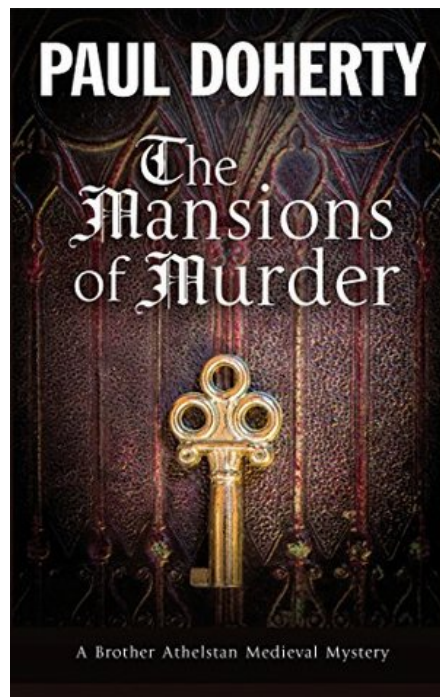




The Mansions of Murder

Paul Doherty

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The Mansions of Murder Paul Doherty

A murdered priest, a missing body, stolen treasure: Brother Athelstan tackles his most challenging investigation to date.

October, 1381. Brother Athelstan is summoned to the church of St Benet's in Queenhithe to investigate the murder of a priest. Parson Reynaud has been found stabbed to death inside his own locked church. Other disturbing discoveries include an empty coffin and a ransacked money chest. Who would commit murder inside a holy church? Who would spirit away a corpse the night before the funeral – and who would be brave enough to steal treasure belonging to the most feared gangleader in London?

Meanwhile, the death of one of Athelstan's parishioners reveals a shocking secret. Could there be a connection to the murdered priest of St Benet's?

Athelstan's investigations will lure him into the dark and dangerous world of the gangmaster known as The Flesher, whose influence has a frighteningly long reach ...

The Mansions of Murder Details

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Author : Paul Doherty

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From Reader Review The Mansions of Murder for online ebook

M.J. says

I received a free copy from Netgalley.

I've not read a book by this author for a very long time. I used to read the Egyptian mysteries and actually credit them with allowing me to read and relax again after a particularly difficult period in my life. As such, I was very keen to read this novel when given the option.

The portrayal of London is very dark and foreboding, and for a time I was worried I would be annoyed by the slight repetitiveness and bleakness of it all. However, as the impossibility of the murders starts to be solved, Brother Athelstan firmly grasps hold of events and the sequence of events that he discovers is intriguing and deeply satisfying.

I don't think this will be the only Brother Athelstan book I read, and I'm pleased to see that there are many more for me to indulge in.

A thoroughly enjoyable tale set in the England of 1381, skillfully told.

Ray Moon says

Brother Athelstan and Cranston Are In the Thick of Murder, Theft, and Treason Right In London

This is the 18th novel in the Brother Athelstan Medieval Mystery Series, and the second that I have read. The novel opens in a seedy part of London that is filthy, smelly and run by a master criminal known as the Flesher. In a local church, a priest and a military man in the service of the Earl of Arundel were found each with a single stab wound to the heart and no sight of a struggle, the corpse of the Flesher's mother, whose coffin was locked up in the church the previous evening was missing and replaced with a ransom note, and a vault that requires two keys, one in the priest's possession and the other in Flesher's possession, was open and empty. Brother Athelstan and Cranston, Lord High Coroner of London, investigate. The main storyline takes off from here with the situation becoming much more complex as the Flesher's ties to this church and its cemetery become revealed. The events of 18 years earlier when Cranston was in charge of ferrying some precious jewels, known as the Twelve Apostles, and their container, known as the Rose Casket, were stolen, and Cranston almost lost his life.

The B-storyline is very rich as the reader learns more about Cranston's life and how it was affected by the events of 18 years earlier. The relationship between the man of violence, Cranston, and the man of the cloth, Athelstan, is so comfortable with each other and share very personal aspects of their lives with each other. These two characters became more real to me as I read this novel.

There are not any explicit sex scenes but some implied sex. The expletives are all medieval equivalents, so there should not be any problems for persons sensitive to foul language. Descriptive violence is described, and some as it occurs. In my opinion it is not excessive and is just reflective of the time. There is much use of medieval terms. I recommend reading this novel on a Kindle with easy access to the Kindle's dictionary and searching the Internet. I used both routinely. Lastly, while this is the 18th novel in this series, I did not find anything that depended upon the previous novels, so first time readers should not shy away from reading this novel first.

Use of Medieval words while providing much authenticity and period flavor to the story did take up time searching for the meaning of these words. One distractor for me was the first part the novel that consisted of Cranston describing the events of 18 years earlier in discussion with Athelstan. All of this information was

very important to the development of the storyline, but, for me, it was slow, and my interest wandered.

While I only reward novels with high star ratings when they capture and maintain my interest throughout the novel. As mentioned above, there was a significant part of the novel during which this was not true. On the positive side, the depiction of medieval London using the terms of the age was so enjoyable that in my opinion makes up for this issue. I give this novel a five star rating. If you read this series, it is a must. If you have not, this novel should be a good introduction into the series.

I have received a free kindle version of this novel through NetGalley from Severn House with a request for an honest, unbiased review. I wish to thank Severn House for the opportunity to read this novel early.

Annie says

Originally published on my blog: Nonstop Reader

This is the 18th entry in the Brother Athelstan series by Paul Doherty from Severn House. Due out on 1st December, 2017, it's a very well researched historical mystery set in the late autumn of 1381 in London. After the great revolt was put down earlier the same year, the uneasy peace was held by private armies, gangs of ruffians called 'riffers', and the standing army. A functional civil government had more or less been re-established and the parliament had been recalled to London.

Brother Althelstan is called in to investigate the perplexing 'locked room' mystery of a priest and a visiting retainer who are found dead in a church. Not only are both men found murdered inside the locked church, but a woman's corpse is missing and a treasure chest is opened and emptied. The missing dead woman is the recently deceased mother of the most notorious of the riffers, Simon Makepeace, a.k.a. the Flesher.

Having read many of Mr. Doherty's other books, I was expecting a well crafted mystery. Although it is the 18th book in the series, it had been some years since I had read any of the other books in this series and it works perfectly well as a standalone mystery. The background for the characters is presented in a way that manages to convey all the necessary backstory without spoon-feeding readers already familiar with the setting and characters.

The plotting and dialogue are very well crafted and the entire book is beautifully researched and historically correct. I felt that the dialogue succeeded quite well in walking the fine line between being comprehensible to a modern audience and still maintaining a period flavor.

There are many subplots and subtly interwoven stories here and I wondered how Doherty would manage to tie them together in a lean 240 pages, but he does manage it (and satisfyingly). I also really enjoyed the development of Athelstan's friend, Sir John Cranston, the Lord High Coroner of London. He's by far one of my favorite characters (and I wish he would get his own series).

All in all, a really nicely written and satisfying period mystery; can we ever really have enough of those?

Four stars

Disclosure: I received an ARC at no cost from the author/publisher.

Melisende d'Outremer says

It has been quite a while since I have picked up a "Brother Athelstan" mystery, and this one for me, I could take or leave it.

Don't get me wrong, Doherty spins an impressive mystery here, but I felt he crammed too many "side stories" into the first few chapters, which had me wondering where this tale was heading, and what was relevant and what was not. Yes, it is all tied up neatly towards the end as the multiple tales begin to merge and coalesce into one.

" ... murder in all its gruesome forms, a daily occurrence ..."

A cast of characters (even if at the end) and map of the area would not have gone astray.

Geoff Boxell says

Another excellent murder mystery for Brother Athelstan to solve with all the usual twists and turns. The answer to who did what is hidden in plain sight, but the clues are there.

It was good to see some of Athelstan's parishioners back in the tale.

Paul Doherty never fails to write an entertaining tale.

Susan in NC says

4.5 stars - Athelstan and Sir Jack never let me down! Neither does Doherty; I thought once the Peasant's Revolt was brutally repressed, the long series of medieval mysteries would wind down or lose my interest.

But no, long-time fans are rewarded with another gripping mystery starring our favorite coroner, Sir Jack Cranston, and his assistant Brother Athelstan of St. Erconwald's parish, Southwark.

This time, the action centers on three dead men found in St. Benet's parish, a missing corpse and fortune, and a shocking discovery after the death of a widow woman in Athelstan's parish. No spoilers, but the two mysteries also involve a notorious gang boss known as the Flesher, treason and the long-missing Rose Casket containing the Twelve Apostles, precious stones worth a king's ransom stolen during a brutal attack on Sir Jack and his royal troops responsible for guarding the treasure as it was transported down the Thames on a barge almost twenty years previous. As always, Doherty gives Athelstan and Jack an intricate puzzle to solve and an exciting climactic revelation of the guilty party! I didn't see this one until the last part of the book, but the author plays fair and the clues are present.

Great fun for fans, and recommended to those who enjoy well-researched historical mysteries.

Patricia says

Brother Athelstan is called to St Benets, the scene of a series of heinous crimes. Not just a double murder but also the theft of church property and the desecration of a coffin of an old lady....her body is also missing. Things become even murkier when it's discovered that the goods taken actually belonged to one of the most notorious and feared gangleaders, The Flesher who also happens to be the son of the missing dead woman. Who would dare cross him? And if Athelstan didn't have enough to contend with the death of one of his own parishioners reveals a shocking secret that seems to link to the very crimes he is investigating.

So I've struggled on how to rate this because it is a good book....a very good book in fact but when requesting it I didn't realise it was the eighteenth (EIGHTEENTH!!) in a series. Sometimes it doesn't matter coming in this late but I felt quite disconnected from the characters and I think that was because I hadn't read the other books. It works as a standalone on most levels but I felt I was missing out on the history of the characters and so not always seeing the full picture. But that's not the fault of the author - that would be mine for totally missing this series which really is my cup of tea. For me it's what Agatha Christie would have written if she'd forayed into historical fiction. If I had my time again I would not have read this....untill I'd read the first seventeen anyway.

I received this from Netgalley for an unbiased review.

Judy Lesley says

Thank you to NetGalley, Severn House and Crème de la Crime for a digital copy of this galley.

The Great Revolt has been smashed and you would think things would be more quiet in London in the year of Our Lord 1381. Perish the thought. When one group of evil doers leaves the scene another quickly takes its place. In this instance we have the gangs who have divided up the territory and make life a misery for the ordinary folk. The Sycamores, led by Simon Makepeace (also known as "The Flesher" - and if you let your imagination go you will realize what he does to his victims) is one of the largest and worst of these gangs. Makepeace rules his territory with a bloody fist and has no problem with bringing down death and destruction to any who stand in his way. How is The Flesher going to react when Brother Athelstan and Sir John Cranston, Lord High Coroner of London begin to chip away at his empire?

This is another well written adventure, number 18 in the series which pairs the Benedictine Friar with the Coroner of London to solve cases where what is going on beneath the surface may be political or criminal or a combination of both. This story involves Sir John personally because of something which happened eighteen years previously. The secrets have remained hidden so well many might have thought the incident never happened. Now the layers of lies and treachery are being peeled back and exposing the truth. I especially enjoyed this one because it has a locked room mystery and those are favorites of mine. There are also many seemingly smaller mysteries that I wondered if author Paul Doherty would be able to tie up. Why did I even bother to wonder?

If you are a fan of historical mystery novels placed in this time period, you know you will be wading through all the filth, muck and gore that was the great city of London. I don't enjoy those parts, but they certainly do set the tone for what that world was like. Brother Athelstan and Sir John are two of my favorite mystery duos and this book in the series was a satisfying read.

Margaret says

Paul Doherty's most recent Brother Athelstan is a classic locked room mystery. Something he does very well.

Athelstan and Sir Jack Cranston must work out who killed the priest of St Benet's Queenshithe, and how it ties in with the legacy of a deceased parishoner of Athelstan's.

After month's of fretting about the death of a parishoner, because over the years I have developed a fondness for a number of the character's, I shouldn't have worried. The parishoner was a very minor one who was mostly mentioned in passing in earlier books.

A gripping thriller, which, unlike previous books, has very few humourous moments to lighten the atmosphere.

The scene with Pike and Watkins in the tavern with Jack Cranston and Athelstan has raised some interesting questions for the future.

Can't quite bring myself to give it 5 stars, because it doesn't reach my bench mark of "The Great Revolt" as being an extraordinary Athelstan novel.

Eustacia Tan says

2.5 stars

I requested this from NetGalley because I really like the Shardlake series and the blurb for this historical mystery reminded me of it.

The Mansions of Murder follows Brother Athelstan as he investigates a most perplexing mystery. First, there's a locked room (locked Church) murder of two strong men. And then two preserved bodies are found in the house of a recently deceased, upstanding member of his parish. The mysteries seem unconnected at first, but as Brother Athelstan and coroner, Sir John Cranston investigate, the signs point towards a gang leader nicknamed 'the Flesher', who also happens to be someone Cranston hates due to their history.

What I liked about this book was its descriptive language. I could picture the grimness of medieval England through the prose and it is definitely not a place that I would like to visit.

However, the language can sometimes work against the story. It was so descriptive that it took me a very long time to be able to form an impression of Brother Athelstan and Sir John Cranston characters. I even got lost in the text a few times. Plus, there was a very long conversation (almost a monologue) to reveal the backstory which I thought was a bit heavy-handed.

I admit that while I understood the ending, I still don't understand how they got to the ending. Perhaps it's because I got overwhelmed by the language, and while I have a very good sense of how England was in the 14th century, I don't have a good sense of how the story flowed. This is probably suited for fans of historical fiction who value setting. And I suppose I should have started from the first book, rather than the jumping in midway.

Disclaimer: I received a free copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for a free and honest review.

This review was first posted at Inside the mind of a Bibliophile

Ashley | ashleyinwonderland says

****I would like to thank Severn House Digital and NetGalley for a copy of this book for an honest review.****

This was my first Paul Doherty novel and I can confidently say that it will not be my last. Before reading *The Mansions of Murder* I had not given much thought to the historical mystery genre, I am ashamed to admit. But now, having finished Doherty's eighteenth instalment in his *Sorrowful Mysteries of Brother Athelstan* series I am excited to delve deeper into both Doherty's prolific bibliography as well as other titles within the genre.

The Mansions of Murder is gripping from the first page, spinning an exciting and intricate web of deceit and murder that left me guessing until the final pages. The stars of the book, Brother Athelstan, a Dominican friar at St Erconwald's in Southwark and coroner Sir John Cranston, find themselves solving a peculiar double homicide and the strange case of a missing corpse. The story takes them throughout the London area of Queenhithe where they meet a colourful cast of characters who help to lead the pair towards solving the book's numerous dark mysteries.

Doherty aggressively pulls the reader into the twisting and grotesque medieval streets of Queenhithe, highlighting the sacrilege and horrors of the damned community. Not for the faint of heart, Doherty's London is one of the grimmest I have ever read. Each location visited by Athelstan and Cranston was described in great detail, often spanning multiple paragraphs and even pages. While this is a writing style I do enjoy, I could see it being a bit of a hindrance for someone who is looking for the plot to move forward more quickly.

But it is because of these details that Doherty's novel shone. I studied medieval art history for my Master's degree and I appreciate that the author chose not to romanticise the medieval period and instead highlighted the less appealing and more problematic aspects of a medieval society. This book is anything but an aesthetically pleasing tour of a time period often interpreted through fairytales of heroic knights and mythical creatures. Doherty's London is harsh and real, and exactly what makes *The Mansions of Murder* so gripping and memorable.

The mystery itself was well plotted. A number of times I was certain I knew the perpetrator only to second guess myself a few pages later. Doherty gives substantial backstory, highlighting characters who are both important to the story as well as a few red herrings. The author constructed an intelligent and plausible murder mystery that had me convinced that nearly any of the characters could be guilty of the various brutal crimes.

My only critique is that the characters of Athelstan and Cranston were enjoyable but a tad flat. Throughout the book, I felt little emotional connection to them. Because of the nature of the narrative, I was more focused on the plot than the wellbeing of the protagonists. But while reflecting on *The Mansions of Murder*, I found that without strong character development from the main characters the book felt a bit empty. I assume that their character development evolves continuously throughout the series, or perhaps this element of storytelling is simply absent in order to focus more on solving gruesome medieval crimes. Either way, I still very much enjoyed this book but I did miss the chance of getting to know Athelstan and Cranston a bit better (more reason to read other books in the series, I suppose!). Having said that, *The Mansions of Murder* can definitely be read as a standalone without having read other entries in the series as it does read like an episode in a long series of similar stories.

Criticism aside, I must applaud Doherty's portrayal of the medieval period and his knowledge of both city planning and church decor. I am incredibly impressed by the way he brought 1381 London to life in such an unapologetically brutal way and how his murder mystery kept me guessing until the bitter end. I'd recommend The Mansions of Murder to anyone in search of a story set in Medieval London as well as anyone seeking a murder mystery that steps away from the popular Victorian London trope. I'm very happy to give The Mansions of Murder four shining stars and I look forward to picking up more of Doherty's books in the future.

Breakaway Reviewers says

A grisly tale in a historical setting.

I love historical thrillers and 'The Mansions Of Murder' is a grisly tale set in London in 1381. The author paints an extremely dismal picture of London, showing how it certainly must have been the survival of the fittest, as the streets were overrun by vicious gangs, thieves, whores and murderers. Medieval London was a hideous hell-hole overrun with rats and criminals.

I gather that this is one of many tales featuring Brother Athelstan and Coroner Sir John Cranston. The unlikely duo has solved previous mysteries together. They definitely have plenty to unravel this time, including a locked church murder mystery, embalmed bodies, missing jewels and coins, plus a vanishing corpse. The reader is also made aware of the most violent gang leader Simon Makepiece, commonly known as the 'Flesher.' He controls his band of "riffers."

I felt that Paul Doherty has researched this medieval period extremely well so that the reader becomes absorbed in the flavour of the plots and subplots. It makes you glad to be living in our modern times! I was kept guessing as to the perpetrator of the multiple crimes, which is always a good sign, as I like to be kept guessing until the bitter end.

Galadriel.

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review.

eyes.2c says

'A bubbling broth of murder, theft, blasphemy and sacrilege.'

Once again Doherty plunged me into the colorful firmament of medieval London of 1381. The starkness of an age where danger encroaches from every side is vividly portrayed. Doherty's descriptions of the hanging fields and the dark depths of the London alleyways are worthy of an Hieronymus Bosch painting. London Hades is a fitting title given the area where the action takes place.

This time Athelstan and his friend Sir John Cranston, Lord High Coroner of London, otherwise known as 'Sir Jack,' are enmeshed in the dark doings of the gangs of London.

Simon Makepeace, the 'Flesher', leader of 'London's most vicious and notorious [gang, the] riffers', an abhorrent person as his moniker surmises, and his minions are unstoppable, backed as they are by Lord Arundel. When the bodies of a priest, Parson Reynaud, and two others are discovered mysteriously slain within the church of St Benet's, the Flesher's mother's body stolen from her coffin, and the Flesher's treasure

taken from the church's iron-bound strongbox, Athelstan is pressed into service.

Things appear to harken back to when the Twelve Apostles (wonderful gem stones) in their Rose Casket were stolen from the King's barge some eighteen years ago. They were never seen again. The French are taking a keen interest.

Meanwhile another mystery linked to a recent death and a strange discovery in Athelstan's parish of St Erconwald's sits patiently in Athelstan's mind.

Court politics as always are always lurking in the background.

A mystery that once again puzzles and delights. I did not see the ending coming until the full disclosure was given.

A NetGalley ARC

Elaine Tomasso says

I would like to thank Netgalley and Severn House/Creme de la Crime for an advance copy of The Mansions of Murder, the 18th medieval mystery to feature Brother Athelstan.

London 1381 is a dangerous place. Athelstan is studying two embalmed bodies found in the cellar of a dead parishioner when he is asked to assist Sir John Cranston, the King's Coroner, at a murder scene in a church where the priest and one of Lord Arundel's entourage have been murdered and a corpse and a large amount of gold have been stolen, all in a locked church. It's all very puzzling but to make matters worse the gold belongs to The Flesher, a cruel and vicious criminal who holds undisputed sway in the area through terror and intimidation, and the corpse is that of his mother.

I enjoyed The Mansions of Murder. The plotting is intricate and absorbing and it held my attention throughout. I admit to not having a clue as to the perpetrator or how he managed to get out of a locked church. The solutions are both clever and ingenious.

Aside from the clever plotting Mr Doherty excels at atmosphere. I felt as if I could literally smell the slums and sense the danger as I walked through London with Athelstan and Sir John. The squalor, poverty and desperation are all too evident as this is the London of everyday people. The political machinations of the rich and powerful, the mainstay of much historical fiction, are more background noise than a prominent feature. I have no doubt that the viciousness of The Flesher and his riffers is historically accurate but it sent a shiver down my back. Strange when we are confronted with man's inhumanity to man on a daily basis.

Brother Athelstan and Sir John make a good team. Like all the best teams they are complete opposites. Athelstan is quiet, reflective, humble and very sharp, the brains of the operation whereas Sir John is bluff, hearty, well connected and has a great zest for life and while no slouch he can be regarded as the brawn. I like Sir John's open, honest hatred for the Flesher as it is very well done.

The Mansions of Murder is a good read which I have no hesitation in recommending.

Joyce says

4 stars

It's 1381 in London and King Richard II sits on the throne aided by his relative John of Gaunt. The city teems with violence and filth. The underworld is ruled by a vicious man named Simon Makepeace also known as "The Flesher."

Parson Reynaud is found in his locked church by Master Cripplegate, Curate Coates and Martha, the parish housekeeper. He has been murdered. Not far away is the body of another man, also murdered. Also the body that was in the displayed coffin was taken and a mysterious note was left behind – a ransom note. The church was also robbed of an amount of hidden money which belonged to The Flesher.

After making a gruesome discovery in the basement of a deceased parishioner's basement, Brother Athlestan is summoned to St. Benet's, the site of the murders begins to investigate the killing of the two men.

This is a well written and plotted novel. The use of the language is beautiful and very descriptive. The story flows smoothly, if a little slow at times. Brother Athlestan is a very kindly and compassionate man who enjoys mysteries and the opportunity to use his detection skills. This is my first Paul Doherty novel and I immediately went to Amazon to check out his other books.

I want to thank NetGalley and Severn House for forwarding to me a copy of this book to enjoy and read.
