

Edinburgh author Mairi Kidd launches her new novel at packed event in Old Town

Edinburgh author Mairi Kidd this week launched her new novel, *The Specimens*, at a packed event held at The Saltire Society in the capital's Old Town, where Burke & Hare's victims lost their lives two centuries ago.

The novel, released by Edinburgh's own Black & White Publishing, is set in 1820s Edinburgh, a city of incredible medical discovery, and violent mob mayhem.

When brutally battered Helen finds her abusive husband dead in the corner of their bedroom, she flees the city to her father's farm, where her estranged children have been sent for safety.

Helen's father has nothing to spare, and so Helen must take her bruised and beaten body to the fields to help with the harvest.

Round the fire one night, she meets the charming Irishman William Burke. With William by her side, 'Nelly' finds she can face life again, and soon the couple have set up home in the heart of the Old Town.

Susan is a new bride, excited to take up her place as mistress

of a fine house and wife of the upcoming anatomist Robert Knox, who looks set to become one of the foremost men in the city. But when the new couple return from their honeymoon, Susan discovers her husband has a very different home planned for her.

There's nothing so coarse as locks or keys, but nonetheless Susan is a prisoner, under the control of a man she has increasingly come to fear.

Helen, too, is in a bind. She and William have moved to a lodging house owned by William's friend William Hare and his partner Margaret, and Helen is afraid of both of them.

And all across the Old Town, people have begun disappearing into the dark of the closes, never to be seen again.

The awful crimes of Burke and Hare have captivated attention for almost two hundred years, but the lives of the women caught up in the killings have been neglected. *The Specimens* reimagines the story through the lives of Helen and Susan, and of three of the victims, Abigail, Effy and Elizabeth.

This is the story of Britain's most infamous anatomy murderers and Scotland's worst ever serial killers, as you have never read it before