

Sue was blown away when she read [Stalemate](#), a reworking of the unsolved murder of Julia Wallace in Liverpool between the wars. Even knowing how it *had* to work out she still couldn't put the book down - and she had a lot to ask author Alan Hamilton when he popped in to chat to us.

- **Bookbag: When you close your eyes and imagine your readers, who do you see?**

Alan Hamilton: A doppelgänger of myself! Seriously, though, I aim at intelligent, frequent readers of either gender, these days probably using an electronic reading device and who want more than just entertainment from their fiction.

- **BB: The murder of Julia Wallace has been one of the great unsolved mysteries for over eighty years. What drew you to the case?**

AH: Nearly 60 years ago I heard a radio talk by a then very well-known writer and commentator on true crime, Edgar Lustgarten. He ended his piece on the Wallace murder, of which I knew nothing, with the suggestion that the murderer still walked the streets of Liverpool, and the words addressed to this person, 'What do you think, chum?' I've never had the case out of my head since.

- **BB: It was Edgar Lustgarten who drew me to the true crime genre! William Herbert Wallace was either guilty - or this was a perfect murder. Putting *Stalemate* to one side, which do you think it was? Why did you decide to make your protagonist - Bruce - guilty?**

AH: Wallace was definitely not guilty as charged. At the time his wife was killed he was several miles away in another part of Liverpool. On the other hand, his behaviour when on his way to, and while engaged in, his search for Mr Qualtrough is highly suspicious. Quite out of character and strongly suggestive of a calculated effort to establish his whereabouts at a critical time. If this had been a genuine out-of-the-blue business opportunity, the highly methodical 'Man from the 'Pru' would have checked it out and found there was no such address. This leaves the strong possibility that his trip to find Mr Qualtrough was contrived to give him an unshakeable alibi while someone else did the killing. He may well have been guilty of conspiracy to murder.

- **BB: Had modern investigative techniques been available do you think that the Wallace murder would have been solved? How competent do you think that the police were?**

AH: This is a seriously complex issue. If we assume Wallace was innocent of any part in the murder of his wife – i.e. someone else killed her without his knowledge – then the police were incompetent as many commentators have

said they were. They made an assumption the husband would always be the prime suspect and in this case, his apparent lack of emotion reinforced their view this was correct.

If, however, we consider that the official files on the case were withheld from public view for almost 70 years and that from the existing police file much of what ought to be in it has been deleted, we have to assume the original file had material suggesting that others came under suspicion and were 'air-brushed' out of the record. If the police strategy was to prosecute Wallace alone while shielding others possibly implicated in the crime, then they appear to have been pretty efficient. They would have wanted to avoid putting Wallace under too much interrogative pressure in case he confessed and implicated the others they had decided not to investigate. Even by the standards of the day he was never aggressively questioned. He was tried and found guilty as charged, and if it hadn't been for the financial support from the Prudential staff union and the company, it's probable he wouldn't have had a defence team of the same quality and might not have won the appeal, even if he'd been able to mount one.

- **BB: I was very impressed by the extent to which you stuck to the bones of the Wallace case. How much research did you do and *how* did you do it?**

AH: I read everything about the case; all the books written on the subject, either bought or borrowed via the national library service, and every on-line article and post. I made a two-day visit to Liverpool where by arrangement I went through the Wallace file at Merseyside Police HQ. I walked the streets of Anfield and Clubmoor where most of the action takes place. I spent time with John Gannon, whose 2012 controversial non-fiction account of the case, *The Killing of Julia Wallace*, I had read in draft. I finished the first draft of the book on New Year's Eve 2012.

- **BB: Are you driven to write? Where and how do you do it?**

AH: I wouldn't say 'driven'. I like writing, always have, and don't find it difficult to get words on the page. I write freehand, then key it in to the pc, editing as I go. I've written another novel, *Nobody's Children*, which preceded *Stalemate* but will follow it in publication. I'd find it harder to write if I hadn't always had an existing framework around which to build the story – if I had to create a story out of nothing. I'm lucky, my second wife and I own two flats one above the other high above the sea at Weston-super-Mare, and I use the upper one as my office. I'm also a freelance copy editor and proof reader and I do that work in the same place.

- **BB: Is reading important to you? What are you reading at the moment?**

AH: I've read widely and voraciously all my life and agree with those who say that the key to being able to write well and fluently is the quality and

quantity of what you read. Biography, history, economics, politics, religion, philosophy, and true crime on non-fiction as well as spy thrillers, police procedurals, historical novels and pure literary fiction; are all part of my reading experience. I enjoy reviewing what I've read and try to explain what I like and dislike about a book. I've done 13 reviews on Amazon alone in the past few years. Right now I'm reading *Never Be at Peace* by Marina Julia Neary – a saga of the movement for Irish independence both well before and well after the seminal event of 1916. I've just finished William Boyd's *Waiting for Sunrise* and Charles Cumming's excellent *A Foreign Country*.

- **BB: I've heard it said - and said it myself - that retirement leaves you wondering how you ever had time to work. What's been your experience?**

AH: I think the answer to this one is it depends on whether you can afford to 'retire'. I couldn't and still can't. For a number of reasons I have a tiny private and a reduced state pension. I always used to work long hours and now I do the same. Most days it's 8am to 6.30pm and often at weekends too. Having said that, I wouldn't have it any other way. I couldn't be idle and if anything frightens me it's the thought that age and infirmity might make me unable to work. Not only do I write, edit and proof read but I also manage the duty rotas for my sailing club and the secretarial and accounting functions for the management company of the flats where we live.

- **BB: You've got one wish. What's it to be?**

AH: Continued good health and fitness. Four months ago I had bowel cancer which was fortunately caught in time and had not spread. The operation and the aftermath were a revelation. I had never been ill before and that was the first major surgery I'd ever had. It was a brush with mortality I'd rather not repeat.

- **BB: We definitely hope *that* wish is fulfilled. What's next for Alan Hamilton?**

AH: I'm in the early stages of an alternative history novel which premises that Richard III won at Bosworth, killing Henry Tudor. The issues are: what kind of king would Richard have been had he lived longer? How would he have handled those who had been prepared to betray him? And what would his relationship have been with France, whose government had supported his challenger with men and money? I've done a lot of reading already, and again, this venture has an origin far back in the past. As a boy I read Josephine Tey's wonderful novel *The Daughter of Time* – a powerful incentive not to take as gospel what my history teachers told me.

- **BB: We look forward to reading that, Alan - and thank you for taking the time to chat to us. It's been a real pleasure.**