

Whodunit?

Currently showing in cinemas worldwide is the latest appearance of one of Britain's most iconic figures – legendary, pipe smoking detective genius Sherlock Holmes, played this time by Robert Downey Junior. The actor is the 75th to assume the role in the 211th cinematic outing of Conan Doyle's creation. Both of these figures are world records and with Agatha Christie being the best selling writer of books ever (!) and her play *The Mousetrap* the longest running stage play, it's clear that Britain's contribution to the world of crime mystery fiction (also known as the **whodunit**) is immense and enduring.

Why do the British have such an appetite for this sort of thing? The puzzle element is undoubtedly a big attraction for the ever playful British – the classic **whodunit** should be a complex, plot driven riddle rich in clues and **red herrings** (false clues) with a surprise ending or **twist**.

Another factor may be the setting of many of these classic tales - the posh town houses of the aristocracy or idyllic English countryside villages. This allowed the curious the chance to see how the other half lived. Indeed film adaptations of these stories are often as much pageant as drama.

Then, of course, there is the added satisfaction of the villain invariably being an upper class scoundrel unmasked by that quintessential British hero - the gifted amateur.

Interestingly, the genesis of the detective story in British literature involved an intriguing blend of fact and fiction. The archetype of the super sleuth was one of Scotland Yard's first detectives, a certain Mr Whicher who investigated a case that gripped the nation in 1860.

http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=the+suspicious+of+mr+whicher

Holmes, who was himself modelled on an Edinburgh physician called Bell, so firmly captured the imagination of the public that many believed him to be a real person and sent him letters to enlist his help. Doyle himself actually became involved in two real cases and managed to clear the name of a wrongly convicted young lawyer. Agatha Christie starred in her own mystery when she disappeared for 11 days in 1926 before turning up in a Harrogate hotel, where she had been staying under an assumed name.

In more recent, televisual times the trend has been for regional detectives. Various cities around the UK proudly boast their own crime busting mastermind such as Morse (Oxford), Taggart (Glasgow), Rebus (Edinburgh) and Hamish Macbeth (the Scottish Highlands). As with Holmes and his foggy, cobbled London alleyways these programmes all make use of their stunning locations and have boosted tourist numbers through visitors eager to walk in their heroes' footsteps.

If you have an appetite for detection you may wish to visit the Sherlock Holmes museum, situated, of course, at 221B Baker Street:

<http://www.sherlock-holmes.co.uk/>

Christie fans can visit her home which has recently been opened to the public:

<http://nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-vh/w-visits/w-findaplace/w-greenway/>

Morse buffs can seek out their hero's haunts in beautiful Oxford while fans of Hamish Macbeth should head to Plockton in the Scottish Highlands.

Alternatively you could just enjoy the new Holmes film. A sequel is already in the works apparently, starring Brad Pitt. It seems Britain's greatest detective will not be taking *his last bow* for quite some time.