

Bristol CrimeFest -2019 Panels

Report and Photographs by Radmila May

In addition to the First Blood Panels (see the July issue of Mystery People, also the blog), there were a number of other panels to which established, and debut writers contributed. As the panels ran side by side I was not able to go to all of them but I did manage quite a few. Here are reports of some panels which may be of interest.

Thursday May 9th



Left to right, John Lawton, Chris Curran, Dominick Donald, Anja de Jager, Dolores Gordon-Smith

Apart from the first panel of debut crime writers, the first panel I attended was **Authors Remembered**. It began with *Dolores Gordon Smith* discussing **Ernest Bramah** (1868-1942) who wrote a number of books including detective stories featuring the blind detective Max Carrados. Anja de Jager described the work of the American writer **Anna Katherine Green** (1846-1935) who has been described as the mother of American crime fiction and whose first novel, *The Leavenworth Case*, preceded the Sherlock Holmes stories by 10 years and was a best-seller. **Dominick Donald's** choice was the thriller writer **Gavin Lyall** (1932-2003), husband of the columnist Katharine Whitehorn and author of a number of highly regarded spy stories whose titles included the **Harry Maxim** series, the **Honour** series and

a number of one-offs such as *The Wrong Side of the Sky* and *Midnight Plus One*. **Chris Curran** reminded us that **Mary Stewart's** (1916-2014) thrillers, although relegated to the romantic suspense category towards the end of her life and after her death, were in fact, with their smart adventurous heroines, an essential component in the growth of post-World War II feminism. Chris writes psychological suspense stories, her latest being *All the Little Lies*. The film critic **Barry Norman** (1933-2017) was remembered by his daughter Samantha and the American writer **Ira Levin** (1929-2007) by **John Lawton**. Levin's best known titles are *A Kiss Before Dying*, *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Boys from Brazil*. John himself is the author of novels set in the period 1935-1965 featuring Detective Sergeant Troy, often with an espionage theme.

Friday May 10th

Real Crimes in History: Mick Finlay and Syd Moore



These two writers each gave solo talks on the real crimes that inspired their writing. **Mick Finlay** was the first to speak. He discussed real crimes that occurred in London in the 19th Century: not the Ripper murders that have already been the focus of so much attention but other crimes that illustrate what life in London was like for the poor. Thefts of clothes were, for instance, very frequent as were instances of arson when fires were deliberately set so that the firesetter could report the fire and claim a reward. Although there is no evidence that there ever was a Sweeney Todd, Demon Barber of Fleet Street, there were cases of identity fraud the best-known of which was the Tichbourne Claimant in which a man appeared claiming to be

the missing heir to the Tichbourne baronetcy which was a legal cause celebre that ran during the 1860s and 1870s. Mick also discussed various other Victorian cases which have now been largely forgotten. Mick himself is the author of a Victorian-set series in which a private detective, William Arrowood, investigates crimes involving the poor unlike Sherlock Holmes whose investigations were largely confined to the rich and aristocratic. So far Mick has published two titles: *Arrowood* and *The Murder Pit*.

Mick was followed by **Syd Moore** whose *Essex Witch Museum Mysteries* have been reviewed in Mystery People. Syd's books, although light-hearted in tone, are based on the solid foundation of her research into the witchcraft stories of her native Essex from the sixteenth century to (almost) the present day which she describes in her interview. See page 4 of this issue.

Lawyers: Who Are You To Judge?

Abi Silver was the moderator on this panel. Two of Abi's own books – *The Pelican Brief* - and *The Aladdin Trial* have been reviewed in Mystery People and a third – *The Cinderella Plan* – is to be published on July 11th this year. Abi is very much concerned with the often not fully understood effect of technology on our lives and the combination of imagination with her knowledge of the law has been highly praised **L. F. Robertson**, a defence lawyer in the U.S., herself specialises in appeals against the death sentence. *Her books – Madman Walking*



Left to right, Abi Silver, Ruth Mancini, L.F. Robertson, Peter Murphy, Caroline England

and *Next of Kin* – deal with the shortcomings of the U.S. legal system. In *Next of Kin*, her protagonist Janet Moodie has to defend a woman accused of organising the murder of her tyrannical husband. I wondered if there was any equivalent in the U.S. of the recently created partial defence of coercive control which has replaced the defence of provocation in the U.K. In **Ruth Mancini's** latest book, *In the Blood*, criminal defence lawyer Sarah Kellerman defends a young mother accused of the attempt poisoning of her own child. **Caroline England**, a solicitor specialising in family law cases writes psychological thrillers, often based on her awareness of the exceptionally deep feelings of anger and resentment aroused in that area of the law. Her latest title, *Betray Her*, which deals with buried secrets between

best friends, demonstrates how people can appear outwardly perfect but are in reality anything but. **Peter Murphy**, formerly a circuit judge who had previously appeared at the Yugoslav War Crimes Tribunal, has two series, one set in the 1960s and 1970s and featuring barrister Ben Schroeder and dealing with important issues of the time and still relevant now, and a less serious series about the fictitious Bermondsey Crown Court which is in the process of being filmed for TV. Titles in both series have been reviewed in *Mystery People*.

Crime Cymru: It's not all Rugby, sheep and singing

Sadly, I have not been able to go the second Cardiff Crime and Coffee Festival this year. However, there was a panel of Welsh crime writers to give us a foretaste of Welsh crime writing. Crime Cymru was founded in order to promote crime stories by Welsh writers and/or set in Wales; hitherto publishers had insisted that Welsh settings and Welsh themes did not sell. In fact they have now been proved wrong and Welsh themed novels have been successful; indeed, crime stories in Welsh have been published successfully. **Alis Hawkins** writes historical crime novels in which the protagonist, Harry Probert-Lloyd, is gradually going blind. Her first novel in the series, *None So Blind*, is set against the background of the Rebecca Riots in the 1840s. **Cathy Ace**, who now lives in Canada, has written a number of novels set in Wales, told us how important the dramatic Welsh landscape is to her. **John Lincoln's** first novel in his Last Resort Legals series has a protagonist whose task is to investigate apparent miscarriages of justice. Clinical psychologist **Rosie Claverton's** two protagonists are Amy Lane, who suffers from severe agoraphobia, and DI Bryn Hesketh; her latest in the series is *Hard Return*. **G.B. Williams** has written a historical mystery *Small Deaths* and she will soon be publishing the first in a new series featuring a community psychiatric nurse, *It Should Have Been You*. In the evening there was a very enjoyable showing of an episode of the forthcoming **Agatha Raisin** TV series. I had never seen any episodes of the previous series: Agatha is thoroughly and satisfyingly bitchy. I am looking forward to making her further acquaintance – at a distance!

Saturday May 11th

Writing the First Draft: Authors' Secret of Works in Progress



Left to right: Robert Thorogood, Linda Stratmann, Simon Brett, Sarah Ward, Mick Herron

This panel with **Simon Brett, Mick Herron, Linda Stratmann** and **Sarah Ward** was moderated by **Robert Thorogood** who is the scriptwriter of the *Death in Paradise* TV series and was Toastmaster at both this and the previous Crimefest. Mick who has written the immensely popular **Spook Street** series about the oddball spies sequestered in the eponymous street led by the insanitary Jackson Lamb told us that he doesn't work regular hours but, like all writers, he works all the time but not always at his laptop or pen in hand. Sarah, who writes the D.C. Childs police procedurals set in the Derbyshire hills where she lives, apparently starts her writing day in pyjamas and dressing

gown; for her the setting is highly important. Simon keeps to office hours and aims for 1500 words a day but, even though his children are now grown up, he does not work at weekends. Since his novels are mostly fairly light-hearted setting is not all that important. Linda does all day-to-day tasks in the morning and keeps her writing for the afternoon. As her novels have historical settings, she feels she has to get everything as correct as she can. Since she is now chairman of the Crime Writers Association, she is obviously going to be pretty busy for the next few years!

All in all, it was a most enjoyable weekend and the new venue was certainly comfortable. My greatest wish was that I could have gone to all the panels but unfortunately, not being able to divide myself into three, that was not possible! I am looking forward to next year's Crimefest.