

ROBERT CROUCH

**NO
MYSTERY**

THE STORY BEHIND THE KENT FISHER MYSTERIES

NO MYSTERY

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Something fresh, something different, something familiar

'Kent Fisher is a wonderful creation and unique in crime literature'

Susan Corcoran, reader and blogger.

When I created Kent Fisher, I wanted to entertain readers with something new, something a little different from the usual police procedurals and private eye novels that fill the shelves.

While I wanted to remain faithful to the traditional whodunit with its complex, twisting plots, red herrings and cast of colourful suspects, the stories would be modern, dealing with personal and contemporary issues that went beyond murder.

And the stories had to be fun. I wanted readers to enjoy the books, to escape into a world filled with engaging characters, plots and themes.

When *No Accident*, the first Kent Fisher mystery, was published in June 2016, I held my breath, wondering whether I could achieve my lofty ambitions.

My first review calmed my nerves.

'Expect sharp dialogue and irreverent humour in this whodunit, which manages to pay homage to the traditional murder mystery, while striking a contemporary and irreverent note.'

Crime Fiction Lover

So, what makes Kent Fisher unique in crime literature?

He's a law enforcement officer. He works with the police at times and follows the same rules and procedures when he investigates offences. He has many of the skills needed to solve crimes, but he's no detective or private eye.

He's an environmental health officer (EHO).

If you're wondering what an EHO does, or how and why he comes to investigate murders, then please read on.

Robert Crouch

Every journey begins with a step

We are all on journeys. Whether it's the passage of years, the pursuit of a career or the fulfilment of a dream, these journeys help to define us. They change us. When we reach the end and look back, we see happy memories or regrets.

Not long ago, I spoke to my first boss and mentor. He greeted me on my first day when I walked into the Environmental Health Department at Bury Metro in September 1977. Fresh from school, eager to impress, and keen to start my training as a Student EHO, I had no idea what lay ahead.

“You were a bright lad,” he said when we started to reminisce. “But you were in the wrong job.”

It could explain why I struggled to fit in, why I came into conflict with bosses and the establishment throughout my career, and why I left environmental health in 2016.

My journey as a writer began when I was taught to read before I went to school, thanks to a fascination with my father's newspaper. I loved reading, I loved writing stories and English was my favourite subject, closely followed by Drama. Aged 12, I won a national short story competition. For my 13th birthday, I asked for a typewriter.

At 14, my class laughed at me when I revealed I wanted to be an actor. At 16, the careers adviser told me not to waste my time doing journalism as I'd never make it as a reporter.

With unemployment rising in the north of England in the mid to late 70s, I secured a job as a student EHO. It

provided training, a qualification and most importantly, a job once qualified. Considering the competition for the job, it was quite a coup.

Trouble is, I wanted to be a writer.

Crossroads

There's always a moment on a journey it's time to decide, to select the path to take at the crossroads.

My first moment came when I was 16, studying English Literature for 'O' level. I finished reading and analysing *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. It changed my life.

I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to write novels that could change lives.

So, why did I choose a career in environmental health?

My teachers, the school and careers' advisers had no idea how to help a kid who wanted to become a writer.

"You don't want to study for a degree at Oxford or Cambridge?" the headmaster asked. "Or any other university?"

"No," I replied, intimidated by his office, where everything seemed oversized.

"Oh," he said, looking lost. He tapped his fingers on the desk and sighed. "In that case, I'm not sure there's much we can do for you."

Looking back, I had opportunities to change course. But either through doubt, ignorance or a lack of support, I took the wrong roads, making mistakes that undermined my self-confidence.

I had moments, like the one when an agent almost accepted *They Laughed at Noah*, my attempt to write a humorous novel in the style of Tom Sharpe. I published articles in national magazines and wrote a regular column in *Writers Monthly*.

But at heart, I wanted to write novels. I simply didn't know what kind of novels.

It took an elderly, nosy spinster with a sharp eye to inspire me and point me in the right direction.

Marple, Morse and Millhone

It sounds like a solicitor's practice, but these three characters inspired me to write crime fiction.

The actress, Joan Hickson, brought Agatha Christie's Miss Marple to life on the screen in a series of peerless BBC dramas. I watched in amazement, marvelling at the plot, the characters, the exquisite production values that set this series above the rest.

Inspector Morse, with the wonderful John Thaw, had a rival. I loved Morse, but never wanted to write a police procedural. Not being a police officer and knowing little about how they operated might have contributed to this. Accuracy to me is synonymous with credibility.

Then the penny dropped.

Miss Marple and Morse dealt with right and wrong, justice, fair play, rising up against those who would take advantage – the values that had mattered to me all my life. Maybe I could harness this and write crime fiction.

I began to watch like a critic, analysing the plots, working out how to lay false trails, divert suspicion and disguise the identity of the killer. I learned how to build tension, how to engage the viewer/reader, how to use surprises and twists to wrong foot.

All I required was a flawed but engaging protagonist with a put upon sidekick. Blend in four or five suspects with motives to murder, a victim with plenty of baggage and reasons to be killed. Base it in an engaging setting and I would have my own, distinctive series, ready to run.

But, you have to walk before you can run.

Despite my best efforts, I couldn't create the distinctive character I needed. All the flaws and foibles were already allocated to the detectives in novels and on TV.

The final piece fell into place when the WH Smith Book of the Month Club had an introductory offer of four books at 99p each. I chose a dictionary, an encyclopaedia, *The Human Factor* by Graham Greene and ... what?

I looked through the list of books, but nothing grabbed my attention. Most of the authors were unknown to me. Most of the titles failed to arouse any interest until I spotted a small book in the middle of the crowded page. I'd never heard of Sue Grafton, but the first three of her alphabet novels had been combined into a Book of the Month Club special edition.

Three complete novels for 99p?

Sold to the frustrated writer with big dreams and no budget!

No looking back

The moment I started reading *A is for Alibi*, I was hooked. This was a detective series like no other, dominated by Kinsey Millhone, a feisty private eye with a fine repertoire of witty observations that echoed my own take on the world. The characterisation was superlative as Kinsey followed a trail that seemed doomed from the start. But she never gave up, never let anyone down, and put her life on the line for her clients in the mythical town of Santa Teresa on the Californian coast.

I wanted to write complex murder mysteries like Agatha Christie. I wanted a unique detective like Kinsey, only male and English. I wanted a setting like Morse's Oxford to make my novels distinctive.

I'd never plotted a whodunit before, let alone written one, but it didn't matter. I was going to be a crime writer – as soon as I created a protagonist that could capture the public's imagination.

As I hated research, I had to write about what I knew.

A struggling writer with intense natural curiosity and a habit of being close by when people are killed was too much like Jessica Fletcher in *Murder She Wrote*.

An environmental health officer (EHO) who dreamt about solving murders while he patrolled his South Downs district sounded implausible, even if it was true. Whoever heard of an EHO solving murders? But no one had created an environmental health detective before.

If I could make him credible, he would be unique.

Creating a unique detective

Sometimes fate lends a helping hand.

For the life of me, I couldn't work out how an EHO would solve a murder.

The local Chief Constable could hardly come along to the council and say, 'Is there anyone here who'd like to solve a murder? We're a bit stretched filling in forms at the moment.'

'Well, it's like this, boss. I was inspecting a restaurant kitchen a few weeks ago when I overheard one of the waitresses planning to murder the owner. I returned to check some works this morning and was refused access because the owner was dead. Even though I'm a month behind on my inspections, I have to investigate and solve his murder.'

Would anyone believe an EHO investigating a murder?

I wonder if many people know what EHOs do.

Most people know EHOs inspect food businesses to ensure food is safe and produced hygienically. There have been documentaries on the TV and cliché officials in various soaps over the years. To some, we're known as the Hygiene Police, which distracts from the help and support we give small businesses.

Less well known is an EHOs role in making sure employers look after the health, safety and welfare of their employees. This includes investigating workplace accidents and fatalities.

EHOs investigate and control the spread of infectious

diseases like food poisoning, E coli O157 and typhoid. They deal with pollution, be it from smoke, noise, odour, animals or light.

They licence and control processes that could harm or damage the environment. They licence zoos, pet shops, boarding kennels and riding establishments to protect animal health.

They prosecute individuals and companies that break the law or refuse to comply, using the same codes, procedures and standards as the police.

In short, an EHO has the skills to investigate a murder, but not the opportunity.

Accidental discovery

When I read a report about a guest who drowned in a hotel swimming pool, I thought, what if it was murder made to look like an accident? As a hotel is a place of work, an EHO would investigate. What if he uncovered details that cast doubt on the accident?

Would that put him in danger? Probably. My EHO needed to look after himself.

I made him ex-army, a paratrooper who fought at Goose Green in the Falklands conflict, winning a medal for bravery. He took a machine gun post single-handed, earning him the nickname, Superman, which led to his first name, Kent.

For that all important surname I scanned the telephone directory. I tried animals (Kent Fox), professions (Kent Butcher), and places (Kent Oswaldtwistle – only joking.) None of them evoked the character in my imagination.

Then once again fate intervened.

On TV, Clive James was interviewing actress and author, Carrie Fisher, who I'd always admired. She had wit, humour, a fascinating but troubled life, and the sexiest, dark eyes on the planet (and universe if you include Star Wars). They sparkled with mischief and charm – a deadly combination.

As she related her humorous anecdotes, I realised that teenage Kent was in love with her. He'd fantasised about her since her appearance in Star Wars, pretending they were married because they shared the same surname.

Kent Fisher was born and the name fitted him like a glove.

But would his wealthy, traditional parents name their only son, Kent?

No, Kent was a rebel. He rejected the name his parents gave him - William Kenneth Fisher, which was his father's name. By rejecting the name, he was rejecting his stuffy father and all he represented.

Teething troubles

Like any new baby, mine suffered teething troubles.

Kent came over as gung-ho, patrolling his district like Sylvester Stallone, probe thermometer pointed and ready for action. He wasn't averse to aggression or violence if the situation demanded, but local government officers aren't noted for their testosterone levels. If someone marched around the district, antagonising and bullying people the way Kent did, he'd be out of a job.

To get around this, I made Kent's father the local MP for Downland, the mythical South Downs area where the stories are set. Better still, I made him a Cabinet Minister, responsible for the environment. As the local councillors were scared of Fisher Senior, no one challenged Kent's behaviour.

But what did I know about being an MP? Clearly, the Fishers came from money, living in Downland Manor, but that's a long way from my poor, working class background. So, I had to improvise, basing them on a local family who lived in a manor house on my district.

I'd met the owner of the manor several times through my work. He was a lovely man, well-connected and fascinated by the origins of his family. He told me about the skeletal remains of someone who died over 1,000 years ago on his land. The remains were tested in a laboratory, revealing a DNA profile so similar to his own that the body had to be an ancestor.

'My family lived on this land before William the

Conqueror invaded,' he proclaimed, proud of his heritage.

That's the heritage I wanted for the Fishers.

But I had little idea of how the gentry lived and behaved. Where was the struggle and conflict in a family who had money and influence? With such a privileged background, why did Kent Fisher become an EHO rather than a stockbroker or a doctor?

Okay, he could have dropped out of university, but that's a cliché. Kent went into the army, like his father. Kent won a medal for bravery. He felt bad about the environmental impact of war, leading to a career as an EHO.

Nah!

No wonder Kent's character never quite caught fire when I wrote the first few chapters of the first novel.

Trust what you know.

My father was in the RAF, so we moved around a lot before he died when I was eight. After that we settled on the outskirts of Manchester, where my mother first lived when she came over from Italy in 1955. She worked as a housekeeper and then a nurse before meeting and marrying my father.

With no money and unable to work as she had me and my younger brother to care for, my widowed mother struggled the best she could. We lived in a two up two down terraced house with a toilet at the bottom of the back yard. On Fridays, we lugged the tin bath from the kitchen and set it down in front of the coal fire in the front room.

I remember damp and mould on the walls, ice on the inside of the windows in winter, and paraffin heaters in the outside toilet, struggling to keep the pipes from freezing. Someone from the local council – an EHO I later discovered - came round one day and told us the house would be demolished along with the rest of the terrace as part of a slum clearance programme.

We used the compensation to buy an identical house further down the street. I never bothered about the lack of facilities until I passed my 11+ exam and went to a grammar school. There I met a curious breed called the middle classes. These children had two parents who both worked. They paid people like my mother to clean their houses. They went on holiday, often abroad, and could afford school trips.

They seemed like a confident bunch, who knew far more than me. They had opinions and judged others on their situation, as I discovered the hard way. Only once did I admit to having free school meals and a uniform paid for by the local council. Whether they classed me as a pariah or a sponger, I don't know, but their mockery hurt and left me feeling ashamed and embarrassed for being poor.

In danger of being bullied, I needed to take action. Two disastrous fights later, I realised I was useless with my fists. But I was quick witted and managed to talk my way out of many difficult situations with a mixture of jokes, profound social commentary and mimicry, which helped me blend in.

I learned to be middle class, though the lack of money meant no school trips or holidays. My mother wasn't well and couldn't travel, I told them, assuming the mantle of unsung hero. I took on three paper rounds to raise enough money to buy a few luxuries and pay for occasional school trips.

Everything went well until I began dating. As her parents never went out (and we wanted to be alone), I took Mary back to my terraced house. I should have realised the moment we turned into the street that things were going awry.

She refused to enter the house, claiming she didn't want to catch some nasty disease.

It took weeks for the fallout to settle as my disguise lay in tatters. Some of my friends abandoned me, possibly on the advice of their solicitors, as I was clearly ... poor.

It didn't take a great leap of the imagination to realise I'd struck fictional gold.

If Kent's mother separated from Fisher Senior and headed 'Up North', Kent could grow up in poverty and return to Sussex many years later as a working class outsider, completely antagonist to his wealthy father.

Floored by a lack of flaws

Kent Fisher didn't drink like Morse, or smoke like most detectives. So I gave him a wholly unsuitable wife, called Elizabeth. She was a shopaholic social climber. She didn't work, preferring beauty treatments and social gatherings with the rich acquaintances of Fisher Senior. Short, shapely and a firecracker in bed, she seduced Kent in a blink. A whirlwind romance led to a lavish wedding and years of misery paying for it.

While physically, Elizabeth was loosely based on someone I knew, she felt like a caricature. At the slightest hint of trouble, she'd seduce Kent and all would be well ... until the next time. Then he fell in love with Sarah, a vet who owned an animal sanctuary. Naturally, as he was married, she kept him at arm's length until the swimming pool drowning threw them together.

I titled the novel, *Too Many Memories*, and submitted it to an internet critiquing group I'd joined. My critiquing buddies kept finding fault with Kent, Elizabeth, the plot, the suspects and just about everything I'd written. I revised and rewrote, generating more bad press.

In the end, I gave up and started another murder investigation to see if Kent would develop.

Too Many Secrets went on to become *No Bodies*, the second Kent Fisher novel, but more about that later.

Second time around

Having learned from the first novel, *Too Many Secrets* was a better story. Kent Fisher was no longer an unhappily married man. Elizabeth was cut from the story, along with the marriage, and Kent became one of those men who liked his freedom. He never went out with a woman for more than a few weeks. He also had a liking for young waitresses in tight white tops and short black skirts.

As an EHO, carrying out food hygiene inspections at restaurants, he met a steady stream of waitresses. Being the son of the local MP, he also had notoriety, thanks to the local newspaper, *The Tollington Tribune*, run by failed hack, Thomas Hardy Logan. Logan loved to pour scorn on Fisher Senior and Kent's antics helped stoke the fire, especially his environmental protests and anti-hunt activities.

These replaced the army career I originally envisaged, allowing me to reduce his age by ten years and make him more colourful.

When I completed the first draft of *Too Many Secrets*, I was convinced I had a saleable book. It was time to send out sample chapters and synopsis to publishers and agents and wait for the offers to roll in.

As this was early in the millennium, and email was in its infancy, you had to send printed copies with a self-addressed envelope and sufficient return postage if you wanted your manuscript back. To my delight, I had more positive replies than I expected. However, many liked what

they read, but ‘it wasn’t for them’, or ‘they weren’t taking on new authors at the time’.

One UK agent asked to read another six chapters, then another six and so on until she read the whole book. Almost driven to distraction as the weeks trickled by, I couldn’t wait for her verdict.

She liked the story, but the characters ‘didn’t leap off the page’. I had no real idea how to correct this as she gave me no helpful suggestions or tips, even though I asked. All I could do was stare at my manuscript, read it once more, and try to work out how I could make my characters leap.

Close but no cigar, as Fisher Senior would have remarked.

Talking about smoking

I smoked heavily while writing – usually after ten at night, often finishing at two in the morning. When I emerged from the study (aka the box room), a cloud of smoke dispersed around the house. The ashtray overflowed with butts and everything stank of stale tobacco, despite the open window.

Cigarette followed cigarette as I revised *Too Many Secrets*, desperately trying to improve it. Having ditched the first novel, *Too Many Memories*, I realised I now had to write a replacement to show how an EHO could become embroiled in a murder investigation.

I could have stuck with the swimming pool drowning, but I wanted something different, but still based on a workplace accident.

Strangely enough, the inspiration came from a noise complaint I investigated years earlier. Local residents complained about a farmer who cut fence posts in a field, using a saw that was powered by a tractor. I'd never seen a saw attached to a tractor, so it stuck in my memory.

Having investigated several fatal work accidents during my career, I was used to working with the police and Coroner's Officer. All I had to do was have my victim killed by a circular saw in an accident that was really a murder.

Within days, the main plot for *No Accident* emerged.

Kent was in love with Sarah, the vet, and minding her animal sanctuary while she visited her terminally ill father

in New Zealand. Jenny, a new officer at work, became his sidekick, helping him investigate the work accident. Being new, she wanted to know everything, which allowed me to explain the complexities of environmental health work to the reader.

I wrote like never before. The story became more complicated with each chapter as suspects formed a disorderly queue after the death of an employee at Tombstone Adventure Park. A Wild West theme park was just about the last thing you'd expect to find in a rural backwater in East Sussex, so naturally that's what I chose. It allowed me to make jokes about cowboy builders, if nothing else.

Then, around two thirds into the story I wrote myself into a cul-de-sac.

Kent couldn't solve the murder.

I couldn't solve the murder.

For months, I tried to find a solution. Finally, after too many failed attempts, I skipped forward in time and wrote the climax, hoping it would inspire me to solve the murder.

It didn't.

I had a novel in two, unconnected parts.

Closer, but still no cigar.

No cigarettes either when I quit smoking on 17th May 2006. I'd put on weight, I wasn't exercising (apart from walking the dog), and I felt tired so much of the time. My struggles to resolve the issues with *No Accident* weren't helping, keeping me awake until well into the night.

I knew when I quit smoking I'd be unable to write.

The two were inseparable, as I discovered after a few days of not smoking. My brain refused to work. The creative spark deserted me.

I needed cigarettes to write.

I could have started smoking once more, but I quit writing instead.

I focused on my health and enjoying life. I was a regular at the gym, running and losing weight as I built up my distances. I can remember considering whether to quit writing altogether.

After all, I hadn't written anything for almost a year and I didn't miss it, did I?

Radio Star

In March 2007, Sovereign Radio wanted to interview an EHO about the ban on smoking in public places. I didn't want to do the interview, but had no choice – I was the lead officer. With a heavy heart and the thought of having my words edited into something slanderous, I walked over to the High Street and into the studios.

At least I was now a non-smoker.

Fifteen minutes later, I emerged, having enjoyed the experience. The interview was edited into a news bite, which was well received and I was mentioned in despatches by the Chief Executive. I was asked to write a short piece on the subject for the council's intranet. The moment I started, I began to embellish and build a story around the radio appearance.

Blogging was in its infancy at the time. I'd toyed with writing a blog, but lacked a starting point. My radio interview was perfect for a short, humorous blog.

As a law enforcement officer, I didn't want to write it under my own name. And if I wanted to poke fun at my work or the council I needed to hide behind someone else - someone like Kent Fisher.

On 30th March 2007, I published the first [*Fisher's Fables*](#) blog, entitled *Radio Star*, unaware it would change my life.

Fisher's Fables

Using characters borrowed from *Too Many Memories*, the blog grew into a mini sitcom that poked fun at local government management. The recession, cuts in public spending, and the advancement of IT provided fertile ground for my irreverent humour. Every character was fictional, except for Kent, who was telling my story.

The blogs were fun to write, exciting and as carefully crafted as any novel I'd written – maybe more so. People loved the blogs, recognising the idiosyncrasies and foibles, the comedy behind the situations.

And that's when I discovered what had been missing from my writing. I'd found my author voice – that authentic style and tone unique to me.

Was it the voice to bring my novels alive, to make the characters leap off the page?

It took an appeal against a poor food hygiene rating before I had the answer.

True Colours

A tea room appealed against the food hygiene rating it received following a routine inspection. The owner thought it was harsh and contacted me. I studied the inspection report and conclusions, interviewed the officer concerned, and visited the business to get a fuller appreciation of the standards.

The owner once worked for the BBC, writing sketches for comedy programmes on the radio. Now he wrote naval fiction, publishing a number of books here and in the USA. Naturally, after we'd dealt with the appeal, the conversation turned to writing.

An hour later, I left with a copy of his novel, *True Colours*, and his offer to take a look at the first chapter of my novel, *No Accident*. Back home that evening, I called up the chapter on the computer. My heart sank. While it wasn't badly written, it didn't exactly shine.

The years had cleared away my illusions.

For the first time ever, I could see the flaws and failings in my writing with a clarity that frightened me. Ironically, these were flaws and failings absent from *Fisher's Fables*.

I rewrote the first chapter of *No Accident* in the voice I used for my blog. The tearoom owner thought it was well-written, different from the usual tired crime novels. He offered to introduce me to a US publisher.

The publisher read the first chapter and offered me a contract by return email.

Robert Crouch, author, had arrived at last.

Just that tiny hiccup of how to solve the murder in *No Accident*.

Revising Opinions

I refused to sign a contract until I revised the whole novel and solved the murder.

Over the next six months I reduced the word count from 145,000 to 100,000, which is still on the long side. Kent found a way to solve the murder, allowing me to email the full manuscript to the US publisher.

He liked the story but wanted more editing. Apparently, I repeated information, as if I was worried the reader would forget details. I didn't think I repeated information in case the reader had forgotten the details, but I read the manuscript once more.

I found so many repetitions it was embarrassing. Another 10,000 words fell to the cutting room floor, but the difference was startling. The novel was sharp, fresh and as my wife said at the time – 'it read like a proper book'.

On 20th June 2016, she came into the bedroom, thrusting her tablet in front of my weary eyes. *No Accident* was available to buy on Amazon.

The Kent Fisher Mysteries

It took time to rewrite the second novel, *No Bodies*, in my new voice, but it was worth the wait.

Due to differences with the US publisher, I self-published *No Bodies* and bought back the rights to *No Accident*. I got to know some bloggers and had blog tours organised for both, leading to publicity and some terrific reviews.

Readers understood that my stories were written to entertain the whole family, like the works of Agatha Christie, Colin Dexter and Peter James. They liked the fact that the stories were different from the usual crime fiction. They loved the humour, the fun, and insights into environmental health. Best of all, they loved the twists and complex plots.

I wanted to pay homage to the fictional detectives and characters I loved.

Kent's boss is Daniella Frost, (*A Touch of Frost* by R D Wingfield). There's a DI Goodman (*Death in Paradise*), Ross McGillycuddy (*The 9.50 from Paddington* by Agatha Christie), Louise Watson (*Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle) and there will be many more in future books.

I'm not sure how to get Scooby Doo into a story, but I'm working on it.

Talking of dogs, Kent named his West Highland white terrier, Columbo, after his favourite TV detective. And Kent's a huge fan of Sue Grafton, often referring to Kinsey Millhone. He once spent the night with Kinsey, though he fell asleep several hours later while reading her latest

adventure.

There's also a backstory that runs alongside the mysteries, involving many of the main characters. They interfere with Kent's investigations and pose additional problems for him to solve.

The Setting

When I worked as a Senior EHO, my district included the South Downs. Those green hills that rolled gently to the sheer white cliffs of Beachy Head and the Seven Sisters have a quiet beauty I've never found anywhere else.

Nestled within these tranquil slopes are picturesque villages that often date back to Anglo Saxon times. You'll find houses made from flint, excavated from the chalk escarpments. Thatched cottages with white walls and rambling roses can be seen among the brick houses with orange Sussex tile roofs. You'll find castles, follies and evidence of a roaring trade in contraband as smugglers moved their goods through tunnels, secret passages and treacherous marshes.

Then there's the natural beauty of the Downland and its wildlife, the Cuckmere River, twisting slowly to the sea, and those white cliffs, towering over the English Channel.

While I wanted to use as much of the landscape as possible, I also wanted to create a fictional world for the stories.

Downland became a Parliamentary constituency as well as a council district. I created Tollingdon, the town where the council has its offices. The name comes from two towns – Polegate and Willingdon, which are situated north of Eastbourne.

One of the possible origins for the name, Polegate, is Toll Gate. From this I took the Toll, adding the 'ingdon' from neighbouring Willingdon to create the new town at the

heart of the Kent Fisher mysteries.

There's no sleight intended for the residents of either Polegate or Willingdon, but Tollingdon gives me the artistic freedom to create a town of my choosing. The town centre I envisaged owes more to Battle, 15 miles away, where the Battle of Hastings was fought in 1066. Battle has a lovely, small market town atmosphere that seems in tune with my stories.

In addition to the fictional places, I use as many real places as possible in the novels for authenticity and because I love them.

Alfriston

Flanked by the Cuckmere River, this charming village with its picturesque High Street, brimming with shops and places to eat, has always been a favourite destination for tourists, ramblers and smugglers in centuries gone by. [Ye Olde Smugglers Inne](#) on Waterloo Square is also one of Kent Fisher's favourite places, featuring in *No Remorse*.

The pub is a close neighbour of [Much Ado Books](#), a thriving independent bookstore.

Birling Gap and the Seven Sisters

Owned by the National Trust, [Birling Gap](#) is a popular visitor destination on the coast. After refreshments in the café, you can walk west over the magnificent Seven Sisters to the Cuckmere estuary or East towards the Belle Tout lighthouse (featured in *The Lives and Loves of a She Devil*) and Beachy Head, the famous landmark overlooking Eastbourne.

Birling Gap is a firm favourite of Kent's, holding romantic memories of time spent there with Gemma. The views from the cliffs on either side are spectacular and the beach is popular with families and dog walkers.

East Dean

East Dean nestles within the South Downs, a mile inland from Birling Gap on the coast. At its heart is the village green and [the Tiger Inn](#). Though Kent doesn't drink alcohol, he spends a lot of time in pubs, mainly because they're often at the heart of the community.

At the top of the green is a flint house with a blue plaque on its wall. The plaque says

Sherlock Holmes, consulting detective and beekeeper retired here 1903-1917.

Whether it's true or not, this felt like fate, nudging me to write crime stories.

Jevington

A small village north of Friston and East Dean, Jevington stretches along a valley close to the South Downs Way, making [the Eight Bells](#) a favourite stopping off spot for ramblers. Kent often meets his friend Mike Turner here as he's rather fond of the barmaids.

It's summer fete, situated in fields below St Andrew's church, has also been known to attract the occasional local author.

Litlington

Situated alongside the Cuckmere River, Litlington is a small village, dominated by the [Plough and Harrow public house](#), which is Kent's favourite, being dog friendly and serving delicious food. The village is also the setting for the orphanage at the heart of *No Remorse*, and a pretty church.

Wilmington

The village is best known for its chalk carving on the hill above. [The Long Man of Wilmington](#) is visible for miles and something of a mystery as no one knows for certain when it was carved or for what reason.

Such speculation is fertile ground for Kent Fisher. He's known as Conspiracy Kent, but his belief in conspiracy theories is more a natural suspicion of large corporations, media empires and politicians.

The Characters

I've included a list of the main players and their relationships at the end. While many of the characters originated in *Fisher's Fables*, others have earned their places from their appearance in the novels.

These characters are the backbone of the stories, providing their own conflicts and issues to add depth to the novels. The members of Kent's team at Downland also offer insights into the work environmental health officers do, which many readers enjoy.

Kent Fisher

Kent cares about the environment and the South Downs. He runs an animal sanctuary in his spare time. He loves his work as an environmental health officer, even though he's at odds with his fast-track boss. He runs to keep fit, doesn't drink alcohol, and eats fairly healthily – though he's rather fond of chips.

If he has a failing, it's the blind spot he has for his colleague and former lover, Gemma Dean. Not sure whether he wants her or if she wants him, he lives in a kind of limbo, scared to commit, but unable to move on.

But without her, he would struggle to solve the murders he encounters.

Gemma Dean

Gemma's a feisty newcomer to Environmental Health. The

niece of the Chief Executive of Downland District Council, she's had to battle accusations of nepotism, her past relationship with Kent, and her lack of experience in environmental health.

She's a quick learner, a willing worker, and an unwitting sleuth in *No Accident*. Without her help, Kent would never have solved the murder, even if he put her life and his career in jeopardy. Their partnership and the sexual tension between them are at the heart of the stories.

But does she carry a torch for Kent?

Mike Turner (aka Chunky)

Mike's a retired Scenes of Crime Officer who now runs a mobile catering van called Mike's Mighty Munch. Jamaican by birth, overweight, and philosophical in the face of disaster, he's the voice of reason and doubt that often corrects Kent when he goes off on a tangent.

They're great friends, running an unofficial second hand catering business to provide funds for Kent's animal sanctuary. Mike's fantastic sense of humour and dread of Kent's food stories provides a running gag throughout the books.

Mike's still well connected in the police and a useful ally to have when there's a murder to investigate.

Niamh Fisher

Kent's stepmother hails from Moy, near Dungannon in Northern Ireland. She met William Kenneth Fisher, MP,

when she became his secretary in Westminster and went on to marry him. She's only a few years older than Kent, has a terrific sense of fun, and is determined to sort out his hopeless love life.

Smart, sophisticated, and used to running her husband's affairs, she's well-connected and liked, providing a reassuring presence in Kent's life. They're more like brother and sister with their banter and behaviour, adding fun and humour to the stories.

Frances Wade

In her combat fatigues and Doc Marten boots, this young woman cuts a stunning figure with her long dreadlocks and no nonsense attitude. Mature beyond her years, she runs Kent's animal sanctuary, having arrived one day with her old caravan, where she lives.

She works for almost nothing, loves animals and the tranquillity of the Downland setting, and gives Kent the freedom to sleuth in his spare time. Without her, he'd be lost and he knows it.

Is there a reason why she appeared one day when Kent needed help?

Daniella Frost

Kent's young, fast track boss begins management at Downland hopelessly out of her depth. Her style, based on text books and motivational quotes from a desk calendar, grates with Kent, leading to a challenging relationship. But

this young woman has hidden depths and starts to match Kent blow for blow as the series progresses.

Their relationship offers more humour and the opportunity to poke fun at management.

And she still manages to surprise him (and me) at times.

Kelly Morgan

Danni's Personal Assistant is a bright, vivacious woman, who dresses like a blousy barmaid at a rugby club. She plays dumb, but is in fact the smartest officer in the department. Wearing bright clothes and make up, she's a fun character who gets to deliver some of the funniest lines I write.

Though the most sociable person in the department, no one really knows much about her or her background. The deft way she handles people and situations means it's likely to stay that way.

She's probably the perfect woman for Kent, but he'll never realise while Gemma's around.

Thomas Hardy Logan

Editor of the *Tollington Tribune*, Tommy's a failed hack who writes his local paper in the style of a daily tabloid. Sharp, cynical and always on the lookout for a scandal, there's something creepy about him and the way he works.

Though he secretly admires the rebel in Kent, Tommy would never let emotions or facts get in the way of a good story – especially one where he can pull Kent down a few

pegs.

Miles Birchill

Birchill is the wealthiest resident in Downland, owning Downland Manor, which he acquired from the Fishers, a Wild West theme park, and a couple of casinos. Usually seen with leggy blondes half his age, he's a complex character whose story is slowly revealed in the books.

He epitomises everything Kent hates about the modern, capitalist world, but shares many characteristics with his harshest critic.

No Accident

The aim of the book was simple – to show how an environmental health officer could solve a murder, which is disguised as a workplace accident.

The action takes place over three days in early September, but the secrets uncovered will cause problems for years to come.

Almost everything in the story is fictitious, from the town of Tollington to Downland Manor – the ancestral home of the Fishers – and my favourite creation, the Game Cock public house. I didn't want to use or belittle any real places or venues as my goal was to entertain readers with a twisting whodunit, interesting characters, and humour.

My only constraint was the second novel, *No Bodies*, which was written first. The events and action in *No Accident* had to dovetail into the second to provide a seamless transition.

[Click here to read the reviews given by readers and bloggers on Amazon.](#)

[Or click here to follow the links on my website.](#)

No Bodies

The novel picks up the story two weeks after *No Accident* ends. Once again, it's a traditional whodunit, but there are no bodies and no evidence of murder – until Kent starts digging around.

The action takes place over several weeks. The less frenetic pace allows me to spend more time with the characters and their relationships. I also placed the story firmly within the South Downs, with a brief detour to Glastonbury. While on holiday there, I walked the route of a chase scene to make sure it was accurate.

While *No Accident* was constructed around a workplace accident investigation, *No Bodies* deals with E coli O157, a nasty bug that can be fatal to the very young and very old. I based the details on an investigation I made at work, where a four-year old boy was rushed to a hospital in London with kidney failure.

[Click here to read the reviews given by readers and bloggers on Amazon.](#)

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No Remorse

This is the murder mystery I always wanted to write – a true whodunit with a sleuth following a trail of crumbs into the past to solve a murder in the present day.

It's my homage to the late Sue Grafton, who inspired me with the Kinsey Millhone mysteries.

I started with one line of dialogue – ‘They’re killing me’, delivered by an elderly resident in a luxury residential care home. I had no plot, no idea where the story would take me or how it would end. I had the best time following Kent on his investigation, discovering the clues as he did, throwing in complication after complication at the end of almost every chapter.

I also wanted to give Kent a love interest to see how that would change the dynamics between him and Gemma. Strangely enough, Kent began to reveal more about himself and his past, which allowed him to explain his drives and behaviour a little more.

[Click here to read the reviews given by readers and bloggers on Amazon.](#)

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Character List

Kent Fisher		Environmental Health Manager, Downland District Council
William Fisher	K	Kent's father and MP for Downland
Niamh Fisher		Kent's stepmother
Ingrid Fisher		Kent's mother
Gemma Dean		Kent's colleague and sleuthing partner
Frank Dean		Gemma's uncle and Chief Executive of Downland District Council
Daniella Frost		Head of Environmental Health and Waste
Nigel Long		Food EHO in Kent's team
Lucy Darling		Food technical officer in Kent's team
Kelly Morgan		Daniella's PA
Sylvie Redmond		Pollution Control Officer in Kent's team
Mike Turner		Former Scenes of Crime Officer and Kent's best friend
DI Briggs	Simon	Sussex Police
DI Goodman	Ashley	Sussex Police

Bernard Doolittle	Head of Human Remains (Resources), Downland District Council
Fiona Wicke	Waste Control Manager, Downland
Gregory Rathbone	Leader of Downland District Council
Brian Peake	Town Hall Caretaker, Downland District Council
Neville Priddy	Head of Planning and Development, Downland District Council
Geoff Lamb	Communications Officer, Downland District Council
Yvonne Parris	American entrepreneur and possible love interest
Sarah Wheeler	Gemma's mother and local veterinary surgeon
Tommy Logan	Editor of the Tollingdon Tribune
Adrian Peach	Reporter at the Argus
Geoffrey Hinchcliffe	Rector of Alfriston and Litlington
Richard Compton	Solicitor
Miles Birchill	Entrepreneur and owner of Tombstone Adventure Park
Tara McNamara	Former lover and estate manager at Downland Manor

Alice Hewitt Niamh's friend and business partner

Frances Wade Runs Kent's animal sanctuary

If you enjoyed this look into the background of the Kent Fisher murder mysteries, please leave a review on Amazon or post about the book on social media.