



## **Watery Grave**

*Bruce Alexander*

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'Blind Justice', the first novel featuring legendary eighteenth-century London judge Sir John Fielding, was one of the most highly acclaimed mystery debuts of 1994. 'Murder in Grub Street', the second novel, was named by The New York Times Book Review as one of the Notable Books of 1995 in crime fiction. Now Fielding returns in his most baffling case yet.

John Fielding was famous not only as co-founder of London's first police force, the Bow Street Runners, but also as a magistrate of keen intellect, fairness and uncommon detective ability. When a crime was committed, he often took it upon himself to solve it. What made this all the more remarkable was that he was blind.

In 'Watery Grave'. accompanied by his "eyes" (and the series' narrator), young Jeremy Proctor, Fielding encounters a case that hits close to home, as a stepson returns from the high seas with tales of typhoons and a captain overboard. Was it an accident, or was it murder? Fielding is asked to investigate, but discovers considerably more than he'd bargained for - including some secrets that might better have been left at the bottom of a watery grave.

Filled with the authentic sights and sounds and atmosphere of the times, and with a supremely colorful and varied cast of characters, 'Watery Grave' is in every way a delight to read.

## **Watery Grave Details**

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## From Reader Review Watery Grave for online ebook

### Caroline says

Bruce Alexander (like Elliot Roosevelt and Stephanie Barron) takes his detective from real life. This time, it is Sir John Fielding, the famous London Magistrate known as the "Blind Beak." His Watson is Jeremy Proctor, a young orphan Sir John has taken under his wing.

In Watery Grave, the third of the series, Sir John is approached by his old friend Sir Robert Redmond, currently Lord High Admiral of the British Royal Navy. His nephew, John Landon is an officer on the HMS Adventure and has been accused of murdering his captain. During a raging storm, the captain fell overboard and the question is: was Landon pushing him, or trying to save him? If found guilty, he will be hanged. Sir Robert begs Sir John to save him. Compounding the situation is that Sir John's stepson, Tom, is also serving aboard the Adventure and has hopes of becoming a midshipman.

As Sir John and Jeremy dig deeper into the mystery, it becomes apparent that all involved know the truth, but none are willing to reveal it - including Sir Robert. Watery Grave is not so much a mystery as a story of investigation. The true villain, solution, etc., is apparent to both the reader and the detective, very early on. The main bulk of story concerns finding and interviewing witnesses, collection evidence, and preparing a case. The blatantly ambiguous ending mixes injustice and justice, and is too obviously meant to be "realistic." I suppose I did not really mind it, though.

The story flows smoothly, but there are few parts, while serving to illustrate 18th century life, serve little narrative purpose. Specifically, I am thinking of an episode where young Jeremy is almost "drafted" into the British Navy. While this illuminating as to certain barbaric practices of the time, it is unnecessary to the story and sounds suspiciously like a sermon.

Curious as to the historical details, I have read several other reviews online. One reviewer was a legal historian and commended the accurate legal details. Another was a naval historian, and condemned the inaccurate naval details. They both sounded convincing.

I do not have much to say about the characters. Jeremy is an appealing Watson/narrator, and Sir John appropriately reserved and intellectual. They have a dynamic not unlike Nero Wolfe/Archie Goodwin. The others are a bit two-dimensional and some seem only included for "local color." Bruce Alexander, like many other historical fiction authors, is OBSESSED with prostitutes.

Can this book stand on its own? Yes, usually. While there are numerous references to earlier works, most do not interfere with the story. On the whole, it was an interesting, mostly well written book and I enjoyed reading it.

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### Rena Sherwood says

I didn't like this book as much as the previous two since it was much sadder. I don't want to explain more than that since it would give away too many spoilers. I'm still glad I read the book and will continue with the series. I wish I knew more of the history of that time but from what I do know of it, the portrayal of the

Royal Navy was accurate.

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And it was just a gosh-darn interesting book in and of itself. I do recommend reading at least the first book in the series **Blind Justice** before this one but it's not entirely necessary in order to understand what is going on.

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### **Elizabeth says**

Although I didn't think much of this book at the beginning, it really grew on me. The author I think struggled in his last book with creating dialogue that was appropriate to the period but didn't sound twee; he struggled also with having a young protagonist who was observant but not too precious. In this book, he appears to have resolved those issues, and it's fun to see his narrator grow in maturity. That said, were 90% of women in 1760s London really prostitutes? In the author's view, this seems to have been the case.

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### **Danielle says**

I'm a big fan of Sir John Fielding. He's a man after my own heart. I love his righteousness, integrity, keen intelligence and sense of humour. And I love Jeremy Proctor, Jimmy Bunkins and Black Jack Bilbo as well as Mr. Bailey and his colleagues, Lady Fielding or Annie. In other words, those characters are so vivid, so friendly, the stories are so enthralling and well written, I can't wait to read their following adventures. After reading the first three novels, I can't tell which one I prefer, as they are all very good.

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### **Linda says**

Did he fall or was he pushed? From the deck of the H. M. S. Adventure in a heavy storm in 1769, that is. Sir John Fielding's interest in this case began when the ship returned to London carrying Sir John's stepson, Tom Durham, a crew member. The unfortunate death was that of the captain of the ship which occurred earlier in the voyage, but Lt. Landon wasn't charged with the crime until the ship returned to London. Fielding a blind magistrate, is asked by Admiral Robert Redmond to help with the case, which gets very involved with Admiralty law vs. British law. As usual, Jeremy, Fielding's "eyes" plays a large part in the story. In the end, preserving an image becomes more important than justice. I've enjoyed his other books more than this.

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### **Marilyn says**

Though this is the third in the series it is the first Sir John Fielding mysteries I have read. I plan to read

others. The style of writing matches the time frame and setting - eighteenth century London and takes a little getting used to. Once into it however, it flows smoothly. I don't know about the others but this one is written from the point of view of Sir John's ward, Jeremy. Apparently early tomes tell the story of how he became Sir John's ward. Sir John is a blind magistrate in London who, despite being blind is a great crime and mystery solver. Good story, good characters.

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### **Gerry says**

The blind Sir John Fielding has his assistant young Jeremy Proctor to assist him in his investigations into various crimes and in this, the third novel in the Fielding series, he is asked to investigate the death of a ship's captain while on the high seas.

The captain was constantly ill, and regularly drinking and was therefore confined to his cabin. Another member of the crew took on the role of acting captain and it was he who made the accusation that another crew member had pushed the captain overboard while the ship was in the eye of a storm. But it took him until the ship was very nearly docking in London to make the accusation and that was almost a year after the incident took place.

Sir John Fielding was therefore recruited to find out the truth. He makes his way round eighteenth-century London, admirably described by the author, ably assisted by young Proctor. But, sometimes hindered by the naval personnel who recruited him, what he discovers is something of a surprise and leads him into all sorts of highways, byways and intrigues.

The officer accused of the crime is jailed but Fielding visits him and hears his story; there is a trial and the offender is sentenced. However, Fielding is not convinced by the verdict so he continues to search out evidence. And something most surprising is uncovered as more evidence comes out ... however, is it too late to save the officer accused? And what would then happen to the acting captain?

'Watery Grave' is a novel with a twist and the action is always swift and constant, making it a most enjoyable read.

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### **Paula Dembeck says**

This is the third book in the Sir John Fielding series.

It is about a year since the events of the last book, *Murder on Grub Street*. Jeremy Proctor is now 14 years old and settled in the home of Sir John who is married to the second Lady Fielding. Tom Durham, Lady Fielding's son has arrived after spending two years at sea aboard Her Majesty's frigate the *Adventure* and is heartily welcomed home. But when the crew arrives in Tower Wharf we learn there is a senior officer who has been accused of murder and is in the brig awaiting court martial. Vice Admiral Robert Redmond, a friend of Sir John's has asked him to assist in the investigation before the trial. The murder is that of the former Captain Josiah Markham, who was either pushed or fell overboard during a wicked storm. The man accused of the crime is Lieutenant Langdon who is well liked and respected and the accuser is the less popular Lieutenant Hartsell who was acting captain at the time of the event. Langdon says he was trying to save the captain by pulling him back in the boat; Hartsell said Langdon pushed him overboard.

What is puzzling is that no one on board knew a crime had been committed as it was several months after the

event and just before they landed in London that the charges were laid and the crew were informed. As the plot unfolds there are many other troubling issues: Why are the witnesses so wary and reluctant to testify and why are their stories so inconsistent? Why are members of the crew being murdered? Why is Sir Robert who hired Sir John hampering the investigation?

Sir John brings his formidable skills to these questions and is heartily disappointed in his findings. He learns the Royal Navy is a law unto itself, a country all its own in which the ordinary rules of conduct and procedure do not apply.

Several characters from other books make another appearance including Black Jack Bilbo and Jimmie Bunkins and the core characters continue to develop.

This is not a complex mystery that you try to figure out as you read. You already know the murderer, but you do want to see how that all unfolds.

One disappointment is the lack of courtroom drama. After the tiring hunt for witnesses and the astute questioning of suspects, we are not carried through to what would have been some interesting trial scenes. They are dealt with rather quickly at the end and that was a bit disappointing.

However, what continues is the detailed descriptions of life at this time in London. We are not spared the squalid streets infested with scoundrels or the drunks vomiting at the side of the road. It all adds to the colorful story.

We do learn how Sir Fielding lost his sight and it is an interesting story.

This is a good read about flawed loyalties and family ties and friendships that are tested.

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### **Rhonda says**

best in the series so far. i like the way jeremy is maturing and relationships are evolving. this was a good story. alexander is good at matching up details and not leaving things hanging. he doesn't come up with some odd thing at the end that doesn't relate to anything else. he reminds us of previous history without going into too many old details, and his characters keep unfolding . he's just good at storytelling and this time, he showed that a good story doesn't require a neat and tidy ending. i'm looking forward to the next book and am glad that this is a long series.

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### **Christopher Taylor says**

As of this book I have now read the entire John Fielding mysteries series, and in my opinion, this is the best of the set. The characterizations are very fine, the various elements of the mystery well woven, the legalities and complexities of the legal system from the time fascinating, and most of all the events not only ring true but are very engaging.

Jeremy Proctor continues to be a bit of a Mary Sue (everyone likes him, he's stronger than most, smarter than most, more skillful than most, always seems to know what to say etc) but that is countered by his self depreciation as he narrates the story, his level of ignorance and naivete about life, and his well-depicted youth.

This story covers a mystery involving the British Royal Navy which through its later years became such an institution that many horrors committed in its name in order to defend England were overlooked or ignored for the sake of national security. For England to survive as a small island nation, it had to have a powerful,

unquestioned navy, which led to serious abuses and injustices.

Sailors were little more than slaves, the "impress" system was little more than slave raids on the English coasts, captains were virtually above any criticism or judicial reach, and more. And all had reasonable bases: the ships were inevitably undermanned, they were needed to protect the island, captains had to be absolute in their authority while at sea... but bad things were done nevertheless. This book looks at these problems and their reasons with a clear and objective eye, finding much both to love and be troubled by in the Navy.

Oh, and one more thing: it tells the story of how Sir John Fielding lost his eyesight.

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### **Kelly says**

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1. The subjects of homosexuality and pederasty were dealt with

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### **Holly says**

This is a very enjoyable mystery series based on the London magistrate who established the first metropolitan police force in the City—the Bow Street Runners. The author writes in a style evocative of the period, and the main characters are interesting and likable. This wasn't my favorite in the series so far, but it did present an unusual portrait of the Navy's twisted code of ethics at the time (hopefully evolved, though I'm not convinced it has changed enough). If you are looking for something light, these fit the bill.

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### **Tara says**

[Completely \$\$@#ing irritated at the way this story ended.

If I wanted to read a dark, cynical tale about a so-called hero's helplessness in the face of a monumental miscarriage of justice caused by the intransigence and indifference of a self-serving military order, I certainly wouldn't look for it in a freaking cozy mystery series about a blind 18th century magistrate and his 14 year old apprentice, would I?

And I certainly wouldn't want i

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### **Brandy Painter says**

From a review originally posted here.

Watery Grave takes place a little over a year after Murder ends. Jeremy is now a settled member of the Fielding home. Sir John has remarried and the new Lady Fielding is welcoming home her son, Tom, who has been aboard ship in the Navy for the past three years. The ship he crews has come into port with a scandal and an old Admiral friend of Sir John's asks him to help in the investigation. The Captain of the ship went

overboard during a storm and the First Lieutenant, now acting Captain, has accused the Second Lieutenant of pushing him over. The crew is not too happy about this as they far prefer the Second Lieutenant to the First. In the course of his investigation Sir John uncovers the nastier side of His Majesty's Navy.

This is a really sad story. There is a lot of disillusionment experienced by the characters and the end was a bit depressing. I liked this realistic aspect and thought the author concluded it well. Jeremy's character is starting to grate on me a little now though. He is not so naive as he was in the previous two but he still seems far more innocent than a boy of 14 who lived in Covent Garden and worked daily at the Bow Street Magistrate would be. Maybe I am cynical though. As a word of warning for any who might be sensitive, this book has a lot of discussion about sex. Jeremy is, as I said, a 14 year old boy who talks to other teenage boys. The subject comes up. Sex is also a major component in what is uncovered in the investigation and a good many characters who turn up in this one are sailors on leave. So it's there more than a bit in the plot but not described at all. Some of the conversations are actually quite amusing.

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### **Starfish says**

Another EPIC book -- a really nice surprise! Well researched, nice Victorian setting and a great mystery to boot! Well, I say mystery. There was never any doubt as to who the culprit was, only what would happen to the accused -- and that was a surprise, although one that was believably so. The story was more about the personalities and the intricacies of Victorian law. The down side of Victorian life was painted over a bit, but it was acknowledged and there, much more than say, *The Death Collector*. But it still felt somewhat circumcised in its treatment of it -- thought it made up for that in other respects. On the whole, I don't think I can complain.

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### **Carl says**

“Watery Grave” is certainly one of the better historical mystery series I have read in the past 20 years. (Thanks Mary!) “Murder in Grub Street,” the second of the Sir John Fielding mysteries, was named by The New York Times Book Review as one of the Notable Books of 1995 in crime fiction. Now in “Watery Grave,” Sir John Fielding returns in one of his most perplexing cases yet, both for Fielding and the reader. Another intriguing aspect of Bruce Alexander’s historical series is that his main character, Sir John, is based on an actual historical person. Sir John really lived from 1721-1780, and he was a blind Bow Street Magistrate who developed London’s first police force – the Bow Street Runners. Additionally, his brother was the noted author, Henry Fielding of “Tom Jones” fame. Note that one does not have to read the first or the second book to understand the events of “Watery Grave”; however, to fully understand the characters and how they have changed and evolved, it is better to read them in order.

Once again, our narrator is 14-year-old Jeremy Proctor, who works as an apprentice to the magistrate. “Watery Grave” seems to involve a murder committed on board a ship during a storm; the charges seem cut and dry. Sir John Fielding, a friend of the Admiral, is asked to help in the naval inquiry involving this murder on the high seas. The subsequent investigation turns up inconsistencies, apparent corruption, lies and deceit, and throws the Royal Navy’s justice system against that of the land-based legal system. So the reader is left wondering: “What is the truth?” One additional interesting tidbit from this book is that the reader is told how Fielding lost his sight when he was a sailor.

“Watery Grave” unravels at a pace that is easy to follow, but keeps the reader involved and interested in the story. The historical details seem realistic to the period, including the Royal Navy’s almost “blind” approach to justice (Officers – right or wrong). Contributing to the realistic local color is Bruce Alexander’s language, which is rich and suggestive of the times. I really enjoyed “Watery Grave,” and I am captivated by Alexander’s characters and how they have grown and evolved in the series. This is one of the best historical mystery series I have read; I strongly recommend that one starts with “Blind Justice” if you have not read any before.

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### **John Lee says**

The third in the series that I have read and more of Sir John's life story is revealed- his 2nd marriage which was just mentioned in the previous book and also the cause of his blindness.

The main story (pardon the pun) centres around a death on board a Navy ship and although I thought that the story got a little bogged down somewhere near the middle, it finished as quite a page turner.

I have said before that I have read another series of books about Sir John Fieldings court and in Watery Grave there is reference of HMS Repulsion which brought back memories of the excellent Ratcatcher series by James McGee set around the same period.

I would score this one 3.5 if I could but with whole numbers only, on balance, go down rather than up.

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### **Sandy Shin says**

The third Sir John Fielding book deals with the special case of the British Navy and the lengths taken to make sure the Navy's public face was not besmirched. A harder read because of the injustice done is so disappointing, but still a book I enjoyed.

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### **Bob says**

Again a new author for me. Sir John Fielding is the Magistrate of the Bow Street Court in London of the 1700s and having been blinded while serving in the Navy is assisted by a young boy of 14. Jeremy is Sir John's legs and eyes and general help around the court and living quarters which are attached. Sir John is called by an old friend in the Navy who has been put in charge of the court marshal of a Lieutenant from a Man-o-war currently at anchor of Tower Hill. When Sir Joseph hears the charges against the Lieutenant, he has serious doubts that he is guilty of the charges and decides to find out the truth which brings him into direct conflict with the Navy and his “friend”. I was a bit doubtful when I started the book, but was soon wrapped up in the story. Good, if you like mysteries and period pieces.

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### **Denise Kettering says**

Sir John Fielding and his young helper Jeremy Proctor return in the third installment of the Sir John Fielding

mystery series. The story unravels at a pace that is easy to follow, but keeps the reader on her toes as she follows the plot through its many twists and turns. The historical details are very accurate and realistic throughout this series, a trend that continues in this book. In this book, Sir John and Jeremy set out to solve a mystery that occurred on the HMS Adventure, where Sir John's step-son serves. After uncovering some scandalous details about what happened aboard ship, many of Sir John's witnesses turn up dead, leading to another series of murders to be solved.

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