

Don't judge a cleric by their dog collar!

Martin Booth is the Vicar of Riverhead with Dunton Green, Kent.

Martin Booth has an impressive CV, which details a life spent in senior management positions in broadcast TV and regulatory bodies. A producer and script editor, he has a life-long interest in the craft of writing for TV and radio as well as being a published novel writer. A married father of two, Martin and his family have faced all the same challenges as most of us; it was not until he was ordained in 2009 that he had to combine his literary loves with his love of God.

Martin said, "I am a great fan of Sherlock Holmes and have loved him since I was a teenager. I think that has something to do with mystery and a quasi-academic approach to problem solving. Arthur Conan Doyle writes in an almost metaphysical way. He sees London as a jungle full of creatures. He had a complex, fearsome mind with good, solid methods of working his way through a problem."

It was Martin's love of Conan Doyle that led him to write his first published novel, *The Reichenbach Problem*. He said, "I began writing this when I was on holiday with my wife and children in Switzerland. The actual Reichenbach Falls were just down the road from where we were staying. I am not a great holiday reader and I don't

chalet and read them to the family later. When I came back to the UK, I had the beginning of the book."

After 20 years of freelance writing, Martin has stopped worrying about writing being the single most important thing. He said,

"I don't think writing is what you do; it's who you are."

"I had written 3 or 4 books before *Reichenbach*, but not with the same energy or sense of purpose. I wrote with the intention of sharing the story, but not necessarily with the ambition to have it published. I think authors should have a degree of caution and humility. You may want to express yourself, but you shouldn't think 'the world deserves this'."

Commuting to work on the train gave Martin the opportunity to either write more, or edit his existing manuscript. He said, "The danger is that you spend too much time editing what you have written but really you need a lump of granite to chisel away at. I began to edit only when I couldn't create." Writing by hand in fountain pen when he could and later typing up the manuscript when the children were in bed, it took Martin about 18 months to finish the book. He said, "I wrote in the voice of a Victorian gentleman. I enjoyed putting myself in the place of Conan Doyle. As a thirty year old, he seemed to me to be a bit of a young fogey. I was trying to get this across. What was Conan Doyle like? Would



sunbathe. At the time, I was working for the Independent Television Commission and the creative side of me was largely unfulfilled."

Musing over what Sherlock Holmes might have done, had he discovered that Conan

Doyle was going to kill him off, Martin said, "I think writing is like a detective story: you are the detective and you don't know whodunnit. It's both wonderful and obsessive. Your mind becomes trained and you have to find the solution. I wrote a few pages in the

he and Sherlock Holmes like each other? I don't think they would!"

Once the novel was complete, Martin enjoyed some enthusiastic responses, but it was not immediately picked up by a publisher. Eventually, he decided to put it away and move onto something else for a while. Martin said, "It's not always the right time for a manuscript. I was told to try writing something a bit more modern, so I did; it was good but not great and I found writing to order quite unnatural. I did put my heart and soul into it and did a lot of research. I think part of the motivation is that you want to share it."

By 2004, Martin had embarked on an MA in medieval history, whilst in full time employment with OFCOM. He had also considered ordination training, but life was just too busy. Although he was later accepted for a PhD, he decided to follow his calling and he was ordained in 2009. Martin said, "Around that time, Sherlock Holmes was back en vogue and Ali Hull, someone I knew from Lion publishing, kindly took *The Reichenbach Problem* on as a project." It took about 12 more months of hard editorial work for him to re-shape the ending and make suggested alterations and the book was finally published in 2013.

Modest about his success, Martin said, "*Reichenbach* is selling steadily; I do look at the reviews online, and those who give it five stars really love it. I'm not too worried by the negative critics, because I

know they just don't get it. I think maybe those who write negative comments expect something that simply isn't there. I do get upset when people dismiss it in a rude way, with no grace; it ruins it for other people before they have had a chance to read it for themselves. For me, it's about the feel and the voice, which I worked very hard on. Some people say I write with all five senses. As the writer, you are the producer and the director as well as the author."

Reichenbach was written before Martin was ordained, but are there any deliberate elements of ministry in the manuscript? Martin said,

"I wanted elements of ministry in there."

"I did have a very good review from one Catholic newspaper." A busy vicar in a thriving parish, Martin still enjoys his writing and is currently revising a manuscript. He said,

"I am enjoying the process and have always wanted to write. My faith really does influence my writing because I am trying to describe what is right, real and true in faith."

And as a published author with work on books two and three well under way, Martin still writes by hand – with a beautiful fountain pen. Perhaps the pen is truly mightier than the sword?

For more information please visit:
www.stmaryriverhead.co.uk