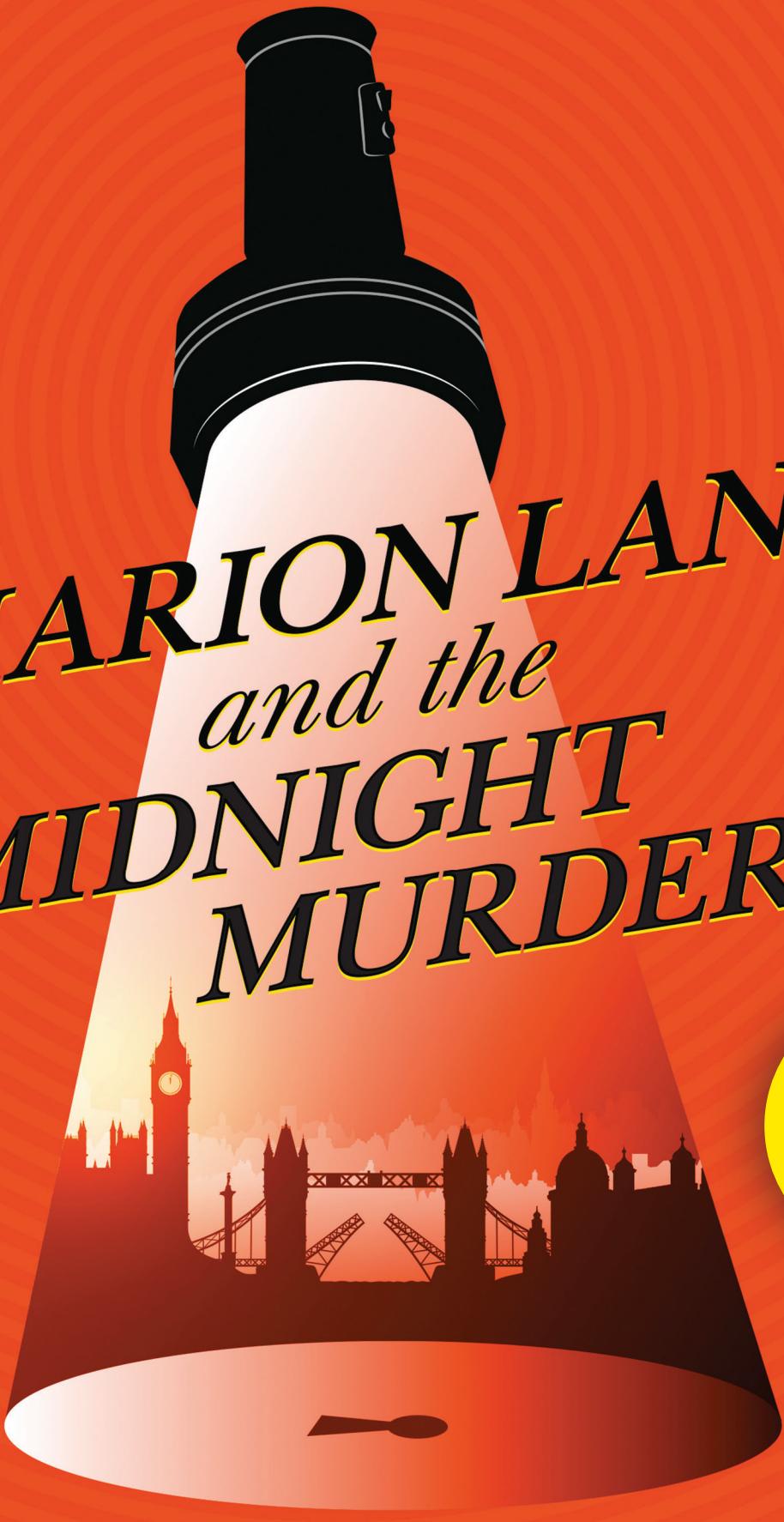


T.A. WILLBERG



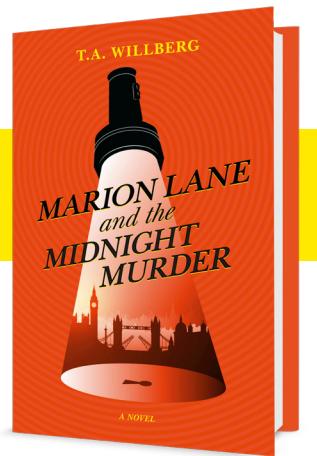
*MARION LANE*  
*and the*  
*MIDNIGHT*  
*MURDER*



A NOVEL

# Discussion Guide

## BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION *MARION LANE AND THE MIDNIGHT MURDER*



- 1) MARION LANE AND THE MIDNIGHT MURDER is set in the 1950s, when London was still recovering from WWII. In what ways does the historical setting lend itself to the story?
- 2) The book is set up as a traditional “locked room” mystery. Which characters did you suspect at first? Did that change over the course of the book?
- 3) What compels Marion to solve Michelle White’s murder? Why do you think Marion wants to be an Inquirer?
- 4) The Inquirers use all manner of peculiar gadgets when solving crimes. What was your favorite gadget and why?
- 5) The Inquirers work far beneath the streets of London, in a labyrinth of tunnels. In what ways does this benefit the Inquirers? In what ways does it leave them vulnerable?
- 6) Toward the end of the book, Marion discovers there are holding chambers. Why do you think Miss Brickett wants to keep them a secret?
- 7) Miss Brickett is an elusive and enigmatic character who will defend her agency at all costs. Do you think she has Marion’s best interests at heart? Explain your answer.
- 8) Do you think Marion will be successful as an Inquirer? Why or why not?
- 9) At the end of the book, Swindlehurst is found out and brought to the holding chambers. But he soothes himself by remembering he has a Plan B. What do you think that might be?

# Behind the Book

## A Real Miss Brickett's? The Secrets of Subterranean London

The idea for an underground private detective agency came to me with little effort. In order for the narrative to work, I knew that the location of Miss Brickett's Investigations & Inquiries had to be guarded from the outside world, nearly impenetrable to outsiders and expertly disguised. Thus the choice to put the agency underground, right beneath the city it served, was an obvious one.

I did think, however, that the idea was a little far-fetched. A vast expanse of working corridors and chambers that no one had heard about, carved beneath the foundations of a sprawling city seemed somewhat implausible. But after some research, I learned that all of this already existed. Here are some of the most fascinating subterranean secrets of modern-day London.

### THE FLEET SEWER

Though it's now known as London's largest subterranean river-sewer, in Roman times the River Fleet was cast in an immensely grander light. The river flowed from Hampstead Heath, through King's Cross toward Blackfriars. Several wells were built along its banks and some were even reported to have healing powers.

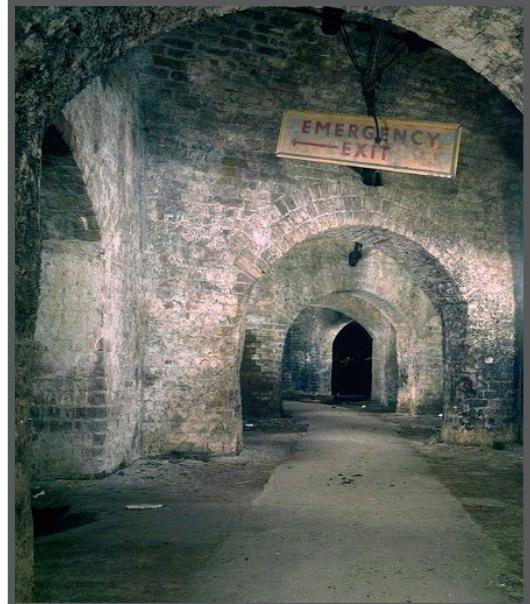
But as London expanded and the population grew, the river turned gray and septic and was eventually entombed. Perhaps for the better.



### CAMDEN CATACOMBS

One of my favorites, and a slightly danker version of what I imagine Miss Brickett's to look like. As wonderfully chilling as it sounds, however, "Camden Catacombs" is a misnomer since bodies were never stored there.

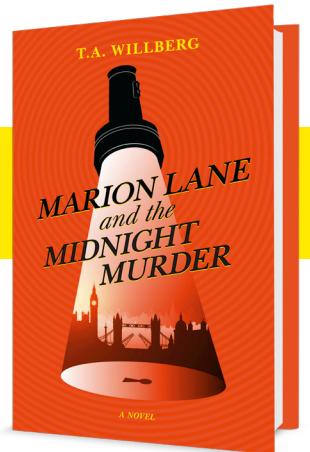
Instead the tunnels—built by Robert Stephenson—were used mostly as a system to transport horses during the 19th century, and later to store liquor (there isn't any left, I've asked around). Unfortunately, the "catacombs" have become prone to frequent flooding and are closed to the public.



### THE CHISTLEHURST CAVES

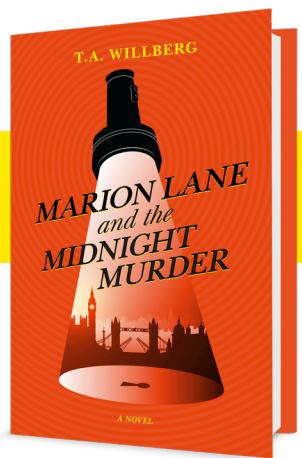
You won't catch me anywhere near these caves (apparently they're haunted) but the Chistlehurst Caves—22 miles of snaking, low-roofed tunnels in South East London—have garnered quite the reputation since the mid-13th century.

Originally created for chalk and flint mining, over the years the caves were used as a weapon storage facility in WWI, an air raid shelter during the Blitz, a venue for ghost hunters and rock bands, a set for film and TV and even....a *mushroom cultivation center*. Peculiar.



# Behind the Book

## A Real Miss Brickett's? The Secrets of Subterranean London



### THE WHITEHALL WAR ROOMS

Perhaps one of the most well-known subterranean structures in London is Churchill's Cabinet War Rooms located beneath Whitehall. The complex was a British government command center during WWII and is now part of the Imperial War Museum.

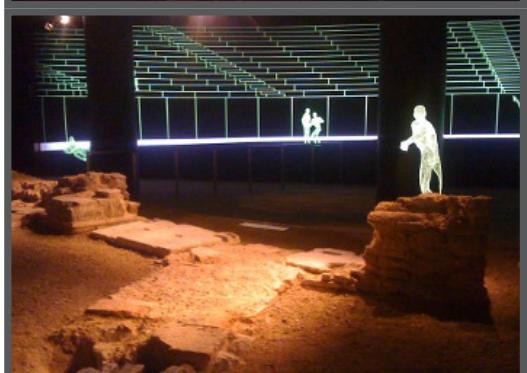
During the Blitz, the rooms were re-enforced with a thick layer of concrete known as "The Slab," protecting all those it held from the continuous German air raids.



### ROMAN AMPHITHEATRE AT GUILDHALL

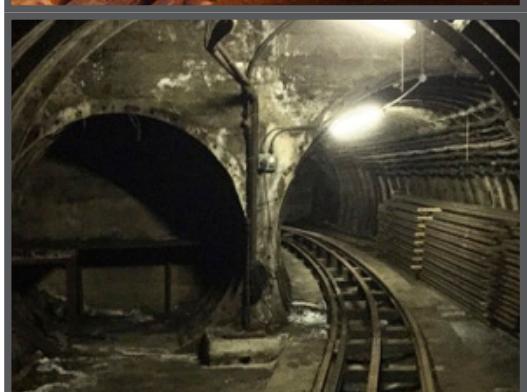
Slipping a little further back in time are the once majestic remnants of the enormous Roman Amphitheatre located beneath the Guildhall Art Gallery.

It is believed that the stadium was first built in 70 AD and later used for fights and other (rather gruesome) entertainment, and capable of holding close to 6,000 people! It is now a preserved historical site open for public viewing.



### MAIL RAIL

This one is endlessly fascinating to me and inspired my idea for the Miss Brickett's secret letter case system. Built at the turn of the 20th century to lessen the chaos on London's congested, smoggy streets, the Mail Rail was a network of underground pneumatic (vacuum-powered) railways, designed by the Post Office to transport mail across the City. In theory, steel, driverless cars would zip along the two-foot-wide tunnels, delivering mail between sorting offices with efficiency and speed.



Construction of the tunnel network (carved 70 feet below the streets, connecting West and East London) was completed in 1917 but installation of the complex powering system was halted until after the Great War.

Unfortunately, the system became a financial burden and was officially closed in 2003. In 2013, the British Postal Museum announced plans to renovate sections of the tunnels as a tourist attraction. You can now ride some of these reconstructed underground lines, provided you are not prone to claustrophobia!