. There is also the memorable DC Gavin Murfin.....

Stephen Dunne A new name in the field, Stephen's first novel is set in Derby, and marks him out as a name to watch. "The Reaper" is a story of Detective Inspector Damon Brook, who leaves his career and his family behind in London and flees to Derby to wind down his career as policeman in the Peak district – only to find himself confronting the one man who terrified him most – the one he could never put away..... Fans of Mark Billingham will love it.

Georgette Heyer Best known as a historical romance writer, Heyer also wrote some historical crime novels, one of which, *The Toll Gate*, was set in Derbyshire. She was a prolific writer, and crime was subject of quite a few of her lesser known novels.

Val McDermid One of the best of all contemporary crime writers, Val McDermid was originally a journalist in the Manchester area. Though her novels are mostly set in this area, *A Place of Execution* was a one off novel set in the moorlands north of Buxton. In the winter 1963: two children have disappeared in Manchester; the murderous careers of Myra Hindley and Ian Brady have begun. On a freezing day in December, another child goes missing: 13-year-old Alison Carter vanishes from the isolated Derbyshire hamlet of Scardale. For the young policeman George Bennett it is the beginning of his most difficult and harrowing case: a murder with no body, an investigation with more dead ends and closed faces than he'd have found in the inner city; an outcome that reverberates down the years. Decades later he tells his story to a journalist, Catherine Heathcote, but just when her book is poised for publication, Bennett tries to pull the plug. He has discovered new information that he will not divulge. This is not a straightforward police procedural, or amateur sleuth story – but in a way is both.

Anne Zouroudi Anne Lives Derbyshire, and is the creator of the Greek detective, Hermes Diaktoros, who has featured in three excellent mystery novels. Known as “the fat man”, Diaktoros is a sort of mythical Greek hero, bringing justice to the olive groves and deep blue seas of Greece. *The taint of Midas* was her first novel in 2006, and the third in her series *The “Doctor of Thessaly”* was published this year.

## **NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**

David Belbin David Belbin is best known as an author of books for young people, and runs the MA in Creative Writing Course at Nottingham Trent University. His original success came as an author of books in the Point Crime series, and one of these, *Avenging Angel*, led to a series called “The Beat” which followed the adventures of a group of young police officers through their probationary period on the mean streets of Nottingham. The series dealt with a range of subjects, including rape, racism, homosexuality and paedophilia, and it culminated in 2000 with the adult novel “*Fallen Angel*”. More recently he has written a number of short novels for reluctant readers, again covering dark, edgy themes.

John Harvey John Harvey is one of the best crime writers of them all. He started out in the mid 1970s as an author of formulaic westerns under at least 8 different names. After this he turned to crime fiction, and his first Resnick novel “*Lonely hearts*” was published in 1989. In 2000 *The Times* named it as one of the 100 best crime novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There have now been 11 Resnick novels, all set in Nottingham, where John Harvey lived for many years. The Resnick stories were televised by ITV some years ago with Tom Wilkinson in the title role, and these can still be found occasionally on *Alibi* or *ITV 3*. He has written three books about retired Nottingham detective Frank Elder, and has started another recent series set in Cambridge. All three series are much more than straightforward police procedurals.

Clare Littleford Clare has written three crime novels, each set in Nottingham. In each simple everyday events lead to discoveries about events that happened in the past, but have tentacles reaching out to today. Clare used to work for Nottingham city council, but took an MA in creative writing and came up with *Beholden* in 2003 and *Death Duty* in 2004. After a break of 3 years *The Quarry* was published in 2008.

Rod Madocks Rod Madocks is another East Midlands writer shortlisted for the CWA New Blood Award in 2009. Having worked in the field of psychiatric care for many years, he put his knowledge to good use in this powerful tale of a man searching for his vanished lover. As Stephen Booth has said, if you want to know what goes on in a high security psychiatric hospital this could be the book to read. Not, I suspect, for the faint of heart.....

Nicola Monaghan Another Nottingham author, Nicola has written two well received crime stories. The Killing Jar from 2006 is an extraordinary tour de force worthy of Ruth Rendell, a sour sweet story of a girl growing up on a crime-ridden Nottingham estate. Her second novel, Starfishing was a novel about risk, destructive games and the world of trading in the 90s.

Phil Whitaker Phil Whitaker's one-off crime novel "The Face" was set in Nottingham. A haunting narrative of family secrets, hidden violence and self-deception, it follows the events set in motion by the mysterious death of a retired policeman in a road accident.

## **LINCOLNSHIRE**

Ken Follett A highly accomplished thriller writer, Ken Follett used the building of Lincoln Cathedral as an inspiration for his extraordinary tour de force about the building of a medieval cathedral - The Pillars of the Earth.

Susanna Gregory Book 12 of her Matthew Bartholemew series is set in Lincoln, when Bartholemew arrives in the City in the winter of 1536, to look for the woman he wants to marry. But a guest in their friary is murdered holding the Hugh Chalice, a Lincoln relic with a long and bloody history. Soon Bartholemew finds himself in a web of intrigue in a strange city, not knowing who to trust. This is a very well written series of historical crime novels, which will appeal to fans of C J Sansom or Ellis Peters.

Karen Maitland Karen's love of travel and history has been reflected in both of her well received crime novels. The Owl Killers was set in rural England in 1321 and brought vividly to life a world of pagan rites, witchcraft and murder, while her second novel The Company of liars dealt with the coming of the Plague, and the efforts of nine strangers, brought together by pure chance, to avoid certain death. She lives in Lincoln. Again these will be of interest to readers of historical crime fiction.

Frank Palmer Lincoln-born Frank Palmer was a journalist before turning to crime fiction. His first novel featuring Detective Inspector "Jacko" Jackson , Testimony, was published in 1994 to critical acclaim . It was the first of 5 featuring Jackson as the central character, but after 5 books in two years the author brought in a new major character, Detective Sergeant Phil "Sweeney" Todd. As with so many crime series, Todd is a maverick policeman – a forceful, no-nonsense character whose refusal to back-down led to him being left lame by a killer's gun. The series was cut short by the author's untimely death in 2000. They are police procedurals with a difference.

## **LEICESTERSHIRE**

Jane Adams Leicester born Jane Adams has been a crime writer for more than 10 years. Though best known for her early novel The Greenway she has over 20 novels to her name.

She has often used local places in her books, though she often changes them enough to make recognition tricky. Jane has written four different crime series. The first two series (one of 3 books and one of four) both featured policemen as the main character – Mike Crofts and Ray Flowers. In 2002 she changed tack and introduced Naomi Blake, a blinded ex-policewoman. This was a successful change, and Naomi featured in 5 excellent novels culminating with “Legacy of Lies” in 2007. She has recently started a new series featuring retired actress Rina Martin and her friend Detective Inspector Sebastian MacGregor, and these are aimed squarely at the “cosy” end of the market, so fans of Hamish Macbeth or Miss Marple will find lots to enjoy..

Ben Beazley Another former policeman, Ben has written several books about the history of Leicester, as well as Leicester Murders, a book relating the stories of a number of murders in Leicester from 1832 to 1966. His first crime novel, Crooked Mile (set in Victorian Britain), was published earlier this year.

David Bell Originally a teacher, David Bell is now the local convenor for the Crime Writers Association. As mentioned earlier, his speciality is true crime, and he has written about murders old and new throughout Leicestershire and Derbyshire.

Colin Dexter Forever revered as the creator of Inspector Morse, Colin Dexter is synonymous with the dreaming spires of Oxford. However his connection to the East Midlands is strong – not only was he born in Stamford, he was also a teacher in Leicester, Loughborough and Corby (Classics Master) long before the family holiday in Wales during which he became so bored that he wrote the first few paragraphs of a potential crime novel. This led to his first novel Last Bus to Woodstock being published in 1975 – and he never looked back. His career was helped immeasurably when in the mid 1980s ITV decided to televise the Morse series, with John Thaw in the title role. However they made some changes to the characters which eventually led to Dexter being influenced by TV in his novels.

Rod Duncan Another Leicester author, Rod is the author of 3 full length novels, plus a short story called “The “Mentalist”. His first two novels were both set around a fictional riot in Leicester, and the third concerned a blackmailed policeman.

James Green Leicester resident James Green was a teacher for 25 years before retiring and becoming a full time writer in the 1990’s. His first Crime novel, Bad Catholics, has been shortlisted for the John Creasey “Fresh Blood” Award 2009 by The Crime Writers Association. It is the first of a proposed trilogy about retired cop Jimmy Costello..

Spencer Jordan Spencer Jordan wrote a one off novel in 2005 “Journeys in a Dead season”, which was chosen as a “Richard and Judy” book that year. The author is a lecturer at the University of Wales and his book is a classic crime novel, linking the present day with events of the past. In 1922, an ex-soldier Captain Crowe is on a journey across Leicestershire to visit old wartime comrades. He is writing a book on horticulture, and trying to come to terms with his horrific wartime memories. Juxtaposing this with the recollections of a present day child murderer it is a psychological masterpiece – a very moving story.

Jessica Mann Jessica Mann studied law at Leicester University, and put this to good use by writing about 20 crime novels between 1971 and 2006. She also wrote “Deadlier than the Male” in 1981, an investigation into feminine crime writing, and what makes women such good crime writers. Her books fit the category “amateur sleuth” and several feature an archaeologist, Tamara Hoyland. She is a crime reviewer for a Sunday paper – and recently

made the news for saying that she would no longer review what she called “torture – porn” – she didn’t specify exactly whose books she was getting at!

Malcolm Noble Former policeman Malcolm Noble, was born in Nottingham and now runs a second-hand bookshop in Market Harborough. His Timberdick mysteries are a series of stories set in a fictional south coast seaport in post war Britain. Unusually, the central character and sleuth is a local call-girl. Not for the squeamish, maybe, but then, crime can be a messy business.

Ann Purser Another Leicestershire resident, Ann Purser was amongst other things, a columnist for SHE magazine for six years before her interest in writing turned to crime fiction. She is most definitely at the Cosy end of the genre, but her books are none the worse for that. Her amateur sleuth Lois Meade is a local cleaner - “New Brooms, We sweep cleaner” is her motto. Since 2002 she has become mixed up in various crimes in the fictional village of Long Farndon, culminating in 2009 with the latest novel, Tragedy at Two.

Joseph Wambaugh In a former life, Joseph Wambaugh was an LAPD detective, who rose to the rank of Sergeant. His first novel was published in 1970, and his second, The Choirboys (1972), became a huge worldwide bestseller. In 2005 the Mystery Writers of America named it as one of the 100 greatest crime novels of all time. In 1973 he turned his hand to non-fiction, and with The Onion Field he told the story of two robbers and two young cops whose destinies crossed in a bizarre execution in a Los Angeles field. He continued writing a combination fiction and non-fiction, and in 1989 wrote The Blooding – the extraordinary story of the infamous Narborough murders in the early 1980s, and the detection method that unravelled them – genetic finger-printing. Without it, an innocent man would have been found guilty of a murder he didn’t commit, and another man might have got away with two murders that he did. Professor Alec Jeffreys worked at the University of Leicester and the Leicestershire setting was used to great effect by a man more used to writing about the mean streets of Los Angeles.

## **RUTLAND**

Robert Goddard For more than 20 years Robert Goddard has been in the top rank of British mystery writers. He rarely features the same character in more than one book, and his novels are generally set in the south or south west. However his 1999 novel Set in Stone was partly set by Rutland Water.

E.W.Hornung Forever known as the creator of Raffles, Hornung is included here as he was educated at Oakham School – and qualifies as the only crime writer I could find who was educated in Rutland!

## **NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

Stephen Done Stephen is a member of staff at Liverpool Football club, but in his spare time he has written two crime novels set on the Great Central Railway shortly after World War Two. “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” and “The Murder of Crows” are classic crime novels, painting a picture not just of the crimes and solutions, but also the world around them – in this case the shortages, the bad weather, the struggles to come to terms with the after effects of the war and the knowledge that the Railway Age was coming to an end.

Jill McGown Jill McGown was born in Scotland, but lived most of her life in Northamptonshire. Her books were police procedurals, featuring D.I Daniel Lloyd and DS Judy Hill. They were an unusual pairing, in that they had been an item, then split up, only to find themselves reunited by the job they did. In all they features in 13 novels and she was not shy of dealing with difficult subjects such as kidnapping, rape and paedophilia - the series was only cut short by Jill McGown's untimely death at 60 in 2007.

Sally Spedding Welsh-born, Sally is now resident in Northamptonshire. Her novels are dark, forbidding mysteries, often set in areas that she knows – such as Wales or indeed, Northamptonshire - where her second novel, Cloven, was set.

## **WIDER MIDLANDS**

Judith Cutler – Birmingham

Ellis Peters - Shrewsbury

Jim Kelly – Fens