

## **Llandrindod Wells & District U3A Lecture Meeting March 2020**

### **Whodunnits - Dr. Geraint Evans**

#### **Report by Clive Barrett**

Llandrindod Wells & District U3A Chairman Roger Malvern welcomed everyone to the March lecture meeting and then introduced the guest speaker for the morning, Dr. Geraint Evans, who was a lecturer for over 35 years at Aberystwyth University.

In his opening remarks Dr. Evans admitted to being an avid and dedicated reader of detective novels in English and Welsh, later stating there was hardly any written in the latter mother language. His first novel of the “Who Dunit” theme was based in the Aberystwyth/Ceredigion area. The speaker noted that crime novels and psychological thrillers are outselling books on the other subjects. Out of the top ten books list there are five crime or thriller novels. The definition of detective fiction----- what we can expect by someone attempting to solve, and what is case solved in the end. Dr. Evans then detailed many different detective novels over the years beginning with the first----- “Murder in the Morgue “ by Edgar Alan Poe, and he included Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes----"The Hound of the Baskervilles”(1902).---also an historical novel. He also mentioned real life detective novels modelled on actual people and forces for example Robert Peel founded the Metropolitan Police, and the officers of Scotland Yard. Further real life murders and detectives e.g The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher(2008) by Kate Summerscale. Another detective theme was set in the 1920’s/ 1930’s New York and Chicago with private detective Philip Marlowe by American—British author Raymond Chandler.

Not surprisingly the speaker mentioned the golden age of detective writing namely that of Agatha Christie, who was born in Torquay in 1890 and died in 1976. She had a massive output of 66 detective novels and 18 plays, with “The Mousetrap” still running after no less than 68 years. She has been listed as the bestselling author of all time--- 2 billion copies, translated into 104 languages, and ranked third behind Shakespeare and the Bible. Dr.Evans also mentioned about plot development ----- the reader or audience not realising who did the crime, led to believe someone else did it until the revelation in the last chapter, these sort of puzzles included Miss Marple. Interesting the Christie novel “The Pale Horse” had recently appeared on television.

He then discussed in some detail the forensic, medical, and psychological categories of novels. Later the speaker talked about international works such as Italian and Scandinavian plus Maigret by Georges Simenon, who was an atmospheric and prolific writer. Some modern police methods and procedure novels e.g Police Commander and poet, Inspector Morse by Colin Dexter. P.D. James (1920—2014) created detective Adam Dalgliesh incorporating closed room technique. He then spoke about the best points of female writers, their prominence, eye for detail, more graphic/ violent, decreasing emphasis on structure, definitely heightened sensitivity to emotions and finally they were analytically colder. Detective fiction novels reflect or mirror society, but what is the future of the detective novel? There is likely to be an increasing emphasis on international terrorism, the technical aspects

of the perfect crime and the development of the breakdown of barriers between crime fact and science fiction. Dr. Evans ended by quoting his favourite character Sherlock Holmes, "The Game is Afoot".

The speaker then answered questions from an enthralled audience, and was thanked for a "fascinating talk" by Chairman Roger Malvern in his last official duty. Following the talk the new Chairman Karen Latham thanked Roger, and presented him with a gift for his work as Chairman. Karen also thanked the new Officers and Committee for coming forward to serve for the next 12 months.