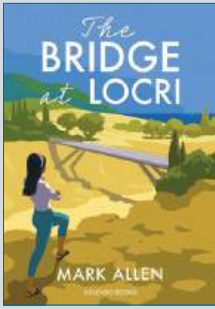




Mystery novel launching in Shire Hall Dorchester



The Bridge at Locri by Mark Allen tells the story of a group of young pacifists who, in 1963, join a workcamp in Locri, a small town on the Ionian coast of Calabria in southern Italy, to build a bridge across a valley. Their ideals are tested in arguments about collective good and the rights of the individual.

Then one of the volunteers, beautiful heiress, Isabella, from Rome, who has been having affairs with two members of the group, mysteriously disappears. Her magnetic presence affects everyone in the group for different reasons. Has she been murdered or kidnapped for money by Calabria's notorious 'Ndrangheta mafia?

Her disappearance remains a mystery for 60 years. In the meantime, the other main characters return to their own countries—England, East Germany, Australia, Bosnia and Colombia—and try to grapple not only with the reality of Isabella's disappearance, but also in adjusting to fundamental happenings in their countries, as well their own lives.

The Bridge at Locri is, on one level, a fluctuating

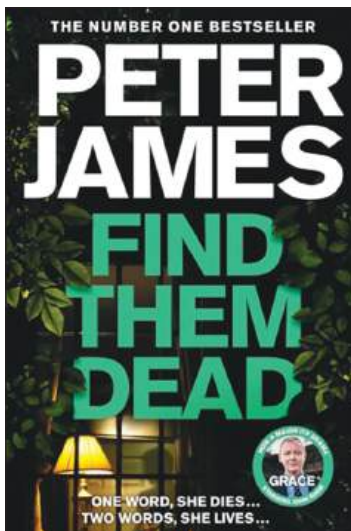
mystery novel but, on another, a social history which in chronological steps, from 1963 to 2023, charts 60 years of a changing world seen through the prism of the main characters. It is about building bridges, but then destroying them, a story perhaps of our times.

Mr Allen, who spent some of his formative years in Dorset, now lives in the next-door county of Wiltshire. His previous novel, *Life Term*, a psychological thriller, was published three years ago to critical acclaim with around 70 positive reviews on Amazon.

The Bridge at Locri will be available from 10th September 2024 at the special offer price of £9.75 (normal retail price £12.50) plus £4.79 postage and packing, a total of £14.54.

The book can be ordered online at <https://markallenaauthor.com>, where you can sample extracts from the book, or you can simply phone to purchase it on 01722 716997. The special offer expires at the end of September.

A launch party will take place at Shire Hall Museum, High West Street, Dorchester on Wednesday, 25th September 2024 from 6.00pm to 8.30pm when Mark Allen will be introduced by local author and poet Jim Potts. Please email Katina Toumba at katina.toumba@markallengroup.com to confirm attendance.



Find Them Dead by Peter James

CALL me cynical, and I may be entirely wrong, but I have always been a little suspicious of fiction books in which the name of the author on the cover is in a much larger typeface than the title.

It's seemed to me like the publishers' persuasion to get you to buy and read a book is based more on the reputation of the author than the particular merits of the story.

Not an issue with Peter James though who is perhaps best known for his creation of Brighton's Detective Superintendent Roy Grace. Several of these stories have been televised recently starring John Simm in the title role.

Grace has only a bit part in this novel which, because it is not so much to do with the traditional crime-investigation-arrest format, makes for much more of an enjoyable read.

Another plus point is that some of the narrative is devoted to a court case. You are right there on the jury benches listening to the cut and thrust of prosecution and defence barristers, the scholarly advice of the judge and the squirming of witnesses as they realise the number of times they have contradicted themselves.

Brief synopsis: Seemingly respectable solicitor and pillar of the community, Terence Gready, is in court on a drug smuggling charge. He can't rely on chance so the only way to guarantee an acquittal is to 'noble' the jury.

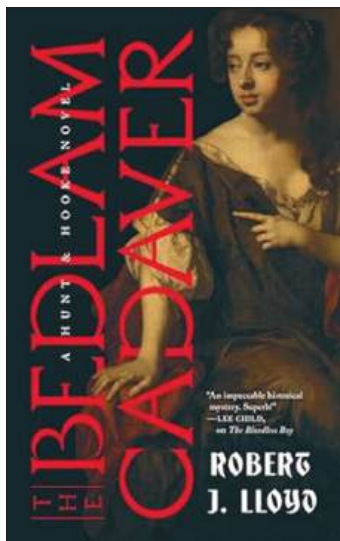
Selected as a juror to try the case, and later to become its spokesperson, is Meg Magellan, grieving from the death of her husband and son yet still public spirited enough to take on this important role.

Then the sinister late-night telephone calls begin to start. The message is crystal clear. A two-word verdict means life goes on as normal. A single word verdict puts Meg and her young daughter at very serious risk.

Review by John Davis

Published by Macmillan

Historical Novels reviewed by **John Davis**



The Bedlam Cadaver by Robert J. Lloyd

THE fact that 'Bedlam' was the popular name for the Bethlem Royal Hospital, the main centre for the treatment of mental illness in seventeenth century London, and that a cadaver is a corpse should not put you off for one moment.

While Restoration England has its famous names like Samuel Pepys, Christopher Wren and Isaac Newton, our heroes here are the scientist/inventor Robert Hooke and his assistant Harry Hunt.

Much is known about Hooke but Hunt is more of a blank canvas for Robert Lloyd to flesh out during the course of a story laced with political and religious intrigue and turmoil.

Both Hooke and Hunt are highly intelligent men who use their powers of reasoning and deduction to solve crimes while also utilising aspects of forensic science long before it was actually given that name.

Basically, Hunt is tasked by King Charles II to investigate the kidnapping and murder of one wealthy lady and the disappearance of another during the course of which he becomes 'framed' for the offences himself and is forced to go 'underground'.

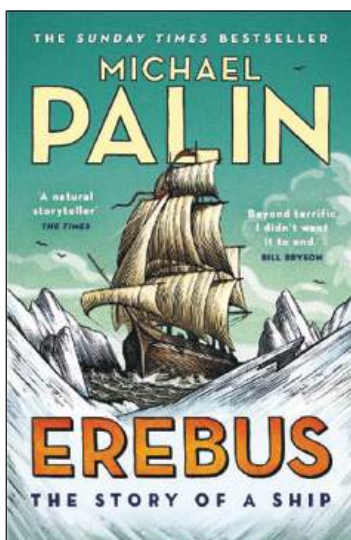
The story unfolds at a leisurely pace but I liked the way Lloyd immerses you fully in the times. You feel as if you are actually walking through the streets of seventeenth century

London still recovering from the effects of The Great Fire. You experience the sights, sounds and atmosphere though fortunately not the smells.

Notable episodes I enjoyed are Hunt's stab at domesticity in Rotherhithe, the way in which one of Hooke's actual signalling inventions is cleverly welded into the plot and a vivid description of all the felons making their way from Newgate Prison to Tyburn Tree on a typical execution day.

Footnote: Although all three are stand-alone stories there is a trilogy of Hooke and Hunt novels. This adventure is preceded by The Bloodless Boy and The Poison Machine.

Published by Melville House



Erebus by Michael Palin

WHAT'S in a name? Well, quite a lot in this case. Erebus was the god of darkness in Greek mythology, it was a naval ship that explored the polar regions in the nineteenth century and now it's the name of two mountains, one in Canada and the other an active volcano in Antarctica.

Michael Palin is well known these days as a traveller/raconteur par excellence. He has also written extensively and while this volume, like the television programmes, contains the usual mix of fascinating facts and meaningful interpretations it does lack those trademark telling comments and witty asides. Perhaps, to be fair, he thought the subject matter was too serious for much levity.

No spoiler alerts here, but Palin's prologue opens with the discovery of the Erebus still partly intact beneath Arctic ice in 2014 and then backtracks to explore the career of the vessel in the Royal Navy following its construction in Pembroke Dock in 1826.

The first two thirds of the book is devoted to Erebus' exploits in the Southern Ocean and Antarctica under James Clark Ross starting in 1839. Places where no ship had been before.

The remainder details the ill-fated expedition led by Sir John Franklin to the Arctic in search of the elusive north-west passage six years later. Some evidence has been gathered about what happened to the crews of the Erebus and his sister ship The Terror but much still remains shrouded in mystery.*

Overall, a stimulating read. Palin is strong on historical context and has well researched a range of primary documents though, through no fault of his own, these tend to be officer sources rather than those of ordinary seamen. Further colour has been added by Palin's visits to a number of the key sites mentioned during his documentary series Pole to Pole.

Note: The story of the two ships feature in The Terror: Series One available to stream on ITVX.*

Published by Arrow Books