**Crime Fiction**

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It is probably no coincidence that the 1920s and ‘30s, celebrated as the Golden Age of crime fiction, saw the publication of so many Kent-based novels. Every summer during these years crowds of people caught the train to British seaside resorts, looking for sunshine and adventure, seasoned with a dash of escapist reading. The trend for holiday page-turners might be said to have begun in the 1860s, when sensation authors such as [Mary Braddon](/19c/19c-braddon-biography) and [Wilkie Collins](19c/19c-collins-biography) realised that the railway itself could provide an exciting setting for mystery and intrigue. The theme was taken up by later writers such as [Arthur Conan Doyle](/19c/19c-conan-doyle), who sends Holmes and the hapless Watson careering around England from their base in London. But if travelling by train offered just the right feeling of danger, readers knew that almost anything could happen when they reached the seaside.

By the twentieth century the sensation novel was starting to splinter into two distinct genres associated with beach reading to this day: romance and crime. Denizens of the former included authors such as [Pamela Wynne](/20c/20c-wynne-biography). Crime writers were quick to see the appeal of murder mysteries with holiday settings. J. S. Fletcher’s \_*The Passenger to Folkestone\_* (1927), John Rowland’s 1930 \_*Calamity in Kent\_* (set in what is so obviously Broadstairs there seems little point in calling it Broadgate), and Freeman Wills Crofts’s \_*Mystery in the Channel\_* (1931) directly reference real holiday locations, while Milward Kennedy’s 1930 \_*Death in a Deck-Chair\_* is set in a lightly fictionalised Margate.

The potential of the Romney Marsh, exploited by Russell Thorndike and his smuggling vicar Dr Syn, was also to catch the attention of later writers including [Julian Symons](/20c/20c-symons-biography) and most recently [Martin Edwards](/21c/21c-edwards-sepulchre-street).

Straying from the coast, [R. Austin Freeman](/20c/20c-freeman-biography) picks up on the [Dickensian](/dickens/edwin-drood-curated-walk) associations of Rochester in \_The Mystery of Angelina Frood\_ (1924) and John Rhode suggests that there is \_Death in the Hop Fields\_ in 1937. Writing after WW2, Cristianna Brand uses the atmosphere of war to explore extreme situations in \_*Green is For Danger\_* (1944) and \_At His Residence\_ (1946).

The [British Library Crime Classics series](https://shop.bl.uk/collections/crime-classics) is now recovering many of these titles for a new generation of readers. It turns out Kent may just be a more dangerous place than you realised.

**Bibliography**

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[‘Down From London? Looking for Literary Trouble at the British Seaside.’](<https://liverpooluniversitypress.blog/2022/04/20/down-from-london-looking-for-literary-trouble-at-the-british-seaside/>). April 2022.