



People

Agatha Christie 1890–1976



Agatha Christie was a mystery writer who was one of the world's top-selling authors with works like *Murder on the Orient Express* and *The Mystery of the Blue Train*.

Synopsis

Born on September 15, 1890, in Torquay, England, Agatha Christie published her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, in 1920, and went on to become one of the most famous writers in history, with mysteries like *Murder at the Vicarage*, *Partners in Crime* and *Sad Cypress*. She sold billions of copies of her work, and was also a noted playwright and romance author. She died on January 12, 1976.

Background

Best-selling author Agatha Christie was born Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller on September 15, 1890, in Torquay, Devon, in the southwest part of England. The youngest of three siblings, she was educated at home by her mother, who encouraged her daughter to write. As a child, Christie enjoyed fantasy play and creating characters, and, when she was 16, moved to Paris for a time to study vocals and piano.

In 1914, she wed Colonel Archibald Christie, a Royal Flying Corps pilot, and took up nursing during World War I. She published her first book, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, in 1920; the story focused on the murder of a rich heiress and introduced readers to one of Christie's most famous characters—Belgian detective Hercule Poirot.

Fame and Tumult

In 1926, Christie released *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, a hit which was later marked as a genre classic and one of the author's all-time favorites. She dealt with tumult that same year, however, as her mother died and her husband revealed that he was in a relationship with another woman. Traumatized by the revelation, Christie disappeared only to be

discovered by authorities several days later at a Harrogate hotel, registered under the name of her husband's mistress.

Christie would recover, with her and Archibald divorcing in 1928. In 1930, she married archaeology professor Max Mallowan, with whom she travelled on several expeditions, later recounting her trips in the 1946 memoir *Come, Tell Me How You Live*. The year of her new nuptials also saw the release of *Murder at the Vicarage*, which became another classic and introduced readers to Miss Jane Marple, an enquiring village lady.

Cast of Characters

Poirot and Marple are Christie's most well-known detectives, with the two featured in dozens of novels and short stories. Poirot made the most appearances in Christie's work in titles that included *Ackroyd*, *The Mystery of the Blue Train* (1928) and *Death in the Clouds* (1935). Miss Marple has been featured in books like *The Moving Finger* (1942) and *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953), and been played on screen by actresses like Angela Lansbury, Helen Hayes and Geraldine McEwan. Other notable Christie characters include Tuppence and Tommy Beresford, Colonel Race, Parker Pyne and Ariadne Oliver.

Sold More Than Two Billion Copies

Writing well into her later years, Christie wrote more than 70 detective novels as well as short fiction. Though she also wrote romance novels like *Unfinished Portrait* (1934) and *A Daughter's a Daughter* (1952) under the name Mary Westmacott, Christie's success as an author of sleuth stories has earned her titles like the "Queen of Crime" and the "Queen of Mystery." Christie can also be considered a queen of all publishing genres as she is one of the top-selling authors in history, with her combined works selling more than 2 billion copies worldwide.

Christie was a renowned playwright as well, with works like *The Hollow* (1951) and *Verdict* (1958). Her play *The Mousetrap* opened in 1952 at the Ambassador Theatre and—at more than 8,800 showings during 21 years—holds the record for the longest unbroken run in a London theater. Additionally, several of Christie's works have become popular movies, including *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974) and *Death on the Nile* (1978).

Christie was made a dame in 1971. In 1974, she made her last public appearance for the opening night of the play version of *Murder on the Orient Express*. Christie died on January 12, 1976.

Source of the text: biography.com

Sir Christopher Wren

1632–1723



Wren was an English scientist and mathematician and one of Britain's most distinguished architects, best known for the design of many London churches, including St Paul's Cathedral.

Christopher Wren showed an early talent for mathematics and enjoyed inventing things, including an instrument for writing in the dark and a pneumatic machine. In 1657, Wren was appointed professor of astronomy at Gresham College in London and four years later, professor of astronomy at Oxford. In 1662, he was one of the founding members of the Royal Society, along with other mathematicians, scientists and scholars, many of whom were his friends.

Wren's interest in architecture developed from his study of physics and engineering. In 1664 and 1665, Wren was commissioned to design the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford and a chapel for Pembroke College, Cambridge and from then on, architecture was his main focus. In 1665, Wren visited Paris, where he was strongly influenced by French and Italian baroque styles.

In 1666, the Great Fire of London destroyed much of the medieval city, providing a huge opportunity for Wren. He produced ambitious plans for rebuilding the whole area but they were rejected, partly because property owners insisted on keeping the sites of their destroyed buildings. Wren did design 51 new city churches, as well as the new St Paul's Cathedral. In 1669, he was appointed surveyor of the royal works which effectively gave him control of all government building in the country. He was knighted in 1673.

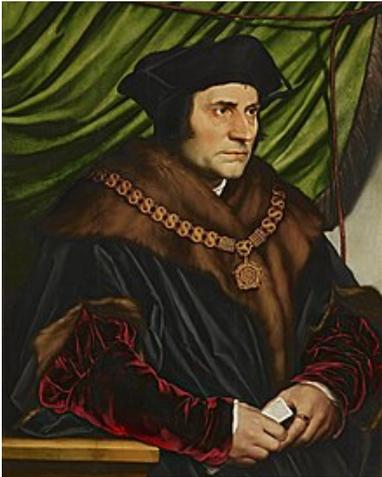
Some other buildings that he designed: the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, a hospital in Chelsea for retired soldiers, a hospital for sailors in Greenwich, Trinity College Library in Cambridge, the facade of Hampton Court Palace. Wren often worked with the same team of craftsmen, including master plasterer John Groves and wood carver Grinling Gibbons.

Wren died on 25 February 1723. His gravestone in St Paul's Cathedral features the Latin inscription which translates as: 'If you seek his memorial, look about you.'

Source of the text: bbc.co.uk

Thomas More

1478–1535



More was an English lawyer, scholar, writer, member of parliament and chancellor in the reign of Henry VIII. He was executed for refusing to recognise Henry VIII's divorce and the English church's break with Rome.

Thomas More was born on 7 February 1478 in London. He studied at Oxford, and qualified as a lawyer, although he did contemplate becoming a monk. In 1517 he entered the king's service, becoming one of Henry VIII's most effective and trusted civil servants and acting as his secretary, interpreter, speech-writer, chief diplomat, advisor and confidant. In 1521 he was knighted, in 1523, he became the speaker of the House of Commons and in 1525 chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

At the same time More was building a reputation as a scholar. He was close to the radical catholic theologian Erasmus, but wrote polemics against Martin Luther and the protestant reformation. Around 1515, he wrote 'The History of Richard III' which established that king's reputation as a tyrant and has been described as the first masterpiece of English historiography. In 1516, he published his most important work 'Utopia' — a description of an imaginary republic ruled by reason and intended to contrast with the strife-ridden reality of contemporary European politics. More remained a passionate defender of Catholic orthodoxy — writing pamphlets against heresy, banning unorthodox books, and even taking responsibility when chancellor for the interrogation of heretics.

More took the post of lord chancellor in 1529, just as Henry had become determined to obtain a divorce from Catherine of Aragon. The previous chancellor, Lord Wolsey, had failed to achieve this objective. Henry was close to breaking with the Church of Rome, and the so-called 'Reformation parliament' was about to convene.

When Henry declared himself 'supreme head of the Church in England' - thus establishing the Anglican Church and allowing him to end his marriage — More resigned the chancellorship. He continued to argue against the king's divorce and the split with Rome, and in 1534 was arrested after refusing to swear an oath of succession repudiating the pope and accepting the annulment of Henry's marriage. He was tried for treason at Westminster and on 6 July 1535 was executed on Tower Hill.

Source of the text: bbc.co.uk