

Matthew Costello

Neil Richards

# CHERRINGHAM

A COSY CRIME SERIES

## Still Dead



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# **Cherringham — A Cosy Crime Series**

“Cherringham — A Cosy Crime Series” is a series made up of self-contained stories. The series is published in English as well as in German; and is only available in e-book form.



# About the Book

When the Veteran Head of Botanicals at the world-famous Cherringham Gin Company is suddenly found dead at the Distillery, it seems at first a strange accident must have taken place. But some family members aren't convinced, and Jack and Sarah are asked to investigate by old friend, solicitor Tony Standish. Soon they discover clues that the eccentric genius behind the famous gin may have been murdered — with a rich cocktail of motives in play. Can the bizarre mystery be solved and the killer found before he strikes again?

# Main Characters

Jack Brennan is a former NYPD homicide detective who lost his wife a few years ago. Being retired, all he wants is peace and quiet. Which is what he hopes to find in the quiet town of Cherringham, UK. Living on a canal boat, he enjoys his solitude. But soon enough he discovers that something is missing — the challenge of solving crimes. Surprisingly, Cherringham can help him with that.

Sarah Edwards is a web designer who was living in London with her husband and two kids. Before the series starts, he ran off with his sexy American boss, and Sarah's world fell apart. With her children she moved back to her home town, laid-back Cherringham. But the small-town atmosphere is killing her all over again — nothing ever happens. At least, that's what she thinks until Jack enters her life and changes it for good or worse ...

# The Authors

Matthew Costello (US-based) is the author of a number of successful novels, including *Vacation* (2011), *Home* (2014) and *Beneath Still Waters* (1989), which was adapted by Lionsgate as a major motion picture. He has written for The Disney Channel, BBC, SyFy and has also designed dozens of bestselling games including the critically acclaimed *The 7th Guest*, *Doom 3*, *Rage* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Neil Richards has worked as a producer and writer in TV and film, creating scripts for BBC, Disney, and Channel 4, and earning numerous Bafta nominations along the way. He's also written script and story for over 20 video games including *The Da Vinci Code* and *Starship Titanic*, co-written with Douglas Adams, and consults around the world on digital storytelling.

His writing partnership with NYC-based Matt Costello goes back to the late 90's and the two have written many hours of TV together. *Cherringham* is their first crime fiction as co-writers.

Matthew Costello  
Neil Richards

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**A COSY CRIME SERIES**



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# 1. An Unexpected Demise

Arnold Pettifer pulled up in the car park of the Cherringham Gin Company, turned off the engine, and climbed out of his battered old Volvo estate.

Seven o'clock, and the place was pretty quiet. Only a couple of other cars in the staff parking area.

*Just how he preferred it, these days.*

Once upon a time, oh, you couldn't keep him away!

Back then, as the youngest Head of Botanicals in the country (and proud of it), he wouldn't have dreamt of leaving the distillery until he was sure the stills were perfectly set up to run through the night.

And then he'd be back at the crack of dawn to test and taste and savour the fruits of all that labour — the careful sourcing of botanicals, the choice of the purest of waters, the selection of the perfect grain spirit.

All combining to form Cherringham Gin — the best small-batch gin in the Cotswolds — prizes, gold medals galore to prove it!

*How things change in such a short time*, he thought, as he took his work bag from the back seat and headed to the main entrance.

*Not just here, at the distillery, but, well, everywhere.*

Nothing certain. Nothing preordained. Life — it seemed — no longer playing by the rules.

He looked across at the main buildings — this place his second home for nigh on forty years. *So many fond memories.*

In the early evening sunlight, the old converted mill building gave off a warm glow, its tall chimney a rusty red against the copse of oaks and chestnut that surrounded it.

Looking at the outside, this historic flour mill, just a mile from Cherringham, would appear to have hardly changed in centuries.

Inside, well, it was still historic, but those medieval flour millers wouldn't recognise it, that's for sure!

Back in the nineteenth century, the grinding stones and hoppers had been ripped out, to be replaced with copper stills, storerooms for spices, giant tanks for water and alcohol.

All thanks to the Rawlinson family, who'd seen that alcohol could become a much more profitable business than bread, and set up the Cherringham Gin Company.

And never looked back.

And — of course now — well, there was more change on its way. Not that he had much say in it.

"Evening Arnold!" came a voice, disturbing Arnold's thoughts. He turned, to see Steve Shriver, the portly security officer standing by one of the rear fire doors, tugging on a cigarette.

Normally Arnold would have made a comment (and only half joking): *cigarettes polluting the atmosphere, filthy habit, lack of respect!*

But these days, it seemed, he no longer had the energy.

"Steve," he said, noting that at least Shriver had the good manners to drop the offending cigarette to the ground and grind it out with one large black boot. "Anyone around?"

Shriver dusted cigarette ash from his faded security uniform, his fingers brown from a lifetime's nicotine. "Think Bill's in the warehouse, checking the latest shipment. Your Kirsty clocked off bang on five, shot out of here on that flashy bicycle."

"No surprise there," said Arnold, raising his eyebrows.

He and Steve had a ritual running joke going about how the younger workers — especially his assistant — couldn't wait to leave at five on the dot.

*Work-life balance*, Kirsty had called it when he'd remarked upon it after her first week at the distillery.

*Running off home at the end of the day — it even had a name!*

*Doesn't "work" for me*, he always told her. *Work is my life!*

He'd hoped that she'd laugh at his little wordplay but she hadn't — just nodded politely.

As the months had gone by, Arnold had accepted that although she seemed to laugh at other people's — in his opinion — feeble jokes quite readily, she never laughed at his wry comments.

Had he done something wrong? Said something he shouldn't? Maybe, just because he was now an old man, representing old ways. Was that it?

If so, he didn't know what. Nor, he now realised, did he really care.

"What about upstairs?" he said, nodding towards the higher floors of the building where management lights were glowing.

"Oh, sales, admin, all gone home too," continued Steve, taking out a handkerchief and wiping his nose. "You know that lot!"

"And no sign of Mr Kavanaugh?" said Arnold.

"The vulture?" said Shriver, rolling his eyes and using the nickname for the new CEO that everyone claimed credit for inventing. "Oh, he's here all right."

"Shame," said Arnold, under his breath.

He saw Shriver grin. Arnold knew that his feelings about Dirk Kavanaugh were no secret. And likewise, Kavanaugh's feelings about him.

"Think from the looks of things he's having another of those long meetings with the young Mr Rawlinson," said Shriver, leaning in confidentially. "All afternoon, they've been at it. The two of them'll go off together as usual. To

some fancy restaurant. That posh spa place, on the road to Chippy? I hear they're regulars."

Arnold nodded at that. The Managing Director and the new CEO, plotting and planning ... *all the changes to come!*

"Yes, well, I'm sure you have plenty to do, Steve," he said, suddenly uncomfortable with this *familiarity*, this *gossiping*. All a little ... *unseemly*. "Mustn't hold you up any longer."

He gave Shriver a polite smile, then turned to head towards his office and the Dry Room.

"Shall I bring you round a cuppa later, sir?" said Steve.

"Oh, so kind of you," said Arnold, pausing for a second, "but I have a flask of coffee."

"Another all-nighter, sir?"

"Probably," said Arnold, eager to get to his office.

"Maybe see you on my rounds, then, sir?"

"No need. I'll be busy, you see," said Arnold.

"As you wish, Mr Pettifer," Shriver said, getting the message.

Arnold now knew — gently warned off — that he wouldn't be seeing Shriver anytime soon. His "rounds" stretched to a ten-minute stroll round the distillery perimeter — then a nightlong snooze in an armchair in his cabin, in front of a TV.

*Tough duty.*

Arnold turned and walked away across the gravel, to the front of the old mill. He noted the rolling shutters of the warehouse were open, and caught a glimpse of Bill Travis hefting sacks from a pallet onto a trolley.

The warehouseman looked up and gave him a friendly wave. Arnold gave a nod of acknowledgement, and wondered if a new shipment had just come in.

One shipment was expected, even overdue. From Morocco, if he remembered rightly.

*He felt a small surge of excitement at the thought.*

Then he reached the main building, went through the double doors, past the empty reception, and down the corridor that led to his office and the Dry Room.

\*

Arnold made sure all his files were saved, then closed the lid of his laptop and drained the last of his now lukewarm coffee.

He'd spent an hour in the Still Room doing some quality tests, checking the calculations of the distilling assistants, and logging the still's pressure readings — all very important.

*Hope* and *Glory*, the two great, ancient copper stills — their names a testament to the spirit of Empire when they were installed back in the 1850s — were, amazingly, still going strong. He wondered how many gallons of gin they'd served up for him over the years. Thousands? *Hundreds of thousands?*

Here in his office, he heard the reassuring hum of the machinery just next door, as the two stills gently stirred and heated the “botanicals”, the secret recipe of herbs and spices that gave Cherringham Gin its characteristic rich, sensual — even unique — flavour.

The process, completely unchanged for nearly two hundred years, would produce another batch of clean spirit by morning, ready to be diluted and bottled.

How many more batches like this would he oversee in his lifetime? He paused, suddenly realising that the answer to this question was an *actual, finite* number.

It could be quantified. It was *real*.

*The old ways soon to pass ...*

*No*, he thought, snapping himself out of it. *This is no time to be maudlin. Work to be done!*