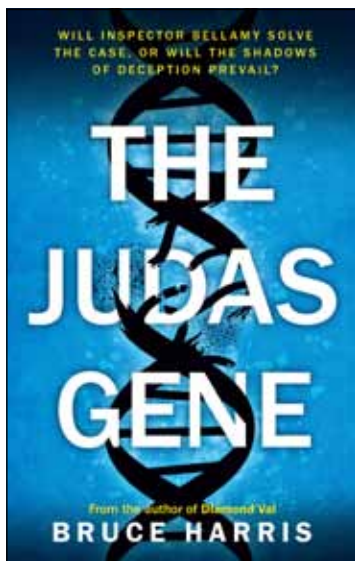


## First ‘Whodunnit’ from local author Bruce Harris



IN *The Judas Gene* leading industrialist and donor to the Conservative Party, Ralph Manningham, forced his father into early retirement so that he could take over the family business. Many years later, he is discovered dead at his home, the spilled bottle of pills on his desk a clear suggestion of suicide.

The news of Ralph’s death causes a stir within his political circles; influential figures are worried that a potential scandal will engulf them. Inspector Max

Bellamy’s task is to pick up the pieces, but as events unfold, it becomes increasingly clear that Ralph’s apparent suicide is not as it seems. Who has the motive to want Ralph dead?

In Bruce Harris’s perplexing and challenging ‘whodunnit’, will Inspector Bellamy succeed in solving the case, or will the shadows of deception prevail?

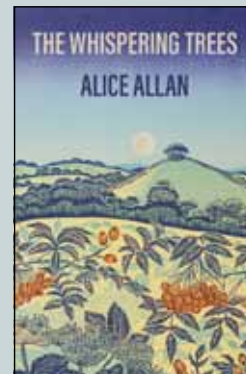
Author of *The Judas Gene* Bruce Harris lives in Devon and began writing after retiring early from a career in teaching and educational research. His educational research articles have been published in the Independent, the Times Educational Supplement and the Guardian, as well as in educational magazines. His publications include three poetry collections, three novels, and five short fiction collections. *The Judas Gene* is his latest novel.

Bruce explains: “This book was written during the time when my civil partner was in the final throes of a long term illness, Huntington’s Disease. Some of the themes in the novel connect with my feelings about my partner, and I do believe that the discipline of writing is a considerable help when life is threatening to take you beyond what you can cope with. In the last few weeks of my partner’s illness, I got a lot of help from Hospiscare nurses and care workers, but before then I was pretty much on my own. Writing was both an intellectual challenge and a steadying influence for me.

*The Judas Gene* is my fourteenth book and my previous novels have struggled to fit easily into a genre. My partner was a great fan of ‘whodunnits’, particularly Christie ones, which no doubt influenced me to write in this genre, however I also wanted to try and give the traditional ‘whodunnit’ some kind of twist, which I think I do in *The Judas Gene*.”

*The Judas Gene* published on the 28th June 2024 is available from bookshops, ISBN: 9781916668935.

## Teen angst and family drama forged in nature



A NEW BOOK, *The Whispering Trees*, by Devon based author Alice Allan has been published by Blue Poppy Publishing.

“They call me a witch, Liv, and maybe I am, in a manner of speaking.”

Olivia doesn’t believe in magic. No sensible

person does. So why, after her dad’s accident, when she moves from London to Devon, does the hill speak to her? The hill’s guardian, Annie Tilke can’t, or won’t, explain.

At school, sparky Sadie takes her under her wing, but what about the smouldering Robert Enticott and the devoted but hopeless Wadsy? Are they friend or foe? Olivia’s dad isn’t getting better and her mum wants to move back to the city. Telling her parents she wants to stay in Devon to become a vet is the least of Olivia’s worries. Old Annie’s tormentors are becoming more menacing, the natural world is in trouble, and the mysterious voice on the hill has an urgent message that only she can interpret.

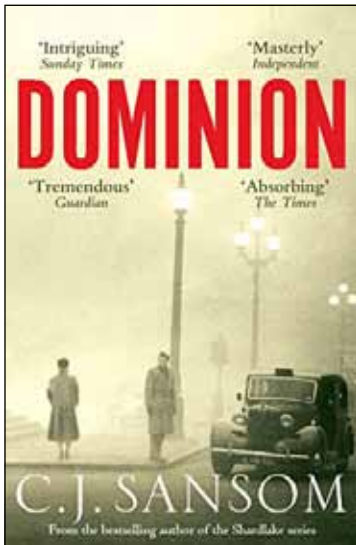
Testimonies for *The Whispering Trees* include: Robert MacFarlane (*The Old Ways, Underland, The Lost Words* etc) who said: “*The Whispering Trees* is a terrific book; at once haunting, witty and witchy, with the tang of the real to it as well as the shiver of the uncanny. Here are shades of Susan Cooper, echoes of Michael Morpurgo, all in a living landscape set just askew from what might be expected.”

‘Claire Reviews’ described it as: “A compelling, emotive, and beautifully written tale of friendship between protagonist Liv and shunned recluse Annie, this book is forged in nature.

Sights and smells of the Devon hedgerows and countryside come alive from the pages. Perfectly portrayed teen angst offsets an evocative riddle which sees Liv playing Nancy Drew, and there’s family drama too! This is one of the most original books I have read in a long while, and I cannot recommend it highly enough.”

Published in July *The Whispering Trees* will be available at Waterstones and other UK bookshops. ISBN: 9781837780334.

## Historical Novels reviewed by **John Davis**



### **Dominion by C.J. Sansom**

A number of authors of historical novels including Robert Harris (*Fatherland*), Len Deighton (*SS GB*) and Philip K. Dick (*The Man in the High Castle*) have considered an alternative view of the Second World War and posed the question: What if Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan had come out victorious instead of the Allies? In his interpretation of the theme, C.J. Sansom, who sadly died recently just as his Tudor sleuth Shardlake reached new audiences through television, starts from the premise that the appeasers succeeded after Dunkirk in 1939 and brokered a peace deal with Hitler.

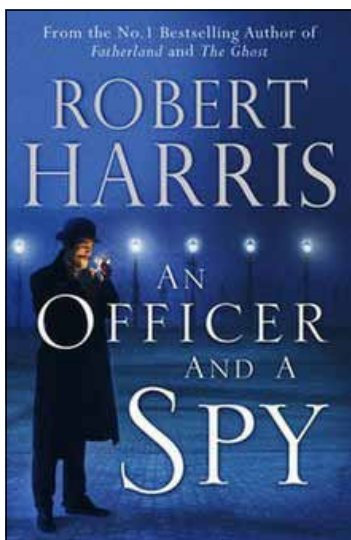
Update to 1952 and we have a scenario where Lord Beaverbrook is running a puppet government of the Nazis in London with Oswald Mosely as Home Secretary while a renegade Churchill tries to mastermind a resistance movement based mainly in Scotland.

With no 'actual' history to root his story in, Sansom is left with a completely blank page so we also learn that over in America, Eisenhower, without a highly successful war record to bolster his campaign, has been defeated in the Presidential election by Adlai Stevenson.

Into the boiling pot Sansom throws his own characters. David Fitzgerald, a civil servant turned resistance spy, his wife Sarah, top scientist Frank Muncaster, confined to a mental hospital, and the inevitable 'baddie' Sturmbannfuhrer Gunther Hoth, renowned man-hunter.

There are many twists and turns before the build up to an enthralling ending which, like all good stories, poses as many questions as answers. How might we have reacted faced with the same situations as the characters? The simple answer, I suppose, is that we never really know until we ourselves are confronted with the same circumstances.

*Published by Mantle, an imprint of Pan Macmillan*



### **An Officer and a Spy by Robert Harris**

In Britain we were to have the Profumo Scandal, in the USA it was Watergate but in France towards the end of the nineteenth century the event that rocked the establishment to its core was The Dreyfus Affair.

Alfred Dreyfus, an army captain with Jewish ancestry, was found guilty in 1895 of passing secrets to the Germans in what, according to the evidence, looked to be an open and shut case of treason.

Disgraced and stripped of his rank and insignia in a public humiliation, Dreyfus was shipped away to serve life imprisonment on Devil's Island, a French penal colony off the South American coast.

Into the fallout, marches Lt. Col. Georges Picquart, another real- life character, who has recently been appointed as the head of Military Intelligence.

He has always had his doubts about the Dreyfus conviction but, as he begins to get closer to unmasking a more likely suspect, his fellow officers in intelligence and the Army's top brass close ranks quicker than a well drilled parade ground display.

Picquart is even posted to a spell in Tunisia to throw him off the scent but, when the eminent French novelist Emile Zola also lends his support to Dreyfus' cause, the possibility of a miscarriage of justice gains credence.

France's Third Republic, riddled as it was with political infighting, corruption, privilege and antisemitism, is fertile ground for intrigue and there is none better than Picquart, with Harris' help of course, to tease out all its little subtleties.

*Published by Arrow Books*