

**Francis John Whaley (1897-1977)**  
Detective Novelist and School Master

Francis Whaley was a son of Oswald Stanley Whaley, an Anglican minister born in 1856 in Kilburn, London. Educated at Christ's College, Cambridge, Oswald Whaley served in many parishes around the country from Durham to Sussex. In 1882 he married Mary Sophia Bevan, born in Melbourne, Australia c1862. Mary Bevan was the brother of James Alfred Bevan (1856-1938). James Bevan, also born in Australia, came to Britain when his parents were killed when the SS London went down in a gale in the Bay of Biscay in 1866. He attended Hereford Cathedral School and St. John's College, Cambridge, where he won rugby blues in 1877 and 1880. He became the first Welsh international rugby captain in 1881. In 2007 the James Bevan Trophy, named after him, was instituted for matches between Wales and Australia. Bevan later became an Anglican clergyman, serving as vicar of St. George's Church, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, until 1936. This church is now an arts centre.

Oswald and Mary Whaley had four children but only two boys, Oswald Stanley Whaley (1890-1915) and Francis lived to adulthood. The boys went to Eastbourne College. Francis entered School House in 1910, played in the rugby XV's of 1914, 1915; was placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in "The Run" in 1915; reached the rank of CSM in the OTC; was an editor of the College magazine and Head of School. He won an open exhibition in history to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and went up in 1915. However his university career was interrupted a year later when he was drafted into the military. He was sent to RMC Sandhurst and commissioned into the Royal Hampshire Regiment. He served in France and Italy and was promoted to Lieutenant (Acting Captain). In 1917 he was cited "for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty" and was awarded the Military Cross. In 1918 he was wounded and invalided out of the army.

Oswald (junior) followed his father to Christ's College, Cambridge, and, like his father, was a talented rugby player, although he did not win a blue. After graduation he was briefly a master at Lindley School at Higham-on-the-Hill, a village in Leicestershire, before enlisting in the army in 1914. A 2nd Lieutenant, he was killed at Gallipoli in 1915.

After the war Francis Whaley returned to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. According to the university records he matriculated on 22 October 1919. (This is at odds with the Eastbourne College records which claim that he was at Corpus 1915-16). Standard regulations regarding residence and tripos were relaxed for ex-servicemen after World War I and

(according to the university records) he was allowed to graduate after six rather than nine terms. On the strength of gaining a 2nd class pass in Part II (not Part I) of the Historical Tripos in 1920 and a 3rd class pass in the English Tripos in 1921, he graduated BA on 20 May 1921. College records do not list his sporting achievements but he was elected a member of the University Hawks Club.

In 1923 Francis was appointed an assistant master at Brighton College, where he stayed until 1933. He then taught at St Bees School, Cumberland, although the dates are not known. His parents died within six months of each other in 1933 and in 1937 he was named as co-respondent in a divorce case between Arthur and Eleanor Weekes. Francis married Joan Eleanor Weekes (known as Eleanor) in 1938. There were no children of the marriage.

As Captain FJ Whaley, Francis Whaley published nine detective novels between 1936 and 1941: **Reduction of Staff** (1936) (a public school tale); **Trouble in College** (1936) (set at Cambridge); **Challenge to Murder** (1937); **Southern Electric Murder** (1938); **This Path Is Dangerous** (1938); **Swift Solution** (1939); **The Mystery of Number Five** (1940); **Death at Datchets** (1941) and **Enter a Spy** (1941). These books are, of course, long out of print although **Trouble in College** has been republished by *Amazon*.

In *Southern Electric Murder*, the key investigator is a well-educated police sergeant assigned to a detective inspector with a class chip on his shoulder. The two men have an interesting relationship, and the book is a splendidly detailed mystery, full of trains and timetables. It also has a very interestingly presented Jewish character and goes out of its way to condemn anti-semitism. Published just before the Second World War, Naziism was topical at the time but it is unusual to find an author in this genre addressing a political issue so forthrightly.

Francis was a reservist during World War II. After the end of the war, he became an assistant master at Belmont, a preparatory school at Hassocks in Sussex, where he taught English, History, Latin and some French. He and his wife lived at Carys, West Furlong Lane in Hurstpierpoint village, a few miles from the school. Francis used to travel to Belmont on a motor scooter. More can be found about his time at Belmont in *Belmont Hassocks: the Rise and Demise of an English Prep School*. He died at his home on 18 December 1977; in his will he made a generous bequest to Eastbourne College. Eleanor died at St George's Retreat, Burgess Hill on 23 April 1993.

