

Lord Edgware Dies



It has arrived! The first Agatha Christie computer game based on the most famous mystery novel of the 20th century.

Lee Sheldon was the writer chosen to carry out the transformation of Dame Agatha's 1939 masterpiece into an interactive game.

Inside you can read an **exclusive interview** he gave to the Newsletter and get the very first look at some of the game's art-work...

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader

Welcome to Issue 2. The feedback and comments on Issue 1 have all been very positive and encouraging but I think that this issue is even stronger.

We have a sneak preview of and an exclusive interview with the designer of the new PC CD ROM game version of **And Then There Were None**; a look at **Lord Edgware Dies** in all its forms; and a review of the new **Marple TV Series DVD Box Set** - a must-have for all Christie fans. Also included is a look at the jigsaws inspired by Dame Agatha's work. And the news items have a truly international flavour!

Issue 3 will be a 'special' devoted almost entirely to **And Then There Were None** to coincide with the release of the interactive game. I will be looking at the book, the stage play, the game itself, the many screen versions and a few associated items that may come as a surprise to even the most ardent fans! I can also promise some exciting news.....

Remember **you** can have **your** say on the Newsletter via the website and let me know what **you** would like to see in future Newsletters.

Happy reading!

Lord Edgware Dies - the Novel



Set amongst the glitterati of London's West End, Lord Edgware Dies began life in Rhodes in the autumn of 1931 and was completed whilst on the archaeological dig at Nineveh, on a table which Agatha Christie had bought for £10 at a bazaar in Mosul.



It was first published in the Spring of 1933 and in the US is known as **Thirteen at Dinner**. It was dedicated to Dr and Mrs Campbell Thompson who led the archaeological expedition at Nineveh and a skeleton found in a grave mound on site was christened Lord Edgware in honour of the book. The character of Carlotta Adams was inspired



by the American actress Ruth Draper who was famed for her ability to transform herself from a Hungarian peasant to a Park Lane heiress with a minimum of props.

In her **Autobiography** Agatha Christie says

*"I thought how clever she was and how good her impersonations were... thinking about her led me to the book **Lord Edgware Dies**"*

Although never mentioned in the same reverent breath as **The Murder of Roger Ackroyd** or **Murder on the Orient Express**, it is one of Poirot's most ingenious cases and a model of detective fiction. The plot is audaciously simple (and simply audacious) and the clueing is as daring as anything from Dame Agatha's Golden Age. Like many of the best plots, it seems complicated until one simple and, in retrospect, obvious, fact is grasped; then everything falls into place and you wonder how you never spotted it!

Every chapter pushes the story forward and almost every conversation contains information to enable Poirot to answer the question 'Did Lady Edgware carry out her threat to take a taxi to her husband's house and stab him in the base of the skull?'

Lord Edgware himself is in the same class as Mrs. Boynton (**Appointment with Death**) and Simeon Lee (**Hercule Poirot's Christmas**) - a thoroughly nasty piece of work whose passing few mourn.

If you have never read this masterpiece you have a treat in store; if you have, take it off your shelf again and admire the masterly skill with which Dame Agatha leads you tantalisingly close to the truth only to divert you with yet another red herring... or is it?

Interesting Facts to Note...

...The opening lines and their similarity to the opening of **The Mysterious Affair at Styles**.

...This novel particularly gives strength to those critics who accuse Dame Agatha of anti-Semitism. Although I always counter this by pointing out that a *character* speaking is not the same as the *author* speaking, I wonder if it might be a good idea to remove some of the more offensive lines in these politically correct days?

...A minor mystery about the butler is the fact that he plays quite an important part in the story yet he is never named!

...Of all the reproductions of documents and maps surely this has to be the cleverest?

...When you finish reading it can you see why it could have been called 'Why didn't they ask Ellis?'

Lord Edgware Dies on Screen

In 1934 Real Art Films totally miscast Austin Trevor, a six foot Irishman, as Poirot. Apart from this, admittedly major, drawback this version is not at all bad - bearing in mind that it is 70 years old. It is very static and as a piece of cinema it is never going to feature in any 100 Best List, but as an adaptation it remains very faithful to the original work. There are a few embarrassing attempts to make Hastings seem funny but it is difficult to see how these were ever convincing.

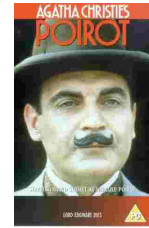
On two separate occasions Channel 4 TV (in the UK) advertised this film for broadcast and each time apologised for cancelling it at the last minute. (The last minute in each case was 3 AM!). Despite a letter of apology from C4 to your editor and an assurance that it would be screened at some stage, this film has still not appeared.

In 1985 Peter Ustinov trimmed his moustache for the third time to investigate the murder of Lord Edgware (played by John Castle - Insp. Craddock from the BBC version of **A Murder is Announced**) in **'Thirteen at Dinner'** set in 1980's London.

The main problem with this version is, I'm sorry to say, the aforementioned Mr Ustinov. By this point he had given up all pretence of trying to capture the character Dame Agatha created and hammed it up as a flirty, wise-cracking foreign detective who has little similarity to Poirot. Faye Dunaway is very effective in the dual role of Jane Wilkinson and Carlotta Adams; in fact, she is by far the closest portrayal of the original character, capturing both the necessary charm and ruthlessness. For Christie fans the real interest lies in the casting of a certain David Suchet.....as Inspector Japp! A dodgy accent and a formidable appetite characterise his appearance and it must have taken a great leap of faith to visualise him in the starring role 3 years later.



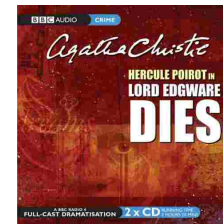
In 2000 we saw the best version (to date) of this classic. The date is firmly established as 29 June 1936 - and only minor liberties are taken: Jenny Driver is re-christened Penny; Jane is now British and the \$10,000 of the novel becomes £2,000. The main departure from the source is a dramatic chase in a 1930's airport - full marks to the art design people. And the butler is given a name!



This last version is readily available on DVD and Video. Some searching might be necessary to find the Ustinov version and the earliest one is, alas, not available. I was lucky enough to see it at a film festival some years ago.

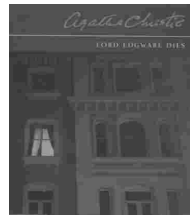
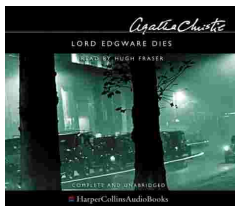
Audio books and radio adaptations

The 1992 radio version was one of the earliest in the BBC series of Williams/Bakewell adaptations with John Moffat as Hercule Poirot. It is the usual classy production with Jane Wilkinson once again given a trans-Atlantic makeover. In this non-visual medium we lose the impact of the letter clue but in all other aspects this is superb radio and Agatha Christie as she ought to be heard.



The audio book edition is available in two forms - a complete reading published by Harper Collins or an abridged version from Macmillan. Both are excellent. The art and craft that must go into one of these readings never fails to impress me - especially when one reader provides the different voices for the various characters. It is an under-rated skill. The reader here has a particularly challenging job with a wide range of accents and ages to cover for both the male and female characters.

All these adaptations can be purchased from most retailers or from www.amazon.co.uk



Tell us what you think of Lord Edgware dies at <http://www.agathachristie.com>

And Then There Were None PC CD Rom Game *Agatha Christie for the 21st Century*

Lee Sheldon Exclusive Interview

Lee introduces himself

'I am primarily a mystery writer and wrote for most of the major mystery shows in the seventies and eighties and into the nineties, everything from Quincy to Simon & Simon to Cagney & Lacey to Murder She Wrote. I was a writing producer on the fourth season of Star Trek: The Next Generation and worked on a few other science fiction shows as well. I also strayed into daytime television as Head Writer of Edge of Night. I wrote a PBS serial as well called The Perkins Family for WGBH in Boston. It starred all kids, even in adult roles. All in all, I have produced over 200 credits as a writer, and many more as story editor, producer, etc'

Lee has also written an 'impossible crime' novel called **Impossible Bliss** and some short fiction, a how-to manual on game-writing and stories for 17 video games.

The game itself will be available in September this year and to celebrate this the next Newsletter will have an in-depth look at **And Then There Were None** in its various forms including the original novel, its stage adaptation and its many screen versions.

But for now read on for our EXCLUSIVE interview with Lee.....

1. Lee, as a mystery writer did Agatha Christie have any influence on your own mystery writing? What do you think of her writing and how would you compare your stories?

Agatha Christie is one of my favourite mystery authors. I've read every novel and story she wrote under her own name. I think I've read or seen all of the plays, too. I also own all of the David Suchet's Poirot and Joan Hickson's Miss Marple that are out on video. Over the years I've written many mysteries, especially for TV. My first love is 'impossible crimes', so John Dickson Carr is another favourite author (my first mystery novel has been compared favourably to Carr). Christie wrote many impossible crimes as



well. One of my favourites is *Hercule Poirot's Christmas*. *And Then There Were None* shows up in Robert Adey's book on impossible crimes, too. I know as I write a mystery, particularly when I'm concocting puzzles and trying to play fair with my audience, I ask myself "What would Christie do?"

2. Why was 'And then There Were None' chosen as the first title?

It's a classic, one of her best-known books, so marketing was a factor. The setting was also a nice, and closed, environment. In games we want to give the player the illusion that he or she can roam freely through the worlds we create. In fact there are always restrictions. Instead of artificial restrictions like impassable forests, cliffs built like fences along a road, or cities where you can't enter any buildings, an island gives us a natural obstacle: the sea. I also wanted to steer clear of a Poirot or a Marple because they have their own very distinctive styles. I knew I would have to mess things about a bit to make the story fit the game. I felt more comfortable starting with a story outside of their respective canons.

3. Can you tell us a little bit about how this adventure game was created?

I adapted the story, and even when a change was necessary, tried to stay within the spirit of the book and its author. I took what dialogue I could from the book (usually edited-games like other visual media tend to have leaner dialogue) and I wrote new dialogue. Thanks to television I'm used to writing other people's characters, so I hope it will be difficult to tell where Christie's dialogue ends and mine begins. I also designed the game play, essentially everything the player can do in the game. I handed over a 400+ page design document to the developers, AWE Games. Since then I've been anxiously watching over their shoulders. They're doing a great job!



4. Coming from a Hollywood background and as a mystery writer how is writing for adventure gaming different from writing a book or a screenplay? How important is the actual writing in comparison to the visuals and the game play?

For me, understandably, the writing has been of equal importance to the other facets of the game. Since I played computer games for years before finally being given a chance to make one in 1994 I was aware early on that you must strike a balance between story and game play. You also have to deal with players who want to wander at will through the world and the story. I've spent years developing techniques to tell stories in a non-linear fashion better suited to games. With a game based on a novel like ATTWN, I've had to restrict myself to a more linear structure. Again I hope I've found ways to naturally restrict the player based on the environment and certain devices like the "film titles" I use to move the story forward.

5. And Then There Were None is one of Agatha's most tightly constructed books - How hard did you find it to dissect? What changes needed to be made to characters or plot?

Not hard to dissect, I think, because it is so tightly constructed. I had a mentor in film school named Alexander MacKendrick (director of the original *Ladykillers* with Alec Guinness, *The Man in the White Suit*, and many more). He showed us certain classic movies over and over and over again until we learned to see past the drama and find the seams that held each one together.

I have made some changes and I'm not going to reveal all of them! But I've added an 11th character on the island: the boatman. He is the character the player manipulates. Like everyone else on the island he has a secret, too. I've expanded on certain character and historical references Christie made only in passing in the book to create a more complete history of the island and that stretch of Devon coastline. This was necessary so I could build a somewhat larger island with more locations for a player to explore.



6. ATTWN is a well known title, how have you made the game challenging for fans who already know the ending? Have you changed the ending?

There is much more for players to discover. This includes many clues and some more developed back story, so there is more for players to find. I've made several other changes to the ending too. The game has the potential to conclude more like the book or the play version, depending upon player actions.

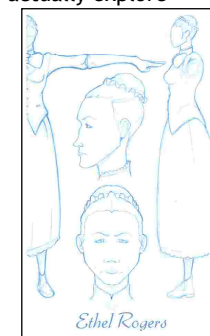
7. Do you need to be computer-literate to enjoy this?

No. I'm not, and I designed it! The interface is very simple. We're still talking about how much help we'll give players in-game to solve the many

puzzles that are the backbone of adventure games, and certain other game challenges. Whatever we finally decide there will be all sorts of help available outside of the game. There may be a printed guide to solutions and the internet is always a good resource. There will be enough information around that players could just follow that and never have to think about a puzzle. I hope they don't do that! Mystery lovers in particular should want to solve the puzzles in the game as much as the puzzles in the mystery.

8. What will a true Christie fan get from this game?

A new look at an old favourite. Players will be able to actually explore locations they've only read about, or seen in a movie version. I can promise quite a few surprises even for those who know the book cover-to-cover. There will also be much fuel for discussion as canny players ferret out even minor connections between the book and the game. Of course I expect quite a bit of discussion about the "liberties" I have taken. Fans should think of this game as a loving tribute to one of the most famous mystery stories of all time.



9. What have you enjoyed most about working on Christie?

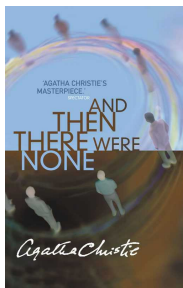
Adapting a vision that began life as prose. We've seen the film adaptations. Now here's one that is interactive; that actually takes our audience on to the island where they can witness events first hand, change the course of the story, and solve the mystery. To do all that, and still be true to the original book was a fun challenge. I hope I have succeeded in making it as much fun for others.

10. If you could choose your next title what would it be and why?

Tough question! Every time we have discussed this at DreamCatcher or Chorion or AWE Games there have been many good ideas. The fact that there are so many good stories to choose from is both a blessing and a curse. But deep down inside I know if they ask me to do another one, I would want it to introduce us to either a certain fastidious Belgian or a little old lady from St. Mary Mead.



Fans of And Then There Were None should WATCH THIS SPACE for some VERY EXCITING NEWS about 'And Then There Were None' in the next Newsletter.



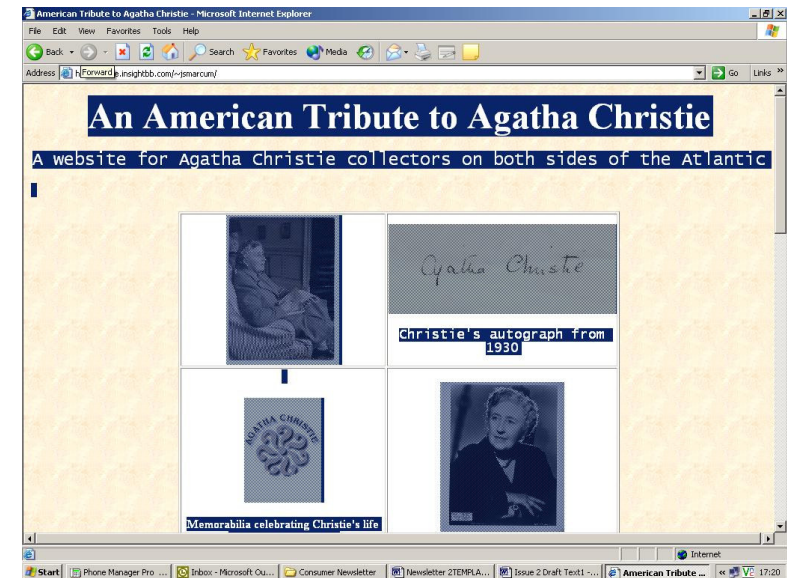
Discuss the new PC CD Rom game at
<http://www.agathachristie.com>

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Check out this website

<http://home.insightbb.com/~jsmarcum/> 'An American Tribute to Agatha Christie'



This is a site devoted to details of American first editions with jacket illustrations and bibliographic details, a list of reference books and a photo and autograph. As Steve, the creator of the website, says a collection of first editions is now prohibitively expensive; but it costs nothing to look! Also included are links to other associated sites. This is one of the few sites that sounds as attractive as it looks. Steve assures me he is happy to correspond with enthusiasts and I can personally confirm this.

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Did You Know...

In the Rutherford film **'Murder Ahoy'** (not based on any Christie work) there is a copy of **'Three Act Tragedy'** on Miss Marple's bookshelves.

The 2002 UK paperback version of **'Murder on the Links'** contains 2 pages (in Chapter 6) not included in earlier editions.

Agatha Christie was the first mystery writer to be honoured with the title of 'Grandmaster' by the Mystery Writers of America in 1954.

Before appearing with Poirot in **'Cards on the Table'** Mrs. Oliver had earlier worked for Parker Pyne. She appears in **"The Case of the Discontented Soldier"** and is also mentioned in **"The Case of the Rich Woman"**.

The swimming pool that provided the inspiration for **'The Hollow'** belonged to Francis L. Sullivan, the first screen Poirot. The book's dedication reads: *"For Larry and Danae, with apologies for using their swimming pool as the scene of a murder."*

Ellery Queen, the famous American detective story writer, abandoned a half-written novel because Agatha Christie had anticipated it with the plot of **'And then there were None'**.

Dame Agatha used her home, Greenway, as the setting for **Dead Man's Folly** (the boathouse), **Five Little Pigs** (the battery garden), **Ordeal by Innocence** (the ferry) and the short story **The Shadow on the Glass** in **The Mysterious Mr Quin**.

Look Out For....

TV Tie in Marple Books

New paperback TV Tie-in versions featuring Geraldine McEwan on the cover in scenes from each of the four new Marple adaptations. They also include the innovative idea of production photographs and exclusive interviews with the casts. Hopefully this trend will continue with the Marple series as these will be very collectable items in years to come.



Marple on DVD

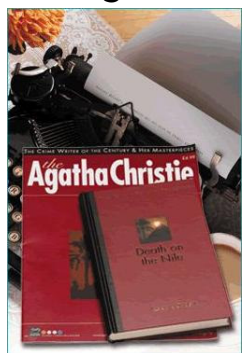
The DVD box set of the four new Marple TV movies broadcast is now available from major retailers and online on Amazon. The DVD box set includes an hour of 'extras'; 15 minutes per film. We get to meet most of the cast, in costume and on the set, talking about their parts and on **The Body in the Library** and **4.50 from Paddington** we get to watch rehearsals and the filming of short scenes. Geraldine MacEwan (or 'Gerry' as Sir Derek Jacobi refers to her!) is interviewed on all the discs.



There is, perhaps, a little too much actual footage from each episode included but two of the locations are identified. Not many trade secrets are revealed and it is a pity that none of the writers/adapters are interviewed, perhaps next time? For the thoughts of the writers and adapters turn to the back of Harper Collins current TV tie-in editions.

Note though that the content is completely different to the 'behind the scenes' programme broadcast on ITV2 immediately after the screening of 'The Body in the Library' last December.

The Agatha Christie Collection



The phenomenally successful Agatha Christie Book and Magazine Collection has finished at Issue 85.

This was originally intended to be a 45-part collection but demand was so great and the publisher was so inundated with requests that it was twice extended. It is a worthwhile addition to any addict's bookshelf and the magazines have included quite a few photos that not even your editor had seen before! It's still available to order for a few months by post. Write to Planet 3

Publishing, Freepost NES8518, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE85 1AS. It is also still available on line for a limited time at

<http://www.agathachristiecollection.co.uk/agatha/>

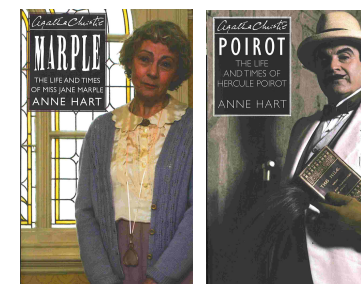
But hurry, this could be your last chance!

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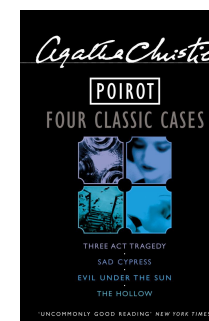
Anne Hart's 'biographies'

"The Life and Times of Miss Jane Marple" and "The Life and Times of Hercule Poirot" have been republished using TV Tie-in illustrations. Miss Marple looks pensive in 'The Body in the Library' and Poirot clutches his guide-book from 'Death on the Nile'.

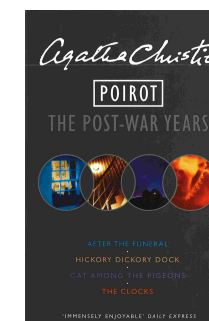


For these new editions the adaptation lists have been completely updated. These are excellent and affectionate surveys of two of detective fiction's most popular characters. They deserve a place on every Christie reader's bookshelf.

New UK Omnibus books



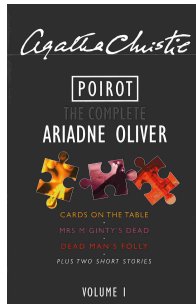
Poirot Four Classic Cases



Poirot The Post-War Years

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The Complete Cases of Ariadne Oliver (Vol1 & 2)

A great introduction to Christie's scattiest detective

BBC Marple Boxset

In May, BBC is releasing a box-set of the entire Miss Marple TV series with Joan Hickson's award winning performance on DVD for £99.99

This box-set contains all of the Joan Hickson Miss Marple mysteries:

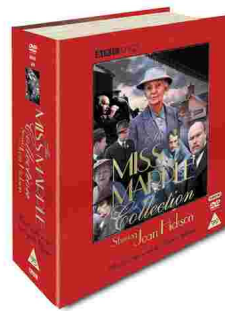
The Body In The Library (3 episodes x 55 minutes)

The Moving Finger (2 episodes x50 minutes)

A Murder Is Announced (3 episodes x 55 minutes)

A Pocketful Of Rye (2 episodes x 55 minutes)

Sleeping Murder (2 episodes x 50 minutes)

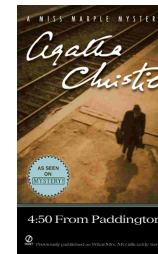


New Marple and Poirot

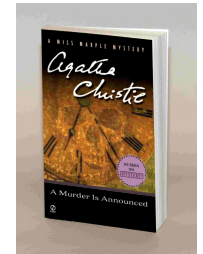
Titles for the next four Marple and Poirot TV films are still to be finalised but I can reveal that the first film to go into production will be 'The Mystery of the Blue Train'. Shooting begins on 9th May in the South of France. Look out for stills in the newspapers.

Unconfirmed reports suggest that the next in the series of wonderful Radio 4 adaptations will be The Mysterious Affair at Styles. Many of the earlier titles have been re-issued with striking new artwork

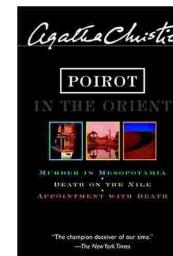
And in the US...



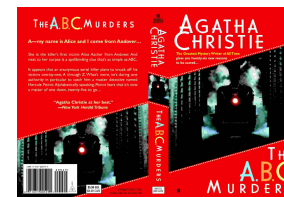
The new TV Marple series is on air on Sundays starting from April 17, 2005 through to June 12, 2005 with a one-week break on May 29 for special PBS Memorial Day programming. New American Library are cross-promoting the TV on book covers. Expect a lot of publicity!



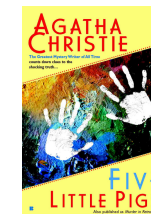
Berkeley has published its first Omnibus edition: 'Poirot in the Orient'. Available in stores from February 2005 (Titles: Death on the Nile, Murder in Mesopotamia and Appointment with Death).



Berkeley are also targeting the youth market with 2 'Young Adult' titles:



The ABC Murders



Five Little Pigs

And in France...



A French screen version of "By the Pricking of my Thumbs" entitled "Mon Petit doigt m'a dit" went on national release on 15th April 2005. Directed by Pascal Thomas, it stars Catherine Frot and André Dussollier. Look out also for the tie-in book from Livre de Poche.

The Agatha Christie website www.agathachristie.co.uk will be re-launched in June 2005 with an exciting new homepage design and more easily navigable and accessible factual information. Added features will include games, e-cards, voter polls and links to a new look Agatha Christie chatsite. The perfect place to explore the world of Agatha Christie and read your Christie newsletter!

Jigsaws

Starting in 1996 Paul Lamond Games in the UK and in 1998 Be-Puzzled in the US released jigsaws based on the stories of Dame Agatha. Varying in size from 323 to 1000 pieces they followed a similar pattern - a booklet synopsising the story, a jigsaw which provided the necessary clues to solve the mystery and the solution concealed in the booklet by mirror-writing. The tricky part was that the illustration on the box was not the same as the completed picture.

The quality of both the picture and the presentation varied and it must be said that even Hercule Poirot would be hard put to solve the mystery from the finished picture! However they were fun and unusual ways to add to a collection of Christie items. Unfortunately neither company is still producing

and although it may be possible to get them online (new or second-hand), few shops still stock them. Below is a list of titles and details. There are unconfirmed rumours that Chorion are working with Paul Lamond to re-release several of the jigsaw titles in 2005.

UK

The Body in the Library - 750 pieces
Death on the Nile - 750 pieces
Hercule Poirot's Christmas - 750 pieces
How Does your Garden Grow? - 600 and 750 pieces (2 versions)
The King of Clubs - 750 pieces
The Million Dollar Bond Robbery - 750 pieces
The Murder on the Links - 750 pieces
The Plymouth Express - 600 pieces
Murder in the Mews - 750 pieces (as Remember, Remember)

US

Case of the Caretaker - 323 pieces
The Double Clue - 1000 pieces
The Theft of the Royal Ruby - 1000 pieces
The Underdog - 1000 pieces
Murder in the Mews - 750 pieces
The Incredible Theft - 750 pieces

For the Christmas market of 2000 Kinnerton Confectionary produced one of the most unusual Christie items ever - An After Dinner Mint Chocolate Murder Mystery Game based on 'Hercule Poirot's Christmas'! A 'Game with Chocolates' for 2-6 players, this featured the evocative artwork from the then current UK paperback edition. And I can confirm that as of February 2005 the chocolate still looks edible!

Quiz

The following addresses are the scenes of murder in which Christie novels?

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Gorston Hall | 10. Towards Zero |
| 2. Littlegreen House | 9. Murder on the Links |
| 3. Rutherford Hall | 8. A Pocket full of Rye |
| 4. Fernly Park | 7. They do it with Mirrors |
| 5. Swinly Dean | 6. Cat among the Pigeons |
| 6. Meadowbank | 5. Crooked House |
| 7. Stonygates | 4. Murder of Roger Ackroyd |
| 8. Yewtree Lodge | 3. 4:50 From Paddington |
| 9. Villa Genevieve | 2. Dumb Witness |
| 10. Gull's Point | 1. Hercule Poirot's Christmas |