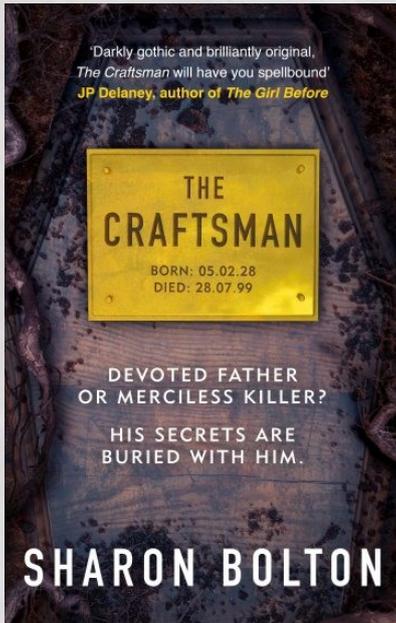


# Reading Group Guide to “The Craftsman” by Sharon Bolton



“The Craftsman” is, fitting enough for a book that deals with witchcraft, Sharon’s 13th published novel. It’s a standalone, based in the real-life town of Sabden in Lancashire, dealing murder in 1969 and the fallout from them in 1999. There’s also, as mentioned before, a strong theme of magic—both black and white—as well as freemasonry. It has been chosen as the Great North Western Read for 2018.

## The author

“**Sharon J Bolton** was born and brought up in Lancashire, the eldest of three daughters. As a child, she dreamed of becoming an actress and a dancer, studying ballet, tap and jazz from a young age and reading drama at Loughborough University. During her Loughborough years she performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.



She spent her early career in marketing and PR before returning to full-time education to study for a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) at Warwick University, where she met her husband, Andrew. They moved to London and Sharon held a number of PR posts in the City, including working at The British Insurance and Investment Brokers' Association, The Solicitors Indemnity Fund and (as a temporary contract) National Savings. She left the City to work freelance, to start a family and to write.

She and Andrew now live in a village in the Chiltern Hills, not far from Oxford, with their son and the latest addition to the family: Lupe, the lop-eared lurcher. Her daily life revolves around the school run, walking the dog and those ever-looming publishing deadlines.” **Fantastic Fiction**

## The Blurb

“Florence Lovelady's career was made when she convicted coffin-maker Larry Grassbrook of a series of child murders 30 years ago in a small village in Lancashire. Like something out of a nightmare, the victims were buried alive. Florence was able to solve the mystery and get a confession out of Larry before more children were murdered., and he spent the rest of his life in prison.

But now, decades later, he's dead, and events from the past start to repeat themselves. Is someone copying the original murders? Or did she get it wrong all those years ago? When her own son goes missing under similar circumstances, the case not only gets reopened... it gets personal.”



## Discussion points

- There's a lot of "magic" in the story but do you think the book treats any of it as "real" or can it all be explained away one way or another?
- Was the book too gruesome in parts? Did anyone have bad dreams because of it?
- Do you think men were really that sexist in 1969? Do you think such attitudes are still around today?
- Does the author show sexism towards men?
- Could the secret men's group "The Craftsmen" be imaginary?
- Do you end up having some sympathy for Larry Glassbrook.
- Are you more interested in, or more sympathetic with, witchcraft now?
- Would you read more by Sharon Bolton in future?
- Did anyone see the ending coming? Does it tie in with what we know of the characters beforehand?
- How much influenced do you think this book is influenced by the BBC series "Life on Mars"?
- What other books have you read with such a strong sense of place?

## Activities

- Make a note of any song referenced and play it, if you can, and play it as background during the reading group session.
- Work out a secret handshake.
- Bring some plasticine along and make a doll. Name it after someone you know.

## Did you know ...

- Sabden is a real village in Lancashire, just south of Pendle Hill. At one stage there were seven mills in the village employing two thousand people.
- The library mentioned is based on the real-life Darwen Library. Sabden itself does not have a library.
- Sharon heavily researched witchcraft before writing the book, including talking to practising pagans.
- "Corpse roads" are a genuine phenomenon and can be known by several different names: "bier road, burial road, coffin line, coffin road, corpse way, funeral road, lych way, lyke way, or procession way". A lane called "Church Way" may also be a corpse road. There are also "coffin stones" where the coffin was put while the pall-bearers rested on the way. There is a corpse road near Sabden, which was used by monks to carry the dead to Whalley Abbey.

"The Craftsman" by Sharon Bolton was selected by Time To Read, a partnership of 22 library services in the North West, to be the Great North West Read 2018.





Local pub



Sabden Church



The "corpse road" near Sabden



Sabden Mill



Clitheroe Police Station



Darwen Library

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