



## **The Coffin Trail**

*Martin Edwards*

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What is meant as a fresh start in the English Lakes District begins to reek of buried secrets....

Oxford historian and TV personality Daniel Kind and his new lover, Miranda, both want to escape to a new life. On impulse they buy Tarn Cottage in Brackdale, an idyllic valley in the Lake District that Daniel knew as a boy. He is still fascinated by a place so remote that the dead had to be carried out over the peaks on pack animals along the ancient Coffin Trail. But though the couple hope to live the dream of downsizing, the past has a way of catching up.

Tarn Cottage was once home to Barrie Gilpin, an autistic youth suspected of a savage murder-what looks like the ritualistic killing of a young woman visitor to the valley. She was found laid out on the Sacrifice Stone, an ancient pagan site up on the fell. Barrie fell to his death near the crime scene before he could be questioned. All these years later, Daniel retains his belief in Barrie's innocence and questions his own policeman father's handling of the case. When DCI Hannah Scarlett and her squad launch a cold case review, Brackdale's skeletons begin to rattle&.

The wild geography of the Lakes District plays against local literary references, all backdrop to the lives of villagers and outsiders drawn to this beautiful spot - but for what reasons? The Coffin Trail launches a new series by a master British hand.

## **The Coffin Trail Details**

Date : Published October 1st 2004 by Poisoned Pen Press (first published 2004)

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Author : Martin Edwards

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## **From Reader Review The Coffin Trail for online ebook**

### **Vicky Thomasson says**

I wanted to read this book as I absolutely love my holidays in the Lakes and I love a good crime read. To say I wasn't disappointed to begin with would be a lie. I found it quite slow to get into the actual story and found the character 'Miranda' to be highly irritating. Having said that, I did end up enjoying the second half and found Hannah and Daniel to be very likeable characters. I loved the twist at the end and will be picking up another book from this series when I go back to the Lakes in September.

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### **Shawna Millard says**

The book was tedious at times, meandering here and there with odd scenes that tended to distract the reader from actually wanting to finish the book. Daniel also lost credibility as a character by being not only hard to relate to but seemingly shallow some of the time while trying to convince us he truly has some depth due to previous trauma. HmMMM.

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### **Seth Lynch says**

This book was selected for the Isle of Man Crime Book Club read. I always feel I read the book s for this more harshly than I would if it were a book I'd selected myself. I had been thinking of reading a book by Martin Edwards as my future boss mention him in my job interview. He's also coming to the Island on the 25th of June – If I am I'll have to go a long to the Crime Evening he has organised. (as it turned out that was the day I left the Island so I missed this)

As for the book... It didn't quite grab me. There were a lot of elements I really liked but there were too many inter-relationships. Nearly every character seems to have had an affair at some point and I felt this diluted the tension between the two main characters. There were some lines I really liked: 'she had been pretty once, even her passport photograph couldn't conceal that fact.' And lines I didn't: '...he couldn't quite believe he'd taken things so far. Thank God their love for each other was so strong.' There were a couple of times where a character notices that someone is sweating or red faced etc from a long distance away. As I read that it made me stop and think – can you really tell if beads of sweat are breaking out on someone's forehead at a distance of twenty feet?

I made the mistake of reading the blurb on the front cover: 'A first-rate complex Thriller.' It is not a thriller in any shape or form. When I'd gotten about a hundred pages in I stopped expecting the thrills and started to read it for what it is – a modern day cozy. A slightly genre bending cozy but cozy non-the-less. It really felt like an episode of Midsomer Murders. Cozies aren't really my thing but I like to read the odd one.

The way Edwards has set this up is nice. There are two main characters – an ex-Oxford don and a cop. The cop is working a cold case so and her ex-boss is the don's late father. Her respect for his father means she (the cop is female) tolerates him more than she would otherwise. A cold case means there is no crime scene to be trampled over and gives scope for a non-cop to get involved. The location – a small village in The Lakes gives you an enclosed set of suspects. And Edwards plays by the rules of the Detection Club – no

clues are withheld, no seemingly sane person turns out to be crazy (so not too much like *Midsommer Murders*) and he does not rely on co-incidences.

I pretty much worked out who had done it and why at about the half-way point. The line that gave it away for me came on page 190 of the 299 page novel. It wasn't a line related to the crime and I don't know why it triggered the reaction it did but as soon as read I knew what had happened. In fact I was only about 75% correct. It made reading the rest of the book different. It didn't spoil it at all, I became interested in how Edwards would misdirect people. It was like watching a magician when you know the trick – you can still admire the skill and dexterity of the performance.

If you are into Whodunnits then this is right up your street.

Martin Edwards has a blog here: <http://doyouwriteunderyourownname.blo...> which I recommend. He is very knowledgeable about crime fiction and has good taste in films.

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### **David Evans says**

I wanted to like this book having read some glowing reviews of *The Lake District Mysteries*. Perhaps it is a mistake to start with the first book of a series as there always has to be a lot of awkward scene-setting before the reader can relax and get on with enjoying the story. The whole of this volume seems to be taken up by an attempt to get the jigsaw of the characters into place in preparation for the next book. A good deal of back story is therefore woven into the plot which, otherwise, is fairly basic. I was irritated by the rather clumsy and gratuitous mentions of "boobs" and "tits" and intrusive foreplay. Sex has no place in a murder mystery, especially bad sex with the irritatingly vapid Miranda whom I sincerely hope rapidly becomes a murder victim in the next instalment as she sadly survives this tale. She is clearly unsuitable for Daniel (or Denial as I call him. Geddit?) As for Marcus!; the sooner these two are out of the way the sooner Denial and Hannah can get together as nature intended; an unstoppable crime detecting force whose bedroom expertise is taken as read and not actually read. And Daniel had better invest in a better book on British birds. His ornithological knowledge is dodgy describing quiet wrens, garden Ring Ouzels, diving herons, kingfishers nesting in vegetation as well as a gull that imitates the cry of a buzzard. Well that is a buzzard. Peterson, Mountford and Hollom's *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* is a good place to start. So not quite in the league of Anne Cleaves or Mark Billingham, let alone Ian Rankin. I will read some more on condition that Martin Edwards promises to dispatch Miranda.

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### **Ken says**

As with *Durdles* some four and a half years ago, I too wanted to like this book and the series after learning of their existence from an interview Edwards did with the incomparable Peter Lovesey, and having bought the first six *Lake District* books, probably fortunately second-hand.

So far I've struggled through this one and had to give up on the second, *The Cipher Garden*, after not many pages because the dizzy and quite unstable Miranda was still present and unreformed, although she's probably not much worse than Daniel, who is supposed to be the hero.

It was a struggle to finish *The Coffin Trail* because of the gratuitous groping and bodice-ripping by the major

characters. Presumably Edwards was encouraged by his editor to include all the soap-operatic swooning and pouting by both of the sets of "partners", all of whom are mature enough to know better, but all it does is interfere with the actual mystery. However by page 29 the groping and groaning made their unwelcome returns.

Get on with the mystery Edwards, I felt like shouting and leave the often-offensive and pointless padding out, you're supposed to be writing a murder mystery, not a titillating romance novel.

I'm regretting my purchase already, but shall try the next one in the series in the hope that, as Durdles hoped in 2013, the character Miranda is the victim, along with the DCI's complete dropkick live-in bloke.

At least Edwards may then have permitted the hero to marry the heroine so they can live happily ever after, thus allowing him to try to write a decent whodunit with minimal soap opera.

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### **Lyn Elliott says**

So much going on in relationships here that it's as much a soap as it is a mystery. The two central characters are clearly in relationships that should come unstuck. I wonder how long it will take for them to get together? I quite enjoyed what will become a recurring partnership, I'm sure, between the detective and the historian, and the glimpses of the Lake District countryside.

Edwards could have written this with a television series in mind - it would translate well, especially if the characters' sex lives were implied rather than slickly presented as they are in the book.

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### **Elizabeth says**

This is a decent English mystery set in the Lakes district. There's nothing to make it stand out too much from many other books of its type.

The few interesting bits were

-the main male character's father left his mother when he was 11 or 12 for another woman. His mother was so upset that she made it exceedingly difficult for his father to see his son and daughter. The father, not wanting to make his children's lives part of the war between him and his exwife, gave up. Now the father is dead and the son is interested in knowing about him. And he was a police officer.

-the main female character, is a policewoman who worked for the father. She seems like she could be very interesting but the book did little with her.

I was afraid that the solution to the mystery was turning out to be obvious and ridiculous but there were a couple curveballs at the way end, uncovered by the male lead character.

I would read more in this series. It has potential to get more convoluted and interesting especially since I don't think there'd be a second book without the female lead. The male lead is an historian, not a police officer.

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## **John Lee says**

Do you get these feelings of deja-vu when you are reading?

In this case my very first inkling should have given me a clue but it didnt come for a few chapters until Daniel started to describe the semi derelict cottage they had bought and the practically wilderness of a garden in which it stood. As my read continued more bells started ringing, like when we found that Daniel's deceased father was a policeman and even more when we learned that the partner of his fathers old number two, ran a book shop which Daniel visited.

I checked my Goodreads Account but there was no sign of 'Coffin Trail' (although there was Coffin Road by Peter May but I remembered that and it was quite different.)

Eventually the penny dropped and a further check of my list threw up 'The Cipher Garden' the second in this series. Problem solved and seeing how much I had enjoyed it it allowed me to settle more into this one.

The 10 year old murder that was the centre piece of the tale provides the 'Who-done-it' element. The bleak atmosphere of the Lakeland Fells comes through well in the writing. A good cast of characters are well described and this time I was able to spot the culprit at about 75%.

From my earlier read of the next in the series, I should remember more about the relationships that are starting to flicker to life - but I didnt.

I reckon that I will just have to move straight on to #3, The Arsenic Labyrinth, before I forget what I have just learnt again. May be that will be the 5\* that this so narrowly missed.

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## **Cleo Bannister says**

The title has been chosen for the name given to the tracks which were used to transport bodies from the remote village to one with a graveyard. The symbolism of bodies being strapped to the horses for their final journey is one that resonates throughout this book.

As the book opens we meet Daniel Heard and his girlfriend Miranda buying Tarn Cottage in the fictional village of Brackdale on a whim while visiting the area for a short break. Daniel has tired in his role at Oxford University but it is Miranda who is the driving force behind the move, after all as a freelance journalist she can submit her copy from anywhere. Daniel has visited the area before, the last holiday before his policeman father left home to be with another woman and while there he met, and became friends with, Barrie Gilpin who lived in Tarn Cottage. The cottage is being sold for a song because Barrie Gilpin was widely suspected by police and villagers alike to have murdered a young woman. He died of an accident before the murder was discovered and his poor mother was shunned by the locals.

Meanwhile DI Hannah Scarlett is wondering if she can get her career back on track after a disastrous collapse of a trial compounded by even more disastrous public relations. She finds herself leading a new team set up to examine whether advances in forensics can solve any of the old cases. With a retired detective to assist and her trusty partner they begin leafing through the old files.

As Daniel probes the villager's memories about Barrie, treating this personal quest he begins to ruffle a few feathers to say the least and Miranda is none too pleased. With some loose ends to tie up about his father,

who died without Daniel ever making peace, who was on the original investigation the claustrophobic nature of life in a remote village becomes ever more apparent.

I enjoyed *The Coffin Trail* which was first published in 2004 for being a 'real' police procedural series. There were no clever tricks but straightforward investigations by both Daniel and Hannah Scarlet into what happened to the young woman who was laid out on Sacrifice Stone, it can't be accidental that this was the place for pagan rituals. There are lots of characters within this book and of course being the first in the series, more time is spent giving these a background to be built on later, this gave the first section of the book quite a slow feel, but with solid writing and the fabulous scenery that Martin Edwards captures, keeping me entertained, I certainly didn't have a chance to become bored.

Once the investigation gets underway it appears that the crux of the matter is going to be examining those old alibis rather than the more straightforward DNA results that DI Hannah Scarlett's bosses were hoping for. And we all know what that means, yes my favourite, old secrets and lies will be exposed! There is no doubt at all that plenty of skeletons, of the kind that hide in cupboards, are rattled. As secret after secret is revealed the inhabitants of Brackdale will most likely never be the same again.

After really enjoying the characters of historian Daniel Head and the fairly level-headed and yet not to be pushed around, DI Hannah Scarlett I am now looking forward to reading the second in this series, *The Cipher Garden*

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### **Svein F Hestvaag says**

My first Martin Edwards read, guess it takes a little time to get used to... whatever. Not impressed, but ready for another Lake District mystery anyway. After all, he shares his name with the former Man U chairman :-)

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### **Melissa says**

Having recently returned from a trip to England that included an amazing three days in the Lakes, I fully understand why people fall in love with the area. When Daniel Kind and his partner Miranda impulsively buy a cottage, I started to look at this as a how-to-guide. Okay, not really but the area plays a huge part in the atmosphere of the story.

This is the second in the series that I've read. I'm actually going to re-read *The Arsenic Labyrinth* now that I've read *The Coffin Trail*. The characters are well developed and the story moves along at a leisurely pace without being plodding. There are just the right amount of red herrings, not so many it starts to smell like a fish-fry but enough to keep you guessing. I have to admit I was enjoying the story so much, I really didn't guess who did it.

I really enjoyed this story and look forward to more in the series. I also look forward to getting back to the Lakes!

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## Eric\_W says

Daniel Kind and his new girlfriend have decided to leave their jobs and move to the country, to a country house that Daniel's childhood friend had lived in. Barrie, an autistic child, had been accused of the murder of a young woman whose body had been found on an old, archaeological sacrifice stone. Barrie could never be brought to trial because he had died that same night of the murder by falling down a ravine. Or was it more sinister?

Some lovely descriptive passages. One of my favorites was his homage to bookstores: *He found it without difficulty, one of half a dozen small businesses grouped around a large yard. Most of the units produced and sold crafts of one sort or another: wall hangings decorated with Lakeland themes, pottery and wooden gifts, hand-made greetings cards, and teddy bears with large, beseeching eyes. The bookshop occupied a section of a converted mill, the rear of which overlooked a weir. Rain was rattling on the gravel and although Daniel ran from his car, his sweatshirt was soaked by the time he was inside. The rich aroma of Kenyan coffee blended with the smell of old books and he recognised the andante movement of Hanson's Romantic Symphony coming from discreet speakers near the entrance. The front part of the lower floor was devoted to fiction and the rear to the café, which spilled out on to an elevated area of decking from which on a fine day customers could sit out and watch the beck rushing by.*

Some reviewers have downgraded the book because they didn't like the characters. I'm not quite sure what they might think of Jim Thompson's or the Ripley books. I don't have that perspective. I don't need to like the characters, only to find them interesting. Here, they are intriguing. Admittedly, some of the coincidences were a bit unlikely, e.g., that DCI Hannah Scarlett should have been Daniel Kind's father's sergeant.

BTW, one of the joys of reading on a Kindle is the instant dictionary feature. I had no idea what a "beck" and a "weir" were. Respectively, they are "a brook, especially a swiftly running stream with steep banks" and "a low dam that is built across a river to raise the water level, divert the water, or control its flow." Both parochial northern England definitions. Nice words.

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## Charlotte says

Eh. This entire series is about two people who are so clearly in the wrong relationships from the very first page that reading about their dumb love-life choices for a couple hundred pages just becomes annoying. Also, would a series of horrible murders really take place in a tiny town in the Lake District in England? I couldn't suspend my disbelief long enough to get invested. Which was too bad, because I liked the main characters when they weren't being doormats for their shitty significant others.

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## Jan says

This is the initial book that launched a series. A first book is always difficult as it appraises the reader of all the background however Martin Edwards carries it off wonderfully. A cold case that involves someone Daniel Kind once knew is reopened to coincide with his move to the Lake District, DCI Hannah Scarlett is in charge of looking into this case, she had originally worked with Daniels father. Daniel and his girlfriend Miranda are now living in the cottage where Barrie Gilpin lived, an autistic youngster who was suspected of the murder and also found dead. I really love Martin Edwards books and have more to read.



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## **Gerry says**

I do enjoy very much Martin Edwards' introductions to the British Crime Library Series of mysteries so when I spotted this title, particularly as it had a Lake District setting, I thought I would give it a try. Unfortunately it was not the success that I hoped for as it proved rather dull in places and the characters were somehow rather flat and lifeless.

The storyline was just about okay in that Daniel Kind and his new partner, the vapid Miranda, relocated to the Lake District to get away from the hustle and bustle of life down south and they purchased Tarn Cottage in Brackdale, once lived in by the Gilpin family, whose son, Barrie, was suspected of a murder some years previously.

Ironically Daniel's father was the lead detective investigating the crime but by that time he had left his wife and children for a new lady, so Daniel knew little about his father's later life. Daniel had met Barrie on his holidays in the Lake District and although Barrie was universally assumed to have been the murderer, Daniel was not convinced that he was a killer and nothing could be proved because shortly after the lady's body was found, Barrie supposedly fell down a ravine and was killed.

Daniel decides to do some digging and his investigations lead him to meet Detective Chief Inspector Hannah Scarlett, who had just been appointed to a newly formed cold case review team. Naturally he approached her, both to find out what her intentions were regarding the Gilpin case and also to learn about his father for whom she worked, and their relationship is an interesting one without developing into anything serious. But the rest of the characters are nothing exciting and it is difficult to empathise with any of them.

Rumours in the village abound but one prime suspect comes to light and it looked as though Barrie would be exonerated, particularly when another body is discovered. But, as they say, there was a twist in the tail but for this tale it was not at all convincing ... indeed, where did it suddenly come from? I just could not get it.

The Lake District ambience was the saving grace in a way for that kept my interest but as a mystery and the first in a series it disappointed and, although I have volume two, it will be some time before I give it a try for I understand that Daniel, probably the best of the characters, his partner plus Hannah Scarlett and her nondescript partner are once again the investigating team.

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## **Steph (loves water) says**

This wasn't so bad. I started out not really liking the protagonists, but through some great character development, the author redeemed himself. I will most likely read the next in this series.

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## **Carol says**

### **Historical research vs police detection.. are they really that different**

Oxford history professor celeb gives it all up to move to lake country with his girlfriend to "get away from it

all". But history has a way of catching up with you. First of all They buy the home of his former boyhood pal who has since been accused of murder. Not only that but his father that abandoned him and his family when he was a child set up shop in the local police station and although now dead, Dan some holes he needs resolved. Ever curious as a history researcher tends to be here opens some wounds asking his questions both about his father and his boyhood pal. The story twists about with a few more bodies and skeletons uncovered. Interested me enough to look into next books of series....

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### **Patricia Gulley says**

This whole series is fabulous. Read them all.

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### **Lindsay says**

A mystery set in the Lake District, featuring historian Daniel Kind, who leaves his position as a historian at Oxford and relocates with his new partner Miranda to Brackdale, where he once spent his holidays as a child and met a friend there named Barrie Gilpin. Daniel's father Ben left Daniel and his sister and mother when Daniel was young, Ben going off to live with another woman in the Lake District. Daniel is curious now to find out more about who his late father really was, what sort of man he was, from his former colleagues in the police force, and from one in particular, DCI Hannah Scarlett, who admired and worked closely with Ben. Coincidentally, Hannah has been tasked with working on cold cases, leading the Cold Case Review Team, looking back into local crimes that were never solved, and one of these involves the murder of a young woman on a local landmark, the pagan Sacrifice Stone. This murder was assumed by most people at the time to have been carried out by Barrie Gilpin, who was subsequently found dead nearby on the very same night. But his guilt has never been proven, and it was a case that Ben Kind questioned. Now, thanks to a tip off in an anonymous phone call, Hannah is looking into it once again, and with Ben's son Daniel on the scene and also believing in Barrie's innocence, there is a determination to uncover the truth behind the secrets in this small close-knit community. However, naturally there are those for whom the past best lies well hidden, and who don't welcome this digging around to unearth secrets long buried.

I was excited about reading this mystery, as it is the first in a series set in the Lake District, my favourite place in the UK, where I have spent many a happy week. It's a good read and the characters are introduced slowly and built up nicely. In particular, the meetings between Hannah and Daniel, as Daniel can't resist getting involved with the investigation, and the story builds to a dramatic, tense conclusion. I believe there are currently five books in this series so far, so there are plenty more cases to read about involving Daniel and DCI Scarlett, and it will be interesting to see how Daniel's relationship with Miranda will fare, and whether they will both be satisfied with lakeland village life in the long-term. Looking forward to reading more of these thrillers soon, perhaps next time I am in the Lakes!

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### **LJ says**

THE COFFIN TRAIL (Amateur Sleuth-England-Cont) – Okay

Edwards, Martin – Standalone

Poisoned Pen Press, 2004- Hardcover

Daniel Kind and his lover, Miranda, buy a house in the Lake Country; a house once lived in by a boy

accused of murder, who was found dead of an accident. Daniel's policeman father investigated the case, but Daniel never believed the boy was guilty. Now Daniel is asking questions and causes the police to take a new look at the murder. The locals are not happy, particularly when someone else dies.

\*\*\* The basic story, the descriptions of the Lake District and the overall writing were enjoyable. But this was offset by lack of character development, being irritated by the relationships of the two main couples, and the coincidences. The scene exposing the killer just wasn't realistic. I found myself having trouble caring about the story or the characters. It wasn't a terrible read, but there are many better out there.

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