

## **The Notting Hill Mystery**, Once A Week, 27 December 1862

The Notting Hill Mystery (1862–63) is an English-language detective novel written by "Charles Felix", a pseudonym, with illustrations by George du Maurier (grandfather of Daphne du Maurier). Several critics have suggested that Charles Warren Adams is the author's real identity. The novel was revolutionary in its techniques and style and has been called the first detective novel.

It was first published as an eight-part serial in Once A Week magazine beginning on 29 November 1862, then as a single-volume novel in 1863 by Bradbury & Evans (publishers of Once A Week).

The editors of the magazine said the manuscript was submitted to them anonymously under the pseudonym of "Charles Felix". In 1952 William Buckler identified Charles Warren Adams (1833–1903) as the author of The Notting Hill Mystery and in January 2011, Paul Collins — a writer, editor and academic — writing in The New York Times Book Review, came to the same conclusion. Adams, a lawyer, was the sole proprietor of Saunders, Otley & Co., which published another book by "Charles Felix" called Velvet Lawn. Collins bases his theory on a number of lines of evidence, including an explicit reference to Felix's identity as Adams in a 14 May 1864 "Literary Gossip" column of The Manchester Times which read "It is understood that 'Velvet Lawn,' by Charles Felix, the new novel announced by Messrs. Saunders, Otley & Co., is by Mr. Charles Warren Adams, now the sole representative of that firm."

A number of critics, including Julian Symons, a crime writer and poet, and Collins, believe it to be the first modern detective novel, but it has been overshadowed by works by Wilkie Collins and Émile Gaboriau who usually receive that accolade even though they came later. The novel contains a number of innovative features, such as the main character presenting evidence as his own findings through diary entries, family letters, depositions, chemical analysts report, crime scene map.[2] These techniques would not become common until the 1920s, Symons said it "quite bowled me over" how far ahead of its time it was.

### **PLOT**

Source documents compiled by insurance investigator Ralph Henderson are used to build a case against Baron "R\_\_\_", who is suspected of murdering his wife. The baron's wife died from drinking a bottle of acid, apparently while sleepwalking in her husband's private laboratory. Henderson's suspicions are raised when he learns that the baron recently had purchased five life insurance policies for his wife. As Henderson investigates the case, he discovers not one but three murders. Although the baron's guilt is clear to the reader even from the outset, how he did it remains a mystery. Eventually this is revealed, but how to catch him becomes the final challenge; he seems to have committed the perfect crime.

The Notting Hill Mystery, serialized in Once a Week (original edition, illustrated), available through the Internet Archive (retrieved 10 January 2011):

Section 1 (Once a Week, Vol. 7, pg. 617, 29 November 1862)

Section 2 (Once a Week, Vol. 7, pg. 645, 6 December 1862)

Section 3 (Once a Week, Vol. 7, pg. 673, 13 December 1862)

Section 4 (Once a Week, Vol. 7, pg. 701, 20 December 1862)

Section 5 (Once a Week, Vol. 8, pg. 1, 27 December 1862)

Section 6 (Once a Week, Vol. 8, pg. 29, 3 January 1863)

Section 7 (Once a Week, Vol. 8, pg. 57, 10 January 1863)

Section 8 (Once a Week, Vol. 8, pg. 85, 17 January 1863)

Lewis, Steve (19 December 2010). Norris, J.F. (19 December 2010). "Reviewed by J. F. Norris: Charles Felix – The Notting Hill Mystery". Mystery File (blog at [mysteryfile.com](http://mysteryfile.com)). Retrieved 10 January 2011.