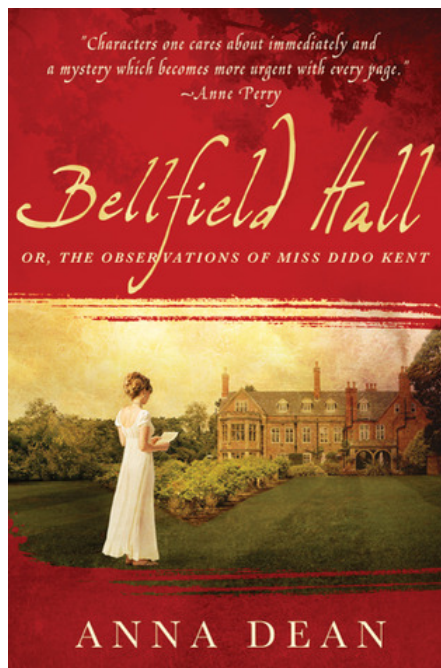




Bellfield Hall

Anna Dean

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1805. An engagement party is taking place for Mr Richard Montague, son of wealthy landowner Sir Edgar Montague, and his fiancée Catherine. During a dance with his beloved, a strange thing happens: a man appears at Richard's shoulder and appears to communicate something to him without saying a word. Instantly breaking off the engagement, he rushes off to speak to his father, never to be seen again. Distraught with worry, Catherine sends for her spinster aunt, Miss Dido Kent, who has a penchant for solving mysteries. Catherine pleads with her to find her fiancé and to discover the truth behind his disappearance. It's going to take a lot of logical thinking to untangle the complex threads of this multi-layered mystery, and Miss Dido Kent is just the woman to do it.

Bellfield Hall Details

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Author : Anna Dean

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From Reader Review Bellfield Hall for online ebook

Barb says

I enjoyed this first novel with Miss Dido Kent investigating the goings on at Bellfield Hall where her young niece has been left by her fiancé with nothing more than a cryptic excuse for his departure.

I liked the clever narration that incorporated Miss Kent's letters to her sister so that we could have her first person perspective alternating with the third person narration. There are some very heavy issues that are addressed in this mystery but they are dealt with in a fairly light way so that the reader isn't too terribly affected by them.

I liked the mystery, though it wasn't too difficult to puzzle out, and I thought Miss Kent's friendship with Mr. Lomax, the elder, added to the overall story. I can see this as a good beginning to a series if the author builds on what she has started here with a more fully developed cast of characters.

Alyssa says

I think this delightful Regency-era novel was the first mystery novel that I have read, at least that I can recall. And it was a very pleasant treat. :) The storyline definitely drew you in to the book as the mystery developed. However, there were a few faults I found with the book - for instance, for some reason, the Regency-era references felt a bit forced, as if the author were trying too hard to make the book feel "authentic." Maybe I'm just being nit-picky, but I did feel that parts of the book were a bit fake. Next, the main character of the book, Dido, herself bothered me. Yes, she wasn't supposed to fill the role of a perfect heroine, but she was just too forward, indelicate, unladylike for my taste. She certainly did not care what other's opinions were of her, and she readily did not hesitate to ask questions that could lead to discomfort on the side of the person being questioned. Finally, I think I must have read the beginning of the book and the introduction of the characters too quickly, as I found myself slightly confused as the book progressed as far as who everyone was, how they were related, and why they were at Bellfield Hall.

The mystery itself was very well-written. There were many complex characters, and almost everyone could have committed the murder. (view spoiler) Every person had some sort of secret, which certainly added to the suspense of the book. I like that it was a good, solid mystery, but that there weren't blood and guts and other varieties of creepiness everywhere. ;) There was a good deal of romance in the book, as well; even Dido starts out on the path of finding true love. There were a couple of loose ends in the story, which I am presuming are wrapped up in the second book of this series. I still haven't decided if I am going to read the sequel. :S Content-wise, it was pretty much completely clean. There were a few small references to illegitimate children or extra-marital affairs, but it *never* went into inappropriate (or even uncomfortable) detail.

Here's my favorite quote from the book:

It was, of course, a great failure in a woman's life - to never have achieved even a doomed and unsuccessful love. But she was not quite sure whether she had failed or not.

When she was young there had been moments, of course. But those moments had never amounted to much more than a little fever of admiration - a little flutter and agitation in a ballroom - so slight a feeling that the cautious Dido had never considered it a secure foundation for a lifetime of living together. And then, sooner

or later, she had always made and odd remark, or laughed at the wrong moment, and the young men became alarmed or angry - and the flutter and the agitation all turned to irritation.

Dido could laugh and gossip about love as well as any woman but, deep down, she suspected that she had not the knack of falling into it.

And thus, my friends, ends the last pleasure book I may read this year, for today, I embark on the exciting (yet nerve-racking!) journey of graduate school. I never thought I'd be here, but the Lord has been so faithful to show me the direction He would have my life take. :)

Amy says

1.5 stars

Meh. This book is a strange combination of irritating historical prejudices and modern references. Dido (*merely a woman* and a spinster at that!) throws herself around bemoaning her own denseness (well...she is quite dense) and lack of accomplishments (alas, she is a spinster aunt, sharp tongued and bad at math!) Yet at the same time she is kind to the servants and somehow able to wiggle out information from everyone. She's nosy and although that is a proper attribute for a detective, it somehow didn't work for her. I couldn't appreciate her character. I do appreciate that she's not entirely 21st-century in her outlook, but the book plays up her reaction (or lack-thereof) to birth control/affairs/homosexuality/female independence etc. Why do historical mysteries always seem to throw a few of those controversial topics in? It gets so predictable and irritating.

The mystery itself was rather predictable, though this twist at the end wasn't bad. The romance was mediocre at best and the love interest rather uninspiring, which perhaps works because that word aptly describes the heroine as well.

Too much stuffy nobility and horrid evilness and vague references. I can't even say this one has potential. Uninspiring.

Ana T. says

Miss Dido Kent is a spinster, she never married but she comes from a big family and her brothers occasionally ask for her help when dealing with their children. She has a special fondness for her niece Catherine who lived with her for a while when she was a young child and when she asks for her help Dido runs to her side.

Catherine had just become engaged when, during the celebratory ball at his parent's estate, Bellfield Hall, the fiancé is approached by a mysterious man who, without a word being spoken, makes him break the betrothal and run away. On the next day the body of a young woman is found murdered in the shrubbery. Although Catherine is more concerned with being reunited with her beau, Dido can't help but think that the two events may well be connected. Is the unwavering faith that Catherine has in Richard well deserved?

I really enjoyed the world that Anna Dean has created; Miss Dido Kent is a very believable maiden aunt, with a great deal of curiosity and a keen eye to observe the world around her. I thought it interesting that part of the story is told through the letters that Dido is writing to her sister relating what happens and how she sees the events. Garnering knowledge not only from the other guests but also from the servants of the house

Dido soon realises that all is not as it should be with the family and that some of the guests are not what they appear.

Set in the Regency period Bellfield Hall is a wonderful cosy mystery where an amateur detective has to uncover the truth and find the villain before the house party is over. Dean created a suspenseful plot where the danger increases with each chapter and where the clues are cleverly inserted in the plot in the form of little details... I look forward to revisit Miss Dido Kent and her world in future books of the series.

Grade: 4/5

Eustacia Tan says

I actually finished this book quite a long time ago, but for some reason, I forgot to review it (._.)" But anyway, here it is~

Bellfield hall (subtitle: Or, The Deductions of Miss Dido Kent) reminds me of Jane Austen. Or at least, Miss Dido reminds me of Jane Austen - an "old" intelligent spinster. The world the novel inhabits is very much like a Jane Austen novel, which means it's "gentle".

Well, except for the murder. The murder sounds gruesome, although there isn't any violence. Even the descriptions are fairly muted, including the time when they examined the corpse. Still, I think that Dido has what they call a "strong constitution", seeing that she dares to examine the body and whatnot.

The narrative style is also really interesting. Apart from using the conventional first person narrative, the novel also uses letters from Dido to her sister. I suspect that this is used to shorten the narrative, since the letter compresses the time frame a fair bit. And it works. The letters are gossipy and interesting, and manage to recap the important points and developments for the reader. I think that was partly the reason why my interest was sustained - the novel never felt draggy.

As for characters, Dido is really interesting. Her niece Catherine is also another engaging character (although there were a few moments when she was a bit brattish. But by the end of the book, she proves to be a very likable character) and I enjoyed reading about the both of them. They don't have very similar personalities, but they get along well, and it's fun to read about how dissimilar they are. There are quite a few moments when the book tethers into a "what a sweet child" mode, but nothing overly saccharine is actually written.

The other characters are average, and didn't really stand out. In a way, they felt like stock characters. One exception might be Catherine's fiancée Richard, but I didn't see enough of him to make an accurate judgement.

All in all, this is a very enjoyable book. Especially if you like Jane Austen :D

Jennifer says

It was a quick, easy read, but I cannot rate it higher for a few reasons--which I will get to later in the review.

Dido Kent, spinster, is called upon by her brother to aid her niece whose fiancé has had an abrupt change of heart about their upcoming nuptials, and has fled. On the day Dido arrives, a woman is found murdered in the shrubbery of the house. Are the two events connected? Dido is determined to find out.

I actually liked the author's writing style, and the mystery, while easy to figure out was still mostly engaging.

I felt that the main character, Dido Kent, was overall believable as a woman of her time period. She didn't seem like a modern day character plopped down in Regency England. And while I liked the fact that the author allowed her to have both strengths and weaknesses, and thus she appeared to be a well rounded character at first, I cannot say I connected much to the character as a whole. The more I read, the less likable she became. She could be overly-judgmental, and leapt to conclusions without proof of her conjecture.

There were also a few things about the book--as mentioned above--that I found disturbing and unsettling. Those will be discussed under a spoiler cut.

Again: SPOILERS AHOY!

(view spoiler)

I have the next in the series and will read it, but I doubt I'll be going any further. A lot will have to change in that second book.

And wow...writing this review made me realize I actually liked this book less than I thought I did. I've changed my initial star rating (three stars) to reflect as such (now two stars).

ilovebakedgoods (Teresa) says

I read this book in one night. I really enjoyed the fast pace and the characters. It was fun to read a mystery that takes place in 1805, solved by a 'spinster' whose intelligence is apparently a turn-off to most men.

Not going into detail in this review, just wanted to make a short notation of my enjoyment of the book.

Maya says

Pros: Really liked the main character, written in first person, her strengths (scary smart and acting with best of intentions) and weaknesses (at times not only judgemental but feeling justified in acting upon that judgement, at times being just as patronizing to younger women as she feels and is irritated by men acting patronizing toward her as a spinster woman) were believable and made her seem genuine. I wasn't able to predict the outcome, and the author does a good job of keeping the reader continually guessing as to who is the most likely suspect and feeding in bits of clues and backstory.

Cons: (left vague so as not to spoil) There were two openended points related to one of the survivors that are frustrating if not pursued, and can be forgiven if they are answered in any follow-up volumes to this first one. The motivation for the murder and previous deception seemed disproportionate, especially considering the measures that had been taken to mitigate the problem. There is never any direct interaction between Dido and the vanished fiance, which would have been helpful to figure out an essential point that seemed odd in explaining why he felt he'd been disinherited.

Will I read Book 2? Yes.

Laura Edwards says

This was okay for the first in a series. The writing is a bit uneven, however. A lot of telling and little action. It seemed half of what was taking place at Bellfield Hall was described by Dido Kent in a letter to her sister instead of the reader enjoying the action as it took place. And, at times, it was difficult to discern the time frame. A scene would be playing out and then, at the end, the reader realizes Dido is recalling what happened and it is actually further along in the day or the visit.

I'm not rushing out to buy the second book, though I'm probably inclined to read it at some point. I am interested in how the relationship between Dido and William Lomax will play out. I also thought Dido was fairly well-drawn. She stayed pretty much in character for a woman living in 1805. A lot of historical mysteries have the heroine acting more in tune with a 20th Century woman. A nice touch was the "mystery" regarding the Colonel and Jack. I think every reader could pick up on the clues that the Colonel was making passes at Jack, but Dido never does figure out the reason for Jack's distress. And I think this is spot on as most women living during the time period could never even imagine homosexuality. A nice contrast between Dido's intelligence and her touch of naïvete.

Alice says

This novel was brilliantly written! Every time I thought I had it figured out, a plot twist had me stymied. I didn't figure everything out until Dido herself explained it all in full, starting about 10 pages from the end of the book.

I loved that the story began after the major events mentioned in the synopsis have already transpired, so that- after a brief explanation of what has happened- you jump right into the mysterious search for answers right from the get-go.

I've read many reviews that mentioned the authors tactful style regarding a few touchy subjects, and I was happy to discover this was true. Anna Dean is vibrant and delicate, with good balance. Randomly, I love this cover! It really grabs your eye. :) This novel ended with an open door for book 2, and I very much look forward to the rest of this series!

bookme4life says

3.5 STARS

Reflecting back on this book, I would hold to my earlier assertion that it's a bit like Miss Marple in Jane Austen's world. Her curiosity and propensity to gently meddle are worthy of Miss Marple. Her niece describes her as casting a satirical eye on others -- I rather wished for a bit more of that from her, but I supposed what I was really craving was Jane Austen's wit.

Anna Dean spreads out the clues such that an attentive reader will have the satisfaction of guessing much of the mystery, though not all of it. The puzzle is a bit more satisfying than the characters. I *liked* them, but I did not *love* any of them. I hope to gain a greater rapport with Miss Dido Kent in future books.

Pauline Ross says

I loved everything about this book. It combines two of my favourite genres, Jane Austen and Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, in one glorious package, and how can anyone resist that? Dido Kent is a spinster, past the age of any likelihood of marriage, although not past the age of interest in gentlemen. But she's no romantic heroine, that role being taken here by her niece. When the niece's fiance disappears, she sends for her aunt to comfort her. But then there's a murder...

Thereafter, this follows the usual pattern of all country house murder mysteries. Dido doesn't so much interview suspects as engage in conversation with them. She also rather ingeniously befriends the servants and gains some valuable clues in that way. And she isn't above a little bit of pretence to inveigle secrets from anyone she thinks may have information. However, even when she's sleuthing away, she's never less than a lady and never has to resort to the slightest impropriety of behaviour.

All this is quite delightful, and both the Regency and murder mystery elements work perfectly. The solution to the mystery is ingenious but convincing (the very best kind), and there's even a perfectly judged happy ever after, although I did wonder just how the final arrangement was going to work out in the long term. But that's a very minor quibble. An excellent five stars.

LJ says

First Sentence: My dear Eliza, I must begin another letter to you, although it is not six hours since I sent my last.

Catherine Kent is engaged to Richard Montague. During a special ball at Betsfield Hall, Richard reacts strongly to a red-headed man and then disappears. Catherine's father sends for his spinster sister, Miss Dido

Kent. The same day Dido arrives, the body of a murdered woman is found under a hedge on the property and Dido decides it's up to her to discover the killer.

Ms. Dean's writing is literate, intelligent, funny and completely captivating. I give her top marks for sense of time and place, as well as dialogue, which is delightfully appropriate to the period. Her observations on women, marriage and inheritance are done with a light, but informative, touch. Dido Kent is a wonderful protagonist. She is smart and clever without being malicious; something of a Miss Marple of 1805, but better. I particularly enjoyed the letters to Dido's sister, which convey Dido's internal questions, observations and explorations. All the characters come to life under Ms. Dean's deft hand. The story is very well plotted. Ms. Dean provides her readers all the clues as Dido uncovers them but, as one who let's the protagonist solve the crime, I was delighted watching the solution unfold. Those who are fans of Jane Austin, traditional mysteries, and/or historical mysteries, should enjoy this book. Personally, I loved it!

A MOMENT OF SILENCE (Hist Mys/Ama. Sleuth-Dido Kent-England-1805) - Ex
Dean, Anna – 1st book
Allison & Busby, 2008, UK Hardcover – ISBN: 9780749079109

Aarti says

Bellfield Hall is an English country home murder mystery set during the Georgian era. Miss Dido Kent arrives at the hall after her niece summons her there- she soon finds out that not only has her beloved niece's fiancée called off their engagement, but also that a woman no one knows has been murdered in the shrubbery. Dido promises to help her niece discover why her fiancée so abruptly called off their marriage, and in the meantime, she does some of her own sleuthing on the murder.

I enjoyed this story. I don't think it was amazing, but I think there is certainly room for the series to grow and strengthen if the author continues with it. Dido Kent is an intelligent and witty sleuth- she's not quite in the upper class, but she's also not in the working class. Thus, she can speak to people at multiple levels of society with ease. She also is often ignored because she is a spinster (we don't know how old she is, but I can't imagine she is over 30). In that way, I can see the comparisons to Miss Marple's kind and diminutive presence in Agatha Christie's novels.

While I liked Dido, I didn't think the story itself was all that great. There were some clues Dido didn't figure out for quite some time, even though there were clues that *I* picked up on (and I generally am quite dense for mysteries, sadly). As Dido is so intelligent, it was hard to believe she didn't pick up on those clues more quickly.

Also, there was an entire storyline involving a Colonel and a footman that either could have been completely left out or reconciled in a better manner. I didn't like this storyline or what it implied on multiple levels, and I don't think it was necessary for the story's success at all.

So while I think the story itself could have been better, I really like Dido Kent and I look forward to seeing more of her. I feel certain that as the author continues writing and getting to know her character that I will enjoy getting to know Dido better as well, and I look forward to the opportunity.

Note: I believe in the UK, this book is titled "A Moment of Silence." This is a much better title and very fitting for the story, and I wish it had stayed the title in the US as well.

Hayden says

I hadn't heard anything about this book series until Goodreads showed it to me (that's beginning to be the story of my reading life, haha) but, while it was a "secular" adult book- something I usually avoid simply because I don't like a lot of "content" in my novels- there wasn't anything in the reviews I saw to raise any red flags, so I decided to try it.

What a delightfully written book! It was interesting- with a solid mystery I didn't solve beforehand- and while there were many of the topics mentioned in other murder mysteries (violence, adultery, ect.) it was all handled with the tact and delicacy of a true Regency lady, even if many of these themes were prominent. There were times I worried that it would delve into more sordid topics, but it never did. I probably wouldn't recommend this book to younger readers, but I personally did not find the content too offensive.

Dido Kent herself was an intensely likable character; one I could root for and relate to. Not only was she intelligent (but not more than believably so) but she had a good set of morals and earned my respect. I also appreciated that she kept to her times; while certainly a bit different from those around her, she still felt like she came from the nineteenth century, not the twenty-first.

Overall, I really enjoyed Bellfield Hall, and I'm sure I shall be seeing more of Miss Dido Kent in the future.

Alisha says

Easy, fast reading. Miss Kent is kind of a re-invented Jane Austen, even down to the details of her life: she's a spinster supported by an allowance from her wealthier brothers, she has a motherless niece that looks to her for a certain amount of advice, and while traveling she corresponds with her sister back home.

The dialogue and vocabulary seem spot-on for the time period. I am pretty impressed by this author's grasp of the Austen-like voice. The rest of the books in this series are good, too; I wish the author would write more!

Sarah says

I forget what motivated me to get this book from the library, but I think I had the idea that Dido Kent would be slightly less conventional and that her ability to rise above the limitations imposed on her by her time and place would be expressed more interestingly than occasionally acknowledging (apparently without irony) that she is indeed a mere woman and math is hard. Seriously, there are at least three occasions where arithmetic is mentioned as something that Dido struggles with and/or is amazed that any woman can do.

I didn't hate the book and it wasn't badly written, but I didn't love Dido Kent or have any interest in what becomes of her. I didn't mind the solution to Richard's end of the mystery, but I had made up a much more interesting story for his mother in which she was a renegade abortionist instead of a passive victim, so I was disappointed there. And it seemed to me that it was insanely inappropriate for Mr Lomax to suggest to Dido that he might have proposed to her if he didn't have to pay off his son's debts. Nobody likes the son, so the idea that Dido is willing to not only be his stepmother but also to go on and find him a rich wife so that he won't be a burden on his father just seems obnoxious.

Delaina says

This was a really excellently told mystery. The author uses the historical setting to her advantage in advancing the plot, and told the story in a very period-correct voice. I really liked the main character, Dido, and the way her intellect and reason pulls her into solving the crime despite her natural humility and reserve.

My only quibble is with the use of ellipses to trail off unfinished speculation by Dido toward the end of her crime-solving. For whatever reason, the use of ellipses almost always bothers me. If you're going to say something, just say it and don't trail off. Don't write a complete declarative sentence and then drag it out with an implied 'hmmmm'... It's very annoying.

Overall it was a great book, if a tad slow to get rolling.

QNPoohBear says

Miss Dido Kent, respectable spinster, has been asked to Bellfield Hall by her niece Catherine, who wants her aunt to figure out a few things. Mainly, where her fiance Richard Montague has disappeared to and why he broke their engagement after a wordless exchange with a mysterious man. Dido also wants to figure out who the dead woman in the shrubbery is. So she begins to ask questions and unravels the secrets of the guests and inhabitants of Bellfield Hall one by one.

The author seems to have based Dido and her family on the Jane Austen and her family. I am profoundly grateful to her for making her characters original and based on the Austens. While I enjoyed Stephanie Barron's Jane Austen mysteries, I felt they would have been more enjoyable if they were about an original character. The mystery kept me up too late trying to figure it all out. Dido sure is a clever sleuth because she put the pieces of the puzzle together easily. I wasn't there yet but I wasn't entirely surprised by the revelations in the end. I felt the story was kind of sad and a bit heavy. Though the book is set in 1805, it really could take place well into the 20th century. My only issue with the plot is she never really figured out why the young footman was scared to be alone with the Colonel and her conclusions about the Colonel's reasons for not marrying were never proven or disproven. A modern reader can guess what's being hinted at. There is a limited amount of historical detail and nothing overtly points to 1805 except for a brief reference to spying for the French, but Regency fans will be pleased with the country house setting and a bit of information on fashion, medicine and education.

Dido Kent is the main character, a respectable spinster of unknown years but more than 30. I can relate to her being a spinster of uncertain years more than 30 myself. Not a lot is revealed about her except she's never fallen in love and she's logical and satirical. I liked her well enough so far. She's intelligent and direct; she doesn't hold back anything. I thought she was a bit forward in some of her questioning but she needed the information so she let propriety lapse.

The other characters are somewhat shallow but the female characters reveal hidden depth which were a revelation to Dido and the reader. I liked that twist a lot.

I recommend this book to casual Jane Austen fans, maybe diehard Janeites will enjoy it and historical cozy mystery fans will definitely like this one. It's very mild and nothing really objectionable except some blood, a medicine that's part of the plot that may shock some readers and hints about homosexuality.

Tracey says

This was on my paperbackswap wishlist (I don't remember why); it became available, and I pounced. While still in a sort of "I don't care, there's too much crap going on for me to not just read what I want to read" mood I firmly ignored all the Netgalley books clamoring on the sidelines, picked this off the upper slopes of Mount TBR, and settled in.

I loved it from the start. I was a little afraid at first – the Regency period spinster aunt swooping in to Detect felt like a mish-mash of various storylines that Have Been Done. Happily, this was, like Miss Dido Kent, highly individual – and delightful. You know how there are certain words that just aren't fashionable anymore, aren't used much anymore, just don't often apply to much anymore? "Delightful" is one of those. I do enjoy a book I can apply it to. In some ways it does feel like it borrows from everything from Austen to Miss Marple – but I don't say that to run it down. I say that to grin about how a really fine writer can merrily mix together familiar ingredients and produce something unique and lovely.

Bellfield Hall is a bit of a classic English Country House Mystery (™), in that there is a group of people gathered together in a home not their own, and Miss Kent (coming in after the fact) must work with a topography and schedule and staff new to her to discover whether it is her niece's fiancé who has committed a dreadful murder – which is certainly what he has made it seem like, since he up and disappeared, breaking the engagement by letter with no real explanation before making his exit. Dido alone supports her niece in the belief that he had some other reasons, reasons of honor, to vanish, and Dido alone begins to dig.

In the process of the investigation she comes to know the other temporary denizens of the house, most of whom must be considered suspects. There are the two sisters being shopped around by their father for husbands, who don't seem to be what they seem to be; there is the reckless young man who has gambled and drunk away a small fortune he never had in the fine Edwardian style of young dandies, and his honorable father who is going distracted trying to find a way to extricate his son, and himself, from the mess. The latter happens to be an intriguing gentleman, and handsome, and very attentive to Miss Kent ...

Dido makes for an interesting, engaging sleuth. She doesn't stray so very far from what is probable and acceptable in a woman of her period; she adheres to the mores of the time, for the most part, and manufactures plausible excuses for the departures she must make in order to find the truth. There's no pretense that she's Sherlock Holmes in skirts – she utilizes her particular skills (observation, good relations with the servants, and a knack for knowing what questions to ask combined with a disregard for unwritten rules that would prevent some of said questions), and gets herself into jams, and doggedly unravels the mystery.

I enjoyed the format, partially epistolary as Dido writes to her sister with news and asking for counsel; the book is entirely from her point of view, and these segments of her first-person voice deepen the picture.

(view spoiler)

Overall, I liked it very much, and I'm looking forward to the series. The mystery was not beyond the capabilities of someone like Dido; her motivations for involving herself didn't tax my willing suspension of disbelief; I'll have to deal with the keeps-tripping-over-murder-victims aspect of the cozy series further down the road. I liked Dido and the to-the-point letters from her sister, and the language in general. It's a keeper.