

Arts & Leisure

Dad was at Oaken Heart of village life

Remembering Allingham characters

Neil D'Arcy Jones

THE great Essex crime novelist Margery Allingham was most famous for her character Albert Campion, the gentleman detective. But what many people may not know about her is her effort to get the Americans to enter the



Second World War. From the outbreak of the war until May 1941, she kept a diary of the events that took place in her home village of Tolleshunt D'Arcy. The result was the Oaken Heart and whether or not it had the desired effect of getting the Americans to join up or not, what it did do was provide a beautiful snapshot of English village life during the war.

Newly re-edited by Margery's biographer Julia Jones, the County Standard went looking for some of the relatives of those characters featured in the book.

One of the people who greatly helped Julia with the new edition was Alan Smith. Aged ten when the war broke out, both Alan's grandfather, Alfred, and his father, Albert, appear in Margery's book.

Julia said: "Albert was really central to village life because he was the handy

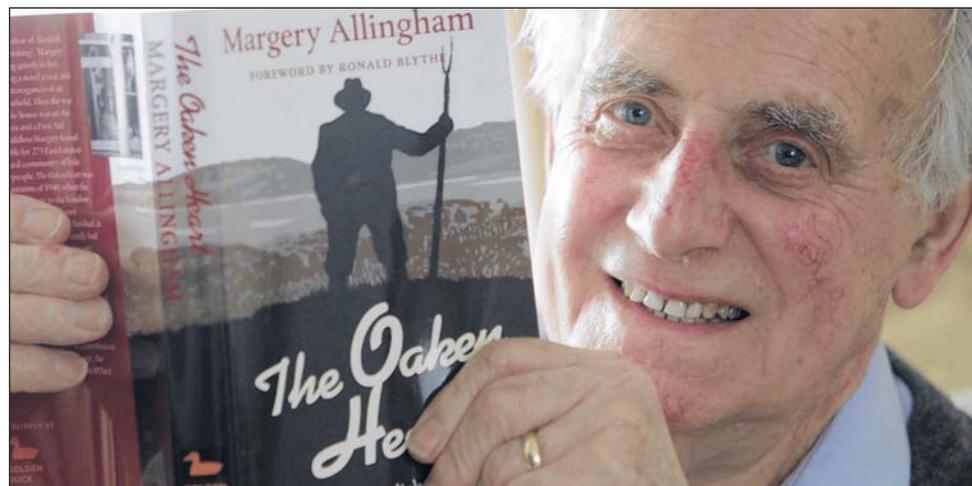
man. If you needed a job doing, then Albert was your man."

Alan, who now lives in Salcott, added: "He was drafted to work on the airfields and he would cycle from Tolleshunt D'Arcy to Wormingford every day.

"I remember one evening he got home and there was a message that he was needed back at the airfield straight away, so he got back on his bike. They met him halfway with a lorry, which he was allowed to bring home for the night."

If the Oaken Heart tells us anything about the residents of Tolleshunt D'Arcy back then, it is that they were down to earth people who responded well in a crisis.

"He didn't know anything about the book," Alan revealed, "until she presented my father with a copy. He was chuffed to bits with it and showed his mates at work.



Pages of history: Alan Smith's father Albert, pictured below, was a character in Margery Allingham's book, *The Oaken Heart*, which has been re-edited. Picture: Nigel Brown CO42240-012

"Unfortunately, that was the last we ever saw of it." One of the key events in the book was when the evacuees came to Tolleshunt D'Arcy.

Julia explained: "Mr Doe, the butcher, and Margery were the billeting officers and I think they got quite a shock when eight double-decker buses turned up with 275 children all to be housed in a village of just 600 people."

The book also details a series of bombs falling around the village, although for an 11-year-old boy that wasn't as fearful as it sounded.

"I think I was more excited than anything else," said Alan. "We used to watch the planes fighting in the skies and I remember one day we saw this huge great thing come down, and it was a V2 rocket. We just all stared in amazement."

Another Tolleshunt

D'Arcy resident of the time was young Royal Engineer Harold Curtis who, with wife Nora, became well-loved characters in their own right in Nora's home village of Tolleshunt Knights.

Although Harold has now died, his wife Nora is still very much involved with community life.

Although now living in Tiptree, one of her many roles includes being life president of the Tolleshunt Knights' young football team.

She had many stories to tell about the war, including the time her father ploughed up a bomb on his smallholding, but perhaps the most poignant was when her Harold returned from the war.

Nora and her child had been living with her parents, but because she was so determined to have her own home when her husband

came back from Germany she found an empty cottage on Oxley Hill.

She said: "On the day he came home he had no idea. He still thought we were living at my parents, so when the bus driver went past, he said 'hey you've missed my stop'. He was in the know, you see, and he said nothing to my Harold.

"When the bus pulled up outside the little cottage and we were waiting there for him at the gate, I could see tears streaming down his face. He said to me 'what a lucky man I am'."

As part of the Essex Book Festival, a special event celebrating the publication of the new edition of the Oaken Heart will take place at St Nicholas Primary School, in Tolleshunt D'Arcy, on Thursday at 7.30pm.

Tickets cost £4 and £3, and are available on 01206 573948.

FILM GUIDE

THE LINCOLN LAWYER (15)

MICK Haller (Matthew McConaughey) conducts business from the back of a Lincoln Continental sedan driven by former client Earl (Laurence Mason). The defence attorney is used to representing the dregs of society, but he hits the jackpot when bail bondsman Val Valenzuela (John Leguizamo) recommends him as counsel for playboy estate agent Louis Roulet (Ryan Phillippe), accused of assault and attempted murder.

Rating H H H H I
Fri: 2.45pm; 5.45pm and 8.30pm.
Sat-Sun: 12pm; 2.45pm; 5.45pm and 8.30pm.

A TURTLES TALE 3D (U)

AFTER hatching on a Californian beach, Sammy the sea turtle heads for the sea where he finds and loses the love of his life, Shelly. Setting out on an epic journey, the tenacious turtle must battle hungry piranhas, escape a fearsome fish eagle and find a secret passage if he is to be

reunited with her again.

Rating H H H H I
Sat-Sun: 10.45am; 12.45pm; 2.45pm and 4.45pm.
A TURTLES TALE 2D (U)
Sat-Sun: 11.30am.

BATTLE LOS ANGELES (12A)

IT'S August, 2011, and capitals around the world are under attack from an otherworldly force. Marine Staff Sergeant Michael Nantz (Aaron Eckhart) is drafted to spearhead Second Battalion, Fifth Marines based at Camp Pendleton and is told to lead his platoon to a police precinct where survivors are barricaded inside the building.

Rating H H H H I
Fri-Sun: 2.15pm; 5.15pm and 8pm.

HALL PASS (15)

MAGGIE (Jenna Fischer) and Grace (Christina Applegate) are sick and tired of their husbands Rick (Owen Wilson) and Fred (Jason Sudeikis) ogling other women. So at the suggestion of their friend Dr Lucy (Joy Behar), the women grant their spouses "hall passes" for one week. Rick and Fred hit the town while, Maggie and Grace leave town with the children and babysitter

FILM OF THE WEEK



Paige (Alexandra Daddario), finding some pleasing distractions of their own.

Rating H H H H I
Fri-Sun: 8.30pm.

THE ADJUSTMENT BUREAU (12A)

MATT Damon plays ambitious politician David Norris, who has overcome tragedy in his personal life to lead the charge for the White House. David meets gifted dancer Elise Sellas (Emily Blunt) and the chance encounter proves a turning point

CHALET GIRL (12A)

TOMBOY skateboarding prodigy Kim Matthews (Felicity Jones) abandons the sport she loves after her life is touched by tragedy and settles for a fast food restaurant job until she accepts a position as an Alpine chalet attendant at the highly exclusive St Anton resort, where she attracts the attention of playboy Jonny Madsen (Ed Westwick).

Rating H H H H I
Fri-Sun: 1.45pm; 4.15pm; 6.30pm and 9pm.

in his potentially glittering future.

Rating H H H H I
Fri-Sun: 6.45pm and 9.15pm.

RANGO (PG)

A LONELY chameleon (voiced by Johnny Depp) is stranded in the Mojave Desert, where he meets an iguana called Beans (Isla Fisher). He rechristens himself Rango, pretending to be a famous gunslinger.

Rating H H H H I
Fri: 2pm; 2.30pm; 4.30pm and 5pm.
Sat-Sun: 10.30am; 11.30am;

2pm; 2.30pm; 4.30pm and 5pm.

UNKNOWN (12A)

DR Martin Harris (Liam Neeson) travels to Berlin with his wife Elizabeth (January Jones) to attend a conference. As they arrive at the hotel, Martin realises he has left his passport at the airport and jumps into a taxi to collect it. En route, there is a freak accident and Martin slips into a coma, waking four days later. He races back to the hotel and is delighted to find his wife... except she doesn't recognise him.

Rating H H H H I
Fri: 2.30pm; 5.30pm and 8.15pm.
Sat-Sun: 5.30pm and 8.15pm.

PAUL (15)

BEST friends Graeme (Simon Pegg) and Clive (Nick Frost) embark on a road trip across America and encounter Paul (voiced by Seth Rogen), an alien stranded on Earth, who is being hunted by agent Zoil (Jason Bateman).

Rating H H H H I
Fri: 1.45pm; 4pm; 6.15pm and 8.45pm.
Sat-Sun: 11.15am; 1.45pm; 4pm; 6.15pm and 8.45pm.

GNOMEO & JULIET 3D (U)

GNOMEO (James McAvoy) lives on one side of the drive with sidekick Benny (Matt Lucas). A chance encounter with Juliet (Emily Blunt) sows the seeds of love.

Rating H H H H I
Sat-Sun: 11.30am.

THE KING'S SPEECH (12A)

OSCAR-WINNING film detailing the story of King George VI and the speech therapist who helped him deal with his stammer.

Rating H H H H H
Fri-Sun: 2pm; 5.30pm and 8.15pm.

ODEON KIDS TOY STORY 3 2D (U)

ANDY has packed up his belongings, setting aside Woody (Tom Hanks) for life on campus, but Andy's mother mistakenly donates the other toys to Sunnyside day care centre. But after saying goodbye to his friends, Woody finds out the truth about the centre.

Rating H H H H H
Sat-Sun: 11am.