



Death in Devon

Ian Sansom

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The second instalment of Ian Sansom's The County Guides series.

What do they know of England who do not Devon know? Sidmouth. Budleigh Salterton. Dawlish. Teignmouth. Fine market towns, quaint little seaports, lovely villages, coves, fuchsia hedges, deep valleys, winding ways, high ridges – and sudden storms.

In the second of “The County Guides”, glorious Devon is the destination.

Swooping down from the majestic heights of Dartmoor, Swanton Morley, Miriam and Stephen Sefton embark on another adventure, only to find themselves involved in a mystery at All Souls School, Rousdon.

Swanton Morley has been invited to speak at the school's Founders' Day.

But a boy has died. With occasional outings to surf and to sample cream teas – Swanton Morley, Sefton and Miriam once again pit their wits against the dark, repressive, anti-intellectual forces of 1930s England.

Death in Devon Details

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Author : Ian Sansom

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From Reader Review Death in Devon for online ebook

Christina says

This is an unusual mystery. Set in 1930's England, the characters are quirky, and the situations unexpected. The main character (Stephen Sefton) works as an assistant to Swanton Morley, a writer and general man-of-letters. Morley is working on a series of guidebooks to the English counties. When he is invited to speak at a school in Devon, he is anxious to hit the road in his Lagonda. I liked the characters and the author's sense of humor. One interesting point is that the book has illustrations. A very quirky book!

Kate Vane says

I've read and enjoyed a few Ian Sansom novels. *Ring Road* succeeded in both gently mocking and celebrating small-town life and had real poignancy. The mobile librarian cosies are light and amusing. So *Death in Devon* – my home county – should have been ideal for me. But the book is a real disappointment.

The set up is that Sefton, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War, is working as secretary and assistant to an eccentric polymath and prolific author named Swanton Morley. Along with Morley's daughter, Miriam, they set off to Devon to research the latest in Morley's county guides series, and visit the public school where his friend is headmaster. And just happen upon a crime.

Morley is supposed to be the larger-than-life character who dominates the story but the problem for me is he is intensely irritating. We hear his opinions on everything from Dickens to apple pressing to surfing, sometimes through wearisome dialogue, at other times as Sefton quotes (at length) from Morley's supposed works. There is endless scene setting with little happening. There is constant cerebral name-dropping of Thirties cultural figures.

I can sort of see that the author is referencing Sayers and her contemporaries – the plot that is marginal to the story, the way that working-class characters are either invisible or shifty, the drone of pseudo-intellectual conversation – but for a parody to work it has to be funny and sharp and this is neither. It's baggy and boring.

It's a shame because there is potential here. There are hints at times that Sansom might be trying to take on the Golden Age and show what lay behind it. Sefton recalls the brutality of school bullying and racism – from teachers as well as pupils. He also refers to his traumatic experiences in Spain. He shows sensitivity and insight into Morley (which of course is never reciprocated) and is a sympathetic character.

The book has some interesting themes but they don't feel fully developed. Could do better.

I received an ARC from the publisher via Netgalley.

Nick Duretta says

This was an unexpected pleasure. The mystery itself is barely mentioned, with the focus primarily on Swanton Morley, an idiosyncratic "people's professor" and long-winded know-it-all who seems to have written a zillion books on practically every subject. His long-suffering aide Sefton somehow puts up with him and his sexy daughter Miriam. It's all very entertaining and quirky. The 1930s timeframe and English locale are additional plusses. This is the second book in the series and I will definitely go back and read the first.

John Ellis says

This is the second in the authors County Guide series, set in Devon this time. I have to say that I was slightly disappointed with this book, as I thought that it took too long to get to the scene of the crime. You don't arrive at the crime scene until around page 50, which is roughly 16% of the way through the book. Also I thought that there were too many references to other books by Swanton Morley, the main detective solving the case. I know that the novel is supposed to be set in the 1930's, but overall I just thought it was too slow in getting off the ground.

Susan says

The first several pages nearly put me off the entire book - talk about run-on sentences! But I persevered, and eventually got used to the wordiness, although it continued and wasn't much less annoying. Since logorrhea is part of the character of Morley, the author of the County Guides, one has to put up with it. The story is narrated by Sefton, a rather annoying wimp who is a sort of secretary-cum-man-of-all-work for Morley, but not very capable. He thinks he is in love with Morley's daughter Miriam, who is another annoying character who loves to cause trouble, but is at least capable of controlling most of her father's mad starts. They all go off to a boys' school in Devon, where Morley is speaking at their Founders' Day celebration. A boy dies, blackmail is discovered, and when the headmaster finds that some of his staff are playing with the occult, he is devastated. I guess the boy's death and the blackmail are what qualified it as a mystery, but the 'sleuthing' was pretty lame, and some things were not finished. It was an interesting read with good characterization, but I feel no desire for anything else in the series.

Ian says

ARC review for Fourth Estate Books via Netgalley.

CREAM TEAS! SCHOOL DINNERS! SATANIC SURFERS!

Join our heroes as they follow up a Norfolk Mystery with a bad case of ... DEATH IN DEVON.

Swanton Morley, the People's Professor, sets off for Devon to continue his history of England, The County Guides. Morley's daughter Miriam and his assistant Stephen Sefton pack up the Lagonda for a trip to the English Riviera.

Morley has been invited to give the Founder's Day speech at All Souls School in Rousdon. But when the trio arrive they discover that a boy has died in mysterious circumstances. Was it an accident or was it – murder?

Join Morley, Sefton and Miram on another adventure into the dark heart of 1930s England.

I had already agreed to read and review this book before I had read the first!

Sadly not much better than the first!

Swanton Morley is still not a character that you would like to meet. He is still an irritating egg-head. His daughter Miriam is no better than her father...irritating! And Stephen Sefton only just gets a bit of back bone near the end of the book.

This one does just come in to the mystery category, but only after you have waded through 70% of the book!

If you like the review and would like to see and read more reviews on books the Final Chapter Reading Group and I have read this year. Please visit my blog @ <https://finalchapterreadersgroup.wordpress.com> like and follow.

Stephen says

felt this wasn't like rest of series had read

Fiona says

I'm hugely disappointed in this sequel to The Norfolk Mystery. The first was so subtly clever and funny, gently caricaturing the prolific writer, Arthur Mee, and English crime fiction of the 20s and 30s. The sequel tries too hard and over eggs the cake completely. It rambles on aimlessly, particularly in the second half, and the ending is just absurd. This was a great series in the making but the author has lost the plot - literally. Having said that, the passages where Sefton is thinking about when he was fighting in the Spanish Civil War are very well written, poignant, and give depth to Sefton's character. Is this the novel Sansom really wants to write? If so, he should do it. To continue this series is just flogging a dead horse.

Damaskcat says

'Professor' Swanton Morley is tackling Devon as his next county guide as he has been asked to give the Founders' Day lecture at All Souls School in Rousden in Devon. He and his assistant, Stephen Sefton and his daughter Miriam set off in the Lagonda to tour Devon but their first stop is the school. Sefton soon realises there is something wrong at the school but can't put his finger on exactly what. When Sefton and Swanton Morley discover the body of a boy at the foot of a cliff mixed up in the wreckage of a car they realise they have stumbled across murder yet again.

What follows is a tense and atmospheric story with Swanton Morley rather less ebullient than in his previous outing. I thought this book was much better written than the first book in the series 'Death in Norfolk', and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Much of it is quite light-hearted but the ending is far from that and it leaves all the people involved reeling from the shock of the events which conclude the novel.

If you like crime novels set in the nineteen thirties, peopled by lovable and eccentric characters which are only just on the safe side of horror story characters then you may enjoy this entertaining series. I received a free copy of this book from NetGalley for review purposes.

ann miner says

Always learn a few facts from this series

This is the third book I have read in the "county guides" series written by Ian Sansom. I enjoyed the two other

books in this series and looked forward to reading this one.

Death in Devon fell flat for me. At the beginning chapters a school boy does from driving a car over the cliff, and then not mentioned until the last chapter as a murder. No mystery. The headmaster commits suicide after killing his brother in a rage. This was all observed by characters in the book, so again no mystery. I thought some of the characters lacked depth and caused the story to fall short. The main characters, Mr. Morley and Mr. Sefton, are well defined and contribute the knowledge and wit to keep the story moving. This review would have only been two stars if it wasn't for facts distributed throughout the book. Beginning to end. If you learn anything new while reading a story, then it is a good book. A good book deserves three stars.

Susan says

Having really enjoyed, "The Norfolk Mystery," the first in this series of County Guides by Ian Sansom, I was delighted to have the opportunity to review this second outing for the eccentric "People's Professor," Swanton Morley, his daughter Miriam and his assistant, Stephen Sefton. Morley has an exhaustive work ethic and is continually writing all kinds of reviews, articles and books – including the series of County Guides which leads to him travelling around the country. Sefton has returned to England after fighting in the Spanish Civil War and has found the position as Morley's assistant through an advert in The Times.

This book sees them visiting Devon, not only to write a new edition of the County Guides, but for Morley to give the speech at All Souls School, at which his friend is the Headmaster. On arrival, Stephen Sefton is slightly miffed when Miriam's attention is taken by Alexander, one of the teachers and brother of the Headmaster. Before long, Sefton feels that something is slightly amiss at the school – the local farmer he is boarded with is upset that his animals have gone missing, the science teacher is distinctly odd and, having worked as a school master himself, he can't help feeling something is slightly wrong. Miriam, of course, imagines that he is jealous and refuses to entertain his suggestions that there is anything to worry about. However, then a pupil at the school is found dead on the beach; seemingly having driven a car off the cliff. Astonishingly, everyone seems to want to cover the death up and carry on with Founder's Day as normal. However, despite the facade of respectability and stability, Sefton's fears are realised, as he uncovers what is at the bottom of mysterious events at the school.

Although I loved both this and the previous book, I know that the first novel was either loved or hated by readers. Presumably, if you are thinking of reading this, you warmed already to the characters and the 1930's setting. Personally, I like the eccentric and ebullient Swanton Morley, his self-assured daughter Miriam and Sefton himself. For me, Sefton is the character who really holds the storyline together – suffering flashbacks

from his time in Spain, he drinks too much and is often rebuked by Miriam – but he adds a serious side to Morley's eccentric and humorous enthusiasms. I really enjoyed this book, even more than the first, and I hope that the series continues as I look forward to reading on.

4cats says

Hurrah for The County Guide series featuring The People's Professor Swanton Morley, his aide/biographer and veteran of the Spanish Civil War Stephen Sefton and the seductive but elusive Miriarm Morley, the professor's daughter.

Death in Devon is the second in this hopefully long and entertaining crime series, following on from their guide to Norfolk the trio are now off to the delights of Devon. Morley being Morley has more than just writing a guide to Devon planned, as he is visiting All Souls School in Rousdon to give their Founder's Day speech. However, as soon as our trio arrive they are thrust into the centre of a mystery. A boy from the school dies in mysterious circumstances, but only Sefton seems concerned, Morley who is close friends with the school's headmaster isn't too concerned and Miriam seems to have been swept off her feet the the headmaster's brother.

Well written, entertaining, filled with great characters who have a depth to them especially Sefton and I look forward to meeting the trio in their next outing.

Richard Thomas says

I found this a bit hard going but worth the effort. It's not a conventional murder but has an enthralling combination of whimsy, comedy, pastiche and genuine suspense in it. The conceit is a loose relationship with the county guides of Arthur Mee and it builds on this quite nicely.

Sandy *The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice* says

I received this book from HarperCollins UK, HarperPress/4th Estate/The Friday Project in exchange for an honest review.

I was looking forward to reading what I expected to be a cosy mystery.

However I was sorely disappointed.

I was 1/3 of the way through the book before we even had a body. And although at first I found the characters amusingly eccentric, their eccentricities soon became wearing and the characters never developed.

The book is packed full of facts (some more interesting than others) and quotes (many in Latin).

I gave up on this book a little over half way through. There was no sign of any development with the body, nor any probability that anything else remotely interesting was going to happen.

Sorry, this one is a non-starter for me.

Kate says

Brilliantly written, however the conclusion/solution is incredibly rushed and not really built up to.
