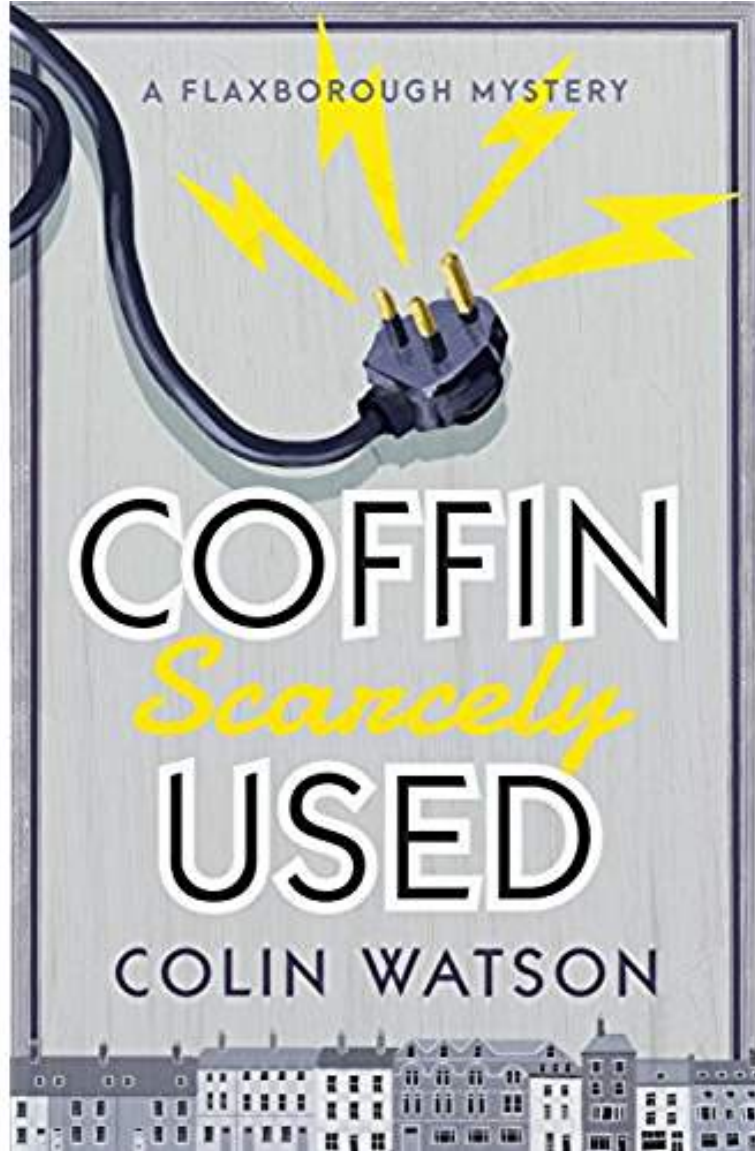


A FLAXBOROUGH MYSTERY



COFFIN *Scarcely* USED

COLIN WATSON

What We Say

A treat. First published in 1958, this light mystery kicked off a series of understated crime novels set in the fictional town of Flaxborough. No, I'd never heard a whisper about it either, but author Colin Watson has a sure, almost unique touch. His balance of genuine humor, a solid mystery and a convincing hero at the heart of it is quite appealing. In the Miss Marple-like vein, Flaxborough is a placid-seeming town with resentment and crime and vengeance roiling under the surface. A local personage dies of pneumonia and no one blinks twice. But when his next door neighbor apparently commits suicide by electrocution, Detective Inspector Purbright starts to give both deaths a much closer look. "Coffin, Scarcely Used" surely doesn't lack for suspects. Everyone offers up dubious or too-tight alibis, along with casual information damning someone else, as much as it pains them to reveal it. On and on the finger-pointing goes. Purbright has a superior who is quite dismayed when our hero uncovers multiple homicides and a den of inequity. But -- here's a twist -- he doesn't interfere. Even better, Purbright is surrounded by other policemen who appear typical footpads but slowly display insight and acumen, without ever seeming to be sleuths or superhuman. They're just good at their job -- as is Purbright, who has a Columbo-like ability to patiently ask questions and wait for human nature to take its course. Someone speaking on the series commented on its decency, which somehow is the right word. Purbright and his men do their job without fuss or bother and that's reassuring and thrilling. Oh and it's deliciously fun, with countless vivid characters taking their turn on stage. The first three books in the series are out within weeks of each other and I'll be gobbling up #2 and #3 soon.

-- Michael Giltz

<http://bookfilter.com/2018/02/16/coffin-scarcely-used-a-flaxborough-mystery/>