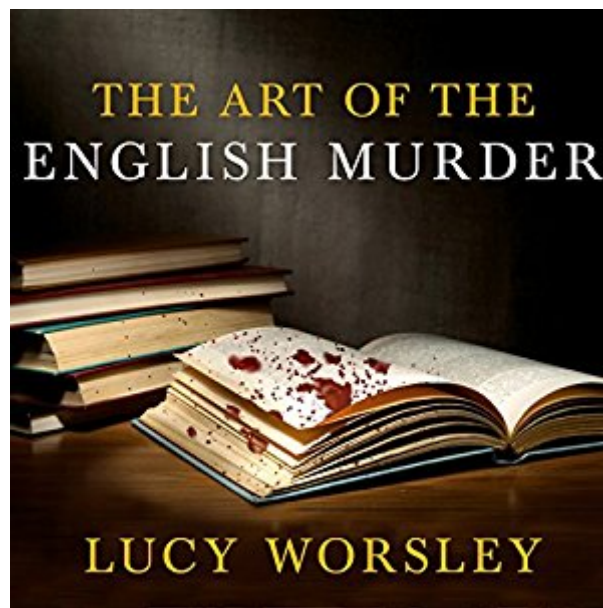


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# The Art Of The English Murder: From Jack The Ripper And Sherlock Holmes To Agatha Christie And Alfred Hitchcock



## Synopsis

Murder: a dark, shameful deed, the last resort of the desperate or a vile tool of the greedy - and a very strange, very English obsession. But where did this fixation develop? And what does it tell us about ourselves? In *The Art of the English Murder*, Lucy Worsley explores this phenomenon in forensic detail, revisiting notorious crimes like the Ratcliff Highway Murders, which caused a nationwide panic in the early 19th century, and the case of Frederick and Maria Manning, the suburban couple who were hanged after killing Maria's lover and burying him under their kitchen floor. Our fascination with crimes like these became a form of national entertainment, inspiring novels and plays, prose and paintings, poetry and true-crime journalism. *The Art of the English Murder* is a unique exploration of the art of crime - and a riveting investigation into the English criminal soul.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starting with how murders were handled before there were police forces in England, Worsley chronologically begins by explaining how "Detectives" came about. The first force in London was the "Bow Street Runners" who worked for "The Blind Beak" Sir John Fielding (Henry's half-brother). Later the Metropolitan Police (The Peelers not Bobbies) were set-up in Greater London (not the City of London) by Sir Robert Peel. As crime became more of a profession of gangs, a separate detective unit was set-up like the Securite in Paris under Francois Vidocq. From here Worsley alternates between the change in the novels about crime and the improvements made in crime detection. She discusses the "Bertillon" and fingerprinting systems that allowed

the Police to categorize criminals and to circulate accurate data about habitual criminals. During this time (beginning in the 1850s) books were being produced that were originally called the "Penny Dreadfuls" which were just cheap short stories, which evolved into what was later called "Crime Novels". Some of the first novelists were Ann Radcliffe, George Augustus Sala and Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Their books were big sellers and even Charles Dickens joined them when he wrote "Bleak House". They truly hit their own in the 1920s and 30s with such luminaries as Edgar Wallace, John Buchan, Ngaio Marsh, Margary Allingham and the Grande Dame Agatha Christie. Crime stories were always under the control of an "amateur" detective and there were very little if any blood and gore. Characters such as Hercule Poirot and Lord Peter Wimsey are the best examples aside from Sherlock Holmes. One of the main commandments of writing crime fiction was that it should be solvable by the reader from the clues, and that "red herrings" were declassified.

In the play *Sleuth* by Anthony Shaffer, mystery writer Andrew Wyke asks, "Do you agree that the detective story is the normal recreation of noble minds?" Noble minds or not, the British and the rest of the world have been singularly interested in murders, real and fictional, for centuries. The fascination has been chronicled by Lucy Worsley in *The Art of the English Murder: From Jack the Ripper and Sherlock Holmes to Agatha Christie and Alfred Hitchcock* (Pegasus Crime). The book details the entertainment value of murders, and proposes a connection between the real ones and the fictional. Murder in England, it seems, has been a source of mass entertainment long before detective stories were being written. Worsley quotes mystery writer Dorothy L. Sayers: "Death seems to provide the minds of the Anglo-Saxon race with a greater fund of innocent amusement than any other subject," and it is Worsley's intent to find out why. Worsley begins with Thomas De Quincey, who wrote the ironic essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts." De Quincey might not have been the first to realize that murder had entertainment value, but in the first decades of the nineteenth century, violence and death that had been part of daily life was being ousted by urban civilization. When murders occurred, they could be the subjects of sensational journalism, and readers would sit at their cozy hearths and enjoy gore and scandal. Worsley recounts the nasty sorts of murders De Quincey would have relished, the Ratcliffe Highway Murders, the Red Barn Murder, and others. People were fascinated by the sensational accounts of the murders, trials, and hangings. There were pictures, broadsides, ballads, ceramic figurines, and song-sheets.

Besides rain, cricket, afternoon tea, and The Queen herself there is nothing considered more

quintessentially English than a good murder mystery. Lucy Worsley, whose wit and sparkle enhance her intellect and solid scholarship, in *The Art Of The English Murder* examines the most famous English mystery writers and some of the most infamous of the murders which helped to inspire them. Murder, of course, has been a part of history as long as humans have, but the modern fascination with that particular crime dates from the beginnings of the nineteenth century. A newly literate population that was eager for entertainment, snatched up broadsides, newspapers, and pamphlets which carried the news of the day. No news was more intriguing than stories of dastardly murders, the bloodier the better. Newly organized police forces in the burgeoning industrial cities strove to track down and bring to justice the murderers, and the reports of their investigations fascinated the reading public as well. Worsley starts her history here, examining famous murderers like William Palmer and Madeleine Smith, still unsolved mysteries like Jack the Ripper and the Rode House murder, Jack Whicher and other police investigators, and, of course, the writers and novelists who produced elaborate fictions based on the crimes that filled the popular press. These included Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, and J. Sheridan Le Fanu among many others. Worsley then goes on to examine the rise of the "middle class murderer" and the rise of forensic science in the late nineteenth century (the heyday of Conan Doyle) and then really hits her stride with the "Golden Age" of detective fiction: the interwar period during which Agatha Christie, Dorothy L.

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