



33rd Crime Fiction Weekend
In Oxford and online



St Hilda's College

crime fiction's
enemies and
anti-heroes

Bad Apples

4th - 6th September 2026

Guest of Honour

Andrew Taylor

Jo Callaghan

Ajay Chowdhury

Natasha Cooper

Abigail Dean

Vaseem Khan

Remi Kone

Simon Mason

Ayo Onatade

Hallie Rubenhold

Laura Shepherd-Robinson

Sarah Vaughan

Martyn Waites



www.st-hildas.ox.ac.uk/events/2026-crime-fiction-weekend

[@crimefictionweekend](https://www.instagram.com/crimefictionweekend) [@HildasGrime](https://www.instagram.com/HildasGrime)





Welcome

from the Chair of Programme Committee



Welcome to St Hilda's Crime Fiction Weekend 2026. 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. Emails have gone out to all attendees with the link to join us online and participate in the Live Chat. Remember that you 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



Mirren Dougan
Campaigns & Data Insights Officer, St Hilda's College



St Hilda's College

33rd Crime Fiction Weekend



Bad Apples

crime fiction's enemies and anti-heroes

From con artists to killers, crime fiction has served up some of the very best bad apples in all of literature. Ripley, Moriarty, Lecter and many more are responsible for prompting our heroes to action, presenting puzzles, peril and confrontations aplenty. Our 33rd Crime Fiction Weekend explores the dark core of these characters, and discusses why we love them – or love to hate them – so much.

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

PROGRAMME

Friday 4th September

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

5.15 – 5.45pm

Meet & Greet

The Pavilion / Harry's Bar

5.45 – 6.30pm

Vaseem Khan in conversation with Abir Mukherjee

'No, Mr Bond. I expect you to die'
JdP



Was Dr No misunderstood? Was Goldfinger an innovator? Can Blofeld really be evil if he loves cats? The James Bond canon has introduced some of fiction's most colourful villains, henchmen - and women; and femme fatales ... In this riotous conversation, Vaseem Khan and Abir Mukherjee peel back the Hollywood veneer to reveal the reality behind the myths of the top ten iconic bad apples from the Bond franchise.

6.30 - 7.15pm

Drinks Reception

Pre-dinner fizz in the Pavilion and (weather permitting) on the Riverside Lawn

7.15pm

Natasha Cooper

Dinner with Guest Speaker
St Hilda's Dining Hall

For someone like Natasha Cooper, who believes the greatest human virtue is kindness, crime fiction provides awful examples of what happens to perpetrators as well as victims when it is overtaken by cruelty and selfishness. The genre also offers some splendid – and very funny – characters, who may appear to shun the very idea of kindness and yet are unswerving in their loyalty and support for those in their charge.



Saturday 5th September

9.15am

Welcome from the Committee & Chair

SESSION 1

9.20 – 10.50am

Chaired by Jane Casey

Simon Mason

From Brer Rabbit to Tom Ripley: Anti-heroes in children's books and crime novels

Not quite villains but not good guys either, anti-heroes are an unsettling bunch with an unusually powerful hold on our imaginations. In the murky world of crime they seem naturally at home. But they pop up in all sorts of fiction, even in stories for the youngest readers, and a comparison of anti-heroes of children's books with those in crime novels may be useful in flushing out the deep-lying ambiguities that make them so unforgettable.



Abigail Dean

That isn't an anti-hero, that's a villain with style

Examining evidence from *Paradise Lost* to *Breaking Bad*, Abigail will question whether there is any substantive definition to being an anti-hero, or whether anti-heroes are, in fact, just charismatic villains, and often great orators.



SESSION 2

11.20am – 12.50pm

Chaired by Jake Kerridge

Jo Callaghan

Roll out the Barrel

The last fifty years have seen an increasing number of thrillers featuring AI and technology as the central threat to humanity, including *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (Philip K Dick) *The Fear Index* (Robert Harris) and more recently, *Eden Falls* (Ajay Chowdhury). Jo Callaghan explores how the very best of crime fiction recognises what B.F. Skinner once observed: 'The mystery which surrounds a thinking machine already surrounds a thinking man.' AI in crime novels offers a powerful new lens on perennial issues, and an inconvenient reminder that although 'one bad apple spoils the barrel' the problem is not the single apple but the barrel they inhabit.



Ajay Chowdhury

From fingerprints to firewalls: The changing role of technology in crime writing

Technology has always been woven into crime fiction: from Holmes's early scientific reading of the crime scene, through Scarpetta's forensic toolkit, to today's algorithmic surveillance and AI-driven policing. Whether it's weaponised to conceal a crime or harnessed to expose the truth, crime writers have often been among the first to explore the possibilities of technology. This talk surveys how tech has evolved on the page, when it strengthens a story (and when it overwhelms it), and where the genre may be heading next.



SESSION 3

3.00 – 4.30pm

Chaired by Jane Casey

Remi Kone

From literary anti-hero to screen icon

Remi examines the path anti-heroes have taken from the page to the screen, including Hannibal Lecter, Lisbeth Salander, Michael Corleone, Jack Caffery, Lou Ford, and Harry Hole.



Sarah Vaughan

Crime fiction's faux friends

Sarah takes a considered look at the unreliable narrators - often female and older - who appear to be our guides to a text but turn out to be at best problematic, at worst malevolent. From Barbara Covett, the narrator in *Notes on a Scandal*, to Lucy Atkins' Vivian Tester in *The Night Beetle* and Dee in *Maggie Lane*, via Verity Baxter in Sabine Durrant's *Finders, Keepers*, and Claire Fuller's Ursula in *Hunger and Thirst*, these women are sly, covetous, and sometimes deeply dangerous.



PROGRAMME

SESSION 4

5.00 – 6.30pm

Chaired by Carolyn Kirby

Laura Shepherd-Robinson

“We are not so different, you and I”: George Smiley and his black grail

Ever since Mary Shelley and Conan-Doyle, authors have embraced the dark mirror: a hero and villain who reflect one another, adding dimension and character layers to both. Nobody does this better than John Le Carré in his original Karla trilogy, a cat-and-mouse battle of the psyche between MI5 agent, George Smiley and his Russian counterpart, Karla. Laura will examine the ways in which Le Carré uses hero and villain to explore one another and inform plot, with additional reference to other classic mirror pairings, such as Holmes and Moriarty, Nick and Amy Dunne, and Hannibal Lecter and Clarice Starling.



Hallie Rubenhold

Victims and villains: Depictions of women in historical true crime

In conversation with Carolyn Kirby, Hallie Rubenhold will examine the ways in which women are depicted in accounts of historical true crimes, from the victims of Jack the Ripper to Ethel Le Neve, Dr Crippen's accomplice in the murder of Belle Elmore, acquitted of murder and of being an accessory after the fact, but almost certainly guilty of the crime.



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

The T Rex murder

The Ashe-Pitt, a hotch-potch of a museum in Oxford, is hosting a film fan convention.

The movie in question is *Lame Duck*, intended as the start of an anti-hero series but one which turned out to be a turkey. Film critic Frank Commode slammed *Lame Duck* on release though he now regards it as a cult classic. Commode is a guest of the convention. Others include the film's director, the screenwriter, one of the actors, a security consultant and the museum curator. On the surface everything is sweetness and light. But by the end of the convention one of the five has clubbed Frank Commode to death in the museum storeroom. The weapon: the humerus of a Tyrannosaurus Rex. So exactly who did for the film critic with T Rex's funny bone?



*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 6th September

9.30 – 11.00am

Chaired by Abir Mukherjee

Announcement of Murder Mystery Winners

Guest of Honour Lecture

Andrew Taylor

Dancing with the Devil

Our Guest of Honour will invite us to examine certain conmen, from both fact and fiction, particularly those who prey on women. His talk will include an account of a real-life Victorian murder case which directly inspired one of his novels.



SESSION 5

11.30 – 1.00pm

Chaired by Abir Mukherjee

Martyn Waites

Chancers, charmers and criminal concert pianists

From the seedy, dangerous side of Earl's Court to not so genteel post-war Brighton and the stifling atmosphere of a Henley on Thames boarding house, Patrick Hamilton, the Graham Greene of the gutter, populated his novels with some of the most famous, unforgettable anti-heroes (and downright villains) in British literary history. Get yourself a pint of mild and bitter, and imagine you're pulling up a seat in the Midnight Bell, and Martyn will tell you all about them.



Ayo Onatade

Shadows in the spotlight: The rise of anti-heroes and anti-heroines as morally complex protagonists in crime and mystery narratives

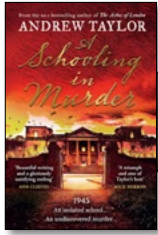
Ayo explores the shift in crime and mystery fiction from traditional, morally upright detectives to complex, flawed anti-heroes and anti-heroines. These protagonists are defined not by their purity, but by their moral ambiguity, psychological depth, and internal struggles.



1.00pm CLOSING REMARKS

1.15pm Traditional Sunday Lunch followed by goodbyes, St Hilda's College Pavilion

BIOGRAPHIES



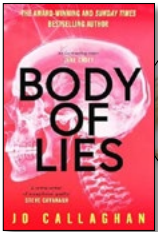
Andrew Taylor is the winner of the CWA Cartier Diamond Dagger (for lifelong excellence in the genre), the HWA Gold Crown for best historical novel of the year, and the triple winner of the CWA Historical Dagger. He has published over 45 books, including *The American Boy*, the *Roth Trilogy* (filmed for TV as *Fallen Angel*), and the *Lydmouth Detective* series set in the 1950s. His latest novel, *A Schooling in Murder*, was Waterstones Thriller of the Month for March 2026.

GUEST OF HONOUR

Andrew Taylor

Sunday | Lecture

www.andrew-taylor.co.uk

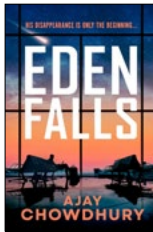


Jo Callaghan

Saturday | Session 2

Jo Callaghan's debut, *In the Blink of an Eye*, was a BBC Two's *Between the Covers* pick, as well as a Waterstones Thriller of the Month, and went on to be a *Sunday Times* bestseller and 2024 winner of both the prestigious Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year and the CWA ILP John Creasey (New Blood) Dagger awards.

@jocallaghankat

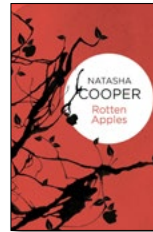


Ajay Chowdhury

Saturday | Session 2

Ajay Chowdhury was the inaugural winner of the Harvill Secker-Bloody Scotland crime fiction award, for his debut novel, *The Waiter*. He is the Artistic Director of the Rented Space Theatre Company and has directed over a dozen plays in London including *The Merchant of Vembley* at the Cockpit Theatre and *Cymbeline* at the Etcetera.

www.ajaychowdhury.com

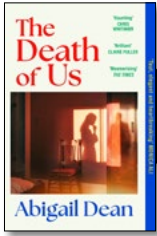


Natasha Cooper

Friday | Dinner

Natasha Cooper is the crime fiction critic of the *Literary Review*. She retired from writing her own novels when she had had more than thirty published and had answered the question that drove her to write fiction in the first place. She chaired the St Hilda's crime weekend for nearly twenty years, as well as presenting many papers.

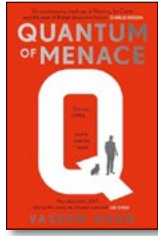
www.literaryreview.co.uk/contributors/natasha-cooper



Abigail Dean
Saturday | Session 1

Abigail Dean is a writer from Manchester, living in south London. Her writing has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Times* and *The New York Times*. Her first novel, *Girl A*, was an instant Sunday Times and *New York Times* Bestseller. Her third novel, *The Death of Us*, is out now.

www.abigail-dean.com



Vaseem Khan
Friday | Evening

Vaseem Khan is the author of two award-winning crime series set in India, and the *Q Mysteries*, beginning with *Quantum of Menace*, the first in a murder mystery series featuring *Q* from the James Bond franchise. In 2023, Vaseem became the first non-white Chair of the UK Crime Writers' Association.

www.vaseemkhan.com



Remi Kone
Saturday | Session 1

Remi Kone is a British-Nigerian author, and an Emmy-nominated producer. Her debut novel, *Innocent Guilt*, came out in May 2025. Her second novel, *Just Kill*, is out now.

@remikonewriter



BIOGRAPHIES



Simon Mason Saturday | Session 1

Simon Mason was born in Sheffield in 1962. He was educated at local schools and studied English at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. He writes the DI Wilkins series, set in Oxford, and the *Finder Mysteries* which explore the legacy of missing persons.

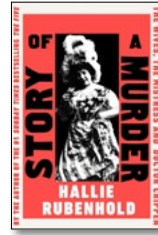
www.davidhigham.co.uk/authors-dh/simon-mason



Ayo Onatade Sunday | Session 5

Ayo is a freelance commentator on crime fiction. She is Chair of judges for the CWA Short Story Dagger, a judge for the Ian Fleming Steel Dagger and a Theakston Crime Novel of the Year Academy voting member. In 2018, she was awarded the CWA Red Herring award.

www.thecwa.co.uk/about-the-cwa/the-board



Hallie Rubenhold Saturday | Session 4

Hallie Rubenhold is a historian and award-winning, bestselling author. Her book, *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper* which focused on the victims' biographies rather than speculating on their killer became an international sensation. Her latest book, *Story of a Murder: The Wives, The Mistress and Dr Crippen*, was published in 2025.

www.hallierubenhold.com

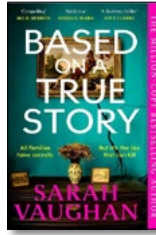




Laura Shepherd-Robinson
Sunday | Session 4

Laura Shepherd-Robinson is the award-winning, *Sunday Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of four historical novels. Her books have been featured on BBC 2's *Between the Covers* and Radio 4's *Front Row* and *Open Book*. Her fourth novel, *The Art of a Lie*, became an instant *Sunday Times* bestseller.

www.laurashepherdrobinson.com



Sarah Vaughan
Saturday | Session 3

Sarah Vaughan spent 15 years as a journalist, including 11 at *The Guardian* as a political correspondent and news reporter before becoming a bestselling author. *Anatomy of a Scandal* was translated into 26 languages, and became a worldwide number one *Netflix* limited series. Her latest book, *Based on a True Story*, is out now.

www.sarahvaughanauthor.com



Martyn Waites
Sunday | Session 5

Martyn Waites won the 2014 Grand Prix du Roman Noir Award for his novel *Born Under Punches*. As a professional actor, he has starred as both policemen and villains in dramas including *Inspector Morse*. He is currently writing under the pseudonym C.B. Everett. His latest novel, *The Final Chapter*, is out now.

www.davidhigham.co.uk/authors-dh/martyn-waites



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, and a Silver Falchion and Macavity Award finalist in the US. Her short stories have won the Fish Criminally Short Histories Prize, the Cheshire Prize for Literature, and the SENSE Prize. Sarah's latest novel, *The Drowning Place*, introduces readers to DS Joseph Ashe at the start of a brand new series set in the Peak District.

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 the CWA Steel, Gold and Diamond daggers.

www.mickherron.com





Jane Casey
HCFW 2026 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 *Maevie 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 2026 Chair

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

@JakeKerridge



Carolyn Kirby
HCFW 2026 Chair

Carolyn Kirby read history at St Hilda's and is the author of three novels. *The Conviction of Cora Burns* was listed for prizes from the Historical Writers' Association and the Crimefest/Specsavers Award, and *When We Fall* was chosen by *The Times* and *Sunday Times* as one of the best novels of the year. Her latest novel, *Ravenglass*, is an 18th century family mystery and an adventure into identity.

www.carolynkirby.com @novelcarolyn



Abir Mukherjee
HCFW 2026 Chair

Glasgow native Abir Mukherjee is a *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 has won the CWA Dagger for best Historical Novel, the Prix du Polar Européen, the Wilbur Smith Award for Adventure Writing and the Theakstons Crime Novel of the Year for his thriller, *Hunted*. His latest book, *The Pinnacle*, is out now.

www.abirmukherjee.com @radiomukhers





BLACKWELL'S FOR LEARNING · FOR LIFE

BLACKWELL'S
will be open all weekend



J&P MUSIC
BUILDING

Show Your Support

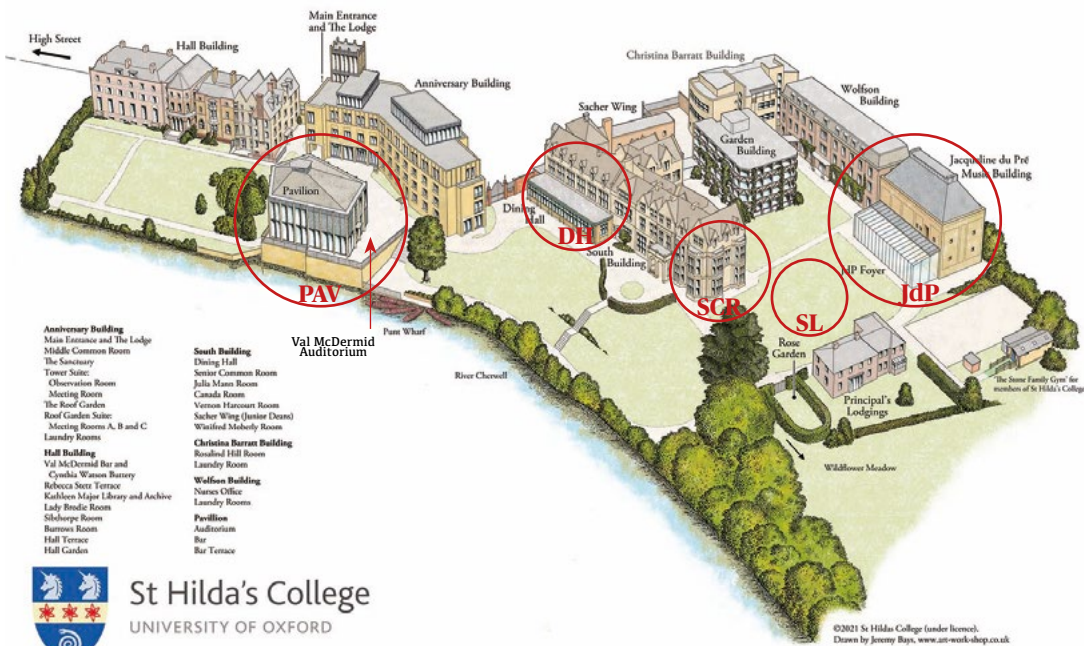
www.st-hildas.ox.ac.uk/jdp-music-building



TIMETABLE

BST British Summer Time

Friday 4th				Location
5.15 - 5.45pm	Meet and Greet			PAV
5.45 - 6.30pm	In Conversation: Vaseem Khan & Abir Mukherjee			JdP
6.30 - 7.15pm	Drinks Reception			PAV/SL
7.15pm	Dinner and Guest Speaker		Natasha Cooper	DH
Saturday 5th				
9.20 - 10.50am	Session 1	Simon Mason	Abigail Dean	JdP
11.20am - 12.50pm	Session 2	Jo Callaghan	Ajay Chowdhury	JdP
3.00 - 4.30pm	Session 3	Remi Kone	Sarah Vaughan	JdP
5.00 - 6.30pm	Session 4	Laura Shepherd-Robinson	Hallie Rubenhold	JdP
7.20 - 8.00pm	Drinks and Author Signing			JdP
8.15pm	P.D. James Dinner	Philip Gooden		DH
Sunday 6th				
9.30 - 11.00am	Guest of Honour Lecture		Andrew Taylor	JdP
11.30am - 1.00pm	Session 5	Martyn Waites	Ayo Onatade	JdP



St Hilda's College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

©2021 St Hilda's College (under licence).
Drawn by Jeremy Bayn, www.art-work-shop.co.uk