

Teesdale u3a Monthly Meeting – September 2025

Forensics to Crime Fiction

Susan described her personal journey from studying chemistry at university, working in forensic analysis and then becoming a writer of crime fiction. Her first job was a short-term contract at Imperial College, London, as a research assistant, working on a small (100 KW) nuclear reactor. This led to a permanent appointment and over several years, she worked her way up to become a professor, specialising in forensic analysis using radio chemistry. She also took on consultancy work which involved several high-profile crime investigations. She quoted cases where soil analysis using mass spectrometry was used to convict and to acquit suspects of crime.

She was asked by Wiley, the American publishing Company, to write a textbook which was then published in hardback. Later, she bought the copyright and republished the book in soft back. She claimed it was easier to write a textbook than a novel as it was factually based and didn't need much imagination. Several walking trips to the Yorkshire Dales with her family provided the inspiration for her to try her hand at writing. Her first novel, *Corpse Way*, set in the Yorkshire Dales, became the first of the Mills Sanderson Series, with Millie, as a forensic archaeologist. There have now been 13 books in the series, all set in the Dales, although Susan prefers to make the setting as anonymous as possible. When she is writing a novel, she likes to outline roughly how the story and the characters will develop, although she is not always sure where the story will end. For example, Nige, one of the main characters in a story had issues and was to become the villain, but in the end, Susan became attached to him and didn't maintain the original character. She does not write full time, and it usually takes her about a year to complete a book. She has now begun a new series about a Regional Unsolved Crime Unit, featuring DI Miriam Abbott and centred around the town of Hawes.

Most of the audience could empathise with Susan's journey and there was a long queue of members eager to buy one of the author's signed copies.

The next meeting is on the 23rd of October when Richard Annis pays a return visit, talking this time about 'Crowtrees, Bowburn: A Lost Rural Industry'

Ian Reid
26/09/2025