

Colin Dexter

The author and his work



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Colin Dexter was born in 1930, in Stamford, Lincolnshire, in the east of England. His full name is Norman Colin Dexter. Colin's parents were poor, and they had both left school at the age of twelve. But Colin and his elder brother worked very hard at school, and both of them later attended Cambridge University. Before he went to university, Colin was in the British Army for two years. He did his National Service. At that time, nearly all young British men had to go into the Army, the Navy or the Air Force for two years. In 1950, Colin became a student at Cambridge University, where he studied Classics – the Latin and Greek languages and Ancient Philosophy. He received his degree in 1953.

Oxford

From 1954 to 1966, Colin Dexter was a schoolteacher. He taught Classics in several schools in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire. Then in 1966, he moved to the city of Oxford, where he has lived ever since. His job in Oxford was with the Oxford Local Examinations Board. This organisation prepared examinations for pupils at schools. These examinations were usually taken when students were sixteen and eighteen years old. If they passed the exams they were able to get good jobs, or to go on to universities, when they left school. Colin was an examiner for this board. He examined students' Latin, Greek and English papers.

In 1973, Colin Dexter and his family – he is married with one son and one daughter – were on holiday in a small house in Wales. The weather was very wet and Colin was bored. He

read two novels about crime and detection. He thought that they were poor novels and he thought that he could easily write better crime novels himself. So he started to write one. He wrote about Inspector Morse, a police detective who worked in Oxford. Colin's first novel about Morse – *Last Bus to Woodstock* – was published in 1975 and since then he has written twelve more novels about Morse and his assistant, Sergeant Lewis, as well as some short stories. All these novels and stories have been made into very successful television films and there have been other television films about these characters in stories written by other writers. Thirty-three television films have been made in the UK by the television company, Carlton Productions. In each of them, John Thaw acted the part of Morse and Kevin Whately acted the part of Lewis. Colin Dexter himself enjoyed acting very small parts in these films.

Dexter and Morse

Colin Dexter often writes about the kinds of people and the places he has known in his work. For example, many of the people he writes about are teachers and examiners. Most of the places he writes about in Oxford are real places. And the author sometimes gives the characters in his books features – tastes, illnesses, etc – which are connected with his own life. For example, Colin does not hear well. He suffers from deafness and he has become an expert on lipreading. Lipreading is a way for deaf people to understand what someone says to them. They watch that person's lips very carefully and guess what words the person is saying from the shapes their mouth makes. In the novel, *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn*, one of the characters is murdered because, although he is deaf, he has found out about a crime by reading someone's lips. Most of the characters in this novel work at an examination board in Oxford. Although this is not a real examination board, Colin's experience as an examiner for the Oxford Local Examinations Board was useful to him when he was writing the novel.

In later life, Colin Dexter has suffered from the illness called diabetes. And Inspector Morse has that illness too in the last few books of the series. In the final novel of the series, *The*

Remorseful Day, Morse dies. The inspector's diabetes was one of the reasons for his death. Morse and Colin Dexter like many of the same things. Both enjoy crossword puzzles – Colin has twice been a British crossword champion. Both enjoy drinking beer in pubs and hotels. Both enjoy the operas of Richard Wagner and the

poetry of A.E. Housman. But Colin Dexter is a much kinder and more generous man than his fictional detective.

Colin Dexter has won various awards for his crime/detection writing and in 2000 he was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE).



Oxford, England.

The Inspector Morse novels are:

- 1975 *Last Bus to Woodstock*
- 1976 *Last Seen Wearing*
- 1977 *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn*
- 1979 *Service of All the Dead*
- 1981 *The Dead of Jericho*
- 1983 *The Riddle of the Third Mile*
- 1986 *The Secret of Annexe 3*
- 1989 *The Wench is Dead*
- 1991 *The Jewel That Was Ours*

- 1992 *The Way Through the Woods*
- 1994 *The Daughters of Cain*
- 1996 *Death is Now My Neighbour*
- 1999 *The Remorseful Day*

A book of short stories, *Morse's Greatest Mystery and Other Stories*, was published in 1993.

(For a list of Colin Dexter's stories that have been simplified for the Macmillan Guided Readers Series, see a copy of the current Readers catalogue.)