

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-r2rbBCaBo>

Watch the video

David Suchet reveal he misses playing Poirot

## **The mysterious disappearance of Agatha Christie**

On Friday 3 December 1926, the English crime novelist Agatha Christie vanished from her home in Berkshire. It was the perfect tabloid story, with all the elements of one of Christie's own 'whodunnit' mysteries. So what was the truth behind her disappearance? Here, historian Giles Milton explores the author's 11 missing days, and the unprecedented manhunt sparked in the wake of her disappearance...



February 7, 2019 at 9:00 am

At shortly after 9.30pm on Friday 3 December 1926, Agatha Christie got up from her armchair and climbed the stairs of her Berkshire home. She kissed her sleeping daughter Rosalind, aged seven, goodnight and made her way back downstairs again. Then she climbed into her Morris Cowley and drove off into the night. She would not be seen again for 11 days.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-r2rbBCaBo>

Watch the video

David Suchet reveal he misses playing Poirot

Her disappearance would spark one of the largest manhunts ever mounted. Agatha Christie was already a famous writer and more than one thousand policemen were assigned to the case, along with hundreds of civilians. For the first time, aeroplanes were also involved in the search.

The Home Secretary, William Joynson-Hicks, urged the police to make faster progress in finding her. Two of Britain's most famous crime writers, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, and Dorothy L. Sayers, author of the Lord Peter Wimsey series, were drawn into the search. Their specialist knowledge, it was hoped, would help find the missing writer.

It didn't take long for the police to locate her car. It was found abandoned on a steep slope at Newlands Corner near Guildford. But there was no sign of Agatha Christie herself and nor was there any evidence that she'd been involved in an accident.

As the first day of investigations progressed into the second and third – and there was still no sign of her – speculation began to mount. The press had a field day, inventing ever more lurid theories as to what might have happened.

It was the perfect tabloid story, with all the elements of an Agatha Christie whodunnit. Close to the scene of the car accident was a natural spring known as the Silent Pool, where two young children were reputed to have died. Some journalists ventured to suggest that the novelist had deliberately drowned herself.

Yet her body was nowhere to be found and suicide seemed unlikely, for her professional life had never looked so optimistic. Her sixth novel, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, was selling well and she was already a household name.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-r2rbBCaBo>

Watch the video

David Suchet reveal he misses playing Poirot

*English crime writer Agatha Christie and her daughter, Rosalind, are featured in a newspaper article reporting the mysterious disappearance of the novelist, 1926. (Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images)*

Some said the incident was nothing more than a publicity stunt, a clever ruse to promote her new book. Others hinted at a far more sinister turn of events. There were rumours that she'd been murdered by her husband, Archie Christie, a former First World War pilot and serial philanderer. He was known to have a mistress.

Arthur Conan Doyle, a keen occultist, tried using paranormal powers to solve the mystery. He took one of Christie's gloves to a celebrated medium in the hope that it would provide answers. It did not.

Dorothy Sayers visited the scene of the writer's disappearance to search for possible clues. This proved no less futile.

By the second week of the search, the news had spread around the world. It even made the front page of the *New York Times*.

Not until 14 December, fully eleven days after she disappeared, was Agatha Christie finally located. She was found safe and well in a hotel in Harrogate, but in circumstances so strange that they raised more questions than they solved. Christie herself was unable to provide any clues to what had happened. She remembered nothing. It was left to the police to piece together what might have taken place.

They came to the conclusion that Agatha Christie had left home and travelled to London, crashing her car en route. She had then boarded a train to Harrogate. On arriving at the spa town, she checked into the Swan Hydro – now the Old Swan Hotel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-r2rbBCaBo>

Watch the video

David Suchet reveal he misses playing Poirot

– with almost no luggage. Bizarrely, she used the assumed name of Theresa Neele, her husband's mistress.

Harrogate was the height of elegance in the 1920s and filled with fashionable young things. Agatha Christie did nothing to arouse suspicions as she joined in with the balls, dances and Palm Court entertainment. She was eventually recognized by one of the hotel's banjo players, Bob Tappin, who alerted the police. They tipped off her husband, Colonel Christie, who came to collect Agatha immediately.

But his wife was in no hurry to leave. Indeed, she kept him waiting in the hotel lounge while she changed into her evening dress.

*The Hydro in Harrogate, Yorkshire, later to become the Old Swan Hotel, pictured c1890. It was here that British crime novelist Agatha Christie was found following her 11-day disappearance in 1926. (Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images)*

Agatha Christie never spoke about the missing eleven days of her life and over the years there has been much speculation about what really happened between 3 and 14 December 1926.

Her husband said that she'd suffered a total memory loss as a result of the car crash. But according to biographer Andrew Norman, the novelist may well have been in what's known as a 'fugue' state or, more technically, a psychogenic trance. It's a rare condition brought on by trauma or depression.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-r2rbBCaBo>

Watch the video

David Suchet reveal he misses playing Poirot

Norman says that her adoption of a new personality, Theresa Neele, and her failure to recognize herself in newspaper photographs were signs that she had fallen into psychogenic amnesia.

‘I believe she was suicidal,’ says Norman. ‘Her state of mind was very low and she writes about it later through the character of Celia in her autobiographical novel *Unfinished Portrait*.’

She soon made a full recovery and once again picked up her writer’s pen. But she was no longer prepared to tolerate her husband’s philandering: she divorced him in 1928 and later married the distinguished archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan.

We’ll probably never know for certain what happened in those lost eleven days. Agatha Christie left a mystery that even Hercule Poirot would have been unable to solve.