

LOCAL STUDIES EDUCATION SERIES

AGATHA CHRISTIE



THE QUEEN OF CRIME
(1890 -1976)

Agatha Christie was the most popular author of the 20th century. Her crime novels have been outsold worldwide by only the Bible and the works of William Shakespeare. Twists in the plot are a distinctive feature of her murder mysteries.



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In Agatha Christie's crime novels, known as 'whodunits', possible suspects are gradually eliminated, either by the killer, or clues, which are pieced together by famous detective characters such as Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple. The reader is cleverly kept guessing until the villain is revealed in the last chapter.

Born in Torquay, Agatha Miller married Archibald Christie in 1914. The couple had a daughter in 1919 and a year later *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* launched Agatha's career in fiction, which was to continue for over half a century. In 1926, shortly after the death of her mother, Agatha discovered that her husband had met someone else and her marriage was over. These twin blows

in her personal life had a devastating effect resulting in her sudden disappearance. The author was found eleven days later in Harrogate, Yorkshire, apparently suffering from loss of memory. She found happiness when she met archaeologist Max Mallowan whom she married in 1930.

In addition to detective stories, Agatha wrote six romantic novels using the pen name Mary Westmacott and was also a successful playwright. Her famous work *The Mousetrap*, first produced in 1952, remains the longest running drama on the London stage. Made a Dame of the British Empire in 1971, Agatha Christie is still regarded by her world wide army of fans as 'The Queen of Crime'.



CHRISTIE

GREENWAY HOUSE

Greenway House is a magnificent mansion overlooking the River Dart near the village of Galmpton. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, a famous explorer in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, was born in an earlier house on the estate in 1539. Here, his half-brother, Sir Walter Raleigh, is said to have smoked his first pipe in England having brought tobacco back from America. Legend has it that his servant, seeing the burning tobacco, threw a jug of ale in his master's face to put out the 'fire'!

Agatha Christie and her second husband, Sir Max Mallowan, bought Greenway in 1938; a year later World War Two started. In her autobiography,

Agatha recalled the terror of German fighter planes attacking targets along the river. During one raid a school-mistress at the nearby village of Cornworthy was wounded whilst supervising children in the playground. Later in the war, the Mallowans had to move out of Greenway which was required to accommodate American naval officers. One of them painted a mural on the wall of the library which included portraits of American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. When Agatha returned to the house she decided to keep the painting as a permanent 'war memorial'.

DID YOU KNOW?

Agatha Miller was born on 15 September 1890. Her birthsign was Virgo.

Her birthplace was Ashfield in Barton Road. The house was one of a number demolished in 1961 to build a new estate and an extension at South Devon College.

At the age of sixteen Agatha trained with a music teacher in Paris but failed in her ambition to become an opera singer.

As a young lady she enjoyed roller-skating on Princess Pier.

Agatha accepted a proposal of marriage from Archibald Christie while they were attending a classical concert at the Pavilion in 1913.

During World War One (1914-18) Agatha nursed wounded soldiers at an emergency hospital at Torquay Town Hall.

Agatha completed her first book while staying at the Moorland Hotel on Dartmoor, not far from Haytor Rock.

The Mousetrap was originally written as a radio play at the special request of Queen Mary, the widow of King George V.

Her books have been translated into 103 languages, which is 14 more than the works of William Shakespeare.

Agatha's favourite hobby was gardening and she won prizes at Brixham Horticultural Show.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Books about the life of Agatha Christie available from Torbay Library Services include:

Agatha Christie - An Autobiography (1977)

Agatha Christie's Devon - Jane Langton (1990)

Agatha Christie, Woman of Mystery - John Escott (1997)

For more about the history of Torbay - visit the Local History Collection at Torquay Central Library or view the Torbay Council website (www.torbay.gov.uk) for information on the following subjects: History of Torbay/Torbay's Heritage/ People and Places/Famous People. The site also contains opening times, news of forthcoming events and general information about the following historic buildings and museums which are all well worth a visit:

Torre Abbey Historic House & Gallery, King's Drive, Torquay.
Tel: 01803 293593

Torquay Museum, 529 Babbacombe Road, Torquay. Tel: 01803 293975

Oldway Mansion, Torquay Road, Paignton.
Tel: 01803 201201

Brixham Heritage Museum, Bolton Cross, Brixham. 01803 856267



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