

# Keeping Faith writer tries to 'break the taboo around mental health'





Matthew Hall's newly-adapted Jenny Cooper novels deal with anxiety.

The writer behind acclaimed BBC drama *Keeping Faith* has said that with each of his projects he tries to “break the taboo around mental health”.

Matthew Hall penned the Welsh-language thriller, starring Eve Myles – which broke the record for play requests on BBC's iPlayer with over 9.5 million viewers – after abandoning a career as a criminal barrister.

The writer, 51, is also behind the Jenny Cooper novels which have been adapted into a television series called *Coroner* for Canadian channel CBC.

Cooper, who is played by Canadian actress Serinda Swan, is a coroner who has an affinity with the dead but suffers from severe panic attacks.

Hall, whose pen name is MR Hall, said he had drawn on his own experience of mental health issues to create Cooper.

He told the Press Association: “My job as a novelist is to try and keep the emotional reality throughout because that's what interests me most – the internal lives of characters.

“I guess that is what I was trying to bring to legal thrillers, that extra layer of digging deep into the psychology of the central characters.

“I was certainly trying to break the taboo around mental health. I'd spent 20 years not talking about it to anyone and the moment I started writing about it I started getting better.

“So, there’s a moral there for you.”

Hall said Cooper’s quasi-mystical relationship with the corpses she examines could be explained by his Welsh upbringing.

He suggested his family’s superstitions and rituals had seeped into his work and were reflected in his protagonists.

He said: “It’s really interesting because you are dealing with death and the idea was to deal with death in quite an intimate way, and to create in Jenny a character that sort of has an affinity with dead people.

“There’s also a sort of mystical element in her. Where did that come from? Perhaps my Welsh family are a bit like that: superstitious, a bit spiritualistic.

“They’ve always been like that. I wanted that and I was interested that (show creator Morwyn Brebner) ran with that.

“I don’t sound very Welsh but my family is all Welsh. There is a sort of streak in that Welsh character who is fascinated with death.”

Coroner continues on Mondays at 9pm on Universal TV.