



St Hilda's College
Oxford

32nd Crime Fiction Weekend



Detecting *the* Gothic

tales from
the dark heart
of crime fiction

Guest of Honour
Val McDermid

8th - 10th August 2025

In Oxford and online

Mick Herron
Olivia Isaac-Henry
Anna Mazzola
Stuart Neville
Ambrose Parry
William Ryan

Catherine Ryan Howard
Stuart Turton
Ruth Ware
Catriona Ward
Louise Welsh

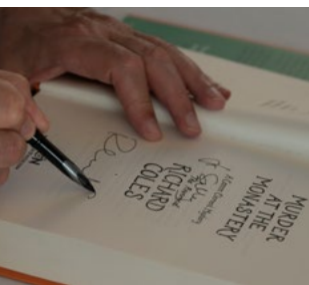
X HildasCrime www.st-hildas.ox.ac.uk





Welcome

from the Chair of Programme Committee



Welcome to St Hilda's Crime Fiction Weekend 2025. This is your guide to an exceptional weekend of talks by acclaimed crime writers and discussions with fellow crime fiction fans. You will find the programme and timings here, along with bios for our speakers and our Programme Committee members. Online attendees will receive an email containing the link to join us online and to participate in the Live Chat. Remember that both in-person and online attendees will continue to have access to watch the recordings for a month after the last session. For those attending in person, Blackwell's bookstall is back, giving you a chance to stock up before an informal signing session on Saturday. Your registration also gives you access to Blackwell's online bookshop, curated for the Weekend. Once again, Blackwell's Rare Books has kindly donated prizes for the 'Whodunnit' - one for our online audience and one for those attending the dinner. We hope you enjoy the weekend.



Sarah Hilary

Programme Committee Chair & Programme Director

Emma Campbell

Deputy Development Director, St Hilda's College



St Hilda's College

32nd Crime Fiction Weekend



Detecting the Gothic

Tales from the dark heart of crime fiction

From *The Woman in White* and *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* to the most modern of monsters and their makers, a fascination with the Gothic has always lent colour to crime fiction. As the summer sizzles, let the shadows creep in at our 32nd Crime Fiction Weekend where a dark gathering of glittering stars will do their best to send shivers down your spine.

Our Guest of Honour is Val McDermid, who will be joined by a stellar list of speakers.

PROGRAMME

Friday 8th August

For early arrivers: tea, coffee and biscuits are available in the SCR

5.30 – 6.00pm

Meet & Greet

JdP Foyer and Lawn

6.00 – 6.30pm

Mick Herron in conversation with Sarah Hilary

Spy Makers and Monsters
JdP



Few Gothic dungeons can compete with Slough House, where the spooks are shackled to their desks under the sometimes-open eye of Jackson Lamb, spy fiction's greatest grotesque. Mick will lead us down the dark paths of his imagination, with detours to the lighter side of handling a cast of misfits, might-have-beens and monsters.

6.30 - 7.15pm

Drinks Reception

Pre-dinner fizz on Riverside Lawn (weather permitting) and South Foyer

7.15pm

Anna Mazzola

Dinner with Guest Speaker

St Hilda's Dining Hall

Anna Mazzola, award-winning author of historical Gothic crime and modern thrillers, will entertain us with the myriad ways in which dark stories develop perspective, empathy and resilience, inviting us to explore the reasons why Gothic fiction flourishes in times of flux, and how turbulent world events might influence what we create.



Saturday 9th August

9.15am

Welcome from the Committee & Chair

SESSION 1

9.20 – 10.50am

Chaired by Jane Casey

Ruth Ware

Something Nasty in the Woodshed: Fear and Anxiety in Gothic Fiction

The creaky old house, with its uninhabited west wing and shadowy hallways. The sinister servant, guarding dark unspoken family secrets. The hint of something malevolent and supernatural (whether real or imaginary) lurking around every corner. We can all list the classic ingredients of a Gothic novel - but the thread that ties them all together, and which makes the tribulations of their heroines (and sometimes heroes) all too relatable, even to those of us who don't dwell in a crumbling Cornish manor house, is anxiety. From the suspiciously hospitable foreign aristocrat of the 19th century, to the seemingly perfect husband of the 21st, Gothic fiction has always warned readers: trust no-one, and take your own fears seriously, because you're probably right. From *Jane Eyre* to *Rebecca*, from *Dracula* to *Verity*, Ruth Ware delves into the murky depths of our collective anxieties and examines how the Gothic preoccupation with female fear has influenced her own genre.



Louise Welsh

Lost in the City, Lost in the Woods

From its birth to the current day, Gothic crime fiction has never been afraid to embrace society's big crimes. Louise Welsh discusses texts by William Godwin, Edgar Allan Poe, John Grisham and Percival Everett, exploring quests for justice, fragile freedoms, and the absurdity of respectability.



SESSION 2

11.20am – 12.50pm

Chaired by Jake Kerridge

Catriona Ward

Reading with our Bodies: Gothic Literature as a Physical Act

At their best, horror and crime writing contain encoded instructions for the body. They ask the reader's heart, breath and adrenaline levels to rise and fall with exact precision, driven by language and rhythm, subliminal suggestion, repetition and variation. Shirley Jackson's novels in particular are scored and arranged like a piece of music - the reader is the instrument on which she plays. Critical attitudes towards the literature of fear can be ambivalent. Comedy, horror, erotica - all writing with a strong physical dimension - provoke discomfort which seems to drive these works to a lower place in the hierarchy. They can be perceived as less valuable than cerebral so-called literary fiction which engages the reader only above the collar. It may be precisely this tension and unease, the ability of crime and gothic to profoundly affect both body and mind, that lend these genres their power. Catriona Ward will consider these questions through the work of canonical writers of fear such as Joyce Carol Oates, Virginia Feito, Stephen Graham Jones, Michelle Paver and Sarah Waters.



Stuart Turton

A Big Monkey Did It and Ran Away: Why Gothic's At Its Best When It Isn't So Poe-faced

Stuart Turton explores the daft edges of gothic crime fiction, talking about his favourite silly premises, weird conclusions and oddest characters.



SESSION 3

3.00 – 4.30pm

Chaired by Jake Kerridge

Olivia Isaac-Henry

The Lore of the Land

Folk horror is having a revival, but what exactly is it and why has the label given to a trio of cheaply-made horror films from fifty years ago regained relevance in the 21st century? Whilst the unholy trinity of films *The Wicker Man*, *The Blood on Satan's Claw* and *Witchfinder General* are often cited as its genesis, folk horror has a much longer literary heritage. Folklore and the occult are woven through the works of everyone from Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie to modern-day writers such as Victor LaValle and Gillian Flynn. Olivia will be looking at how the folk horror and crime genres intertwine and considering why, in turbulent times, we seek out the uncanny and succumb to the lure of isolated regions, where science has no place and the gods demand sacrifice.



William Ryan

Seeing the Story - How Photographs Can Shape Atmosphere, Character and Plot

The careful examination of historical photographs can often give insights into day to day life that other sources do not. William Ryan has written crime and Gothic-tinted novels set in Nazi Germany, 1930s Moscow, the Spanish Civil War and the Irish War of Independence. He uses photographs both as essential sources to recreate the period and atmosphere of the time and to shape his stories and help him develop memorable characters.



PROGRAMME

SESSION 4

5.00 – 6.30pm

Chaired by Jane Casey

Catherine Ryan Howard

Ordinary Monsters: The Changing Face of the Fictitious Serial Killer

Serial killers who loom large in crime fiction possess almost supernatural powers, more gothic monster than flesh-and-blood man. Ripley is an incomparable mimic. Hannibal is a psychic wendigo. Norman Bates performs a sort of necromancy – albeit the kind of inferior, off-brand substitute you might find in Aldi's middle aisle. But is this what serial killers are really like? The faceless phantom leaving a trail of horror in his wake defies rational explanation, so we fill in the blanks with our own nightmares, making myths and creating legends. The Golden State Killer was thought to exert a magic power over dogs because normally-vigilant four-legged guardians cowered when he came to call. But on the day that science, time and luck finally brought police to Joseph James DeAngelo's door, they found a former police officer who'd shoplifted a can of dog repellent. The reality of the modern serial murderer is mundane, and captured in a trio of recent novels: Danya Kukafka's *Notes on an Execution*, Clémence Michallon's *The Quiet Tenant*, and Jessica Knoll's *Bright Young Women*. Come meet the men who leave blood on their pages and see why ordinary monsters are the most terrifying creatures of all.



Stuart Neville

Beyond the Pale: Moving Past the Boundaries of Crime Fiction

Using the origin of the expression "Beyond the Pale" (which refers to leaving the safe eastern counties of Ireland and moving into the ungovernable west), Stuart will look at how writers often explore beyond the safe confines of crime's genre conventions.



He will explore how the genre's earliest practitioners, such as Edgar Allan Poe, often flirted with the supernatural and macabre, not drawing a line between one genre and the other, and consider how writers such as Thomas Harris and John Connolly continue that tradition today.

SATURDAY EVENING

7.20 – 8.00pm

Drinks Reception and Informal Book Signing JdP

Buy a book, get it autographed, take a glass while you mix and mingle.

8.15pm

The P.D. James Dinner St Hilda's College Dining Hall

It's a tradition to celebrate with our P.D. James Dinner* with a specially written celebrity 'Whodunnit' featuring a cast of your favourite authors.



Philip Gooden

Who killed Johnnie Alucard?

Johnnie Alucard – real name Jack Smith – is a writer of teen vampire tales and a thoroughly despicable individual. He's a member of the Children of the Night, a small society that meets once a year in the ruins of Godstow Abbey on the edge of Oxford to re-enact Dracula's last moments. Naturally, Alucard plays the sharp-toothed Count. But when the coffin is opened there is no need to stab Alucard through the heart with a retractable plastic stake since he has already died – of fright. Someone has played a murderous practical joke on the vampire writer. But who did it? Guided only by clues in the statements from the five suspects, that's for the audience at the St Hilda's Crime Fiction Weekend to work out. (The winners will be announced on Sunday, at the start of the Guest of Honour Lecture.)

*Proceeds go to the P.D. James Fund, which supports the work of the English School and students at St Hilda's College, kindly endowed by Honorary Fellow Baroness James of Holland Park OBE.

Sunday 10th August

9.30 – 11.00am

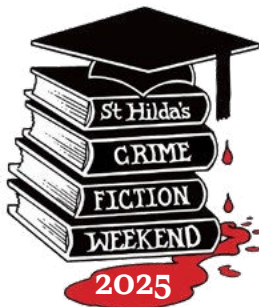
Chaired by Abir Mukherjee

Announcement of Whodunnit Winners,
followed by Guest of Honour Lecture

Val McDermid

Reinventing the Gothic

A past that never dies, the Janus face of duality and identity, dark psychological instability, and excess ... all lie at the very heart of Gothic fiction and define the twisted world of Tartan Noir. Join Val on a journey into shock and delicious suspense.



SESSION 5

11.30 – 1.00pm

Chaired by Abir Mukherjee

Ambrose Parry

Beyond Burke and Hare

The magnificently macabre history of Edinburgh medicine is all too often overshadowed by the tabloid celebrity conferred upon two squalid and opportunistic serial killers. It is a travesty that this aspect of the city's mythos is so synonymous with such unremarkable individuals when a heritage of invention, discovery, experimentation, mutilation, smuggling, rivalry and betrayal is there to be picked over. Even the wider history of resurrection men is far more interesting than that of these two layabouts, who were too lazy to even rob graves properly. Marisa Haetzman and Chris Brookmyre – collectively Ambrose Parry - delve into the fascinatingly gruesome legacy of a time when Edinburgh led the world in the realm of blood and guts: a legacy that brought forth literary creations including *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Frankenstein* and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and which still has its echoes in modern works, from *Poor Things* to *The Wasp Factory*.

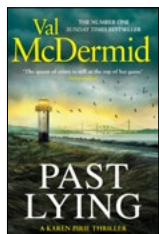


1.00pm CLOSING REMARKS

1.15pm Traditional Sunday Lunch

followed by goodbyes, St Hilda's College Pavilion

BIOGRAPHIES



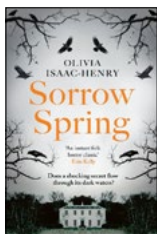
GUEST OF HONOUR

Val McDermid

Sunday | Lecture

Val McDermid has sold over 19 million books to date across the globe and been translated into more than 40 languages. She is the recipient of six honorary doctorates and is an Honorary Fellow of St Hilda's College.

www.valmcdermid.com



Olivia Isaac-Henry

Saturday | Session 3

Olivia Isaac-Henry is the author of two folk suspense novels, *Sorrow Spring* and *Hallows Hill*, as well as two crime novels *Someone You Know* and *The Verdict*.

www.marjacq.com



Anna Mazzola

Saturday | Session 1

Anna Mazzola is an award-winning writer of historical, Gothic and crime fiction. She also writes legal/political thrillers under the name Anna Sharpe.

www.annamazzola.com

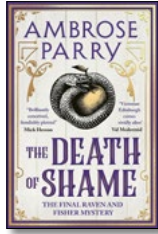




Stuart Neville Saturday | Session 4

Stuart Neville's debut novel, *The Ghosts of Belfast* (published in the UK as *The Twelve*), won the Mystery/Thriller category of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. He has since published nine more critically acclaimed books, the latest, *Blood Like Mine*, in August 2024.

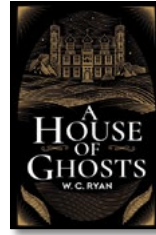
www.stuartneville.com



Ambrose Parry Sunday | Session 5

Ambrose Parry (Chris Brookmyre and Marisa Haetzman) write a series of historical crime thrillers, featuring the darkest of Victorian Edinburgh's secrets. In 2024, *Voices of the Dead* was shortlisted for the CWA Historical Dagger.

www.unitedagents.co.uk/ambrose-parry



William Ryan Saturday | Session 3

William Ryan is the author of six novels, including the *Captain Korolev* series set in 1930s Moscow. His latest, *The Winter Guest*, set in the Irish War of Independence, has been described as 'a gem of a novel'.

www.william-ryan.com



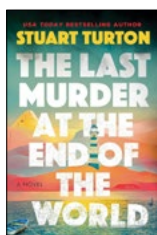
BIOGRAPHIES



Catherine Ryan Howard Saturday | Session 4

Catherine Ryan Howard is the author of eight novels including *The Nothing Man*, *56 Days* and *The Trap*. Her latest, *Burn After Reading*, was published in April 2025.

www.catherineryanhoward.com



Stuart Turton Saturday | Session 2

Stuart Turton is the author of *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, *The Devil and the Dark Water*, and *The Last Murder at the End of the World*, fusing locked-room mysteries with literary fiction, sci-fi, fantasy, and horror.

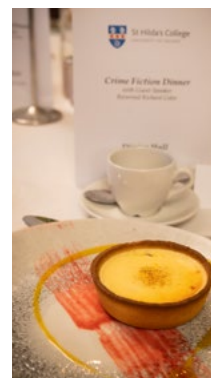
www.stuturton.com



Catriona Ward Saturday | Session 2

Catriona Ward read English at St Edmund Hall, Oxford and is the author of five novels including *The Last House on Needless Street*, *Sundial*, and *Looking Glass Sound*.

www.andrewnurnberg.com/book-author/catriona-ward





Ruth Ware

Saturday | Session 1

Ruth Ware is the author of ten thrillers including *In a Dark, Dark Wood*, *The Woman in Cabin 10*, *The Death of Mrs Westaway*, and *The Turn of the Key*. Her latest, *The Woman in Suite 11*, was published in July 2025.

www.ruthware.com



Louise Welsh

Saturday | Session 1

Louise Welsh's debut novel *The Cutting Room* won the CWA Creasey Dagger. Of her ten crime novels, the latest *To the Dogs* was published in 2024.

www.rcwlitagency.com/authors/welsh-louise



COMMITTEE MEMBERS



Sarah Hilary
Programme Chair

Sarah Hilary's debut, *Someone Else's Skin*, won the Theakstons Crime Novel of the Year and was a World Book Night selection, a Richard and Judy Book Club pick, and a Silver Falchion and Macavity Award finalist in the US. Her latest book, *Sharp Glass*, came out in July. Sarah's short stories have won the Fish Criminally Short Histories Prize, the Cheshire Prize for Literature, and the SENSE Prize.

www.sarahhilary.com



Jean Buchanan

St Hilda's alumna Jean Buchanan is co-founder with Eileen Roberts of the Crime Fiction Weekend, which began in 1994 with 'Women Crime Writers'. Jean is mostly a scriptwriter. She created and wrote many episodes of the children's tv sitcoms *The Wild House* (BBC, series 3 short-listed for a British Comedy Award) and *Welcome to Orty-Fou* (ITV). Her first foray into TV was a play, *The Princess and the Lute-Player*, for the series Jackanory Playhouse. Jean tackled crime with her Radio 4 dramatisation of David Dodge's 1952 novel *To Catch a Thief*, the book behind the iconic Hitchcock film, and tracked down Dodge's small rented villa on the Riviera for a tie-in Radio 4 Arts feature, *In Search of the Villa Noel Fleuri*, written up for Kindle as *Mr Dodge, Mr Hitchcock, and the French Riviera*. She used to work for Oxford University Press on the revision of OED and on quotations dictionaries, and began her writing career in the traditional way, with short stories in magazines.



Mick Herron

Mick Herron is a bestselling and award-winning novelist and short story writer, best known for his *Slow Horses* thrillers. Raised in Newcastle upon Tyne, Mick studied English Literature at Oxford, where he continues to live. He was awarded the Theakstons Crime Novel of the Year 2022 for *Slough House*, the seventh book in the series. Mick has also won both the CWA Steel and Gold daggers.

www.mickherron.com



Jane Casey
HCFW 2025 Chair

Jane Casey was born and brought up in Dublin, and studied English at Jesus College, Oxford. A former editor, she has written twelve novels for adults and three for teenagers. Her books have been international bestsellers and the *Maeve Kerrigan* series has won many awards. *The Killing Kind* was a Richard and Judy Book Club pick in 2021 and was filmed for television in 2023.

@JaneCaseyAuthor



Jake Kerridge
HCFW 2025 Chair

Journalist and literary critic. He has been the crime fiction reviewer of the *Daily Telegraph* since 2005 and has judged many crime and thriller prizes.

@JakeKerridge



Carolyn Kirby

Carolyn Kirby is the author of two novels. *The Conviction of Cora Burns* was longlisted for the Historical Writers' Association Debut Crown Award and shortlisted for the Specsavers Debut Crime Fiction Award. *When We Fall*, published in May 2020, was chosen by *The Times* as one of the best novels of 2020 and described by the *Daily Mail* as 'a terrific World War II novel'. Carolyn studied History at St Hilda's College, Oxford. Before becoming a full-time writer, she worked in social housing and as a teacher. She has two grown-up daughters and lives with her husband in rural Oxfordshire.

www.carolynkirby.com @novelcarolyn



Abir Mukherjee
HCFW 2025 Chair

Glasgow native Abir Mukherjee is the Times bestselling author of the Wyndham & Banerjee series of novels set in Raj-era India, which have sold over 400,000 copies worldwide and been translated into 15 languages. He's won the CWA Dagger for best Historical Novel, the Prix du Polar Européen, the Wilbur Smith Award for Adventure Writing and the Amazon Publishing Readers Award for E-book of the year. His latest novel, *Hunted*, is out now.

www.abirmukherjee.com @radiomukhers



BLACKWELL'S
FOR LEARNING · FOR LIFE

BLACKWELL'S
will be open all weekend



JdP MUSIC
BUILDING

Show Your Support

www.st-hildas.ox.ac.uk/jdp-music-building



TIMETABLE

BST British Summer Time

Friday 8th				Location
5.30 - 6.00pm	Meet and Greet			JdP SL
6.00 - 6.30pm	In Conversation	Mick Herron	Sarah Hilary	JdP
6.30 - 7.15pm	Drinks Reception			SL
7.15pm	Dinner and Guest Speaker		Anna Mazzola	DH
Saturday 9th				
9.20 - 10.50am	Session 1	Ruth Ware	Louise Welsh	JdP
11.20am - 12.50pm	Session 2	Catriona Ward	Stuart Turton	JdP
3.00 - 4.30pm	Session 3	Olivia Isaac-Henry	William Ryan	JdP
5.00 - 6.30pm	Session 4	Catherine Ryan Howard	Stuart Neville	JdP
7.20 - 8.00pm	Drinks and Author Signing			JdP
8.15pm	P.D. James Dinner	Philip Gooden		DH
Sunday 10th				
9.30 - 11.00am	Guest of Honour Lecture		Val McDermid	JdP
11.30am - 1.00pm	Session 5	Ambrose Parry		JdP

