

## A Conversation with Andrea Carter about *DEATH AT WHITEWATER CHURCH*

### TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF, HOW AND WHEN YOU STARTED WRITING.

While I was working as a solicitor on the Inishowen Peninsula, in Co Donegal, I began writing a crime novel. It was just for fun, to see if I could do it. It was something to occupy me in the evening after work, or at night, when I couldn't sleep; a way of keeping work stresses at bay.

### WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL?

What inspires me is place – landscape and buildings. When I visit somewhere for the first time, I find myself imagining what might have happened there, and whether the memory of those events might have remained embedded within the walls, in the atmosphere, marking it out as a place of contentment or sadness or fear.

My grandmother believed that to be the case; she believed that a place retained the essence of what had occurred within, and that one could sense it. And despite years of level-headed, rational legal training, I think she was right! It was no surprise that when I started to write, I wrote about Inishowen beautiful and windswept, with its towering headlands and golden beaches, sea stacks and ruined forts. In particular the idea of a deconsecrated church on a wild coastline with a hidden crypt beneath, fascinated me.

### HOW DID YOU USE YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCE OR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND TO ENRICH YOUR STORY?

My amateur sleuth is a solicitor, so I have drawn on my experience as a solicitor living and working in Inishowen, a place where I, too, was an outsider. It has meant that there is an authenticity to my books and my main character in particular.

### ANYTHING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IN YOUR NOVEL?

It is no coincidence that when I began to write, my protagonist emerged as a female solicitor named Benedicta O'Keeffe, known as Ben (while my own friends and family call me Andy), nor was it a coincidence that Ben ran the most northerly solicitor's practice in Ireland, as I did at the time (although only by a hair's breadth). But Ben is not me. Her characteristics and back story are not mine.

### ARE ANY CHARACTERS BASED ON PEOPLE YOU KNOW?

Maeve the vet is inspired by (but not based on) my friend Fidelma who is a vet in Donegal and Leah is inspired by (but not based on) my friend Lily who was my old receptionist and legal executive. Both are aware of the books and happy about them. But there are no characters based on people I know – as an ex-lawyer I would be very wary of that!

### WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE OR MOST SYMPATHETIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

I have a real soft spot for Phyllis the bookseller who is eccentric and liberal, nosy and kind. I like Liam too, for his solid traditional values combined with a contented live-and-let-live approach to life.

### WHO IS YOUR LEAST SYMPATHIC CHARACTER? AND WHY?

I think that has to be Luke, who makes sporadic appearances throughout the book and haunts Ben for some time after her sister's death.

### WHAT PART OF WRITING YOUR BOOK DID YOU FIND THE MOST CHALLENGING?

I find endings difficult. It is important for me to get my ending right and that the solution to the mystery is both satisfying and unexpected. I write a number of drafts, layering and developing characters as I go. Often, I don't know until draft three or four exactly who the killer is, because I don't yet know my characters well enough.

### WHAT DO YOU HOPE THAT READERS WILL TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR BOOK?

I hope that that they will experience that sense of complete immersion in another world that we get as children, and I suspect we are still searching for as adults! That would make me happy!

### WHAT WRITERS HAVE INSPIRED YOU?

Jane Austen, Tolstoy, Ruth Rendell, The Brontes, P. D. James, Daphne du Maurier - there are so many. Writers who tell stories with a strong sense of place inspire me.

### WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?

My story starts with a setting. I write the first draft straight through, because for me it is about story: that age-old human need to relate and to hear stories. The first draft is rough, like a piece of stone I need to sculpt, and I sometimes construct "scaffolding" which I remove later.

At no point do I plan out the novel. I simply write as I like to read; with every chapter the mist clears a little, and I can see what will happen in the chapters to follow. It is that very quality of not knowing how it will end that drives me to finish the book. Although I understand and appreciate the value of editing, I always write the same way. I am driving along a foggy road at night and there are times when the road stretches clearly ahead and other times when it is barely visible; either way, I can never see further than the next bend!

### WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

Stop talking about it and just do it. And once you do – keep going! Don't keep re-writing the same small section.

### WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU? ANY NEW BOOKS IN THE PIPELINE?

I am working on *Murder at Greysbridge* which is the fourth Inishowen mystery. I also have an idea for a standalone novel that I want to start after that.

### ANY FINAL WORDS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR NOVEL, OR LIFE IN GENERAL?

If I am allowed to continue to write, I will always be happy!