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Introduction

Herbert Allingham: A Common Writer

Born 1867

This is a study of the working life of Herbert Allingham: a life that may formally be held to have commenced with the publication of his first serial story in 1886. It is, however, a central argument that the significance of Allingham's career only becomes apparent when it is viewed in wider social, economic and cultural contexts. These include the characteristic patterns of capitalistic development as well as specific historical factors contributing to the proliferation of cheap, nationally distributed periodicals designed for working class family entertainment at a time when the working classes comprised the majority of the population.

Allingham was born into a family that was still functioning as a business entity. During his lifetime this became a very much less common situation (in towns at least) but, as the family's potential as a unit of production declined, its importance as an agent of consumption increased. Broadly, people's domestic expectations rose. Though this was a material process, it possessed an underlying moral impetus that may have been a legacy of the teachings of nineteenth century evangelical Christians and social reformers.

In this thesis the word family works hard. As well as referring to people in their domestic, gendered or generational relationships to one another, it is also used collectively for people, businesses, or artefacts (such as magazines) that were linked by their common interests. Flavouring all these is an evaluative usage of 'family' to convey a generalised approbation, a benison of social respectability. In cultural terms family entertainment is marketed as something to be shared. It may be bland but it is implicitly

guaranteed to be safe and to avoid certain areas that might arouse conflicting responses in people of different genders or generations.

Allingham's fiction was 'family' in several senses. It was published in periodicals which were intended for multiple readers, often of different genders or generations, and which were primarily to be read in the home (though they may also have been read and shared in street and workplace). His dramatic serial stories, which are the main focus of this study, focus insistently on threats to the family; enforced severance from spouse or child, for instance, or banishment from the home. Their language is accessible: their narrative framework moral. This family fiction may be considered as combining two previously antagonistic narrative types – 'dreadful' street literature and sentimental domestic tracts – into a single popular product.

Born 1867

I commence therefore, not in 1886, but in 1867, the year of Allingham's birth, his arrival in a particular family. In 1867 Karl Marx finally published the first volume of his long-awaited *Das Kapital*. Alfred and Harold Harmsworth (Lords Northcliffe and Rothermere), conspicuous capitalists, were born in 1865 and 1868 respectively: their competitor, C. Arthur Pearson, in 1866. In 1867 the penny fiction paper *The London Journal* was in its heyday, printing the melodramatic serials of J.F. Smith and selling almost half a million copies a week to its Northern mill-girl readers, while, in Scotland, John Leng, the astute editor-proprietor of *The People's Journal* (1858), was soon to found *The People's Friend* (1869), the oldest family story-paper still in existence in Britain today and the last true survivor of what was, in Allingham's day, such a welcome form of entertainment for ordinary people. In 1866, in the commercially exciting

field of juvenile publishing, Edwin Brett took over the penny weekly magazine *The Boys of England* and made it an influential, mass-market success.

In 1867 the population of mainland Britain was growing, particularly in the cities. Families were large and the country was demographically youthful. 1867 was the year of the Second Reform Bill. The limited extension and redistribution of the franchise to certain sectors of the male working class that this initiated prompted expressions of elite anxiety about the education of ‘our future masters’. Mass literacy was both desired and feared. The journalist James Greenwood’s alarmist collection, *The Seven Curses of London* (1869), typified the middle class feeling of moral panic at the criminalizing and contagious effects of ‘dreadful’ popular fiction, especially when purchased by boys. This encouraged both philanthropic organisations and individual commercial entrepreneurs to develop socially acceptable, family-centred, alternatives. For the ensuing half century, to the end of the First World War, it proved a lucrative line to take.

Structural Change in Entertainment Publishing, 1867 - 1936

In this thesis I present Herbert Allingham’s working life and the trading activity of his family as embedded within the penny paper industry. This area of publishing did more than grow between 1867, when Allingham was born, and 1936, when he died; it changed structurally. Apart from the sheer number of papers produced and sold, distinguishing features of this period include the greater degree of social penetration achieved by the penny periodicals, their increased variety and sophisticated targeting and, above all, the scale and corporate nature of the businesses producing them. From the first decade of the twentieth century Allingham’s main employer, the Amalgamated Press could increasingly be described as

a publishing 'empire'. It owned or leased vast areas of pulp-producing forest in Newfoundland, paper mills on the Thames, extensive and varied print-works across London, impressive editorial suites in Fleet Street and a national system of distribution and local representation. Allingham's contemporaries, Alfred and Harold Harmsworth, had developed all this and more from a couple of rented rooms and a penny weekly magazine for the common reader, *Answers* (1888).

Passages in the first volume of *Das Kapital* brilliantly describe the processes of accumulation, concentration and centralization by which so much was enabled to happen in such a relatively short space of time. Activity of this nature had a direct impact on other producers (such as the Allingham family) who were attempting to function in the same area. The first three chapters of this thesis describe the failure of three distinctively nineteenth-century penny-publishing ventures, with which Allingham was involved, to survive more than a few years into the twentieth century. Marx's description of 'the battle of competition' is especially helpful in understanding the reasons for their failure. 'The battle of competition is fought by the cheapening of commodities. The cheapness of commodities depends, *caeteris paribus*, on the productiveness of labour and this again on the scale of production. Therefore the larger capitals beat the smaller.' Or, as A.A. Milne is supposed to have put it, 'Northcliffe killed the penny dreadful by the simple expedient of producing the ha'penny dreadfuller.' Chapters four and five will show Allingham moving away from struggling family enterprises to engage in much more remunerative work with just such Harmsworth-published 'ha'penny dreadfullers'. 'Capital grows in one place to a huge mass in a single hand because in another place it has been lost by many,' wrote Marx. The Allinghams were among the many.

Structural change in the penny paper industry during Herbert Allingham's lifetime can be compared

to capitalist development in other areas of industry, though not necessarily over the same period. Volume one of *Das Kapital* demonstrates that the changes in this sector, which affected different generations of Herbert Allingham's family in different ways, were not isolated or adventitious happenings but the results of the activity of capital elsewhere in the economy. In 'The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation', for instance, Marx describes the inherently self-expansive nature of capital:

The mass of social wealth, overflowing with the advance of accumulation and transformable into additional capital, thrusts itself frantically into old branches of production, whose market suddenly expands, or into newly formed branches, such as railways, etc., the need for which grows out of the development of the old ones.

Certainly the growth of the consumer market for inexpensive entertainment fiction, of the type produced by Allingham and his peers, can be seen as a delayed result of the profound changes in many people's living and working patterns imposed by capitalistic industrialisation in the first half of the nineteenth century. Urbanisation was one crucial change and it seems worth noting that it was the growth of the market for urban housing that enabled Allingham's grandfather, William Allingham, to accumulate the modest capital sums that his older sons, James and John Allingham, would then use to enter the penny-publishing business.

In 1867 this thrust of wealth into the penny-paper sphere of production was at an early stage. Metal and steam had reached the print industry more slowly than, say, textiles or pottery and in the 1860s, 70s and 80s this area of production still offered opportunities for the small-scale entrepreneur such as Allingham's father, James, and his uncle, John. Start-up costs (for the purchase of machinery, blocks, copyrights) were still temptingly low. Unfortunately, as Marx explains:

With the development of the capitalistic mode of production, there is an increase in the minimal amount of capital necessary to carry on a business under its normal conditions. The smaller capitals therefore crowd into spheres of production which Modern Industry has only sporadically or incompletely got hold of.

Initially this worked in favour of the penny-publishing pioneers when small amounts of capital from other

sectors (such as urban housing growth) were all that was needed to fertilise new periodicals. But once sufficient capital had ‘crowded into’ the penny paper sphere of production, technology became more specialized, impressive and expensive; competition became more intense and many of the smaller enterprises, with inadequate ‘carry on’ capital, withered and died.

At the time of Marx’s arrival in England (1849) – and during the early years of James and John Allingham’s careers – the penny-publishing industry was, broadly, at the transitional stage of capitalistic development which Marx calls the ‘manufacturing’ stage. This is the stage in which ‘machinery squeezes itself into the manufacturing industries first for one detail process and then for another’ - exactly as new machines did in printing works. Stages in the print production process were mechanised piecemeal. It took the best part of a century, from the introduction of the iron-framed press c1800 to the crucial adoption of mechanised type-setting in the 1880s, for the printing of newspapers and magazines to evolve into the completely coordinated ‘factory’ system. The manufacturing stage, in Marx’s vision, is a period of ‘small masters’; a description that certainly fits Allingham’s father, James, and also C.W. Bradley, the printer-publisher for whom Herbert Allingham would edit *The London Journal* for twenty years. From the point of view of the workers, daily labour in this phase of industrialization might be at least as oppressive and dangerous as under the factory system proper. Marx describes some of the partially mechanised print works of his day as ‘slaughter-houses’.

Marx himself was dead before the subsequent factory phase, which he had observed elsewhere in British industry, effected widespread structural change in penny publishing. Broadly speaking, it was in the years after 1900 that the accumulation of capital in the hands of individuals such as Pearson and the Harmsworths did away with the small masters and pulled all aspects of production, marketing and distribution into single corporate systems. I will argue that at precisely the moment in 1909 that Allingham thought he was gaining his independence as a freelance writer, abandoning editorship and a small but regular salary to move out of London into the country with his wife and children, there to set up his own ‘fiction factory’ (chapters four and five), he was actually selling himself as a component part of the Harmsworths’ out-sourced production system.

For working people the difference between the manufacturing and factory phases, lies not in the oppressive physical conditions per se, but in the degree of structural alienation (loss of connection with their own work) experienced in the latter phase, together with the two-fold processes of intensification of

labour for the few and the casualisation of the majority. As it developed from manufacturing to factory over the turn of the century, the print industry conformed to this pattern but in its own distinctive way. Some groups, such as the compositors, were supported by a strong tradition of collective organisation that survived the move to mechanisation because the operation of typesetting machines demanded such a high level of skill. Other labourers in printing and print-distribution were exploited actually and structurally. The story of the nineteenth century – and of *Das Kapital* – is the story of the cheapening of labour in all areas of production. The production of surplus value demanded that wherever work no longer required great physical strength or extended periods of training, it should be taken from adult men and given instead to women and adolescent boys.

There were important efforts to curb this (such as the Factory Acts and the introduction of compulsory schooling) but in essence fundamental alterations to the social division of labour continued up to and beyond the First World War and had side-effects in areas such as the readership of periodicals and also their presentation and contents. Working class women and adolescents (both boys and girls) were increasingly Allingham's core readers. Some contemporaries, such as Arnold Freeman in his observation of the casualised boys of Birmingham c1912, believed that the nature of their employment as pawns in a callous system, and their lack of future prospects, might account for the enthusiasm with which they read the melodramatic, escapist, wish-fulfilment tales that Allingham and others provided for them via the halfpenny papers of the Amalgamated Press. In chapter six I analyse some of the characteristic formulae used by Allingham to touch these readers; then, in chapter seven, suggest some of the ways in which he needed to revise his narratives as the demographics of his readership and the context of penny-paper publication changed during the crisis years of the First World War.

Adolescents and working-class women were particularly quick to respond to the pleasures of the early cinema. In chapter eight I describe some of the ways in which mass-market print publishing attempted to manipulate this to its own advantage and how Allingham and other members of his family were involved. Both chapter eight and chapter nine show Allingham's serial fiction adapting to what Raymond Williams has termed new 'structures of feeling' though the post-war years and the economic crisis of the 1930s. In my conclusion I consider Allingham's position and that of his readers in 'an Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.

The growth of mechanisation, as explained by Marx, changes the balance between constant capital (plant and raw materials) and variable capital (labour). It increases the quantity of surplus value (profit) accumulated by the capitalist even when it also cheapens the commodity produced. The latter years of the nineteenth century did see a slight fall in commodity prices which, coupled with some restriction on the length of the working week, left just a little more money and time at the disposal of working-class families. And as mechanisation deprived work of its interest or challenge, leisure mattered more. In Marx's lifetime the inordinate length of the working day allowed little time for recreation; by Allingham's adulthood legislation had had some small success in curtailing this. The fall in prices was not sustained into the twentieth century and agitation for wage increases intensified as 'Modern Industry' (inevitably in Marx's vision) continued to consign more and more of the working population to its 'reserve army'. Particular sectors of the working class, especially adult men, were casualised, under-employed and finally, in the 1920s and 30s, put out of work. Allingham's readership fragmented over his lifetime, partly through more specifically targeted (and thus divisive) marketing by his publishers, partly due to the competition from new media, but perhaps also as a reflection of the strain and the potential for disintegration that such economic manipulation was inflicting on working-class families.

Allingham's richest years were those immediately before the First World War when the accumulation of surplus value, reinvested as 'constant capital' by the Harmsworths, meant that they needed additional labour power to 'vivify' (Marx's word) this capital into production (and thus further accumulation). Allingham was paid well and lived well during that period and may have had some illusion of independence as he worked from his home in the Essex countryside. Only later, in the mid-1920s, did the extent of his actual dependence become obvious and his employers' expectations of productivity

burdensome. Allingham had become part of a factory system. For Marx it is the bringing of machines (and hands) to bear upon one another in a total, first-to-last automated process that constitutes the factory system – whether or not all of those hands (or machines) are housed under the same roof.

This modern so-called domestic industry has nothing, except the name, in common with the old-fashioned domestic industry, the existence of which presupposes independent urban handicrafts, independent peasant farming, and above all, a dwelling house for the labourer and his family. That old-fashioned industry has now been converted into an outside department of the factory, the manufactory or the warehouse. Besides the factory operatives, the manufacturing workmen and the handicraftsmen, whom it concentrates in large numbers at one spot, and directly commands, capital also sets in motion, by means of invisible threads, another army; that of the workers in the domestic industries, who dwell in the large towns and who are also scattered over the face of the country.

Allingham described his story plots as *his* ‘capital’ and seems to have thought that the (rented) house where he and his wife spun their formulaic plot-happenings into instalments (commodities) was *his* ‘little fiction factory.’ His lifelong determination to retain his subsidiary rights wherever possible did mean that he retained some of the products of his labour in his own hands. These provided his only security in hard times. However the increased centralization of the publishing industry severely restricted the market available to him as a seller, especially as his periods of personal financial difficulty were usually linked to wider trade problems. The actual status of his home and family as ‘an outside department’ of someone else’s factory is made perfectly clear in the letters sent to him by the ‘overseers’ – his editors. Not only do they attempt to specify exactly what he is to supply, thus to some extent coming between him and his product and potentially alienating him from it (though I shall argue that Allingham’s personal skill forced them closer to a creative partnership), but they constantly remind him that if his copy is late the publication schedule will be disrupted. ‘*Justice* is late and the *Steel Clutch* is even worse.’ ‘We are out of copy and the compositor is waiting.’

The peremptory tone of these letters betrays Marx’s ‘invisible threads’ of capital. Editors’ demands to

extend a successful story or re-package something already written can be interpreted as the inexorable urge of capital to wring every last drop of surplus value out of labour. Allingham, believing himself to be a capitalist, is generally complicit in this process, though rare moments of confusion and rebelliousness can be glimpsed and his relationship with his editors is always marked by carefulness and some anxiety. In later years his exhaustion is often evident and the basic financial insecurity of this life becomes clear. He had no regular salary, pension or investments, beyond those copyrights he had managed to retain or which had reverted to him after a specific number of serial uses. There were no royalties from earlier work to sustain him in his old age and, unlike his editors, he could not expect a pension. He did not own a house until he borrowed the money to qualify for a building society mortgage when he was sixty-five. This was close to the situation of many of his readers but a far cry from the shrewdly managed property portfolio that had supported his grandfather's bourgeois lifestyle in the 1860s and 1870s.

A Common Writer

Describing Allingham as a common writer is intended to encourage understanding of him firstly as a writer who, though personally isolated, was working in a common undertaking with others, severally contributing to the set format of the periodical, as well as a writer who was writing consciously for the 'common people'. These two connected factors are likely to have influenced his development as an anonymous artistic personality who used and re-used situations, character types and patterns of language taken from a common stock. The words anonymous and personality do not nowadays sit easily together, though, paradoxically, in the centuries before the introduction of the printing press to Great Britain, this situation was closer to the norm. In chapter six I suggest that the essence of Allingham's art lies in his

presentation of certain archetypal family situations – the coming of a stepmother, for instance, or the reluctance of a father to recognise a daughter's suitor – which are elsewhere expressed in folk and fairy tales. The influence of earlier popular novelists also pervades Allingham's writing and may perhaps be seen as part of the process by which certain literary landmarks from the dominant culture are assimilated into popular consciousness. However the relationship between what may be thought of as bourgeois culture and the modes of perception preferred by Allingham's common readers is not conceptually continuous or even harmonious. There is an imbalance of power between the cultures, which, expressed in the language of criticism, makes evaluation of a common writer's achievement problematic. Raymond Williams's painstaking deconstruction of critical terminology in *Marxism and Literature* has been invaluable in my attempt to understand how an anonymous writer, using literary convention and cliché, can also present an artistic personality.

This study seeks to contribute to the biography of a particular type of fiction, the editors who commissioned it, the papers in which it appeared and the people whose decisions to purchase were the final arbiters of value. It has been made possible by the accident of archive survival – and also, appropriately, by family affection and respect. Allingham's contribution to the enjoyment of his millions of unknown readers should be seen as exemplifying the achievement of many other forgotten fiction-producers whose personal records have not survived. They were men and women whose working lives were inexorably shaped by the rise of their more economically powerful contemporaries and by the structural changes within the publishing industry for which men such as the Harmsworths were catalysts. The common writers who were Allingham's peers never attained the celebrity of best-selling authors but collectively entertained millions of the people whose individual potencies Marx saw as stolen from them

by the stalking 'hobgoblin', not of communism, but of capitalism.

Allingham's older colleague, the prolific E.H. Burridge (1839-1916), asserted with some pride, 'We were the men who wrote for the Million and as such we were not without influence in the world.' A question to be considered might be the extent to which working people's enjoyment of their entertainments, including entertainment fiction of the type provided by Allingham and Burridge, did influence them – into acceptance of their lot and away from education and revolution perhaps, or merely into mild addictions which ensured that their pennies were regularly taken from them by representatives of the same capitalist employer-class who had doled them out so sparingly in the first place. Of course the moment one looks at even a handful of the individual readers who made up Burridge's 'Million' or Allingham's 'Common People' it becomes obvious that many of these readers drew from 'a mongrel library', in Jonathan Rose's words, and that 'the realm of "mass culture" is so vast and various that even an army of sociologists could not reliably generalise about its political effects.'

If Allingham, in his small area of this mass market, had influenced any of his readers, they would not have known it. He was a nameless writer, much more often anonymous than pseudonymous and most regularly defined by his own products – 'the Author of *Driven from Home*, etc'. The research activity of tracing and cataloguing his output reveals the extent to which personal invisibility became an essential component of his productivity and, sometimes, in the periodicals which were most characteristically his own, his ubiquity.

He did not start his career expecting this to be so. Several of his earliest works not only print his name but also, somewhat incongruously, add 'B.A.', acknowledging his Cambridge University theology degree. His mother, Louisa, apparently brought up her eight sons to believe 'that they belonged to an important

family, a famous family.’ This was not the case. Her father-in-law, William, from whom came a crucial small bequest of capital, had been a South London *rentier* and her husband, James, for all his energetic business hustling, was never more than a middle-class tradesman. They were able to send their children only to the very cheapest public school, one set up specifically to provide opportunities for the ‘sons of publicans’. Nevertheless ‘such was her influence,’ wrote Allingham’s younger daughter, Joyce, ‘that her grandchildren were well into their teens before they were able to get a more realistic outlook [...] on the family as a whole.’ Allingham, the second son, was considered the cleverest of the children and, as a young man, was probably conventionally ambitious. An early diary (1886) reveals him solemnly discussing with his father and older brother the ‘value of a Name in art’ and, in the excitement of overseeing publication of the young Allingham’s first serial story in that same year, his uncle, John Allingham, wrote encouragingly, ‘stick to it old boy and you will make a name’.

It was neither failure nor lack of application that rendered Herbert Allingham almost anonymous. Celebrity, the magnification of Names, was one of the commodities that he and his peer-writers laboured to manufacture for the greater entertainment of readers and the reflected glory of their products. An important activity in capital’s wringing of surplus value out of commodities, whether human or material, was to turn them into ‘fetishes’. This process led some authors, like many film-stars, to become famous but, in Allingham’s un-prestigious area of the literary market, it was the fictional products not the producers whose status was thus enhanced. Anonymity, pseudonymity or the attribution of his work to others were the inescapable conditions of his success. His name is currently absent from the literary record of his period.

Primary & Biographical Sources

Allingham's older daughter, Margery Allingham (1904-1966), was the only family member whose name evokes any response from readers today. She wrote popular fiction in a different cultural area - a 'middlebrow' area where readers become fans of an author and authors may therefore chose to project a more or less fictionalised image of themselves to please readers and encourage sales. As she grew older Margery Allingham observed the parabola of her reputation with some anxiety and expressed her fear of fading out 'into a dusty heap of old papers'. For years she had preserved just such a stack – the records of her father's un-celebrated life. After Margery Allingham's death the papers passed to her younger sister, Joyce Allingham, who bequeathed them to me.

That archive provides the essential foundation for this study. It comprises business letters, some diaries and account books, some manuscripts, typescripts and some of the runs of clippings from periodicals that served Allingham as his file copies. Cataloguing it has been my central research activity and a detailed indication of its contents will be found in the bibliography and three major appendices. I wrote a biography of Margery Allingham, for which I used her archival material. These included diaries and snatches of reminiscence about her father with whom she had worked closely, particularly in the years immediately after the First World War. I also enjoyed many informal conversations with Joyce Allingham and, incidentally, as I then thought, spent some days helping her to pack their father's papers into brown paper parcels and assorted cardboard boxes, making a rough list as we went.

In retrospect, these few days of joint activity were revelatory. Even the cursory examination needed to add a title to a packing list revealed what seemed to me to be an inordinate number of escaped convicts, outcast mothers and filched inheritances. Repetition of the same incidents in different stories or of the

same stories under different titles challenged my expectations of literature and artistic honesty. The action of the stories was melodramatic, the language and characterisation clichéd. Yet the individual who produced these insistently derivative tales – and with whose daughter I was working – was evidently neither stupid, cynical nor a charlatan. His family consistently described him as an ‘intellectual’ and his friend, the novelist William McFee, wrote frequent letters, which assumed Allingham shared his literary and philosophical interests in

Ibsen, Shaw, Shakespeare, Kinross, Kipling, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Chesterton, Balzac, Tolstoy, Whitman, Goethe, Heine, Horace, Tarkington, Howells, Harris, Squire, Noyes, Brooke, Belloc, D’Annunzio, Maeterlink, Bergson, Bottomley, Wells, Cobb, Irwin, Galsworthy, Bennett, Conrad, Garland, Tasso, Morley, Thompson, Mencken, Nathan, Rolland, Sedgwick, Joyce, Nicholson and many others.

Joyce Allingham insisted that her father was a craftsman and Margery Allingham described him as someone who worked ‘with unrelenting care and precision, never once relaxing the enormous care that ensured his success’. Clearly he was successful – the quantity of published material, the figures in the account books proved that – but it was not a success I felt able to understand or evaluate. The central purpose of my undertaking is to move this material from the domestic to the public domain so others may use it and reflect on it.

This study is not a biography of Herbert Allingham; it is an analysis of his career and of a type of fiction from which the concept of individuality is strikingly absent. Yet it would not be accurate to deny that some of the information about his personality and beliefs which was provided by his family and friends, as well as gleaned from his own rare personal comments, has been invaluable in encouraging me to find the evidence to make sense of the apparent incongruities between his intellectual outlook, his dedication to his work and the conventionality, ephemerality and repetitiveness of his products.

To take a specific example: George Orwell famously claimed that the composite personality presented by writers of fiction for mass-market papers resembled ‘a rather exceptionally stupid member of the Navy League in the year 1910’. Joyce Allingham’s assertion that her father was a lifelong Fabian socialist persuaded me to cross-check diary references against some unsigned leading articles written for the family’s *Christian Globe* newspaper in 1910. These articles oppose the arms race with Germany and support Sidney Webb’s Minority Report of the 1909 Commission on the Poor Law. They are almost certainly by Allingham. Once sensitised to Allingham’s personal political beliefs it was then relatively easy to discern a vein of sympathetic social comment running through his fiction. Though this is never more than thin when compared to campaigning mid-Victorian penny-paper writers such as G.W.M. Reynolds, it certainly encourages a reconsideration of Orwell’s assertion that ‘in England popular imaginative literature is a field that left-wing thought has never begun to enter’.

Family biographical evidence is sparse and, like the archive, refers only to the production side of Allingham’s essentially interactive relationship with his readers (other than his editors). Margery Allingham may have fictionalised him as ‘a man who was always trying to make friends with working folk, only to have them touch their hats to him and turn away uncomfortably’. The commercial testimony from the editors at the Amalgamated Press and John Leng / D.C. Thomson who frequently bought as much work as he was able to produce, confirms that Allingham did consistently engage with and please his penny patrons. Evidence from the papers themselves offers some clues as to who these readers were – impoverished clerks, unskilled working boys, business girls and women with rooms to let.

As an artist, Allingham was in touch with his audience; as a man his life did not obviously resemble theirs. For the first twenty years of his career he wore a top hat and frock coat when he went to work;

later, his son in law described him as ‘a gentle austere man’ who ‘even in his working dressing gown looked like a successful actor of the old school or an intelligent bishop off duty. There is no evidence that readers felt any curiosity about Allingham the author – they did not want to be friends with him as, say, Margery Allingham’s readers did. The editors solicited comments on his stories as part of their market research and it is deeply regrettable that none of these appears to have survived. No editor’s letter includes any hint that any reader was interested in the writer as separate from his works. There are no letters from readers in Allingham’s archive and no correspondence or invitations to him, as a writer, to attend any literary or public function.

In this thesis I argue that it was the very anonymity and formulaic construction of Allingham’s art that allowed readers to respond in their own way. Finding any evidence to particularise their response has been difficult. In their letters Allingham’s editors sometimes presented themselves as responding on behalf of the readers and, occasionally, Allingham presents his own readings. Generally my preferred method has been to include contemporary pen-portraits of actual readers where these could be found. Like any portraits these often say as much about the assumptions of the producer as about the characteristics of the subject. Nevertheless I have found that these unknown figures function almost as a sighting-stick to give new perspectives to the work.

Review of the Literature

Collectors, observers, cultural historians and specialists in the periodical as a publishing genre supply their own distinctive insights into the production and consumption of serial stories for mass-market magazines:

(i) Collectors: The records of collectors are the only sources where Allingham himself can occasionally be identified. His uncle John Allingham / 'Ralph Rollington' produced a *History of Old Boys' Books* specifically for enthusiasts. This does not mention Herbert Allingham by name but, treated with care as being written by a self-confessed romancer thirty years after most of the events described, does help us to understand part of the publishing world into which Allingham was born and in which he was first published. *Peeps in the Past*, a much more extensive survey of the world of small masters, contributed by Frank Jay to a periodical, *Spare Moments*, edited by Allingham's friend and former colleague F.A. Wickhart, is much more exhaustive and includes comment on Allingham's editorship of *The London Journal*. Margery Allingham and Philip Youngman Carter provided some minimal information to W.O.G. Lofts & D. Adley for *The Men Behind Boys' Fiction* and to E.S. Turner for his seminal study *Boys Will Be Boys*. The nostalgic appeal of the boys' market has attracted the most eager collectors and, given the millions of words he supplied to F.C. Cordwell's comic papers, the invisibility of Allingham is nowhere more poignant than in his absence from Alan Clark's authoritative *Dictionary of British Comic Artists, Writers and Editors*.

(ii) Observers: Allingham's working life coincided with a great age for the social survey – quasi-anthropological studies of the working classes from whence the bulk of his readers came. Given his political interests, family connections and the concern for social justice evident in *The Christian Globe*, Allingham would certainly have known the work of Henry Mayhew, James Greenwood, Charles Booth, Andrew Mearns and the literature surveys of Edward Salmon. He himself commissioned a series of articles from Olive Malvery on sweated labour and he is arguably likely to have read, or at least known

about, the observations of Maud Pember Reeves and Ada Chesterton. I have no evidence that he knew the surveys of Florence Bell, Arnold Freeman and A.J. Jenkinson but it is in these that I have found some direct information about readership. Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* was published twenty years after Allingham's death, but as so much of it refers to observations made in Hoggart's own childhood (born 1918), and as his 'illustrations from popular art' include the women's story-papers for which Allingham was writing during the 1930s, I have felt justified in attaching particular weight to Hoggart's analysis of 'the real world of people'.

Other likely contexts for the consumption of Allingham's work can be reconstructed from the studies of those modern historians who use oral history or autobiography to illuminate daily life. In a 1940s film, *Hue and Cry*, Margery Allingham's friend T.E.B. Clarke, an ex-Amalgamated Press employee, produced some memorable images of working-class boys sharing comics in the wasteland and then confronting the bewildered serial story-writer with their own version of the reality of his work. (The figure of the author could have been modelled on Allingham but was probably Frank Richards.) It is rare that I have been able to find an actual reference to a paper containing an Allingham story being read by a particular individual or family at a particular date. However *All Quiet on the Home Front* by Richard Van Emden and Steve Humphries did bring me very close to a Scottish family of readers during and after the First World War.

Janice Radway's and Dorothy Hobson's researches into consumers' reflections on types of entertainment art (romantic fiction and soap opera) that are analogous to Allingham's fiction have been illuminating, particularly Hobson's. She takes a holistic approach to researching the different, and often incompatible, interests surrounding this low status soap opera:

A television programme is a three part development – the production process, the programme and the understanding of the programme by the audience [...] *Crossroads* is a form of popular art and far from writing it off as rubbish we should look at what its popularity tells us about all programmes and

indeed all forms of popular art.

If *Crossroads* is indeed analogous to the popular serial story of Allingham's era, Hobson's description of the interactive way in which she observed its audience relate to its text could be highly informative:

The constant referencing of events within the programme with ideas of what would be likely to happen within their own experience is the overriding way in which viewers interact with the programme [...] Stories which seem almost too fantastic for an everyday serial are transformed through a sympathetic audience reading whereby they strip the storyline to the idea behind it and construct an understanding on the skeleton that is left.

Hobson's concept of the 'idea behind' the storyline could represent a cultural schema, a pattern of meaning which assists in the ordering of experience. Without access to readers' private thoughts, or any of the actual conversations with which they may have surrounded their reading, it is hard to prove that this was indeed the way it worked. Analysis of Allingham's narrative patterns, however, does demonstrate that such frameworks existed.

(iii) Literary and cultural historians: Bill Bell's essay on the implications of the serial form was especially illuminating for me as it led to the reading of Norman Feltes's *Modes of Production in the Victorian Novel* and, more crucially, Raymond Williams's *Marxism and Literature*. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the fields of cultural production and Peter MacDonald's demonstration of the different balance of critical criteria in different publishing areas stimulated my desire to find a way to evaluate Allingham's work in terms appropriate to the 'Masses' and not to the 'Intellectuals' (in John Carey's formulation). Williams offered an analysis of the language to make this possible.

No understanding of the historical context of Allingham's work would be possible without Richard Altick, Louis James, David Vincent, Richard Hoggart, Jonathan Rose. Contemporary novelists such as

Bennett, Wells and Gissing also enhanced my understanding not just of Grub Street (Gissing), advertising (Wells), printing (Bennett), but innumerable small details relevant to the lives of Allingham and his readers. Amongst so many authoritative male voices, my moment of epiphany came with a reading of Marina Warner's *The Beast and the Blonde*, in which she makes the case for fairy tales as being anonymous family dramas expressing collective experience (especially female experience) in specific social and historical contexts. 'But tune your ears to another key,' said Margery Allingham once, when considering the relationship between Arcadian conventions and muddy country reality, 'and the whole thing becomes pure satisfying truth'. It is my unproven contention that readers mediating between the improbable incidents of Allingham's serials and their own lived experience may have done so, like Warner's consumers of fairy tales and Hobson's *Crossroads* audience, by tuning their ears to narrative patterns dramatic enough to offload some of the day's anxieties and strong enough to construct some order from their individual experiences.

(iv) Specialists in the periodical as a publishing genre: This thesis is indebted to the work of scholars who have focussed on particular publications with which Allingham was involved and the publisher who employed him: Andrew King on *The London Journal*, Cynthia White and Margaret Beetham (*My Weekly* and *Woman's Weekly*), Penny Tinkler (*The Oracle*, *Poppy's Paper*, *The Miracle*) and Joseph McAleer (D.C. Thomson Ltd.). It is, however, a serious omission that amongst all the words poured out on the Harmsworth family and their newspapers, there has been no operational history of the Amalgamated Press (subsequently Fleetway publications, then IPC magazines) which, over Allingham's lifetime, achieved an unprecedented level of cultural penetration and funded the newspaper empire from the astonishing profits

of its early years. Sarah Gjertsen of the *Daily Mail* reference library has at least produced a timeline but our lack of detailed knowledge of the company's activities is revealed in the factual errors that litter our commentaries and, more seriously, I would argue, in the possible overvaluing of the cultural influence of some products, the boys' story papers, for instance, as opposed to others, the comics or the cinema papers, perhaps.

Very little has been written on the areas where Allingham worked – historically the periodical press of the early twentieth century and the interwar years is not studied with the same intensity as in the Victorian period. Overall understandings of the periodical as a publishing genre have been enhanced by the recent work of several scholars who emphasise its materiality, the influence of its constituent parts on one another, the problems of boundary definition, the importance of reading contexts and methods, and the interplay between proprietors and editors, contributors and readers. These are valid guidelines to the study of periodicals (and serials) at any period.

Reading Allingham

There is a randomness amongst the papers in Allingham's archive that underpins the importance of materiality and of reading in context. Those stories that have survived in manuscript or typescript feel different from those which exist in runs of printed clippings and different again from the few where the whole magazine issue has been preserved. I have therefore spent many days in the British Library at Colindale and St Pancras following some of Allingham's stories through the actual issues in which they appeared.

This type of study affects understanding of the form. Read in typescript without illustration, editorial

comment or print context, the impact of the stories is thinner. Typescript reading does allow clearer focus on individual word and phrase but these are not qualities of prime importance. Allingham's serials (and others like them) are constructed from resonant situations rather than resonant language and their effectiveness is most apparent when they have been editorialised into their slots within periodicals. I have found it helpful, in broad terms, to think of this type of fiction as a version of performance art with the editor as producer. The periodical, with its multiplicity of features, is so blatantly designed to entertain that it evokes a sense of audience far more surely than the solitary typescript. Empathising with a particular audience as one reads gives substance to the fictional situations and allows for the collective sensations of excitement, suspense, shock and relief in which the serial form excels.

The importance of context does not mean that each story was confined only to the periodical in which it first appeared. Many of Allingham's most potent narratives were written for the adolescent comic-and-story papers published in the years immediately before the First World War (*The Butterfly*, *The Jester*, *Merry & Bright*, *The Favorite Comic*) but subsequently proved able to migrate across a range of different papers. However, in contrast to the publishing migrations, say, of a Dickens story, all the papers needed to be of much the same status. What was sold for a halfpenny in 1910 might be given a different front-cover slant and priced at twopence in 1920 but the audience, defined socio-economically and culturally (though not necessarily by age or gender), would be similar, and the periodical would be intended to occupy the same ephemeral, habitual, place in their lives. Allingham in a leather-bound edition is unimaginable. Or, to continue the analogy with stagings, his are 'turns' that work equally well in the Hammersmith Empire or the Dundee People's Palace but couldn't be transferred to Stratford-upon-Avon or to Broadway.

Turns need an audience as well as a location and Allingham's escapist fiction achieves its full

significance when it is read with Hoggartian awareness of ‘the real world of people’. In a gesture towards holistic reading, I have included in every chapter a reader, an editor (though at times these are the same) and a periodical.

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Boundaries blurred between upper working and lower middle class – Searle estimates 88% of population falling below income tax threshold of £160 p.a. c1886. G.R. Searle *A New England? Peace and War 1886-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 83.

Guarantee explicit in some instances – e.g. television’s 9 o’clock ‘watershed’, categorizations of the British board of film censors.

My Weekly (1910) and *Woman’s Weekly* (1911) are also survivors but were more explicitly focused at their foundation on the women’s market rather than the family.

John Springhall ‘A Life Story for the people? Edwin J. Brett and the London “low-life” penny dreadfuls of the 1860s’ in *Victorian Studies* 33 (Winter 1990) p.223-246. *Boys of England* circulation 250,000 when Harkaway running. Readers formed clubs paying a farthing each to buy it. – readership therefore c 2,000,000 Kevin Carpenter *Penny Dreadfuls and Comics* (London: Bethnal Green Museum, 1983) p. 4.

Asa Briggs *Victorian Cities* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) p 59ff.

Robert Lowe, Viscount Sherbrooke, House of Commons 15.7.1867, ‘I believe that it will be absolutely necessary that you should prevail on our future masters to learn their letters.’ Frequently misquoted as ‘We must educate our masters’. Cf Asa Briggs *Victorian People* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954) p. 262.

James Greenwood *The Seven Curses of London* (London: Stanley Rivers, 1869) p.134ff.

At this point I am using the term ‘penny publishing’ quite loosely to indicate cheap popular periodicals usually with significant fiction component cf. ‘penny dreadfuls’.

The Amalgamated Press was incorporated in 1901 and re-constituted in 1922. George Dilnot’s company history *The Romance of the Amalgamated Press* is the best source of reference for this period (London: The Amalgamated Press, 1925).

Karl Marx *Capital: a new Abridgement* edited by David McClellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) ‘The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation’ pp. 345-350.

Marx (ed. McClellan) p.347.

Pound & Harmsworth *Northcliffe* (London: Cassell, 1959) p. 116.

Marx (ed. McClellan) p.347.

Marx (ed. McClellan) p. 352.

Richard Martin suggests that William had been successful with some form of invention before investing his money in property, *Ink in her Blood* (Michigan: U.M.I. Research Press, 1988) p.33.

Born 1843 and 1844 respectively.

Marx (ed. McClellan) p. 347.

Particularly if they had underestimated the cost of paper and also the expense of marketing themselves pro-actively to attract and retain readers.

‘Wherever the nature of the process did not involve production on a large scale, the new industries that have sprung up in the last few decades [...] have, as a general rule, passed through the handicraft stage and then the manufacturing stage, as short phases of transition to the factory stage. The transition is very difficult in those cases where the production of the article by manufacture consists not of a series of graduated processes, but of a great number of disconnected ones,’ Marx (ed. McClellan) p. 277.

By 'manufacturing' in this context, Marx means every productive process except agriculture. Marx (ed. McClellan), p. 278.

Marx (ed. McClellan) p. 277.

'The Rate and Mass of Surplus Value' Marx (ed. McClellan) p.186.

Marx (ed. McClellan) p. 281.

It is arguable that earlier businesses such as those owned by Edward Lloyd or George Newnes were organized into factory systems but this was not the overall structure of the industry.

Many of the very low paid workers in Maud Pember Reeves's South London study, *Round About a Pound a Week* (London: Bell & Sons, 1913), were printers' labourers or warehousemen. Selling newspapers was the epitome of low-paid casual work, often done by boys.

Arnold Freeman *Boy Life and Labour* (London: King & Son, 1914).

Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977) pp.131-132.

Walter Benjamin 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations* (translated Zohn) (London: Cape, 1970).

Cf. Walter Greenwood's portrait of family division in *Love on the Dole* (London: Cape, 1933).

Marx (ed. McClellan) p. 278.

Letter 306 n.d. (c1932).

He claimed that he had turned down an offer of £25 for the copyright of his first serial story aged 19 when such a sum would have been quite significant. Letter 43 (8.4.1905)

Letter 164 (18.5.1916).

Letter 187 (16.10.1918).

The title of this introduction owes a debt to Nigel Cross *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth Century Grub Street* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985) – a book which gives details of many other popular writers in this predicament.

'I know the common people, I get my living from studying them.' HJA letter to Northcliffe, May 1915 (in the Margery Allingham Archive).

'Hobgoblin' is an alternative translation for the 'spectre' of capitalism in the opening sentence of Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, Francis Wheen *Karl Marx* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999) p. 124.

E.H. Burridge *The Ruin of Fleet Street* (London: E.W. Allen, 1882) p. 38.

Theodore Adorno 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' in Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (trans. John Cumming) (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane 1973).

Jonathan Rose *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 2001) 'A Mongrel Library' Chapter 11, quotation p. 386.

Not the same as the 'onymity' that leads to the delayed appearance of the author's name as described by Gérard Genette in *Paratexts* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997) p. 39.

E.g. when *A Devil of a Woman* was reprinted in the low class penny paper *Shurey's Illustrated*, (28.7.1900) it was credited to Herbert J. Allingham B.A.

Joyce Allingham quoted in Julia Thorogood *Margery Allingham: A Biography* (London: Heinemann, 1991) p. 3.

A.N. Wilson *The Victorians* (London: Hutchinson, 2002) p. 282 on the social intake of the Woodard schools. Ardingly was intended for the lowest social echelon willing to pay boarding fees for their children. Information on parental occupations checked in Ardingly College registers – mainly shopkeepers, tradesmen and other artisans.

Joyce Allingham notes as above. In *Dance of the Years* (London: Michael Joseph, 1943) Margery Allingham portrays her as 'Miss Julia': 'She was a snob' p. 157.

Ref. HJA letters no 1, n.d. (1886).

I am indebted to Andrew King who uses Marx's concept of commodity fetishism to explore the 'varied and complex' relationship between the producer and consumer of periodicals. *The London Journal 1845 – 1883: Periodicals, Production and Gender* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) p. 4.

Detective fiction often discussed as a discrete genre but MA more usefully considered as part of the 'feminine middlebrow' as this allows better appreciation of her significance as a cultural commentator, cf. Jenny Hartley *Millions Like Us* (London: Virago, 1997) and Nicola Humble *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel* (Oxford: OUP, 2001).

Thorogood p. 317.

Auctioneer's description of McFee's letters to Allingham sold c 1932. Now in Bienecke Collection, Yale University.

Margery Allingham, 'Mystery Writer in the Box'. Introduction to *The Mysterious Mr. Campion* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963). p. 8.

George Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies' in *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters vol. 1: An Age Like This 1920 – 1940* edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) p. 528.

The second leader was usually on religious affairs which Allingham was unlikely to have written.

Orwell p. 531.

Allingham (1943) p. 208.

Philip Youngman Carter *All I Did Was This* (London: Sexton Press, 1982) p. 32.

Very occasionally a few laudatory words appear in the magazine eg. E.W. wrote to *The Jester* about Allingham's *The Lights of Home* 'I think it is the best tale I have ever read,' *Jester* 18.6.1910.

E.S. Turner *Boys Will Be Boys* (London: Michael Joseph, 1948). W.O.G. Lofts & D.J. Adley *The Men Behind Boys' Fiction* (London: Howard Baker, 1970).

Olive Malvery mentioned in HJA diary 6.1.1909.

Richard Hoggart *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958).

Richard Van Emden and Steve Humphries *All Quiet on the Home Front* (London: Headline, 2003).

Janice Radway *Reading the Romance* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), Dorothy Hobson *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera* (London: Methuen, 1882).

Hobson p. 136.

Hobson p. 129 & p. 136.

Concept which emerges at several points within Peter Burke's *What is Cultural History?* (London: Polity, 2004) pp. 11-12.

Bill Bell 'Fiction in the Marketplace' in Robin Myers and Michael Harris, (eds.) *Serials and their Readers 1620 -1914* (Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 1993).

John Carey *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (London: Faber, 1992), Raymond Williams *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Richard Altick *The English Common Reader* 2nd edition (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), Louis James *Fiction for the Working Man 1830-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), David Vincent *Literacy and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Marina Warner *From the Beast to the Blonde* (London: Vintage, 1995). For particular novels by Bennett, Wells and Gissing see bibliography.

Julia Jones 'A Fine Sturdy Piece of Work' in *Margery Allingham: 100 years of a Great Mystery Writer* ed Marianne Van Hoeyan (Norfolk: Lucas Books, 2004) p. 189.

In *The Romance of the Amalgamated Press* (London: The Amalgamated Press, 1925) George Dilnot claimed 'approximately one person in four of the population of the British Isles buys one copy of an Amalgamated Press production each week [...] It is improbable that there is a single home in the country, however remote, where one or more of its publications is not familiar.'

p.20

Hoggart p. 102.

Chapter 1

Commodify Your Dissent!

The Christian Globe 1874 – 1916

Evangelicalism in the later years of the nineteenth century was a socially dynamic movement that included many Anglican as well as Nonconformist churches. Like the temperance movement it was, in part, a response to the new conditions of urban living and many adherents campaigned vigorously for improved material conditions as well as offering guidance intended to help families make the most of their current circumstances. Entertainment was frequently a part of the churches' missionary efforts and this included fiction as well as music, club facilities and the opportunity to hear popular preachers. Preachers who were most successful in attracting and motivating audiences became celebrities and were promoted as such. Evangelical activity linked easily with advertising, both religious and secular, but when an individual's commercial motivation outweighed their idealism there were widespread opportunities for exploitation, sometimes of the most vulnerable members of society. By the early years of the twentieth century the churches' role in providing entertainment had been convincingly overtaken by commercial and secular provision. However some residual influence of the evangelical movement may still be detected in the domestic family magazine.

The Allingham Family's Business

In 1874, when Herbert Allingham was seven years old, his father, James, founded a non-denominational penny newspaper, *The Christian Glowworm*.¹ James's father,

William, had died at the beginning of the year and James was his executor, together with his oldest sister, Julia. William had owned and part-owned a number of leasehold and freehold properties in South London and was also involved in the private provision of mortgages, not as unusual an activity for a small investor then as it would be today.² His estate was valued for probate at just under £4000. This, though it did not make him rich, was not an insubstantial sum when the cost of a long lease on an eight-roomed house in the area was £310 or a villa at Twickenham with eleven rooms (including two WCs) and a large garden ‘planted with full-bearing fruit trees’ could be had for £480.³ It was a more substantial sum still when one realizes that only leasehold property, not freehold, was included in the probate calculation and that William (together with his brother, Charles) had owned both.⁴

How William had accumulated this modest fortune is not known. His origins were sufficiently obscure to allow his great-grand-daughter, Margery Allingham, plenty of scope to fictionalise his life in her 1943 novel *Dance of the Years*. The salient point for this study is his apparent realisation that his estate would be insufficient to support all of his eight children.⁵ They would have to earn their own livings. He probably bought printing apprenticeships for his older boys, James, John and Frederick, thus denying them his own status of gentleman (though *rentier* would seem more accurate) but attaching them to a trade some of whose members counted themselves as the ‘aristocrats among working men’.⁶

In the later 1850s and 60s when James Allingham was learning his trade, printing remained a highly skilled and differentiated craft but was also entering an exciting era of technological innovation. This was the period when the growing circulations of penny papers such as *Lloyd’s Weekly News* stimulated the search both for faster

presses, such as the Wharfedale cylinder press of the late 1850s and the Hoe web-fed rotary press imported from America in 1871, and for cheaper materials for paper-making (esparto and then pulp). Experiments with stereotyping during the 1860s increased the speed and ease of typesetting although a single, fully mechanized typesetting and composing process was not possible until after the introduction of the linotype machine in 1886. Colin Clair estimates that 'between 1816 and 1874 improvements to the newspaper printing press increased the speed of printing by something like 60,000 times'.⁷ Simultaneously lithography, chromolithography and the development of half-tone photographic processes were increasing the variety of illustration techniques available to the publishers of periodicals as well as to the printing industry as a whole. When James Allingham received his legacy and took his chance to become a printer-publisher, his evident interest in modern techniques and his keenness to innovate constituted an important part of his business strength.

Printing, as a trade, had been relatively slow to feel the effects of the mechanization and labour reorganisation usually associated with the Industrial Revolution. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the increased productivity that these processes had brought to the British manufacturing sector in general began to play a crucial role in stimulating and financing change in the service industries of newspapers and magazines. Not only were print products themselves a potentially lucrative means of entertaining the recently urbanised and increasingly literate population, they might also increase sales to them of the other commodities that the nation was engaged in producing. To maintain increased productivity – and thus continue to vivify their capital – manufacturers needed to

expand the market for their products and increase consumption. Their chosen means was advertising.

‘Advertising is to business what steam is to machinery – the great propelling power,’ was an often-quoted piece of mid-Victorian business wisdom coined from Lord Macaulay.⁸ This belief had a powerful effect on the print industry as a whole and on periodical publications in particular. The removal of newspaper advertising duty in 1853, together with the removal of the other taxes on knowledge, attracted a rapidly increasing proportion of manufacturers’ advertising expenditure towards newspapers and magazines. Unlike stunts, posters and mail shots, advertising in periodicals offered the in-built advantages of an instant audience and ready-made distribution systems. In return, revenue from advertising provided the steady income that encouraged printers and publishers to invest in the new machinery that would enable them to boost their circulations, vary their layout, and thus, in a cycle that certainly seemed virtuous to James Allingham and his peers, made them still more attractive to advertisers. The speed with which James Allingham developed his business after the death of his father suggests that he had already been observing the workings of the periodical market and noting opportunities.

William Allingham’s executors were left detailed instructions as to how and when they should proceed to sell, manage or re-let each type of his investment during the period of the younger children’s minority. This gave everyone a lump sum that the older children were free to invest as they wished. The older children were expected to take care of the younger ones. This duty fell particularly on Julia, who was still living at home, whilst James, who was already married with a young family of his own, handled the financial arrangements. It appears to have worked satisfactorily as

most of the brothers and sisters continued to see and support one another for the rest of their lives – as Herbert Allingham would later do in his generation. James Allingham's younger siblings provided him with a ready-made group of investors as he developed his entrepreneurial schemes.

James, it seems, immediately invested in a printing works at 29 Farringdon Street and in Bear Alley, just off Fleet Street. By July he had produced the registration issue of *The Christian Glowworm*. This was initially launched as a monthly paper. Its first issue comprised just four pages: much of the front and first pages were devoted to an article on the life and lessons of 'The Patriarch Abraham' together with a short report of a recent sermon preached by the popular American evangelist, Dwight Lyman Moody, at the Islington Agricultural Hall. Page three contained a question box for Sunday School teachers (e.g. 'If you were a teacher would you invite your scholars to your home and how would you entertain them?'⁹) and there was also the text of a tract and an article of comfort for bereaved parents. The back cover was devoted to advertisements. If there was a wrapper it has not survived.

There is no indication that James Allingham was an unusually religious man. He was certainly energetic, business-like and eager to seize opportunities. Why did he decide to publish this type of paper? In an uncharitable fictional portrait of her grandfather as William Galantry in her family novel *Dance of the Years*, Margery Allingham presents the religious orientation of *The Converted World* (i.e. *The Christian Globe*) as a cynical answer to the problem of content:

He worked out the cost of the printing, the office and the distribution, and soon became fascinated. He saw the venture in its clearest and most material light. To him it appeared as a method of selling low-grade bulk paper at forty times its value, with the added advantage that the more of it one sold the higher the profit

became. He saw, too, that it was the ink on the paper which did the selling, so that the only real problem was which words to print with the ink.

William Galantry's commercial inspiration came from witnessing people's response to the Essex-born evangelist, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who preached to capacity audiences in venues such as the music hall in the Royal Surrey Gardens:

One day as he watched the crowds thronging the Gardens outside the Surrey Music Hall and thought of the panting mass of humanity in the aisles, and the eager eyes fixed hopefully upon the vision which the earnest East Anglian evoked, it occurred forcibly and even reverently to [*him*] that here was a subject that would appeal to a great many [...] people.¹⁰

Later, both Spurgeon and his brother James were amongst the shareholders in James Allingham's *Christian Globe* Newspaper Association Ltd.

It may have been that the printing company purchased by James Allingham was already engaged in the printing of tracts for Sunday Schools. Either that or he was quick to produce an initial stock of these publications. As well as the specimen text of a tract in the first, July, issue of *The Christian Glowworm*, there is an advertisement for 'The Christian Globe Pictorial Tracts (assorted)':

Being got up in Book Form, Illustrated and printed on good Toned and Coloured Paper, they are more readily taken than the ordinary kind of Tract, and are admirably adapted for Sunday School Teachers to give Children to take home to their parents [...] These tracts are got up and printed in a superior and attractive manner. They contain the glorious Gospel Truth and are illustrated according to their contents.¹¹

The foundation of *The Christian Glowworm* might therefore have been a logical extension of pre-existing business activity, presenting the paper as a type of tract in itself, or it might have been part of an overall plan to establish James Allingham's presence in several inter-related areas of the popular religious market. By October he was able to inform 'Pastors of Churches and other friends generally that he has every facility for Printing and Publishing Daily, Weekly, or Monthly Christian or

Temperance publications.’ He had ‘NEW TYPE! NEW MACHINERY!’ so could offer letterpress, copper-plate and lithographic printing with book binding on the premises. ‘A SPLENDID photograph of some POPULAR DIVINE’ was promised as an early marketing offer for the *Glowworm* and the literary advertisements for October contained announcements of tracts, reward books, sentimental religious novels and the texts of sermons.

Religion Commodified

Tracts, sermons and reward books were traditional productions; the development of *The Christian Glowworm / Christian Globe* in a newspaper format was more self-consciously contemporary. Using ‘Christian’ as a search term in the Newspaper Library Catalogue reveals that twenty-six new titles including this word were published in London between 1800-1869, increasing to sixty-one in the period 1870-1900.¹² One of the drawbacks of this crude method of examining the growth of this sector is that several of the earlier-established periodicals had perceived no need to highlight the word in their title or subtitle; to *The Watchman* (1835-1884), *The Nonconformist* (1841-1879), *The Guardian* (1846-1951), *The English Independent* (1867 – 1879) and *The Rock* (1868-1905), among others, their Christianity was self-evident. An 1872 survey of metropolitan religious weekly papers assumed that such serious papers (typically costing 3d - 6d) were differentiated by their respective positions in the arena of theological politics. They were organs of one or another denomination articulating different ideological positions in relation to the issues of the time – ritualism, rationalism, ultramontaniam, evangelicalism.¹³ Some of the newer, cheaper papers, however, took a more commercial approach offering what

one might call lifestyle Christianity. The market leader in this sector was James Clarke's penny weekly paper, *The Christian World*. It seems highly likely that James Allingham was looking to emulate Clarke's success when, in January 1875, he renamed his paper *The Christian Globe* and began publishing it weekly. Clarke used profits from *The Christian World* to subsidise the Congregationalist *English Independent* (4d); Allingham used his profits to found an advertising agency.

The Christian Globe's primary mission was to be popular. It presented itself as both worthwhile and up-to-date:

We rejoice to know that during the last few years papers of this class have been multiplied in England, but in proportion to the immoral and hurtful literature they are still in a minority. *Our desire is to furnish a periodical that will be welcome in the houses both of people who are connected with the churches and of those who are not.* [my italics]¹⁴

It was rarely, if ever, dogmatic, slipping naturally into a type of evangelism that simply wanted to persuade everyone to live good lives and be nice to each other. When, twenty-five years later, it took stock of its success, its editor claimed that it had:

entered but little into religious controversies [...] It has always seemed to us that the kindly human side of life is the side best worth cultivating. What the world needs today is more sympathy, more love and a keener sense of human brotherhood.¹⁵

The Christian Globe was un-denominational and therefore included news from Anglican churches as well as Congregationalists, Methodists, Primitive Methodist, Baptists, Presbyterians and more. It referred courteously to Jews, 'Mohammedans' and 'Hindoos' though it did not go as far as to include their news.¹⁶ Herbert Allingham's secular fiction would demonstrate a similar inclusivity.

The Use of Fiction

From its earliest issues the editor made clear that *The Christian Glowworm* was not offering an alternative perspective on salvation but an alternative reading experience – one intended especially for the culturally and materially disadvantaged:

We are convinced that many read the trashy and vile papers simply because they will read anything that comes to hand, and that these will as readily read moral and religious literature if it be interesting and they can get it. We shall endeavour to make 'The Glowworm' as good as the best penny serials of the day [...] We hope occasionally to illustrate our pages by pictures and we promise to do our best to make our paper as useful, interesting and popular as possible. We think we have a strong claim on Christian people for earnest and practical support. A little effort on the part of many will secure for us great prosperity, and the more we succeed the better will the paper become.¹⁷

The cynical reader might detect a certain ambiguity about what type of 'prosperity' was in prospect and for whom, exactly, it was to be secured, but the overt aim of the editorial was to harness respectable-class anxieties about the effect of 'trashy and vile' publications on more susceptible members of society, then use this to make sales. The appeal was to those who counted themselves 'Christian' people and Christian was assumed to mean respectable, responsible, and concerned. It was a desirable attribute, a compliment – hence its inclusion in the title of the paper. Buy the paper and you were buying in to a good people's club. Christians were urged to subscribe not only for their own edification and pleasure but also on behalf of others who might 'need' it. *The Christian Globe* commented approvingly on articles such as James Greenwood's 'Poison in Penny Numbers' and endorsed comments made by magistrates about the responsibility of unscrupulous publishers for young delinquents' slide into crime. 'Alderman Knight regretted that he could not give the publishers of *Blueskin* a month's imprisonment.'¹⁸

Such strong language paid indirect tribute to the perceived attractiveness of stories and, from the outset, secular fiction of an ‘interesting’ but ‘pure’ variety (to use the standard descriptive terminology) was part of *The Christian Globe*’s offer to its readers. Evidently this proved popular as the space allocated to fiction grew steadily more extensive and prominent. An early marketing innovation was the ‘Christmas Hamper’ (1878), a supplement produced early in December and containing specially commissioned stories as well as poems, brainteasers, information about Christmas customs and advice concerning the giving of cards and presents. These hampers were intended to attract new readers as well as pleasing the regular subscribers and included nothing explicitly religious. Though them *The Christian Globe* added its mite to the Victorian commercialisation of Christmas.

Christmas Hampers usually included stories by writers who would be well known to the readership – George W Sims, John Strange Winter, Silas Hocking, Emma Watts Phillips, Florence Hodgkinson. They also provided opportunities for the young Herbert Allingham, and later his wife, Emmie, to achieve publication. Typical stories were heart-warming tales about family reconciliation at Christmas time – Emmie Allingham’s ‘Pops the Peacemaker’ for instance – or the rich and selfish seeing the error of their ways and showering largesse upon the poor.¹⁹ Allingham’s ‘The Conversion of Gerard Dane’ (1890) is a good example of the latter. It also includes favourite themes of romantic love and good works.²⁰ In this story the impoverished heroine, expecting to be evicted from her cottage with her elderly father, rejects the wealthy, arrogant hero, Gerald Dane, in tones which recall Jane Austen’s Elizabeth Bennett:

‘You thought me worthy to be your wife – you who live a useless, vegetable, soulless existence: who, while possessing wealth, youth, strength and possibly some ability, by which you might do a man’s work in the world and rid it of some of the human wretchedness by which it is oppressed!’²¹

Her words change his life. Gerald is next heard of having ‘started some marvellous scheme for doing away with the London slums, elevating the masses, abolishing poverty or something of that sort’. He is ‘robbed right and left’ and becomes ‘practically a pauper’.²² Hero and heroine then fall into one another’s arms and live poor and happy ever after.

Despite a hint of levity ‘The Conversion of Gerald Dane’ is the sort of fiction one might expect to find in an evangelical family paper – if one had expected to find fiction included at all. Conversionism and activism are two of the defining characteristics of evangelicalism listed by David Bebbington in his *History of Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*.²³ (The other two, biblicism and crucicentrism, are rarely to be found in *The Christian Globe* – under James Allingham’s management at least.) Allingham’s next two Christmas Hamper contributions, however, ‘Trust’ and ‘The Vagabond’s Victory’, retained the romantic misunderstandings but not the features, such as conversion, that identified ‘Gerald Dane’ as evangelical.²⁴

The Christian Globe’s fiction became steadily more secular. Early serials might have featured a clergyman as hero, or included a principled liturgical disagreement as a plot element, but such explicit religious colouring soon faded out and the fiction employed standard romantic or domestic themes. This eventually enabled Allingham to offer the same stories to *The Christian Globe*, to John Leng’s family papers and the Amalgamated Press’s comics. In 1910, for instance, he wrote *The Rod of the Oppressor* for *The Christian Globe* and was immediately able to sell second serial

rights to *The Dundee Evening News*. The story was reprinted in *The Kinema Comic* (1924), in *The Weekly Welcome* (1928), in the *People's Friend Library* (1932) and in *The Family Journal* in 1934.

The Rod of the Oppressor, a tale of false accusation and social injustice, does at least have a clergyman in a secondary role. No such character graces Allingham's best-selling serial, *Driven from Home*, a tale of wrongful imprisonment, treacherous millionaires, disguises and double-crossings that he wrote for the ha'penny comic-and-story paper, *The Butterfly*, in 1909. *Driven from Home* was a 'human story-drama' containing nothing religious whatsoever. Yet in 1913 it was published in *The Christian Globe* as *The Trials of Mary Travers* and did not seem out of place.²⁵

Two developments may be deduced from this: the weakness, by 1913, of *The Christian Globe* (and other, similar, papers) and the strength of a type of popular fiction that had been fostered within the hybrid religious/family entertainment market.²⁶ Conversion, repentance, illumination and atonement are all experiences that can be equally well fictionalised in a secular melodramatic or romantic adventure as in an evangelical novel or a tract. The derivation of family fiction from such evangelical antecedents may lead one to suspect that it was fiction with a design on its readers. Was it fiction which was consciously trying to improve people to someone else's specification or subdue them socially for someone else's convenience? Or was it freely chosen by readers and enjoyed because it conformed to their sense of what was morally right as well as what was entertaining? Studying *The Christian Globe* offers evidence for both interpretations.

Richard Hoggart gave a qualified affirmative answer to the latter question when he described fiction published in the cheap women's story papers of his childhood.

In 'The Real World of People', Hoggart suggested that the plot conventions used in these 'older' magazines spoke for 'a solid and relevant way of life' endorsed by readers. Their diction

uses boldly words which serious writers for more sophisticated audiences understandably find difficulty using today and which many other writers are too knowing to be caught using. It uses [...] words like 'sin', 'shame', 'guilt', 'evil' with every appearance of meaningfulness.²⁷

Hoggart linked such characteristics back to stories by evangelical authors such as Silas Hocking, Annie S. Swan 'and of a great number of others, often published by the Religious Tract Society and given as prizes in the upper classes of Sunday Schools'.²⁸ Both Hocking and Swan were published in *The Christian Globe*.

Allingham lost his youthful faith, yet throughout his life his fiction continued to use the language Hoggart describes and, at crucial moments, his characters frequently pray. Such prayers, however, are fictional gestures; they are conventions, accepted as representations of deep emotion; dramatic underlinings of the gravity of a situation, not components of an external, valid, belief system. In secular fiction the writer is god and he is only a *deus ex machina*. However, the skill of a common writer lies in making best use of the gestures and situations that his intended readers see as meaningful: the evangelical tradition provided Allingham with some of those gestures and situations.²⁹

James Allingham as Entrepreneur: Sermons, Social Justice and Advertisements for Patent Medicine

From the outset James Allingham's *Christian Globe* used a variety of means other than fiction to attract and retain its readers. Visually it was a well-presented paper, at

least until the early 1880s. After that time James Allingham sold his principal shareholding in order to found the J.C. Francis Advertising Agency and stood down as managing director.³⁰ Joyce Allingham remembered her grandfather as a stiff Victorian patriarch; in fact his editorial style in the early years of the paper and then the development of his career into advertisement canvassing, gives the impression that was that he was something of a hustler. Without his active involvement *The Christian Globe* became noticeably more respectable but gradually ossified.

As an editor, James Allingham was direct and personal. He appeared eager to take readers into his confidence about the exciting opportunities opened up by a new piece of machinery, an extension to his distribution network or an associated magazine he was planning to establish.³¹ Many of the techniques he used were associated with the New Journalism of the 1870s and 1880s. *The Christian Globe* emphasised the personalities of preachers, for instance, rather than the detail of their messages. Engravings from portrait photographs were an early innovation on the front page and other advances in printing techniques were soon enlivening the advertising sections. James Allingham used short articles and filler paragraphs in his editorial pages and defended this irreverently:

Life is short, time is short and newspaper articles must be short too. Long articles require eternity for reading them. If, as a certain author says, we editors are going to be editors in heaven and publish newspapers there, we would prefer using long articles when we have all eternity before us, than printing them now with the earthly limit of three score years and ten.³²

One of James Allingham's favourite editorial references was to 'the enterprising spirit of the times' and, in this spirit, he arranged for the sermons of the Rev Dr T de Witt Talmadge to be rushed over from America – 'Never before published in England!' This was something of a coup, as Talmadge claimed to preach every

Sunday 'to the largest audience in the world.'³³ His style was flamboyant and his public relations technique polished. He sent a photo to accompany his first sermon for *The Christian Globe*:

You ask me for my photograph. Here it is; my wife who knows everything of me worth knowing says it is the best of me yet taken [...] In reference to your paper it surprises me by its cheapness and pleases me by its spirit of pure Evangelism. Let there be light! You are welcome to anything I say or write.³⁴

An introductory editorial described Talmadge's sermons as 'flowing warm from his heart'.³⁵

Talmadge offered emotionalism, star-status and a celebration of domesticity that must have appealed to readers of *The Christian Globe's* as his sermons appeared weekly for almost the next forty years. By 1877 they were 'phonographically reported and forwarded in advance' – in keeping with the enterprising spirit of the times, no doubt. His message on the importance of home and family was unequivocal. 'Any amusement that gives you a distaste for domestic life is bad,' he pronounced.³⁶ He was a skilled media operator. As well as using periodicals, books, spoken word and photography to promote himself and his message, he caused a regular appeal to be printed in *The Christian Globe* (and presumably in similar American papers as well): 'Dr Talmadge requests that all readers of his sermons every Sunday morning, between eight and ten o'clock, pray for the Blessing of God on his work.'³⁷ This plea for endorsement and support, involving the millions of unknown readers, accords with *The Christian Globe's* presentation of itself as a virtual community, a good people's club.

The format James Allingham established for his paper endured for most of its existence. On the first page the portrait of a popular preacher or philanthropist in the

news, together with a biographical sketch: on the second, Talmadge's sermon. There were regular pages for 'Denominational Notes' and a 'Miscellany' column which used a significant amount of human interest material clipped from American papers. Other regular features were 'Half Hours with Popular Preachers', the 'Family Circle' and a 'Young Folks' sections ('Chats with Uncle Charlie'). These were interspersed with appeals for good causes, advertorials, poems and fillers. As well as the space reserved for fiction, two or three leading articles on the centre pages commented on matters of ecclesiastical, political or social interest.

The Christian Globe was registered as a newspaper (rather than a magazine) and, as the paper developed, it moved imperceptibly away from the explication of religious texts and towards a reading of society. As well as commenting on church and national affairs, its leader columns and miscellanies embraced a variety of causes: it was anti-vivisection and white veal, pro-shelters for cabmen and education for canal folk, indignant about the treatment of native Americans and Hindu wives, and increasingly concerned, in a socialistic way, about the relation of Labour and Capital.³⁸ In times of industrial strife it took the side of the workers, but reluctantly, wishing that both parties would respect the other's point of view. A general aspiration that the world should be a better place and a desire to persuade others to share its view of what constitutes better, was present throughout. The improvements advocated were almost always social and material and the political stance was usually liberal-labour. Rather like the temperance movement, *The Christian Globe's* central concern was with improving the quality of life on earth, not in the hereafter.

Improving the material quality of life on earth might be used as justification for the amount of space devoted to advertising – if justification had been required. In

reality, the Victorians seem to have been pragmatic about advertising and profit-making in their religious press. Grant's survey of weekly metropolitan religious papers ends its analysis of *The Guardian* ('the most influential and ablest of them all') as follows:

The price is sixpence; and as it has a large circulation for a paper published at so high a price, and has a great number of well-paid advertisements, it is one of the best paying weekly papers in London. I should be surprised if the annual profits of *The Guardian* be much less, if less at all, than from £4000 - £5000.³⁹

Successful advertising agent Henry Sell, who had begun his Fleet Street career with *The Christian Globe*'s earlier-established rival *The Christian World*, went further and suggested a causal link between effective advertising and religious papers:

An important fact not always or even generally appreciated is that, though the Advertisement and Editorial columns are entirely dissociated, yet the latter lend the former an unconscious influence which should be born in mind by the Advertiser, and should guide him in his selection of papers nearly as much as circulation. This is probably the explanation of the extraordinarily successful results of advertising in the religious papers, as it is obvious that such papers do exert an almost personal influence on the majority of their readers.⁴⁰

In 1883, when these words were written, Sell's agency was sharing a building (167-8 Fleet Street) with *The Christian Globe* Newspaper Association Ltd and James Allingham had begun describing himself on official forms as an 'advertisement canvasser' rather than as a 'printer'. Advertising was central to his activities. In 1876 he had been able to announce not only that '*The Christian Globe* has now, with one exception, the largest circulation of any Christian paper in the world' but also that 'advertisers inform us that they recognize more benefit from an advertisement inserted in the *Christian Globe* than through any other paper.'⁴¹ Around 1883 Allingham went into partnership with James Caradoc Francis, a commission agent from Walthamstow. Although their advertising agency never achieved the prestige or

commercial success of Sell's, it certainly outlasted *The Christian Globe* and provided employment for at least three of James Allingham's sons and probably James Francis's brother as well.⁴²

Under James Allingham's management the editorial and advertising columns of *The Christian Globe* were by no means as 'disassociated' as Sell had assumed. *The Christian Globe* used advertorials (columns that look like articles and are only at the end revealed as advertisement) and was not slow to intersperse advertisements throughout the editorial pages rather than corralling them at the back. Stylistically, the characteristic use of narrative and personal testimony within advertising copy tended to blur the boundaries further. Intellectually, the mix of commercial push with spirituality and altruism made for inconsistencies, though there is no indication that these would have been felt as jarring by contemporary readers, at least in the early days of the paper.

Later, in the early years of the twentieth century, attitudes to advertising became more critical, particularly towards the advertising of patent medicines, a staple of *The Christian Globe*. James Allingham's granddaughters remembered him cursing the inefficacy of the indigestion remedies he promoted but there was no suggestion that that affected his or his sons' readiness to act for their major client, Beecham's Powders. Child heroes died beautifully in *The Christian Globe*'s fiction and grieving parents were eloquently consoled in its 'Family Circle' column. Regular advertisements, meanwhile, shrieked 'DO NOT LET YOUR CHILD DIE! Fenning's Children's Powders Prevent Convulsions.... Read FENNING'S EVERY MOTHER'S BOOK, sent post free for 8 stamps.'⁴³

The Christian Globe's editorial attitude to children is likely to be found congenial. It insisted that children should be cherished as their time on earth might be short. Although it placed a conventionally high value on obedience, it spoke out against corporal punishments, such as the use of the cane in schools, and against fear-inflicting punishments, such as shutting children in dark cupboards. It was an eager supporter of Dr Barnardo, of National Refuges for Homeless Children, and of the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. 'How to make children lovely?' asks the 'Family Circle' column rhetorically. 'There is just one way: that is to surround them day and night with an atmosphere of love.'⁴⁴

It is the more disturbing to find small advertisements, slipped in to its back pages, which appear to come from baby-farmers: 'A respectable married person would take a baby from the birth.' 'Married lady would take entire charge of a child. 5 years for £40.'⁴⁵ There are not many, but it is surprising that there should be any, when the abuses of this practice had been so sensationally exposed by, among others, James Greenwood – a journalist after *The Christian Globe's* own bleeding heart and a regular colleague of John Allingham if not of James himself.⁴⁶

The Christian Globe's advertisements are never quite as lurid as E.S. Turner suggests was possible in the 'so-called religious press'.⁴⁷ There is, nevertheless, a certain lack of scrupulousness about the acceptance and presentation of advertisements in these early years, which becomes obvious when the advertising pages are compared with those produced during the 1880s and 1890s. By then James Allingham was no longer so immediately involved with the paper and the advertising industry as a whole was under pressure to look more closely at its practices.

The Christian Globe's Sources of Capital

Early issues of *The Christian Glowworm / Christian Globe* carried a relatively large number of property-related advertisements. Many of these were inserted from James Allingham's home address in Kennington, as he set about his task of managing his father's estate.⁴⁸ There was 'Money ready to be ADVANCED on Freehold or Leasehold property' and, alternatively ONE HUNDRED ONE POUND SHARES in the Camberwell Advance and Investment Company Ltd FOR SALE 'in consequence of the owner having urgent need of cash.'⁴⁹ Similar advertisements, inserted in *The Christian Globe* classified section over the next five years, give a clear impression that James continued as a property dealer and private mortgage provider in his own right rather than simply acting as his father's executor.

Additionally, in the 1870s, he appears to have been associated with the Starr-Bowkett Building Societies. Not only was *The Starr-Bowkett and Terminable Building Society News* published from his business premises in 29 Farringdon Street but this also functioned as an accommodation address for Richard Starr himself.⁵⁰ 'Why pay rent' ran the Starr-Bowkett marketing campaign, 'When by a small weekly subscription you can become your own landlord?'⁵¹

Unfortunately, it was not so simple. A ballot was central to the Starr-Bowkett system, thus inviting accusations of gambling. The resulting 'appropriations', intended to provide the thrifty (and lucky) working man with the lump sum necessary to buy or build a house, could become tradable items in the hands of unscrupulous dealers.⁵² By the early 1880s Richard Starr had to defend himself against accusations of dishonourable practices and, after James Allingham's removal

of his business premises from Farringdon Street to Fleet Street, there is no evidence of their further association.

James Allingham's involvement with the property market might seem tangential to his activities as founder and editor of *The Christian Globe*. There would, however, have been no *Christian Globe* without money made in the housing market.⁵³ Not only James's share of William Allingham's estate went into it, but some of his brothers' and sisters' inheritances too. Twelve members of the family (or their spouses) are recorded as shareholders at some point during the paper's lifetime. Seven members can be identified as having worked for it and that is almost certainly an underestimate. The contributions of illustrators and photographers are not regularly credited and there were several of those in Allingham's generation.

The paper was itself a property and James Allingham treated it as such. Once the newspaper had been developed, he lost little time in turning it into a limited company, The *Christian Globe* Newspaper Association Ltd. The Association had a notional capital of £15,000 made up of 3000 shares at £5 each. Its primary purpose was to purchase the copyright of *The Christian Globe* Newspaper – a deal for which Allingham received £10,000, half in cash and the rest in shares; subsidiary objectives were to continue printing, publishing and issuing *The Christian Globe* together with a general printing and publishing business. Allingham was appointed Managing Director on a salary of £250 p.a. plus a dividend deal. He was given a budget of £167 10/- to produce each issue of the paper (60,000 copies) and prohibited from selling his 1000 shares for three years.

In the forefront of this business arrangement was a core group of 'Members'. All had south London addresses and none had any obvious connection with either

religion or the periodical publishing industry. Apart from James Allingham, the largest shareholder was a hop-factor – an occupation which may seem slightly surprising in a periodical promoting temperance. The other directors were a doctor, a ‘commission agent’ and Louis-Philippe Noble, described as an ivory turner. Advertisements reveal that Noble was also a property developer owning a number of houses in and off the Walworth Road.

The doctor and the hop-factor soon dropped out and sold their shares to men who described themselves as ‘commission agents’ and took on the directorships of the paper.⁵⁴ I am making an assumption that these men were either connected with advertising, organized betting or with property finance.⁵⁵ It seems that James Allingham was not the only petty capitalist seeking to use the periodical industry as a new branch of production through which to ‘transform’ money.⁵⁶ Direct property advertisement ceased in the 1880s when Allingham stepped back from *The Christian Globe’s* management, yet housing remains a cultural theme that should not be ignored. It was more significant factor than, for instance, education.

The Christian Globe celebrated, almost sanctified, the domestic. Any housing need – in the shape of shelters, refuges, orphanages, slum reclamation movements – called forth its immediate sympathy.⁵⁷ In its fiction, homelessness, exposure to the elements, slum-living signified the depths of misfortune. To be cast out was disaster indeed. Its advice columns aimed to educate men, women and children in the making of a happy home and family. Even its advertisements had some part to play, though domestic consumer goods comprised a relatively small proportion of advertisements – an indication, presumably, of the low disposable income of the readership.

As well as the Allingham family members and the commercial entrepreneurs, there was a third group of shareholders whose motivation for investment is less immediately apparent. In the initial capitalisation *Christian Globe* Newspaper Association shares were bought, in ones and twos and tens, by ordinary members of the public from addresses all over the country. Half a dozen nonconformist ministers, including the Spurgeon brothers, were among those who held a few shares each; the listed occupations of the other small shareholders cover a very wide economic and social range.

medical doctor, stay-maker, horse-keeper, stationer, bank manager, surgeon, doctor's assistant, civil engineer, solicitor, grocer, groom, ironmonger, shop assistant, clerk, accountant, butter merchant, labourer, warehouseman, registrar of births, governess, newsagent, gardener, upholsterer, chemist, pastry cook, hosier, lodging house keeper, watchmaker, brewer, outfitter, book-keeper, spinster.⁵⁸

There were almost two hundred such investors, 20% - 25% of them women.⁵⁹ How normal was it for shop assistants, clerks and labourers to invest even relatively small sums such as £10 or £20 in a business flotation? In Bennett's *The Card*, the Countess of Chell's groom and coachman have a few shares each in the Universal Thrift Company, but this is presented as a reward for services rendered. M.J. Daunton's comments on the 'sociology of investment' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century suggest that lower middle class people with a little surplus money tended to invest in property or business premises, usually in their immediate neighbourhood (as William Allingham had done); richer people (assessed at death over £5000) were more wide-ranging in their investments.⁶⁰

The majority of small investors in *The Christian Globe* cannot have belonged to this wealthier category. Neither were they, in any modern sense, playing the financial market as most of them (unlike the speculative commission agent group) retained

their holdings, neither selling nor buying, for the lifetime of the Association. The obvious, but unprovable, implication is that their investments were ethically motivated, and that they represented the most ideologically committed of the paper's readers and sympathisers. Perhaps these two hundred non-commercial, non-family investors should be considered as evidence that the paper did exert, in Henry Sell's words, 'an almost personal influence' on at least some of its readers.

When, in 1900, the paper took stock of its first twenty-five years, it paid tribute to its loyal audience. It had set itself, it claimed to further all good causes; to keep readers acquainted with the religious and social movements of the day and 'to provide weekly a budget of wholesome and interesting reading.' These aims

could never have been achieved had we not received the loyal and hearty assistance of our readers. It is pleasant to think of the many forms of social and religious work which the readers of *The Christian Globe* have assisted during these last twenty-five years. Whenever we have advocated any work of Christian endeavour which seemed to us good, we have been encouraged by the hearty approval and support of our readers.⁶¹

Awareness of this unobtrusively approving and committed section of the audience is a healthy corrective to any overly cynical reading of *The Christian Globe*.

A Reader's Verdict?

No actual readers' verdicts survive.⁶² The closest I can offer is a much mediated, fictionalised, comment. In the tense and lonely years of the Second World War James Allingham's granddaughter, Margery Allingham, wrote *Dance of the Years*, the first part of a fictional family history. Almost her only companion at this time was her grandmother, Emily Jane Hughes, one of James Allingham's younger sisters. In 1875 Emily Jane had been among the first shareholders in *The Christian*

Globe. She may also have been more directly involved in its production as she assisted her husband, a photographer.⁶³ It is likely that Emily Jane formed her own view of the paper and it is also likely that she shared this with her granddaughter. Margery Allingham particularly admired her grandmother's 'profound and simple religious faith'.⁶⁴ In *Dance of the Years* this attribute is given to the fictional character of Jinny whose opinion of the first number of *The Converted World* is eagerly solicited by its entrepreneurial founder.

Later after she had studied it she gave him her verdict.

'It's wonderful Will. So very clever, my dear. But not religious.'

'Not religious Mama?'

'No dear,' said Jinny, 'not religious.'

It was all that she could tell him and when he argued with her and pointed out the name of the Almighty in every other paragraph, let alone on every page, she stood her ground helpless and without the means of expression.⁶⁵

Publishers read other publishers' products and pay their most characteristic compliments by imitating those which have achieved success. In 1894 Alfred and Harold Harmsworth founded their own evangelical family paper. This was *The Sunday Companion*, a penny weekly bearing a strong resemblance to *The Christian Globe* and others of its type. It differed, however, from *The Christian Globe* in two important respects. *The Sunday Companion* was clearly envisaged as a magazine and not a newspaper. It supported charitable causes but rarely commented on national happenings – left-wing politics, trade union news and social justice campaigns were conspicuously absent from its pages. Secondly, it was conceived as part of a mixed group of mass-circulation periodicals: 'Answers 360,000, *Comic Cuts* 430,000, *Chips* 240,000, *Forget-me-Not* 120,000'. These were owned and managed by two men with extraordinary commercial flair, immense ambition and few, if any,

small-scale stakeholders to be considered.⁶⁶ The business structure and keen capitalistic understanding behind *The Sunday Companion* was where the future lay.⁶⁷

¹ Paper was initially called *The Christian Glowworm* but changed to *The Christian Globe* 1875.

² M.J.Daunton *House and Home in the Victorian City: working class housing 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983) p104-105.

³ Advertised in *The Christian Glowworm* July & August 1874.

⁴ Daunton p. 96.

⁵ Cf. Jones (2004) p. 214

⁶ Cf. Patrick Duffy *The Skilled Compositor: an aristocrat among working men 1850-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

⁷ Colin Clair *A History of Printing in Britain* (London: Cassell, 1965) p. 221.

⁸ Aphorisms such as that attributed to Lord Macaulay were commonplace in the productions of the major advertising agencies, such as Sell's and Deacon's. Cf Sell's *Directory* (1883) pp 411 – 430. Some may well have been apocryphal but this was no deterrent to their use in the advertising sections of periodicals – eg above the advertising rates section of *The Christian World*, 8.1.1875. Cf E.S. Turner *The Shocking History of Advertising* (London Michael Joseph, 1952) p. 94.

⁹ Answer 'Yes, by all means. Invite them to tea even if you give them a very inexpensive meal. Entertain them with games and the best pictures you have or can borrow. Ask a genial neighbour or two; those who know how to talk pleasantly without making the children feel that they are being operated on as specimen candidates for missionary efforts...' *Christian Glowworm* July and August 1874 p. 3.

¹⁰ Allingham (1943) p. 149 and p. 151.

¹¹ *CG* July 1874 p. 3.

¹² Decade by decade the total divides 1870-1879 19 new titles, 1880 – 1889 15 new titles, 1890-1900 17 new titles.

¹³ James Grant 'Weekly Metropolitan Religious Press' chapter 3 of *The Newspaper Press Vol. III* (London: Routledge, 1872).

¹⁴ *The Christian Glowworm*, October 1874 p.2.

¹⁵ *CG* 10.5.1900.

¹⁶ Roman Catholics referred to as 'our Romish fellow-citizens' in a friendly context *CG* 24.11.1892.

¹⁷ *The Christian Glowworm*, October 1874 p. 2.

¹⁸ *CG* 8.10.1875 p. 24.

¹⁹ *CG* Christmas Hamper 1912 p. 12.

²⁰ As 'Herbert St Clair' *CG* Christmas Hamper 1890 p, 18.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 19.

²² *Ibid.* p. 19.

²³ David Bebbington *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) p. 2.

²⁴ 'Trust' *CG* 1892 pp 6-8, 'The Vagabond's Victory' (n.d). 'Trust' ends as a doctors-and-nurses tale which may represent a type of activist ministry.

²⁵ Cf. *Mother Love* published in *Fun & Fiction* (1912) and in the *CG* (1915) and, moving in the opposite direction *A Work Girl's Love Story* published *CG* (1913) and then *My Weekly* (1914).

²⁶ *The Christian Globe* was increasingly unable to afford new fiction.

²⁷ Hoggart p. 129.

²⁸ Hoggart p. 130.

²⁹ In *Tommy* Richard Holmes suggests that, for the pre-WW1 working class, Sunday School attendance may have been much more significant than actual church membership in inculcating religious knowledge and ethics (London: Harper Collins, 2004) p. 504.

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- ³⁰ He remained on the board until 1901 when his place was taken by W.S. Bradley. When HJA left Bradley's *London Journal* in 1909, the connection of the Bradleys with *The Christian Globe* was also severed.
- ³¹ New magazines announced by James Allingham included *The Boys' World* (1879) *Our Boys' Paper* (1880), *The Ladies World* and *The Family Paper* (1883). Only the first two can be traced as having actually gone into production.
- ³² CG 1.10.1875.
- ³³ Hartley Aspden *Fifty Years a Journalist* (Clitheroe n.d.)
- ³⁴ CG February 1875 p. 1.
- ³⁵ CG February 1875 p. 1Feb 1875.
- ³⁶ CG February 1875 p. 3
- ³⁷ CG 11.3.1877.
- ³⁸ E.g. Anti-vivisection 15.10.1875, white veal 21.4.1876, Hindu women 7.1.1886, North Western Indians 8.1.1891, Capital and Labour 4.9.1891.
- ³⁹ Grant p. 143.
- ⁴⁰ *The Philosophy of Advertising* Henry Sell (1883). Item SL09 in the History of Advertising Trust Sell collection. Sell's business records can be viewed in the Public Record Office.
- ⁴¹ CG 24.3.1876 and CG 8.12.1876.
- ⁴² The only public mention of the agency that I have been able to unearth is the report of Francis's suicide in *The Advertising World* of 1909 (in History of Advertising Trust collection).
- ⁴³ *The Christian Glowworm* July & August 1874 pp. 3 and 4.
- ⁴⁴ CG 2.1.1890
- ⁴⁵ CG 24.11.1876.
- ⁴⁶ E.g. Greenwood *The Seven Curses of London* 1869. Greenwood suggested that cost was the key factor when evaluating any advertisement of this sort. £40, though a large sum if paid in advance, seems little to cover a child's expenses over 5 years, especially if the married lady was expecting to earn something for her trouble.
- ⁴⁷ Turner p. 175.
- ⁴⁸ 137 Kennington Park Road.
- ⁴⁹ CG 25.8.1875
- ⁵⁰ James Allingham may also have been associated with another property finance company, the National Society Ltd., which offered loans to women and minors and which advertised regularly in *The Christian Globe*.
- ⁵¹ *The Starr-Bowkett Journal and Building Society News* 2.1.1882.
- ⁵² Arnold Bennett *Clayhanger* (1910) refers to the 'perils' of the system of the Starr-Bowkett Building Societies as well as the 'defalcations' of other secretaries of societies p. 242.
- ⁵³ The increased need for housing was an intimate part of the move to the cities which affected the development of the penny press. Cf. John Burnett *A Social History of Housing* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1978) p. 23 on the building of Camberwell (South London).
- ⁵⁴ They were W.E. Williams, J.C. Francis and Thomas Penfold.
- ⁵⁵ Cf. Hoggart p. 73 'Their street corner betting is a risky business, if they ran an account with a Commission Agent it would not be.' Bennett *The Card* (1911) p. 44 'Mr Calvert was a little fellow of fifty who had made his money in the mysterious calling of a "commission agent" [...] Surely if any man in Bursley were capable of unmercifully collecting rents on his own account, Herbert Calvert must be that man!'
- ⁵⁶ Marx (ed. McClellan) p. 352 for the idea of social wealth seeking new branches of production by which to transform itself into additional capital. Margery Allingham makes the accusation that investment in *The Converted World* was a form of spiritual money-laundering.
- ⁵⁷ This was the period of social outrage sparked by publication of Andrew Mearns's *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883).
- ⁵⁸ PRO BT31/14535/9609.
- ⁵⁹ Checking the gender balance of the thousand who collected sufficient coupons to win an oleograph in July-August 1878 shows that the majority were men, with only 20-25% women – a similar gender balance to that of the ordinary shareholders.
- ⁶⁰ Dauntton p. 104-5.

⁶¹ *CG* 10.5.1900.

⁶² The Barmby sisters in George Gissing's *The Year of the Jubilee* read 'semi-religious periodicals': Mrs Baines and Constance in Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* read *Sunday at Home*, Bell's respondent 118 read *The Sunday Companion*, respondents 16 & 65 *The Sunday Magazine*.

⁶³ *CG* 26.4.1877 advertises work by a photographer called Hughes. Emily Hughes was a shareholder at this time.

⁶⁴ Margery Allingham *The Oaken Heart* (London: Michael Joseph, 1941).

⁶⁵ Allingham (1943) p.155.

⁶⁶ As soon as they were able the Harmsworths had manufactured a quarrel with their initial backer, Beaumont, in order to regain sole control of their business. Ferris *The House of Northcliffe* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971) p.58.

⁶⁷ Editorial control of *CG* taken back from Penfold in 1909. Much more input from HJA at that period. Also from his younger brothers, Phil and Ernest, who gradually took over advertising agency from James. HJA and Phil were major *CG* shareholders in its final years. Sold to F. Carl late 1916 and discontinued 1918.

Chapter Two

Uncle is such a Fool

The New Boys' Paper, 1886

In his famous essay on the reading choices of the Unknown Public, Wilkie Collins suggested that mass-market serials offered their readers 'a combination of fierce melodrama and meek domestic sentiment'.¹ If meek domestic sentiment was readily available to the young Allingham through his father's *Christian Globe*, the publishing tradition represented by his uncle John Allingham's *The Boys' World* was very much closer to fierceness.² It was the linear descendent of the 'trashy and vile' fiction, the penny bloods and dreadfuls, which were editorially deplored by *The Christian Globe*. From the late 1860s and 1870s the conflict between the reprehensible and respectable, between stories to be read in the street and stories to be taken home to the family, was nowhere more passionately contested than in the boys' publishing market. Boys were a demographically, commercially and politically significant group. They had pennies to spend and, with the extension of the franchise, some might be numbered among 'our future masters'. As the century wore on, even those who would never attain the dignity of a vote mattered increasingly as the future hewers and drawers whose labour would maintain the Empire.

Allingham's family background encouraged him to develop a quasi-professional view on the boys' penny-publishing market when he was still a boy himself. The diary he kept, aged 18, detailing the circumstances surrounding the publication of his first serial story in a paper optimistically conceived by his uncle John, is a valuable

aid to understanding speculative activity in this market area as ‘fierce’ adventure stories were domestically repackaged to gain wider acceptability amongst parents and educators as well as from boys (and girls) of different social groupings.³

Ralph Rollington

Herbert Allingham’s uncle, Albert John Allingham – better known to posterity as ‘Ralph Rollington’ - presented a very different personality from his older brother James. Family legend cast him as the black sheep, ‘wild Uncle John’, a practical joker, unpredictable, with hard-drinking friends and a tendency towards exotic chaos at home. In *Dance of the Years*, Margery portrayed John Allingham as Tom, an inveterate prankster and scourge of his brother’s ‘good young men’.⁴ It would be easy to assume that the brothers were incompatible and it is certainly possible to use them to personify different attitudes to fiction: John the reprehensible, James the respectable. Family relationship, however, proved a strong bond when combined with mutual commercial interest.

Crucially, both James and John Allingham were ‘small masters’ (in Marx’s terminology), individual entrepreneurs trying to take advantage of the social and economic conditions of their times to build up their semi-independent businesses. Their relationship encouraged them to use one another for support in a competitive, unstable arena. John was a founder member of James’s *Christian Globe* Newspaper Association and James used his newspaper to advertise John’s magazines: *The Boys’ World* and *Our Boys’ Paper*.⁵ Both men were important to Herbert Allingham’s development as a fiction writer. The extent of their co-operation to facilitate the

publication of his first serial story in 1886, offers a glimpse of this generation of the family functioning as a commercial unit within a distinct publishing network. Allingham's diary also suggests that the real reason for disapproval of 'wild Uncle John' may not have been due to his bohemian lifestyle, but because he was a potential business liability.

There may, anyway, have been an element of play-acting in wild Uncle John's japes. He seems to have enjoyed being Ralph Rollington, his fictional persona. Ralph Rollington existed on various levels. First he was a boy-adventurer, also known as 'the Fat Boy'. The popularity of this character ensured that Ralph Rollington became narrator, editor and, when finances allowed, proprietor / publisher of the magazines in which his adventures (and those of 'Timothy Teazer', 'Dick Darlington' and 'Rupert Reckless') appeared.

As Ralph Rollington, John Allingham was not an intrusive editor but, when he did intervene, it was with a jocular facetiousness designed to position himself with 'our boys' and in opposition to 'aged imbeciles'.⁶ In cheap boys' papers it was normal for writers of letters to the editor to submit their messages under the name of a favourite character: Ralph Rollington therefore appears, quite frequently, in the guise of a letter-writing reader of his own papers.⁷ The character's final incarnation was as the chronicler of his publishing generation in *A Brief History of Boys' Papers with some Facts about the Writers of Boys' Stories* (1913). One 'fact' Ralph Rollington failed to include was his real name.

In his generation John Allingham was by no means alone in his incorporation of a fictional identity into daily business dealings: S. Dacre Clarke / 'Guy Rayner' was a

similar author-hero-editor-publisher-reader; E.H. Berridge wrote 'Ching-Ching' stories in *Ching-Ching's Own* which he also edited and part-owned. Fictionality – playing games around identities – permeated the cheaper end of the boys' school and adventure story market. Setting up a hero was seen (and still is) as an instant means of imparting some personality to a product and thus facilitating the sense of human relationship that might help attract readers and then ensure their loyalty. In commercial terms it can be considered as a method of fetishising the commodity.

Popular Publishing for Boys: the influence of Edwin Brett

During the period of Ralph Rollinton's active involvement, popular publishing for boys was buccaneering and volatile.⁸ The previous generation, penny publishers of the 1830s and 40s, had demonstrated that there was substantial money to be made by providing sensational fiction for working-class readers. Louis James cites a correspondent to the *Morning Chronicle* in 1849 who claimed that six penny-publishers, born in poverty, had achieved sufficient wealth to run both town and country houses.⁹ By the 1850s and 1860s, when John Allingham was growing up, the next generation was eager to emulate them. Their characteristic 'penny blood' fiction, outmoded for adults, provided the foundation for the 'penny dreadfuls' of the rapidly developing juvenile market.¹⁰

The census of 1861 had revealed that 45% of the population was under 20 years old. Unsurprisingly that decade saw the beginnings of a half-century boom in publishing for older children and young adults. It also saw significant developments in what Kirsten Drotner presents as the gradual coming-together of cultural

experiences for children of different social classes.¹¹ As the reprehensible was challenged or cloaked by the respectable, these widely popular magazines established *de facto* reading communities.

The success of Edward Lloyd, G.W.M Reynolds and others of the ‘Salisbury Square School’ had encouraged new publishers to come onto the scene, some offering boys’ fiction in magazine format rather than part-issues.¹² A few of these pioneers, notably Samuel Beeton, aimed to provide inexpensive serial adventures written ‘by men of education’ that would be acceptable to middle-class families as well as the children of the respectable working classes.¹³ Ralph Rollington, a middle-class child, remembered purchasing the first number of Beeton’s *Boys’ Own Magazine* (1855-1866) when he was not quite twelve.

I well remember how I sat on one of the old desks in the class-room of the old Academy, with my feet resting on a long form, devouring every line of the story entitled ‘The Nine Lives of a Cat’ and when the first instalment finished with the loss of the cat’s first life, I heaved a sigh and would willingly have sacrificed a week’s pocket money to have secured another chapter.¹⁴

But Beeton’s magazine cost 2d, then 6d, was only published monthly, and eventually failed with his other businesses.

The commercial role model for John Allingham’s publishing generation was Edwin Brett, editor, from 1867, of the phenomenally successful penny weekly *Boys of England*.¹⁵ Under Brett’s editorship *Boys of England* became popular and more socially acceptable. In the later 1870s it boasted the patronage of HRH Prince Arthur as well as circulation of up to 250,000.¹⁶ Producing *Boys of England* clones provided Brett with the foundation of a fortune for himself and a publishing idiom much imitated by others – including Ralph Rollington.

Brett was a prime example of the new commercial synthesis of street and domestic publishing. Before he took over *Boys of England*, he worked as manager of the Newsagents' Publishing Company (NPC). This company became notorious in 1870 when a reissue of their publication *The Wild Boys of London* (1864-66, produced during Brett's editorship) was suppressed under the Obscene Publications Act of 1857.¹⁷ The NPC drew unashamedly on the sensational penny bloods of the past; publishing cheap, low-life tales of pirates, highwaymen, juvenile criminals etc. These were weeklies, usually part-issues, and easily available through tobacconists, sweetshops, and small chandleries as well as via newsagents.

It was through such unpretentious outlets, allegedly, that they threatened the 'well-dressed' children of 'quiet, suburban neighbourhoods [...] serene and peaceful semi-country towns where genteel boarding schools flourish'.¹⁸ John Springhall describes Brett as having helped provoke a middle class 'cycle of outrage' when manager of the NPC.¹⁹ As editor and proprietor of *Boys of England*, he then profited from it, dying in 1895 a wealthy man publicly fêted by his peers. Brett's success established a pattern whereby each new magazine launched on the market promised something 'pure' and 'healthy' in contrast to the 'pernicious rubbish' supposedly put about by their predecessors. It also unleashed 'one of the most intense periods of competition in the history of juvenile magazines'.²⁰

The public expectations of mass literacy, aroused by the passing of the 1870 Education Act, gave additional encouragement to the boys' publishing projectors. Enterprises proliferated, bifurcated, failed, changed hands, were revived and renamed. Whoever could publish, did and wider developments within the industry aided them.

Technical progress with stereotyping was particularly significant as the moulds made from typeset stories could be stored for future low-cost reprints. These accumulated capital for the publisher but not for the author, the illustrator, the engraver, or for any other of the self-employed craftsmen who might have contributed to their production. In the absence of strong copyright laws, and before the establishment of the Society of Authors (1884) or National Union of Journalists (1907), the position of many workers by hand and brain in this sector of the publishing industry was as demanding and as insecure as any other casual labourers in Marx's Britain.

The entrepreneurial style of publishing which was characteristic of small masters in this section of the market in the 1870s and 80s has a hand-to-mouth materiality that is well illustrated by one of Ralph Rollington's anecdotes.

I remember a good many years back, Charles Fox, the publisher, meeting me in Fleet Street. He was carrying a small parcel that appeared exceedingly heavy for its size. 'What on earth have you got there, Charlie?' I queried laughingly. 'Only some old comic electros,' he replied, 'by 'Phiz' and I want you to write them up into a comic school story.' I took them home, worked up a plot, and named it *Timothy Teazer's Schooldays*, which duly appeared in the *Boys' Half Holiday*²¹

Rollington would have been paid but it is unlikely that Phiz got anything out of this re-use of his illustrations. The electros, product of his and others' work, had become Charles Fox's capital, which he could reinvest in his own new ventures - in this case *The Boys' Half Holiday*, a paper which failed almost as soon as it was launched.²²

William Laurence Emmett had been among the first of the new publishers to set up a string of periodicals in blatant imitation of Brett. He was one of four brothers and a sister, all of whom, according to Ralph Rollington, were employed in the penny-fiction market. On William Laurence's bankruptcy in 1871, his brother George had continued publishing several of his titles. And when George's enterprises had

flagged, the Emmetts' manager, Charles Fox, appropriated some of the material (titles, stories, blocks – as above) and began publishing on his own account. As a writer and editor, Ralph Rollington was closely associated with members of the Emmett family, as well as with Fox. He had written for their papers and they would write for his.²³ He also knew Edwin Brett, but the tone of his *Brief History* suggests that by the late 1870s, when Rollington ventured into boys' publishing, Brett's success had already put some social distance between him and his less well-established competitors.

Economic and social distinctions between publishers and printers were becoming more marked: 'Publishing became a profession but printing remained a trade'.²⁴ In his overview of the print industry in the nineteenth century, Patrick Duffy touches briefly on some of the human stresses which developed as printing moved from a guild- and state-regulated craft to a service industry, 'adapted to the industrial capitalist mode of production'.

'What was new was the way in which labour was subordinated to the will of capital [...] through integrated systems of production and distribution.'²⁵ Individual publisher-capitalists, like the Emmetts, or Fox, ready to profit from their knowledge of the network of writers and artists needing work in order to eat, and from printers newly possessed of extended capacity through mechanization, were recognizably part of the exploitative economic system as deconstructed by Marx, but had not reached the integrated, 'factory' stage where their many small businesses combined into large corporations and they took firmer control of their sources of supply.

This was manifest in their working environments. Laurel Brake includes a quote from *The Author* of 1895 which describes these ‘new publishers’ as ‘men who rented two rooms somewhere, and without machinery of any visible kind, and almost without visible capital, carried on noisy and apparently unprofitable businesses, by the sole help of the great and powerful distributing agencies.’²⁶ Two rooms would have been more than enough to produce a boys’ weekly, when the businesses of advertising, printing, marketing and distribution could all be carried on elsewhere. There was little need for lavish suites of offices and an editorial retinue when writers, copy-writers, illustrators and engravers, were so casual, cheap, and eager.

Ten years later when Herbert Allingham or Frank Richards would go seeking work in the boys’ fiction market, no-one would pass them a bundle of electros in the street. Instead they would have to negotiate ever more imposing buildings with editors’ names on the doors of their offices and layer upon layer of corridors in which the timid hacks could easily lose their way.²⁷

The Boys’ World

The first number of John Allingham’s penny paper, *The Boys’ World*, was produced in April 1879 from his brother’s premises at 29 Farringdon Street. Presumably it profited from the distribution network already established for *The Christian Globe* and it was conspicuously advertised within that paper. *The Boys’ World* promised ‘Sixteen pages of pure and healthy literature, beautifully illustrated’.²⁸ As usual the new paper was to be unlike anything else on the market:

Among all the so-called ‘Boys’ Journals’ there is scarcely one that answers to the title and comes up to what a boy with any intelligence would wish for. The

contents are either altogether too unreal or too dull and heavy to interest; and many of them, of the Newgate Calendar type, at best can only mislead and deprave.²⁹

The Boys' World had a masthead motto 'overcome evil with good' and promised that the tendency of its serial stories 'will always be to encourage the practice of uprightness, perseverance, sobriety and reverence for virtue and religion'.³⁰ In fact the paper was completely in the Brett-Emmett-Fox format and, far from breaking with papers of the past, the Allinghams are believed to have purchased and reused the stock of George Emmett's paper, *The Young Englishman*, when it ceased publication in September 1879.³¹ E.S. Turner comments: 'Often the stories in the Brett, Emmett and Fox publications did not differ greatly from the type of story put out as penny dreadfuls'.³²

The list of story types drawn up by Louis James supports this analysis – certainly the popularity of highwaymen and pirates did not noticeably diminish – but what Brett and his contemporaries did achieve was a shift in emphasis; away from gothic horror and Tyburn tales, towards the historical romance, the school story and the imperial adventure. *Boys of England* had also signalled an important presentational development that put the magazine format, instead of the cheap book or part issue, at the centre of popular weekly publishing for young people. Where Brett had led, the Emmetts, Fox and Ralph Rollington followed.

Story type is one defining factor; another is the way that story type is used. The *Boys' World*, *Our Boys' Paper* and *The New Boys' Paper* aim solely to entertain and not instruct. Despite its pious pledges, Rollington's most successful magazine, *The Boys' World*, bears little resemblance to the true candidate for the pure and healthy market. That was *The Boy's Own Paper*, first published in 1879 by the Religious

Tract Society. On almost all points of comparison – production values, balance of fiction/non-fiction, nature of advertisements accepted, use of authors’ real names – *The Boys’ World* is qualitatively inferior to the *B.O.P.*

Such factors were not necessarily important to readers. Frederick Harrison (‘Barry Ono’), born 1876, began collecting boys’ papers at the age of twelve and left his final collection to the British Museum. He rejected *The Boy’s Own Paper* contemptuously as ‘a semi-highbrow goody-goody publication’ but had no hesitation in including Ralph Rollington’s papers, together with those of Brett, Emmett, Fox and earlier bloods and dreadfuls in his treasury of ‘fierce’ tales.³³ Frank Jay, another collector and appreciative commentator on ‘old boys’ fiction, concurred with Ono’s distinction.³⁴

It is salutary to reflect for a moment (as Louis James does in his introduction to *Fiction for the Working Man*) on the nature of the debt book history owes to obsessives such as Ono and Jay. Historians rightly stress the ephemerality and disposability of nineteenth century penny fiction, yet the small ads in the back pages of these boys’ magazines bear witness to the avidity with which a minority of contemporary readers accumulated, swapped and hoarded runs of their favourite papers. Their choice of papers to collect was personal. It defined them as members of one reading community or another – as Ono did by his rejection of the goody-goody *B.O.P.* in favour of fierceness. Even when the boy readers had become ‘old boys’ and some collections acquired monetary value, the comments of *aficionados* such as Ono, Jay and their correspondents betray their continuing emotional engagement with the stories at the papers’ hearts.³⁵ They are therefore discriminating in a way that is

authentic to their experiences as readers. Inclusion of *The Boys' World* in the Ono collection therefore assists us to recognize where in the market contemporary readers would have placed it.³⁶

Allingham as a Boy Reader: Cambridge and Hammersmith

Direct comments are also available from a contemporary reader much closer to John Allingham's publications – and very much more critical. In the summer of 1886 Herbert Allingham was a theology student at Cambridge University. He was a non-collegiate student living in lodgings but such evidence as exists suggests he spent surprisingly little time actually in Cambridge.³⁷ Between June and November 1886, Allingham was at home in Goldhawk Road, Hammersmith, with his parents and brothers. He was studying with a private tutor, possibly because he had missed or failed an examination. The brief diary that survives from this period reveals a much livelier interest in literature, cricket, visitors' personalities and magazine fiction, than in the achievement of academic success. His comments on the penny papers he and his younger brothers were reading convey both a personal response and a level of critical awareness unsurprising in the intelligent son of a media businessman.

I bought a copy of *Youth* today. There are one or two good things in it but it is, I am afraid, dying. A boys paper must have good serials, or it won't do – The success of *The Boy's Own* is due to this I am certain – By the by they are advertising widely just now, a new volume begun. They announce stories by first-rate writers. Talbot Baines Reed, Jules Verne, Paul Blake, Dr Gordon Stables, A. R. Hope etc etc – [...]

Arthur bought the first number of the new volume of the *B.O.P.* today. It is a first rate no – The first story opens very well with a remark something like this. 'B – school wanted two slight reforms, one was that all the masters be dismissed, the other that all the boys be expelled.'³⁸

Allingham's interest has been caught by the opening sentence of Talbot Baines Reed's *A Dog with a Bad Name* but he has additionally noticed the advertising campaign surrounding the new *B.O.P.* volume and has a view about the prime importance of serial fiction in boys' weeklies. He was working to improve his own writing at this time and was particularly excited by a popular feature entitled the 'Literary Olympics'. This ran in *Young Folks*, (or *Y.F.P.*) a penny weekly published by James Henderson for older boys and girls. The 'Oly', as Allingham referred to it, offered readers a chance to submit poems and essays for expert criticism, with the lure of publication and even payment. It provides a rare example of a popular, commercial, penny paper successfully undertaking an educative role. Allingham's longing for success in this forum is patent but privately he was realistic. 'I should have to improve a good deal before I was fit for the *YFP* whereas anything interesting would do for Uncle's paper.'³⁹ Patently he was not an admirer of *The Boys' World*.

His diary suggests that life in James Allingham's suburban household was relaxed, cheerful and noisy, with frequent outings and visits from other family members. All eight boys, then aged from four to twenty, were living at home with 'Mater' and a single maid. His father ('Dad') travelled in daily to the offices of *The Christian Globe*, to C.W. Bradley's, or the J.C. Francis office, all in Fleet Street or Fetter Lane. When he was at home James Allingham obviously talked freely about business to his family. There was regular news, for instance, of Uncle John's activities:

I hear that Uncle John if he succeeds with some mad scheme for making money, he will put his profits into a boys' paper. He has several blocks on hand and has all the stories written, so he says, and if this is true, he may be able to start it.⁴⁰

By 1886 *The Boys' World* was failing. John Allingham does not appear to have been a prolific author and the Ralph Rollington character had not proved capable of the same continued expansion as had his close friend Bracebrydge Hemyng's 'Jack Harkaway' or even E.H. Burrage's 'Ching-Ching'. *The Boys' World's* pages were filled with pseudonymously contributed stories from the pens of Emmetts, Burrages and other 'for the million' writers. It also carried un-attributed material, probably purchased from other publishers' old stock or cut-and-pasted from American papers.⁴¹ In his memoir Rollington blamed the final demise of the paper on the unwise insistence of his paper manufacturer that they should have 'some instructive matter inserted in its pages'.⁴² His nephew Herbert would have been more likely to have cited the poor quality of the serial stories – his uncle's *Rupert Reckless* being particularly feeble. But both explanations would have been inadequate.

John Allingham's Business Difficulties

Commercial conditions were changing and the Allinghams' position within their market area had also changed. The periodical printing market in the 1870s and 1880s was intensely competitive with a number of firms vying for short-term production contracts to make most profitable use of their extended capacity. Printers' increasing need to invest in specialized machinery to undertake more complex technical tasks had encouraged companies to specialize in particular areas: books, newspapers and periodicals or general jobbing services. Mechanized presses then needed large volumes of work of the same kind to ensure economic production. James Allingham's company may not have been sufficiently large or specialist to compete effectively.

Around 1880 James had tried to make best use of his production and distribution systems by founding more magazines – *The Girls' World*, *The Ladies' Journal*, *The Family Paper* – but there is no evidence that any of them went into production. Ralph Rollington had been more successful. He had developed *Our Boys' Paper* on the same lines as *The Boys' World* and it had lasted three years.

By 1883 the Allingham brothers' stake in the market had changed significantly when James Allingham moved out of 29 Farringdon Street, sold most of his *Christian Globe* shares and founded the J.C. Francis Agency. They were no longer printers. Conversely the specialist periodical printers, C.W. Bradley & Co of 12-14 Fetter Lane, to whom both the Allingham brothers took their business, were attempting to address their own economic insecurities by becoming publishers. The two families' business dealings would be interwoven for the next twenty-five years. Unfortunately the evidence of their precise nature is scanty. It appears that, in the early 1880s, there was a separation between the affairs of *The Christian Globe*, which, though printed by Bradley's in Fetter Lane, had its own offices at 167-168 Fleet Street, and *The Boys' World*, which used Bradley's as its editorial as well as its production address.⁴³ *Our Boys' Paper* closed immediately and *The Boys' World* moved closer to insolvency. In 1886 Herbert Allingham, disapproving at eighteen, wrote in his diary 'From what I have heard of U J lately I think the less I have to do with him the better in business matters'.⁴⁴

The hard lesson to be learned by many small publishers in this period was that a little capital was not enough to do more than start up a paper. More was needed to maintain market share. Neither *The Boys' World* nor *Our Boys' Paper* possessed a

supportive group of loyal reader/shareholders like *The Christian Globe*; nor did they attract the same amount of advertising. Boys' papers generally needed to rely on their circulation for their profits. To attain (and maintain) circulation in this fiction-hungry sector, papers either needed to buy plenty of good, new stories, establish a powerful personality or run entertaining and energetic marketing campaigns. All of which were expensive. Rollington was lavish in his offers of prizes to reward reader loyalty but, apparently, unreliable in delivery.⁴⁵ He was briefly fortunate that John Holloway, an ex-army officer who enjoyed writing, invested £1000 and several stories into what, briefly, became a partnership entitled Allingham & Holloway. But the bills continued to increase.⁴⁶

Paper costs were inescapable and Ralph Rollington was eventually forced to surrender *The Boys' World* title with its blocks and story copyrights (including the rights to his own *Boys' World* fiction) to settle his debts to his paper suppliers. In his memoir he represents himself as lucky that they didn't take his house and furniture too.⁴⁷ There is no Ralph Rollington story in the first numbers of what became *The New Boys' Paper* and it may have been a shortage of original material that led him to convey an initial enquiry to his nephew.

One day Dad asked me if I would write a short sketch for uncle's paper. I said I would see if I had one about me, so he and I looked through my papers – And we came upon my school story – He had read part before but now he finished it and liked it so much that he told uncle about it the next day and the following day took it with him to business. The same afternoon (it was last Tuesday) I received a note from him saying that he had shown it to uncle who had read it and said he liked it and who in turn submitted it to Pierce Egan. Who, according to uncle, liked it also. Uncle said he would publish it and have it illustrated. [...]The first picture is going to be the ivy scene. Bobby Prowse is going to illustrate it. He says this will make a good scene.⁴⁸

The process described here offers a glimpse of an informal publishing network of family and friends checking the credentials of one of their own. Initially James Allingham uses his knowledge of the boys' market requirements to find something among his son's essays and sketches that might be suitable for his brother's paper. As editor John Allingham does not then rely solely on his own or his brother's judgement but asks the opinion of two other professionals. Pierce Egan was the son and grandson of famous popular writers and was at this time employed by C.W. Bradley & Co. to edit their recently purchased fiction magazine, *The London Journal*.⁴⁹ Bobby (Robert) Prowse was one of the best-known illustrators in the 'fierce' boys' paper market.⁵⁰ He had worked regularly for *The Boys World* and appears to have been offering to illustrate stories on spec for Rollington's new paper. His style was dark, coarse-lined and melodramatic.

Illustrations were of prime importance in establishing the class of a paper, as well as attracting readers, and Allingham does not appear to have whole-heartedly grateful for Prowse's approval. Given his personal admiration for the 'goody-goody' *Boy's Own Paper* and his low opinion of Ralph Rollington's earlier productions, one might guess that he shrank from Prowse's stylistic connection with the 'trashy and vile' sector. He and his father were soon lobbying for Prowse's replacement by an artist called Phillips, undistinguished but stylistically more refined.⁵¹ During the weeks before the appearance of Ralph Rollington's new paper Allingham's feelings oscillate between pleasurable anticipation and disappointed awareness of its low status.

But for all this I would ten thousand times rather see it in a most insignificant part of YF and get nothing for it, that have it well illustrated in uncle's paper and get a couple of pounds a number – Not that I am likely to get this – Of course I shan't get a penny, nor do I want it –

But still I shall feel jolly pleased to see it in print and if the paper is a success (and there is a slight possibility of such a result) I shall feel that I have been awfully lucky in getting it printed.⁵²

His emotional uncertainty was intensified by his lack of confidence in his uncle's business acumen: 'I have not much faith in anything uncle takes up'.⁵³

He was almost proved right. John Allingham had overlooked the most basic material, paper.

It seems very probable that uncle's new paper will not make its appearance after all; almost certain that it will not by the advertised date (Monday 27th). Uncle is such a fool; he has no money and goes around borrowing a shilling or two from whom he can. No one will supply the paper and he does not know what to do. He has tried everybody and Dad advised him to go to Hunt. Hunt replied, 'I will give you £4 per week and a third of the profits, only I must take all money in the first place.' And Uncle like a fool refused. Of course if he could do it himself, well and good but he can't. He says he will try and get a partner, I hope he will succeed.⁵⁴

Allingham, at home and frustrated, provides us with an eloquent vignette of this unprofessional, almost adventitious, small-scale publishing as uncle 'goes around borrowing a shilling or two from whom he can'.

Finally, however, all seemed well. 'Dad has come home and brings the news that the *New Boys' Paper* will come out on Monday. The paper being procured and the printer having advanced £15 for expenses.'⁵⁵ The printer this time was W. Burgess of 56 Southwark Street and *The New Boy's Paper* Company found an office in Dr Johnson's House, 17 Gough Square. *The Christian Globe* allocated its entire back page to advertise it.

Allingham's story, *Barrington's Fag*, was announced as 'a true tale of school life' by Herbert St Clair. It occupied third place amongst the serials; the first being *The Cruise of the Phantom; a Mystery of the Sea* by Charlton (Harry Emmett) and the second *The Sword and the Treasure* a swashbuckling tale of cavaliers and roundheads

with no attribution given (therefore almost certainly a reprint). 20,000 copies of the first number of *The New Boys' Paper* were printed and sold before John Allingham had to stop the presses because the paper was of such poor quality.⁵⁶ All were sold and news came home that more had been demanded. Sales of the next few numbers increased – to 50,000 the editor claimed – and John Allingham paid his somewhat surprised nephew thirty shillings for instalment one. 'The first money I have ever earnt.'⁵⁷

The New Boys' Paper's undercapitalised start did not bode well for its future, however. After only twenty three numbers it was taken over by the Aldine Publishing Company who ran it (using yet more reprinted material) for less than a year before changing its name to *The British Boys' Paper* and selling it on to the speculative writer/publisher Guy Rayner in whose ownership it finally expired.

Characteristics of Allingham's First Serial Fiction

Allingham's conclusion to this first story demonstrates his concerned and responsible approach to his readers.

Now, boys, I bid you all farewell and with more regret than you can possibly imagine that my task is done. Not even my best characters have proved themselves to be faultless but if you will profit from their experience, imitate their virtues and avoid their faults, my story will not have been written in vain.⁵⁸

The plot of *Barrington's Fag* is frequently reminiscent of the evangelical writer Talbot Baines Reed, though several incidents (especially those involving dressing-up and acting) appear to have been included more for their entertainment value than to chart ethical progression. There are scenes of junior mischief making and sixth form power struggles; reciprocal bonds of loyalty and protection; the ragging of masters

and resistance to bullies. Episodes include rowing practice, a cricket match, a fight in the woods with a gypsy boy, joining a theatrical troupe in disguise, saving the headmaster's daughter on her runaway pony, accusations of cheating and a showdown in front of the whole school, when the sadistic replacement headmaster and his toadies are finally ousted. Overarching the forty four chapters (twenty one instalments) is the outline of a dramatic intrigue involving a packet of letters sent by the headmaster's elder daughter to her fiancé, who has been unjustly convicted of burglary. It is ambitious, readable and quite exciting. Evidence from around three-quarters of the way through (chapter thirty seven) suggests that the Allingham was asked to extend his story beyond its planned conclusion. This may indicate that it achieved some popularity with readers – or perhaps that Ralph Rollington was finding it difficult to organize follow-up material.

The young author had done his best. 'For I mean always to write my best, whatever may be the subject on hand or the pay expected.'⁵⁹ Although the story had already been written, instalments were carefully reworked before they were sent over to *The New Boys' Paper* office. His reading of his own work is thorough.

On Saturday and Sunday last I wrote the cricket match in my story. But am not very well satisfied with it. Besides I am afraid it is a trifle too long. I think I shall be able to make a very decent character out of Barrington but I very much fear Trevor.⁶⁰ I am not a wit and I don't quite know how I am to make him say witty things. Platt I think will make a nice character and I am going to introduce an incident as soon as I have done away with the cricket, in which I think I shall be able to unfold the characters of Dacre, Easy, and Norton.⁶¹ They are too much alike at present, especially Dacre and Norton. [...] Of course I think that 'Barrington's Fag' will be a good story (what young author does not think his own work good?) but I can see it lacks knowledge. That is *the little bits of instruction with which a good story should be sprinkled* are absent. It also lacks description. *In fact its only virtues are, I am afraid, interesting incident and a little (a very little) character drawing.* But still, in spite of its faults, I think it will take with the boys. For boys like incident better than they like instruction or description. And it is quite

incorrect to imagine that boys don't care for character sketching. On the contrary they soon chuck in a story in which all the characters are puppets.⁶² (my italics)

Self-critical and earnest he might be but he was still a boy himself (by nineteenth-century standards) and living in a house full of brothers. Although his diary entries show that he and his older brother, Will, discussed business, matters of taste and 'the importance of a Name in Art etc', the younger ones are revealed as noisy, excitable, emotional and Allingham as not too superior to join in with them. There was little domestic help in the household and he and Will were used to taking charge of their younger siblings. His confidence in his understanding of his potential readers' tastes is not therefore surprising. 'Will says the pictures are rubbish but I think the boys will like them.'⁶³

Allingham's criticism of his own failure to include 'the little bits of instruction with which a good story should be sprinkled', suggests that he agreed with commentators such as Edward Salmon, who insisted on the educative and socially-responsible aspects of fiction for youngsters.⁶⁴ Although Salmon's book *Juvenile Literature As It Is* was not published until 1888, his ideas had previously been expressed in articles such as 'What Boys Read', and these had been editorially noticed in *The Christian Globe*.⁶⁵

Allingham's few attempts at moral reflection and psychological analysis in *Barrington's Fag* indicate that he aligned himself with the family values (the 'meek domestic sentiment', even) of *The Christian Globe*. At one moment in the story, when a junior boy is facing unjust punishment, the eighteen-year-old author intervenes:

We are too careless about the emotions of the young: their petty struggles seem small indeed in comparison with the fierce battles we ourselves have to fight in our

passage through the world. But really boyhood's hopes and fears, joys and sorrows are just as acutely felt as those of maturer years.⁶⁶

The Christian Globe had advertised *Barrington's Fag* as 'a true tale of school life' and Ralph Rollington emblazoned it as such. Similar claims were conventionally made by the publishers of school stories but Allingham's youngest daughter, Joyce, did assume that her father had based it on his own school experiences at Ardingly College in Sussex.⁶⁷ This could not have been the case as school records prove he was never there.⁶⁸ Allingham may not have been to boarding school at all. His elder brother, Will, had attended a small private school in Kennington and it is possible that Allingham was educated somewhere similar. It seems equally likely that he received part of his education at home, before taking up residence in lodgings in Cambridge from age fifteen.⁶⁹ For the purposes of his fiction, however, Allingham accepted the convention that important moral and social lessons were best learned at boarding school. The passage from *Barrington's Fag* concerning boyhood's hopes and fears continues, 'And the boy who overcomes the difficulties and temptations of his school life is likely to be the one who will do the same in after life.'⁷⁰

This strikes a very different note from the picaresque slapstick that is Ralph Rollington's writing for boys. *Barrington's Fag* was not 'a true tale of school life', yet, when Allingham revisited it almost twenty years later, he believed that the story had been grounded quite genuinely in his emotional experience as a boy. He was writing in 1905, to Charles Murray, editor of *True Blue* at the Aldine Press:

My wife tells me you don't care for the 'Fag' – Before deciding will you try it on one or two of the youngsters – office boys for choice? I wrote the story when I was a boy myself and I think it has the boy's point of view – They take themselves very seriously and what seems pompous and priggish to us seems all right to them

– Charlie Brown – no bad judge of what the youngsters want offered me £25 for the story a year or so after it appeared.⁷¹

Allingham had turned down Charles Perry Brown's offer for the copyright of *Barrington's Fag* because he hoped to sell the story to Messrs Blackie of Edinburgh for hardback publication. Nothing had come of this except proof that Allingham was already sufficiently astute to realise he should retain his ownership of his copyright. Whether Murray actually consulted an office boy or was convinced by Allingham's letter, he did change his mind and accepted the story – though with many of young Allingham's reflective comments excised.

They are no great loss. His real strength all along had been, as he himself had identified, lively incidents and 'a little (a very little) character drawing'.⁷² In 1911 the re-written *Barrington's Fag* was republished in the Amalgamated Press colour comic *Puck* and again, in 1921, in the A.P's *Merry and Bright*. This pattern of republication, in increasingly mainstream, though low class, periodicals suggests that Allingham had judged his readers' taste correctly even if he had not achieved his own more elevated ambitions. He had not instructed but he had entertained.

Career Change

It comes as no surprise to the reader of his fragmentary 1886 diary to discover that Allingham's heart was not in theology. There is a revealing moment in one of the short stories he later wrote for *True Blue*. His hero, The Duffer, decides to leave Cambridge in search of adventure. With great charm he persuades an old school friend, Arthur Merlin, to spend his inheritance financing this.

Merlin laughed,

‘Oh Duffer,’ he cried, ‘you are hopeless. Well we’ll have some fun, and when our five hundred is spent, we’ll go into the workhouse together.’

‘The workhouse!’ My dear Merlin, what an unpleasant suggestion! On the contrary, when we have spent our money we will earn some more. Really I begin to hope my trustees will not relent. It would be rather fun to work for one’s living.’

‘Not much fun clerking on eighteen shillings a week,’ suggested Merlin.⁷³

All of Allingham’s working life would be spent writing for people whose employment opportunities were tightly restricted and whose wages were low. He wasted no more time sprinkling little bits of instruction over his stories. The Duffer acquired a horse, took a spectacular leap over a greengrocer’s cart and left the breath squashed out of a pompous don.

In 1889, when Allingham departed rather more soberly from Cambridge, his inheritance lay waiting in the trade contacts made by his father and uncle, and in the informal training he had already received through his interest in their affairs. Pierce Egan III, the first non-family reader of *Barrington’s Fag*, had died whilst editing C.W. Bradley’s *The London Journal*. The association between Bradley and the Allingham family was then at its closest and the publisher was persuaded to appoint Allingham ‘a young man fresh from the University’ to succeed Egan.⁷⁴ It would be fifteen years before Allingham would return to writing for boys. Meanwhile Bradley’s *London Journal* would offer him the opportunity to learn about the hopes, fears and pleasures of another group of readers. This period of Allingham’s career may be seen as an example of a writer using ‘habitus’, his inherited understanding and personal qualities, to find ways of operating in a cultural field whose power structure was changing.

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- ¹ Wilkie Collins 'The Unknown Public' *Household Words* XVIII 21.8.1858 p. 439-44.
- ² *Boys' World* 1879-1886. No complete run of this paper exists. It is possible that initial issues were published by James Allingham or the Christian Globe Newspaper Association; then by Allingham & Holloway partnership. Published by C. W. Bradley from 1883. Issues survive in Ono and Opie collections.
- ³ This type of paper is actually described as 'fierce'. Elizabeth James & Helen Smith *Penny Dreadfuls and Boys' Adventures* (London: British Library, 1998) p. ix.
- ⁴ Allingham (1943) p. 170.
- ⁵ *Our Boys' Paper* 1880-1883. Fragments of this paper exist in the Bodleian Library (Opie Collection) but its publishing history can only be ascertained from Rollington himself in his *A Brief History of Boys Journals* (1913) and from Frank Jay *Peeps into the Past* (1918).
- ⁶ 'Aged imbeciles who, because they are no longer young, take exception to us delighting our boys and grumble away like the old bears they are.' *BW* 2.10.1882.
- ⁷ Possibly some readers' letters came from the editor's office anyway - e.g. letter in reply to 'Nellie A.' (Grace Allingham) in *British Boys' Paper* 7.4.1888.
- ⁸ John Allingham's career as a writer may have extended from the early 1870s to the mid 1890s – the last point at which any of his stories may have been republished.
- ⁹ James (1963) p. 44. They may have been Edward Lloyd, George Vickers the Younger, John Dicks, George Stiff, W.M. Clarke and G.W.M. Reynolds.
- ¹⁰ James (1963) p. 44. I am using generalized differentiations between the penny blood and the penny dreadful as promulgated in Peter Haining (ed.) *The Penny Dreadful or Strange Horrid & Sensational Tales!* (London: Gollancz, 1975) p. 18.
- ¹¹ Kirsten Drotner *English Children and their magazines 1751-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) p 28 and chapter 11.
- ¹² Altick p. 289.
- ¹³ Jay 9.10.1920.
- ¹⁴ Ralph Rollington *A Brief History of Boys' Journals* (Leicester: H. Simpson, 1913) p. 13.
- ¹⁵ Started by Charles Stevens Nov 1866, Brett took control Feb 1867. First 66 numbers published from NPC office then Brett moved to own premises in Fleet Street.
- ¹⁶ Readership mainly low-class despite Brett's claims. Content railed at by Kipling but enjoyed by H.G.Wells and Havelock Ellis (Drotner p. 75).
- ¹⁷ Jay 18.1.1918.
- ¹⁸ Greenwood (1869) p142.
- ¹⁹ Springhall (1990) p231.
- ²⁰ Drotner p76.
- ²¹ Rollington p. 77, *Boys' Half Holiday* 1887.
- ²² *The Boys' Half Holiday* (1887).
- ²³ Allingham used work from several members of this group in *The London Journal*.
- ²⁴ Duffy p33.
- ²⁵ Duffy p21.
- ²⁶ 'Doing the Biz' *Print in Transition 1850-1910* (London: Palgrave, 2001) p. 71.
- ²⁷ Cf. HJA correspondence where writers give one another directions eg Letter 51 (16.10.1905).
- ²⁸ The publisher of this first number was James Allingham for the CG Newspaper Association but this connection was severed. View of Rollington's contemporaries was clearly that the *BW* was his paper.
- ²⁹ *Boy's World* 12.4.1879.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Jay 8.2.1919.
- ³² Turner p. 74.
- ³³ James & Smith p.ix.
- ³⁴ Jay p. 84 *BOP*, *Union Jack* and *Chums* do not belong to 'old bohemian class'.
- ³⁵ James & Smith p xiii. Haining's book on penny dreadfuls was developed from a collection.
- ³⁶ Unlike its inclusion in the Opie collection which was accumulated on historical rather than personal principles.
- ³⁷ Addresses in 'Amateur Scraps' (March 1885 – May 1888). These are a series of exercise books containing the records of the writing circle in which Allingham participated at Cambridge.

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- ³⁸ Diary 28.9.1886.
- ³⁹ Diary 22.8.1886.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Cf 'What an Editor is like' *BW* August 1882.
- ⁴² Rollington p. 30.
- ⁴³ J.C. Francis acted as advertising agents for both.
- ⁴⁴ Diary 22.8.1886.
- ⁴⁵ *British Boys' Paper* Feb 1889.
- ⁴⁶ Rollington p. 39.
- ⁴⁷ Rollington p. 76-77 The paper merchant later sold all the matrices of *The Boys' World* to speculative publisher, Charles Shurey, who used them in 1893 to establish yet another boys' magazine *Comrades* which was successful only until *The Boys' World* reprints ran out, Jay 8.3.1919.
- ⁴⁸ Diary 10.9.1886.
- ⁴⁹ Pierce Egan (1845-1890) was son of Pierce Egan the Younger (1814-1880).
- ⁵⁰ His work can often be identified by initials RP. Career from 1860s to early c20th. Ended career working for Aldine. James and Smith p. xvii regret the lack of information about this prolific artist.
- ⁵¹ Diary 22.8.1886.
- ⁵² Diary 10.9.1886.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ I cannot identify Hunt with any confidence. Hunt Fourdrinier was a leading firm of paper manufacturers; the Rev T Bonavia Hunt was managing editor at Cassell's Publishers but neither appear anywhere else in the Allingham papers. £4 per week would be a reasonably good editorial salary.
- ⁵⁵ Diary 23.9.1886.
- ⁵⁶ Diary 28.9.1886
- ⁵⁷ Diary 25.10.1886.
- ⁵⁸ *NBP* 7.3.1887.
- ⁵⁹ Diary 22.8.1886.
- ⁶⁰ Barrington is the sixth form hero – his name is the same as a highwayman figure in earlier penny dreadfuls written by M.J.Errym. This Barrington is supreme in his small community, only slightly flawed by his hot temper and pride. Trevor is the editor of the school magazine. His character and the contents of his fictional magazine are sharpened up considerably in the 1905 re-issue when Herbert had had the experience of being an editor himself.
- ⁶¹ Platt was another sixth former, Dacre and Norton the two main protagonists, irresponsible juniors with their school lives ahead of them. Jack Easy borrows the name from Captain Marryat's fictional hero – and also from a character in *The Christian Globe's* 'Chats with Uncle Charlie' series.
- ⁶² Diary 14.9.1886.
- ⁶³ Diary 28.8.1886
- ⁶⁴ Edward Salmon *Juvenile Literature As It Is* (London: Henry Drane, 1888).
- ⁶⁵ *CG* 22.7.1886
- ⁶⁶ *NBP* 15.11.1886 p. 124.
- ⁶⁷ Error repeated in my biography of Margery Allingham and in Lofts and Adley's entry for HJA.
- ⁶⁸ His younger brothers later attended Ardingly and Allingham identifiably uses it as the setting for *Max the Magnificent* (1907).
- ⁶⁹ In Allingham's later school stories, home tuition is presented as a far more effective way than school attendance to gain real academic knowledge and skills.
- ⁷⁰ *NBP* 15.11.1886 p. 124. Talbot Baines Reed had also not attended the boarding schools about which he wrote. Cf. 'The central school story' in Quigly *The Heirs of Tom Brown: the English School Story* (London: Chatto 1982) pp. 77- 85.
- ⁷¹ Letter 43 (8.04.1905).
- ⁷² Diary 14.9.1886.
- ⁷³ 'The Duffer, Detective' *True Blue* 9.12.1905.
- ⁷⁴ Jay 23.11.1918.

Chapter Three

Mab, Jack, Aspasia and Sir Harry Beldair

Editing *The London Journal*, 1889 – 1909

Allingham's twenty-year editorship of *The London Journal* was a failure, from the magazine's point of view, at least. Despite his best efforts he could not finally reverse its decline in circulation nor repackage it convincingly for the twentieth century. Three years after he left, its sixty-five year existence came to an end and a subsequent attempt to revive it proved abortive. This was a failure attributable to the changing dynamics of the mass-market field, as well as to the specific characteristics of the Journal's proprietors, which Allingham was probably powerless to avert. His management choices appear intelligent – as far as can be ascertained. Few records have survived from this period.

Evidence from the *Journal* itself suggests that Allingham tried to present the paper as a welcoming, informative, entertaining entity and to reconfigure it diplomatically so that it might appeal to new readers without alienating the old. As well as providing his readers with fiction on the story pages, he told them stories about the paper and about themselves, and conjured up personalities to mediate between his own activity as the paper's producer and the readers as its consumers. Editorially he was creative and skilful in his attempts to make the most of limited resources. It was his misfortune that the arena of the cheap family magazine in which he was attempting to operate was, in the 1890s and 1900s, as intensely contested as, say, boys' penny

papers in the 1870s and early 1880s, or mass-market daily newspapers in the late 1920s and 1930s.

The London Journal and its Competitors

In 1881 George Newnes's *Titbits* had introduced a new popular-publishing idiom and had provided the foundation of an extremely successful company. The subsequent establishment of a competitor, *Answers*, by the Harmsworth brothers in 1888, then *Pearson's Weekly* by Newnes's former employee, C. Arthur Pearson, in 1890 initiated a period of rivalry that inevitably affected other periodicals in the same area. The new papers prospered, the new owners reinvested expansively and the new businesses began to display the patterns of capital accumulation and centralisation that Marx had described two decades earlier. Allingham's proprietors at *The London Journal* were either unwilling or unable to compete against their aggressive marketing campaigns. Arnold Bennett's *These Twain* (1916) depicts a family overwhelmed with enthusiasm for the missing word competitions pioneered by *Pearson's Weekly* during 1892.¹ *Answers's* £1 a week for life competition attracted 718,000 entries in 1889 but, while *Tit-Bits* promised a villa or a £100-a-year job as a competition prize, *The London Journal* offered copies of its own previously serialised novels.

Andrew King has produced detailed studies of the earlier history of *The London Journal*, from its foundation in 1845 until its purchase by C.W. Bradley in 1883, the end of its first series.² King understands periodicals as,

commodities that occupy specific places in a changing market: 'Place' here can be understood as where the periodical is located in cultural and geographic space

by those who describe it, as well as where it positions itself through its contents in terms of gender and other identity categories.³

Though my approach focuses on Allingham's tactics as *The London Journal's* editor rather than on the periodical as a whole, this theoretical approach to the paper's position within its field provides some strong underpinning concepts. King comments, for instance, on 'the increasing differentiation' of the literary marketplace during the nineteenth century; a process that had already rendered the *Journal* potentially vulnerable when Allingham took over the editorship and which accelerated dramatically over his twenty year tenure.⁴

Fiction had traditionally provided *The London Journal* with a strong position vis-à-vis its rivals, one which Allingham obviously understood but was unable to maintain. Other factors, such as marketing and the re-creation of an audience, were even more crucial, and in my scrutiny of *The London Journal* over the period of Allingham's editorship, I have focussed on some areas of the paper not explicitly labelled story as well as reading Allingham's own fictional contributions.⁵ The features I have found most useful in trying to elucidate his aims and methods as editor, have been 'Notices to Correspondents' (re-labelled 'Replies to Readers'), the general balance of contents (including advertisements) and the contributions of the columnists 'Mab', 'Jack' and 'Lady Jane'. I take the period of Allingham's active involvement to have been from some time after the insertion of the short story 'Eileen's Choice', in March 1889, until November 1909.⁶

The decade before Allingham's appointment had not been easy. Pierce Egan II, the long-serving editor who died in 1880, had also been a highly popular common writer. King quotes an anonymous article from *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1866:

There is a mighty potentate in England and his name is Mr Pierce Egan [...] many amongst us fancy that they have a good general idea of what is English literature. They think of Tennyson and Dickens as the most popular of our living authors. It is a fine delusion from which they should be aroused. The works of Pierce Egan are sold by the half million. What living author can compare with him?⁷

Egan was a close friend of the then proprietor, W.S. Johnson, a rich and dapper man who kept a smart carriage and was willing to spend money on his businesses.⁸ Johnson's willingness to re-invest his profits had enabled Egan to make several useful arrangements with American authors such as E.D.E.N. Southworth and Harriet Lewis and with the Canadian, May Agnes Fleming. He purchased the copyright of all the tales that the *Journal's* most successful writer, J.F. Smith, had produced after he left it for Cassell's in 1855. With Egan and Johnson in charge, *The London Journal* had been recognized as 'one of the most prosperous of the penny weeklies' and Edmund Downey, who viewed the accounts when Johnson was preparing to sell the paper, reported that its circulation was around 500,000 copies per week and that the proprietor had been able to draw £1,000 a month from his property.⁹

After Egan's death, Johnson appointed his son, Pierce Egan III, as editor. Egan's failure in this position was, rightly or wrongly, attributed by many to his personal lack of ability as a serial writer at a period when editors of popular papers were often also significant contributors to their story pages – and when the story pages were widely accepted as key to success.¹⁰ Although, with hindsight, a variety of other factors could have been involved (not least the *Titbits* effect), Allingham would probably have shared this view. His assertion in his 1886 diary that 'a boys' paper must have good serials or it won't do' appears to have remained his belief and was applied to all periodicals in the cheap entertainment sector where he worked.¹¹ He would almost

certainly have endorsed Jay's suggestion (below) that the final failure of *The London Journal* was attributable to its proprietors' unwillingness to invest in new fiction.¹²

By 1883 Johnson had lost interest in *The London Journal* and sold it, together with its associated story copyrights and engraved illustration blocks, to Bradley & Co., still with Egan as editor. The price, if Downey is correct, was probably high and the circulation falling. I have found no company records for the *Journal*, or for Bradley's printing business, but it is possible that some additional investors may have been involved in the paper's purchase. Other Bradley family members can occasionally be glimpsed, one of whom used the paper for occasional property advertising and who also took a substantial shareholding in *The Christian Globe*. The advertising agents Mather & Crowther were initially involved in publishing the new series of *The London Journal* but in 1886, they were replaced by J.C. Francis Ltd. Another advertiser and probable investor was E.J. Blogg, a stationer.¹³ Despite any potential strengths of such a syndicate it seems clear that they had misjudged the magazine's potential. Frank Jay describes what happened in the early years of this new ownership.

Attempts were made to restore its popularity but whether the editing was at fault or for some other reasons they were unsuccessful. Then, early in 1887, one of the publishers (Mr. E.J. Blogg) suggested to Mr. Bradley an experiment – namely to republish *Minnigrey* in serial form. The proprietors were not in favour of this but later in the year, as sales continued to decline, it was a case of 'death or glory'. So the decision was taken to try J.F. Smith again. The feature was boomed and in six weeks the sales had jumped by over fifty thousand per week, proving that the famous author was still a popular novelist. [...] Several of J.F. Smith's romances were then republished in serial form from 1887 onwards and some of Pierce Egan's at the same time.¹⁴

It was a defining moment. King cites a letter written to *The Star* in March 1890, which claimed that *The London Journal's* circulation had doubled since the republication of Smith's stories. (Smith meanwhile had died a pauper in New York.)

Advertising and *The London Journal*

The writer of this helpful letter was James Allingham's advertising partner, J.C. Francis. The attempt, in the 1880s, to establish a nexus of Bradley / Allingham interests around Ralph Rollington's boys' papers and *The Christian Globe* had not succeeded. In the 1890s mutual commercial benefits were sought by an informal linking of *The Christian Globe* with *The London Journal* and F.A. Wickhart's *Spare Moments*. The papers were not united in any formal ownership structure but all three used Bradley's as their printers and J.C. Francis Ltd as advertising agents. The appointment of the twenty-two-year-old Allingham as editor of the *Journal* might not have been unconnected to this pooling of resources. The use of *The London Journal* as a medium for advertising increased markedly during his period as editor and his ability to supply the copy for some of these advertisements was probably a means of supplementing his salary. (Where such payments can be seen in his account books they appear to be at a much higher rate than story-writing or editing.) Allingham's characteristic style as a copywriter was to tell people a story either about themselves or about the product advertised. This was also his characteristic approach as editor.

It might have helped *The London Journal* if its proprietors had advertised it more energetically to potential readers but there is no evidence of external marketing campaigns beyond notices in *The Christian Globe* and *Spare Moments*. Although

Allingham began running internal competitions almost as soon as he was appointed, these were modest affairs with low value prizes.¹⁵ They entertained existing readers (there is evidence of whole families taking part) but seem unlikely to have attracted many new subscribers. In such a keenly competitive period it was also essential that Allingham should continually market the paper to itself. As the editor he needed to develop and maintain an impression of *The London Journal* as a commodity with a distinctive and congenial personality. He might thus hope to retain the loyalty of his customers by persuading them that they were purchasing something more valuable than paper with words on. In Marx's terms, Allingham needed

to have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the products of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with each other and with the human race.¹⁶

By developing the personality of his paper Allingham could hope to turn a commodity into a fetish and thus intensify his readers' loyalty.

Reassuring the Readers: Notices to Correspondents and Aspasia

As editor, Allingham can be seen using a variety of tactics to develop readers' emotional and irrational relationship with his product. These were not obtrusive. He did not, for instance, take readers into his confidence with the blatant entrepreneurial enthusiasm of his father's early years at *The Christian Globe*. This may have been simply because he was not in a similar position of control but it may also have been part of an overall editorial intention to convey a feeling of comfortable continuity rather than novelty and change. Direct address was more often a feature of his style when he had redesigned and re-launched the paper as *The New London Journal* in

1906. Before that date Allingham more usually made his editorial comments indirectly.

One of the most obvious means at his disposal was his choice of language. In January 1897, for instance, his columnist Mab reports:

The year that is dying has proved a very successful one for the old *London Journal*. It has gained many new friends and kept all the old ones. During the twelve months that have passed some very delightful stories have appeared – stories which have brought pleasure to thousands of homes.¹⁷

This language of cosiness, making ‘friends’ and bringing ‘pleasure’ to ‘homes’, is typical of the *Journal*’s tone under Allingham’s editorship. The use of the word ‘old’ is characteristic too. Readers are invited to take a pride in their paper’s longevity, to find reassurance from this and feel affection for it as for a companion of long-standing. (And, without putting too much onto the single adjective as used in this extract, it is also worth remarking that Allingham had to make a virtue out of necessity and persuade his readers of the special qualities of stories that were already old, because C.W. Bradley refused him the money to commission new ones.) This comforting language may represent a considered pitch for the pennies, not of a particular category of reader (definable by age, gender or social class), but of a reader wanting a particular type of commodity. What is being offered is a paper that will provide its readers with personal encouragement and modest hope, as well as practical advice and imaginative escape. I shall argue below that Allingham’s editorial focus deliberately attempted to include men as well as women and address both younger and older readers. This diction is family-friendly.

Reassurance and inclusiveness are also evident in Allingham's advertising copy:¹⁸

THE SECRET
OF A
GOOD
COMPLEXION

BEAUTY FOR ALL

Many think that beauty is not possible for all, that it is but a rare gift of Nature. How great the error of this idea is can be easily proved. Nature is always lavish with her gifts. Take for example your own features, your friend's or even those of strangers, and in the vast majority of these they are perfectly regular, and as far as facial formation and pose – faultless. What then is it that prevents us calling them perfect? What is it keeps you from possessing the beauty you desire? It is the skin and complexion. It is the unsightly SPOTS, PIMPLES, SALLOWNESS, PALLOR, BLACKHEADS, BREAKINGS OUT, SORES and all such disfigurements that mar a face that would otherwise be perfect, without blemish.

Fortunately, continues the advertisement, David Macqueen's 'Vegetine' pills are available, complete with testimonials from other satisfied users and with the offer of a refund if the purchaser is not feeling or looking better after ten days' use.

Account book evidence proves that this copy was written by Allingham. His confident assurance that All are Beautiful beneath the skin, is so persuasive that it might itself contribute to Vegetine's potential efficacy. An additional part of the advertisement's appeal is derived from endorsement by other, named, ordinary people. The text is long and wordy: it tells the story of Vegetine's discovery, personalises its proprietor as a benefactor and attempts to address customers' possible anxieties. Reassurance, collective and individual, is its over-riding message and the

basic premise from which it starts is positive and uncompetitive: nature is lavish, everyone can be lovely – with a little, inexpensive help.

Constant, explicit reassurances both individual and, by implication, general, can also be found in the ‘Notices to Correspondents’ section. This feature was traditionally a direct editorial responsibility though specialists could be consulted (over legal questions for example). In earlier incarnations of *The London Journal*, Notices to Correspondents had been intended primarily as a medium for factual advice and instruction (‘science’). Under Allingham’s editorship it was swamped by readers sending photos, letters, locks of their hair, samples of their own or other’s handwriting and wanting, apparently, authoritative descriptions or judgements in return. Here are some examples selected from a single issue:

LOVE LADY SHIELD (Newcastle on Tyne) Affectionate, sympathetic, domesticated, weak, yielding and lacking in confidence. You are timid, good-natured, cautious and economical. When you write again write more fully and we will endeavour to answer you at greater length.

MISS MUGGINS The writer of the enclosed fragment is intelligent, affectionate, warm-hearted, impatient and quick-tempered. That is all we can say about him from so brief a specimen.

A CRAHAM MAIDEN The face is a very pleasant one although it would not be called exactly good looking.

ANXIOUS ALBERT You are straightforward, conscientious, chivalrous, high-principled and with a strong sense of duty.

BLUE-EYED NELL You are decidedly a blonde and delicate greens are the colours which will best suit you.¹⁹

Of the fifty eight replies printed on this sample day twenty eight contain personal commentary of this nature. The most common adjectives are ‘affectionate’, ‘sympathetic’ and ‘warm-hearted’.

Readers of the Notices to Correspondents were offered an impression of a wise and understanding editorial presence whose personal benevolence and realism about

life was nevertheless underpinned by a clear set of principles. ‘RUGBY: Your conduct will not bear investigation. How can you expect us to give you advice?’²⁰ Allingham, for his part, must all the while have been building up a picture of his readers as he ascertained the nature of the reassurances required. Although one might assume that *The London Journal* was most regularly read by older people whose loyalty had been established in the paper’s more prosperous days, Notices to Correspondents reveals that some letter-writers were very young (aged fourteen and fifteen) and that many more were in their later teens and twenties. These correspondents may have been a self-selecting group, not representative of the total readership, as their youthfulness might have given particular urgency to their need for assistance in understanding their own identities and for guidance in their romantic relationships. Because they were young they may have been more readily interested in buying and sending cheap portrait photographs of themselves or, as the first board school-educated generation, they may simply have been more confident in their ability to write letters. The mother from Manchester who hadn’t missed a single issue of the *Journal* for fifty-two years didn’t write to the editor herself, her son or daughter did it for her.²¹

Usually the editor and his columnists welcomed, indeed solicited, letters. Letters developed the editorial team’s knowledge of their readers and the readers’ feeling of participation in their paper. They filled space at no cost and personalised readers to one another thus building up a sense of community.²² Nonetheless Allingham may have come to feel that this stream of enquiries from people wanting to be told how blue-eyed and warm-hearted they were, was taking a disproportionate amount of the

magazine's public space, and perhaps of his own time. In 1896 he introduced Aspasia, dedicated graphologist.

Aspasia, whose name is derived for the Greek 'to welcome', was historically a fifth-century Athenian *hetaera*, the mistress of Pericles.²³ She was introduced to *The London Journal* readers as 'a mysterious Grecian lady, who now resides in London [...] She tells a person's character by looking in the eyes, touching the hand, or listening to the voice. In reading character from handwriting her skill is also astonishing.'²⁴ It must have helped Aspasia initially that those readers anxious to have their characters deduced from their handwriting were asked to write her 'a fairly long letter (say two full pages of notepaper) and sign their names in full.'²⁵ They were then answered directly rather than through the Notices page. Aspasia became a permanent expert and may even have brought extra revenue to the paper as she required payment in a steadily increasing quantity of stamps.

Aspasia was contactable through Bradley's office and also offered her services to readers of the *London Journal's* companion paper, *Spare Moments*. As her character analyses were presumably little more than an extension of the evaluations Allingham had already been supplying to readers, he could have written her letters himself. He knew the words that the readers liked to hear. 'The Science of Reading Character from Handwriting' (as it was described in Aspasia's advertisements) was just another type of story-telling with the reader pre-disposed to accept its fictions as fact.²⁶ In life Allingham and his children were confident in their ability to tell fortunes for fun or for gain and, many years later his son, Philip, would set up a business supplying astrological prediction cards to 'grafters'.²⁷ Aspasia's introduction to the paper

certainly lightened Allingham's direct editorial postbag. I assume, but do not know, that he then sub-contracted the work.²⁸

Creating a Personality: Mab

The exotic personality of Aspasia is lightly suggested by devices such as the description of a visit to her apartment.²⁹ Her art is made mysterious, her judgements authoritative and thus commercially attractive. Aspasia belongs in the 'mist-enveloped regions' but adds only a little to the impression of the paper as a peopled entity.

The introduction of named contributors appears to have been Allingham's editorial choice. In 1893 he stamped his personality more confidently on the paper with the publication of his first sensational serial, *A Devil of a Woman*, and a limited redesign of the contents. One of his main innovations was the introduction of a new feature, 'Mab's Gossip'. Mab is female, married, pleasure-loving and reluctant to give her age. She would almost certainly be described in Notices to Correspondents as 'affectionate', 'sympathetic' and 'warm-hearted'. Her Gossip columns cover two distinct periods, 1893-1899 and 1906-7. In the first period she is often used to discharge regular editorial functions such as setting competitions and awarding prizes, answering letters, puffing serials and penning advertorials for Christmas cards or bargain bundles of dress-making material.³⁰ In the second, she expends a high proportion of her space talking about her baby, Margery. In both periods she represents herself as a working woman, a journalist, who is also contentedly domestic.

Biographical evidence suggests that Allingham was Mab. Many of the names in her columns, the activities she enjoys and the places she visits are also to be found in Allingham's family life or in his fictions. A scrap of paper survives from late in his *London Journal* period, on which he has jotted down the different types of writing he has undertaken: 'gossip paragraphs etc' are included in the list. Whether or not Allingham wrote this feature himself, its function within the paper is worth studying. Market research, for instance, was becoming a key editorial activity. The success of the Harmsworth brothers can be attributed not only to their obsession with circulation figures but also to their development of management structures that ensured that this information was shared with editors. The editors were then responsible for interpreting the data and implementing a response.³¹

Mab's research into *The London Journal's* market was small scale and qualitative. She encouraged readers to think of her as their friend and professed a great interest in information about them. What features in the paper did they enjoy most; where would their dream holiday take them; what were the facts of their working lives? Sometimes their descriptions appeared to surprise or move her. The following lengthy extract comprises approximately two-thirds of her column on April 1st 1893:

As I anticipated, quite a number of my women readers earn their own living. The competition I announced in No. 482 has brought forth some very interesting letters indeed. Pupil-teachers, dressmakers, lace-cleaners, writers, book-binders, telegraph-clerks, manageresses and artists are among the women wage-earners who read my gossip.

'Mary S.' is a dressmaker in a North-country village, and, as her experience is a little out of the common, I give her letter nearly in full. 'I am a dressmaker,' writes my correspondent, 'and I cannot tell you how much I like the work. I often earn from £1 10s to £2 per week. I have two apprentices. I only get five shillings for making a lady's dress and 2s to 3s 6d for a girl's. Nevertheless as I have said, I am making a good living at the work. My husband, by his perilous work in the

coal-mine, earns less. The prices paid in Newcastle-on-Tyne for making a dress range from 10s 6d to £1 and more. And, although we in the country only get the small prices I mentioned we are supposed to keep up to the styles that prevail in the towns. That I still make my occupation pay proves that dressmaking is not a bad trade after all.'

No doubt for a girl who has a taste that way and who possesses ideas as well, dressmaking is a very agreeable and profitable occupation. The prices named by 'Mary S.,' however, certainly do astonish me. I had no idea that even in country districts they ranged so low. I am afraid that my correspondent (and her apprentices) must work very hard.

'F.Sharman' is a pupil-teacher, and speaks highly of the life. I quite envy her the morning walk across the fields which she describes so graphically. But of course one cannot be a pupil teacher all one's life. It is the preparation for another work, and, as such I should say it was very agreeable. I hope 'F.S.' will write to me again.

Another very interesting letter is from 'R.B.' who is a native of Guernsey but now resident in London. Two years ago she had the misfortune to lose her husband, and since that time she has endeavoured to keep her home together by cleaning lace. It appears that in Guernsey all the best laundry work is much superior to what it is in this country. 'In Guernsey' writes this lady, 'our mode of getting up linen is so different from yours. We never use a brush and we never boil, with the result that our linen is like snow.' My correspondent offers to send me some specimens of her work and asks me to recommend it. I will certainly do what I can, and hope that 'R.B. will soon have a wide and profitable connection.

Among those who are not satisfied with their present occupations is 'Jenny,' who is a frame-tenter in a cotton mill. 'Jenny' dislikes the close confinement which her work necessitates. Curiously enough she wants to be a dressmaker. I hope she will soon get into some congenial occupation, for, after all, one never does good work if one detests it while one is doing it. 'Jenny' must write and tell me how she gets on.³²

Mab sent her prize, a copy of J.F. Smith's *The Will and the Way*, to Mary S., the coal-miner's wife from Lintzgreen, County Durham. She, and the other industrious women who found the time to write to Mab, help us as well as Allingham to visualise some of the magazine's readers and consider its possible appeal to them. *The London Journal's* monthly Fashion Supplements, for example, must have been a boon to a

village dressmaker, anxiously keeping up with the Newcastle smart set. They contained nothing for her customers' daily needs – the coloured fashion plates are self-consciously Parisian, full of silk and ruffles, unlikely ever to be worn in a North Country mining village – but what a stimulus to dreams! In 1897 Allingham introduced another new columnist, Lady Jane, into the main paper to comment on the latest fashion trends and suggest ways of producing cheap imitations.

Allingham's lifelong friendship with William McFee dated from the time when he was editing *The London Journal*. McFee remembered Allingham as editor, dressed in a top-hat and frock-coat and working 'in a room like a dust-bin while the building shook to the presses downstairs'.³³ His forgotten masterpiece, *Casuals of the Sea*, which was partly written in the Allinghams' Essex home during 1909, includes many details that he observed from their business world in London. In the first section of the book McFee's heroine, Minnie, has been out collecting material for Mrs Olga Wilfley, a freelance writer of fashion notes for a magazine called *Sunday Words*.³⁴ She discusses the likely response of readers who will benefit from her activity. 'They're servants mostly, poor people anyhow, so I suppose they fancy themselves a bit when they read about nice things rich people wear.' 'Yes, and they make up their own things and get ideas from the pictures, I expect.'³⁵

It remains possible that Mab was the creation of a lady journalist like McFee's Mrs Wilfley. Allingham and his wife, Em, whom he married in 1902, were friendly with several freelance women journalists.³⁶ *The London Journal* also had regular female fiction contributors who could have written to the editor's specifications. Mab could even have been the product of several pens. Whether or not Allingham wrote some,

none or all of the columns himself, Mab provides an essential clue to the intended personality of the *London Journal* in his most proactive periods as editor. There were times during his twenty-year tenure that his attention seemed to be elsewhere and *The London Journal* was produced mechanistically to formula. In those periods Mab is also absent. In 1907, for instance, when Allingham was asked to concentrate on rescuing *The New Boys' Paper*, both Mab and the editorial address columns in *The New London Journal* cease together.

Mab links readers to the fictional figure of the editor. She describes her meeting with him in his 'editorial sanctum'. The editor is elderly, apparently and smokes a pipe.³⁷ Allingham was twenty-six at that time and smoked cigarettes. Factually Mab's description is untrue in every detail but it suits the authoritative editorial persona created in the Notices to Correspondents section better than the truth would have done. Elsewhere Mab reassures her readers that it is indeed the editor who answers their letters. 'His mighty wisdom and his innumerable virtues, not to mention his advanced age, fit him for the task, as I often remind him.'³⁸ By positioning herself as the readers' friend, Mab attempts to excite their interest and support their belief in *The London Journal's* personnel, whether they are actual journalists or a stage army.

A high point of her fictionalising is achieved when she describes meeting the editor of *The London Journal* at 'a literary gathering':

The editor had with him the author of *The Adventures of Sir Harry Beldair* and *A Devil of a Woman*. He has recently returned from Morocco and is a very queer person indeed [...] He is an extraordinary man and never seems happy unless he is mixed up in queer adventures. Ever since his return to England he has managed to get into some mysterious intrigue and our Editor follows him about like a shadow lest his valued contributor should be snapped up by a Russian Nihilist or stabbed in the back by the emissary of an Italian secret society.³⁹

As Allingham was the author of both *The Adventures of Sir Harry Beldair* and *A Devil of a Woman*, it was not surprising that the editor was following him about ‘like a shadow.’ For anyone in the know it would have been a comic picture: the actual Allingham in the 1890s was still the enthusiastic, slightly earnest, ex-theology student living at home in Hammersmith with his brothers and his parents.

Mab is fetishising the commodity. She is whetting the readers’ appetite for a forthcoming story by pretending that it might all be real, exciting them by the thought that, just around the corner from their own daily lives, is an alternative world of intrigue and Nihilists. It is not dissimilar from the way that Ralph Rollington and Bracebridge Hemyng (posing as his own fictional character, Jack Harkaway) affected to have lived the Munchausanesque tales they told.⁴⁰ Throughout Allingham’s writing career, other editors of cheap papers blurred the boundaries between the worlds of fantasy and fact and, in his case, consistently pixillated-out the identity of the author to allow the readers to experience a more direct entry into their weekly story.

Mab’s joke is private, self-referential. There are others hidden throughout Allingham’s work; jokes that readers who did not know him would never notice. McFee later commented what appeared to him to be the complete separation of Allingham’s life from his work. He is describing a visit to the Allinghams’ home in Essex c 1909 (when he wrote a large section of *Casuals*):

My host and another man were writers of pulp fiction. They wrote adventure serials for weekly papers though they never had any adventures and they were very successful. They were professional writers. What they wrote had nothing to do with their personal experiences. I am not sure, but I fancy they would have considered using their own lives in fiction as bad form.⁴¹

Although Allingham frequently used minor details from the surface of his life in his fiction, McFee is essentially right. Allingham's art was neither realistic nor autobiographical. It would, however, be a mistake to think that Allingham was not as well aware of the ironies of his situation as was his friend. ('They wrote adventure serials [...] but they never had any adventures.') As well as titillating his readers in Mabs' vignette he is surely amusing himself by his cloak-and-dagger fictionalisation of the author as a man of mystery. There was little glamour attached to his workaday life as editor. As he travelled in and out from the suburbs in his frock-coat and top-hat to the 'terrible old building' in Fetter Lane where he worked, he might well have been as full of escapist dreams as the readers for whom he was beginning to write.⁴² His second *London Journal* serial, *The Mouth of Hell or the Adventures of Sir Harry Beldair* (1894-5) soon leaves England and detection behind for exotic, erotic fantasy. Many (far too many) episodes are spent on a tropical island with a beautiful native girl named Naroji, who 'had taken to the civilized habit of kissing with astonishing readiness'.⁴³

Stories from Mab's life give a context to her columns and provide an attractive space for her friends, the *Journal's* readers. In her first series, published during the 1890s, she describes her visits to the theatre, outings on the river, attempts to bake bread and holidays on the Norfolk Broads (a location featured in several of Allingham's stories of this period).⁴⁴ It is a domestic scene but with very little detail of everyday life or sense of the pressure of running a household; nothing that a unmarried man of the period could not have written if he had thought himself into a role and had a standard household manual to hand. Mab is qualitatively unlike Lady

Jane who provided specific domestic guidance and embodied *The London Journal's* expert appeal to women readers through her 'Household Hints', 'Toilet Table' and regular 'Woman's World' chat.⁴⁵ Mab is more interested in her life, her work, pleasures and relationships. Sometimes she offers household hints but it is part of her persona that she is not a perfect housewife; her home-baked bread is hard and when, a decade later, she has a servant girl, she is singularly inept at managing her.⁴⁶ Mab's way of life was not identical with her readers' but was neither intimidating nor patronising.

Gender Balance: Jack

From April 1893 there are regular references to Mabs' husband, Jack. Jack is introduced as an amiable domestic prop. He is said to be interested in politics and to have a job in the city. By November, however, Jack has begun occasionally to write Mab's gossip for her and they vie gently for the readers' attention. In his first contribution Jack affects some bashfulness as well as excitement: 'Besides, I suppose that most of those who read Mab's gossip are ladies. Just fancy that! Here I am told to gossip with some hundreds and thousands of womenfolk all at once.'⁴⁷

King's account of *The London Journal's* first series maps its move away from its foundation as a family paper and leaves it situated as a 'lower-middle-class women's magazine'.⁴⁸ However his concept of a periodical's 'place' is not necessarily intended to mirror its actual readership. The continuing presence of male readers of *The London Journal* was obvious from the first months of Allingham's tenure when names of competition winners were published or when the Notices to Correspondents

pages are analysed. The invention of Jack may have been a deliberate gesture towards the recognition of those readers.

My analysis of *The London Journal* in the first decade of Allingham's editorship (from 1890) suggests that he attempted to strengthen the male voice within the paper: not to the exclusion of the female, but rather to enhance readers' recognition of the domestic man. This may have been idealistically as well as commercially motivated. The evangelical model of the family (as promulgated by *The Christian Globe*, for instance) promoted coupledness at the heart of the household and included aspirations towards friendship and equality between husband and wife, as well as the simple aim of making home attractive to keep men away from the temptations of the pub.⁴⁹ Many features in *The London Journal* under Allingham's editorship seem designed to interpret men and women to one another within the areas of courtship, marriage and the early years of domestic life. In the years before the First World War much of Allingham's fiction balances the action between hero and heroine in a way that is different from the clearly male- or female-focused writing that he also produced. Children appear more frequently once he had become a father himself. Mab's second series (1906-1907), for instance, frequently celebrates the delightful doings of baby Margery. Margery's name was her real one and her reported activities had their basis in actual family happenings. Selectively reported by Mab she becomes another character in a cosy family tale.

The converse of the domestic man is the woman who works outside the home. Although *The London Journal* under Allingham's editorship has domesticity at its heart, it is discreetly sympathetic to the aspirations of the New Woman in the 1890s

and the campaign for the vote in 1906.⁵⁰ It is always realistic about the numbers of its female readers who were, of necessity, self-supporting and on occasion goes further and sees this as a positive benefit.⁵¹ A question such as 'Do Business Girls Make Good Wives' produces a resounding yes and the use of the term 'Bachelor Girl' rather than the 'Old Maid' promotes a more attractive model of the older single woman.⁵² The *Journal* does not question the assumption that a happy marriage, home and children are the aim for almost all women ('ninety-nine out of a hundred'). Pages and pages of strategic advice are devoted to achieving this, and for men as well. But there is a realistic acceptance that not every one will marry and, additionally, that some married women, like Mary S., will need paid work to supplement the family income.

The hands-on quality of *The London Journal's* household hints presumes that, for its readers, the home itself is a place of work. Next door to the *Journal*, at 10-11 Fetter Lane, *Woman* magazine was being produced to appeal to a better-off and better-educated female readership, whose less onerous domestic responsibilities allowed them time for leisure activities, including political or social activism. *Woman* was edited by Allingham's contemporary, Arnold Bennett (born 1867), who later described himself as a more 'advanced woman' than all his staff.⁵³ Its motto was 'Forward, but not too fast' and it was more clearly focussed on a single gender. *Woman* was not domestic. Bennett expected his readers to be interested in art and literature, not in practical instructions how to disinfect a room or to prolong the life of worn mattresses with sheets of brown paper.⁵⁴

Lady Jane's 'Woman's World' page of *The New London Journal*, from which those two examples were selected, also included a poem entitled 'Beautiful Hands' which complimented its hard-working readers. It began:

Beautiful hands are not always white,
Shapely and fair to see;
But are often cast in a humble mould,
And are brown as brown can be.

And ended:

Beautiful hands are always found
Where the heaviest duties lie.

The London Journal's Fiction: Allingham's Sir Harry Beldair

Turn-of-the-century periodicals can also be placed socially by the quantity and type of the fiction they include. Bennett's *Woman* had very little: Allingham's *London Journal* gave it prime position. Every issue contained instalments of at least three serial stories, sometimes as many as five. There were short stories, long complete stories, monthly novels and novelettes. Allingham's primary editorial duty was to supply these. All his market information, whether requested directly or gleaned via Mab, told him that fiction was what his readers wanted. All the other features that he offered to intrigue or educate them were of secondary interest. Paradoxically it was the magazine's own inherited capital – the wealth of popular serial stories that Bradley's publishing syndicate had purchased from W.S. Johnson – that was Allingham's main impediment in carrying out this crucial editorial function. Frank Jay later explained:

During his reign as editor Mr Allingham made many attempts to revive the past glories of *The London Journal* but he was hampered by his proprietor's incurable

reluctance to pay for new stories. Mr C.W. Bradley was a shrewd man of business and a good employer but the success he achieved by reprinting Mr J.F. Smith's stories made him believe that any old story was better than any new one. It may be said that *The London Journal* was both revived and killed by reprints.⁵⁵

This explanation is likely also to have been Allingham's. Jay was commissioned, in 1918, to write his *Peeps in the Past* series for Allingham's friend and former colleague, F.A. Wickhart, who had recently purchased the *London Journal* title and was considering a revival.⁵⁶ Jay commented directly on Allingham's editorial frustration: 'Despairing of ever being able to induce his proprietor to engage new writers, Mr Allingham ultimately wrote a story himself. This was a very exciting work which bore the sensational title *A Devil of a Woman*.'⁵⁷

A Devil of a Woman (1893) was certainly exciting. Its opening instalment features the unwrapping of a brown paper parcel from which tumbles a severed head and the plot continues lavish with melodramatic incident. The central character is not an intrepid adventurer from Morocco (as described by Mab) but a guileless young journalist who falls headlong in love with the Salome-style heroine and needs almost all of the remainder of the story to be cured of his infatuation. *London Journal* readers enjoyed *A Devil of a Woman*, and included it in lists of their favourite fictions, but Allingham earned nothing from it, then. 'I remember you writing the story for Bradley without any payment,' wrote Wickhart, years later. 'It was CWB all over. Only when you got him against the wall would he fork out. However the sale of the reprints has been some recompense.'⁵⁸ Though most subsequent editors found it necessary to tone down *A Devil's* lurid opening instalment, it was re-published at least seven times in Allingham's lifetime.⁵⁹

Allingham's second serial *The Mouth of Hell or The Adventures of Sir Harry Beldair* (1894-5) was less successful and appears not to have been reprinted. Mab complained that she did not find the early episodes 'so exciting as *A Devil of a Woman*.' The author offered an explanation intended to reassure her (and thus the readers): 'In the first story I was recounting incidents in my own life,' he claimed, 'Whereas the gentleman whom I call Sir Harry Beldair is merely a friend of mine. But still, do go on with the story; you will find excitement enough presently.'⁶⁰ As well as standing for the readers, Mab provided an opportunity for Allingham to record his own self-criticism. Nothing here was factually true: *A Devil of a Woman* was not based on incidents from Allingham's own life and he did not have a friend called Sir Harry Beldair. But he may be using this language to record his own perception (which I share) that the first story has a quality of personal emotional involvement that the opening chapters of the second lack. Emotional involvement comes later with Sir Harry's alternate self-indulgence and guilt about his sexual relationship with Naroji. Like Ouida's heroine Cigarette in *Under Two Flags* (1869), a continuing bestseller which may have influenced *The Mouth of Hell*, Naroji finally sacrifices herself to save Sir Harry. As she dies in his arms he finally acknowledges his feeling for her:

All the passionate words I spoke I fully meant and never shall I deny them or be ashamed of them. The fact is that, man-like, I had never realised how thoroughly Naroji had become a part of my life until I found her slipping out of it.⁶¹

Naroji's death enables Sir Harry to return home and marry his English fiancée, Lucy, thus returning the reader, as always, to domesticity. He tells Lucy all that has happened, 'and there were tears of tenderness in her eyes as she said, gently and

simply, 'Poor Naroji!''⁶² Although the level of sexual emotion in this story is completely untypical of Allingham's later fiction, its qualities of tolerance and inclusivity are characteristic.

Twenty Years Largely Wasted?

Allingham's 1886 diary indicated his youthful interest in analysing what makes successful fiction for particular groups of readers. His job as editor of *The London Journal* required him to consider the question almost daily. Considered as a common writer's apprenticeship, the time he had necessarily to spend reading, or re-reading the serial stories of J.F. Smith, Pierce Egan the Second, Percy B. St John, E.D.E.N Southworth, May Agnes Fleming, Fairfax Balfour, or Miss M.E. Braddon was extremely valuable. He had also to consider how to re-present them to his readers decades after their first publication. Only occasionally does he betray any defensiveness; reprinting *Minnigrey* (1856) yet again, in 1906, he acknowledges 'a certain old-world diction, a certain stateliness in the dialogue' but expresses his confidence that 'its amazing invention and the intense human interest of the romance' will still appeal.⁶³ Usually he expresses appreciation, as in this editorial introduction to *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862):

The plot is conceived with a skill that is more than marvellous, the characters are true to life and boldly drawn while the interest aroused as the story gradually unfolds itself is both eager and fascinating. The character of Lady Audley herself is a truly wonderful creation and the reader watches her career with a strange, nervous, anxiety. We may say without exaggeration that a story of such powerful interest only makes its appearance once or twice in a century.⁶⁴

Together with the complete runs of 1860s and 70s sensation fiction that constituted *The London Journal's* capital, Allingham had also inherited a tradition of

readers sending in their own contributions. He or Mab usually commented encouragingly: 'The verses are not particularly good and the writer would never make a poet but they show intelligence and depth of feeling'.⁶⁵ 'Your little story is well-written and is not without humour but it is too slight. We shall be pleased to see any other work you may do.'⁶⁶ It seems likely that he used readers' contributions where he could but it is not clear whether reader-contributors were paid. Allingham answers a correspondent publicly. 'LENA: You are right to expect to be paid for work that was considered good enough to be published.'⁶⁷ That falls somewhat short of a commitment, however. Those readers who contributed to the 'Little Articles' page in the *New London Journal* in 1906 could only hope for a 'surprise gift'.

Allingham (or Mab) offered his readers occasional advice on techniques of story-writing and presentation.⁶⁸

One thing seems absolutely necessary. The writer of a really good story – by which I mean a story that is not merely a tale describing the misunderstandings and reconciliations of a love-sick couple – must be a person of keen observation who has a wide experience of life. One successful author whose stories are not unknown to readers of *The London Journal* always carries a notebook with him and is for ever jotting down incidents, scraps of conversation, characters etc which he meets with in everyday life.⁶⁹

And again,

I was talking to a *Journal* writer the other day – one of the cleverest and most popular – and I asked him why he only wrote serial stories [...] 'I cannot get interested in my characters in so short a time,' he said. 'I cannot make them seem real to me and *I do not think that a story can ever really be good unless the writer looks upon the characters as real living human beings.*'⁷⁰ (my italics)

Such comments, in the light of Allingham's own career, may seem to pose more questions than they answer. His stories are not obviously derived from everyday observation and his characters come from a range of fictional types. Yet because

these comments are so firmly grounded in the context of *The London Journal*, a leading outlet for a kind of fiction that had given pleasure to millions of people, and because they form part of the critical understanding of a writer who went on to give pleasure to millions more, they cannot be dismissed as platitudes.

Allingham's twenty years editing *The London Journal* situated him within the history of common writing. He inherited a fictional tradition which told readers over and over again:

how rich and poor babies were wickedly changed in their cradles by conniving nursemaids, how long-lost wills miraculously turned up in the nick of time and penniless beauty and virtue were 'led to the hymeneal alter by the wealthy scion of a noble house'.⁷¹

These duly became the stock incidents of his own fiction. What connection did they have with the advice he gave his readers about the need to develop keen observation and to look upon their characters as 'real living human beings'? It is a central question for this thesis.

Mab's introduction to an Allingham short story implies a distinction between reality and probability that may offer a clue to his appraisal of his own work: '*Silverdale*, the first story in the Christmas number is, I think, a particularly good one. It is a little improbable, perhaps, *like all this writer's work*; but it is profoundly interesting and if the central incident is improbable, the characters are real-life and human.'⁷² (my italics) Mab is using the critical vocabulary indigenous to this literary area which expresses approbation through words such as 'interesting' 'real-life' and 'human'. 'Improbable' is a more ambiguous descriptor. Allingham's work was always improbable, as he says in the guise of Mab and this would be cause for criticism and rejection by other editors. As himself, however, Allingham appears to

have made little effort to change this characteristic and may even have cherished some of his own improbabilities.

Allingham had served his common writer's apprenticeship at *The London Journal* and it had offered him invaluable opportunities to learn about his readers' lives and about a type of fiction they had traditionally enjoyed. He had fictionalised himself for his readers; towards the end of his time as active editor of the *Journal* he confided that he, in turn, had been fictionalising them.

In reading a letter I often try to picture not only the person who wrote it but also the home and surroundings in which it was penned. No doubt I make many grotesque mistakes but I find it helps me if I clothe my shadowy correspondents in some human shape. It enables me to picture my readers as a collection of friends, each with an individuality of his own and not merely as a mob of strangers whose weekly pennies help to pay my salary.⁷³

A week previously he had given free rein to his imagination in the portrayal of a relentlessly dissatisfied reader from the East End of London.

I have pictured him as a little bent rather pathetic figure hurrying out every Saturday morning to his newsagent. Then, having secured his *Journal*, he creeps back to his garret and devours the newly printed pages. I see the old fellow polishing his glasses and settling down with the gleam of battle in his eyes for an encounter with his imaginary enemy the editor. He makes notes as he reads and when he has finished he seizes a pen and fills a postcard with incoherent abuse. This he does week after week with no encouragement and no reward.

If such a character were introduced into a story, the author would be accused of caricature. The idea of this old scribbler is of course very grotesque, but there is just that touch of pathos about it that would have appealed to Charles Dickens who understood better than any writer how quaint are the devices by which some poor souls seek to bring a little brightness into their dull grey lives.⁷⁴

Allingham's twenty years as editor of *The London Journal* had been frustrating and publicly unsuccessful; they had not been wasted.

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- ¹ Arnold Bennett *These Twain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) p. 47. R. Allen claims that competition no 53 attracted 473,574 entries, *Voice of Britain* (Cambridge: P. Stephens Ltd., 1983) p. 15.
- ² King (2004) p. 63ff.
- ³ Andrew King *Periodical Places: The London Journal 1845-1883* (PhD thesis: Birkbeck College, 2000) p.2.
- ⁴ King (2000) p. 41.
- ⁵ He contributed three original serial stories and eighteen short stories, mostly reprints.
- ⁶ Jay p. 20.
- ⁷ Anon. *Macmillan* 1866 quoted King (2004) p. 39.
- ⁸ Johnson was also proprietor of the Nassau Steam Press and earlier proprietor of *The Home Circle* with Egan as its editor.
- ⁹ Edmund Downey *Twenty Years Ago* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1905) p 31.
- ¹⁰ Jay p. 19.
- ¹¹ Diary 28.9.1886
- ¹² Jay 'The London Journal was both revived and killed by reprints' p. 19.
- ¹³ Blogg later persuaded Allingham to take on the editorship of the second series *New Boys' Paper*.
- ¹⁴ Jay p. 19.
- ¹⁵ In 1892, for instance, Allingham had to split £50 between 53 winners. 'Something Like a Hero' an undated short story in his archive, uses this situation to comic effect.
- ¹⁶ Marx (ed. McClellan) p. 43. Allingham used the imagined rather than the religious world but the technique is the same.
- ¹⁷ *LJ* 2.1.1897.
- ¹⁸ *NLJ* 13.12.1906.
- ¹⁹ *LJ* 1.11.1890 p. 288.
- ²⁰ *LJ* 7.3.1903.
- ²¹ *NLJ* 21.7.1906.
- ²² *London Journal* readers did not usually engage in communal discussion, however, and their companionship was only implied; not taken as far as the formal establishment of readers' clubs.
- ²³ *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* 17th edition (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005). Cf. Ouida *Under Two Flags* (1869) who says that the pseudonym 'Aspasia' 'serves so often to designate in journalistic literature those freelances of life'. (First published 1869, edition used London: Chapman & Hall, 1919) p. 69.
- ²⁴ *LJ* 1.2.1896 p.100.
- ²⁵ *LJ* 10.10 1896 p. 320.
- ²⁶ E.g. display ad back cover *NLJ* monthly part July 1906.
- ²⁷ Information from Joyce Allingham (who told fortunes with her brother at the Festival of Britain in 1951). See also Philip Allingham's book *Cheapjack* (London: Heinemann, 1934) and Allingham's diary account of travel round the markets in 1935.
- ²⁸ She went on a mysterious 'mission' at the same time as Mab went on holiday and Allingham was sailing on the Norfolk Broads. They all had to apologise to readers for getting behind with their correspondence, *LJ* 10.10 1896.
- ²⁹ *LJ* 1.2.1896.
- ³⁰ Advertorials e.g. Mab's column in *LJ* Christmas number Dec 1897 publicising Thridgold's cards.
- ³¹ Obsession with figures attested by Ferris p 71. Observations re management development ref. Northcliffe papers and from comments in Allingham's diaries.
- ³² *LJ* 1.4.1893.
- ³³ WM to MA 5.6.48.
- ³⁴ William McFee *Casuals of the Sea* (London: Secker 1916) pp. 146-7 for the way in which these fashion notes were copied, pirated, disseminated.
- ³⁵ McFee (1916) p. 151.
- ³⁶ Em Allingham would have been too young to have produced Mab in the 1890s.
- ³⁷ *LJ* 16.9.1893.
- ³⁸ *LJ* 28.11.1896.
- ³⁹ *LJ* 27.4.1895.
- ⁴⁰ Rollington p. 16.

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- ⁴¹ William McFee *In the First Watch* (London: Faber, 1947) p. 281-283.
- ⁴² WM to MA, 5.6.1948. (In Margery Allingham archive)
- ⁴³ *LJ* 27/4/1895.
- ⁴⁴ *LJ* 19.5.1894, *LJ* 25.5.1895, *LJ* 3.7.1897, e.g. *The Prisoner of the Mill*, *SM* 26.12.1896.
- ⁴⁵ Lady Jane occasionally awards her special prize for the best household hint to a man – evidence, if this is needed, that male readers did not necessarily skip the ‘Woman’s World’ section.
- ⁴⁶ *LJ* 18.6.1895.
- ⁴⁷ *LJ* 4.11.1893.
- ⁴⁸ Seminar announcement 30.9.2002.
- ⁴⁹ *NLJ* 16.6.1906.
- ⁵⁰ *NLJ* 1.12.1906.
- ⁵¹ *NLJ* 22.9.1906.
- ⁵² May Saxon *NLJ* 5.10.1907.
- ⁵³ Beetham (1996) pp. 188-189.
- ⁵⁴ *NLJ* 16.6.1906 p155
- ⁵⁵ Jay p. 19.
- ⁵⁶ F.A. Wickhart, editor of *Spare Moments*. Was a lawyer and also founded and edited a philatelic magazine. It is tempting to identify him with the ‘Wick’ of HJA’s diaries who was an investor in various periodicals around the *Christian Globe* / Bradley area. The survival of HJA’s archive probably owe much to his intervention – cf. letter 243 (26.9.1932).
- ⁵⁷ Jay p. 20.
- ⁵⁸ Letter number 244 (3.10.32).
- ⁵⁹ cf Appendix 2.
- ⁶⁰ *LJ* 27.4.1895.
- ⁶¹ *LJ* 20.7.1895 p 46.
- ⁶² *LJ* 17.8.1895 p126.
- ⁶³ *NLJ* 20.10.1906 p 585.
- ⁶⁴ *LJ* July 1890 p.357. M.E. Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* was first published in 1862.
- ⁶⁵ *LJ* 27.4.1897.
- ⁶⁶ ‘Replies to Readers’ 16.6.1906 *NLJ*.
- ⁶⁷ *LJ* 1.3.1902.
- ⁶⁸ *LJ* 9.1.1897 Mab, *LJ* 28.4.1900 p374, *NLJ* 9.6.1906 editor.
- ⁶⁹ *LJ* 29.4.1893 Mab.
- ⁷⁰ *LJ* 9.1.1897.
- ⁷¹ Vizetelly 1893 vol 2 pp11-13.
- ⁷² *LJ* 19.12.1896.
- ⁷³ *NLJ* 3.11.1906.
- ⁷⁴ *NLJ* 27.10.1906.

Chapter Four

Smart Men at the *Daily Record*

Writer Seeks Editor, 1893 – 1908

When studying a working life, a type of fiction and a market area, developments frequently seem more straightforward in retrospect than they could have appeared at the time to any but the most visionary. Alfred Harmsworth had, he claimed, made his plans for a range of magazines that would overwhelm all opposition even before he launched *Answers* in 1888. He called it his ‘Schemo Magnifico’.¹ The foundation of the halfpenny, eight-page weekly, *Comic Cuts* in 1890, closely followed by *Illustrated Chips*, also a halfpenny, was a highly significant advance within the Schemo.² There was a social gulf between those who could afford a penny for their papers and those for whom only halfpenny purchases were possible. The huge circulations and impressive profits made by the Harmsworth papers came from a more impoverished readership (in relative terms) than had ever previously been regular buyers. By 1892 the Harmsworth brothers’ weekly circulation was over a million and they had dispensed with their original, outside investors. The following year they became a public limited company, *Answers* Ltd. Between 1890 and 1894 they had established (among others) *Forget-Me-Not*, *The Wonder*, *Pluck*, *The Union Jack*, *The Marvel*, *Home Sweet Home*, *Home Chat*, *The Sunday Companion*, *The Boy’s Friend* and purchased their first daily newspaper, *The Evening News* (1894). The Schemo Magnifico was well underway.

Previous chapters have touched briefly on the ways these developments may have affected Allingham as a penny paper editor (*The London Journal*) and as a member of a publishing family (*The Christian Globe*). This chapter follows his search for his place as a writer within the evolving area of mass-market publishing. His final commitment of his own, and his immediate family's, fortunes to the Harmsworths' Amalgamated Press was crucial to his success as a prolific writer of serial fiction and may, in retrospect, appear inevitable. Detailing some of his false starts, rebuffs and dead ends is intended to demonstrate that, at the time, the progression was not necessarily obvious.

In human terms this will come as no surprise. Although Allingham was well-placed to have an insider's knowledge of the market, he did not have access to the Schemo Magnifico. Additionally, like any other developing artist, he needed to discover his creative identity, including his strengths and limitations. My argument in this chapter is that, as Allingham's art relied crucially on its fitness for purpose, that is to say its ability to appeal to particular readerships (rather than on intrinsic qualities such as distinctive use of complex language, for instance), his essential search was for an editor. An editor stood, professionally, in the place of a reader. His or her function was to create the whole product, the particular periodical, of which Allingham's work would be a part, and within which his fiction could reach its audience.

As an editor himself, Allingham clearly understood the process. During this period, he can be seen doing as he had advised the readers of his own paper to do, using short stories both to develop his own skills and to gauge the acceptability of his work. The skills of an effective short story writer are not necessarily the same as the skills of a

successful writer of serials but at least the types of stories Allingham attempted were designed for broadly the same commercial area as would later welcome his longer fictions.³ He wrote heart-warmers (sentimental stories for the Christmas numbers of family papers), light detective stories and slabs of melodrama for the cheaper end for the general adult market, and school stories for boys' papers. Comic tales of adventure for adolescents eventually earned him his warmest editorial acceptance. His most enthusiastic readers, it then transpired, were from the Harmsworths' halfpenny sector.

Early successes: a heart-warmer

Allingham's first acceptance beyond his family group came in 1893 from *Answers*, but to date I have not been able to trace this story, 'The Crime and Capture of Widow Kelly'.⁴ His next success was in December 1895 when 'Our Madge' won a Five Guinea *Tit-Bits* Prize for the best story of the stage. Allingham loved performance. He was a regular visitor to theatres and music-halls, and read reviews and theatrical gossip. Famous actresses and singers, elderly actor-managers, travelling players would all become stock characters in his future fiction. 'Our Madge' is a heart-warming story of a standard type which relates a variety-star's seasonal munificence to an elderly former actress and her starving grandchildren. It is made distinctive by its vignette of Madge (whose details sound as if they refer to an actual actress) and by the character of the narrator, an impecunious young journalist who idolises the star. When he discovers proof of her generosity, on Christmas Day, he is quick to capitalise on it:

I hurried back to my room, altered my copy, and then let the flimsies fly. The result you all know. It was the biggest ‘scoop’ I ever organized.

It was before the days of the new journalism or I should have done even better. As it was, I was satisfied. The ‘Daily Telephone’ of December 26th gave me two columns, besides a picturesque leader of its own. Madge was immensely popular as it was, and this story of her visit to a fellow-artist who had come upon evil days just suited the ‘Telephone.’⁵

Technical language (‘flimsies’ and ‘scoop’) offers the reader an impression of authenticity, as does the knowingness of the actress’s response to the public acclaim which follows the article. ‘ “Why,” and she pointed to the stalls with comical horror, “They’ll be saying I did it for the ad; but I didn’t, ’pon my honour.” ’⁶ Despite the specificity of the detail however, ‘Our Madge’ is merely a neat example of a wish-fulfilment story type that Allingham and his peers wrote regularly for Christmas Numbers. The centrepiece, as it had been in Dickens’s *Christmas Carol*, was a warm room and a lavish meal with colour, toys, and unexpected company – features known to be absent from many people’s daily lives.

Allingham’s Madge is described both as a ‘Christian’ and as a ‘good fairy’, indicators of two belief systems that underlie popular writing of this sort. He wrote another wish-fulfilment story that same year for *The Christian Globe* entitled ‘The Redemption of Richard Deane’ and re-published it two years later in *The London Journal* as ‘A London Arab’.⁷ These two different titles for an identical story effectively switch the reader’s attention between the giver, whose life is redeemed by his charitable action, and the recipient, whose life is transformed by his unexpected good luck; one title suits the evangelical, the other the secular paper. The presentational skills involved in choosing a title are those of the editor rather than the writer. The editor is, as it were, the author of their paper. They may be working to a

proprietary brief rather than to their own vision, but theirs is the responsibility for making a whole out of a multitude of contributions. Including a story within a magazine package requires editorial qualities of craftsmanship and responsive creativity that will be evident to the contributors (for better or worse) but virtually invisible to the reader.⁸

Generally, in the years before 1900, Allingham stayed within his family group of papers.⁹ Apart from these single stories in *Answers* and *Tit-Bits*, his only other outside acceptance was of a cricket story in *The Golden Penny*, 'An Illustrated Home Weekly' published by *The Daily Graphic* Group.¹⁰ He published very little of his own short fiction in *The London Journal* between *Eileen's Choice* in 1889 and the establishment of *The New London Journal* in 1906.¹¹ Elsewhere, between 1890 and 1900, *Spare Moments* and the *Christian Globe* published thirteen of his short stories, all original and the majority with his name attached. External recognition of a sort came from the re-publication of his serial story *A Devil of a Woman* by Charles Shurey in 1900. Shurey was a sensationalist publisher previously associated with *The Police News* and with the type of reprint publishing that thrived on the failure of other enterprises, purchasing old stock of blocks and copyrights at knockdown prices and reissuing them anonymously and cheaply.¹² Allingham's letters give the impression that being published in Shurey's papers was something of a last resort. In the years following 1900 Allingham's sales strategy was consistently directed towards the newer businesses of Pearson and Harmsworth. He also followed a particularly encouraging editor, W. Newman Flower, to the respectable house of Cassell.

Episodes in the Professional Career of a Newspaper Man

In 1901 Allingham sold a series of 3,000 word detective stories, *The Achievements of Michael Power*, to *Pearson's Weekly*. The stories were subtitled 'Being Episodes in the Professional Career of a Newspaper Man'. They take as their setting the new area of Fleet Street rivalry that had developed since Pearson's foundation of the *Daily Express* in 1900 which challenged the Harmsworths' *Daily Mail* of 1896. Allingham conveys a feeling of excitement about this new journalistic world:

We were all smart men at the DAILY RECORD, but beyond a doubt Michael Power was the smartest of the lot. He not only had a wonderful nose for news but when he got hold of an item he knew how to make the most of it.¹³

His use of technical jargon heightens the impression of authenticity:

We gave Power's story all the glory of scare headlines and leaded type, and added whatever gossip Carter and Dobbs had been able to gather, and then wound up with the contributions of the agencies.

And the portrayal of newspaper machinations is engaging – then as now:

Now we of the RECORD belonged to what was called the new journalism – that is we were more distinguished for enterprise than for scruples; but when Paterson read this production in MS, he caught his breath and looked grave.

'Are you sure this is all right Mick?' he asked. 'You know it means libel actions and no end of trouble if –'

'There is no 'if'' replied Power quietly.

Meanwhile our revelations fell like a bombshell upon the country. Our sale went up with a rush. At the clubs everyone agreed that we must know something. Even our rivals were compelled to quote us.¹⁴

'The Wimbledon Murder Mystery' is a tale of media manipulation. Michael Power has the murderer, a wronged man, hidden in his cellar throughout. He makes him comfortable, doles out the story in instalments and then persuades Paterson, editor of the DAILY RECORD, to pay the killer enough to enable him to get out of the country and start a new life abroad. The narrator is impressed:

‘Well, Mick, I always have held that the one great requisite for the making of a modern journalist is impudence.’

‘Yes, impudence and luck,’ amended the Irishman, modestly.¹⁵

Power, in these stories, is an Irishman with a past, few scruples, much vitality and the remains of a brogue.¹⁶ He is the first of a handful of characters in Allingham’s oeuvre who are reasonably fully realized in their first incarnation and whose names, but not necessarily their attributes, are reused in later stories. In the 1902 Christmas number of *The London Journal*, Allingham uses Michael Power as his pseudonym (rather as Ralph Rollington might have done). Will Holt, Allingham’s ‘Duffer’, is another such character. These repeat-characters are not unlike pieces in an authorial chess game. When they reappear they are no longer lead actors but agents of the plot, ready-to-hand instruments to facilitate events, with the possible advantage that their names may convey a ring of familiarity. The action requires an investigator? Allingham has one ready to hand; it’s Michael Power.¹⁷ Contradictions, continuity errors, do not seem to matter as these character-pieces move from story to story. Michael Power loses his Irishness in later appearances; he loses his wife (though she is never more than a mention) and, saddest, he loses his intimate connection with the DAILY RECORD, becoming more often the detective, infrequently the newspaperman.¹⁸

These six stories were presented by *Pearson’s* with apparent appreciation. They occupy first place in the weekly numbers and the numbers themselves are flagged as ‘a splendid start’ to the twentieth century. Number two in the series, ‘The Leadenhall Street Explosion’, dramatizes an intense Fleet Street rivalry between Power’s paper, THE DAILY RECORD and its competitor, THE DAILY COURIER:

The COURIER was the only paper we really feared. It not only had any amount of capital behind it and a staff of picked men, but its proprietor was on intimate terms with the leading lights of the Government.¹⁹

Power engineers a sting that enables the RECORD to gain the moral high ground, but he admitted afterwards, ‘ – with a grin be it said – that it was not “in accordance with the high traditions of the British Press”’.²⁰ The next two stories narrate Michael Power’s ‘saving’ of the French Republic, using kiss-and-tell trickery; and his crucial achievement of an interview with the German Emperor, through incognito invasion of privacy.²¹ Unfortunately there is no editorial correspondence surrounding these stories; nothing to indicate whether they were unsolicited offerings by Allingham, accepted ready-written, whether they were sold through a fiction bureau or requested from him by the *Pearson’s Weekly* editor.²² The stories offer the reader the flattering feeling that they are involved in big events; that they are, to some extent, insiders. Professionally they appear to have led nowhere. Allingham set no more stories in newspaper offices and produced nothing so deft and topical again until his series *Perkins & Co* in 1910.

Sending Stories on their Travels

In the three years immediately following *The Achievements of Michael Power* there is no evidence that Allingham attempted any original writing beyond his regular Christmas contributions to *The Christian Globe* and *The London Journal*. In 1904 however, Allingham, who had married his first cousin Emily Jane (Em) Hughes in 1903, became a father for the first time, and began persistently looking for work outside his family papers. He also began to work from home more frequently with the

useful consequence (for the researcher) that he needed to write more business letters. Replies were addressed to him at home and it is mainly these that have been kept, though occasionally Allingham retained either a draft or copy of a letter sent.²³ Sixteen letters survive from 1904, thirty-seven from 1905, forty from 1906 and a similar number from 1907. From that year the number of extant letters declines as his work developed a regular pattern and his relationships with editors stabilised. Account books survive from 1908 and, in the crucial period early in 1909 when he was taking the decision to leave *The London Journal* and move out to Essex, he kept a diary.

The surviving business letters, 1904-1908, came from a variety of correspondents as Allingham explored different creative options, seeking his place in the market. He answered an advertisement from a P. Delmar who wanted to write plays in collaboration; he sounded out Robert Barr, editor of *The Idler* with a proposal for a jointly written novel and he sent some stories to an Anna Wilke in Königsberg, Germany. None of these met with success. Delmar offered only a share of possible profits, nothing in advance; Barr reassured him that he was quite capable of writing a novel without help and Wilke said his stories were not suitable for her readers:

They are – how shall I say? – so sensational, so little natural. I have only got two, ‘Dick’s Mascot’ and ‘Tom Munro’s Murder’. You write interesting but please don’t misunderstand me – not for the better public- more for the middle-class who like sensational stories *’

(She adds a note ‘* at least here in Germany, in England it may be otherwise’)²⁴

Allingham only rarely tried writing for ‘the better public’ and never with any success.²⁵ Regrettable as it might be, he replied to Wilke, the fact was that

sensational stories sold: 'Owing to the rivalry of two or three popular publishers in this country the demand for sensational stories is so great that the temptation to supply is almost overwhelming.' He asked her to send him a couple of German magazines so that he could get a better idea of her requirements, but nothing further came of this.²⁶ With his flair for melodrama and his unregenerate liking for improbabilities Allingham may well have been tempted to produce sensational stories but, as part of his quest for publication in the newer family papers, it was a risky strategy. Alfred Harmsworth's papers contained plenty of lurid and extravagant fictions but publicly their proprietor insisted they should be presented as crusading for 'pure and healthy' reading in overt opposition to the penny dreadful.²⁷

Sensational serials of the *Devil of a Woman* type proved particularly difficult to sell. Frank Grlman, of the *Daily Mail* and *Evening News*, rejected a serial as 'altogether too wild and improbable for my requirements' and urged Allingham to keep to 'human interest'.²⁸ A few months later Charles Sisley at the Harmsworth *Pictorial Magazine* returned four instalments of a previously commissioned serial as being 'suggestive'. There was no appeal against such a charge: 'We have to be very particular about these matters.'²⁹ The same serial, *For Sale – a Woman*, was also rejected 'after careful consideration' by *Pearson's Weekly* and eventually went to Shurey's. All three of the editors who had turned down the serial expressed willingness to consider short stories instead. Allingham therefore settled to spend two days a week away from his editorial duties at *The London Journal* writing fiction for *True Blue*, a cheap boys' paper with pretensions to the 'imperial' market (discussed

below), a sensational melodrama, *The Czar's Chief Spy*, for Shurey's, and original short stories which he sent 'on their travels' round other papers.³⁰

Pearson's Weekly, publisher of the Michael Power series, only accepted one more story, 'The Master of Annersley' – a tale of counterfeiters, detection and mutual deceit, with a twist at the end. The Harmsworth papers were more welcoming. Letters show that Charles Sisley at *The Pictorial Magazine* accepted at least four stories between 1904-1906, that a story or two was published in *Puck* at the same time and that some successes were achieved with J.A. Hammerton's *London Magazine* in 1908.³¹ In the Harmsworth hierarchy this was possibly the most prestigious paper ever to publish Allingham's work and it has been particularly frustrating not to be able to trace actual copies of the stories Hammerton accepted for his readers.

Short stories are generally among the more elusive elements of Allingham's work. File copies have not been reliably kept and many of the magazines in which they were published have not survived in the British Library collection. One reason that copies are rare among Allingham's own papers may be that he was composing by hand (as he did throughout his life) and only using a typewriting agency selectively. Typing agency invoices from 1906 and 1907 list several titles of which there is no other trace. Other letters suggest that some work was only typed after it had been accepted.³² The cost of typing in 1906 was about one shilling per thousand words. Although Allingham was trying to establish himself with the sorts of magazines, such as those owned by the Harmsworths, that could potentially pay him one or two guineas per thousand words, most of his work at this stage earned considerably less, if

anything at all. Ten shillings and six pence per thousand was the norm in the cheaper houses.³³ Sending out uncommissioned stories involved waiting, first for the editorial decision and then for publication (as payment was usually made then rather than on acceptance); money expended in advance on typewriting therefore, would have been money trapped in the system. Allingham was well aware of the impact of editorial delay on his cash flow:

Why doesn't your firm pay more promptly? There are scores of men like myself knocking about Flt St – Here am I with quite a gift for popular fiction and yet I have to stick to journalism for my bread and butter simply because journalism means ready money –

Although I only do fiction 2 days a week I have at the present moment over £50 worth of stuff out – all accepted but not published and therefore not paid for –

One of your papers has had a story of mine 11 months, another has had one 5 months. Is it surprising that we are driven to the cheaper houses where you deliver your copy in the morning and call for the money in the afternoon?³⁴

The chief sub-editor replied, making no concessions on payment but offering general encouragement:

We pay on publication and if you keep up your present standard there is no reason why you should not become one of our regular suppliers of short stories. Send in some stuff regularly every week and what I cannot use I will return promptly so you can try it elsewhere.³⁵

Despite the rejection of his serial, Allingham achieved publication for several stories in the Harmsworth penny magazine, *The Pictorial*. Two have survived: a Christmas short story 'The Lovers of Lucy Grey' (Christmas 1904) which contrasts the dangers of the Australian outback with the idealized jollities of upper-class English countryside and 'Her Ladyship's Pearls' (March 1905) in which the resourceful heroine, a lady's maid, triumphs by taking a poker to smash the valuable antique knick-knacks that girls of her class would normally be expected to dust. The

most encouraging aspect of Allingham's contributions to *The Pictorial* was the link forged with Sisley's sub-editor, W. Newman Flower.

Newman Flower: Mystery without Murder

Allingham's relationships with his editors were essential to his functioning but were purely business relationships: no conviviality was expected in this literary area. Editors' letters are directive and frequently peremptory: only rarely does a sense of liking or appreciation creep into the correspondence. Newman Flower was not effusive but did take the trouble to solicit stories and to explain exactly what he wanted. When he moved to Cassell's in 1906 to edit their *Penny Magazine* in direct opposition to *The Pictorial*, he wrote to Allingham to request, 'Short stories of between 1,500 to 3,000 words in length. Each story should contain a strong love element and lend itself to illustration. There is no opening for very sensational stories.'³⁶ Allingham does not appear to have written any stories for the *Penny Magazine* with 'strong love interest' but fortunately Flower also liked 'plenty of action'. Despite his caveats about sensationalism, he was not in practice adverse to tales of theft, blackmail and sinister secret societies. He praised Allingham's 'The Black Knight' a tale that includes ruthless Italians, child kidnap, multiple killings and a morally ambiguous ending and, when he criticized stories, he did so with rather more courtesy than others of his peers:

The only fault I have to find is that they are inclined to be a little too sensational, but otherwise are admirable. This is what I meant about your 'Martha' story. This you can doubtless remedy however. I like mystery stories without too much 'murder.'³⁷

Deborah Wynne's study of the sensation novels of the 1860s, novels written for the shilling rather than the penny public, teases out some of the fine discriminations by which the melodramatic fiction associated with the older 'Newgate' and gothic novels and with the G.W.M. Reynolds *Mysteries of London* type, was re-presented in more realistic and domestic contexts to enthrall and unsettle the middle-class reader.³⁸ Wynne refers to a 'respectability divide' which differentiates the work of Reynolds from that of Dickens and which sensation novelists such as Ellen Wood, M.E. Braddon and Wilkie Collins succeeded in bridging 'to satisfy middle class cravings for sensationalism whilst minimising the risk of disturbance to any sense of propriety.' The divide itself did not disappear however and *The London Journal* remained on the wrong side of it. Despite its status as a family paper, its readers' tastes continue to be shaped by its melodramatic heritage; although Allingham's *A Devil of A Woman*, for instance, showed the influence of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* in its villainess's deceptively angelic face its action remained overtly melodramatic. It was not entirely surprising that publishers with pretensions to respectability above the level of *Shurey's Illustrated* and the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* refused to accept it.³⁹

In the 1890s and early twentieth the pressure on family penny papers to conform – or appear to conform - to shilling values was intensifying, Flower's preference for 'mystery without too much murder' allowed for sensational happenings as long as they were held within a context of normality. Allingham's 'Martha', in the story referred to above, appears to be an elderly lady keeping a small shop in a quiet street off the Uxbridge Road. 'She sold tobacco, a few boys' books and novelettes and a

little cheap stationery.' In fact she is a man, 'Maxwell', the villainous betrayer of a beautiful and trusting young woman in distant California. The murderer, who tells the story through a journalist-narrator (a common device in Allingham's stories at this time), has 'an agreeable and interesting personality'. He quotes Milton and lives comfortably and with impeccable taste. The reader discovers that he has pursued Martha/ Maxwell for fifteen years and has finally strangled him in a fit of passionate revenge. Flower asked for the story to be 'toned down considerably' then said it was just what he wanted and please could Allingham send more?⁴⁰

In the same letter he grumbled that 'Carried by Storm' the other story of Allingham's he proposed to accept was 'hardly strong enough.' The lines of acceptability were finely drawn. To the modern reader 'The Man Who Murdered Martha' may seem slightly dull as all the violent action takes place off-stage, but if sensationalism does consist in unsettling readers' notions of the relationship between appearance and reality, then it certainly qualifies.⁴¹ The story prefigures aspects of Allingham's later fiction where disguise is regularly impenetrable and little old ladies may well be murderous super-villains. It is unfortunate that I have not succeeded in tracing a copy of 'Carried by Storm' so cannot know what Flower thought was 'hardly strong enough'. One feature that is noticeable from the few 'strong' short stories that have survived is how closely they resemble single sensational incidents in Allingham's later serial fiction. What Allingham appears to be learning from Flower is how to repackage melodrama into a format acceptable to the twentieth-century penny magazine editor.

Writing for Boys – Old Style

In the world of boys' fiction Allingham was more immediately successful perhaps because he was aiming lower. When he attempted to sell boys' stories to the newer penny papers for boys published by Pearson's or Cassell's he was rebuffed.⁴² The Aldine Publishing Company, who bought Allingham's school stories regularly between 1904-1906, could be described as one of the 'cheaper houses'. It was in fact Aldine who had taken over Ralph Rollington's *New Boys' Paper* in 1887 together with much material from earlier Emmett and Charles Fox publications. Charles Perry Brown, the founder of the company, had been among Rollington's circle of acquaintance and had offered to buy the copyright of *Barrington's Fag* in 1887. Robert Prowse drew for Aldine; E.H. Burrage, his own company wound up, wrote for Aldine in the early years of the twentieth century as did his brother, A.S. Burrage.⁴³ The story types favoured by the company correspond closely with the categories in the Ono collection – tales of highwaymen and outlaws, sea stories, detective stories, cowboys and Indians, tales of Empire and school stories. Their main strength was in 3d 'libraries', cheap complete books, published in monthly batches and corresponding to the Emmetts' *Hogarth House* series or the American 'dime novels' which they regularly reused.⁴⁴

At this time, however, Aldine was attempting to compete in the area of penny-magazine publishing. Their product, *True Blue*, aimed to appeal to the increasing number of working-class boys and young men abroad as well as those at home. Emigration advice was a regular feature and the editor expended an appreciable amount of effort attempting to foster loyalty by encouraging readers to link with one

another through the ‘*True Blue* Trusty Band’.⁴⁵ *True Blue* was a low-budget product. Several of its authors wrote for it under pseudonyms – as was common in Aldine publications. The more pseudonymity and anonymity in the penny publishing world, the lower the class of paper. An obvious explanation is financial; reprints were cheaper than commissioned originals and it was traditional to omit or disguise authors’ names when a story had been previously published elsewhere.

Other reasons for manipulating or reducing the identity of the author were connected with fostering the illusion of the paper. *True Blue* attempted to bolster its status by pretending that there were more people writing for it than there were, and that they were more exciting and distinguished than was the case. In December 1904 Allingham was introduced twice in adjoining paragraphs of the same editorial:

Mr. Pitt [...] is a writer of world wide reputation and his tales of school life and adventure have proved some of the most popular ever written.

(David Pitt was Allingham’s newly devised pen name. He had no ‘world wide reputation’.) The editor continued:

The long-complete which will occupy the front pages of our Christmas number is entitled ‘Snowed Up or Christmas at Crag Castle College’. I need hardly say that it is a real rollicking Yuletide tale. With it *another new author*, Mr. Herbert Allingham, makes his bow to True Blue-ites.⁴⁶ (my italics)

This is symptomatic of the false variety with which publishers on a tight budget tried to conceal their penury. Were readers expected to notice, three months later, when Mr. Allingham’s ‘Crag Castle’ boys invaded Mr. Pitt’s ‘Rathgar’ serial? Either it was assumed that they would not, or it might be that the reality of the fictional school in the mind of the reader was expected to eclipse the idea of an author. Editorial headings usually emblazoned the most fantastic tale as ‘a true story of school life’

and, if Crag Castle school were real, it would be quite natural for Mr. Pitt to know and write about it as well as Mr. Allingham. Such fictional reality was, however, fairly thin. Neither does Allingham, unlike Frank Richards or Ralph Rollington, reveal any special attachment to his pseudonym. David Pitt was an alternative name, not an alternative self.

David Pitt may have been an insubstantial figure but Will Holt, the hero of *A Regular Duffer*, the first Allingham serial published in *True Blue*, ‘made a hit in a small way’.⁴⁷ On the strength of this, Allingham dug out his 1886 story, *Barrington’s Fag*, and wrote to a boys’ paper editor at Pearson’s hoping to re-sell it. The editor found it ‘totally out of keeping with the notions of school tales in the minds of present day youngsters’.⁴⁸ Allingham was almost rebellious: ‘I doubt whether your policy of insisting that all school stories should be made to one pattern is sound.’⁴⁹ He failed to convince Pearson’s but persuaded *True Blue*’s Charles Murray to run the story again after some limited re-writing. As well as taking out the ‘little bits of instruction’, Allingham wrote his new character, ‘the Duffer’ in to the *True Blue* version. Will Holt is athletic, resourceful, scholarly but deceptively naïve, languid, and eccentric – a twentieth-century popular type who seems to have moved upwards, fictionally, from the periodical to the book; from lowbrow comedy to middlebrow detection. Allingham and his fellow writers for boys believed that their readers liked ‘a character’ and that providing them with an idiosyncratic hero was a means of assuring their loyalty as well as making them laugh.⁵⁰ The re-written *Barrington’s Fag* was well received by readers so, as soon as it had finished, Holt grew up fast to star in long-complete detective tales of his own.⁵¹

By this time Allingham had been writing for *True Blue* continuously for over a year and might have thought he (or David Pitt) had a career in prospect as a writer of school and adventure stories. In April the editor, Charles Murray, had called him into his office in order to suggest future storylines. Allingham produced another long-complete Duffer tale and a series of stories featuring a new set of comic characters called *The Frolicsome Five*. Then, in May 1906, *True Blue* ceased production and Aldine stopped paying – even for the work they had commissioned. In 1906, however, writers were not as completely powerless as they had been in the 1870s and 80s. Allingham appealed to the secretary of the Society of Authors, G. Herbert Thring. Although Thring does not seem to have taken any action, Murray capitulated, offering Allingham six pounds to compensate him for work already done and confirming that the commissioned stories were now at his disposal. Aldine then refocused almost exclusively on their library series, an area in which they could continue to compete effectively with the new corporations.⁵² The Amalgamated Press was re-organising its own juvenile department and pushing other publishers out of business wholesale. Brett's former company went into liquidation in 1907 as did the Emmett's Hogarth House but, as if to prove that not everyone saw how irrevocably Alfred Harmsworth's (now Lord Northcliffe's) Schemo Magnifico had changed boys' publishing, one more optimistic entrepreneur of the old type came forward with a plan to use up the redundant blocks and copyrights of these failed ventures in a new paper.

This was E.J. Blogg of 11 Gough Square⁵³. In the autumn of 1906 Blogg and his colleagues decided to revive Ralph Rollington's *New Boys' Paper* title (though

disclaiming any connection with the previous venture). Its first editor was Arthur Viles who was almost certainly a member of a penny dreadful-producing family and the majority of (traceable) contributions to the *New Boys' Paper* were from Aldine writers using different pseudonyms.⁵⁴ All were men with their roots in the era of George Emmett and Ralph Rollington. Both the paper's fiction and its format looked tired in comparison with the plethora of highly illustrated, occasionally colour-printed, frequently cheaper papers published by the Amalgamated Press, Pearson's and others.⁵⁵ It is not surprising that the sales of the *New Boys' Paper* were disappointing from the outset.

Blogg was also a director of *The London Journal* and *Spare Moments*. In 1907 he wrote to ask Allingham to take over as *The New Boys' Paper* editor. In retrospect it was almost an object lesson in hopelessness and it is a measure of Allingham's innate optimism, or uncharacteristic failure to read the market signs, that he accepted. It may also represent his own frustration at the closure of *True Blue* and the continuing reluctance of the Harmsworth and Pearson editors to accept his contributions. Having identified a shortage of good stories as one of *The New Boys' Paper's* problems, he immediately ran his own *Max the Magnificent*, recently rejected by the editor-in-chief at the Amalgamated Press, Hamilton Edwards.

Allingham's more old-fashioned correspondents in the boys' publishing world warmed to *Max*: 'A very excellent and powerful piece of work and should send the circulation of the *NBP* up to 100,000' wrote Charles Perry Brown, who was now investing time and energy, if not money, in *The New Boys' Paper*.⁵⁶ But the circulation of *The New Boys' Paper* did not break the success barrier. *Max the*

Magnificent and Allingham's other mild editorial innovations may have possibly been successful in postponing the paper's demise but not averting it. In 1907 format was at least as important as fiction in achieving success and so were capital and skilful marketing. The new *New Boys' Paper* was as deficient in all of these as its namesake had been twenty years before.

Allingham adopted a companionable, man-to-man, editorial persona and peopled his office with his own stage army, including 'Billy Bard', the 'poetry editor' – a character from one of his 'Crag Castle' school stories, as well as a reference to Shakespeare.⁵⁷ This use of story characters to work across a paper was current in the comic strips of newer periodicals as well as being completely in the spirit of Ralph Rollington's earlier generation.⁵⁸ Fictionalising aspects of the production process was an alternative way of engaging readers in their commodity, by making them laugh rather than trying to impress or mystify them. Perry Brown rifled his store of illustrated tales and sent volumes of old material up to Gough Square for Allingham 'to cut away at'. He also collected a 'large parcel' of material from American publishers. 'I shall be out in my calculation if you do not make the paper pay,' he wrote encouragingly, but when Allingham asked him for £300 to run an advertising campaign in the *Daily Mail*, he pleaded over-commitment on the stock exchange. He added consolingly, 'You are in much closer touch with your readers. That is a great thing.'⁵⁹ Finally Allingham tried to persuade Peter Keary at Pearson's to take over *The New Boys' Paper* but without success. 'As you can readily understand,' wrote Keary, 'it would be more to our profit to project a new paper of our own and take all the gains (or losses) in it, than enter into a bargain with others.'⁶⁰

The New Boys' Paper fizzled out and with it went Allingham's own editorial ambitions. He wrote one further serial, *A Society Woman's Secret*, for *The New London Journal* but otherwise showed few signs of enthusiasm for his paper. There was no Mab. In January 1909 *The Christian Globe* was also in crisis. Allingham was dutifully involved, offering to find new serial fiction to enliven it, but his diary reveals how gloomy he felt about prospects for the *Globe* and the Allingham family generally.⁶¹ It was lucky for all of them that his continued knocking at the editorial doors of the Amalgamated Press had finally paid off.

Finding an Editor

Allingham's persistent belief in his ability to write stories for boys must have been severely tested by his correspondence with one of the Amalgamated Press's most senior figures, Hamilton Edwards, 'Editor-in-chief *Boy's Friend*, *Boys' Herald*, *Boys' Realm*, *Girls' World*, *Woman's World*, *Jester*, *Union Jack*, *Pluck Library*, *Marvel Library*'. Edwards had rejected one of Allingham's favourite serials *Max the Magnificent*, as 'not strong enough' then adopted tones of outrage when sent something a bit meatier.

I regret that I am unable to make use of the enclosed story which is not at all on our lines. The drunkenness part is unpardonable in my papers, and I could not possibly allow it to go in. The sort of thing I require is a simple, well-written school yarn with plenty of fun and perhaps a little pathos. Gambling may be introduced occasionally, but it must be very nicely done and the habit condemned.

He added,

I would recommend you to read some of our school serials and get a good idea of their style before making another attempt. The work of Mr Henry St John, Mr John Finnemore, Mr Charles Hamilton and others will form excellent models.⁶²

Allingham was by this time (1908) forty-one years old, a fellow-editor (of *The New Boys' Paper* as well as *The New London Journal*) with a steadily increasing record of fiction successfully published by Edwards's own company, the Amalgamated Press. His reply expresses some of the frustration he may have felt at such a patronising as well as sanctimonious rejection.

I am much obliged to you for your helpful letter of the 23rd -

I was aware that my story '*The Boy Who Won Out*' was entirely different from the school yarns you publish and I only sent it on the chance you might be disposed to make a new departure.

By the way with regard to your objection to the drunkenness episode I am tempted to remind you that the most popular school story ever written contains a chapter dealing with the same subject. I refer to the late Archdeacon Farrar's '*Eric*'. This story is very goody-goody but it has run through 36 editions and in chapter 8 the hero gets drunk with far less excuse than my hero has for his slip -

My story was an attempt to describe real school life - However I can do the conventional stuff quite well. My *A Regular Duffer*, *The Captain's Fag* and *Max the Magnificent* are all in this line.⁶³

Hamilton Edwards had previously accepted Allingham's 'The Boys of Oldbridge Towers' but there is nothing to suggest that Allingham did send him any more stories after this exchange.⁶⁴ Both *Max the Magnificent* and *The Boy Who Won Out* were eventually published by the Amalgamated Press, as were all of the stories by Allingham which, at this point, only Aldine or his own *New Boys' Paper* would consider. Once he had found his editor, there was little in his oeuvre that could not be reused. Hamilton Edwards and his colleagues represented an 'imperial' approach to publishing for boys which has sometimes been taken to represent the overall policy of the Amalgamated Press. Fortunately for Allingham, other editors within that organisation found themselves in unobtrusive disagreement and internal commercial competition with their Editor-in-Chief.

As publishing businesses developed into hierarchically organised corporations with internal systems of accountability, writers' careers might be unexpectedly affected by editorial rivalries. In his *Autobiography* (1952), Allingham's younger contemporary, Frank Richards (real name Charles Hamilton) described how disconcerting it was to find himself poached by 'pushful Percy' Griffith, Hamilton Edwards's sub-editor. Richards had arrived at Carmelite House under the impression that he was to discuss his St Jim's series with his then editor H.J. Garrish. First he was surprised to find himself shown into a strange office within the large building and then he was 'bewildered to find himself discussing a new paper to be called the *Gem* with a man he had not seen before.'⁶⁵ He had been redeployed. For a while Richards was allowed to write for both editors (under two pseudonyms) but was then told, by Griffith, that the St Jim's series in *Pluck* was to be amalgamated with the Tom Merry series in the *Gem*.

This almost drove the author to resistance.

He thought it a rotten idea, and disliked mixing up his works in this way. Also it meant a break with Garrish's papers, to which he strongly objected. But, as usual, he was swept away by the torrent. He fancied that Garrish might intervene, and save him from being devoured by the insatiable Percy. But his former editor made no sign: and the pocket-*Dictator* had his way as he always did.⁶⁶

As Richards was being pulled out of Garrish's papers, Allingham was finding his way in. There appears to have been significant internal restructuring within the Amalgamated Press around 1907. Penny paper editorships were being reallocated and departmental boundaries clarified. H J Garrish, the editor responsible, with others, for *Chips*, *Comic Cuts*, *The Butterfly*, *Puck*, *The Jester* was to work with G.H. Cattle and F.C. Cordwell on the low status comics: Hamilton Edwards, H. Havant and Percy Griffith, were to manage the imperial portfolio (*School Friend* etc., listed above).

Letters from Edwards to Lord Northcliffe, preserved in the British Library, allow a glimpse into the seething world of inter-departmental jealousy as Edwards angled to maintain his own standing in his 'Chief's' affections by disparaging his colleagues.⁶⁷ Contributors like Allingham and Richards were some distance away from the rows over seniority, reporting responsibilities, and internal advertising, but as the crucial test of a department's performance was its sales figures, and these were routinely compared with figures achieved in other departments, the pressure to succeed quantitatively would soon be felt by workers in all areas of a paper's production.

Garrish welcomed Allingham flatteringly to his family of papers. He noticed and encouraged Allingham's gift for comedy and provided entirely new opportunities for him to write for – and about – girls as well as boys. Unusually, he took Allingham into his confidence, both about his plans for particular papers and about his frustrations with the corporate style of working.⁶⁸ As a writer Allingham sparkled for Garrish in a way not evident since the first Michael Power stories. He may also have felt specific loyalty to Garrish's department. In 1909 he made a note in his diary 'Saw Garrish. His papers doing well. H.E.'s not.'⁶⁹ Later in that year he would confirm this editor's faith in him by producing a story that doubled the circulation of one of his half-penny papers, *The Butterfly*. Allingham had found his place in the Schemo.

- ¹ Ferris p. 44, S.J. Taylor *The Great Outsiders* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996) p 13, 18-19.
- ² Clark points out the importance of the new technology of photo-engraving in bringing printing costs down and enabling illustration, Clark p. vi.
- ³ Allingham's short stories are very similar to single instalments of the serials, except with benign endings rather than reversals.
- ⁴ Letter 3 (10.2.1893).
- ⁵ *Tit-Bits* 21.12.1895.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ *CG* Xmas 1895, *LJ*, Xmas 1897.
- ⁸ Skills of sub-editor directly relevant but even less visible to readers.
- ⁹ Use this term to cover *CG*, *LJ*, *NBP*, *SM*.
- ¹⁰ 'Tyndall of Kent' *Golden Penny* 22.8.1896.
- ¹¹ *The Guest of Silverdale* (1896, reprint, *A London Arab* (1897, reprint) *The Welcome Ghost* (1902) *Only a Gypsy Queen* (1902, reprint).
- ¹² His boys' paper, *Comrades*, had used old Ralph Rollington material.
- ¹³ *Pearson's Weekly* 5.1.1901.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Power a 'strong' name in popular literature cf. Dare. Both surnames also used in music-hall.
- ¹⁷ Allingham possessive of Michael Power's name – Letter 144 (26.5.1908) in Appendix III suggests that he complained to an editor at D.C. Thomson about another of their authors using the same name.
- ¹⁸ Cf. 'Miss Maggie Macfee', *Puck* 1909.
- ¹⁹ *PW* 12.1.1901.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ *PW* 19.1.1901 & 26.1.1901.
- ²² Identity of *PW* editor not known by me. Allingham on distantly friendly terms with Peter Keary, Pearson's business partner.
- ²³ Home address: 5, Broughton Road, Ealing, London W.
- ²⁴ Letter 36 (5.3.1905).
- ²⁵ Tried selling a story to the A.P. monthly magazine *Red* in 1909 but it was returned.
- ²⁶ The exchange of letters was conducted in English but the request for magazines suggests that Allingham could at least read German.
- ²⁷ Ferris p. 60.
- ²⁸ Letter 5 (16.3.1904).
- ²⁹ Letter 6 (2.6.1904).
- ³⁰ *The Czar's Chief Spy* was published in *Yes or No* 1905. Correspondence exists with its editor, Isabel Thorne, and her colleague, Agnes Carruthers. Rejected by Alex Shand at D.C. Thomson & Co., letter 99 (11.12.1906).
- ³¹ Founded in 1898, circulation approaching 1,000,000.
- ³² Letter 152 (4.8.1909).
- ³³ J.A. Hammerton at the *London Magazine* offered £8 8s 0d for a 4,000 word story, letter 95 (22.11.1906).
- ³⁴ Letter 27 (10.1.1905).
- ³⁵ Letter 28 (17.1.1905). Letter incidentally contradicts claim that one of the Harmsworths' achievements was to pay on acceptance – e.g. made by Taylor p. 21.
- ³⁶ Letter 61 (27.2.1906).
- ³⁷ Letter 88 (3.11.1906).
- ³⁸ Deborah Wynne *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) p. 9.
- ³⁹ Appearance of respectability more important than actual change – e.g. *Devil* later acceptable to papers designed for juvenile public and also to family papers such as *The People's Journal* once the severed head in the first instalment had been replaced with a photograph.
- ⁴⁰ Letter 89 (12.11.1906).
- ⁴¹ In his introduction to *East Lynne* (Canada: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002) Andrew Maunder writes 'the genre was disturbing because of its tendency to undermine the Victorian ideas of reality whereby truth and human nature appeared knowable and predictable'.
- ⁴² Letter 34 (14.2.1905). Letter 49 (18.10.1905).
- ⁴³ A.S. Burrage, formerly an editor for George Emmett's *The Young Englishman*. The next generation of the Burrage family included A.H. Burrage, A.M. Burrage and Rita Coatts, all school story writers.
- ⁴⁴ Aldine introduced popular futuristic tales, a category Allingham attempted only twice.
- ⁴⁵ *True Blue* editor was initially A.C. Murray then his brother C.G. Murray. Both were writers of stories for boys.
- ⁴⁶ *True Blue* Dec 1904 no 255.
- ⁴⁷ Letter 35 (n.d. Feb 1905).
- ⁴⁸ Letter 34 (14.2.1905).
- ⁴⁹ Letter 35 (n.d. Feb 1905).

⁵⁰ Letter 105 (2.2.1907).

⁵¹ Three 'Duffer Detective' stories in *True Blue* 1905, later greatly extended in *Film Fun* 1922.

⁵² Answers Ltd and associated companies had merged into Harmsworth Brothers Ltd and then, in 1901, became the Amalgamated Press.

⁵³ The same address as that used by Charles Shurey's publications.

⁵⁴ Probably a member of the family that included both Edward Viles of *Black Bess* fame and Walter Viles who had written for Ralph Rollington's *Boys' World* as Brenchley Beaumont.

⁵⁵ *True Blue* had four-colour covers in 1904-5 but by 1906 was blue only. Cf. the AP's *Puck* 'the one and only coloured comic paper.' 'Don't stick to old fashioned penny papers – order *Puck* today.' (advt in *Butterfly* 1906).

⁵⁶ Letter 59 (21.2.1907).

⁵⁷ 'Crag Castle College' *True Blue* Christmas 1904.

⁵⁸ E.g. the exploits of Adolphus the Office Boy in Aldine's *British Boys' Paper* 1888.

⁵⁹ Letters 103 & 104 (Jan 1907)

⁶⁰ Letter 115 (2.3.1907).

⁶¹ Diary 6.1.1909.

⁶² Letter 138 (23.4.1908).

⁶³ Letter 139 (n.d.).

⁶⁴ Later stories by Allingham in the *Boys' Friend* Library were published after Edwards's departure from the company.

⁶⁵ Richards p. 27.

⁶⁶ Richards p 28.

⁶⁷ BL ADD MS62182A

⁶⁸ Diary 6.1.1909.

⁶⁹ Diary 20.1.1909.

Chapter Five

The Fiction Factory and its Customers

Puck, The Butterfly and The Jester, 1907 – 1910

In the periodical market finding an appreciative editor (or, in this case, editors) signifies the finding of a readership. H.J. Garrish and his younger colleague, F.C. (Fred) Cordwell, were instrumental in introducing Allingham's work to a newly conceptualised audience. The nineteenth-century interest in boyhood as a crucial life stage, developed in the twentieth century to an interest in adolescence.¹ The publication of *Adolescence* by G. Stanley Hall promoted new discussion of the psychological characteristics of young people in the period after they had left school and before they were accepted as adult (i.e. entitled to an adult wage).² The interest of the mass-market publishing companies in this newly identified group was commercial rather than psychological or sociological. School leavers of the working class went immediately into jobs which, though often casual and low paid, usually left them with a little spare spending money, even after they had handed the bulk of their wage packet to their mothers. Allingham's new editors proved especially skilled at developing families of papers that appealed to working-class adolescents of both sexes as well as to some older readers. In the years before the First World War Allingham was of material assistance in providing the fiction that caught the imaginations of these young wage earners.

H.J. Garrish

H.J. (Harold) Garrish, is described in the official history of the Harmsworth Amalgamated Press as having had ‘a flair for what the public – particularly the younger public – wanted’.³ He had joined the Harmsworths’ Pandora Publishing Company (dedicated to ‘clean, wholesome fun and good drawing’) as an editorial assistant in 1891 and eventually became a director of the Amalgamated Press with complete charge of the humorous journals. As he stayed with the company throughout its changes of ownership until his death in 1956, he may even have been its longest serving employee in an age of long service.⁴

When Allingham first met Garrish he was working as an editor with G.H. Cante on *Chips*, *Comic Cuts*, *The Butterfly*, *Puck* and *The Jester*. These were the ha’penny dreadfullers, the Harmsworths’ comic-and-story papers; highly successful but low status hybrid publications using a standardised format of alternate pictures and text. Their intended readership was young adults of both sexes and those whose reading skills were weak.⁵ Readers were encouraged to buy one almost every day:

Tuesday: ('Nuff said. You’ve bought *Comic Cuts* already.) Wednesday: Buy the *Butterfly* ½d. The dainty little journal printed on green paper. Thursday: Get *Chips* ½d Your old favourite. Friday: Purchase *Puck* 1d. The one and only coloured comic paper.

When *The Jester* was added to the group, it was twice as long as the others, cost 1d, and was described as ‘the weekend edition of *Comic Cuts*’.⁶ Borrowing, swapping and sharing were editorially encouraged and, although the primary appeal was to the young, Allingham was assured that he need not let this inhibit his writing as there were also older readers.⁷

Allingham had had some short stories accepted into *Puck* by its chief sub-editor, Herbert Hinton, before that paper was redesigned for the younger audience. His first meeting with Garrish, however, was to discuss a possible serial for *The Jester*. Afterwards Garrish wrote:

I am very glad you were able to grasp my idea so well. 'The Three Friends Together' is exactly the thing I have been trying to impress upon authors for some time past, but which you alone have been able to grasp. The absence of slang and any suggestion of overdoing it makes the story read very naturally and very interesting. You should proceed along these lines and should clear up your mysteries etc as you go along so as to simply have the three friends on their travels and adventures. One point that is excellent about your story is that there is no straining after effect. I should get them out of England as soon as you can and just dwell a little more on the characteristics of each. Work in funny replies and funny situations where you possibly can [...] I think if you go on as well as you have begun that your adventures abroad in forests, jungles and at sea should prove very good reading and make a very successful story.

He added, by hand, 'Though of course the proof of popularity lies not with me but with the readers.'⁸

Frank Richards described himself as an author who 'never could write anything to his own satisfaction unless it was also to the satisfaction of the person for whom it was written [...] he could only unfold in the sunshine'.⁹ His *St Jim*'s series had been written for Garrish in 'a very cheery and happy atmosphere.' Garrish, he said, was an editor 'who was pleased to express satisfaction in the most agreeable way, with never a word to which the most touchy author could have taken reasonable or unreasonable exception'.¹⁰ Allingham's brief diary notes for the first months of 1909 show him studying his new editor's moods, evidently well aware that this was a commercially crucial relationship. Garrish, he recorded, 'opened his heart'. 'Did not seem quite so keen. Still very friendly.' 'Saw Garrish – He has started *Maggie* and wants no 2 by

Monday – Gave me the impression that he would give me more work if I could do it – Must work him for all he's worth this year.'¹¹

1909 was the year that Em Allingham decided that they were to move out of London. Ralph Rollington's daughter Grace, their favourite cousin, had been established in Pope's Hall, a seventeenth-century Essex farmhouse, by her 'stage door Johnny' lover and Allingham's parents and older brother were also living in the county.¹² Em had begun contributing to the family income in 1906, writing 'charming' fairy tales for children, and Allingham, his fiction-sales apparently assured, seems to have had no hesitation in resigning from *The London Journal* and putting her plan into action.¹³ Later, when he and she were both supplying London editors with regular serials, and when friends such as William McFee or George Mant Hearn or Allingham's younger brother Claude, came and used the space and quiet of their large Essex house to do their own work, Allingham described it as his 'little fiction factory'.¹⁴

Allingham's supplier relationship with Garrish's papers was initially based on his own expertise in writing for boys and Garrish's ability to appreciate and develop Allingham's flair for comedy. *Comrades True*, his first contribution to Garrish's family of papers was published in *The Jester* in the autumn of 1907. Will Holt, ex-Duffer, no longer schoolboy nor detective, but jungle explorer, was its lead character and Garrish worked closely with Allingham to ensure its suitability:

Instal of '*Comrades True*' (this is the name I have given your story) that you left with me today will do. Try and work in a little more fun in the dialogue in future. Whenever you see a chance branch out into comic business without of course overdoing it. The coolness of Will is well accentuated. But please don't mention pubs or alcoholic liquors except wine occasionally. Our heroes always keep so fit they never drink. Also don't use foreign terms of address etc such as 'senor'. Keep everything plain English 'Mr.' or 'Sir' etc. [...] You will notice that I am following your yarn very carefully as I think we shall score a success with it.¹⁵

Allingham was instructed to ‘work a good striking subject for a picture in every instal.’¹⁶ He was pressed for copy – often to be delivered by the following day. Then, in September, came a new set of instructions:

I want you to close up ‘Comrades True’ in the next instalment as we have a new serial to produce that we cannot delay and we wish to try your three chums in *Puck* in a series of complete stories of three thousand words per week. The *Puck* stories should be refined and the reverse of slangy. Also no mention of strong drink or pubs; more like the old *Boy’s Own Paper* type of adventure yarns.¹⁷

Editors in the mass-market, anxious for productivity, often treat their authors as if they possess inexhaustible supplies of inventiveness. Although Allingham too can be observed acting in this way in his role as an editor, as a writer he grumbled occasionally at the difficulty of spinning out material.¹⁸ In this case he appears to have sent Garrish an entirely new story idea instead of more adventure yarns. Luckily Garrish was delighted:

Your yarn of Potts is quite excellent. I suppose it is a take off on our ‘Monk Mortimer, The Man with the Thousand Millions’. We had better call the series ‘Bank Baltimore, The Man with the Million Thousands’ so as to bring it home to the readers.¹⁹

‘Monk Mortimer’ was a fictional character from *The Jester*. When that paper had been part of Hamilton Edwards’s editorial group, Monk was a gung-ho, xenophobic adventurer apt to refer to the lower classes, especially if foreign, as ‘alien scum’, ‘whipped curs’ and ‘human animals’.²⁰ Later, in 1906, when editorial control of the *Jester* was transferred to Cantle and Garrish, Mortimer was re-presented more as a Robin Hood figure, righting the wrongs of the (British) poor. Tales of his heroic adventures ran week after week and he was obviously considered to be a sufficiently well-established personality to be used in editorial advertisements: ‘Rockefeller,

Vanderbilt, Monk Mortimer won't need an extra 5/- but do you?'²¹ Allingham's parody rich man was eventually called Sport Monkimore and appeared in *The Jester* the following summer. Sport was an unashamed drone, lolling around on oriental divans and terrified by a mock-up of the sort of thieves' kitchen that would have had Monk flinging racist insults and spoiling for a fight. The central character and narrator of Allingham's comic series was Sport Monkimore's employee, 'his Trusted Body Servant, Gaston Gaters':

When Sport Monkimore, the Man with a Million Thousands, secured my services, he made me understand very clearly the nature of my duties.

'Mr Gaters,' he said, with a yawn, at our first interview, 'do you happen to have any brains?'

I smiled and explained that brains were my speciality.

'I'm glad of that, because you'll need 'em if you want to keep your job,' he went on. 'I'm bored; I'm always bored. You've got to amuse me. Think of something.'²²

Gaters was no Scheherazade, however. He ensured that his employer was provided with new numbers of *The Jester* 'price 1d', but even that could not beguile Monkimore indefinitely. The Man with a Million Thousands had much to learn. After Gaters had persuaded him to ward off ennui by dressing as a highwayman to hold up the Chelmsford coach, by shooting a tiger skin rug under the impression it had escaped from Bengal and, most terrifying of all, by standing for election as a pro-suffrage candidate, Sport could take no more. He pleaded with Gaters to accept ten thousand pounds and leave. "'Don't think I am dissatisfied with you, dear friend. Your ideas are great, colossal, but I need repose Gaston, I need repose.'"²³ Gaters belongs to the broad comic tradition of servants who are cleverer and more worldly-wise than their employers but know they are required to disguise this "'I'm not going to do any thinking," says Monkimore, "That's what you're paid for." '²⁴

Comedy was the staple ingredient of Garrish's magazines at this point and he seized upon this evidence of Allingham's talent with enthusiasm. In his letter accepting 'Potts' (as the story was initially called), he also requested 'Comic stories of a broad but natural style for the other three ½d papers. They should be 2,200 words and either single stories or series'. In addition he wondered whether Allingham might like to contribute to one of the *Jester's* regular features. 'If you ever fancy doing some Kenneth Muggs in the style you might turn us out some of about 2,500 words.'²⁵ There were standard series in the comic papers that were the product of several authors – and sometimes of the editors as well.²⁶ They were held together by their central characters, in this case the 'screamingly funny' Kenneth Mugg and his 'famous' pup detective.²⁷ Gaters does claim Mugg as an acquaintance but such references by fictional characters to one another, irrespective of authorship, were part of the illusion of this comic world.

The Butterfly

Allingham's next significant collaboration with Garrish was a serial, *The Lights of London Town*, written for *The Butterfly* in 1908. This featured Billy, a Dick Whittington figure, finding his way by comic adventure from the country to the city and finally making good in business – helped by luck and a Pitman's Shorthand course as well as by his own qualities of integrity and ingenuity.

The Butterfly was the paper where Allingham's writing flourished. It had been founded just after *Puck* in 1904 and was the most feminine in personality, particularly from 1906-1907 onwards.²⁸ Its keynote character was 'Flossie, the up-to-date School Girl'. Flossie had a regular space on the back cover in which she regaled her friend

Gertie with the different ways in which she met boys. All the males she met wanted to cuddle her and Flossie was never adverse to a squeeze or a kiss despite her disingenuous protests. So, even when events went comically awry, this was how every brief encounter ended. Both boy and girl readers could respond to Flossie: girls because she flattered their own desirability; boys because she seemed approachable and appreciative as well as attractive. The adventures of flirty, frivolous girls like Flossie were stock features in this family of papers. *The Jester* (aiming at a slightly older readership) had 'Pretty Peggy, the Girl Behind the Counter' and 'Kitty, the Chorus Girl' and during World War 1 *Merry & Bright* introduced 'Madcap Molly, the Munitions Maker'.

Women as heroines are extremely rare in Allingham's writing before 1908. 'Our Madge' has been mentioned and there are a handful of proactive female characters in the redemptive stories. In 'The Garden of Glory', for instance, a roomful of men are confounded by the discovery that an anonymous, best-selling author whom they had planned to honour is a woman working in a East London boys' club. And in 'The Education of Mr. Smith' a struggling lady bookseller is saved from penury by a male customer but gives him a literary education in return.²⁹ Wicked women are central to *A Devil of a Woman* and to *The Czar's Chief Spy* but, until Allingham wrote his unusual, and apparently unappreciated serial, *A Society Woman's Secret*, for *The New London Journal* in 1908, virtually all the action in his fiction is primarily conducted by males. His involvement with *The Butterfly* changed this.

A Society Woman's Secret might have initiated a new type of writing for families. It included the feelings of grandparents as well as the worries of parents over the

prospects of their teenage children and the risky attempts by those children to take responsibility for their lives. These are included within the usual plot parameters of false accusation, misunderstandings and lost inheritance but what differentiates *A Society Woman's Secret* from Allingham's later dramatic serials is the attention paid to each of the generations. It is essentially a family story – not unlike a J.F. Smith in the previous generation or a soap opera in our own – but it found no market in Allingham's lifetime and was never reprinted. His move to the comics meant that his main characters would always be young to suit the intended (if not the actual) readership. The next serial Allingham wrote with an active heroine at its centre was *Plucky Polly Perkins*, written for *The Butterfly* 1908-1909. In contrast to *A Society Woman's Secret* this was one of Allingham's most popular creations and was reprinted at least five times during his life.

'Plucky Polly Perkins' was Allingham's first full-length heroine and was well suited to his new readership. Her story began in the Christmas double number of 1908 and was subtitled 'a story of Pathos, Fun and Adventure, with a bit of Love-making Thrown In'. In illustrations Polly is as attractive as Flossie and men and boys regularly fall in love with her. She is charming to them in return without committing herself or allowing 'liberties'. Polly and her brother and sister are the privately-educated children of artistic, middle class parents. When the story opens they face destitution. Polly plans to take action. "What is the use of having an expensive education at Miss Montgomerie's high class establishment for young ladies if I can't clean windows?" she asks her genteel sister.³⁰ The children have been orphaned and Polly decides to invest their

modest legacies in setting up a sweet shop. When the headmaster of her brother's school, St Bede's, arrives to expostulate – and even to threaten – Polly is unperturbed:

‘Can I get you anything, sir?’ she said demurely.

‘No, my dear young lady, I think not,’ he replied pleasantly; ‘but there is just a word or two I should like to say, if you will allow me. I am Dr Beverley, Headmaster of St Bede's College.’

‘Yes, sir,’ answered Polly.

‘Your brother is a pupil at the college.’

‘Yes.’

‘And a very promising pupil. I should be sorry, Miss Perkins, deeply sorry, if he had to leave.’

‘So should I,’ rejoined Polly calmly; ‘but I don't think it will be necessary. Of course the fees are high, but I am doing very well here, and hope to do better when I get my new stock in. You will get your money all right.’

Dr Beverley coughed.

‘I was not thinking of that,’ he said, a little awkwardly. ‘The fact is, my dear young lady,’ he went on, ‘you have, by opening this shop, upset quite a number of people, and among them the parents of several of my pupils.’

Polly opened her eyes in innocent surprise.

‘I am very sorry, but I dare say they will get over it,’ she observed presently.³¹

The St Bede's parents are not only upset because of the taint of trade but because they fear, justifiably, that their sons will all fall in love with Polly. The Headmaster asks Polly to show ‘a little coolness, a little maidenly reserve’ but Polly has her own methods:

‘When he comes to your study tomorrow you can tell him that I am not really cross with him and that if he is a good boy and minds his lessons I will perhaps think about marrying him when he grows up.’

‘My dear young lady!’ protested the schoolmaster, at a loss for words.

‘Oh, it's always best to be gentle with them!’ explained Polly wisely. ‘I've had such a lot of little boys fall in love with me, and I always tell them that. It comforts them and makes them work.’³²

Polly ends by persuading the Headmaster to give her an order for £20 worth of cigars. Her confrontations with figures of authority through the ensuing series are varied and successful. She routs a Major-General, slaps a policeman who harasses her for a kiss and, when the workpeople go out on strike, she proves equally able to stand up to a

bullying mill owner or an incensed lynch mob. Class issues are explicit in this story and Polly's political sympathies are with the workers: 'Although her father had been an artist she had lived in a working-class neighbourhood all her life and all her sympathies were with the wage-earners.'³³ She offers advice:

'If you want to beat Tom Mullins, you'll have to fight shy of the public house and keep your brass in your pockets. It's brass that's going to win this fight, and nothing else. Collect all you can and hold on to it for when the pinch comes. You may lay your life that is what old Tom's doing. He isn't ramping round, and playing the giddy goat generally. He is getting ready for battle and that's what you ought to be doing. Now go home and give your wives all the money you've got left to take care of for you. Then cut down your baccy, and go in and win, and good luck to you.'³⁴

Tom Mullins was the local mill-owner, not an out-and-out villain but still a dangerous antagonist. Everything about *Plucky Polly Perkins* and *The Butterfly* could be used to differentiate these papers from the boys' weekly papers as edited (at this time) by Percy Griffith and Hamilton Edwards and described, thirty years later, by George Orwell.

Sex is completely taboo [...] Occasionally girls enter the stories, and very rarely there is something approaching a mild flirtation, but it is always entirely in the spirit of clean fun. A boy and a girl enjoy going for bicycle rides together – that is all it ever amounts to. Kissing, for instance, would be regarded as 'soppy'. Even the bad boys are presumed to be completely sexless.³⁵

Kissing is almost the *raison d'être* for *Butterfly* characters such as Flossie, and when Polly meets Will Holt, she is as seriously attracted to him as Joe Mullins, the mill-owner's son is to her. Teenage sexual longing simmers throughout this story and is not always treated as comic. As this group of papers developed – their growth accelerated by the popularity of Allingham's dramatic fiction – characters regularly fall in love, propose, marry and have children. 'Newlywed' jokes abound; bad women are treacherous seducers, bad men beat women and indulge in sadistic fantasies of domination that stop just short of rape.³⁶

Orwell also complains that ‘the working classes only enter into the *Gem* or the *Magnet* as comics or semi-villains (race-course touts etc.). As for class-friction, trade unionism, strikes, slumps, unemployment, Fascism and Civil War – not a mention.’³⁷ Whether or not that was true of *The Gem* and *The Magnet* it was not true of the comics. Social issues were directly addressed in Allingham’s *Plucky Polly Perkins, Perkins and Co, Ruby Wray* (*Jester* 1909) and *Ruby Wray in London* (*Jester* 1910) as well as in stories written slightly earlier by H.J. Garrish for *The Jester*.³⁸ True working-class heroes and heroines (as distinct from those who appear to be working-class but are actually gentry) are present throughout Allingham’s fiction though they are usually of secondary importance, taking noble supporting roles rather than centre stage – at least until the First World War years. Willingness to work manually is a touchstone of character and the middle-class heroes and heroines are often shown as shocked when they realize how hard such work is. *The Lights of London Town*, Allingham’s first serial for *The Butterfly* dramatised some of the difficulties for young people in finding work and the occasional hostility of others to their efforts.

Orwell’s observations were made in an essay written in 1939, almost thirty years later than the period under discussion here. Although Orwell may have believed himself to be commenting on the situation in 1910 as well as in 1939 (it is part of his indictment), in fact there had been big changes in the relative positions of the papers. By 1939 *Puck* and *The Butterfly* were obviously intended for children, whereas in 1909 they were available to the same age and social groups who might also purchase *The Gem* and *The Magnet*. The existence of internal, editorial rivalry within the Amalgamated Press (as demonstrated by Griffith’s poaching of Frank Richards from

Garrish, and Garrish's welcoming of Allingham who had been turned down by Edwards, Griffith's departmental head) impacted on the choice offered to readers. This may not have been entirely detrimental. As more and more of the small-scale publishers were forced into liquidation by the Schemo Magnifico, the A.P. was colonizing an ever-large proportion of the mass-market publishing field. This aspect had not altered by 1939 when Orwell wrote 'It appears that if you feel the need of a fantasy life [...] you can only have it by delivering yourself over, mentally, to people like Lord Camrose'.³⁹ That there should be internal disagreement and discontinuities within such monoliths may even have been advantageous. Even before the First World War, the comics were benefiting from the Chief's relative lack of interest in their activities.⁴⁰ What really mattered, however, was readers' endorsement of the conflicting editorial choices. As Garrish had reminded Allingham, 'The proof of popularity lies not with me but with the readers.'⁴¹ Comparative internal circulation figures are rare but those for 1909-1910, when Allingham was writing both *Plucky Polly Perkins* and his first drama-story *Driven from Home* in *The Butterfly*, reveal that *The Butterfly's* figures rose and overtook those of *The Gem*, which declined.⁴²

Manipulating the Market

Readers' choices fuelled the editorial rivalry and could set a publishing agenda. The editors, unsurprisingly, expended a significant amount of effort (and money) discovering what readers liked – whilst simultaneously assuring them that they did like it. 'You will be glad to hear,' wrote the editor of *The Butterfly*, in early January 1909, 'that our new chum, Plucky Polly Perkins, has speedily won her way into the hearts of

our readers and is quite one of the most popular favourites we have ever had.’⁴³ Editorial techniques for sampling readers’ opinions had moved on somewhat from the days of ‘try it on the office boy’ or ‘write and tell your editor what you think’.⁴⁴ This was approached rather more systematically. Readers’ tasks were made more specific. They were asked, for instance, to list their three favourite features and were rewarded for doing so – with a paint box, five shillings or even ten. This was used to inform the data gathered from the constant monitoring of circulation figures.

The Butterfly’s spectacular rise in circulation 1909 – 1910 was not, therefore, attributed to Allingham’s Polly, despite all her pretty ways and social conscience, but to his melodramatic serial *Driven from Home*. The identification of *Driven from Home’s* popularity with readers ensured that its formula was replicated again and again over the next five years, as new comic-and-story papers were developed to extend and repeat *The Butterfly’s* success. And, from this point onwards, as soon as one of Allingham’s major new serials – e.g. *The Lights of Home* (*Jester* 1910-11), *The Girl Outcast* (*Favorite Comic* 1911-12), *Romney Hall* (*Butterfly* 1912-14) – was underway, readers’ opinions would be canvassed specifically on that feature. When *Human Nature* commenced in *The Butterfly* November 1913 the inducement went up: ‘£5 – Grand Cash Offer!’ was offered for opinions of *Human Nature* written on a postcard. ‘Do not imagine that good writing or spelling are necessary. All I want is your honest opinion.’⁴⁵

Positive results were fed back to the readers as well as being used internally. A reader, E.W., wrote to the editor of *The Jester* to say that *The Lights of Home* was ‘the

best tale I have ever read'.⁴⁶ The editor thanked him publicly and hoped he would write again soon. The editor of *Puck*, who had expended six boxes of paints, thanked

All his many readers for their valuable letters sent to him regarding the contents of *Puck*. You will be pleased to learn that 'Val Fox', 'Tom-All-Alone' and 'The Smart Girl of the Family' will continue in *Puck* until further notice as a result of your representations.⁴⁷

Although this was phrased to foster readers' sense of ownership of their paper, and thus their loyalty to it, the editor's response also functioned as a collective reassurance. *The Smart Girl of the Family* was in fact *Plucky Polly Perkins* to which the editor was already, to some extent, committed through the ownership of second serial rights. It would have been financially disadvantageous (though not impossible) for him to pull it if readers' letters had indicated dissatisfaction.⁴⁸ These editors were attempting persuading their audience to like what they were being offered.

Survey results were also fed back to the author but only in a generalised form to urge greater productivity. 'We are right out of *Lights*. As the story seems popular I am letting it rip. More Monday please.'⁴⁹ What this information was not intended to do was give the author any increased economic sense of his own worth. When R. Chance, of *The Jester*, wrote to Allingham to update him on readers' views about *The Lights of Home*, he was bullish:

In reply to your letter I have found that 'The Lights of Home' is extremely popular with my readers and only last week it attained a high place in a competition. Under the circumstances and considering that the paper is doing well I do not want to finish it up yet, so please continue with it until you hear from me to the contrary.⁵⁰

Allingham was less than delighted. *Lights of Home* had already been running ten months. Its hero, heroine and villain had each died and been revived several times and he was clearly running out of ideas. Also he had, in the interim, successfully negotiated

a pay rise from one to two guineas per thousand words for new Amalgamated Press work. *Lights* was still being paid at the old rate. Evidently he tried suggesting to Chance that his new work on *Lights* should be paid at the new rate or he would follow his own inclinations and bring it to a close. The editor was horrified:

I could not pay such a price as you suggest for the story which has been running such a length of time. You started the story at the rate of one guinea a thousand and it has always been usual for authors to complete yarns at the original rate.

As you have left the instalments until the last moment - to finish the story up in one instalment would inconvenience me considerably, as it would not give me the slightest chance to make a fresh arrangement. Therefore I should be glad if you could see your way to doing for me another ten or eleven thousand words of this story so that I can start another yarn after it. Otherwise I should be compelled to have the end of the story written by another author, which besides being a difficult task would be a great pity.⁵¹

Allingham capitulated and *The Lights of Home* ran on for a full fifty episodes, paid for at the original rate. Exchanges of this sort spell out who really ran the fiction factory.

Readers played their part, but readers who were sufficiently organized and confident to write 'sensible and thoughtful' letters on the chance of winning a box of paints or even £5 were probably a minority group. None of their letters reached the author, all were mediated by the editors and none seem to have been considered of sufficient importance to be retained in the company archives. It is therefore a piece of good fortune to come across an eye-witness account of a small group of Allingham's readers selected, initially at least, on social scientific principles.

Boy Life and Labour

Arnold Freeman, a social observer working in the tradition of Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree, was concerned to investigate and demonstrate the waste of talent that occurred, he believed, when boys left elementary school aged fourteen and went

straight out to work. The six or seven shillings a week they could earn in a succession of menial jobs was of instant benefit to the income of their struggling households and Freeman acknowledged this. What concerned him was the lack of informed guidance and possibilities of further training available to these boys. Apprenticeships, even then, were for the few and fortunate in slightly higher income brackets. Freeman's study was based in Birmingham, a city with an exceptionally high number of opportunities for artisan training. Even in Birmingham there was little hope of advancement for the unskilled. Freeman saw the majority of boys approaching their twenties, when they would expect to be paid at a man's rate, either being turned off from their boys' jobs with a lifetime of casual work and unemployment ahead or continuing in unskilled labour for the rest of their working lives.

Boy Life and Labour: the Manufacture of Inefficiency was commissioned by Birmingham Town Council. Freeman lived, for the duration, in the city's Woodbrooke Settlement and worked closely with Birmingham's schools, its Labour Exchange, Aid Societies and Children's Care Committees. He started his survey in 1912 with one hundred and thirty four boys in their seventeenth year, selected because they had attempted four or more jobs since leaving school. He completed with seventy one, the remainder having either lied about their ages or simply disappeared in the course of the investigation. His survey therefore excluded both what he termed the 'superior' boy, on course for higher paid and better class manual work, who tended to remain in single jobs, and also boys employed in such casual ways (street trading, for instance) that they did not use the Labour Exchange. 'The bulk of boys selected,' concluded Freeman, 'are, I believe, typical of the mass of uneducative Boy Labour in Birmingham.'⁵²

As well as asking the boys about their work and education Freeman visited their homes, met their families where possible, asked some to keep diaries and had extended conversations with others, if they were willing. He found them lamentably ignorant (as those who research the young so often do) and concluded that picture palaces, music halls, cheap literature, football and their own street culture were their sole sources of pleasure, imaginative stimulus and ideas:

The senses of the adolescent, now open at their widest, are opened not to Nature and Art, but to cheap and tawdry pantomime; his kindling imagination is not nourished with fine, heroic literature, but with the commonest rubbish in print.⁵³

A significant proportion of this common rubbish was supplied by Allingham.

Freeman quotes the literary preferences of six boys as typical. Their chosen periodicals were not the imperialist penny papers so often the focus of modern research but Garrish and Cordwell's comics – *Chips*, *The Butterfly*, *Merry and Bright*, *Dreadnought* and Griffith's *Gem* and *Marvel*.⁵⁴ 'These,' said Freeman, 'can be bought second hand very cheaply indeed; they are freely circulated from one boy to another, and are read to the exclusion of almost all other literature, except perhaps Sporting and Police News in the *Mail*.'⁵⁵ He offered some typical titles and synopses extracted from these favourite papers at the time of his survey. They include one of Allingham's most popular serial stories, *Mother Love*, which was running in *Fun and Fiction* during 1912-13.⁵⁶ Additionally Freeman's brief notes gleaned from 'some of the friendly talks I have had with the more communicative of these boys,' revealed that boy H.H. was reading *Chips* and *The Butterfly*. He would therefore have been following Allingham's serial *Ashamed of his Mother* (*Butterfly* 1912-13) as would boys M.C. and C.W. Boy K.L., who bought the *Gem* and borrowed the *Dreadnought*, would have been about to

read a reprint of Allingham's *Max the Magnificent* (Dreadnought 1913). Boy M.C., who enjoyed *Merry and Bright* as well as *The Butterfly*, would have finished Allingham's *Girl Without a Home* in 1911 and gone on to read his next serial for that paper, *The Girl Who Married a Scoundrel*.

Three Boy Readers: Birmingham

Freeman's descriptions of H.H., M.C. and C.W., the three boys who read *The Butterfly* are quoted here at length as portrayals of actual individuals known to have read issues of the papers in which Allingham's stories were appearing.

H.H. was classified by Freeman in group A of his Class Two, 'Boys apparently destined for unskilled work who were fitted for skilled work':

The home of H.H. is broken up. His father had, for some years before the birth of this boy, been getting such broken employment and beggarly income that he left home when he knew this fresh burden was coming into his life and died soon after. The mother now lives with a married sister and helps support the household by charring and baby-minding. The boy has been looked after from infancy by kind-hearted neighbours, who suggested that their not having the authority of the boy's father was the cause of H.H.'s instability. However that may be, H.H. has had a changeful career. There are signs that he wanted to learn, and his jobs have mainly been in the same line of work. He went to evening classes for a short period but abandoned them as too burdensome. He left his first job of errands because he didn't like it; was discharged from a second job of errands because a big waiter was scratched but he declares he didn't do it; he left a third job of errands because he could not learn anything (so he says); he next tried to learn chasing but left through shortage of work; then spoon-polishing and brass-polishing, and again spoon-polishing, leaving in each case for what he thought would be a better job. He is now polishing at a silversmith's, and when I asked him why or how he got this last job, he replied, 'I hadn't got any other. You take the first one that comes round to you.' That seems to express with fair accuracy the purposeless nature of the boy's career and the careers of great numbers of boys like him. He appears to have deteriorated since he left school, is pale and weak-looking and seems feeble in character and intellect. This boy will probably never be fit for good work again.⁵⁷

Freeman foresaw a bleak future for this young *Butterfly* reader and others like him, as they became ‘ordinary unskilled workers’:

They will use their hands and not their heads; they will in most cases do work which you or I could learn in as few months or even a few days; they will in most cases take low-skilled jobs in factories, in association with machines or as assistants to skilled workers. Their earnings will in almost all cases be well under 30/- a week and insufficient to maintain themselves and their wives and children in comfort, even in decency! They will inhabit the overcrowded areas that fill the central parts of Birmingham, and perpetuate their own inefficiency in the weak bodies and slow brains of their children.⁵⁸

H.J. Garrish had published a story of his own in *The Jester* which dramatised his sympathetic understanding of the hopelessness felt by even the relatively fortunate thirty shillings per week workers as they reached their mid 20s with no further prospect of advancement:

And I am a clerk and I earn thirty bob a week and what’s more I haven’t the chance of rising higher than that. There’s thousands of chaps like me. We go away and dream for a fortnight at Herne Bay or Margate of what we would like to do or like to be: of some girl we would like perhaps to be able, to dare, to look forward to – to asking to be our own one day. But for most of us that can be nothing more than a dream [...]

We are educated up to knowing that we must not look for anything beyond a living wage for oneself [...] I am a thirty bob a week man, subject to a week’s notice and when that comes it’s Rowton House before me or the workhouse.⁵⁹

But even the situation of a ‘thirty bob a week’ clerk was beyond hope for Freeman’s other two young *Butterfly* readers. M.C. was consigned to Class 3, ‘apparently destined for unemployables’:

This boy was at Marston Green Cottage Homes for four and a half years and, though a rough sort of fellow, he was – the Superintendent says – ‘a sharp boy in school.’ He was in Standard VI at the Elementary School afterwards, and satisfactory in character. In physique he was ‘rather poor, undersized.’ The whole of M.C.’s family combined could not recollect all of his jobs, but the main ones are:- helping in a shop, errands, power press, polishing, errands, labouring, van, errands. His present job is one of straightening wire out at a large brass factory and he asserts that he means to stick to it. The boy’s father was a glass-beveller who died of consumption eight years ago. M.C. alleges as the main reason for leaving his jobs that his mother

has been poor and didn't bother as long as he brought home the money. This is perhaps true, but as one of his brothers remarked of him, 'He's changed because he likes change,' and this seems to be the most accurate diagnosis of the case. He is not at all dejected but is a merry, irrepressible youth. He seems constitutionally unstable, and irresponsible. His intelligence is low and his physique not good – to say nothing of his smallness.⁶⁰

C.W., the third *Butterfly* reader, was placed firmly among the 'wastrels.' All that Freeman learned from the boys in this category only convinced him of 'their worthlessness from an industrial or social point of view':

Concerning C.W.'s jobs I have no reliable record. He himself told me: - Tube factory (one year); looking after stables etc (two years); militia (six months); and now casting. The Labour Exchange record gives him two jobs neither of which he mentioned to me. His old school teacher says:- 'He has worked at several places.' His parents told me naively that he has had 'a week here and a week there.'

Of his home his head-teacher says:- 'This lad was raised in a caravan under conditions hygienically truly awful. The parents are both densely ignorant, with little moral perception.' The home had been moved from the caravan when I saw it – it moves every few weeks – but it was still just as loathsome as when the teacher had known it. The room I saw looked more like a sea of filth and rags and rubbish than a place where human beings lived. The father was then on remand on a charge of 'receiving'. He says he is a hawker.

C.W. left school at the bottom of Standard IV; 'Physique good but stamina poor'; his character was as good as might be expected in a boy with such blood in his veins. To-day a glance at his face is sufficient to convince the least observant person that there is a kind of moral rottenness in him. His answers to the many questions I put him confirmed the impression he made upon me. He has just completed six months in the 'Special Reserve,' but found the life too hard for him and is glad to be out of it. But for that six months he would probably be far inferior in physique and capacity to what he is.⁶¹

It is extraordinary and touching to imagine this boy, in these conditions, or, more likely in the street, reading flimsy copies of the 'dainty' pale green *Butterfly*, and following Allingham's *Ashamed of his Mother*, a drama of moral scruple; *Girl Without a Home*, a story yearning for the restoration of cottage bliss; and *The Girl Who Married a Scoundrel*, an exciting tale of imposture among the gentry. Although Freeman apparently believed that a glance at C.W.'s face was sufficient indication of his 'moral

rotteness' he continued to make conscientious research notes. These give us an unusually full portrait of an individual reader and a generally avid consumer of mass-market entertainment:

This boy said he hated his home and having seen it I can quite believe his statement. He spends his earnings at the Picture Palace, the Music Hall, and loafing about the street with mates and girls. (He has been in the militia and this apparently privileges him to have no fewer than five girls who will walk out with him.) He is intensely interested in football, horse-racing and boxing. He confessed shamelessly to gambling and to other worse vices, that most boys are either guiltless of or silent about. He reads the Comics, *The Gem*, *Butterfly*, *Picture Fun*, *England's Boxing*, the *Sporting Buff* for football and the *Mail* for Police News. He mentioned Crippen, when I asked him for his favourite characters in fiction, and said:- 'There's a fellow I like to read about.' His superficial knowledge of Christianity was above the average, due probably to the length of time spent in his religious instruction in a Roman Catholic school and to the religious services in the Army. He neither knew nor cared about politics; nor about any of the parties or principal current measures (excepting, as always, Votes for Women and the Insurance Act!). He apparently did not even know of the existence of Mr. Asquith, nor of the present or late leader of the Opposition. But he knew of Mr. Lloyd George's existence and considered that it ought to be terminated by his being buried alive. He was ignorant of the names of Tennyson and Dickens, Columbus, Edison, Gladstone; Shakespeare, he thought, was the 'head of an army'; while Birmingham's great statesman, John Bright, he thought was a 'thief.' (Birmingham's other great politician, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, he knew, in common with practically every other boy.)⁶²

On Freeman's evidence C.W. had already developed his own tastes. He may have been leading the researcher on a little ('Crippen – there's a fellow I like to read about') but he knew what he enjoyed and *The Butterfly* had a place among his pleasures. Just because he mentioned the paper does not mean that he regularly read all its features of course. Nevertheless *The Butterfly* was a thin paper and every week for nine years without a break (1908-1917) at least two of its eight pages carried an instalment of a serial story by Allingham. These were almost invariably presented as the paper's lead attractions and it would therefore be surprising if they had never succeeded in engaging the attention of C.W., H.H. and M.C.

By 1912, when Freeman interviewed these boys, Allingham was no longer offering them socially-conscious comedy of the *Polly Perkins* type. Heroines were still at the centre of his stories but now they, their lovers or husbands, and their babies, were battling against almost overwhelming odds to be together, to find peace, safety, prosperity. Bringing together the descriptions of these boys with the content of Allingham's stories may lead us to think more carefully about Freeman's conclusion.

'Working-boys are not greatly interested in things of real life,' he decided:

They want sensation, excitement, melodrama; they love romance, no matter how fantastic or far-fetched. Their imaginations are prepared for any flight of fancy; their instincts are all agog for anything that is lurid or weird or bloodthirsty; and *the literature that is prepared for them* makes the most direct appeal to these boyish instincts. The boy, tired with a real life that presents little enough of romance, finds a vent for all the emotional stirrings that thrill in him, in these sensational 'shockers'.⁶³ (my italics)

This is an emotional account in itself and wins respect for the humanity of the researcher as he conveys to us the imaginative vulnerability of these sixteen and seventeen year old boys. But if Allingham's stories did represent their choice of literature, they were not reading 'lurid or weird or bloodthirsty' tales, they were reading stories that dramatize a longing for family life and domesticity. The individual incidents in Allingham's fiction might qualify them to be described as 'sensational shockers' but what is truly shocking, when the incidents are considered as symbolically significant, is the accuracy with which they depict a world where everything conspires against the attainment of this simple human dream of a home.⁶⁴

'These boys,' wrote Freeman elsewhere 'are mostly kind and generous and cheerful; and are capable of heroism and self-sacrifice.'⁶⁵ His study was published early in 1914. It is therefore likely that the boys who were physically fittest of those he met would

have joined or been conscripted into the army. For many of these boys – even C.W. – the future might be short

‘The literature that is prepared for them’: F.C. Cordwell

Before generalizing too freely from such a small number, it must be noted that Freeman found a few (very few) boys who read ‘better-class’ literature and used the public libraries.⁶⁶ There were a large number of boys who dropped out in the course of the investigation whose leisure decisions are therefore unknown. The boys whose choices he did record had made varied selections from the limited range of periodicals available. All of these boys – the studious, the refusniks, the cinema- and comic-lovers – testify to difference. Even though they had been selected using specific criteria, in order to typify ‘the mass of uneducative Boy Labour in Birmingham’, his respondents were not a homogenous group.⁶⁷ There were no homogenous groups when the masses were encountered severally. The ‘ordinary’ boys who Freeman observed, trapped in industrial and social conditions that seemed to him deplorable, were exercising one of the very few freedoms available to them, the limited freedom to choose their entertainment.⁶⁸

Once this clarification has been made, the phrase ‘the literature that is prepared for them’ can be reconsidered. Those readers like C.W., H.H. and M.C. who yearned for sensation, excitement, melodrama and loved romance, were not completely passive recipients of editorial or authorial hand-outs. By their buying choices – and specifically by their enthusiasm for Allingham’s *Driven from Home* – the readers of *The Butterfly* had exercised a tangible influence on its future contents and those of its sister papers.

Many years later Allingham described to another A.P. editor what the effect of this particular story had been:

This was the first of my drama stories. It sent the Bfly up over 100,000 and owing to this success Sir Harold Harmsworth (Lord R) permitted Mr. Cordwell to start 3 other papers – *The Favourite Comic*, *Merry & Bright* and *Fun & Fiction*. Each of these papers started with a drama story by me and all ran a year or more. I wrote continuously for all these papers up until about 1916 or 1917 when the paper shortages somewhat disorganized our little fiction factory.⁶⁹

F.C. (Fred) Cordwell was an increasingly significant influence in the world of comic papers. Born in 1886 his first association with Allingham was as Garrish's sub-editor with, it appears, particular responsibility for *The Butterfly*. Increasingly the letters and the detailed instructions came from him. Cordwell assumed the position of a somewhat literally-minded reader:

I think that *Plucky Polly Perkins* is going along splendidly, but if you could manage to bring her away from the seaside I should be much obliged. It is rather late in the season to be at a summer resort.⁷⁰

Thanks for *Driven from Home*. I have just finished the last instalment and think it a very good curtain. Jack must, of course, escape somehow and take Reuben Price with him. We do not want him to fall into the hands of Reuben Price again if it can be avoided.⁷¹

He evidently expected that readers would relate these stories to real time ('It is rather late in the season to be at a seaside resort') and also that events within them would be taken seriously ('we do not want him to fall into the hands of Reuban Price again if it can be avoided').

Behind the scenes, in his own small corner of the A.P. empire, he was reflecting on the nature of this success and developing ideas for new papers and his own career as their editor. On January 7th 1911, *Driven from Home* reached its romantic end, "Only one thing belonging to those dark days will we remember and that is our love, my

darling – the love that never failed us and never can while life lasts, my dear, dear wife!’” and Cordwell told his readers how important they had been, in practical and commercial terms. ‘*The Butterfly* has been so tremendously successful and I have been asked by so many readers to enlarge it and make it a penny, so I am starting a new paper, similar to *The Butterfly*, entitled *The Favorite Comic*.’

The price, shrewdly, was held to a halfpenny and not one but two new papers were started. A third soon followed. By 1912, when Freeman was working in Birmingham, these new papers had split away from *Chips*, *Comic Cuts*, *Puck* and the *Jester* to form an editorial subset of their own. Readers needing to vent their ‘emotional stirrings’ could now follow an alternative weekly timetable: Tuesday, *The Favorite Comic* (1/2d), Wednesday *The Butterfly* (1/2d), Thursday *Fun and Fiction* (1d), Friday *Merry and Bright* (1/2d), Saturday *The Dreadnought* (1d). There were many months during which a boy or girl who bought (or swapped or shared) all the papers could have been reading a story by Allingham on four days of every week. Additionally they could have bought *Driven from Home* in book format. ‘It is well worth 6/- but only costs 3d. 80,000 words for 3d. On sale everywhere.’⁷²

F.C. Cordwell is recognized in the official history of the Amalgamated Press as ‘one of the men who have helped to build up the colossal circulations of publications emanating from the Fleetway House’.⁷³ His anonymous author and adolescent purchasers had also played their decisive parts in this.

- ¹ John Springhall *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Modern Britain* (London: Gill & Macmillan, 1986).
- ² Cf. Freeman p. 93ff.
- ³ Dilnot p18.
- ⁴ Clark p. 62. (Garrish born c1870 therefore similar age to Allingham.)
- ⁵ Ferris p. 44 quotes Alfred Harmsworth 1893: *Comic Cuts* is 'naturally read by a large number of juveniles'.
- ⁶ *Comic Cuts* Easter double number 1907.
- ⁷ Letter 143 (26.5.1908).
- ⁸ Letter 126 (26.6.1907).
- ⁹ Richards p24.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Diary refs. 6.1.1909, 7.2.1909, 10.3.1909.
- ¹² Joyce Allingham's verbal description of Grace's partner.
- ¹³ Letter 83 (n.d. 1906).
- ¹⁴ Letter 307 (n.d.)
- ¹⁵ Letter 128 (1.7. 1907)
- ¹⁶ Letter 129 (10.7.1907).
- ¹⁷ Letter 132 (16.9.1907).
- ¹⁸ Diary 30.1.1909 'Saw Hearn and asked him to keep *Flirt* going. Says it will be difficult.'
- ¹⁹ Letter 133 (23.9.1907).
- ²⁰ *Jester* 22.1.1906
- ²¹ *Puck* 10.4.1907
- ²² 'How Sport Monkimore held up the Chelmsford Coach' *Jester* 22.8.1908
- ²³ *Jester* 26.09.1908
- ²⁴ *Jester* 22.8.1908 cf. P.G. Wodehouse's Jeeves introduced 1917 in 'The Man With Two Left Feet'.
- ²⁵ Letter 133 (23.9.1907).
- ²⁶ Cordwell contributed the 'Jack Johnson' series to *The Butterfly*, for example, Clark p.43.
- ²⁷ *Jester* summer number July 1907.
- ²⁸ As it was such a thin paper (8 pages) a single content change had an immediate effect on the overall balance – e.g. if a schoolgirl story was replaced by a boy detective series. The advertisements usually seemed to be aimed rather more towards boys than girls (presumably recognizing that boys had more spending money) but checking the results of competitions usually reveals at least a 50-50 girl-boy split. Masthead represented male and female.
- ²⁹ 'Garden of Glory' *CG* 1901, 'The Education of Mr. Smith' *NLJ* 1906 (See Appendix I)
- ³⁰ *Butterfly* 21.12.1908
- ³¹ *Butterfly* 26.12.1908. (Note: Same school name as in *The Captain's Fag*. *PPP*'s location, Wicket Friars', is often a Northern mill town in Allingham's fiction but can also be an Essex village.)
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ *Butterfly* 3.4.1909.
- ³⁴ *Butterfly* 10.4.1909.
- ³⁵ Orwell p. 509.
- ³⁶ One of *Puck*'s long running comic strips featured Mr. and Mrs. Newlywed.
- ³⁷ Orwell p. 517.
- ³⁸ E.g. *Jester* 25.08.1906
- ³⁹ Orwell p. 529. (The A.P. had been sold in 1927.)
- ⁴⁰ Diary 6.1.1909.
- ⁴¹ Letter 126. (26.6.1907).
- ⁴² Northcliffe papers BM ADD 62182 B.
- ⁴³ *Butterfly* 2.1.1909.
- ⁴⁴ Turner p. 22, HJA letter 43 (8.4.1905), *NBP* 12.11.1906.
- ⁴⁵ *Butterfly* 22.11.1913.
- ⁴⁶ *Jester* 18.6.1910
- ⁴⁷ *Puck* 4.2.1911
- ⁴⁸ The editor took the trouble to clarify that *The Boys of St Bede's* (Allingham's *Duffer*) which was only just starting, had not been available for comment at the time of the competition. These two Allingham reprints then ran opposite one another for the next few months in a nice example of gender balance. Will Holts' name had to be discreetly changed to avoid him proposing marriage on page 6 whilst still attending school on page 7.
- ⁴⁹ Letter 147 (20.8.1908).
- ⁵⁰ Letter 161 (17.2.1911).

⁵¹ Letter 162 (20.2.1911) I have not found that Allingham wrote for *The Jester* again after this little spat. However that may be because he was fully occupied with the new papers, *The Favorite Comic* and *Fun and Fiction* from this time – as well as *Merry and Bright* and *The Butterfly*. *The Jester* was redesigned and relaunched in 1912 and may not have remained part of this editorial group.

⁵² Freeman p. 7.

⁵³ Freeman p. 151.

⁵⁴ E.g. Joseph Bristow *Empire Boys* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), Kelly Boyd *Manliness and the Boy's Story Paper* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), Freeman pp.154-159. Freeman's boys also liked sporting papers, detective stories and the police news.

⁵⁵ Freeman p.144. The *Mail* refers to the *Birmingham Daily Mail*.

⁵⁶ Freeman p.148-149. (Also listed is *The Girl Who Trusted Him*, a serial initially intended to be written by Allingham but which was passed to another common writer, probably Richard Starr, when Allingham realized he was over-committed. Years later Allingham wrote a new version of it for Anne Cooper.)

⁵⁷ Freeman p. 39.

⁵⁸ Freeman p.28.

⁵⁹ *Jester* 25.8.1906.

⁶⁰ Freeman p.57.

⁶¹ Freeman p.72.

⁶² Freeman p. 158-9.

⁶³ Freeman p.144.

⁶⁴ Cf. chapter six.

⁶⁵ Freeman p. 159.

⁶⁶ Or boy G.G who preferred to spend his evenings at home and read the *Arabian Nights*, Freeman p. 154.

⁶⁷ Freeman p. 7.

⁶⁸ Freeman p. 159 (contrasting the majority of his respondents with the 'exceptional' boy who might escape 'from apparently the most hopeless conditions').

⁶⁹ Letter 307 (n.d.).

⁷⁰ Letter 154 (29.9.1909).

⁷¹ Letter 152 (5.1.1910).

⁷² Advertisement in *The Favorite Comic* 25.3.1911

⁷³ Dilnot p. 29. (Fleetway House was the A.P.'s corporate headquarters from 1912.)

Chapter Six

Something with a little love and a little murder

Merry & Bright, The Favorite Comic, Fun & Fiction, 1910 - 1916

The conventions established in Allingham's first drama-story for *The Butterfly* were regularly repeated in his later work. Mapping them against the circumstances of ordinary readers' lives, as observed by their contemporaries, may help us understand their significance and emotional impact.¹ Allingham's use of formula had many practical benefits, not least to his own productivity. It may also have assisted accessibility and memorability for readers and widened its applicability by linking with other literary patterns, particularly the patterns of fairy tale.²

Driven From Home: Establishing the Formula

It was a pitch-black night in November, and the rain fell in torrents on the desolate country road, and lashed the high hedges on either side into a kind of living fury.

Along the narrow lane a shadowy figure staggered blindly.

It was the figure of a woman, slight and frail, and in her arms she carried a shapeless bundle sheltered under her cloak, and hugged it tightly to her bosom.

She made little headway against the merciless storm and her every movement betrayed the fact that she was growing weaker and weaker. At times she would stop and sway giddily, as though about to fall in a heap on the muddy, rain-swept road, but each time she recovered herself as by a desperate effort of will, and pressed blindly on once more.

Suddenly the lane widened out, and the wretched wayfarer, peering into the darkness, could see no hedge at her right hand, but only a vague blackness; and then, in the midst of it, she perceived a light.

Thus, in *The Butterfly* of November 6th 1909, began *Driven from Home* subtitled 'A Story of a Young Girl's Struggles against the Trials and Temptations of the World' and introduced by the editor as 'This Great New Heart-to-Heart Story-

Drama'. The woman is the story's twenty-two year old heroine and she is carrying her three-year-old child. Her husband is in prison, falsely accused of murder, and the man who he trusted to protect her, her uncle, is doing his best to force her into a new marriage with a millionaire. She has run away to escape his 'insults' but is friendless, penniless and her child is hungry.

In this first instalment she finds shelter in a wayside inn but is discovered by her wicked uncle. Simultaneously her husband has escaped from prison and arrives at the same time at the same inn. There is an ecstatic moment of reunion:

'Jack, Jack – my darling, darling Jack!'

The strong arms closed around her and held her as in a vice, and eager passionate kisses were pressed upon her up-turned face.

'My wife,' murmured the man in broken tones – 'my dear, dear wife!'

The instalment ends here but in addition to the wicked uncle, the prison warders are closing in. For a moment, in instalment two, hero, heroine and child are together, the nucleus of a family. 'Love mummy now; love daddy too,' declares the child. But even as he speaks, heavy footsteps are heard in the gravel outside. The hero is desperate:

'Oh, Mary, my beloved!' he groaned in a tone of bitter anguish. 'It is hard – it is hard to bear! I could endure my own cruel fate without flinching; but to leave you – you and the child – to face the world alone, persecuted by that villain and shunned by all! Can we turn nowhere and find a friend in this hour of need? Will no one help me to make one dash for liberty?'

It was then that Jim Gubbins the poacher, who had been bottling up his feelings with the greatest difficulty exploded into excited speech.

'Yes, by gum, I will!' he shouted heartily. 'You shall have a fox's chance for your life.'³

Jim, who is at this point a slightly comic irritant of the local gentry, proves resourceful and stalwart for the rest of the story, as does Louise, the lady's maid whom he later marries. Admirable, idiosyncratic, lower-class characters

(costermonger, petty thief, slum girl) abound in Allingham's fiction and can cope in situations where the more refined hero or heroine is at a loss. Unexpected help from another unlikely source comes later in the story: Monsieur Antoine, an impresario, acts as a fallible fairy godfather to the heroine. He is the prototype of several benevolent, eccentric *dei ex machinae* from the world of theatre who can be found in many of Allingham's later stories. This may be connected with an optimistic understanding, shared between writer and readers, that the stage is one of the few areas where talent can earn a lucky break irrespective of social class.

Millionaire financiers are rarely to be trusted in Allingham's fictional world; lawyers are viewed with suspicion and prison warders and policemen are presented with unremitting dislike. Clergymen and doctors practising in the community are usually good but may be ineffectual; doctors in private institutions and doctors interested in experimentation are extremely sinister. Other professions have their good and bad exemplars. The prison governor in *Driven From Home* is self-serving, unimaginative and venial whereas in *The Lights of Home* the governor is narrow but decent, concerned to reform some of the prisoners in his charge and aware that the corruptibility of his warders may be due to their low wages.

Class issues are central to Allingham's fiction. His characters are morally varied (the good governor / the bad governor) but are essentially stereotypical and so are their social places. Their social standing (or lack of it) is crucial to the plot as it determines the amount of power they can exercise. Allingham's serials are composed of a succession of confrontations between might and right. The hero and heroine have invariably been wrenched from their class location and have only their individual moral qualities, or the kindness of others, to help them survive in a hostile social world. They are likely to possess such attributes as 'innate refinement' (the heroine of *Driven From Home* is instantly recognized by the inn-keeper as being 'of the gentry') and their happy ending always includes improved social position as well as plenty of money and the downfall of their enemies. The heroes are usually from wealthy backgrounds whether they know it or not and an important part of the stories' action is their repossession of their rightful inheritance. Deprivation of inheritance is such an insistent theme that it is hard not to connect it with readers' inarticulate awareness of their own exploitation or, at least, their longing for an unexpected piece of luck, financial security or personal recognition.

During the writing of *Driven from Home*, Allingham moved from suburban Ealing to a former rectory, with servants to help run it and a nursemaid for his children. By the endings of his stories, his heroes and heroines have usually attained even more gracious country locations, usually with an aristocratic title to confirm their position in society, and a more secure income from land or investments than Allingham would ever achieve from writing. Tilting the social balance upwards and thus imputing desirable personality traits as well as material comfort to the upper-class characters is only too easy in wish-fulfilment writing. Nevertheless the next young heroine to come stumbling exhaustedly out of the dark, Ruby in *Romney Hall* (1912), is similarly possessed of a natural delicacy but is a cottage girl who has married the son of the hall. The butler is horrified but the elderly chatelaine proves her true gentility by immediately making her unknown daughter-in-law welcome. Viewed overall Allingham can be seen attributing personal vices and virtues relatively even-handedly across the social scale. By the time of his aptly-named serial *Justice* (1916) even a financier is allowed to redeem himself and a canny artificial flower-seller marries the hero.

One way of making sense of his general typology of characters is to view it from the perspective of a working-class family, much as Hoggart does in his discussion of ‘them’ and ‘us’ in the *Uses of Literacy*:

I have emphasized the strength of home and neighbourhood, and have suggested that this strength arises partly from a feeling that the world outside is strange and often unhelpful, that it has most of the counters stacked on its side, that to meet it on its own terms is difficult. One may call this, making use of a word commonly used by the working classes, the world of 'Them'. 'Them' is a composite dramatic figure, the chief character in modern urban forms of the rural peasant – big house relationship. 'Them' is the world of the bosses, whether those bosses are private individuals or, as is increasingly the case today, public officials.⁴

Stylistically, the opening of *Driven from Home* typifies many of the qualities of Allingham's drama-stories. The language is extreme (the hedges are 'lashed' into a 'living fury') and the depiction of the heroine struggling through the storm is intensely visual, stagy even. There are sharp contrasts in lighting and the storm has a symbolic appropriateness. His next major serial *Girl Without A Home* (1910), written to establish F.C. Cordwell's new halfpenny comic, *Merry and Bright*, contrasts the tempest outside with the cosy tranquillity of the cottage room where a young mother-to-be sits sewing. It is an emblematic scene. The little room is a precarious haven but as soon as the cottage door opens, trouble rushes in with the relentlessness of the hurricane. Allingham never really needed the editorial instruction to 'work in a good striking subject for a picture in every number'; his literary style excels in dramatic tableaux, whether it is the heroine defiantly vulnerable in the dock, a hero grappling with his assailants, a mother and her child excluded from light and shelter or a scheming villain surrounded by ill-gotten opulence.⁵ The reader is a viewer, whether or not there is an actual picture on the page. It is not hard to envisage writing of this kind making a similar appeal to its audience as early cinema was beginning to do.

The plot happenings are as stylised as the settings and the characters. The structural demands of composition in instalments – the need for attention-grabbing openings and surprising, suspense-inducing curtains – may convey an impression that

the characters are being stage-managed into their positions. Hero and heroine seem destined to miss one another with the regularity of figures on a weather clock though their longing to be together is incessant. Over the sixty weeks of *Driven from Home*, throughout 1910 and into 1911, Jack and Mary achieve only brief moments together. They both spend time in prison; both escape; both are recaptured; both are proved innocent after much delay. They both believe the other dead; the heroine suffers total amnesia, destitution in London and momentary triumph as a singing star. The child is kidnapped twice and almost dies twice. There are two fires, a car crash, a shipwreck, a forced marriage, a trial, threat of entombment in an underground vault, and unwilling involvement with a criminal gang.

The villains may seem to have been killed at various points along the way but are never finally disposed of until the penultimate episode. Again and again when they are at the mercy of the hero, the heroine persuades him to hold back. Vengeance is not, ultimately, for good characters to dispense in these stories. They are acting within an ethical framework that includes an ultimate trust in some higher power. The hero may rail, the heroine may despair, but they never lose their faith in one another, or in God. And Providence (in the person of the author) finally pulls them through. An impression that events have been stage-managed is not necessarily detrimental as long as virtue is rewarded and vice punished at the end. The plot is fuelled by betrayals, daring escapes, impenetrable disguises and calamitous co-incidences. Money means power and 'papers' are the key to proving innocence, as they often are in life. The plot happenings may be melodramatic but the social understanding is thoroughly realistic.

The actions and the *dramatis personae* of *Driven from Home* are repeated again and again in Allingham's subsequent work. There are some additions. In his next serial *The Lights of Home* for instance, he introduces the horror location of the private mental hospital, the deceptive glitter of the 'masque ball', a temporary blinding and a scheming stepmother. These stereotypical incidents, characters and locations are Allingham's formulae. They are the standard ingredients of his stories and bear an oblique and stylised relationship to readers' lives. They may also derive from earlier literary sources, including, as I shall argue below, fairy tales.

The story-titles have clearly been chosen to advertise conformity to a type rather than to indicate uniqueness. They frequently include a reference to social exclusion and bore such a likeness to one another that, towards the end of his life, even Allingham and his agent had to send one another memoranda as to which story was which. The title of *Driven from Home* was reused by Allingham in the early 1930s for the working draft of a totally different tale which was then published as *The Woman Outcast* – no connection to *The Girl Outcast*, another major early success. Cataloguing Allingham's serial stories has not been easy. *Driven from Home*, for instance was republished (in *The Butterfly* 1923) as *A Convict and a Man*. This, however, is quite separate from *A Convict but a Man* (*Oracle* 1935), which is a republication of *London* (*Favorite Comic* 1916), a different though not dissimilar story. Finding an account book or diary entry for 'Girl' around this first productive period is not especially helpful since it could refer to *Girl of My Heart* (*Puck* 1908-9), *The Girl Without a Home* (*Merry and Bright* 1910-1911), *The Girl Outcast* (*Favorite Comic* 1911-12), *The Girl Who Trusted Him* (*Fun and Fiction* 1912-13) or the *Girl Who Married a Scoundrel* (*Merry and Bright* 1912-13).

Titles may assert their place in a particular line of literary succession – Robert and Marie Connor Leighton's famous *Convict 99* provides obvious ancestry for Allingham's *Convict 66* and *Convict 98*. J.F. Smith's *Stansfield Hall* may be remembered in Allingham's *Romney Hall* and *Marley Hall*.⁶ The debt to Smith is acknowledged elsewhere – for example when Allingham's heroine, Lucy, in *The Lights of Home* needs an alias to work as a parlour maid, she calls herself Minnie

Grey ('Minnigrey'). Generally, however, a comparison of Allingham's drama-story titles with those of his Victorian predecessors reveals a tendency to move towards something less specific (not so many proper names and place names) and more emotive. A story of the post-*Driven from Home* type which has a heroine's name as its working title is likely to be re-titled on publication, e.g. 'Dorothy Darrell' becomes *Girl without a Home*.⁷ It may even be possible – in the small group of magazines where Allingham had greatest influence – to see Allingham-imitation titles emblazoning other writers' tales as his time became fully committed and his rates of pay went up.⁸

Reading in Context: Mainly Middlesborough

Allingham's long drama stories are based on powerful, easily graspable ideas – to get justice, to be reunited with the beloved, to escape destitution, to protect children, to return home. Despite their weekly twists and turns his plot structures are essentially simple, suitable for an audience who would spend over a year following them. Their formulaic construction has practical advantages both for the writer and for the reader – as long as they are read in the way intended. Sitting in a library silently reading issue after issue of *The Butterfly* with one eye on the clock to complete the task by closing time is not the way to appreciate this. As Janice Radway writes, 'If literature is to be treated as a document in the study of a culture, it is first necessary to know something about who reads, why they do so and how they go about it.'⁹

A contemporary reader almost certainly read with time lapses. He or she may have borrowed or shared the comic, and the serial story may have been read aloud, either

in the home or other communal setting. Florence Bell, wife of colliery owner and North Yorkshire magnate Sir Hugh Bell, was able to draw on thirty years experience and visits by a dedicated group of women researchers to over thousand homes of iron-workers and their families in Middlesborough for her study *At The Works*.¹⁰ In it she included a survey of the reading habits and attitudes of two hundred such households.¹¹ In sixteen households there is explicit mention of one family member reading to other adult members as a regular recreational pastime. Books of all sorts, newspapers and magazines were read aloud in these houses and so were the comics for which Allingham was beginning to write. 'I have seen a large number of comic illustrated papers compared with which *Answers* and *Titbits* are the very aristocracy of the press,' wrote Bell, referring explicitly to the *Comic Cuts* group from which *Merry & Bright*, *The Favorite Comic*, *Fun and Fiction* were derived.¹² Her survey usefully confirms that the comics were not confined to juvenile street reading but provided home entertainment as well. In her household 51, for example, 'Wife fond of reading but comic papers only. (Wages 23s per week)' A single instalment of *Driven from Home*, read aloud without interruption, would have provided 25-30 minutes of entertainment suitable for a range of ages. A notable feature of these pre-World War 1 serials is the way in which Allingham divides the action between hero and heroine thus potentially appealing to both male and female readers or listeners. Several of Bell's male respondents stated that they liked 'romances' whereas some of the women chose 'boys' adventure stories'.¹³

Florence Bartle, born in Poplar (London) in 1882, remembered penny novelettes being read out of doors in Victoria Park during her childhood to whatever audience

would listen.¹⁴ It is not clear how long into the twentieth century such reading aloud in public places lasted. Youngsters are usually assumed to have read to one another within their street groups and reading in the workplace is also documented.¹⁵ The thought of numbers of people waiting week by week for a particular publication day on which to read or listen to the next instalment of a serial gives a dimension of collective experience to the reception of these stories. If serial story happenings were then told on to others who had missed a particular instalment, it brings them perhaps a little nearer to folk tale or at least to the same sort of shared cultural understanding as is represented by updating friends with the latest plot developments in a TV soap. It suggests that Allingham's audience was potentially much larger than the purchasers or even the readers of the comic-and-story papers. Their circulations were in the hundred thousands: the A.P. management assumed each copy was read repeatedly but there are no calculations for those who may have listened.

If it a serial story were being read aloud, or in a crowded setting, the use of plot formulae would have helped people grasp the story's action and bridge the weekly memory gaps. More importantly readers or listeners would have become experienced at guessing what lay ahead (this was encouraged by editorial queries) and might have discussed their predictions with one another (as watchers of soap operas do today). But they could not have known until the following week whether their anticipations were right. Unlike users of books they had no physical indications as to whether the last chapter was close at hand or still six months away. From the writer and editor's perspective, composition by formulae offered plenty of scope to close down a story if circulation numbers fell or extend it if sales were good. The fact that so many of *Driven from Home's* incidents are repeated (two fires, two child-illnesses, several re-incarcerations) may indicate that Allingham extended the story beyond its planned dates, though there is no extant correspondence to prove this. His approach to construction is always strategic with a variety of possible exit and re-entry points. Allingham's family described his method of plotting as 'intellectual' and equated it with his lifelong pleasure in playing chess.

Maximising Productivity and Profit

Formulaic composition facilitated productivity. Both writer and publisher had vested interests here. F.C. Cordwell and his departmental superiors may have considered cashing in on the success of Allingham's serial in *The Butterfly* by enlarging it and raising its price to a penny (as their publicly quoted letter suggests)

but instead their chosen strategy was to replicate, virtually to clone.¹⁶ ‘Our policy,’ wrote Northcliffe later,

Was to rain paper after paper on the public and thus raise our prestige and block competition. (You will remember that that policy was then regarded as madness by those inside and outside the office, especially when I said that most of our new papers should be issued for coin of the lowest denomination).¹⁷

This was clever capitalism. In a household such as Bell’s no 51 where the weekly income was only twenty three shillings, the expenditure of a penny, rather than a halfpenny on a single item of entertainment might feel uncomfortably extravagant. Budgets for such households reveal that purchases of even the most basic items, such as tea, were made frequently for the lowest possible amounts to spread the meagre wages safely through the week. That housewife would be more likely to buy two thin comics at a halfpenny each on different days than a thicker one for a penny. *Merry and Bright* and *The Favorite Comic* were identical in price and in format to *The Butterfly* – so the same machines and production personnel could be used three times over – an instant tripling of surplus value. The experiment of increasing both size and price was actually tried in 1912 with *Fun and Fiction*, the third of the new papers built on *The Butterfly*’s success, but appears to have failed as the paper changed its title in 1913 (to *The Firefly*) and dropped its price back to the usual halfpenny.

Cloned commodities needed to refresh their appeal to readers. Allingham’s serials, therefore, identified as the papers’ main attractions, had also to be renewed – with sufficient difference for the readers to be encouraged to buy all three (or more) papers. Announcing *The Favorite Comic*, *The Butterfly* editor wrote: ‘I have secured the services of the author of *Driven from Home* and he is writing a grand new serial story for the paper entitled *The Girl Outcast*.’¹⁸ Allingham was never named in these

papers even though building up his personality could have been a way to establish reader loyalty. Instead he is always referred to in relation to one or other of his (presumably most successful or most recent) titles. These readers were expected to thrill to the memory of a story and perhaps accord it just a little more reality if the person of an author did not obtrude between them and the characters. After all how many soap opera viewers can reliably identify each series' scriptwriter? Possibly, too, an author might have got in the way of the relationship with readers that was being built up by the paper's editor. Whatever the rationale, Allingham's anonymity, even from his first entry into the comics, must have facilitated his stories' later reprintings and migrations.

Allingham himself saw his plots as his capital and managed them as shrewdly as his employers managed their production systems. Standard units of composition, such as the escape from prison, co-incidental arrival in a lonely spot, heavy footsteps outside, ecstatic reunions, benevolent interventions and desperate partings could be re-ordered and re-named into a new serial offering familiar pleasures. In *The Girl without a Home*, for instance – the serial commissioned to establish *Merry and Bright* – the intrusion and the separation happen in advance of the benevolent intervention, ecstatic reunion and arrival in a lonely spot. During 1910, when *Driven from Home* was running in *The Butterfly*, *Lights of Home* in *The Jester*, *Rod of the Oppressor* in *The Christian Globe* and *The Girl without a Home* in *Merry and Bright*, Allingham must have produced between 400,000 – 500,000 words of story (this is not including leader articles or advertising copy). As well as these long melodramas he was writing a school serial, *Phil Fisher of Friars*, a story series *Perkins & Co*, and the

continuation of a work-girl serial, *Ruby Wray in London*. A ready-made stock of happenings was obviously invaluable.

Allingham was paid by the word. As his productivity rose, so did his income. His total earnings for 1910 were £655 18/2. In 1911 his income rose to £1111 8/2 and continued to rise until the outbreak of war. This was not, however, all earned from new work. Even with the aid of formulae his output was constrained by the limits of his own time and energy and by his commitment to his family. From 1911 he and his AP editors began to use straightforward replication – republication with just a change of title and new names for the central characters – to extract even more value from his and their initial investment. (This can best be seen in appendix II.) Later in this study I will attempt to analyse some of the ways in which the stories appear subtly changed by their changed contexts but, in the main, the plot- and character-formulae and the overall story-types that Allingham developed at this period proved remarkably resilient over their twenty five years of republication.

The Influence of Drama

The editor of *The Butterfly* had introduced *Driven from Home* as a ‘story-drama’ and Allingham himself referred to this type of writing as his ‘drama stories’. The end of each instalment was the ‘curtain’. This theatrical analogy may help us to conceptualise these popular tales as something other than novels-in-instalments and thus come closer to appreciating their appeal. Many years later, Allingham’s daughter, Margery, who began her career writing up the stories of silent films for her aunt’s mass-market papers, before becoming a successful detective novelist,

described the genre in which she then wrote as ‘the Folk Literature of the twentieth century’. She saw her books and others like them as ‘a modern version of the Morality plays of the Middle Ages.’ The morality plays, like ‘pantomimes of personified Vice and Virtue’ had, she thought, ‘stated an elementary theory of Right or Wrong, Growing or Dying, in a cheerful, popular way, to a generation of ordinary people.’¹⁹ Margery’s analysis fits her father’s writing even better than her own. Pantomimes of personified vice and virtue do not require uniqueness of incident or subtle complexities of character drawing to make their appeal. Their meaning is made by a shared understanding of conventions they use, whether of gesture, presentation or incident. This is how Allingham’s formulae work.

Allingham’s readers may themselves have watched plays of this sort – not pantomimes or morality plays, but melodramas. In the years before the First World War, live theatre was still part of the recreation of many working-class households despite the rapid growth of cinema and the attractiveness of music hall. Florence Bell describes the repertory of Middlesborough’s two theatres as usually consisting of,

Sensational pieces of a melodramatic kind – that is, usually sound and often interesting plays, in which the boundary of what is commonly called vice and virtue is clearly marked – virtue leading to success and happiness, vice to a fate which is a terrible warning.²⁰

She concedes that these established theatres might not have been sufficiently cheap to be regularly accessible to all families but continues:

There is a small town a few miles distant from Middlesborough to which comes at intervals a stock theatrical company, which performs literally in a barn, at infinitesimal prices. The plays produced, if not very nourishing to the more complex mind, are always sound and good, full of movement, full of interest to the audience before whom they are performed. Night after night that barn is full; night after night men and women, boys and girls, who might be loitering in the streets or

in the public houses, are imbibing plain and obvious maxims of desirable conduct, are associating mean, cowardly and criminal acts with pitiable results.²¹

Allingham had considered writing plays himself. He enjoyed theatres, music halls and cinemas and was well-placed to understand the impact of drama to a wide range of audiences. His younger brother Claude spent some time with a travelling theatre company and his first cousin Grace made her career as a variety artist.²² In *His Convict Bride* he allows himself a mild in-joke when he sends his own *The Girl Outcast* on a low-budget provincial tour.²³ The staginess of Allingham's stories is central both to their structure and their style and must therefore have constituted a major part of their appeal. Once we have discovered that large numbers of working-class readers really enjoyed these long-running dramas, we cannot hesitate in accepting their major qualities as positives. Although it is not easy to use words such as stagy, repetitious, melodramatic, sensational, sentimental or stereotypical undisparagingly, if we respect the readers we respect their aesthetic preferences.

Picture Presentations of the Known

Richard Hoggart, writing about working-class *Peg's Paper*, and about magazines such as *Red Star Weekly* and *The Oracle* (for which Allingham later wrote and in which several of these early stories were reprinted) confirms that the writing is clichéd; that 'every reaction has its fixed counter for presentation'; that 'the audience seems to want cliché; that they are not exploring experience, realizing experience through language' and argues that different criteria should therefore be used for evaluation:

These are, I repeat, statements; picture presentations of the known [...] If we regard them as faithful but dramatized presentations of a life whose form and values are known, we might find it more useful to ask what are the values they embody. There is no virtue in merely laughing at them: we need to appreciate first that they may in all their triteness speak for a solid and relevant way of life.²⁴

In 'The 'Real' World of People', Hoggart picks out some of these qualities as an intense interest in other people, a belief in the centrality of home and family, an emotional and empirical rather than an ideological approach to life. He argues that the aesthetic preferences of *Peg's Paper* readers and their families can be seen as a perfectly rational response to 'the "real world" [...] of work and debt.' This economically hard and uncertain world should, I believe, be seen as the absent signifier in Herbert Allingham's art. Hoggart concludes that, despite the size and commercial ethos of the corporations producing the cheap, mass-market magazines for which Allingham (and his peers) wrote,

The authors and illustrators seem to have a close knowledge of the lives and attitudes of their audience [...] Most of the material is conventional – that is mirrors the attitudes of the readers; but those attitudes are by no means as ridiculous as one might at first be tempted to think.²⁵

Well yes. What after all is so silly about stories which assume a world where it is harder for the poor to get justice than for the rich and where the vulnerable may well be unjustly convicted and languish forgotten in prison if no-one with influence is sufficiently interested to take up their case?²⁶ Not another escaped convict arriving just at the crucial moment, an economically comfortable, out-of-context reader might sigh; not another unlikely rescuer, handy disguise or secret passage to help them evade their pursuers! Allingham's drama stories may have been 'improbable', as he admitted himself, but he and his editors were determined also to be 'real-life' and 'human'.²⁷ In a hard world such unlikely happenings may have provided a humane

gleam of comfort for families who felt their 'real' existence threatened by the tendency of authority to bear most heavily on those who can least withstand it.

Happiness Dashed, Domesticity Regained

This first group of stories, *Driven From Home*, *The Lights of Home*, *the Girl Without a Home*, *The Rod of the Oppressor* (and the others discussed in this chapter) were written at a time when public attention, including Allingham's own as a leader writer, had focused on the economic insecurity of working people's lives and the need for reform of both employment conditions and welfare provision. The stories offer variations on a single theme that is repeatedly present in Allingham's writing: the destruction and re-establishment of a home.

In this meta-narrative two young people who love one another and wish to marry, or who are recently married, find their security, happiness, and reputations, cruelly destroyed, without warning or desert. The forces against them are discovered to be colossal, disproportionate and although the hero and heroine find some help, often in unexpected places, it usually takes them a year of week by week struggle before they can re-establish the respectable family-life for which they long. Being driven from and returning to home is central to these stories. From his own impoverished working-class childhood Hoggart wrote eloquently of the felt importance of keeping the home together: 'Where almost everything else is ruled from outside, is chancy and likely to knock you down when you least expect it, the home is yours and real.'²⁸ Hoggart was born later, in 1918, but his understanding of the insecurity of many working people's lives was prefigured by Bell: 'We forget how terribly near the

margin of disaster the man, even the thrifty man walks, who has, in ordinary normal conditions, but just enough to keep himself on'²⁹ and by an anonymous leader writer in *The Christian Globe*: 'The poor live constantly on the edge of a precipice.'³⁰ This leader writer was almost certainly Allingham.

The precipice was there for all those families who had only the sale of their own labour on which to rely. It was there for Allingham as well as for his readers. As he wrote in his diary in 1909 when worried about one of his younger brothers and the family businesses generally, 'Looks as though Em and I would have to support the whole family in ten years time or so unless we too break down. Then the whole lot goes under.'³¹ For families, such as those in Bell's study, whose weekly income was between £1 and £3, the 'margin of disaster' was much closer.³²

No deterministic correlation between people's economic circumstances and their reading choices should be made, however. There were workers who were reading theology, history, science or who were trying to teach themselves French and German in their spare time.³³ And there were families where no one read at all.³⁴ The majority read fiction and daily or weekly newspapers (which usually contained a serial story) and some explicitly linked their reading with a desire to escape imaginatively from their ordinary lives and problems. Bell's respondent 24 was 'fond of reading 'downright exciting stories after his work is done, to get his mind into another groove.'³⁵ Respondent 186 wanted 'Something that will take one away from oneself.'

Bell concluded:

It seems undeniable that for the great majority of people reading means recreation, not study [...] And we may well rejoice and not seek anything further, if the working-man, and especially the working-woman, whose daily outlook is more

cramped and cheerless than that of the man, should find in reading fiction a stimulus and change of thought.³⁶

To provide such escapist reading, Allingham ‘worked hard and slowly, never for a moment relaxing the enormous care that ensured his success’.³⁷ His stories were not clichéd or stereotypical because he was lazy or because he despised his audience. He and his editors were trying, within their limits, to provide what many readers clearly indicated that they wanted. Respondent 185 was a woman who ‘at the age of fifty, made a desperate attempt to learn to read, and, being asked what sort of books she would prefer, said, “Something with a little love and a little murder”’.³⁸ No drama-story of Allingham’s lacked love or murder. The stereotypical characters and stock incidents that he used again and again in different combinations were expertly chosen to give scope for colour and excitement in readers’ imaginings whilst retaining a discernable relationship to their emotional experience of life. Do they have any further significance?

Family Fairy Stories

Allingham’s stories (and no doubt others like them) operate in a symbolic landscape of hopes and fears. They have much in common with fairy tales when fairy tales are taken seriously not just for their psychoanalytical connotations but, as the cultural historian Marina Warner argues, for their ‘powers to illuminate experiences based on social and material conditions’.³⁹ Warner’s study of fairy tales and their tellers *From the Beast to the Blonde* may seem far removed from Allingham’s post-Victorian epics but her explanation of her starting-point is illuminating.⁴⁰ She began, she says from Charles Perrault’s *Contes de ma Mère l’Oye*⁴¹, the collection that

contains 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Red Riding Hood', 'Bluebeard', 'Puss in Boots', 'Cinderella' and 'Tom Thumb':

Charting from the Perrault epicentre, as it were, meant that I was focusing on fairy tales with family dramas at their heart [...] I began investigating the meanings of the tales themselves, but I soon found that it was essential to look at the context in which they were told, at who was telling them, to whom and why.

This made it possible for her to consider the social and political alongside the psychological:

The double vision of the tales, on the one hand charting perennial drives and terrors, both conscious and unconscious, and on the other mapping actual, volatile experience, gives the genre its fascination and power to satisfy.⁴²

Warner presents fairy tales as bearing 'a strong affinity' to the romance. Janice Radway's exploration of the actual circumstances in which a group of women in Smithton read romantic novels, enabled her to give social and cultural substance to the psychological understanding she had derived from subjecting the stories to Proppian analysis and considering their structural patterns in the light of Nancy Chodorow's theories of mother-daughter neediness.⁴³ Radway's respondents convinced her that it was the act of reading – the 'repetitive consumption' of romantic novels – that was as significant as their content. Warner's starting point is her memory of her personal 'hunger' for fairy tales when she was a girl. They seemed to offer her the possibility of change; they could 'remake the world in the image of desire'. 'That this is a blissful dream that need not be dismissed as totally foolish is central to the argument of this book,' she asserts.⁴⁴

Both Radway and Warner focus primarily on women as the readers and the writers of these tales. Allingham's audience, at this period, included readers of both sexes and a range of ages. Their common attribute is that they exist in situations of relative

powerlessness and repression. The fairy tales ‘with family dramas at their heart’ in which Warner is interested, and the drama-stories produced by Allingham for *The Butterfly*, *Merry & Bright*, *The Favorite Comic* etc, are romances in that they are adventures. Things happen and the hero and heroine have to deal with them. Like fairy-tales, Allingham’s stories are only intermittently concerned with the developing relationship between the two main characters that Radway’s readers identified as the touchstone of romance.⁴⁵ In *Driven from Home*, *The Lights of Home*, and *The Girl without a Home* the hero and heroine are already married. They never doubt one another. Their struggle is against the external forces of state power and individual malice that would separate them.

The likeness of Allingham’s drama-stories to fairy tale is made evident by some of conventions they share. Conventions such as the impenetrability of disguise, returns from apparent death, the reversibility of maimings (especially blindness and amnesia) are common to both. They are examples of metamorphosis, the single quality that, for Warner, defines the fairy tale.⁴⁶ She speaks of ‘this instability of appearances, these sudden swerves of destiny [which] created the first sustaining excitement of such stories’ for her as a young reader.⁴⁷ These would be excellent phrases with which to describe Allingham’s roller-coaster plots.

Margery Allingham described the ‘pop’ adventure form as ‘A surprise every tenth page and a shock every twentieth’.⁴⁸ Translated into halfpenny comic instalments this means at least one major reversal every four thousand words. Transformations are commonplace and so are the more usual agents of change in fairy stories. The surface of Allingham’s writing – costumes, locations, diction – is sub-Dickensian. Apart from

the few great gleaming motor cars the temporal location of most stories might be a vague half century earlier than their composition dates. One small shift in perception, however, recasts them in the fantasy world of wicked witches, forests, dungeons, lascivious ogres and fairy godmothers. Blink again and there is evidence of ‘actual, volatile experience’. Suddenly alternative elements of Allingham’s writing spring into focus and it becomes easy to comprehend the appeal these serials made to their readers. Discovery by the hero or heroine that they are the unacknowledged heirs to a fortune can be read politically – these readers are the dispossessed; or psychologically – relating to the common fantasy of being a prince or princess in disguise, the Freudian ‘family romance’.⁴⁹

The Girl Outcast, written to launch *The Favorite Comic* in 1911 and republished by the Amalgamated Press a further six times over the next fifteen years, suggests that Allingham was well aware of the fairy-tale aspect of his stories. Fairy stories, possibly of a more whimsical kind, were part of his family’s life by this time. Em Allingham had begun her writing career with ‘charming fairy tales’; their daughter, Margery, peopled their garden with imaginary beings and, by 1911, was already at a desk of her own ‘writing the same fairy story five hundred and forty five times’.⁵⁰

At the heart of *The Girl Outcast* is the enmity of the dark, alluring, older woman, Sonia, the stepmother, for the young, blonde Doris. Doris may be lovely but Sonia has ‘something of that quality that is called fascination’.⁵¹ Essentially she is of the same Jezebel type as Madge Milton, that ‘Devil of a Woman’, but here she is locked firmly into a family drama instead of plotting the downfall of nations. Sonia has recently married Doris’s father and lost no time in coming between parent and child.

She engineers the father's absence, then his death. Instead of sending her stepdaughter to starve in the wild wood, she throws her out into London, 'the mighty city which rewards the strong but has no mercy for the weak'.⁵² Throughout Allingham's work London is used as the trial ground, the dangerous location far removed from the shelter of a true home. Doris 'inexperienced, gentle and retiring' is found, ragged and unconscious, by a handsome prince – or knight errant at least. He is Jack Travers 'son of one of the wealthiest men in England'.⁵³ 'A month ago she was poor [...] today she was a queen.'⁵⁴ But, as this is only instalment five, Doris and Jack's troubles and adventures have barely begun.

Warner suggests that fairy tales were often a way for women to express their resentments at situations of powerlessness, and for older women, as tale-tellers, to share their experience and offer the hope that things might be different. *The Girl Outcast* was written for youngsters, another relatively powerless group. Sonia is frightening not just because she is a Jezebel but because she is an adult. Authority will believe her not her stepdaughter. As narrator Allingham is on the side of the hero and heroine as if he were their ultimate fairy godfather. He reassures them that their suffering will help them to grow and steps in occasionally to offer advice. *The Girl Outcast* is rites-of-passage story – a common fairy-tale or adventure type. Jack and Doris are slightly comic and occasionally inept but their bravery and their love for one another enables them to move from situations of dependence to become responsible parents themselves. The editorially-added subheading in *The Favorite Comic* changes from 'A Story of the Trials and Tribulations of a Young Girl Alone

and Penniless in the Great City of London' to 'The Story of a Young Wife and her Young Husband and of a Wicked Woman who Tried to Separate Them'.⁵⁵

The Girl Outcast draws heavily on the typology of folk and fairy tale for its effects. Sonia, 'lithe and sinous' (ie snaky), calls down the forces of evil on the two young lovers. She is in league with both Baron Sarke, a sinister foreigner with extensive powers to impersonate others and the even more sinister Dr Cain who also specializes in disguise and potion-making.⁵⁶ Sonia herself turns from beautiful to hideous and back at least twice in the story – as wicked stepmothers/witch queens so often do. When her facial disfigurement as 'Mrs Silver' is obliterated for the second time she reappears looking years younger than her first self and poised to lure other young men to their fate.⁵⁷ Doris has her Cinderella moment when fairy godfather M. Antoine provides transport to the ball and a beautiful dress so she can rescue Jack from a designing brunette just on the stroke of midnight.

Material objects do not change in Allingham's stories. There are no magic lamps but many of the other examples of metamorphosis listed by Warner can be paralleled. The blinding of Baron Sarke brings him back true rather than actual sight. He has been enabled 'to see things as they are'.⁵⁸ Doris and Jack's dead child, whose body was found in the ashes of a baby farm, the 'House of Hope', is not dead. She is rediscovered as 'Doll', a seven-year old pick-pocket with the pluck to defy Sonia as her mother never could. And, just in case the reader misses the point of all these transformations, there is a short scene when Jack is buying the identity of Tom Tiffin, second footman at the prison governor's mansion. "First rate," replied Tom Tiffin, as with wonder in his eyes he took the three crisp banknotes and the three sovereigns

which Jack pushed over the table towards him. “By Jove it’s like a fairy-tale. Here, landlord, a railway timetable please!”⁵⁹

Mother Love

‘You kin git a sweet’art any dye / But yer can’t git annuver muvver!’ sings young Doll, Doris’s unknown daughter from the slums. ‘It was a song she had heard in Angel Court and its neighbourhood and ‘although the tune was terrible, the sentiment was excellent,’ comments the narrator.⁶⁰ It is the absence of the mother that opens the way for the cruel stepmother. In a third group of stories (the first being broken homes, the second rites-of-passage) Allingham deliberately removes the mother from her children – the father being already dead or emotionally distant from them. This leaves them terrifyingly vulnerable, a situation not at all uncommon in the fairy-tale genre. ‘The good mother often dies at the beginning of the story,’ explains Warner. ‘Tales telling of her miraculous return to life, like Shakespeare’s romances *Pericles* and *The Winter’s Tale*, have not attained the currency of ‘Cinderella’ or ‘Snow White’ in which she is supplanted by a monster.’⁶¹ Allingham certainly produces monsters but, in the group of stories that began with *Mother Love* in *Fun and Fiction* (1912) his mothers are never really far away. They are watching over their bewildered children in almost impenetrable disguise and they are restored to them – and to wealth and social station – before the story ends.

Mother Love was wringing surplus value from the popularity of Mrs Henry Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861). ‘*East Lynne*,’ writes Bell ‘is perhaps the book whose name one most often hears from men and women both’.⁶² Seven of the respondents to her

survey mentioned it, as opposed to Shakespeare twice, Dickens twice, Marie Corelli once, Miss Braddon once, Rider Haggard once. Bell attributes this to the author's 'admirable compound of the goody and the sensational' and suggests that its very popularity was an important reason for its greater popularity.⁶³ The fact that *East Lynne* was available in so many versions (including an adaptation for the stage) made it increasingly likely to be read. Once a book is distributed via corner shops, newsagents or supermarkets, its success is boosted exponentially by its simple availability. Books that are sold like newspapers may attain the circulation and the social penetration of newspapers – as Mills & Boon or Harlequin romances did in the late twentieth century – or 3d copies of *Driven from Home* 'on sale everywhere' in 1911.⁶⁴ The cheap papers wanted some of this market for themselves so set out to attract their readers with editorial promises of 'the new *East Lynne*', 'the greatest story since *East Lynne*' etc.⁶⁵

I cannot think of a novel before *East Lynne* that so strongly evokes maternal anguish and protectiveness and it was this element, not Lady Isobel Vane's adultery, that Allingham selected for his readers. Whilst Wood's heroine has been permanently disfigured and dies, almost unacknowledged, after watching over her dying child, Allingham's Mary Grant is merely disguised. Her appearance is therefore reversible. Although Allingham can be seen utilising some of his own parental feelings by putting a child with the same name, age and characteristics as his own daughter at the centre of his first mother love story, *Mother Love* remains a fairy tale. The stepmother figure is irredeemably bad – her male associates are shocked by her cruelty to the children – and the heroine shoots her without hesitation when she is discovered

beating little Margery. However, because the context is 'goody' as well as sensational, the stepmother later returns from death, thus ensuring that the heroine has not actually transgressed.

The characteristic mood of fairy tales, explains Warner, is optative:

Imagining the fate that lies ahead and ways of dealing with it (if adverse - as in 'Hansel and Gretel' and 'Donkeyskin') or achieving it (if favourable - as in 'Puss in Boots') is the stuff of Mother Goose tales. The genre is characterised by 'heroic optimism', as if to say 'one day we might be happy even if it won't last'.⁶⁶

Allingham's formulae, developed during these early years of writing for the young (and older) readers of *The Butterfly*, *Merry and Bright*, *The Favorite Comic*, *Fun and Fiction* provided him 'a language of the imagination with a vocabulary of images and a syntax of plots'.⁶⁷ The formulae would survive the forthcoming years of war though many of their readers would not. Their quality of 'heroic optimism' would be severely tested.

¹ I am using *Driven from Home* as a base-line here. However several of these plot-happenings and character-types had already appeared in Allingham's own earlier work as well as in his common writer predecessors.

² Burke on 'schemata' p.11 - 12. 'It has been argued by psychologists that it is impossible to perceive or remember anything without schemata.' They may provide 'a principle of selection that would allow the observer to see pattern rather than confusion.'

³ All these quotes taken from reprinted version of *Driven From Home*, retitled *A Convict and a Man*. See Appendix II.

⁴ Hoggart p. 72.

⁵ Letter 129 (10.7.1907).

⁶ *Convict 99* (Answers 1892). Described as "the most famous serial in the world," Dilnot p. 17.

⁷ *Polly Perkins* and *Miss Maggie MacFee* are of a different type; *Ruby Wray* may be considered hybrid or transitional.

⁸ A new author is piggy-backed onto readers of *The Girl Outcast* thus, 'if you like this story, please read 'Her Broken Heart' – the grand new serial just starting in our companion paper, *The Butterfly*' *Favorite Comic* 22.4.1911.

⁹ Radway p ix.

¹⁰ Florence Bell *At the Works* (London: Nelson, 1911). This was first published in 1907 with part of the chapter on recreation rewritten for the 1911 edition.

¹¹ Unfortunately the reading survey formed the earliest part of Bell's work. It was completed before 1907 and thus preceded Allingham's period of success.

¹² Bell p. 207, p. 215.

¹³ Bell's respondents 16 (romances) and 41 (boys' adventure).

¹⁴ Transcript made by Anna Davin, quoted in *Growing up Poor* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996) p.77.

¹⁵ Rose p. 84.

¹⁶ See previous chapter.

¹⁷ Letter to Sutton 30.11.1919, quoted Ferris, p. 230.

¹⁸ *Butterfly* 31.12.1910.

¹⁹ Allingham (1963).

²⁰ Bell p. 195.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Bell reports that there were ten music halls with both moving pictures and variety entertainment in Middlesbrough c 1911. Grace Allingham might have performed in locations such as these. Bell also comments on rapid development of moving pictures.

²³ *The Convict Bride* was the opening serial for a new paper *Fun & Fiction* in 1912. This was a 1d paper and Allingham's rate of pay likewise doubled.

²⁴ Hoggart p. 129.

²⁵ Hoggart p.122.

²⁶ The trial of the old mother in *Ashamed of His Mother* (*Butterfly* 30.12.11) is a travesty of justice and is presented with anger and compassion.

²⁷ *LJ* 19.12.1896.

²⁸ Hoggart p. 34.

²⁹ Bell p. 81.

³⁰ *CG* 20/5/1909.

³¹ Diary 6.1.1909.

³² Cf. the families studied in Reeves *Round about a Pound a Week* which was based in Allingham's childhood area, Kennington, in South London.

³³ Bell listed 25 houses "where they read books that are absolutely worth reading".

³⁴ Bell found 17 women and 8 men who could not read; 8 men and 3 women who actually disliked reading; 7 women who had no time for reading and 28 houses "where no-one cares to read."

³⁵ Bell p. 212.

³⁶ Bell p. 241.

³⁷ Allingham (1963) p. 8.

³⁸ Bell p. 227.

³⁹ Bruno Bettelheim *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Knopf, 1976); Warner (1994) p. xiii.

⁴⁰ Warner p. xiii.

⁴¹ 'Mother Goose Tales' published Paris 1697.

⁴² Warner (1994) p. xvii.

⁴³ Radway further links this to the material conditions of the novels' production and thus to the vested commercial interest of the producers.

⁴⁴ Warner p xii quoting Beer *The Romance* (London: 1970)

⁴⁵ Radway p162 (Allingham's stories would count as failed romances by the Smithton criteria).

- ⁴⁶ Warner p. xv.
- ⁴⁷ Warner p. xii.
- ⁴⁸ Thorogood p. 126.
- ⁴⁹ Warner p. 210.
- ⁵⁰ ref letter 106 17.2.1907. Thorogood p. 30.
- ⁵¹ *Favorite Comic* 21.1.1911 p. 2.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ The same name is used for this hero as for the hero of *Driven from Home* which had just finished in *The Butterfly* (Jan 1911). Might it be that type for these names was ready set up by the printers so it saved trouble to use it again? 'Jim Gubbins' from *DfH* become 'Joe Gubbins' in the *GO*.
- ⁵⁴ *Favorite Comic* 18.2.1911.
- ⁵⁵ *Favorite Comic* 23.9.1911.
- ⁵⁶ The G O is a good example of balance and tolerance re foreigners – Baron Sarke vs. M. Antoine and the quiet law-abiding immigrants of the Surrey shore vs. the handful of criminal anarchists. Explicit criticism of English lack of welcome. *Favorite Comic* 25.3.1911.
- ⁵⁷ The young farmer who she enchants calls her his 'beautiful princess' and longs to 'carry her away.' *Favorite Comic* 3.2.1912; Baby Doris reappears tumbling from a peach tree like a 'wild-eyed sprite' or 'a creature out of fairyland' *Favorite Comic* 23.9.1911.
- ⁵⁸ *Favorite Comic* 2.12.1911.
- ⁵⁹ *Favorite Comic* 1.4.1911.
- ⁶⁰ *Favorite Comic* 11.11.1911.
- ⁶¹ Warner p. 201.
- ⁶² Bell p. 235.
- ⁶³ Ibid
- ⁶⁴ McAleer quotes 85% market share for Mills & Boon in the 1990s, p. 106.
- ⁶⁵ E.g. *Happy Home* 23.9.1916 (illustration).
- ⁶⁶ Warner p. xvi.
- ⁶⁷ Warner p. xix.

Chapter Seven

Canaries chirping in an earthquake

The Happy Home, The People's Journal and Woman's Weekly, 1914 - 1919

The First World War had a devastating impact on families and thus on the readership of Allingham's serial stories. Initially it seemed that his fictional formulae were sufficiently adaptable to continue to function effectively within the comic-and-story papers for which they had been designed. But the wider demographic and economic crises inevitably affected these low status papers that had included so many young men among their readers. As women became more prominent in the domestic population, first as suffering mothers, then as newly significant workers (sometimes with more disposable income to spend on entertainment), the market for Allingham's stories was reshaped. Observable changes in the stories themselves – the focus on heroines rather than couples, for instance - can best be comprehended if the effect of war on families is understood as the absent signifier.

Human Nature, 1913-1916

At the outset of the First World War Allingham was, as usual, writing a serial for *The Butterfly*. *Human Nature* had already been running for the best part of a year and by September 26th 1914 the hero and heroine, Jack and Joyce, have overcome their difficulties and are finally married.¹ They set off for their honeymoon through the hop-gardens and harvest fields of Kent. Joyce gazes around her:

‘What a beautiful land England is Jack!’ she said, with a sigh of contentment.

‘Yes dear’, said her husband gravely, ‘a land to live in, a land, if need be, to die for.’

They arrive at their new home and sit out after dinner in its lovely garden, revelling in their togetherness. Joyce, however, is prescient:

‘Beautiful as it is, it would seem like a prison if you went away and left me here alone.’

Jack pressed her hand with a firm grip. ‘But I am not going away. No power on earth can now take me from your side.’

A discreet cough near at hand startled them both.

Formulaically this is very neat. Allingham’s pre-war serials regularly ended with hero and heroine portrayed in just such a tranquil setting when they had finally earned their right to live happily ever after. However these serials also frequently began with an official intruder fracturing a couple’s domestic contentment and often dispatching one of them to prison. In this case the unwelcome visitor is an emissary from the War Office. He has come to ask Jack, as the inventor of the Kingsley monoplane, whether he is prepared to join the Royal Army Flying Corps:

‘That would of course involve active service in the field in the event of war.’

Jack raised his eyebrows.

‘War? You don’t suggest that there is any possibility of England being involved in war?’

The stranger shrugged his shoulders.

‘Oh no, I hope not! But this Servian business is developing rather rapidly. It will most likely blow over but we don’t intend to be taken by surprise this time. What I want to know is this. In the event of war can we rely on you for special service with the Kingsley monoplane?’

Joyce had risen to her feet, and stood beside her husband. He turned and looked at her.

She was trembling but the brave look in her eyes gave him courage.

Once more he confronted his visitor.

‘Sir’ he said gravely. ‘In the event of this country being involved in war, I trust every Englishman would do his part to uphold her honour and repel the invader. At any rate you can rely on me. When England needs me I am ready.’²

The next instalment brings Jack's call to duty. The formula ingredients continue to adapt well to the new circumstances. The first half of *Human Nature* had already included an ambiguous foreigner, Julian Marck, undertaking sinister medical research. He is effortlessly diverted to spy status (and membership of the secret 'Society of the Eagle and the Serpent') ready to steal the vital papers that Jack keeps locked in his study desk (a regular location from *A Devil of a Woman* onwards). There is also Bobs, a comic and gallant little cockney girl, dedicated to the protection of the ladylike and artistic Joyce. She swiftly and easily becomes a symbol of working class patriotism and effectiveness, quick to spot a sham and very much more acute than her mistress. When Joyce suggests application to the War Office for news of Jack, Bobs is scornful:

'You can go where you like, but it's only wasting time,' said Bobs emphatically. 'If you want to find Mr. Kingsley you'll have to get as near as you can to the fighting line. He's bound to be where the bloomin' bullets are thickest. He's that sort of mug.'³

From being a secondary character in the 1913-14 half of the story Bobs takes centre stage in the wartime section, effectively displacing Jack and Joyce in instalment after instalment as she foils any number of dastardly German plots by the exercise of her loyalty and shrewdness – qualities which are presented as stereotypically working-class. Bobs is almost a comic strip character herself. In illustrations she is usually short, broad and bulgy with a flat hat and often a large umbrella which she uses as a weapon – rather like Carl Giles's famous 'Grandma' pictured as a child.⁴ She has a truculent edge to her heroism that suggests a type of music-hall humour and which is echoed later in Margery Allingham's more famous cockney character, Magersfontein Lugg. Certainly she represented something

important in Allingham's own idealisation of working-class pluck and grit: 'I know the common people,' he wrote to Lord Northcliffe in 1915, 'I get my living from studying them as you once did – and I tell you that if this war lasts ten years, it will not be their courage and resolution that will be the first to slacken.'⁵ At the end of *Human Nature* it is Bobs who crawls un-noticed across the floor and bounds up to take the final bullet, thus saving all the officer-class characters and finally consigning Julian Marck to a firing squad in the Tower of London. Throughout the story Marck has deceived and evaded the intelligentsia time and again. But he has never fooled Bobs.

From its new beginning *Human Nature* ran on until February 1916, the longest of all Allingham's productions. There was, however, a variation in the presentation of the parting of the hero and heroine in autumn 1914 that may, in retrospect, appear significant. For the first time, the sundering of the couple included explication of their different roles as male and female. When Jack tells Joyce that he will indeed be in the fighting line within a week:

Joyce stared at her husband with a look of mingled terror and admiration.

This man who she only knew as an adoring lover, gentle and tender as a woman, was suddenly transformed.

With a thrill of wonder she saw before her *a primitive man, a grim fighting animal with the light of battle in his steady brown eyes.*

She was frightened, but she also experienced another emotion which conquered her fears. There was born within her a fierce determination to be loyal to her man, *to be what he expected her to be*, and not to fail him in this hour of crisis. (my italics)

Jack shows he too appreciates the situation in gender terms.

'It is you women with your courage who give us courage and nerve us to do and dare. Yours is the harder part and the braver part. We go out to new scenes and new adventures; you have to stay at home, hearing good news and bad news, and, what is worse, no news at all, and all the time you have to keep calm and strong so

that the courage of those about you does not fail. If things go badly, as well they may for a time, it is you brave and loyal women who will keep up the spirit of the nation so that in the end, come it soon or late, victory must be ours.’⁶

The outbreak of war immediately raised many people’s awareness of their gender-determined social roles: soldier / wife or mother, adventurer / nurturer, fighter / sufferer. The full effects of the war on families could not be foreseen at this early stage, nor the commercial effects on the family-fiction market. The small group of papers with which Allingham was involved was not as obviously bellicose as other Harmsworth publications. *The Dreadnought*, for instance, which had previously been part of the group and had run Allingham’s *Max the Magnificent* early in 1914, had left the group to join with Hamilton Edwards’s *Boys’ Friend* department. It immediately produced a Special War Number and was soon re-titled *The Dreadnought and War Pictorial*.⁷ *Human Nature* included stereotypes such as the evil high-placed spy and the ultra-obedient Hun soldiery, but when Julian Marck has duped a group of ordinary German trades people into possible sedition, Allingham’s London policeman just takes their names and addresses and lets them go with a caution. This fleeting incident is presented as an exemplar of proper British behaviour. It is quite unlike the actual, shameful, persecution of German naturals, which has been described as ‘an ugly chapter in British history’.⁸ Popular newspapers - such as Northcliffe’s *Daily Mail* (the circulation of which rose 15% in the early days of the war) – are held largely responsible for outbreaks of mob violence against inoffensive German shopkeepers, or indeed anyone (or anything) with German-sounding names.

The Butterfly and its companions carried only a few war-related features until 1917 when F.C. Cordwell had joined up and the character of the papers changed. *Merry & Bright* began a long series of Red Cross adventures and *The Favorite Comic* introduced 'Molly Madcap the Merry Munition-Maker'. Allingham rewrote an episode of *His Convict Bride* to include a dramatic courtroom appearance by a wounded VC and attempted to structure part of *The Way of the World* as a war prequel.⁹ A few Tommy jokes found their way onto the cartoon pages but otherwise it was almost as if the war did not exist. Some efforts were made to use contemporary allusions to market *The Firefly*, weakest of the group: 'Never mind if the price of bread has 'gone up.' *The Firefly* hasn't. It's still 1/2d.' 'Wearing Khaki? Then he's entitled to a presentation copy of *the Firefly*, price 1/2d. Give him one.'¹⁰ But generally, until the spring of 1917, the comic-and-story papers continued to offer the mixture as before, using their internal advertising to direct readers to dedicated war-interest magazines (such as *The War Pictorial*) elsewhere in the company.

The real-time writing in *Human Nature* was not typical of Allingham's wartime contributions or of his work generally. His other big drama-stories produced for the comic-and-story papers after the outbreak of war were *Justice* (*Favorite Comic* 1915-1916), *London* (*Favorite Comic/Merry & Bright* 1916-1917), *The Steel Clutch* (*Butterfly* 1916) and *The Way of the World* (*Butterfly* 1916-1917). All are set in fiction-times and places that make no reference to actuality. Only by reading them with cognisance of surrounding national events (as a contemporary reader naturally would) can one notice how the pre-war formula has subtly adapted in response to new emotions and priorities. The hero of *Justice* relinquishes his blonde and gently-born

first love in favour of gutsy, dark-haired, working-class Madge. The villain of *The Steel Clutch* presents himself as a superman demanding the aristocratic and beautiful heiress as his fit mate. His megalomania has a different tinge to previous villains as he frequently refers to his own 'higher intelligence' and makes quasi-philosophical assertions such as 'there is no evil but failure, no good but success'.¹¹ (It is not a surprise to discover, from McFee's letters, that Allingham had been reading Nietzsche at this time.¹²) At a first encounter Allingham's plot-elements may appear so consistent though his quarter-century of drama-story writing as to constitute an *idée fixe*. On closer scrutiny, however, it is such small changes in the relative positions of plot elements that reveal his live engagement with the wider world. At this period the condition of war with Germany makes such small shifts comprehensible.

Absent Boys

Allingham's was an entertainment art. It needed its weekly audience of readers to make it complete. As the war progressed, the mixed age, mixed gender audience in the comic-and-story papers fragmented and by the middle of 1917 his stories stopped appearing. Shortage of paper in that year necessitated the absorption of *The Firefly* (ex-*Fun and Fiction*) into *The Butterfly* and *The Favorite Comic* into *Merry and Bright* but this does not seem sufficient explanation for the absence of Allingham after eight years of continuous supply. F.C. Cordwell, had joined up in May 1916 but the larger question remains as to why any substitute editor decided to alter the personality of the comics by not including work from their main contributor?

Part of the answer may have been that Allingham was now expensive (in comic paper terms). When *Fun and Fiction* had become a 1d rather than a halfpenny production in 1912, his rates had doubled from 1 to 2 guineas per thousand words for new work.¹³ Cover prices had to rise in 1917 and cutting Allingham may have been an economy measure for all. The preferred fictions in the new-look papers were briefer, more fantastical, more bellicose and, apparently, aimed at younger readers. This strategy seems to have been successful. Later in the summer of 1917, Sir George Sutton, managing director of the Amalgamated Press, was able to reassure his Chief:

Business at the A.P. is very good indeed. This is the holiday week of course when everything is generally up. *Answers* is particularly good, 331,000 and sold out and the 1/2d papers which were raised to 1d have started to go up for the first time.¹⁴

This cheerful note should perhaps serve as a reminder of the extent to which life on the Home Front preserved a veneer of normality with seaside holidays being taken even within earshot of the guns across the channel. The nation came close to starvation in 1917 but the A.P.'s gross receipts still managed to show an increase.¹⁵

Producer economics aside, if the consumers had been as steadily enthusiastic for Allingham's work as they had been since *Driven From Home* in 1909, there is little doubt that any caretaker editor would have done his or her best to include it. The 'proof of popularity' remained with the reader but the lives of readers were changing. Although the data is unclear, it seems reasonable to assume that different audiences were changing in different ways and that this was related to their age and gender. Allingham's drama-stories did not leave the Amalgamated Press; they moved from the comics into *Woman's Weekly* (see below).

The primary audience for the comic-and story-papers had been young. Most of the men who volunteered for active service in 1914 and 1915 were also young. Even when conscription was introduced in 1916 it was usually the young and single who were sent abroad first. A recent study of the British soldier during the Great War generalizes that ‘one in four of the men who served were under 25 years old in 1914’¹⁶ and by 1918 ‘half the infantrymen in France are 18 years old’.¹⁷ J.M. Winter calculates that age-related mortality was greatest at age 20 and that over the period 1914-1918 the age structure of British war losses was as follows:¹⁸

Age at death	% war deaths in each age group	Total war deaths in each age group
16-19	11.76	85,000
20-24	37.15	268,515
25-29	22.31	161,253
30-34	15.17	109,646
35-39	9.18	66,352
40-44	3.07	22,189
45-49	0.94	6,794
50 +	0.42	3,036
Total		722,785

When social class as well as age is taken into account, the middle and upper classes can be shown to have suffered proportionately more than the working class – 13.6% officers (across all three services) killed as opposed to 11.7% other ranks – yet in sheer numbers there is no doubt where the weight of casualties fell. 45,000 officers died between 1914 and 18 but so did 677,785 ‘other ranks’.¹⁹ That represents fifteen times as many individual bereavements for ‘the common people’ and very much greater financial hardship in real terms for those families who had no security apart

from the labour of their most active members. The economic impact of a 1915 war death on an Allingham-reading family is illustrated later in this chapter.

These casualties cannot fail to have had an impact on the penny and halfpenny paper markets – remembering, for instance, Allingham’s boy readers in Birmingham, all of whom would have been eligible to serve. The data however is complex, as there was differentiation between and within social classes on grounds of physique. ‘Their poor physical state probably saved the lives of many industrial workers who simply did not reach the minimum physical standard for military service, let alone combat duty,’ comments Winter.²⁰ So perhaps not as many of those Birmingham teenagers went as might have been expected. Perhaps it was their slightly more integrated contemporaries: those who had joined the boys’ clubs, had the fathers in steady, craftsman-level, work and had been just a little better nourished through their brief lives to date. Possibly the immediate impact of casualties fell a percentage point or two more heavily on buyers of the *Boy’s Own Paper*, than on the readers of *The Butterfly* and *Merry and Bright*. We cannot know. As Van Emden and Humphries remind us, ‘Bald figures on casualties, dead, wounded, even the shell-shocked, hide a mostly untold story of massive individual dislocation from family, friends, even society at large.’²¹ Over five million men, from England and Wales alone, served in the British Forces in the Great War. Their absence changed the daily lives of those who remained at home in innumerable practical as well as emotional ways.

It was the home market rather than the men abroad on whom the mass-market publishers concentrated – though they were as keen to see their products in the trenches as they had been to distribute them across the empire. Lord Northcliffe wrote

to Sir George Sutton: 'The sale of our periodicals, both newspapers and magazines, is paramount in France' and his context suggests that by 'paramount' he means dominant or at least ubiquitous. '*Titbits* and *Answers* are purchased by the Red Cross and distributed to the wounded soldiers in large numbers [...] The *London* and the *Red* are to be seen in very, very sad places, I can assure you.'²² These were market leaders among the penny papers and though Northcliffe does not mention the comics, it is likely that they too were being read by some of those millions of men at arms. *Comic Cuts*, the original and longest-running of all the A.P. comics, gave its name in trench slang to the daily intelligence reports.²³ E.S. Turner, the authority on boys' papers, who was himself 'a little lad' in the Great War years, speaks of youths 'who, when their hour came, threw aside *Comic Cuts* and *The Magnet*, went over the top and died as virgins'.²⁴ Frank Richards wrote that he was proud 'to know that his writings had been read in the trenches in one war and in the Western Desert in the next.' He described *The Magnet* and *The Gem* as 'canaries chirping in an earthquake'.²⁵ This image could also stand for the entertainment papers for which Allingham wrote.

There are some indications the boys abroad were still thought of as among the readership of the comic-and-story papers. 'Are you sending a copy of *the Butterfly* to that friend of yours in the trenches?'²⁶ A reader's comment is inserted under a page of Allingham's *The Steel Clutch*: "'Thrilling to a degree"' is the verdict on this serial passed by a reader stationed at Cherbourg.'²⁷ But such comments are rare. Unlike newspapers, such as *The Christian Globe* or *The People's Journal* (below), the comics did not include forms for direct subscription. Probably the most usual system

whereby a young man in the trenches could continue to receive his *Merry & Bright* or *Butterfly* would be by private mail. ‘You should include this in your Christmas parcel to your brother in the trenches,’ instructs the *Merry & Bright* editor. ‘It will make him ‘Merry and Bright’ too.’²⁸ Families and friends regularly sent letters and parcels to their relatives at the front and the arrival of the day’s post became a part of trench life. Contemporary photographs of the mail arriving include periodical-sized packages. The understanding was that whatever came would be shared within the unit – a man’s surrogate ‘family’. Pictures of dugouts show newspapers and magazines as well as books among the quasi-domestic items.²⁹ ‘Men read voraciously across a literary spectrum of extraordinary breadth,’ writes Richard Holmes.³⁰ Probably the new trench families were as varied in their reading and as likely to read whatever was to hand as Florence Bell’s ironworkers had been in Middlesborough.

Suffering Mothers

During World War One women, not boys, were the mainstays of Allingham’s fiction factory. He wrote with a woman, as a woman, for a woman editor and for women readers.³¹ His primary market moved to family papers (Leng’s *The Happy Home* and *The People’s Friend*) and also to papers explicitly dedicated to women (*My Weekly* and the Amalgamated Press’s *Woman Weekly*). Significantly, Allingham’s stories for these new customers no longer shared the action between couples but focused on the heroines whose survival was at stake – together with the survival of their children. *Mother Love*, the *East Lynne*-derivative written for *Fun and Fiction* in 1912 was central to Allingham’s success in the new market. Public

emotion around motherhood, already high at the outset of war, swiftly rose higher. Interest in woman as workers came noticeably later and Allingham's stories reflect this. It was asserted at first that women could best serve their country in their capacity as wives and mothers – most obviously by urging their sons or husbands to volunteer or supporting them in their decision to serve, as Joyce Travers does in *Human Nature*.³²

Just before the war Allingham had begun to forge a relationship with a penny family paper called *Sunday Hours*, which was owned by John Leng & Co. a Dundee company. The paper had redesigned itself during 1913-1914 as *The Happy Home* and had purchased second serial rights to two of Allingham's drama-stories. The first story written specifically for *Happy Home* readers opened on October 10th 1914. 'Don't Leave Us Mummy!' evoked emotions around maternal anguish and protectiveness. It highlighted the vulnerability of children in a world of absent fathers and cruel stepmothers and used the same *East Lynne*-inspired trope of the disguised mother watching over her little ones as *Mother Love* had done. *Mother Love* itself had already appeared in *The Happy Home*'s companion paper, *My Weekly*, as *Spare My Children!* 'The most intensely pathetic story that has ever been written' announced the editor.³³ In late 1914-1915 it ran in *The Christian Globe* and was taken by *The Happy Home* as soon as 'Don't Leave Us Mummy!' finished. 'Don't Leave Us Mummy!' then moved to *The Firefly* as *The Drama of Life*.

Readers of *The Happy Home*, it seemed, had an appetite for maternal suffering and child insecurity. Their optimistically titled magazine, however, was clearly signposted as a means of escape from daily problems:

In these times it is not good for us to sit studying the war news all day; a little light reading does us good now and then, and in the pages of *The Happy Home*, the RIGHT paper for the family circle, you will find all your needs supplied.³⁴

At that point *Mother Love* was making its fourth appearance in as many years. Later in 1916 Allingham supplied them with *The Heart of a Mother* and in 1918 with *A Mother at Bay* still commodifying the same emotions into near identical formulae. The mother series continued and diversified after the war with *Her First Born Son* (*Happy Home* 1920). *The Dead Secret* (Merry & Bright 1922) and *Kept From her Child* (Mascot 1924) as well as numerous re-prints of the first two narratives.³⁵ In the later examples there are some intriguing differences in the circumstances that sunder the mother from her children. Divorce as well as death becomes a factor post-war and sometimes the situation is complicated by the need to conceal the existence of children from earlier, sometimes un-married relationships.³⁶

Such manipulation fits with Warner's understanding of fairy-tale narratives as satisfying people's need to anticipate the worst in order to imagine ways of dealing with it. The social settings of Allingham's stories were far removed from readers' actual lives, thus allowing the relief of escapism, and the melodramatic language and situations may have facilitated some transfer of emotion at a time when stoicism was in everyday demand. The editors' 'readings' of particular instalments frequently indicated that sympathy was the desired response (rather than excitement, for instance). Sympathy was a means of bringing people closer to one another, promoting a sense of community and mutual comfort. *Heart of a Mother* was presented as appealing 'to the sympathy of every true woman':

If you have ever loved – if you have ever suffered – you will feel for the young girl wife in this great serial and by your sympathy you will be able, in a measure, to help all the women who are suffering in just such a way today.³⁷

It was not unlike being asked to remember other people in one's prayers.

In the interests of variety, perhaps of balance, Allingham's *Baby Jess*, supplied to *The Happy Home* in 1917, included a father who is loving and protective, albeit absent, and a woman who must learn how to be a good stepmother. The child's mother is dead and does not return: the heroine's child also dies and does not come back. 'This cheer-up paper is wanted at the front. Enclose a copy in your next parcel to Him.'³⁸ If this forwarding to soldiers happened in fact, *Baby Jess* could have conveyed the reassuring message that good women would finally ensure that children were cared for and homes re-established despite the daunting odds against them. *Baby Jess* was not typical, however. What readers and their editors apparently wanted was repeated severance and reunion between biological mothers and their children, with the added reassurance that Mother, however disguised, was never really far away. Throughout the years of war there was always an Allingham 'Mother Love' story running somewhere.

William Harvey and *The People's Journal*

In 1918 Allingham received a letter from William Harvey, Leng's fiction editor. 'We are in need of a good holding story of the 'East Lynne' type suitable for our weekly newspaper *The People's Journal*.'³⁹ This was the flagship publication in the

Leng group and claimed the largest circulation of any paper north of the Forth.⁴⁰ It was a weekly Saturday newspaper produced in Dundee in both national and local editions. In wartime this meant that the photographs as well as the names of the dead were published in their localities – together with desperate pleas for information about ‘missing Soldier Heroes’ (insertions free of charge).⁴¹ Deaths in the Scottish regiments serving on the Western Front were double those in English regiments – 26% as opposed to 12% since the Scottish troops were so often used as shock troops in the forefront of a major attack. Given the strong local recruitment bases of so many regiments this could mean major impact on particular areas in any one week and a recent study by Van Emden and Humphries has suggested that the scale of family tragedy ‘was probably greatest in Scotland’.⁴² Very many of Allingham’s new readers were among those coping with loss.

Allingham’s literary agent was unfeignedly delighted by the invitation. ‘There’s a lot of money to be made in that corner if you lay yourself out for it.’⁴³ It was soon apparent that this money would not be earned lightly. Allingham, who disliked writing synopses, wrote one and received a detailed and highly directional response from Harvey:

Dear Mr. Allingham,

I am favoured with your letter of 29th inst., embodying the synopsis of a proposed *People’s Journal* story. Generally speaking we think this is on the right lines, but we shall be glad if you will give the following points your best consideration.

(1) So far as the synopsis goes the woman does not seem to have a very compelling reason for deserting her children. The reason, however, may be made sufficiently strong by what you write.

(2) With reference to your remark as to having a little more freedom in *The People’s Journal*, we do not want to handicap you in any way, but at the same time we desire to state that we place great value on our stories having the ring of plausibility. Consequently we should like you to be as natural as possible in your

incidents avoiding anything which might be called super-fantastic or anything of the ultra sensational atmosphere such as was prominent in the early chapters of your story 'The Steel Clutch', and in an earlier reprint story which we bought from you and which you will recall dealt with the work of a Russian Secret Society in London.

(3) As the *Journal* is a domestic newspaper you must be careful to avoid sexual questions or anything suggesting immorality.

(4) The impression left by the synopsis is that the story will be a rather sad one. We should like you to relieve it in some way but we do not wish you to get this effect by bringing in any low comedy character. We would rather prefer that the element of hope should be introduced by the workings of some character – it might be one of the grandmothers, or an aunt of the children whose business it would be to bring things finally right, and whose efforts towards this would always hold the sympathy of the reader. Alternatively this hopeful side of the story might appear in the strength of character of the husband who never lost faith in his wife, and who, knowing that he himself was innocent, believed that everything would come all right in the end.

These are suggestions only and not meant to bind you or cramp the development of the story in any way. Probably you already see a plan for getting this effect. We know we can safely leave the matter in your hands.

In these days of short sizes a first instalment must not exceed 6,000 words, but I know that you can get a good number within these limits. As I mentioned before, we want to start the story at once, and I shall be glad therefore to have the opening instalment at your earliest.⁴⁴

Checking the story Allingham produced against these specific instructions it seems that he chose to follow them in spirit rather than literally. *She Sinned for her Children* (editorially re-titled *For Love of her Bairns*) dispenses with the husband completely. He and the heroine's brother have both died in action, the brother crucially before he signed the Will that should have provided for the heroine, Mary Keith, and her children. Foolishly, indeed criminally, Mary is persuaded to add his signature for the sake of her children's inheritance. Her action opens her to blackmail and thence to enforced parting from her young son and daughter. Assumed dead she returns, with the inevitable pair of heavily tinted glasses, to protect the children as their governess. Allingham allows himself a joke – an *East Lynne* story had been requested; when disguised, Mary calls herself 'Mrs. Wood'.⁴⁵

There is a cruel sister-in-law who steps in as guardian and a sinister foreigner with both sexual and financial designs upon the heroine. Allingham takes no notice of Harvey's suggestion that he might bring in some strong grandmother-figure to make all well. Instead he makes the *deus ex machina* a wealthy and eligible officer, deeply indebted to the dead brother and ready to solve Mary's problems 'as with the touch of a magic wand'.⁴⁶ The editorial ban on 'low comedy characters' – and perhaps also the insistence on 'plausibility' – makes for a duller, more socially and stylistically homogenous tale than those produced for *The Butterfly* group. This is generally true of Allingham's work for Leng's when it is compared with his mature work for the A.P.⁴⁷ The single comic vignette (of immensely fat Mrs. Jones from the country going to London and complaining that 'everyone in this over-grown city seems to think I am in the way') is a reminder of what has been lost.⁴⁸ The Dickensian, the music-hall aspects of Allingham's art have been suppressed.

Mary Keith's eldest child is a boy. His name, Raymond, was a name made contemporarily famous by Sir Oliver Lodge's best-selling memoir of his dead son, and also by Raymond Asquith, eldest son of the then Prime Minister, killed in action. In this story, begun before the war ended, little Raymond is suffering, adamant and angry:

During these last few weeks he had suffered much. He had been insulted and cruelly treated. He had been caned. He, who never in his life before had received a blow.

But the bodily pain he had endured was as nothing compared with the violence done to his sense of justice.

It was this that maddened him and filled him with a secret, passionate desire to kill and destroy.

One consolation and only one he had. They had not conquered him. They had not made him say he was sorry. They had not made him admit they had any right to treat him as they did. He, the son of Lieutenant Douglas Keith had defied them

all and he would defy them to the end. Whatever they did, he would never give in.⁴⁹

Mary realises that she has given up her child to a sadist:

Must I stand by and look on while they ill-treat him? What does it avail to have won wealth and success for him in the future if he is to endure thus now? If they break his spirit, if they crush and brutalise him, what kind of man will he be when the time comes for him to enjoy the fortune I have sinned to give him?⁵⁰

In her disguise she offers Raymond the chance to run away but he is stubborn and means to 'stick it.' 'What give up Lynwood? Give it up to her? No jolly fear. By rights I'm master here, and in a year or two I'll show her.'⁵¹ The portrayal of such determined, even arrogant, resistance might convey Allingham's understanding of young Englishmen in a backs-to-the-wall fight without trespassing into an arena about which, as a non-combatant, he knew so little.

Readers Coping With Loss: A Mother and Son in Dundee

How would this have been read in Dundee? Young Douglas Raymond Keith and his mother are English officer-class characters engaged in their fictional battle for money, status and inheritance. ('Lynwood' was a Kentish manor house). Many of *The People's Journal* readers were living in conditions of extreme hardship. Immediately before the war Dundee had the highest infant mortality rate and second highest household overcrowding in all Scotland (higher too than in the worst districts of the East End of London) and the substandard heights and weights of the children of workers in the town's jute mills had been noted by the factory inspectorate as evidence of chronic malnutrition.⁵² Although nationally some appalling social statistics eased slightly during the war years, this brought little comfort to the

bereaved. One survey conducted found that 12% of widows died within a year of their husband's death.⁵³

We are fortunate to have the testimony of a child whose widowed mother did eventually survive. Dennis Gilfeather's father had been killed at the battle of Loos in September 1915. Dennis described what life was like for his family in 1918:

After Dad was killed Mum received the magnificent sum of £1 2s 6d [£1.12] that was her pension every week for herself and us four kids. It wasn't enough by any means. Life was very hard and Mum went down with erysipelas and became close to death. I felt my whole world was changing. The sunshine was leaving my life. Your mother's in bed in hospital and they're prophesying her death. I remember saying to her, 'Now you canna go, Mum. I love you so much.' That's when she said to me, 'If anything happens to me, you'll look after the bairn and Annie' – that was the two youngest. I said 'Yes I'll do that.' And that's what I tried to do. Mum really didn't want the family broken up, she dreaded that. I done the things in the house, I began to take authority over the younger ones. Then after about six weeks, Mum started to recover. She was a fighter and though she was still weak, she managed to come home again.

To help his mother Dennis took a job in a jute mill.

I was just a wee boy. I was only nine when I started in the mill [...] Anyway they badly needed the labour because all the men were gone. At the mill they gave young boys a new name, often the name of someone who'd been killed in the war, that was how they got round the rules. In the books I was down as David Morris, I found out later that he'd been killed at the front when only seventeen.

Every few months the school inspector would catch up with Dennis and send him back to the classroom.

They'd be talking about verbs and nouns and semi-colons and I didn't know what they were speaking about but I could cope with that. I was a proud boy because when I got my pay and took it back home to my mum, I knew it would make her happy.⁵⁴

Looking back at his periods in school Dennis tries to see his teachers as men with their own frustrations and personal difficulties but still cannot quite forgive the savagery with which they caned the children, 'often when we had come to school so

cold'. Though a highly intelligent and determined personality, Dennis learned little. Only after he had officially left school and escaped the jute mills for work as a delivery boy, did he teach himself to read, using Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan* stories and Wild West novelettes before moving to the 'heavier stuff'. Reading, he says, 'was the only chance I had to find my feet'.⁵⁵

Dennis's mother, his aunt and his grandmother all read *The People's Journal*. In 1918, when *For Love of Her Bairns* was its lead serial, the family were living on the Lochee estate, mill-workers' housing nicknamed 'Little Tipperary' because of the numbers of poor Irish immigrants crowded in there. The arrival of *The People's Journal* on a Saturday was the highpoint of their week. 'It went through houses and homes and then all over the world' says Dennis. He thinks his mother would almost certainly have sent it to her husband in France.

In 1915 *The People's Journal* was presenting itself as a means of communication between 'Tommy' and his family at home. If Mrs Gilfeather had not posted it John Gilfeather could have subscribed directly – as a 'Sergeant J.G.' apparently did.⁵⁶ And if that was indeed the case, in the month that he died, both he and his wife would have been about to read the fifth reprint of Allingham's *A Devil of a Woman*. This is how the Dundee editor was whetting their appetites for the story:

Within the past few weeks, the country has been astounded by extraordinary revelations concerning people who have lived double lives, posing in our midst as loyal citizens while all the while they were engaged in the deepest villainy, the most ungrateful and the blackest treachery.

Around just such a character there has been written a powerful and arresting story. It concerns a woman whose beauty, whose grace and charm of manner were combined with a cunning and a cruelty that amply justifies the title *The Wickedest Woman Alive*.

Read this great story. It will interest you, entertain you and teach you something you do not know about the world in which you live.⁵⁷

By 1918, however, when Allingham returned to *The People's Journal* with a commissioned original rather than a reprinted tale, such editorial sensationalism was a thing of the past. Too many homes had been touched; the daily lives of too many families irrevocably changed. Dennis Gilfeather's reminiscence of his life then, presents a vivid picture of fear, endurance and the renegotiation of family relationships. He was just a little younger than Raymond, Allingham's fictional boy. Although it is odd, initially, to imagine Mrs. Gilfeather in Lochee reading the story of Mary Keith struggling to keep her Kentish estate with its staff (albeit depleted by war service) and gardens (overgrown) and an old mare (plucked from retirement) for the 'young master', setting this fiction in an actual family context brings us closer to some understanding of its appeal.

In *For Love of Her Bairns* suffering and struggle are transposed into the idiom of another class and place. War and death happen off stage. Strong emotional involvement is possible but so too is escapism via the lifestyle of a wealthier class. Young Raymond's defiance could serve as a focus for all who were refusing to give up, wherever they lived. The fairy-godfather figure of the returning soldier, who restores the family to live happily ever after, allows for optimism without making any additional demands on readers. For families in extreme circumstances, like Dennis Gilfeather's, there was nothing more they could do except hope. Fairy tales are finally optimistic and so, usually, is the process of shared reading.⁵⁸ Dennis's daughter, Irene, remembers her grandmother and great-aunt talking over the happenings in their weekly serial and speculating eagerly about future developments. Though Irene's memories are from a much later date than the publication of *For Love of Her Bairns*,

there is no reason to assume that the women's fiction-reading then was not similarly woven into the conversations of their daily lives. Irene compares this with way people might now discuss TV soaps.⁵⁹

Business Arrangements

Editorially *For Love of Her Bairns* was evidently considered satisfactory. After only two instalments had been published (though more would have been approved), Harvey wrote, 'We shall soon need to get a story to follow *She Sinned for her Children*. We should like this to be by you. I hope you will be able to send me an opening soon.'⁶⁰ As fiction editor for the John Leng group, Harvey worked from an office in Bank Street, Dundee where he commissioned or bought stories for *The Dundee Advertiser*, *Evening Telegraph and Post*, *Happy Home*, *People's Journal*, *People's Friend*, *My Weekly* and for the 3d series of *White Heather Novels*. He worked closely with the editors of the separate papers (a Mr. Glass in the case of *The People's Journal*) and they travelled regularly down to the Fleet Street office to make their requirements known to writers or to literary agents such as Allingham's Cotterill and Cromb.

On one of their trips to London, in December 1918, Harvey and Glass completed negotiations with Allingham and his agents for a wholesale purchase of reprint rights. One serial use each on thirteen stories was leased to 'The North' for a twelve year period.⁶¹ The sum was not large (£392 after the agents' commission and the repayment of an earlier loan) and several major stories were thus out of play for a potentially lengthy period.⁶² The agreement allowed the publishers 'power to alter and

condense as they may find necessary' and by its expiry of the agreement at the end of 1930 all the stories had been or were being used.⁶³

Early in 1919 Cotterill and Cromb also brokered a Memorandum of Agreement covering all Allingham's future work for Leng's. Allingham undertook to supply not less than two instalments every week of serial-story matter; one of 4,500 words and one of 3,500 words, for at least forty weeks of every year. For payment of 3 guineas per 1,000 words of 'approved matter', Leng's acquired a lease on the copyright on each story entitling them to three separate issues of the story within a twelve year period – altered, cut, changed, extended or edited as they saw fit.⁶⁴ After which the rights would revert to the author.⁶⁵

The second paragraph of Harvey's 1918 letter suggests that Allingham had queried the extent of his creative freedom in *The People's Journal*. Although Harvey's reply offers some recognition of Allingham's standpoint: 'these are suggestions only and not meant to bind you or cramp the development of the story in any way' the boundaries in the Leng/Thomson world were clearly drawn in favour of the firm, not the individual. Eventually this would lead to a parting of the ways but, in the difficult economic circumstances of 1917-19, Allingham must have been glad of the additional security offered to himself and his family by the Dundee connection. The Allinghams too had been forced to change their style of living. The Essex house had been relinquished and the family were living cramped in a flat in Bayswater. 'It is an agonizing business to be jerked out of one scheme into another when one is thirteen or so,' commented Margery Allingham later.⁶⁶

Harvey and his colleagues clearly knew their business and their readership. At least two of the magazines for which Allingham wrote survive to this day with little apparent change in formula or process. The Leng periodicals were part of the Scottish way of life and also had a large sale in the industrial areas of England. At the beginning of 1917, when conscription was fully operational and even older married men, like Allingham aged 49, might be called to justify their remaining out of uniform, Allingham's friend William McFee had written to wish him 'a happy, prosperous and non-military new year. Personally I am convinced that you can best serve your country by continuing to entertain those half million people a week and I hope that nothing will happen to take you off it.'⁶⁷ Writing for 'The North' meant that Allingham was reaching a significantly different section of 'the common people' than those he thought he knew when he was writing for the A.P. comics. There is no evidence that he ever travelled to Scotland or had any opportunity to meet readers like Mrs Gilfeather and her Irish Catholic neighbours in the overcrowded tenements of Lochee. Neither was his relationship with Harvey marked by any of the personal cordiality or sense of common purpose that had distinguished his early correspondence with H.J. Garrish. However his understanding of the other new market and new editor to whom he sold fiction in the war years was much closer to home.

Em Allingham and Maud Hughes: *Woman's Weekly*

Em Allingham and her sister Maud Hughes were Allingham's first cousins as well as his wife and sister-in-law. From 1916 they were also his writing partner and editor

respectively. As children neither of the sisters had had Allingham's advantages of education nor even stable family life. Their mother had left their father when the children were very young and the girls had had to make their own way economically as soon as they were able. Their mother earned her living as a housekeeper and their older sister as a governess. Their brother emigrated. Em had been a milliner before her marriage and Maud had worked at the Post Office.

The employment shortages of the First World War opened wider opportunities to the sisters as to so many other working women. Em Allingham had been writing children's fairy tales and sentimental short stories since 1906 but 1915 saw her first serial, *None Other Gods*, published in the depleted pages of *The Christian Globe*. *None Other Gods* is a redemption story in which Molly, a cosseted young woman, discovers that her handsome fiancé is a rack-renting landlord. She meets the children around his tenement block: 'Their little noses were scarlet and they all looked almost perished with cold. There was a peculiar drawn look upon all their faces which the girl did not understand. Was it possible they were hungry?'⁶⁸ Her father initially sides with Rex, her fiancé, and accuses Molly of being 'like most women [...] You want the good things of life but you don't want to know too much about how they are got.'⁶⁹ When Rex will not reduce his rents, Molly breaks off the engagement and finds new purpose in life attempting to help poor families. The story is clearly ascribed to 'Emmie Allingham' and equally clear are the entries in Allingham's 1916 diary that indicate he, too, worked on it.

Two more short serials by Emmie Allingham, *Janey's Child* and *The Girl Who Waited at Home*, followed in *The Christian Globe*. Both also feature occasionally in

Allingham's daily entries for work done though there is no doubt that they were primarily Em's. 'My mother wrote in the drawing room across the hall,' Margery Allingham reported: 'She did not do it for as long as the others but she did do it, and sold the products, reaping a sort of awed unpopularity in consequence.'⁷⁰ Em Allingham's hand in a story can often be seen in the inclusion of precise details of dress, colour and textiles which are not found in Allingham's own work. Molly, for instance, wears 'a dress of shell pink ninon with an edging of fur' on the evening she breaks off her engagement. These stories are set in a version of the real world and are much closer to romance as described by Radway. There are no bizarre disguises, Gothic locations, undetectable poisons or other of Allingham's improbabilities. Neither are there any comic eccentrics.

Em's work fitted well with the ethos of *The Christian Globe* but she also proved capable of writing for a wider audience.⁷¹ *Presumptuous Polly or The Girl Who Looked Like Gladys Cooper*, for instance, plays to the dream of looking like a film star.⁷² This story also features in Allingham's diary. It was published under a pseudonym 'Tess Allenwood' which appears to be a casual cover for work done primarily by Em with Herbert as collaborator. (Elsewhere the name is printed as 'Jess & E Allenwood' and as 'Tess Allanwood'.) A half dozen serials of this type were produced between 1915 and 1919 and sold first to the family-owned *Christian Globe* and then to the A.P.'s *Woman's Weekly*.

Here too the purchaser was family. Maud Hughes had left the Post Office and gone to work at *The Daily Sketch*, apparently at Allingham's suggestion. Evidently she made an impression. When a rescue team was required for the A.P.'s *Woman's*

Weekly, which had been founded in 1911 but had failed, initially, to find a distinctive tone or readership, Hughes was drafted in along with Winifred Johnson, editor of the highly successful women's story paper, *Forget-me-Not*. Unlike Johnson who had already spent most of her working life with the A.P., Hughes had recent relevant experience of earning a living as a woman outside journalism. 'Between them,' said the Fleetway Publications house magazine on Hughes's death forty-five years later, 'They were to run a newer-than-1917 feminist paper, *Woman's Weekly*.'⁷³

Scrutiny of the magazine over the three-year period of Hughes/Allingham involvement (1915-1919) reveals an assertiveness of tone and an abundance of factual information about careers, including an in-house information bureau. 'We have helped hundreds of readers find war jobs. Let us help you.'⁷⁴ The careers advice published was notably practical – what training would be needed, what hours usually worked, rates of pay and even what possibilities for post-war continuation. *Woman's Weekly* anticipated that many of its readers would be thrown out of work after the war so advised them either to consider newly developed careers, such as being a 'phone-girl', which had no tradition of male tenure, or to seize opportunities to build up sidelines, such as insurance agency, which could provide a useful fall-back income.⁷⁵ Emotional problems related to women's work are also considered. When the girl-wage-earner returns home, for instance, she may find that she is no longer integral to her family's daily life. 'Independence is a splendid thing,' comments the editor, 'but we must pay the price for it.'⁷⁶

Allingham's first drama-story commissioned by Maud Hughes for *Woman's Weekly* was *Her Own Game*, a story of a young girl who accepts the sort of risky

impersonation deal that might previously have been offered to a hero (in *His Convict Bride*, for instance). He also wrote its introductory puff:⁷⁷

A poor girl – so poor that she does not know where her next meal is to come from – is suddenly offered wealth and all that wealth can buy.

In return she is only asked to play a part – to be an actress, not behind the footlights, but on the stage of Real Life.

She cannot resist the temptation to seize the tempting prize which the hand of Fate dangles before her wondering eyes, and so she becomes embarked upon a series of amazing adventures with only her own brave heart and her woman's wit to save her from disaster.⁷⁸

Although *Her Own Game* was actually published first in Leng's competitor magazine, *My Weekly* (as *Her Luck in London*, 1915) the evidence of its synopsis and typescript make it clear that it had been initially written 'for Maud's magazine'. Comparison of the illustrations and editorial signposting demonstrate how subtly stories are adapted to different contexts. *Woman's Weekly* illustrations are crisp and lively and the editorial headings emphasise risk-taking, excitement and suspense.⁷⁹ *My Weekly* pictures initially play on the rags-to-riches theme (one of the magazine's favourites) and the more provincially dressed heroine is frequently depicted in a pleading position. Editorially she is described as 'caught in the web of Fate' whereas the point of the story, not missed by *Woman's Weekly*, is that she chooses to throw off male manipulation and take her life into her own hands. 'Her instinct told her that her only chance was in a deliberate, unhesitating audacity.'⁸⁰

In contrast with the Leng magazines, sympathy was not the prime quality *Woman's Weekly* intended to evoke. During the period of Hughes's involvement it was notably tough-minded and assertive in its advice to readers. Domesticity was by no means ignored – there was plenty of practical domestic-management advice offered to 'Tommy's wife on 17s 6d a week'. But there was support too for married women who

hoped to stay 'in business' after the war was over. Editorially *Women's Weekly* supported women who made this choice. It argued not only that the extra income might be an important factor in a period of rising prices but also that going out to work might be more stimulating than staying at home with housework and children.⁸¹ Nevertheless, warned the editor, the married woman at work must be careful not to abuse her position by failing to show solidarity with her fellow-employees when pressing for pay-rises. 'She must make it clear to herself that she is not a wife who is a worker but a worker who is a wife.'⁸² Advice of this type found no airing in the analogous pages of *My Weekly* or *The Happy Home*. As well as the problems of married women, both *My Weekly* and *Woman's Weekly* focussed on younger single women many of whom found the War opening new opportunities as well as new difficulties for them. The contrasting approach of the two papers to this section of the readership would repay further attention if only as exemplars of different editorial styles and management structures.

Fiction-buying at *Woman's Weekly*, for instance, was obviously a more individualised business compared with the central purchasing system at Leng's. During this period (1915-1919) it was distinctively, incestuously, familial. Not only did Hughes commission three drama-stories in as many years from Allingham and five serials (plus short stories) from 'Tess' or 'Emmie', the magazine's new management had also established a chic female detective, Phinella Martin', as one of their first actions. Although no stories from the series are to be found in Allingham's archive, it is probable that many of them were 'fiction factory' productions. Inter-family visits were frequent, particularly after Herbert and Em moved back to London

in 1917 and business would have been conducted in the course of those visits with little need to keep records.

Such a close author-editor relationship must have meant that reader-responses to particular stories could have been communicated to the writers in the very same conversations as the editor might have been using to explain her own shaping vision for the paper. Maud Hughes's niece, Margery Allingham, later ascribed her aunt's success as an editor to her instinctive understanding of her readers, her closeness to them coupled with an ability to analyse this. She also possessed formidable drive and determination. 'Aunt M was a power and an authority who had learned how to be popular by using her head: she was used to making money and spending it and getting her own way.'⁸³ Hughes stayed not quite four years at *Woman's Weekly*. Correctly interpreting the postwar cultural mood, she gained backing from the A.P. management in 1919 for a new magazine, *The Picture Show*, and was its editor for the next forty years. Her brother-in-law and sister's work soon disappeared from *Woman's Weekly* and the tone of that magazine altered yet again. Readers' lives had changed and the Allingham family fictions were relocating.

- ¹ Allowing at least a four week time lag for production, Allingham would have delivered this instalment in August.
- ² *Butterfly* 26.9.1914.
- ³ *Butterfly* 21.11.1914.
- ⁴ Carl Giles, *Daily Express* cartoonist (b. 1916).
- ⁵ HJA letter 1915 – in MA archive.
- ⁶ *Butterfly* 26.9.1914.
- ⁷ Amalgamated with *Boys' Friend* in 1916.
- ⁸ Van Emden and Humphries p. 54.
- ⁹ A reprint of *His Convict Bride* was running in *Firefly* during 1915; *The Way of the World* was being written for *The Butterfly* during 1916.
- ¹⁰ Examples from *The Butterfly*.
- ¹¹ *Butterfly* 28.10.1916.
- ¹² WM to HJA 1.7.1916 Allingham attacks the concept of Nietzschean *uber-mensch* in a short story *Dick and the Superman* (c1929).
- ¹³ Experiment seems not to have worked as *Fun & Fiction* was re-launched in 1913 as *The Firefly* with price reduced to halfpenny.
- ¹⁴ ADD MS 62184A Letter 9.8.1917.
- ¹⁵ 1914 £1,223,400 1915 £1,299,500 1916 £1,268,300 1917 £1,296,000, ADD MS 62185.
- ¹⁶ Holmes p. 626.
- ¹⁷ Holmes p. 367.
- ¹⁸ J.M. Winter *The Great War and the British People* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986) pp 79-81.
- ¹⁹ Winter p. 91. It is simplistic to assume all officers were from the upper and middle classes and other ranks from the working class but for my non-specialist purposes I hope this approach will be adequate.
- ²⁰ Winter p. 49.
- ²¹ Van Emden & Humphries p 309.
- ²² ADD MS 62185 Letter 4.8.1916
- ²³ Holmes p. 544.
- ²⁴ E.S. Turner *Dear Old Blighty* (London: Michael Joseph, 1980) p. 201.
- ²⁵ Richards p. 174.
- ²⁶ *Butterfly* 22.7.1916
- ²⁷ *Butterfly* 17.6.1916
- ²⁸ *Merry & Bright* 8.12.1917.
- ²⁹ C.E.Montague, quoted in *Tommy* p 532 described front-line life as 'very domestic, highly atomic. Its atom, or unit, like that of slum life, is the jealously close, exclusive community of a family based in an urban cellar' (*Disenchantment* p. 40).
- ³⁰ Holmes p. 604.
- ³¹ Em Allingham was his writing partner: 'Tess Allenwood' their pseudonym; Maud Hughes his editor.
- ³² Some wartime advocates of women went further, equating deaths in childbirth with laying down one's life for one's country. Nicoletta Gullace '*The Blood Of Our Sons!*' (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).
- ³³ *My Weekly* 17.1.1914.
- ³⁴ *Happy Home* 8.1.1916.
- ³⁵ Eight appearances in Allingham's lifetime for *Mother Love* and six for '*Don't Leave us Mummy!*'
- ³⁶ Chapter Nine.
- ³⁷ *Happy Home* 23.9.1916.
- ³⁸ *Happy Home* Sept 1917.
- ³⁹ Letter 175 (28.5.1918).
- ⁴⁰ 100,000 every week in 1898 quoted McAleer p. 164. Rose quotes 250,000 by 1914, p. 61.
- ⁴¹ *People's Journal* 1919.
- ⁴² Van Emden and Humphries p. 277.
- ⁴³ Cotterill & Cromb 30.5.1918 (The back of the letter is covered by Allingham with calculations.)
- ⁴⁴ Letter 177 (31.5.1918).
- ⁴⁵ He may be allowing himself another when he gives the fairy godfather, Major Dick Harvey, the surname of his Dundee editor, William Harvey.
- ⁴⁶ TS *She Sinned for Her Children* instalment 10.
- ⁴⁷ Allingham's earliest drama-stories for A.P. (e.g. *Driven from Home*) were generally serious. Then he began to allow the narrators some avuncular humour and it was not long before some of his most gallant characters were also his funniest – e.g. the Dickensian actor Conrad Wing in *His Convict Bride* and Bobs in *Human Nature*.
- ⁴⁸ TS *She Sinned for Her Children* instalment 7.

- ⁴⁹ *People's Journal* 21.9.1918. (Allingham's stories regularly protest against the physical punishment of children.)
- ⁵⁰ TS *She Sinned For Her Children* no. 2 p. 10.
- ⁵¹ TS *She Sinned For Her Children* no. 2 p. 13.
- ⁵² Winter 1986 p. 18, pp. 150-151.
- ⁵³ Van Emden and Humphries p. 277.
- ⁵⁴ Van Emden and Humphries pp. 277-9.
- ⁵⁵ Interview JJ / DG 22.6.2004.
- ⁵⁶ *People's Journal* advert 11.9.1915.
- ⁵⁷ *People's Journal* 4.9.1915.
- ⁵⁸ Warner p.xvi.
- ⁵⁹ Interview JJ/ IG 22.6.2004.
- ⁶⁰ Letter 186 (20.9.1918).
- ⁶¹ Allingham family used this term to refer collectively to their work for Leng's and for D.C. Thomson. The two firms were still separate at this point though working co-operatively rather than competitively as had previously been the case.
- ⁶² HJA diary 17.6.1918 'He is obviously satisfied and they want to secure copyrights but very cautious. Meanwhile I want money – Pity – Puts me at a disadvantage in negotiating.'
- ⁶³ Letter 220 (29.12.1930).
- ⁶⁴ The exercising of this right, together with the number of local Scottish editions of Leng papers and the highly formulaic nature of the fiction published in them, has rendered it impossible to trace the reprints of all these stories.
- ⁶⁵ Letter 193 (9.1.1919).
- ⁶⁶ Allingham (1941) p. 23.
- ⁶⁷ William McFee to HJA 1.1.1917.
- ⁶⁸ *CG* 25.11.1915.
- ⁶⁹ *CG* 2.12.1915.
- ⁷⁰ Thorogood p. 32.
- ⁷¹ Biographically Em Allingham was more overtly interested in spiritual movements than HJA. Wrote and worked for the Girls' Friendly Society and later in life was a church-goer. She may have contributed to the *CG*'s 'Family Circle' column under the pseudonym 'Elizabeth Joyce'.
- ⁷² *Woman's Weekly* 1916.
- ⁷³ *The Record* 1961, White (1970) pp 88-90. The earlier religious references in *Woman's Weekly* disappeared under the new regime.
- ⁷⁴ *Woman's Weekly* 7.4.1917.
- ⁷⁵ *Woman's Weekly* 1918 (various).
- ⁷⁶ *Woman's Weekly* 27.4.1918.
- ⁷⁷ Diary 16.3.1916.
- ⁷⁸ *Woman's Weekly* 6.5.1916.
- ⁷⁹ Illustrated by Charles Horrell?
- ⁸⁰ *Woman's Weekly* 13.5.1916.
- ⁸¹ An article of 1917 asked 'Who gets the most out of marriage, the business girl or her dull stay-at-home sister?' Maud was semi-secretly married but remained childless - unlike her sister, Em.
- ⁸² *Woman's Weekly* 18.1.1919.
- ⁸³ Margery Allingham, *The Relay* (1964, unpublished) quoted Thorogood p. 55.

Chapter 8

Written by Houdini Himself!

The Kinema Comic, Film Fun and The Picture Show, 1919 – 1929

In the first post-war decade Allingham tried and failed to link his fiction to the newly popular family entertainment, the cinema. The personalities of celebrities had appeared to offer material for fictions but soon generated a bigger Hollywood narrative of their own. As periodicals were increasingly differentiated by age and interest groupings, the comic-and-story paper audience fragmented and Allingham experienced a period of insecurity in his employment. His characteristic formulae, however, significantly re-directed once again towards women readers, proved sufficiently adaptable to reflect post-war ‘structures of feeling’ and he was thus enabled to reposition himself in the changing market.

Celebrities as Heroes and Authors

In England a tuppenny weekly, *The Kinema Comic*, which provided literary nourishment for persons of moderate intellect, was beginning a serial entitled ‘The Amazing Exploits of Houdini – Written by Houdini Himself’ which was to run for several years. None of the Exploits was authentic, none was written up by Houdini; but the term ‘amazing’ was wholly justified.

That was the opinion of Houdini’s first biographer in 1928.¹ The story series had opened in 1922 and the first thirty of these ‘Amazing Exploits’ had been written by Allingham. He had invented a cheerful cockney called Arth Wright as a resourceful boy assistant for Houdini and had introduced the escapologist to one of his series detectives, Pelham Webb. This may well have allowed him to recycle situations from

earlier detective stories that have not survived.² This was the first time since *Perkins and Co* in 1910 that Allingham had written an extensive series of light short stories and they are pleasantly readable examples of their type. Early in 1923 however, F.C. Cordwell, editor of *The Kinema Comic*, instructed Allingham to drop *Houdini* and cut the other serial he was writing for the paper. *Houdini* was continued by other anonymous writers. 'My price too high' wrote Allingham in his diary.³ It was an ominous sign of trouble ahead.

Once the euphoria of the Armistice and the subsequent brief period of national economic confidence ended, the 1920s proved unexpectedly difficult years for Allingham and for many of his readers.⁴ For some there was an increase in gaiety (superficially at least) and material goods: for others there was the fear and the reality of unemployment, depressing whole communities and re-dividing families on age and gender lines. For many people the General Strike of 1926 proved that antagonism between capital and labour was now structural. Allingham's relationship, as a labourer (albeit with some small capital in his copyrights), with the now massive capital of his publishers, sometimes suggests a feeling of desperation as his personal financial anxieties grew and he was forced to recognise the extent of his dependence on his editors' goodwill.

Emotionally and socially the 1920s were contradictory, volatile years. For some people, wartime had been emancipatory; for others it had curtailed hope. Lives lost in war were irreplaceable and the effect of trauma on survivors, whether they had suffered on the home front or abroad proved complex and long-lasting. The disillusion of those who returned from the horror of the trenches, to misunderstanding

and broken political promises at home, was not theirs alone. Families suffered and changes to the Divorce Laws in 1923 represented public recognition of a new instability in marriage.

From the first years of peace, popular entertainment flourished in unprecedented variety. Though print remained the dominant domestic medium, it was increasingly challenged by the wireless, the gramophone and above all by the expansion and development of the cinema. This provided a distinctive new context for Allingham's fiction during the early 1920s, particularly in the presentation of his stories for younger readers. In the 1920s story had a special role to play in mediating between the worlds of film and print. There was the story of the film to be written up but this was usually low-paid hackwork. Allingham, as a craftsman with his own skills and conventions and understanding of his readers, looked for other ways to link with the new forms of entertainment they enjoyed. Working with his two main editors at the Amalgamated Press, F.C. Cordwell and Maud Hughes, he used his own stories to contribute to the development of celebrity culture in the comic-and story papers and elsewhere.

Two years before *The Kinema Comic's* 'Amazing Exploits', its companion paper *Merry and Bright* had responded to the interest aroused by Houdini's 1920 visit to England by giving its readers *Houdini's Schooldays* as their weekly serial. In *Merry and Bright's* version, however, the boy Houdini was not Erich Weiss, the rabbi's son from Budapest, growing up impoverished in America; he was a cricket playing, boater-wearing fine young fellow at Rathgar College. He was in fact Will Holt, Allingham's Duffer, with the Dufferish-ness reduced a fraction and the agility played

up. Only a few new sentences and occasional descriptors were needed to make this happen and, apart from such small manipulations, *Houdini's Schooldays* was simply the fourth printing of the story that Allingham had first written in 1904 for Aldine's *True Blue*.⁵

Using 'schooldays' in this way was not itself a new idea. It had been used extensively through the Brett, Emmett, Rollington and Burrage papers to the end of the nineteenth century as an easy method of extracting more value from an already popular character. The characters were always male and either historical/mythic or fictional: the Barry Ono collection includes *Young Pickwick's Schooldays*, *Jack Easy's Schooldays*, *Jack Harkaway's Schooldays*, *The Boyhood Days of Jack Straw* and *The Boyhood Days of Guy Fawkes*.⁶ Fictionalising the schooldays of a living character - and for the purposes of entertainment rather than instruction - seems to have been a new development.⁷ It was an indicator of a rapidly accelerating interest, social, economic and cultural, in the marketing of entertainers as celebrities. Allingham's archive reveals that he experimented with *Charlie Chaplin's Schooldays* (or *The Boys of Codliver Hall*) and re-titled his 1905 long-complete *Stone Ginger and his Band of Twelve*, as *Larry Semon's Schooldays*.⁸ Neither of these appears to have been published, however. The *Larry Semon* stories in *Film Fun* (1923) are not by Allingham; neither is the series *Fatty Arbuckle's Schooldays* in *Film Fun* (1920).⁹ Clearly he was not the only writer engaged in this undertaking.

Houdini, Larry Semon, 'Fatty' Arbuckle and other favourite personalities from the world of entertainment entered Cordwell's comic-and-story papers in a variety of guises. Sometimes they were presented as authors. Allingham's *The Duffer*, *Detective*

story series, first written for *True Blue* in 1905, was republished and greatly extended in *Film Fun* (1922-3) as *Jorkins & Co* 'by Houdini, The Handcuff King'. In *The Kinema Comic* during 1920 and 1921 authorship of the third reissue of *Max the Magnificent* (*New Boys' Paper* 1907) was ascribed to 'Winkle' (Harold Lloyd) and the second reissue of Allingham's *Ashamed of his Mother* (*Butterfly* 1911) to 'Fatty' Arbuckle.¹⁰ A sketch of Arbuckle, pen in hand, formed part of the story's header and the editor could not have been more specifically untruthful about its provenance:

Like most big men he (ie Arbuckle) has big ideas on all sorts of subjects. He can write better than most professional authors, and he has published several books. Others from his pen will appear shortly.

I have just read a story by him which to my mind is one of the finest stories ever written. [...]

I am so impressed by the story that I have arranged for its publication in the *Kinema Comic*. The opening chapters will appear next week, and if, when you have read them, you send me a postcard letting me know just what you think of Fatty Arbuckle as an author, I shall be much obliged, and so will Fatty.¹¹

Arbuckle had published about as many books previously as David Pitt had done in the years before he joined *True Blue*. In 1920 he was under a million dollar contract to Paramount films and being pushed to the limits of productivity working on as many as three films at once.

Arbuckle and his fellow comedians of the silent cinema were also naturals for transposition into cartoons. At the same time as the editor was drawing attention to the serious side of Arbuckle ('a big man with big ideas') he was also running him as the front-page cartoon character in 'The Funniosities of Fatty Arbuckle'¹². This was not such a new development. *Merry & Bright* had used images of music hall and cinema comedians in its front-page comic strips almost from its inception and the other comic papers in Cordwell's group had frequently followed suit.¹³ Music hall

entertainers such as T.E. Dunville and Little Tich had been used first but were soon superseded by cinema comics such as Louise Fazenda. This preference was not surprising. Although music hall was capable of attracting a cross-class audience (and music hall stars had provided celebrity copy for family penny papers since the 1890s at least) pre-war cinema was more particularly patronised by the working class and especially the working-class young.¹⁴ The same Birmingham boys who included *The Butterfly* and *Merry & Bright* among their reading were avid cinema goers.¹⁵ *Merry & Bright's* pre-war use of film actors as cartoon characters was a way of recognising its readers' enthusiasms. Apart from the printed acknowledgement to a film studio (such as Mack-Sennett Productions for Fazenda) the comedians in this context had about as much reality as *The Butterfly's* 'Portland Bill' or *Chips's* 'Casey Court Kids'.¹⁶ There was little difference between cartoon slapstick on the front page and black-and-white slapstick on film. Promoting the off-screen personality of the actor, either as 'schooldays' subject or as 'author' took the promotional process significantly further.

The Kinema Comic, The Picture Show & Film Fun

Cinema audiences had increased dramatically during the war years. Men and women as well as boys and girls began attending regularly and, as the cleanliness and comfort of the picture palaces improved, so did their appeal to the respectable classes and to families. In the immediate post-war period, the Amalgamated Press appeared determined to appropriate the growing national appetite for film into a commercial

synthesis with its own print products. Its editors' strategies for achieving this were as varied as their audiences.

F.C. Cordwell had been away from his papers in the last years of the war but he was back in charge of *The Butterfly* and *Merry and Bright* by 1919 and able to announce his first new comic since 1913 when he had re-packaged *Fun and Fiction* as *The Firefly*. This new paper would be called *Cheerio!* and Allingham's work would be its prime attraction, just as it had been before the war:

First and foremost there is to be a grand serial story by one of the most successful serial writers of the day.

His work has appeared many times in *Merry & Bright* (and our companion paper, *The Butterfly*) from the first number onwards.

To mention but a few of his successes; *The Girl Who Married a Scoundrel*, *Driven From Home*, *Ashamed of his Mother*, *Friendless*, *The Girl Without a Home*, etc.)¹⁷

So often Allingham was introduced in this circumlocutory way, as if it were a guessing game to which no answer was ever provided. Readers were apparently expected to remember and be excited by the titles of his serials – *Driven From Home* especially – but not to recall their incidents sufficiently clearly to notice when the story was reissued with a new title and new names were given to the lead characters. Perhaps editorial announcements such as this were simply expected to convey a collective reassurance that the writer's work had been enjoyed by previous, like-minded readers. Four of the five stories highlighted here would be brought out again, lightly disguised, within a few years of this announcement, together with most of the rest of Allingham's pre-1917 serials.¹⁸ Cordwell's market research may have told him that the readership was now more narrowly defined by age than it had been before the war. Then the comic-and-story papers had been marketed 'to young and

old' and reprints had been relatively infrequent. If it were clear by 1920 that they were only regularly read by the new generation of teenagers, rather than by young adults and the wider family, then wholesale repetition might pass un-observed.

Reprinting was also an economy measure. *Merry & Bright* and *The Butterfly's* cover prices had trebled during the war but all the signs indicate that they were still produced to a very tight budget during the 1920s. Paper costs continued to offer cause for concern and management may have been demanding a higher rate of profitability.¹⁹ The Amalgamated Press was now a large concern grandiosely accommodated. Its chairman and managing director, Sir George Sutton, earned thirty thousand pounds a year.²⁰ When it was reconstructed in 1922, its capital amounted to £3,800,000 and by 1924 it was issuing one hundred and two periodical publications.²¹ Allingham's rate of pay had not risen since 1912 yet over the next few years he would come under increasing pressure from to cut his prices or lose the work.

In 1919, however, the A.P. editors evidently had some money to spend.²² New papers were authorised; new stories commissioned. Allingham's newly written serial for the first numbers of *Cheerio!* was called *Judgement*.²³ The story uses an idea of return and change that Allingham also used, differently, in another new story of 1919, *The Mystery of Brandon Chase*.²⁴ The returning hero of *Judgement / His Father's Son* is unrecognisable to his family and has not grown up exactly as expected; the returning daughter in *The Mystery of Brandon Chase* discovers that her father, who has remained at home, is oddly changed. Neither hero nor heroine of these formulaic drama-stories is returning from a war, yet the theme of adjustment seems unobtrusively appropriate to the 1919 situation.

Judgement was a serial in Allingham's established style and the initial success of *Cheerio!* may only have been moderate. A fresh approach, borrowing glamour from the cinema, was not far away. Cordwell followed *Judgement* with another new serial from the Allingham fiction factory. This was *The Fellow Who Loved Violet Hopson*, credited to 'E. Allingham' but a joint-authored production. The story takes film fascination as its starting point. Billy Poole, a young village lad, is so overwhelmed by his first visit to the cinema, and especially by screen heroine Violet Hopson, that he abandons Mary, his actual sweetheart, in quest of the celluloid image. He forfeits his home and his money as well as his good sense. When Billy is down and out on the Thames Embankment a tempter appears and a classic Allingham formula of disguise and duplicity born of desperation comes into play – as it had in *Girl of my Heart* (1908), *His Convict Bride* (1912) and *Her Own Game* (1915) and as it would again in *Burnt Fingers* (1922).

Tess Allen-wood had supplied a not-dissimilar story to *Woman's Weekly* in 1916.²⁵ *Presumptuous Polly: The Girl who looked like Gladys Cooper* was a romantic-comic serial playing on the themes of identity confusion and rags-to-riches wish-fulfilment. The editor (presumably Maud Hughes) cannily gave an extra dimension to the story by including a printed endorsement from Cooper herself:

Polly Parsons is a very delightful girl. Her adventures as my double become more interesting and amusing each instalment and I have greatly enjoyed reading about her. What I like best is that there is no mercenary motive in her acceptance of the double role that is forced upon her by reason of her extraordinary resemblance to me. The adventures are the outcome of a real girlish spirit which is British in every sense of the word. At heart Polly is a good-hearted, lovable girl and I should be delighted to meet her.²⁶

When *The Fellow Who Loved Violet Hopson* was published in the A.P.'s *Cheerio!* Hughes was running a new magazine, *The Picture Show*. It carried lengthy excerpts from the opening instalment of *Cheerio*'s serial together with a letter from Violet Hopson. The star claimed to have read the story 'with great interest [...] I think it a very charming tale'.²⁷ *The Picture Show* placed Hopson's name at the centre of network of endorsements – a commodity among commodities. It ran a series of 'Violet Hopson's Beauty Tips' in close proximity to advertisements for products such as 'Harlene Hair Drill' (copy for which was occasionally provided by Allingham).²⁸ Its special December offer was an art plate of Hopson whilst readers of *Woman's Weekly* were offered a 'companion plate' of her leading man, Stewart Rome.²⁹ *The Fellow Who Loved Violet Hopson* goes further than *Presumptuous Polly* in playing with viewers' confusions between art and life 'She's [ie Hopson's] only a picture,' Mary tells the confused and infatuated Billy before leaving home become an actress herself and a friend of the 'real' Violet Hopson 'She is so sweet and always so nice,' claims fictional Mary – a sentiment which would surely have been taken for truth by *Cheerio!* readers who were also Hopson fans.³⁰

Maud Hughes's cultural contribution was to the construction of the relationship between the film-fan and the film-star. In 1916, when *Presumptuous Polly* had been published, Hughes was writing a regular cinema column for *Woman's Weekly* under the pseudonym Fay Filmer. Many of her anecdotes at this time were connected with the reception of films, by troops in France, for instance, and she also included regular items about the doings of the stars as well as straightforward information to assist the cinema-going public. Hughes was herself a fan – Fay Filmer had been her personal

innovation in the restyling of *Woman's Weekly*.³¹ She developed a network of contacts in film publicity and marketing which she put to immediate use in 1919 when she founded *The Picture Show*. This was her 'great adventure' and she remained devoted and in charge until 1958.³²

The Picture Show functioned on a variety of levels (informative, educative, domestic, entertaining) but above all it celebrated the stars, promoting their off-screen personalities as well as their acting skills. This promotion was, of course, largely dependent on the selection and management of information by the film companies to whom the actors were contracted. In the early years of *The Picture Show* there appears to have been a particular emphasis on establishing a domestic context for the stars, featuring their homes, pets, spouses and this may have been intended as reassurance as to the respectability of the medium and the suitability of the cinema for family entertainment.³³ The film industry, particularly in America, had experienced its own abbreviated, intense cycle of economic development in the first decades of the twentieth century. It had passed through Marx's 'manufacturing stage' – the period of multiple small-scale entrepreneurs, fiercely competitive, selling a cheaply produced and often shoddy product in innumerable ad hoc locations. By 1919 processes of capital accumulation as well as technological advance had transformed it into a highly centralised, increasingly glamorous and respectable operation dependent on tight control of production and distribution, together with lavish and sophisticated marketing.³⁴ Cinema historian Eric Rohde writes: 'By 1919 Hollywood was everywhere recognised as the dream capital of the world.'³⁵ Showmanship was at its

heart and the personalities of the stars were the means by which the film commodity was to be fetishised.

The Picture Show was the pioneer fan magazine in Britain: 'Devised on ingenious lines and printed by the most modern methods, it was an instant and enormous success.'³⁶ From its earliest issues it demonstrated Hughes's mature understanding of publicity and her close collaboration with her family members as well as with her editorial colleagues at the Amalgamated Press. The complex, inter-related promotion of Violet Hopson – the actress, the story, the products and, by reflection, the status of the magazine as the space where such a celebrity could be encountered – was a confident demonstration of her editorial skill.

In the first years after the war the pace of new magazine formation at the A.P. appeared to be returning to pre-war levels. *The Picture Show* was itself only a few months old when it promoted *Boys' Cinema*, a new paper which affected to believe that the heroes of adventure movies were equally heroic in their (fictional) daily lives.³⁷ This was followed by *Girl's Cinema*, another editorial venture by Hughes, which depended on extensive anonymous labour by her niece, Margery Allingham.³⁸ Allingham provided *Boys' Cinema* with fictional 'boyhood' tales of Tom Mix, the cowboy star, but these were uninspired. His natural market was still the comic-and-story papers with their mixed gender readership. In January 1920, while *Violet Hopson* was running in *Cheerio!* his regular editor, F.C. Cordwell, founded yet another new paper, *Film Fun*. Like *The Picture Show* this was to be a long-lived success. *Film Fun* took the overall format and the most popular fictional elements of

the *Merry & Bright* group and glossed them, far more thoroughly than before, with the personalities and vocabulary of the silent cinema. It was advertised as:

An Absolutely NEW and ORIGINAL comic paper [...] All the REAL Film Favourites in Flickers of Funniosity, *Film Fun* strikes an entirely new note in both humorous and cinema papers. NOTHING ELSE LIKE IT ON THE MARKET.³⁹

In mass production publishing, however, nothing successful stayed unique for very long. Just four months later Cordwell re-launched *Cheerio!* as *Film Fun*'s value-for-money companion paper, *The Kinema Comic*. Although the first numbers of *Film Fun* did not carry a serial by Allingham, *The Kinema Comic* opened with his newly written *Peg of the Pictures*, a self-referential comedy in which Allingham gives a witty twist to a young boy's quest to win his inheritance together with a modern-day princess. His joke is that the film, 'The Comic Convict', which the hero, Charlie Chester, produces to try to fulfil the terms of his comedian uncle's Will, is so sad it has to be released as 'Driven from Home'.⁴⁰ Fortunately for the happy ending there is a Will within a Will. The boy wins the money, buys a three-thousand-guinea car and goes back to farming and to caring for his elderly aunt. The girl meanwhile has escaped department store slavery and has become a star in her own right. He is not yet twenty. She has grown self-possessed and considerably wiser in the ways of the world.

For a moment she scrutinised him, and as she did so she realised that he was not a bit spoiled by his good fortune.

He was just the same tender-hearted, generous, simple-minded boy who had befriended her eighteen months before when she was turned away from Smithers' Store.

'You are much too young to think of marriage, Charlie, she said quietly; 'but when you do marry, I think the lady you choose will be a very lucky girl!'

'And that means, Charles, said Miss Perks in a confidential whisper, loud enough to be heard by all, 'that she'll have you when you ask her!'

THE END⁴¹

In Allingham's pre-war serials the heroes were usually aged about twenty five and the heroines nineteen or twenty. The youthfulness of this hero, and his slightly altered relationship to the heroine, may include some recognition of demographic change after the decimation of war. Margery Allingham recollected how it had felt:

When we of our generation were just preparing to break the earth over our heads, we found that the whole generation immediately in front of us had disappeared. [...] Those of us who were in our teens when the war ended came out early [...] into a disillusioned world.⁴²

The two reprint stories that followed *Peg*, *Ambitious Bob* and *Dear Old Piggy*, also had boy-heroes.⁴³

Readers evidently liked Cordwell's new papers. By 1921 both *The Kinema Comic* and *Film Fun* were running one Allingham serial after another. His work was published almost continuously in both papers until 1927 when it faltered and 1928 when it ceased.⁴⁴ Only one or two stories a year were original however; the rest were reprints. Some of the more melodramatic tales were ascribed, not to comedians, but to a popular Japanese film star, Sessue Hayakawa. Elsewhere in the cinema press, in *The Picture Show*, for example, Hayakawa was portrayed reassuringly as a highly professional actor and as a Westernised family man but in the comic-and-story papers his name appears to lend Allingham's tales an extra touch of exotic fierceness. Under Hayakawa's 'authorship' *The Girl Outcast*, for instance, became *The Woman with the Tiger's Heart*; *The Steel Clutch* became *The League of the Yellow Hand* and *The Girl Who Married a Scoundrel* was re-titled *The Price of his Silence*. The fact that Allingham's first original serial to be written specifically for *Film Fun* was an

uncharacteristic oriental adventure, *Sen Yan's Devotion*, suggests that this ingredient was being deliberately introduced to heighten excitement.

Portrait of a Reader

The boys and girls who were reading Allingham's newly disguised stories in *Film Fun* and *The Kinema Comic* in the early 1920s, may have been a little younger, but otherwise were probably not so very different from the adolescents who had read them on their first appearance a decade earlier.⁴⁵ As Freeman had commented then: 'the boy, tired with a real life that presents little enough of romance, finds a vent for all the emotional stirrings that thrill in him, in these sensational 'shockers'.'⁴⁶ Boy labourers in the 1920s might also feel dull and disillusioned. Soon after the re-launch of *The Kinema Comic* a whole page of the paper was devoted to an interview with a prize-winning reader. His name was Albert Watson and he also read *Film Fun*. He lived just off the Old Kent Road in London and he had recently turned fifteen and started work in a tannery. 'I asked him whether he liked work,' wrote the editor. 'I'd rather be at school,' said he.'⁴⁷

Albert was one of a family of ten children; his older brother and father had both served in the war and returned safely but the bulk of his family was younger. Although Albert claimed that he intended to buy *The Kinema Comic* 'for the rest of my life', the comic-and-story papers can be observed steadily repositioning themselves for younger and younger readers. Cordwell lost editorial control of *The Butterfly* and *Merry & Bright* in January 1926. Their new editor preferred shorter stories, sport and Westerns to Allingham's long, relatively complex, family fairy

tales.⁴⁸ In *Film Fun* and *The Kinema Comic* the tenuous film links provided by attributing Allingham's stories to a celebrity author looked increasingly inadequate and were discontinued. He was also, definitely, too expensive - even when the papers put their prices up to 2d. As the decade wore on even loyal editors such as Hughes and Cordwell preferred to send a fast, cheap writer (such as Margery Allingham) to a press screening and fill their pages with the rewritten-up stories. 'Films in *Film Fun*, no room for me,' wrote Allingham sadly.⁴⁹

David Vincent sees it as ironic that at the exact historical moment when almost 100% literacy (at least nominal literacy) appeared to have been achieved among the younger generations, the main threat to reading, film, began to take a hold.⁵⁰ Despite the assistance offered by their formulaic construction and highly visual style, Allingham's stories had demanded some reading stamina and a moderate vocabulary. This requirement was reduced in the redesigned papers until eventually the hybrid format was discontinued and the comics became entirely pictorial and for children only.

Insecurities

In the later years of the war the need to economise as well as fears for their three children's safety had persuaded Herbert and Em to return to London from the Essex coast. They remained there until early 1926. Although the relatively cramped conditions of their Bayswater flat put some strain on family relationships forcing first Allingham, and then Margery, to find separate spaces of their own in which to work, metropolitan life returned him to proximity with his audience and must have assisted

his understanding of other current entertainment. Cinema, like mass-market journalism, sprang from the conditions of urban living and Allingham was essentially a Londoner. His daughters remembered him as someone who hated to be bored. In the tiny Essex village of Layer Breton during the blackout, opportunities for diversion after a day at the desk would have been very limited. In London, despite occasional air raids, Allingham could visit his brothers, agents or editors, talk, eat out, find opponents with whom to play chess or go to see some sort of show. His 1918 diary has entries on over a hundred and twenty days. Many of these are merely the jotting of the title of a serial story with the number of words completed but on twenty five of those days, he notes a visit to a theatre, music hall or cinema – overwhelmingly to the cinema. What his diaries do not mention is the hours he spent walking through London either with Margery or on his own, gazing at the windows of houses and speculating about the lives of their inhabitants. Allingham was an observer, not a participant, in other people's lives. London gave him plenty to observe.

The process whereby Allingham's observations fed into his work, when his work is so stylised and dependent on formulae, is opaque. That it did so is a main argument of this thesis. Evidence for this assertion is derived from analysis of his adjustments of these formulae in correspondence to what Williams terms the altered 'structures of feeling' of different decades.⁵¹ In the 1920s responses to change can be seen within the stories he wrote for the Leng papers (discussed below) and also in the new contexts, the periodicals, into which his editors incorporated his older stories. His editors, too, were observers of society – or at least those sections of it from which they made their markets.

Biographically Allingham's work was also affected by his own changing position relative to his children. There was an economic aspect to this: fatherhood, even more than marriage, had spurred him to produce fiction to augment his income and to work in a more congenially domestic environment. Arguably he had succeeded too well. His children did not shirk the responsibility for earning their own livings yet they had imbibed certain expectations of support that would keep him working until his death in an effort to supply more than his own needs. And unlike most working-class children they were economically able to leave home early and felt no need to support the family with contributions from their own wage packets.

Personally and artistically Allingham had gained much from his family. Brought up in a household of boys, it is noticeable that he rarely wrote about women until after his marriage and that children only entered his fiction after he had become a father. In the early 1920s both his and Margery's diaries indicate the extent to which his involvement with doings of his two older children and their friends added to the scope of his observations and kept him in touch with a younger generation. Margery described him as 'bitten with curiosity' about the doings of the Bright Young People that he thought she knew.⁵² From the mid-1920s when the older children had left home and he and Em retired again to the countryside, this time as a relatively isolated couple, he became depressed: 'Fire smoking. Dinner poor, Don't feel happy'⁵³ His scattered writings for children and adolescents from the latter years of the 1920s do not have the vitality or confidence which characterised his writing produced from within a multi-generational family home. 'This story now very feeble,' he commented on his 1927 school serial, the B.A.T.S.⁵⁴

The economic optimism of the early 1920s had soon waned for Allingham, for his employers, and for many of his readers. By New Year 1924 Allingham was overdrawn and had to resort to borrowing £25 from Cotterill and Cromb, to put this straight. Advancing money against work yet to be written or – when money was really short – selling the copyright of a serial into the cheap book market was the most useful service his agents performed. Allingham's publishers only paid in arrears for approved work and he had no overdraft facility. Gaps between sales meant no income. He sold his work as energetically as he could; children's stories to Heath Robinson at *Toby*, short star-attributed serials to *The Picture Show*, women's serials to Leng's *The Mascot* (formerly *The Happy Home*) as well as reprints to Cordwell and occasionally to women editors at the A.P.⁵⁵ There was even a hardback book – unique in his career. It was the story of the film *The Right to Live*, officially co-authored by Em and the film producer A.E. Coleby, but mainly written by Allingham who also sold it twice as a serial.⁵⁶ Still he was struggling. 1926, the year of the General Strike, was an especially bad year. *The Butterfly* and *Merry & Bright* were redirected to younger readers; *The Mascot*, which had been publishing his work for twelve years, in its three incarnations, closed down and a promising new opening with Anne St John Cooper, a women's magazine editor at the A.P. also came to nothing when her paper failed.

Allingham sought help from H.J. Garrish, his first A.P. editor, who was now a director of the company. Garrish used his influence and R.N. Chance, then editor of *The Boys' Friend*, reluctantly offered Allingham a commission for a school story. This and a final serial for *Film Fun* helped Allingham to earn £920 in 1927 – a large

sum compared with his readers' likely wages but one that was earned with increasing anxiety and humiliation. Garrish had warned him that he could no longer expect much work at his old rate. Allingham offered old school stories at £1 per thousand words. He may have sold one or two to The *Boys' Friend* Library but on several occasions he noted in his diary 'Garrish refused to see me.' Sometimes even Cotterill and Cromb were too busy to see him or could not help financially, 'Letter from C & C. No cash. Balance at bank £1.'⁵⁷

Internal restructuring (and possibly office politics) had provided Allingham with his entrée to the Amalgamated Press in 1907. Now it may have felt as if corporate events beyond his control were forcing him out again. Northcliffe had died in 1922 and eventually the decision had been reached within the Harmsworth business empire that the A.P. must be sold to pay his death duties. Reluctantly Sir George Sutton negotiated its sale to the Berry brothers, a younger, energetically entrepreneurial family from South Wales. This was completed early in 1927. Inevitably it created some uncertainties: 'Sutton going to *Mail*. Lynforth also leaving. Clark or Tod Anderson may be the new chief.'⁵⁸ In fact the transfer of ownership appears to have caused minimal disruption. This in itself, illustrates how far the company had changed from its initial, nineteenth century incarnation as the conception and property of a single individual to its twentieth century status as a corporation.⁵⁹

The editors with whom Allingham was in contact kept their jobs and their papers but the change of proprietorship may have encouraged a new hardness in negotiation and thus an awareness in an individual worker like Allingham of the essential insecurity of his employment. On the day in 1927 that Allingham had called at the

A.P. office and heard speculation as to the identity of the new chief, Cordwell had offered him one more serial for *Film Fun* - though only three thousand words per instalment, not the usual four. This serial, *Mother's Boy* (1927-1928), was Allingham's last original story for Cordwell's comic papers. The papers' circulation was falling; there was a new competitiveness in the juvenile market and when *Mother's Boy* ended, Cordwell told Allingham that he was 'not in need of another story at present'.⁶⁰ A month later Allingham called again, twice. On the second occasion he was ready to capitulate: 'Called on Cordwell again. He had seen Garrish. No work. I tried to see Garrish. Saw Chance. Offered to work at lower rate. He promised to tell Garrish. Saw C & C. Cheery but not hopeful.'⁶¹

When next he saw Cordwell the editor told him that he was no longer allowed to pay more than 25/- per thousand words and, even at that rate, he had no work to offer. Garrish tried again to help by putting Allingham in touch with the editor of *Merry*, a children's magazine, who took some stories based on Allingham's earliest, 'Gaston Gaters' style. An updated rewriting of the *Motor Man* adventures was published in *Gem* as *The Robot Man*. These crumbs of work demonstrate the limited extent within which a personal relationship between supplier and buyer could still assist. By 1928 Allingham had been working for the A.P. for more than twenty years but he had built up no security other than goodwill and his remaining copyrights. These were valuable only when he could find buyers. His income dropped to £653 5s 2d. He wrote hairdressing copy for his brother Phil and borrowed money where he could. His end of year summary was depressed:

1928. Lost my work at the A.P. Started work for P. Dunn of Dundee. Marge wrote and sold *Black Dudley*. PWA took his future in his own hands and went on the road. Many money worries. A little tired. Aged 61.⁶²

Work for The North

At least with Leng's he had a written agreement. In 1919 Cotterill and Cromb had arranged that a regular amount of 'serial-story matter' would be supplied by Allingham at a regular price. This (plus the potential sale of cheap book rights) was the security against which they were usually prepared to lend him money. By January 1927 Allingham was so far in their debt that he had to propose a short term £5 10/- weekly repayment plan as well as the previously agreed 10% commission on all his work, (except work for *The Picture Show* which was 5%).⁶³ As he negotiated all his work other than work with The North himself, these extra payments were essentially money-lender's fees.⁶⁴

From Allingham's point of view the arrangement Cotterill and Cromb had made with William Harvey in 1919 had two main drawbacks: firstly that the material he supplied had to be approved before it could be accepted as part of the agreement – and every small supplier to a supermarket chain will know how swiftly the criteria for acceptability rise when demand is slow or money in short supply. Secondly, Leng's then acquired a twelve-year lease on the copyright of each story, which entitled them to three serial uses of the 'story matter', altered, cut, changed, extended or edited as they saw fit.⁶⁵ Potentially stories could be out of circulation for the full twelve years though this does not usually seem to have been the case.

It has not been possible to see exactly how this agreement worked in practice. Leng's publications appeared in many local editions and there was no requirement on

them to tell Allingham where they were using his stories or how they were changed after they had left him. A scribbled skit, probably from the early 1930s, suggests that he suspected his ideas were handed to other hack writers: ‘then Johnnie MacDonald, Ronnie Duncan, Jessie Stuart and owd uncle Tammas McTavish could have a spier at them for their new stories.’⁶⁶ Despite his own obvious debts to earlier writers Allingham was very scrupulous and inclined to be touchy about the ownership of plots. In 1922 he had an angry exchange of correspondence with *Answers* editor W. Blackwood on the subject of plagiarism. This confirms that there were writers who ‘wrote up’ the plots of others although Blackwood indignantly refuted the suggestion in the particular instance. Generally Allingham trusted the A.P. to treat him fairly in the matter of intellectual ownership but he did not have the same confidence in Leng’s.⁶⁷ There was little warmth or sense of shared endeavour in the letters he received from Harvey, nothing to ameliorate his position as a supplier of a product whose sole duty was to deliver on time and up to standard. When demand from Leng’s dropped, Allingham might have assumed that he was being undercut. In fact he discovered that they had come to consider him too slow.⁶⁸

Two newly written stories a week for forty weeks of each year had been agreed. In practice this quantity varied, as did the choice of papers in which they appeared. William Harvey was the central buyer.⁶⁹ His interpretation of readers’ tastes, and his matching of story to paper, was therefore most influential. Harvey continued to accept Mother Love narratives but the plot-explanations for the mother’s separation from their children show a new acceptance of fractured, and even scandalous, family situations. In his first detailed letter of requirement when commissioning for *The*

People's Friend in 1918, Harvey had stipulated that the heroine should have 'a good reason' for leaving her husband and children if she was to retain the sympathy of his women readers. During the 1920s readers were apparently judged ready to be more widely tolerant. In *Her First Born Son* (1920) the mother is a young war widow who has given up her child for adoption then married again without telling her new husband of this first child. 'Is a mother's duty to her husband or her child?' the editor asks his / her readers. 'Your sympathy will go out to this dear girl whose life was made hideous by the dread word – "Blackmail!"'"⁷⁰ The mother in *Because of her Children* (1922) has married a second time not knowing her first husband was still alive. Illegitimacy and bigamy were symptoms of the post-war domestic disorder and a fertile source of copy in the news pages of papers like *The People's Journal*. Sensational 'human interest' stories in news pages were not new; the nineteenth-century penny and halfpenny evening papers include plenty of examples. What had changed was the willingness of a respectable editor like Harvey to include such topics in family fiction magazines such as *My Weekly* or *The Mascot*.⁷¹

Even in the fiction produced out of the somewhat dour author-editor relationship in the Leng papers we can discern a responsiveness to changed social and economic conditions. In 1925 and 1926, for instance, with industrial relations at crisis point, class-issues separate mothers from their children in *Kept from her Child* (1925-26,) and *Helen Travers* (1926). Narrative sympathies are with the working-class heroines – they are after all maternal variants on the established mill-girl type – but Harvey's new openness to socially realistic detail was obviously tested by *Helen Travers*. 'Harvey approves no 7 HT but still objects to beer.'⁷² Perhaps not so much had

changed since 1908 when Hamilton Edwards had condemned drunkenness as ‘unpardonable in my papers’.⁷³

Film-stars and Families

Three more Leng stories, *The Custody of the Child* (1928), *The Stepmother* (1929) and *Her Stolen Bairn* (1929), all use divorce as the factor separating mothers from their children. Not only had the law made divorce more easily available to couples from a slightly wider social range, but the publicity spotlight on Hollywood had also ensured that news of celebrity marriages was swiftly followed by tales of celebrity divorce. If there had been an intention, in magazines such as *The Picture Show*, to present film-stars as reassuring exponents of family values, it had obviously backfired. The front-page photograph in *The Picture Show* for February 11th 1928, for instance, depicted Mr. & Mrs. Reginald Terry awaiting their final decree with their young daughter, Barbara. ‘Why can’t they be happy?’ asked the caption.⁷⁴ Inside the paper Hughes’s unacknowledged husband, sports journalist Edward Wood, commented: ‘Unfortunately for Hollywood the powers that be have always made a feature of personal publicity. They were right that the public liked to know about its favourites and they reaped the reward of that publicity.’⁷⁵

Wood apparently thought that this development was regrettable. Gwendoline Freeman, a collector for the Provident Bank, who made many friends in the slums of Birmingham during the 1930s, did not consider that the content of Hollywood scandals mattered at all. She was more interested in the process of reception and saw

the role of the press in telling tales of film-stars' eventful personal lives as positively beneficial to her very poor families:

When anyone in the Lane begins to read the papers or go to the cinema regularly it is always a sign of progress. It shows a certain amount of interest in the world: interest in something beyond one's family circle, to go and look at American pictures or read about the latest murder.⁷⁶

Gwendoline Freeman viewed the cult of personality as a means by which this wider world could be assimilated within the Birmingham back-to-backs. It offered a 'human angle' and enhanced a good 'mag' (a women's gossip session). Here she describes a mother and her two daughters making magging into an occasion:

We would have a special tea – tinned salmon and tinned peaches. I listened mostly but the others gossiped until tears ran down their cheeks with laughter [...] They had a wide range of subjects but always saw things from the human angle. The affairs of the Duke of Windsor were a gift and we had endless anecdotes culled from the Sunday papers [...] They told me at length the plots of the films they saw but Hollywood provided more than that. The film stars' private lives were a rich mine.⁷⁷

This intensely pleasurable, socially bonding, activity seems not unlike the eagerness with which Mrs Gilfeather and her sister in the tenements of Lochee are said to have discussed the incidents of their weekly *People's Journal* serial. In effect, newspaper reports of the doings of celebrities were providing some readers with stimulating human interest material similar to the excitements of serial fiction but with the added attraction that they could be presented as 'real life'.

Reports such as Gwendoline Freeman's of people's actual responses offer a different perspective on the developing culture of celebrity from that expressed by its critics. Walter Benjamin, for instance, understood the film industry's build-up of its lead characters as an attempt to compensate for the loss of immediacy and originality (the 'aura' of a genuine work of art) that was made inevitable by the techniques of

mass-reproduction: 'The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality', the phoney spell of the commodity.'⁷⁸ The implication is that consumers of these phoney spells were being short-changed.

'A commodity,' said Marx, 'appears at first sight a very trivial thing and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is in reality a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.'⁷⁹ The use that the magging sisters of Birmingham made of celebrity gossip demonstrates that the commodity had a tangible value for them. Weekly instalments of formula fiction had evidently possessed a comparable value for the slightly older sisters in Dundee. Comparable but not, of course, identical.

Allingham, escapologist

Houdini spent much of his career developing new variants on a limited number of tricks and escapology routines and Allingham's art is not dissimilar. Both Houdini and Allingham were entertainers: one ostentatiously famous, the other almost perversely anonymous. The impact of the cinema on their mass-market audiences in the years immediately after the war offered both men a challenge. Both initially responded opportunistically. Allingham had wondered whether his stories might become films and Houdini had experimented with writing films that would showcase his stunts and ease the burden of incessant physical repetition.⁸⁰ Neither was successful. Different branches of popular art were discovered to have incompatible conventions and audiences were quicker to notice this than producers might have

hoped. In Houdini's case they could not be brought to believe that his stunts were genuinely performed once they had grasped the potential for camera-trickery. In Allingham's case they wanted to read something closer to the actual experience of cinema, not recycled pre-war fiction. 'Films in *Film Fun*, no room for me.'⁸¹

By the end of the decade when film was poised for another technical and conceptual leap forward with the advent of colour and sound, Houdini was dead. Allingham was about to experience an 'Indian Summer' of popularity but not in the guise of Fatty Arbuckle or Sessue Hayakawa.

¹ Harold Kellock *Houdini, His Life Story, from the Recollections and Documents of Beatrice Houdini* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1928) p. 275.

² Evidence that these existed comes from daughters' memories as well as fragments among the papers.

³ Diary 9.2.1923.

⁴ John Burnett *Idle Hands: The Experience of Unemployment 1790-1900* (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 200ff.

⁵ *A Regular Duffer* (*True Blue* 1904), *Will Holt's Schooldays* (Aldine Library c1908), *Chums at Rathgar* (*Puck* 1911). The attributions in *Merry & Bright* make interesting reading. First they state that all rights to the story - 'dramatic, screen, book etc' - are held by Harry Houdini, *M&B* 13.9.1920, but by *M & B* 6.1.1920 these have been divided between Houdini and Allingham, who, for once, is explicitly named.

⁶ James & Smith catalogue of Ono collection.

⁷ Possibly already have been done for someone like 'Wild Bill' Hickox. Anecdotes about young royalty or other role model characters were also fabricated.

⁸ 'Charlie Chaplin's Schooldays' in manuscript only.

⁹ When Allingham's 'Stone Ginger' story was republished it was straightforwardly fictional, 'The Lucky Thirteen' *Film Fun* Christmas Number 1924.

¹⁰ As *Ambitious Bob* (*Kinema Comic* 1920-1), *Dear Old Piggy* (*Kinema Comic* 1921).

¹¹ *KC* 28.8.1920.

¹² *KC* from 24.2.1920.

¹³ 'Footlight Favourites' series running in *Fun & Fiction* during 1911.

¹⁴ Peter Stead *Film and the Working Class* (London: Routledge, 1989) p. 6.

¹⁵ Freeman p.133.

¹⁶ The fictional characters could visit other papers in the group, mingle with one another, go on holiday together etc.

¹⁷ *M & B* 10.5.1919.

¹⁸ Other than those placed temporarily out of play by the 1919 reprint deal with Leng's.

¹⁹ Northcliffe papers ADD 62187 mentions foreign imports of paper as assisting the A.P's competitors. Payment of staff pensions also an issue.

²⁰ Ferris p. 302.

²¹ Gjertsen timeline.

²² Letter from Sir George Sutton 20.9.1921 to Lord Northcliffe 'I shall make some pace' ADD MS 62187.

²³ I have not been able to locate any 1919 numbers of *Cheerio!* so cannot comment on the way in which Cordwell presented *Judgement*. My comments are from the reprint *His Father's Son*.

²⁴ Written for *Weekend Novels* 1919, published in *The Butterfly* 1920 as *The Hidden House*.

²⁵ Spelling of 'Tess Allen-wood' varies. Certainly a pseudonym for Em. Diary evidence shows that Allingham was involved. Maud's married name was Wood. Her husband Edward (Teddy) Wood was also a journalist and occasionally contributed to her papers.

²⁶ *WW* 8.4.1916.

²⁷ *Picture Show* 6.12.1919.

²⁸ Brothers Phil and Ernest Allingham ran a hairdressing magazine during the 1920s, presumably as a vehicle for advertising.

²⁹ *Picture Show* 6.12.1919.

³⁰ *Cheerio!* 10.1.1920.

³¹ Thorogood p. 330.

³² *Picture Show* 17.1.1919 'To My Readers'.

³³ *Picture Show* 3.5.1919 'Peggy and her Pets' p. 3, 'Real Lovers on the Reel' p. 25.

³⁴ Eric Rohde *A History of the Cinema: from its origins to 1970* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1976) pp. 260 – 264; Stead p. 10-21.

³⁵ Rhode p. 73.

³⁶ Dilnot p. 47.

³⁷ I do not know who edited *Boys' Cinema*. Its companion paper, *Girl's Cinema* was edited by Hughes.

³⁸ Thorogood p. 88.

³⁹ *Cheerio!* 17.1.1920.

⁴⁰ *Kinema Comic* 28.8.1920 Assume hero's name is a reference to popular comedian Chester Conklin.

⁴¹ *Peg of the Pictures* TS No. 19 p.19.

⁴² Allingham (1941) p. 21.

⁴³ *Ashamed of His Mother* and *Max the Magnificent*.

⁴⁴ Some occasional later contact with Cordwell. He still reprinted old favourites, such as *Plucky Polly Perkins* and *Max the Magnificent* in his new papers.

- ⁴⁵ Still some evidence for a wartime mixed age readership. *Merry & Bright* editor replies to reader 'I hope your father, who is also a reader, will soon be demobilised,' 1.3.1919.
- ⁴⁶ Freeman p. 144.
- ⁴⁷ *KC* 24.7.1920.
- ⁴⁸ Editorial control of *The Butterfly* moved to R.N. Chance, Clark p.37. (He was the editor with whom Allingham had clashed over higher pay for extra work on *Lights of Home*, *Jester*, 1911.)
- ⁴⁹ Diary 28.3.1928.
- ⁵⁰ Vincent p. 4.
- ⁵¹ Williams pp.131-132.
- ⁵² Allingham (1963) p. 9.
- ⁵³ Diary 27.1927.
- ⁵⁴ Story had started well – Garrish apparently described first instalment as 'a model of what a serial should be,' diary 9.2.1927
- ⁵⁵ Miss McGlachan buys two or three reprints for the *Home Mirror*. McGlachan may be professional name for Anne St John Cooper.
- ⁵⁶ *The Mascot* 1921-2, *Film Fun* 1922.
- ⁵⁷ Diary 3.3.1928.
- ⁵⁸ Diary 28.3.1927.
- ⁵⁹ Details Lord Hartwell *William Camrose. Giant of Fleet Street* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992) p. 126-8.
- ⁶⁰ New competition from DCT 'Big Five' comics (*Hotspur*, *The Wizard*, *The Rover* etc)
- ⁶¹ Diary 30.3.1928. C&C = Cotterill and Cromb.
- ⁶² Dunn was editor of Thomson's *Weekly News*.
- ⁶³ Diary 25.1.1927 (re instalments), letter 216 (15.10.1926) re commission.
- ⁶⁴ Allingham's financial affairs do have their points of resemblance to the complex credit arrangements which enabled his poorer readers to get through each week.
- ⁶⁵ Letter 193 (9.1.1919).
- ⁶⁶ Letter 312 (n.d.). McAleer mentions the importance attached to 'speering' at Thomson's, p. 204.
- ⁶⁷ Cf. letter 218 (21.12.1929) from Graeme Thomson at *Dundee Weekly News* offering HJA a plot situation from which to start a story.
- ⁶⁸ Diary 19.4.1928.
- ⁶⁹ Allingham had more direct contact with individual editors when he was writing for the D.C. Thomson rather than for the Leng papers where dealings were with Harvey.
- ⁷⁰ *Happy Home* 1.5.1920. Identity / gender of this editor not known to me. Dealings supervised by Harvey, also dealings with *My Weekly*.
- ⁷¹ These situations characteristic of the 1860s sensation novels but those originally written for quite a different public, the shilling public, cf. Deborah Wynne *Sensation Fiction and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).
- ⁷² Diary 27.8.1926.
- ⁷³ Letter 138 (23.4.1908).
- ⁷⁴ *Picture Show* 11.2.1928.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Gwendoline Freeman *The Houses Behind* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1947) p. 86.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid p. 88.
- ⁷⁸ Walter Benjamin 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' from *Illuminations* (translated Zohn) (London: Cape, 1970) p. 233.
- ⁷⁹ Marx (ed. McClellan) p. 42.
- ⁸⁰ Letter 168 (2.4.1918) and *Film Fun* editorial competition (1921). Houdini productions *The Man from Beyond* (1919) and *Haldane of the Secret Service* (1921).
- ⁸¹ Diary 28.3.1928.

Chapter Nine

My Indian Summer

The Family Journal and The Home Companion, Poppy's Paper and The Oracle,

1929 – 1935

‘Get as much as you can for it (one serial use) – there is a run on me just now. My Indian summer I suppose!’ Allingham’s instructions to his agents in December 1931 show a cheerful confidence compared with the occasionally desperate tone of his diary entries in the later 1920s. His earnings were rising. From the depressed levels of 1928 and 1929 (£658 and £698 respectively) his total income for 1931, 1932 and 1933 was £1305, £1546 and £1537. Only in 1934, Allingham’s last complete production year, did it begin to drop away again.¹ His output table for these years shows new stories being commissioned and old stories finding new incarnations in a different set of magazines. The purpose of this chapter is look at some of these stories and to consider the factors that had led to this final burst of popularity. Allingham’s ‘Indian summer’ may be attributed to readers’ appetite for a particular type of fiction in specific social and economic circumstances; to the intrinsic qualities of his writing that met these needs and to the creative flair of his editor. 1931 was a year of national crisis and it seems that this, in some way, confirmed his success. His ability to regain and sustain popularity was made possible by the plot-capital he had accumulated over twenty years of serial production and the skilful manner in which this was presented to a new audience.

Anne Cooper

The most important factor shaping Allingham's success in the early 1930s was his editor. Anne St John Cooper, editor in charge of a clutch of successful story-papers for the Amalgamated Press, was the second wife of Henry St John Cooper, one of the authors whom, twenty years ago, Hamilton Edwards had held up to Allingham as an exemplary producer of boys' school stories. Allingham, who had then been attempting something he considered more realistic, had replied with dignity: 'I know Mr. Henry St John's work. It is very conventional of course but the author has a real sense of fun and his stuff is nearly always readable.'² They were both long-standing A.P. authors and their output had overlapped in areas other than the school story. In 1909, for instance, when Allingham was writing *Plucky Polly Perkins* for *The Butterfly*, St John Cooper was producing stories about 'Pollie Green', who demonstrated similar qualities of wit, assertiveness and willingness to stand up to authority.³

The two men were unlikely to have met socially – the passing of the old ramshackle bohemianism amongst common writers was one of the changes deplored by Ralph Rollington in 1913.⁴ Once Allingham had set himself up in his fiction factory (or as an outworker in the corporate enterprises of others) he was effectively isolated by the demands of deadlines and productivity and centred his leisure time round his family or his chess club. By the later 1920s, however, St John Cooper's son, Robert, was one of the close-knit group of friends which included Allingham's older daughter, Margery. Although family connections did not influence twentieth century career choices in the direct way that they had when businesses were small,

family-owned concerns: it is nevertheless noticeable that the ‘gang’ to which Margery Allingham and Robert St John Cooper belonged included other children of AP writers who were developing their own media careers.⁵ The informal level of expertise developed by childhoods in the fiction factory was demonstrated on the occasions when Maud Hughes’s husband, Teddy Wood, or Maud herself, were too incapacitated by whisky to file their copy. Not only Margery but her younger brother, Phil Allingham, could step in and file for them. Few members of this next generation followed their fathers down the mine (or into the A.P.) for long. Instead they used their inherited understandings (or ‘habitus’) to achieve success in new areas of the burgeoning communications industry.⁶ By the early 1930s Margery Allingham’s career as a ‘middlebrow’ detective novelist was well underway and Phil Allingham was making a series of broadcasts for the BBC.

Henry St John Cooper had died in 1926 and Allingham sent a letter of condolence to his widow. Allingham had been searching for new markets at that time and it had come as a great relief when Mrs Cooper had approached him for reprint material to use in one of her story papers *The Home Mirror*.⁷ Unfortunately *The Home Mirror* did not survive for long and in 1927 its readers were redirected to the established periodical, *The Home Companion*. No subsequent invitation to contribute appears to have been extended to Allingham until 1930 when Anne Cooper, as editor of *The Home Companion*, requested another use of *Out of the Past*, one of the aborted *Home Mirror* stories. At the same time she bought second serial rights to an Allingham ‘Mother Love’ story for her main paper, *The Family Journal* and followed it immediately with another.⁸ This was the beginning of a working relationship as close

and almost as productive as that established with F.C. Cordwell on the comic-and-story papers in the years before the war. From 1930 until autumn 1937, more than a year after Allingham's death, there was not a week without an Allingham serial in *The Family Journal*; sometimes two or three running concurrently, as well as reprinted stories in *The Home Companion* and in Cooper's other story-papers *Poppy's Paper*, *The Oracle* and *The Miracle*.

Cooper possessed the prime editorial quality of putting herself in the place of her common readers. In a similar way that Maud Hughes's personal enthusiasm for films and film stars underpinned the success of *The Picture Show*, so Cooper presented herself as reading her magazines' fiction for her own pleasure. When she was 'ordered away by her doctor' for a few weeks' rest in Broadstairs, she instructed her office to tell Allingham that his instalments would be sent on to her 'to brighten her up and act as a tonic.'⁹ She was ready to be delighted:

I thought the instalment received this week for the F.J serial now running was wonderful. I'd never in my wildest flights of imagination thought that the burgled house was going to be Phil Rodney's.

You are astonishing in your surprises!¹⁰

Her generously expressed enthusiasms probably facilitated Allingham's acceptance of her occasional criticisms and suggestions.

I love all the characters in your new first instalment, but most of all I love TOBY TILES. What a creature!!

The one criticism I have to make is the curtain. I am making this my autumn boom story in *Family Journal* and the curtain is not strong enough to carry a leaflet. As I do not know what is in your mind in the way of developments I am rather at a loss to know how it can be strengthened up.

Will you give me some idea of what is to happen in the second instalment as then I might be able to add a piece on to number 1?¹¹

The courtesy and charm with which she ensured that she got what she wanted, contrasts with other editors' more overtly dictatorial tones. William Harvey, a few months earlier, had objected to what he saw as an arbitrary change in one of the characters in Allingham's current serial for Leng's. He expressed this as carefully as he could but Allingham was sufficiently unhappy to retain a copy of his reply. 'Dear Mr Harvey, I will of course do what you suggest but I cannot help thinking that you are taking a lot of the interest out of it.'¹² Allingham explained his reasons and his plans for the development of the serial and included a couple of newly-written pages to be used for clarification. But Harvey was obdurate:

It is not easy in correspondence to see each other's point of view but I do want to repeat that all of us have been rather disappointed with this sudden change of character on the part of Crewe, and we feel that if we have been disappointed our readers would be sure to be disappointed also.

As far as Harvey was concerned a bad character should stay bad. The time taken for him to receive and disregard Allingham's explanation presented a threat to his production schedule:

I know you will do your best to meet our view, and as some days have been lost over this correspondence I sincerely trust that you will be able to let me have the revised instalment by Monday.¹³

The presses were imposing their timetable on both editor and author. Harvey's letter was dated Thursday 25th and arrived on 26th. He also sent a telegram. Allingham complied – as Harvey had known he would. On the Saturday 27th he altered the instalment and posted it to Dundee. On Monday 29th he received a telegram from Harvey confirming that the instalment was 'now O.K.' and by Thursday he was at work again on the next instalment. But this was the last serial he wrote for The North.¹⁴ More factors than a wounded authorial sensibility contributed to Allingham's

reluctance to continue working for Harvey and his colleagues but it is impossible to escape the conclusion that, even within the factory system, the quality of relationships still counted and that Anne Cooper managed these better.

Allingham was in his sixties. He was often tired, sometimes oppressed by a sense of futility and, despite his pride in his older children and the quasi-metropolitan pleasures of his and Em's new home near Southend-on-Sea, his home life was not serene.¹⁵ It is hard to see that he would have succeeded in maintaining his inventiveness, and keeping up such a steady monthly work rate, had it not been for this editor's regular encouragement. 'Mr Allingham at his best!'¹⁶ 'Today's instalment of *Deserted* was perfect! I did enjoy reading it.'¹⁷ Like all of Allingham's editors, she sometimes had to chivvy for her material; 'Phone call from Cooper, "Get on with *Lover* – very late."¹⁸ Nevertheless, the sense of joint enterprise that had been fostered by her appreciative readings meant that when she had made an editorial miscalculation, it was not hard for her to enlist extra help and effort from Allingham.

Lover (15) Cooper called me up to end this story in 2000 ... Later Mrs C called me up again. She has made a mistake. *Lover (15)* is to be 5000, not 2000. I scrap my ending and go at it again.¹⁹

Cooper's letters to Allingham, read together with the notes in his diaries, present a picture of author-editor co-operation which, though it is quite clear that power lies with the editor (and with the production schedule and management reporting requirements beyond her), does ameliorate the impression of rigid editorial control reported by other fiction writers. Esther Wyndham, for instance, a young writer producing stories in the 1930s for the A.P.'s by-now-venerable woman editor, Winifred Johnson, claimed that the sudden arrival of an illegitimate baby in one of

Ethel M Dell's stories had resulted in a refusal by Johnson to publish any romantic serials in *Woman's Weekly* until she had read the full text.²⁰ Cooper, however, adhered to the practice of passing each instalment of a serial as it came in, whilst simultaneously publishing instalments passed approximately two months earlier.²¹ This retained some flexibility in the publishing schedule (serials could still be pulled or extended in response to the magazine's performance) and a sense of immediacy in the author / editor relationship.²²

Wyndham also recalled being issued with plot 'guidelines' by Johnson. A recent commentator on girls' magazines of the period states, without qualification, that the duties of editors 'included commissioning the fiction *and dictating its plot*.'²³(my italics) The magazines she cites include three where the Cooper-Allingham partnership was in operation and four others in which his fiction had been published.²⁴ Allingham's editors might ask him for a certain type of story and make suggestions or criticisms during its production, it would not be accurate to say that they dictated his plots – as this just-in-time letter from Cooper makes clear:

Dear Mr Allingham,

You will remember that we discussed a new story for the *Family Journal* centred round a character like Madge, who appeared in another serial of yours.

When do you think you can let me have the first instalment? It ought to go to the works in three weeks.²⁵

Souvenirs of Evangelicalism: *The Home Companion* & *The Family Journal*

Presumably one reason that Anne Cooper felt confident in letting Allingham work out his stories in his own way is that he already had such a thorough understanding of the medium in which they would be published. Her two main papers, *The Family Journal* and *The Home Companion*, demonstrate the way in which aspects of

nineteenth-century evangelicalism had been commodified into entertainment, secularised into the family fiction paper and finally narrowed into the domestic women's magazine. James Allingham had tried to use the success of *The Christian Globe* to establish a *Family Paper* and a *Ladies Journal*: the Harmsworths had achieved this. Their *Sunday Companion* (1894) had been extremely popular and, in accordance with the Harmsworths' characteristic accumulative approach, its profits were quickly reinvested to produce a 'weekday edition', *The Home Companion* (1897). This was the paper into which Cooper recruited Allingham in 1930.²⁶

Initially *The Home Companion* was associated with the campaign for 'pure' reading and with the sanctification of home and family. 'A good home is the earth's reflex of heaven,' as the editor, Hartley Aspden, explained in its first issue:

There are millions of enemies ready to break down the gate and assault the citadel; and amongst them there are none more insidious than the millions of evil books and papers that the devil scatters like snowflakes across the land.²⁷

Aspden's marketing message was endorsed by a whole-page article 'The Influence of Good Reading in the Home' attributed to two celebrity preachers, Dean Farrar and Dr Parker.²⁸ *The Sunday Companion* had encouraged Bible Study and support of the Barefoot Mission: *The Home Companion* was a secular paper dominated by romantic fiction, together with household hints, a children's page, a members' club and incessant self-interested aphorisms concerning the duty of parents to encourage right reading. 'You can't gather figs from thistles and you can't make good men from boys who read bad books.'²⁹ Both the *Sunday* and *The Home Companion* assumed a special role for the mother within the home and most of the advice was directed at her.

Nevertheless there were clear domestic roles for fathers too and membership of the 'Red Rose of Courage' readers' club shows a 50 – 50 male / female balance.³⁰

The first numbers of *The Family Journal* (1909) showed it targeting the same mixed, domestic audience: men, women and children were each addressed on its front page by the Rev Hugh Chapman and the magazine regularly ran features such as 'The Day's Devotions' as well as scattering pious and uplifting exhortations through out its pages.³¹ *The Family Journal* proved one of the Harmsworths' most successful ventures and Henry St John Cooper had been one of its most regular contributors from the first issue. His dramatic story *Master of the Mill* opens with a violent scene in which the hero is disinherited and his cousin plots against him. In the middle of this opening page is an inset box proclaiming:³²

<p>A United Happy Family Life is the Basis of a Prosperous Country. Those who love the name of Father, Mother and Home are asked to join our Family Club. The Key that unlocks the entrance to a successful career is True Family Life.</p>

Such exhortations remained a feature of *The Family Journal* and were regularly inserted in the midst of Allingham's 1930s dramas of divorce, bigamy, illegitimacy and betrayal. *The Family Journal's* Family Club continued to be active in the 1930s. It was a pen-friends' agency putting the lonely (and often the disabled) club 'sisters' and 'daughters' in touch with one another and functioned additionally as a method of advertising lodgings. The paper still possessed some regular male readers, old and young; as well the dress patterns, recipes and household hints, there were handyman's features (often beginning 'Down at our Working Man's Club the other day ...'). A long-running cartoon feature 'The Gay Goblins' aimed to appeal across the

generations.³³ The Editor of *The Family Journal* was pictured as a man though the Club President, a more active figure, was 'Mother'. The other regular advice-givers 'Joan Courage' and 'Nurse Honor' were also female.

The Family Journal's success in retaining the vestiges of a mixed gender readership was unusual by 1930. The readership of *The Home Companion*, for instance, appears to have been entirely female. The category of family magazine, so powerful around the turn of the century, had fragmented as the managed proliferation of periodicals within single companies such as the A.P. meant that each individual member of the household could be targeted to purchase something specifically addressing their interests – thus multiplying revenue by the number of individual readers rather than the group. Families had changed too. Family sizes had dropped; disposable family income (for many) had risen, and by the 1930s, a slightly higher proportion of even working-class housing offered some more private and differentiated spaces. These might affect the way individuals within the family spent their leisure time – encouraging solitary reading, for instance. Family reading aloud had generally declined as the literacy gap between genders and generations had closed and as the wireless offered professionalised opportunities to listen together. A move to the new suburbs often changed the way a family unit functioned and, for many women, the sanctification of the home took ever more material forms as the housewife became a solitary labourer within its servant-less, sometimes child-free space.³⁴ The loneliness of 'married club daughters' who hope to hear from 'sister members' is as patent as the financial neediness of the single club members who

advertise for others to rent small furnished bedrooms or share their homes as a paying guest ‘very small premium asked.’³⁵

Both *The Home Companion* and *The Family Journal* continued to convey an impression of piety. Religious verse was regularly included.

He that helped the homely folk
Still brings
His wondrous power to beautify
Plain pots and pans and things.³⁶

Both papers appeared to assume that their customers needed cheering and comforting as well as entertaining and advising. During 1930 Anne Cooper changed the title of a snippets feature from ‘The Day’s Devotion: A Comforting Thought for Every Day of the Week’ to ‘Sunny Pars’ but the content remained similar. She was protective towards its readers:

I am exceedingly sorry, but the instalment of *Cora Royle* received today is much too strong for the *Home Companion*. I am returning from page nine to you and hope that you will be able to develop it without so much shooting and without making Baron Sarke so dreadful in appearance. I hope you will not mind doing this but as it stands it is not really *Home Companion* stuff.³⁷

This seems to have been the only occasion that she found it necessary to make such a comment to Allingham. Usually she relied on his understanding of the paper’s particular needs. ‘Meantime, have you any story that you think would be suitable for the *Home Companion*? If so would you send it onto me to look at?’³⁸ He was, of course, well qualified by his association with *The Christian Globe* as well as his editorship of *The London Journal* to understand the requirements of papers such as these.

Writing for Women: *Tricked into Marriage*

The loss of his adolescent, mixed-gender audience during the 1920s had left Allingham, almost by default, as a writer for women. He and F.C. Cordwell and Maud Hughes at the A.P. might have been excited early in the decade by the challenge of celebrity culture and linking with the new enthusiasms of boys and girls, young men and women, but the hard economics of the later 1920s had kept him writing steadily for William Harvey and his colleagues in Dundee. The story-paper, *The Happy Home*, which had been his main Leng outlet during the war, was another paper with superficially religious commercial origins.³⁹ After the war it was refocused around the concept of Luck and renamed *The Mascot*. Allingham's work for the Leng family paper, *The People's Journal*, had dried up as that paper became more self-consciously Scottish, but he had continued to write for their mother-and-daughter paper, *My Weekly*. Additionally, from 1929, he was regularly selling stories to D.C. Thomson women's papers such as *The Weekly Welcome* and *Red Star Weekly*.⁴⁰ This provided a body of work that transposed easily into Anne Cooper's papers. His skill and hers then ensured that many of the stories first written for Cordwell's comics could also be reissued for the new readership. (Their relatively easy re-use confirms that they had suited adults as well as adolescents in the first place.)

The first story requested by Anne Cooper for the *Home Companion* in 1930, was the fourth reprint of *He Thought She Was His Wife*, a serial written for Leng's *The Mascot* in 1925 and which she herself had used in *The Home Mirror* in 1926. Its plot-type is characteristic of a group of Allingham's 1920s non-juvenile productions in which good women marry men under false pretences. The women are persuaded to

‘trick’ the men into marriage by various combinations of economic need, self-sacrifice and compassion. The men are blinded or amnesiac and become quite disorientated in the midst of a plethora of true and false wives, heroines and impersonators, good-time girls and devoted nurses. In *He Thought She Was His Wife*, John Hardy is rendered vulnerable by a blow on the head in a train accident. He has been out of England for some time and has also, suddenly, acquired wealth. This combination of factors exposes him to female predation and imposture as well as to love and nurture.

Similar ‘Tricked into Marriage’ plots are used in *The Girl He Thought He Married* (*Mascot* 1924), *Tempted by Love* (Leng’s 1926) and *The Man She Took From Another* (ms 1929). As a group, these stories can be viewed as dramatising a perception of social change in post-war gender relations – a new ‘structure of feeling’ to use Williams’s term.⁴¹ Between 1924 and 1931 twelve of the stories written by Allingham first for Harvey and then for Cooper include a catastrophe for the hero (or husband). When the men are weakened they become more perceptive. The women, meanwhile, have greater scope for action (whether for good or ill.) This fictional disabling of men – and women’s different reactions to a man’s disability – makes sense in the post-war sexual situation, particularly when two women compete for the one man. Public anxieties were centred around the increased ratio of women to men in the population; the numbers of surviving men who were physically or emotionally maimed and the wider realignment of male-female relationships in the aftermath not only of the conflict but of women’s new legal and political status. All the heroines in the ‘Tricked into Marriage’ group are fatherless (motherless too but that appears less

significant) and it is in part their economic desperation that persuades them to substitute for the anti-heroine, the good-time girl, when she rejects the hero because of his disability.

He doesn't write in his old jolly masterful way. His letters are timid, almost apologetic and yet he wants to see me. And I can't! I won't! Suppose I gave way and married him out of pity. It would be hideous! I've got my own life to think of. I can't bear illness of any kind. I'm healthy and I must have healthy people about me. It sounds heartless but I can't help it. That's my nature. Besides I must have money and when I marry it must be a man who, if he isn't rich must be able to make a good income.⁴²

This story cuts immediately to the amnesiac hero, poignantly weakened, yet romantically, naively, passionate and constant. 'God help me win her and be worthy of her!' Dramatic tension is thus set up – how can this situation be resolved without inflicting further pain on a character who is already suffering? Such questions are frequently posed by the editor at the end of the instalment and could have provided the beginnings of conversations between friends or family members who were reading the same story and who might enjoy predicting possible outcomes.⁴³

Allingham's readers would only have been in doubt as to how the situation would be worked out, not in doubt as to the morally – or fictionally – correct action. One of the givens of these stories is that a good character will never turn away from someone else in need. There are at least three frameworks which may be used to understand this assumption. Firstly, as a recognition of the pragmatic importance of mutual aid in the conditions of working class life; secondly as derived from the ethical code which Hoggart terms 'primary religion.'⁴⁴ And thirdly as compatible with the broadly positive attitude to other people and to adventure that makes a good story. Plots function this way in fairy tale: a hero or heroine makes their own luck by saying yes

to someone in need; love the frog and he will turn into a prince; give the old crone your last crust of bread and she may repay you with a magic potion.⁴⁵ These different justifications are not mutually exclusive; many of the formulae used by Allingham and other common writers can be interpreted equally convincingly using any of the different codes. What is important is that the writer and reader share an understanding of what is 'right' in the narrative context. 'It is against this ground pattern that the thrills throw their bold reliefs and to which they are indissolubly bound,' writes Hoggart.⁴⁶

Blindness as a plot-device

In the post-war stories blindness (or other disability) tests the lead characters' ethical reactions. Allingham had used blindness as a plot device throughout his serial writing career but not always in quite this way. In his theatrical, highly visual, writing, blindness, like amnesia, can function as an instant means of altering characters' potency and their relationships to one another; additionally, in his stories as in fairy tales, blindness is dramatically reversible. In an early example, such as *The Lights of Home*, reversibility is merely used for dramatic effect and excitement. The hero has been blinded and the heroine instructed that his cure can not be complete until midnight. Just before the magic hour the villain's hand is reaching for the heroine's throat. Bravely, knowing how much is at stake, she does not make a sound. It is the villain's frustrated exclamation that wakes the blinded hero:

With a fierce, angry cry, he seized the wrappings that swathed his head and, tearing them away, flung them to the ground.

Lucy sank to her knees, her wrist still held by the other's fierce grip.

'Oh God have mercy! Let him see!'

And as the passionate prayer, in a tone of anguish and appeal, came from her white lips, the clock on the mantelpiece began to strike the hour of twelve.⁴⁷

This is the end of the chapter and the reader is clearly intended to feel the suspense of wondering whether the hero's impetuous action in pulling off his bandages minutes before twelve o'clock, will have cost him his sight forever. The three protagonists freeze 'as in a tableau' until the clock has finished striking.

Blindness can also be used to alert the reader to the residual patterns of conversion and redemption in these stories. A physical blinding, or un-blinding, can function as a metaphor for a change in spiritual perception: wicked Baron Sarke in *A Girl Outcast* (*The Favorite Comic* 1911) is brought to repentance and confession by his blindness and suffering at the hands of Dr Cain. The failing eyesight of the mother in *Mother's Boy* (*Film Fun* 1927) underlines her lack of insight into the very different characters of her two sons. Her eldest, disregarded, son sacrifices himself to save her sight but, when she goes to him in his hour of crisis, he is too ill to recognise her.

Flinging her arms across the now motionless figure of her son, she buried her face in the bedclothes and prayed.

She prayed for her boy's life. Prayed that he might be spared to her so that in the years to come she might make up to him for the wrong she had done.

For as the fervent prayer rose to her lips, many things became clear to her; past happenings took a new shape, and in some measure at least, the scales fell from her eyes.⁴⁸

The Lights of Home, *The Girl Outcast* and *Mother's Boy* were all written for the readers of the comic-and-story papers. The periods of blindness or disability are an affliction for the individual: they do not realign the relationship between hero and heroine as they do in the stories written after the war for adult women. David Bradford in *A Woman's Victim* (*My Weekly* 1930) is not physically sightless but condemns himself repeatedly, at the outset of the story, as having been 'blind' to the

way his female relatives had made life unendurable for this factory-girl wife. Unfortunately he has not acquired sufficient perception to see the true evil in his housekeeper, Ann Pritchard, and when he does, the shock induces dumbness and paralysis. ‘What a fate for David Bradford who used to be so domineering!’ says his snobbish sister-in-law, Lady Brandon. The she turns to his work-girl wife, ‘I always said you were a fool. Just like you to run away when he was strong and healthy and come back when he is a wreck.’⁴⁹ But the reader knows that, in these stories at least, that is how a heroine behaves.

This regular weakening of men in the stories written for women may suggest that Allingham is ‘Taming the Beast’, plotting the symbolic emasculation of heroes that Mary Cadogan, among others, identifies as a common narrative among romantic novelists. One example cited by Cadogan is of particular interest as a comparator to Allingham’s work. It is highly likely that Allingham was familiar with Florence Barclay’s best-selling novel *The Rosary* (1909). Barclay was an evangelical, romantic novelist, hugely popular and therefore of obvious relevance to an editor seeking serial fiction for his family’s *Christian Globe*. Cadogan uses this story – where the big, plain heroine, in denial sexually, can only come close to the hero when he is blind and she is masquerading as a nurse – to support her theory that ‘many fictional heroines [...] or their creators – still had reservations about living intimately with full-blooded men’.⁵⁰ Allingham may well have lifted Barclay’s central situation in much the same way as he re-used the image of the disguised, protective mother from *East Lynne*. It provided a powerful, ready-made image easily transposed into his different medium whilst leaving behind the lengthy soul-searching of Barclay’s characters or the erotic

charge created in the novel by the hero and heroine's elaborate precautions against touching one another.

It may seem paradoxical to claim that Allingham's post-war serials are about the altered relationship between the sexes but are not about sex but this is what a reading of *A Woman's Victim* or the 'Tricked into Marriage' group alongside *The Rosary* makes clear. Allingham's heroes and heroines do experience physical attraction for one another and this is centrally important but not, in itself, complicated. His writing is not sensual – few flushes, blushes or throbbings – and, while his heroes may be made more vulnerable or more perceptive by their temporary disabilities, they are not emasculated by them. The eminent doctor in *Tempted by Love* tells the amnesiac hero: 'A link in the chain of your memory has been destroyed and you are so to speak disconnected from your past. That is all [...] both in body and mind you are fully qualified to play a man's part in the world.'⁵¹ These heroes father children without difficulty; their problems come in identifying the right mother later.

Heroines, likewise, are not squeamish about their bodies once they have met the right man. In the post-war stories there are a number of illegitimate babies where loving couples have not been able to wait for marriage. The existence of these children causes endless emotional and practical difficulties for the heroine but the act of creation is never regretted – nor authorially censured. Allingham has a regular location, 'a tiny island in one of the upper reaches of the Thames' which is his favourite setting for romance from 1890s onwards. His young heroine, Milly, in *The Child She Dared Not Claim* (*Family Journal* 1931) conceived a baby there and suffered abandonment, marriage and miscarriage, blackmail, incarceration and

unremitting persecution thereafter. But even in the last instalment when the choice appears to be a new marriage to a man whom she does not love or continued imprisonment in an asylum, one look into her child's eyes is a revelation:

She was no longer in the sitting room of the dingy Paddington flat but in the open air on a lonely island in one of the upper reaches of the Thames. The sun was shining in a blue sky and she was gazing into eyes as brown and as serious as these. But they were not the eyes of her baby boy; they were the eyes of his father, Harry Dare.⁵²

Eyes are conventionally eloquent. This vision compels her to reject the marriage-and-safety offer, making one those fictional decisions that seem completely irrational but by the emotional logic of the story turn out to be right. Before the instalment is out Harry Dare has returned, her enemies are routed and at last he, she and their child can begin family life together.

Types of Narrative

The comparison with *The Rosary*, as with *East Lynne*, reveals, once again, the difference between the novel and the drama-story. There is little time for introspection in Allingham's serials. His instalments are shaped by surprises, reversals, revelations: 'Dramatic things happen, one after another in the next episode of this great story,' as Anne Cooper typically promised her readers.⁵³ He is not writing courtship romance in which two people gradually learn more about each other until they accept that they are in love. His serials are moral adventures in which the main characters are continually buffeted by Fate (in the person of the author) to test how they behave in extreme situations. That is why they are as likely to take place after marriage as before.

Temptation scenes are staples of all these story-dramas but the type of temptation is related to money or position rather than to sex and the right response is not always negative. Many a hero, loitering suicidally on the Thames Embankment, sets off an ultimately benign chain of events by the reckless acceptance of an impersonation offer, as in *She Loved A Rogue* (*Family Journal* 1932). When a heroine is offered an opportunity to step into someone else's life she shows her pluck by responding positively. 'Her life had been dull enough in the past and doubtless it would be equally dull in the future. Why should she refuse to accept this one day of sunshine and adventure and colour which fate offered her?'⁵⁴ Allingham seems to have had various rough categories of story-type: references to 'blind man story', 'mother-love story' and 'impersonation story' are all included in his diary notes. The categories merge into one another as a blind man or a mother love story may contain impersonations and an impersonator story, such as *The Man Who Stole Her Heart* (*Family Journal* 1931) may include a period of amnesia for the hero.

Considering impersonation as the central feature of a story, rather than just as one incident among others, may be a route towards understanding the place of these stories in the lives of their readers. Impersonation stories – or impersonation sequences within other story-types – are often the most exciting to read as the hero or heroine has to rely on their wits and their luck in unfamiliar situations. They are also the most improbable as they usually rely on impenetrable disguise, unlikely coincidence or astonishing resemblance. As well as being central to performance art, impersonation is a consistent feature of the adventure story and thus the most obvious

chance for readers to step out of their own dull lives and accept ‘a day of sunshine and adventure and colour’ – as the heroine of *Tempted by Love* chose to do.

The Family Journal and the National Crisis

Many readers of *The Family Journal* were probably middle-aged rather than young, to judge from the number of front page pattern advertisements which promote themselves as ‘flattering to the older figure’, and it was their approbation that was crucial in consolidating this period of success for Allingham.⁵⁵ However friendly Anne Cooper might be, or however much she might personally relish his work, she was not an autonomous or disinterested reader. Nor was she a powerful leader in the Victorian editorial mould.⁵⁶ She was an employee of the Amalgamated Press and, as such, accountable to its Directors. She and her papers needed to show results. His ‘Indian Summer’ of prosperity had begun with the marked success of his contributions to *The Family Journal* in 1931. On October 28th he noted in his diary what she had told him then. ‘While other papers went down during the crisis the *F.J.* went up. The people downstairs asked her why this was. She replied Mr A’s story’⁵⁷

The story was *The Child She Dared Not Claim*: the crisis was the fall of the Labour Government on August 24th coupled with the decision of the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald to form a new ‘National’ Government with the Conservatives and Liberals. There had been an acute financial emergency which had included including worries about basic food supplies. This had triggered an attempt to pass draconian legislation which would reduce payments to teachers, civil servants and

members of the armed forces as well as to the unemployed. Then, in September, came the psychological blow when the nation was forced to abandon the Gold Standard.

The Navy had mutinied at the government's cost-cutting measures, teachers and civil servants had lobbied successfully for some reconsideration but there was no such reprieve for the millions of people dependent on unemployment benefit. The Conservatives demanded a General Election and won it on October 27th, the day before Allingham's diary note. 1931 has been described as a political 'watershed' and its events as having 'an impact in countless working-class homes.'⁵⁸ Was it a need for comfort that persuaded people to buy *The Family Journal* over this period or did the sheer grippingness of 'Mr A's story' serve to take their minds off it? Editorially, comfort and exhortation were being dispensed in large helpings – together with economy household recipes such as the making of sheep's head broth. 'Mother' in 'Our Family Club' assured her readers that everyone was sharing the need to make sacrifices:

There are few indeed among us who will not feel some difference for a time. The plans we've made may be subject to alteration and we shall all have to make some little retrenchment. But the present state of affairs is one of national importance. Pride in our country will urge us to do our bit towards keeping our beloved country in the front rank among the nations.

She promised that the hard times would not last.

Make no mistake about that. Our troubles and trials – whatever they may be – are purely transitory. They will assuredly pass, as those we have known before have passed. Look back over your life and recall the difficulties you have known. At the time they were present in your life, you saw no way out – the whole future seemed clouded over, with no ray of light to relieve the blackness. Yet those trials passed away, and once again you saw the light [...] If trial be your lot today, remember you have come successfully through trial before. Similarly you have had your happy days, and will have many more at the direction of a wise and merciful Providence. The right thing to do then is to face up manfully to your present difficulties, and await with confidence the turning of the tide.⁵⁹

Week after week, in Allingham's stories, the heroes and heroines are trapped into impossible situations (which are usually family-related) and week after week they escape, only to face some new disaster. Like fairy tales these stories are characterised by their 'heroic optimism'.⁶⁰ Although the prison warders do not crash through the cottage door in the 1930s stories quite as frequently as they did before the war, they, and the keepers of the sinister private asylums, and the baby-farmers, have certainly not gone out of business. Serious, additional, post-war threats to family stability come from misunderstandings and failures of trust, usually precipitated by the malice of others. They are dire (as in *The Child She Dared Not Claim*) but under the providential direction of the author, happy days always return. The readers can thus face their fears, enjoy the periods of adventure, suffer the 'heart-pull' of sympathetic emotion knowing that all will come right in the end.

One might question whether it was a validation or a condemnation of Allingham's art that readers should have turned to it in this period of crisis. Was he simply part of a capitalist conspiracy to keep the common people quiet whilst the elite manipulated the situation to their own advantage? 'All fiction from the mushroom libraries downwards is censored in the interests of the ruling classes, stated Orwell in 1940.⁶¹ Allingham was not directly censored but was an experienced interpreter of the expectations of others and the dynamics of the field within which he worked. 'I know your desire is to give us exactly the kind of story we like,' William Harvey had written so long ago and Allingham knew as well as any other supplier that if his product did not please, it would not be published and he would not be paid - a strong incentive to self-censorship.⁶²

The problem in 1931 was that ‘Mother’, the spokesperson of the Amalgamated Press, was not telling the truth. ‘Little use to resent such trials,’ she writes ‘They fall to rich and poor alike, for trial and adversity are no respecters of persons.’⁶³ As the 1930s wore on it became increasingly obvious that the burden was not being shared equally: whole areas of the country – the Distressed Areas, ‘graveyards’ of the industries whose workers had given Britain such ebullient prosperity in the nineteenth century – were suffering completely disproportionately.⁶⁴ The crisis of 1931 was actually advantageous for the capitalist class, in the short term at least, as it left the country’s first experiments in Labour government discredited, and returned political power to Conservative hands for the next fourteen years.

One lie that Allingham’s fiction never told was that rich people, as a group, were no happier than poor people. The rich, in his stories, are nakedly powerful. They can hire detectives, impress policemen, lawyers, doctors and nurses; rush across the country in powerful cars and pay whatever fees the baby-farmers and the private asylum keepers require. His fiction strips out whatever legal and financial safety nets there actually were in the early twentieth century, to present the central injustices starkly. The rich are warm and comfortable while the poor are anxious and hungry: the rich are believed, the poor are not.

Allingham has no collective political solution to offer. The happy ending for hero and heroine is that they achieve riches and thus safe haven for themselves, their children, and anyone else who has befriended them in their tribulations. They must do this without sacrificing virtue on the way but the criteria for virtue become less and less prescriptive. Whatever the specific immoralities Winifred Johnson was trying to

guard against in *Woman's Weekly*, Anne Cooper clearly had no problem passing stories of Allingham's that included sex before marriage, adulterous sex and bigamous sex, as long as the protagonists were more sinned against than sinning and as long, as she put it in a letter on the question of the husband's premarital affair in *The Child She Dared Not Claim*, it was tastefully managed. 'This is not a big point and in your own inimitable way you will gloss nicely over anything of this sort.'⁶⁵

In Allingham's penultimate serial, *The Silence of Jane Carter*, there is even a nicely glossed-over suggestion that prostitution might be acceptable if it helped to feed a hungry child. The heroine, an unmarried mother, has been deserted by a nice-but-weak stockbroker's son, and is struggling to support herself and her child. After an interview with a master-crook she returns exultant to her garret in Kennington where she is found by her landlady:

Mrs Martin, Jane's landlady, was a typical member of her class. Her figure was shrunken, her face lined with care and over work, but her eyes were brave. After a lifetime of struggle and suffering, she had retained her power to sympathise with others.⁶⁶

Jane tells her that she has a 'situation' that requires her to go out in the evening and not return until very late at night. She offers to pay Mrs Martin or her daughter five shillings to look after her baby for her. The landlady is amazed, especially as Jane has just paid all her arrears of rent:

'Five shillings! It must be a grand situation you've got my dear.'

'Yes, I think it is.'

'Or maybe you've found a friend? But there, that's no business of mine. Whatever it is, I wish you luck and we'll look after the baby all right, don't you fret [...] It's lucky for him your luck turned when it did, my dear. I've seen many a fine healthy baby ruined by underfeeding. If you don't get enough to eat when you're young, you can't ever make up for it afterwards.'⁶⁷

In fact Jane Carter has turned to crime. She believes that there is nothing she will not do to earn her baby the wealth and security that she considers is his 'right'. She warms to the master-criminal for whom she is now working because he is 'at war with the very same thing – Respectable Society – that had treated her so cruelly'.⁶⁸ Valentine Finch is a financier / thief who glosses his activities with the language of restitution, even of religion:

My own view is that the wealth of the world is unfairly distributed. I make it my business to alter that as far as I can. But it is not wealth alone that I am after. I like to control the lives of others, to cast down the mighty from their seats and to raise up those of low degree.

Allingham neither condemns nor condones Finch. He sets him up in the story to play providence, almost as if he were standing-in for the author: 'Do you know Jane, it gives me quite a thrill to think how I am going to shape your life.'⁶⁹ This gives scope for a dramatic switchback of activity and impersonations, much praised by Anne Cooper. 'And in London – what new adventures wait for Jane Carter, the woman to whom something is always happening?'⁷⁰ Jane, however, is not putty in Finch's hands. Eventually she abjures wealth (though only from the comfort of the seaside cottage that had belonged to *his* mother) and writes a full confession of her crimes. This brings her first love unexpectedly back into her life and, as ever, the story ends with their nuclear family united and even the snobbish mother-in-law approving. A right action in the moral world of the story has produced a right result for the family reader.

Erotic Bloods

The Silence of Jane Carter was the last of Allingham's new stories to be unequivocally successful. In the way of A.P. editors, the good results of her core magazines (in this case *The Family Journal*) encouraged Anne Cooper to start new papers. *The Oracle* (1933) and *The Miracle* (1935) were both women's story-papers rather than family magazines. Their general presentation as well as their choice of authors made it clear that they were competing in the section of the market occupied by D.C. Thomson's *Red Star Weekly*, the paper that had serialised Allingham's murder story *The Silent Lady of Deadman's Lane* in 1929. A.J. Jenkinson's term 'erotic bloods', though not intended to mean more than romantic magazines read by young people, is an apt descriptor of these papers, conjuring up, as it does, the *Newgate Calendar* type of story from a hundred years before.⁷¹ There was no vestige of piety and little domesticity in these new papers. Murder and violence by men against women were their dominant themes: instead of reassuring their readers, they seemed intent on arousing the shudder factor. These papers were marketed to adult women but Jenkinson highlights their particular popularity among Senior School girls.

The Senior School girl can look forward to earning money at 14+. Throughout her short Senior School life she is rapidly nearing a job. She is much closer to the task of earning a living than is her contemporary in a Secondary School, closer to what are termed the 'hard realities of life'.⁷²

The A.P. had been losing readers to Thomson's; *The Miracle* was part of their fight back. It announced itself as being 'full of really grand stories that will make you want to pull your chair up to the fire and have a good read'.⁷³

The new policy did not bode well for Allingham. *The Miracle's* lead story was *Daughter of the Scaffold* by Walter Tyrer, who had been writing similar capital punishment tales for several years for Thomson's *Red Star Weekly*.⁷⁴ Cooper selected and cut several of Allingham's earlier convict stories for her new papers as well as re-printing *The Silent Lady of Deadman's Lane* and immediately asking him for an additional re-write (*The Woman in his Way*).⁷⁵ Allingham could and did write murder stories for both Thomson's and the A.P but they were not his forte. His first story for *The Miracle* had been hastily pulled, presumably in response to poor sales figures, and although he was later asked to re-write it for *the Family Journal*, he was far too astute not to notice that his editor's strategy had changed.⁷⁶ 'Tyrer the great favourite now with Mrs C. but she is anxious to hold me.'⁷⁷

Allingham was always quick to worry if he didn't hear from an editor or they didn't seem 'friendly'. Despite his lifetime of steady work and achievement, a phone call from an editor that was unsatisfactory in some way could unsettle him for days.⁷⁸ Now, in 1935, aged 67, he was finding it unusually hard to summon enthusiasm for new work and his perception of Anne Cooper's changed priorities made even re-writing old stories difficult. 'Had a shot at *Girl*. Afraid this story is not in line with Mrs C's present policy.'⁷⁹ His brief diary notes make increasingly painful reading: 'Up to Town 2 or 3 times. Mrs C cooling off. Can't get going. Rather worried.'⁸⁰ His worry was such that he forced himself to try once again to begin a story for Davidson at Dundee.⁸¹ But, even with Em's help, he could sustain nothing beyond an instalment or two.

The final crisis came on November 6th. 'Frantic phone call from Mrs C. Number no good. Went to Town with Em by car. Saw Mrs C. Told her I could not go on with story. Asked her to lend me £200. Came home and went back to bed.' His beautiful flowing handwriting, perfectly clear for the printer or typist and producing regular numbers of words per page for so many years, degenerated into poorly formed pencil jottings and ceased on November 13th. Two months later he was dead.

None of the papers for which he had written mentioned the fact. As he had never really existed for the readers, he could not really die. His stories continued to appear in the *Family Journal* until autumn 1937 – the A.P. had its £200 to recoup. Then, after more than thirty years when there had always been an Allingham serial running somewhere, there was nothing more. Millions of readers had pulled out their pennies to catch the latest instalment of his work, had discussed it with their friends and looked forward to discovering what would happen next. He died as unobtrusively as most of them would, mourned only by his family. Other common writers would supply the next episodes.

- ¹ Diary 13.5.1935 Income tax return £768.
- ² Letters 138 and 139 (23.4.1908).
- ³ As 'Mabel St John'. Cf Mary Cadogan *You're a Brick Angela!* (London: Gollancz, 1976) pp130-135. Also Lofts and Adley.
- ⁴ Rollington p. 86.
- ⁵ E.g. Barbara Muir (novelist and bookseller) daughter of HJA's rival John Gowing. Pippa Gee, Robert St John Cooper's then wife was also an A.P. child. 'Gang' was M.A's word for their group.
- ⁶ Bourdieu's concept is as applicable to Margery Allingham as it had been to her father.
- ⁷ Diary 10.9.1926.
- ⁸ *Her Darling*, written for Leng's 1928 published *FJ* as *Give Me Back My Baby* 1930.
- ⁹ Letter 251 (23.12.1932).
- ¹⁰ Letter 241 (8.9.1932) The story is *Justice* - reprinted three times by Cooper in as many years.
- ¹¹ Letter 291 (8.5.1934) A re-writing of *London* – re-printed three times in two years in different papers.
- ¹² Letter 281 (copy, n.d.).
- ¹³ Letter 293 (25.1.1934). The serial was *Wedded to a Monster*.
- ¹⁴ Letter 304 (9.11.1934).
- ¹⁵ Diary 18.10.34 'Phil died today [...] I wrote Tod. Oppressed with the thought of futility, futility, futility.'
- ¹⁶ Diary 11.1.1935.
- ¹⁷ Diary 17.1.1935.
- ¹⁸ Diary 13.6.1935.
- ¹⁹ Diary 21/6/1935. Serial completed the following day.
- ²⁰ Cadogan (1994) p 234 'Esther Wyndham' = Mary Lutyens.
- ²¹ Letter 241 (8.9.1932) shows that this was also Cooper's practice with Richard Starr's work.
- ²² E.g. when Allingham's *Outcast Lover* failed to please readers of *The Miracle* in 1935, it was hastily brought to an end and re-presented in the *Family Journal* as *Her Husband's Crime*.
- ²³ Tinkler p. 64.
- ²⁴ These were *Poppy's Paper*, *Oracle*, *Miracle*, *My Weekly*, *Red Star Weekly*, *Butterfly*, *Merry & Bright*, Tinkler p.188.
- ²⁵ Letter 268 (1.8.1933) The story he provided was *The Wife of a Wanted Man*, a re-writing of *The Woman Pays* (1919) which commenced in the *FJ* on 27.1.1934.
- ²⁶ Aspden p.56.
- ²⁷ *Home Companion* 18.2.1897 p. 4. Noteworthy in this context that Northcliffe – prime scatterer of papers across the land, insisted on Aspden, alone among the AP editors, identifying himself in his papers. This was, apparently, so that Northcliffe was not held accountable for Aspden's temperance campaigns which he found socially embarrassing.
- ²⁸ *HC* 18.2.1897 p.3.
- ²⁹ *HC* 18.2.1897 p. 20.
- ³⁰ Members, including the editor, pledged themselves to Say No to Gambling, Profane Language, Intemperance, Lying, Dishonesty, Impurity, Evil Speaking and Bad Literature.
- ³¹ Gjertsen records *FJ* as having annual circulation of 341 million in 1925.
- ³² *FJ* issue number 1, 1909.
- ³³ Drawn by Ernest Shaw (1891-1986).
- ³⁴ Burnett p. 231.
- ³⁵ *FJ* 10.1931 p. 5.
- ³⁶ *HC* 21.6.1930.
- ³⁷ Letter 264 (15.6.1933).
- ³⁸ Letter 226 (30.7.1931).
- ³⁹ First called *Sunday Hours* (1913).
- ⁴⁰ A coming-together of management between DCT and John Leng at this time cf McAleer p. 163.
- ⁴¹ Expressed differently in different genres – eg Margery Allingham's 'new man' detective, Albert Campion is cited by Nicola Humble as exemplifying the post war mood in the middlebrow domestic novel, Humble ch. 5 'A Crisis of Gender' p. 197ff.
- ⁴² *Tempted by Love* (TS) ch. 1 p. 3.
- ⁴³ Cf. Mrs Gilfeather and her sister, chapter seven and chapter eight.
- ⁴⁴ Hoggart p. 112.
- ⁴⁵ In Allingham's *The Love of Jenny Lee* (*FJ* 1933) for example – or J.F. Smith's *Minnigrey*.
- ⁴⁶ Hoggart p. 130.
- ⁴⁷ *Lights of Home* (TS) no 34 p.18.
- ⁴⁸ *Mother's Boy* typescript instalment 15 p. 5. Cf also instalment 17 p. 17: 'the money you thought Billy had taken when your eyes were bad.'

- ⁴⁹ *Weekly Welcome* 1930.
- ⁵⁰ Cadogan (1994) p. 91.
- ⁵¹ *Tempted by Love* (TS) ch 1 p. 7.
- ⁵² *Her Hidden Past* (ms of *The Child She Dared Not Claim*) instalment 20 p. 7.
- ⁵³ *FJ* 18.5.1935. The story is *Her Husband's Crime*.
- ⁵⁴ *Tempted by Love* (TS) ch. 2 p. 2.
- ⁵⁵ Perhaps they had also read his stories in the comic-and-story papers when they were younger.
- ⁵⁶ Cf. Joel Weiner (ed) *Innovators and Preachers* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985) p. xvi.
- ⁵⁷ Diary 28.10.1931. The story was *Her Hidden Past / The Child She Dare Not Claim*.
- ⁵⁸ Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann *Britain in the 1930s* (London: Weidenfeld, 1971).
- ⁵⁹ *FJ* 24.10.31
- ⁶⁰ Cf. chapter six, Warner p. xvi.
- ⁶¹ Orwell p. 531.
- ⁶² Letter 192 (21.12.1918).
- ⁶³ *FJ* 24.10.1931
- ⁶⁴ Branson & Heinemann (1971) p. 44ff.
- ⁶⁵ Letter 223 (11.5.1931).
- ⁶⁶ Mrs Martin sounds like a *Family Journal* reader. Her daughter Sarah who lives with her is plain, stocky and lame in one foot but 'in spite of these handicaps she was cheery in disposition and faced life with courage and good humour.'
- ⁶⁷ *FJ* 3.11.1934 .
- ⁶⁸ *ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ *FJ* 15.12.1934.
- ⁷⁰ *FJ* 8.12.1934.
- ⁷¹ McAleer likewise divides the Thomson/Leng women's papers into two categories the romance and the blood-and-thunder papers p. 165 ff. Endorses claim that the Thomson 'Feminine Five (including MW, RSW and WW) sold 1,250,000 weekly in 1939.
- ⁷² Jenkinson p. 219.
- ⁷³ *Miracle* 9.2.1935.
- ⁷⁴ E.g.. *The True Story of Cora Crippen* , *Jane Corder or the Shadow of the Red Barn*, published in *Red Star Weekly*.
- ⁷⁵ Letter 302 (Nov. 1934). Story published 1935.
- ⁷⁶ *Her Outcast Lover* - cf. note 21 above.
- ⁷⁷ Diary 5.9.1935.
- ⁷⁸ Diary 27.5.1935 -28.5.1935.
- ⁷⁹ Diary 9.9.1935.
- ⁸⁰ Diary Sept 1935.
- ⁸¹ Diary 4.10.1935.

Conclusion

Naming no Names ...

‘A Master-Storyteller’ says *My Weekly*

This study has traced a strand of literary production, an individual and some members of a family over more than fifty years. Today, all of Allingham’s direct descendents have died, most of the periodicals for which he wrote have ceased publication and serial fiction is no longer a dominant form in print.¹ Between the publication of *Barrington’s Fag* in 1886 and the eventual cessation of stories in *The Family Journal* in 1937 Allingham had contributed about three hundred serial stories (originals and reprints) for the enjoyment of his audience.² In this final section I consider his achievement.

Reputation (lack of)

When there is no public recognition of death and no obituaries there is then no formal, contemporary evaluation of a lifetime’s work. Perhaps that is appropriate. Allingham’s fiction was intended to be judged by his editors and readers at its moment of consumption. Its material ephemerality (no hardback production) and his anonymity (no Name to make) negate any implicit appeal to a third, adjudicating audience whether of literary critics or of Posterity. This is not unique to Allingham; it can be seen an inherent tendency within the serial form. Bill Bell has described ‘the disappearing author’ of the Victorian serial and Laurel Brake has demonstrated how the two spheres of fiction production, ‘the collectivism of the serial as a cultural form

and the individualism of the book', impact on ideas of authorship.³ Over the twentieth century systems of cultural value became ever more strongly author-orientated, publicly at least. The generally accepted idea of the author is an individualistic concept, which does not fit easily with the situation of the common writer, particularly the common writer who publishes in an instalment format or within a dominant series. An author-orientated system of value, as Brake points out, results in the privileging of books and the marginalizing of serials.⁴ Viewed historically Allingham's serial stories may be considered as doubly marginalized (if such a state can be conceived) both by their embeddedness within their periodical contexts – they did not translate out into books – and by the low status of those periodicals.⁵ Being published anonymously within *The Butterfly* or *My Weekly* was not at all the same as being published anonymously in 'Maga' (*Blackwood's Magazine*).⁶

In the celebrity-conscious twentieth century Allingham's editors could have chosen to build up his authorial personality either directly, though the inclusion of profiles for instance, or fictionally through the use of pseudonyms – as with Frank Richards, Ralph Rollington or Mabel St John (Henry St John Cooper). In the later 1920s even *My Weekly* occasionally offered author profiles and photographs to enhance the attractiveness of the product: 'I know that it will make the reading of our new serial doubly interesting now you know her, as it were'.⁷ That there was no attempt to market Allingham, despite the popularity of his work, suggests deliberate editorial decisions not to intrude between story and reader.

Editorial instructions to the reader therefore often appear perverse. Introducing *The Girl Who Loved Him Best*, Anne Cooper (or her sub-editor) wrote:

Those who remember that wonderful love story, *The Man Who Stole Her Heart*, will be delighted to know that this new serial, starting today, is by the same author. And my new readers will take care never to miss another story by this great writer.⁸

A reader might reasonably wonder how they were expected to do this in the absence of a name. In fact Allingham was contributing so much to *The Family Journal* at this period that it might anyway have been impolitic to name him. His *Where Are My Little Ones?* had ended that same day. It had been presented as ‘by The Author of *The Child She Dared Not Claim* etc etc.’⁹ Linkages of this sort work on the principle of recommendation; if you liked that, you’ll like this; different sets of linkages suggest additionally that there are a variety of writers at work.

Editorial decisions concerning attribution are part of the ‘paratext’ as Genette has defined it.¹⁰ However not only does he specifically except serial publication from his analysis, but when he does consider it, he apparently regards it as ‘a disfigured text pending publication in book form’.¹¹ Decisions concerning attribution in periodicals are not taken with primary reference to the interests of the individual text or its author, but tactically in the interests of the whole paper.¹² They are connected with the periodical’s identity and its place within the market. Naming Allingham, as this study has done, will have some effect on our understandings of the periodicals within which he wrote. It will not destroy their identities, leaving them, in Brake’s phrase, ‘a husk whose contents have been removed and eaten’, neither will it have the same impact as the revelation of Frank Richards’s almost total authorship of *The Gem* and *The Magnet* did.¹³ It should make a contribution to the aspects of ‘cultural sociology’ defined by Williams as the study of ‘different types of institution and formation in cultural production and distribution and the linking of these within whole social

material processes'.¹⁴ To achieve an overall connected understanding, something more than an addition to knowledge, this sociology needs to be linked to an aesthetics.¹⁵ Finding appropriate critical criteria to evaluate formula fiction and discriminate between its manifestations is not an easy task.

Allingham's art as literature

Attempting a critical evaluation of Allingham's art when it was so clearly not intended for such analysis, may seem a paradoxical or even an intrinsically ridiculous undertaking. It was, however, evaluated by its editors, readers and the author himself, and it is their understandings, however rarely or partially articulated, that provide the first pathway. The second comes from recognition of the codes within the work. Once a literary relationship or a type has been identified, it is easier to answer the question; is this text a good example of its type? Holding examples of type together with understandings of readers enables us to define appropriately what is 'good'.

Confronting the problem of evaluation brings us closer to the peculiar nature of the serial commodity-text: 'the parameters of whose content and form are overdetermined in all kinds of ways by the constraints of reader expectation and productive convention.'¹⁶ Authors such as Hardy and Dickens complained that their creative freedom was restricted both by the rigidities of the weekly or monthly number and by the actual or potential interventions of readers within the process of production. Dickens and Hardy made Names in their lifetimes and their work is an accepted part of the literary canon whatever its initial mode of production. An immediate question with regard to Allingham's output is whether it is to be judged as literature. Williams

describes the concept of Literature in the nineteenth century as becoming ‘defensive and reserving’ against ‘the full pressures of the industrial capitalist order’ and the impact of modernism was to exacerbate this trend as the intellectual elites sought to defend this cultural interests against the perceived threat of the masses.¹⁷ Such a narrowing process, together with the more precisely defined concept of Art, effectively excluded popular writing such as Allingham’s from the literary canon, an exclusion with which he would have been educated to concur. These boundaries have been breached but not finally redrawn. Professor John Carey’s recent definition may be avowedly personal but still carries a nineteenth-century critical weight: ‘My definition of literature is writing that I want to remember – not for its content alone, as one might want to remember a computer manual, but for itself: those particular words in that particular order’.¹⁸

Allingham’s art is a word art but the way that the words are used is subordinate to their function in setting up a situation, sketching in a character type, offering a broad theatrical colouration to shape emotional response. The words are not memorable in themselves. There is nothing, for instance, like his daughter’s ‘when we of our generation were just preparing *to break the earth over our heads*’ (my italics), a verbally-memorable evocation of a mole-like pushing towards adulthood.¹⁹ Allingham writes with cadence and simplicity but his style eschews both individuality and metaphor.²⁰ His words are perhaps closer to those of Carey’s computer manual – a computer manual that simply does what it is required to do: tell the reader how the computer works and what its capabilities are, without requiring any previous specialist knowledge of computer function or operational jargon. His strength is in

accessibility. In Allingham's narratives words are used instrumentally. They make pictures, stylised dramatic tableaux, and it is these stereotyped images (often aided by the magazine illustrations) that remain in the memory when the words have slipped unobtrusively away.

The effect intended at the time was probably more dynamic. It is easy to disregard the editorial introductions to Allingham's stories because they are so blatantly a marketing ploy and because they are so often economical with the truth (when presenting reprints as new work, for instance). The editor was the closest to a professional critic that these stories were ever expected to reach but their choice of features to praise was a guide to interpretation rather than the recording of a judgement. When composing their brief announcements of forthcoming serials the editor needed to attract readers and then to retain them once the serial was running. By commending distinctive qualities of the stories' style and content they attempted to pre-dispose readers to experience positive responses. Their introductions offered a partial evaluation, which was supplemented, as the stories progressed, by their choice of sub-headings, running titles and closing rhetorical questions. They were partial because they were inherently commercially biased and also because they were often composed in ignorance of the future development of the narrative.²¹ Nevertheless they did need to achieve some level of descriptive accuracy if readers' trust was to be retained.²²

In 1929, for instance, the editor of *My Weekly* announced 'A story that will set all women talking':

The story of Harriet Yorke and the Carter children is such as has never been told before, written in the simple moving language of a master-storyteller, it gives you

vivid pages of stirring emotions and depicts strong incidents that will grip you and live in your memory for ever.²³

This, however partially, sets out artistic aspirations. Firstly the serial is intended to ‘set all women talking’ (thus ignoring the male readers of *My Weekly* who did, almost invisibly, exist). Its language is intended to ‘move’, its recreated emotions to ‘stir’ and its incidents to ‘grip’ and to be remembered. The essence of the story is presented through its desired effects: as this editor would undoubtedly join H.J. Garrish in saying, ‘the proof of popularity lies not with me but with the readers’.²⁴

There need be no disagreement that the language of this story, *The Wicked Guardian*, is ‘simple’ (in the language of the literary critic this would translate as ‘conventional’, ‘clichéd’) and its incidents are ‘strong’ (‘melodramatic’, in that same language). It has been set up to be judged by the responses it elicits, though it is difficult to see how this can be done in retrospect. If I, as a twenty-first century student of print media and not part of any magazine-reading community, report that my reading responses were not those set out in the blurb, this carries little weight. Neither the style of *My Weekly* in 1929 nor its intended mode of consumption suit my cultural habits and expectations:

In spite of substantive and at some levels decisive continuities in grammar and vocabulary, no generation speaks quite the same language as its predecessors [...] What really changes is something quite general over a wide range, and the description that often fits the change best is the literary term ‘style’ [...] For what we are defining is a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or a period.²⁵

Both historical and material factors affect receptivity. Ada Chesterton, a journalist, who felt quite indifferent to cinema in her normal comfortable existence, was amazed

by the intensity of her visual response to a film when she was experiencing homelessness in 1926:

I dwelt with rapture on her dinner with the hero in an expensive restaurant. I noted with extraordinary precision everything she ate [...] I would not have forfeited any one of the thousand mechanical sensations she enjoyed [...] When you are hungry and cold, without a home and without hope, the 'Pictures' warm your imagination, heat your blood and somehow vitalise your body.²⁶

This was 'a story of a conventional type in which a poor girl becomes a leader of society,' the sort of Cinderella story *My Weekly* would traditionally have offered its readers, which Allingham and the common writers produced and which Mrs Chesterton would usually have dismissed as clichéd (or to use her actual words 'garish' and 'impossible'):

Commerce always caters for a steady public and while the taste of the artistic is soon surfeited and the intelligence of the thinking easily annoyed, the vast residuum of the patient poor who unendingly bear the burden of monotony is a sure and certain market in a world of shifting values.²⁷

This helps explain the *My Weekly* readers' extraordinary tolerance of repetition. Their editor's claim that the story of *The Wicked Guardian* (1929) had never been told before is at the least misleading as it is yet another re-writing of *Mother Love* (1912), another take on the story of cruel stepmother, never-truly absent mother. At this point in Allingham's career, or within his society's prevailing anxieties, the narrative emphasis falls more frequently on the pathos of the children than on the anguish of the mother. Its most enduring image, for me, is of an exhausted little girl dancing late into the night in a squalid circus ring, watched greedily by the circus master who is planning how best to market her.

The serial set out to arouse emotion and it is hard not to be touched by a depiction of the vulnerability of children even when one knows that this effect is part of the

commodification of feelings. In the absence of explicit testimony from *My Weekly* readers themselves, we must assume that because they continued to buy the magazine, and the editor continued to commission Allingham to write serials for it, that at least some of them must have been moved, stirred and gripped by *The Wicked Guardian*. To cite Carey again: ‘Value, it seems evident, is not intrinsic in objects, but attributed to them by whoever is doing the valuing. However, though this makes aesthetic choice a matter of personal opinion, it does not, I argue, reduce its significance.’²⁸ Allingham would not have expected his work to be judged as Literature. Superficially the literary-critical criteria imbibed through his university education, and which informed his correspondence with McFee, might seem to have had little relevance to his working life.²⁹ Nevertheless, the engrained habits of reflection and self-evaluation evident from his first surviving diary of 1886 enabled him to shape a personal aesthetic of practice that was reflected in the intrinsic quality of his work as well as in his skill as a market strategist.

Industrial Exploitation?

The consumers’ unforced willingness to continue purchasing *My Weekly* or *The Butterfly* or *The Family Journal* or any of the other large-circulation papers that made Allingham’s serials their central attractions may seem, to a convinced capitalist, to provide sufficient empirical evidence of their worth. One reason to continue trying to look beyond their exchange-value – George Orwell’s reason for instance – springs from unease about the power that editors and writers, and beyond them proprietors and their vested interests, possessed to mould their own audiences, define their own

terms of exchange and thus further diminish the choices of people who were already diminished by the capitalistic process itself. Theodore Adorno sets out this charge in his essay 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception'. Although his main indictment is of the cinema, magazines and radio are also denounced: 'for culture now impresses the same stamp on everything.'³⁰ Many of Allingham's readers were regular cinema-goers and, during the later 1920s and 1930s, availed themselves of the new hire-purchase system in order to buy radios. Adorno, writing out of the experience of Nazi Germany, shared neither their social conditions nor their tastes but, as his condemnation is of an economic system, the culture-industry, which had taken over the wholesale manufacture of their pleasures, many of his accusations are relevant to an assessment of Allingham's work.

Adorno cannot reconcile art and entertainment. Precisely the aspect of Allingham's work that might be cited in its defence: that it was shaped according to a perception of people's emotional need and offered them alleviation and escape through the fictional expression of their hopes and fears is condemned:

The work of art, by completely assimilating itself to need, deceitfully deprives men of precisely that liberation from the principle of utility which it should inaugurate. What might be called use-value in the reception of cultural commodities is replaced by exchange value.³¹

The alleviation provided by art that is designed to provide it, art that is sold for that purpose (like a patent medicine), is only an illusory relief and is thus dishonest. Adorno charges the culture industry with centralising the consumer, identifying their needs through market research and then designing art-products to almost-satisfy them, whilst simultaneously titillating their appetite for more of the same. This closed circuit, he believes, is a betrayal of the true, liberating function of art. Consumers of

entertainment, he alleges, are deliberately deprived of opportunities for independent thought and individual response and then, in their powerless state, are further insulted by producers' shoddy workmanship:

No independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction: not by its natural structure (which collapses under reflection) but by signals. Any logical connection calling for mental effort is painstakingly avoided. As far as possible, developments must follow from the immediately preceding situation and never from the idea of the whole.³²

Within the sphere of popular periodicals, editors and writers might attempt to 'prescribe' readers' reactions but it is unlikely that they were uniformly successful. Throughout his essay Adorno's assumption of the passivity and homogeneity of the mass is deeply contemptuous of the individual variety of other people. On the few occasions when actual readers of Allingham's stories have been identified – the three boys in Birmingham, the Gilfeather family in Dundee – they have been discovered to be distinct individuals actively making their own choices and building their own identities and social relationships within the oppressive circumstances of their lives. The readers who wrote to Allingham's *The London Journal* were doing so as a method of self-discovery, attempting to form their view of own identities by having their qualities reflected back to them in someone else's words. The two hundred ironworkers' families interviewed by Florence Bell within the culturally limited environment of Middlesbrough had made a multiplicity of individual decisions about whether to read, what to read, who read and how they read. Every social survey of a defined area such as a street or a group of families on similar incomes, reveals the diversity of ways in which people actually interacted with their circumstances and with each other, including the types of entertainment they selected. Even *My Weekly*,

normally among the most opaque of the magazines, began running occasional reader self-portrait features in the late 1920s. Characters' personalities do not burst out of these but even the glimpses of occupational variety, such as that illustrated in this chapter, serve as a reminder of the variousness of the people who comprised the mass-market. Scott Bennett is right to remind us that 'mass-markets can exist only where widely shared interests or values exist or can be created' but no editor could hope to have all these readers responding with unanimity.³³ The skill lay in creating a reading space where large numbers of readers could feel comfortable whilst retaining their right to an individual response.

Adorno's specific charge is that 'the product' prescribes every reaction by 'signals' rather than requiring independent thinking and 'mental effort'. Leaving aside the obvious objections that all art forms function through signs and conventions and therefore needs to ensure that its audience recognises these, his criticism is likely to be a 'Literary' criticism of the types of signs and conventions, such as the use of stock responses, as Hoggart observed in the magazines for which Allingham was writing towards the end of his career:

Every reaction has its fixed counter for presentation. I run through the account of a trial: the mouths are 'set', the faces 'tense with excitement'; tremors run down spines; the hero exhibits 'iron control' and faces his captors with a 'stony look'; his watching girlfriend is the victim of an 'agonised heart' as 'suspense thickens in the air'.³⁴

In Allingham's formula fiction, as we have seen, readers are expected to accept conventions such as the impenetrability of disguise and they are also assumed to feel pre-determined responses at the sight, for instance, of a woman beating a child. Independent thought is not required: that woman is bad. Nevertheless these

conventions are consistent with one another and are supported by an identifiable system of connections, though these may function according to the logic of fairy-tale or epiphany rather than that of realist cause and effect. Allingham's skill with construction is an aspect of his art that can be externally evaluated and I would argue that it is this that justifies the *My Weekly* editor's description of him as a 'master'.

An Example

In 1933 Anne Cooper returned some pages of *The Crimes of Cora Royle* which she judged 'much too strong for the *Home Companion*'. She asked him to develop the scene 'without so much shooting and without making Baron Sarke so dreadful in appearance'³⁵. *Cora Royle* is the lightly re-written sixth printing of *The Girl Outcast* (1911). Baron Sarke is the least of its three major villains. In the scene returned by Cooper hero, heroine, two children and their benefactor, M. Antoine, confront evil experimental scientist, Dr Cain. Cain is shot and wounded, his servants flee and then, with a tap-tap-tapping that clearly recalls Blind Pugh in *Treasure Island*, Baron Sarke enters, sightless, tortured and ready to repent.

Allingham's amended copy survives together with Anne Cooper's letter. His changes are economical: he merely tones down the scene's more gothic moments. When the tapping pauses at the door of the room where Dr Cain has been wounded, for instance, the assembled characters wait fearfully. The original reads:

And then as they waited, holding their breath, the thing came and Amy, with a low cry of horror, held her child closer to her and drawing young Doll to her side, hid the little one's face in her gown to shut out the hideous sight.³⁶

Rewritten this becomes:

And suddenly there appeared in the doorway the figure of a man. It was Baron Sarke but he was strangely, terribly changed. His face was white and haggard and had on it an expression of suffering and despair.

The desired response has moved from horror towards pity, an interesting incidental comment on the altered expectation of the *Home Companion* readers from the story's most recent previous incarnation in Cordwell's *Film Fun*.³⁷ The original shock-horror element was not gratuitous, however. In Allingham's melodramatic universe it is the anguish though which Baron Sarke has passed that makes credible his surprise recantation in the next instalment:

'Cora, I have passed through the valley of the Shadow of Death! I have been tormented by fiends! The very agony which tore my heart and robbed me of my sight and plunged me into ever-lasting darkness, the same agony opened the eyes of my soul – rent asunder the veil which hides the living truth from our world of mockery and shame and enabled me to see things as they are!'³⁸

His slight alterations in response to Anne Cooper's 1933 letter leave Sarke's motivation for this crucial change unaffected. However, in the final, seventh, printing of this story, *Clara Brent: The Woman Who Had Hate in Her Heart* (1935) the apparition scene has been omitted completely.³⁹ Baron Sarke, now Gustavus Parke, is unexpectedly encountered in his London house wearing thick, blue-tinted spectacles: "'Are you blind?'" asks Moll (aka Doll). "'I cannot see very well replied the man," and his voice faltered in spite of himself.' The narrator informs the reader that Parke has changed, 'His spirit was broken', and this is soberly confirmed when Parke encounters Clara and refuses to fall in with her plans. "'Call it guilty conscience, or what you will, something has changed me. I repeat that I have done with plotting and scheming for good and all.'"⁴⁰ Not only the drama but the symbolic logic of conversion (insight through sightlessness) has been leached out.

Tellingly, this version was not produced by Allingham. Late in 1934 he had requested an advance of £250 from the Directors of the Amalgamated Press in order to help Margery and her husband buy a house. He had bound himself to work for no other firm until the loan was repaid and had agreed with Mrs Cooper that all reprints used and credited towards the loan could be cut to her requirements.⁴¹ Only 50,000 words of the immense *His Convict Bride* would be used, for instance. The roughness of such in-house cutting can be seen when *She Had to Share His Shame*, the final version of *The Rod of the Oppressor* and known to be an office cut, is compared with the version passed by Allingham himself in 1932.⁴² Five stories were used to repay the loan and *The Girl Outcast / Clara Brent* was one of them.⁴³ Close comparisons of these reprints to Allingham's own products give some idea of the extent to which his work has a coherence and an artistry which can very quickly be lost under a sub-editor's scissors or a hack writer's insensitivities.

The 'natural structures' of Allingham's work do not, as Adorno alleged, 'collapse under reflection' and to that extent he was not short-changing his customers. They function in the way that Dorothy Hobson suggested that the story-lines of *Crossroads* functioned; as 'skeletons' on which readers could construct their understandings.⁴⁴ He may have worked in an 'Age of Mechanical Reproduction' but his art remained that of the hand-craftsman.⁴⁵ He was only fully alienated from it when it was taken from him and re-written without understanding or consultation.⁴⁶ It may be that his readers did recognise this. Margery Allingham wrote: 'He worked hard and slowly, never once relaxing the enormous care *that ensured his success*'⁴⁷ (my italics).

Integrity

Discriminations between more or less skilful or scrupulous producers of popular serial fiction were made with most authority by their peers. Scattered comments reveal that Allingham formed his own opinions about the work of his colleagues or competitors. A note in his 1909 diary referring to his friend, George Mant Hearne, describes him as ‘clever and cheap and *not a hack*’ (my italics).⁴⁸ Hearn wrote Robin Hood stories, sea stories, fairy stories and Sexton Blakes. Margery Allingham remembers him working, ‘with care and precision, his basket full of spoiled pages’. The advice he offered remained with her for the rest of her writing life: ‘They never mind you putting all you’ve got into this sort of stuff. They never pay you any more for it, but they don’t stop you.’⁴⁹ Putting ‘all you’ve got’ into Sexton Blake, Albert Campion or Cora Royle represents integrity and is likely to be reflected in workmanship of a high quality, whatever the product.

At the outset of his career the young Allingham had promised himself ‘always to write my best, whatever may be the subject on hand or the pay expected’.⁵⁰ As a mature supplier he combined an anxious, pragmatic, respect for his editors’ position with a private confidence in his own ability. In June 1935 he noted ‘Had a good interview with Mrs Cooper. A new assistant – Mr Lewis – is to read old stories of mine and select for me to write up. He seems a decent chap but does not yet know my strength.’⁵¹ This quiet certainty that he knew what he was doing, and would do it in accordance with his own standards of excellence as well as the requirements of the market, is why I have had no hesitation throughout this study in referring to Allingham as an artist.

- ¹ *My Weekly* (1910) and *Woman's Weekly* (1911) are still published as is *The People's Friend* (1869).
- ² This is certainly an underestimate – in 1940, for instance, Margery Allingham received a request from her father's agents for a file copy of one of his stories as they had hopes of making an additional sale Allingham (1941) p. 175. (I have not traced this but assume that it was likely to have been the second half of *Human Nature*.)
- ³ Bell p. 126-129. Writer 'as independent first cause' disappears and is reconstructed as a market-created image. Laurel Brake 'The Trepidation of the Spheres' in *Serials and their Readers* (Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 1993) p. 93.
- ⁴ Brake p. 93.
- ⁵ Other than in the cheap 'libraries' which are themselves a type of periodical.
- ⁶ Ibid p. 84.
- ⁷ *My Weekly* 6.10.1928. If Allingham's gender had presented a problem within the woman-focussed periodicals, a pseudonym could have been used, as he himself had used 'Mab'. This happened only once, in *Poppy's Paper*, 1932, when he wrote as 'Victoria Strong'.
- ⁸ *Family Journal* 4.6.1932.
- ⁹ *FJ* 5.3.1932.
- ¹⁰ Genette ch.. 3 'The Name of the Author' p. 37.
- ¹¹ Genette p. 406.
- ¹² Or even its wider group if an individual paper is subsisting on unacknowledged reprints from others.
- ¹³ Brake p. 84 and 'Frank Richards Replies' in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds) *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Vol. 1* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) p. 531.
- ¹⁴ Williams p. 138.
- ¹⁵ Williams p. 141.
- ¹⁶ Bell p. 129.
- ¹⁷ Williams p.50.
- ¹⁸ John Carey *What Good Are the Arts?* (London: Faber, 2005) p. 174.
- ¹⁹ Allingham (1941) p. 21, quoted in chapter eight.
- ²⁰ There are some minor exceptions to this claim: firstly his allusions to the language of religion and secondly his choice of words with personal meaning to him – his children's names, for example, or references to other of his works.
- ²¹ In the case Allingham's newly written or rewritten serials the editor was probably about four to six instalments ahead of the reader.
- ²² They were also selective about which stories were given advance space. Readers probably picked up on this and assessed the stories' perceived value accordingly.
- ²³ *My Weekly* 16.2.1929. Introduction to *The Wicked Guardian*. McAleer offers figs to suggest *MW* had a circulation of more than 200,000 at this period, p.175.
- ²⁴ Letter 126 (26.6.1907).
- ²⁵ Williams p. 131.
- ²⁶ Mrs Cecil Chesterton *In Darkest London* (London: Stanley Paul, 1926) p. 186.
- ²⁷ Chesterton p. 187.
- ²⁸ Carey (2005) p. xii.
- ²⁹ Although McFee, too, wrote from the standpoint of a practitioner.
- ³⁰ Theodore Adorno 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' in Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1973) p. 120.
- ³¹ Adorno p. 158.
- ³² Adorno p. 137.
- ³³ Scott Bennett 'Revolutions in Thought' in *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* ed. Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester U.P., 1982) p. 251.
- ³⁴ Hoggart p.128.
- ³⁵ Published under the title *She Gave Him Her Love*.
- ³⁶ Changes on script as appended to letter 264 (15.6.1933). Published copy *Home Companion* 19.8.1933.
- ³⁷ Published under the title *Against Dangerous Odds*, *Film Fun* 1926-27.
- ³⁸ *FF* 22.1.1927.
- ³⁹ *The Family Journal* 23.3.1935 - 13.7.1935
- ⁴⁰ *FJ* 8.6.1935
- ⁴¹ Letter 303 (2.11.1934).
- ⁴² This was *The Fateful Hour* – a cheap book. A main difference is in the delicacy of the relationship between hero and heroine as presented in the first instalment.
- ⁴³ The five stories used to make up this sum are listed in diary 13.7.1935. I have underlined these together with *She Had to Share His Shame* as being known office cuts.

⁴⁴ Hobson p. 136, quoted in the introduction.

⁴⁵ Reference to Benjamin 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.

⁴⁶ I suggest that suspicion of this was what lay behind his increasing anger and resentment of 'The North', letter 312 (n.d.).

⁴⁷ Allingham (1963) p. 8.

⁴⁸ Diary 10.3.1909.

⁴⁹ Allingham (1963) p. 9.

⁵⁰ Diary 22.8.1886.

⁵¹ Diary 15.6.1935

Bibliography

I Herbert Allingham's Papers

Contained within the archive are:

- *Amateur Scraps* (March 1885 – May 1888) Twenty six exercise books containing the records of a writing circle to which Allingham belonged in Cambridge. Of interest as an example of mutual improvement.
- Over three hundred business letters (?October 1886 – November 1935) These are listed with short extracts in Appendix III.
- Diaries for the following years: 1886, 1909, 1916, 1918, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935 These are usually related to work rather than personal matters and are rarely complete. His 1935 trip round the markets with Phil Allingham is recorded in a separate notebook.
- Cash books covering the years 1908 – 1913, 1925, 1927 1929 - 1935
- Manuscripts, typescripts and clippings. Appendix I includes an indication of which titles may be found in the archive and which are in library collections.
- Fragments of otherwise untraced texts. These offer evidence that Allingham's actual output was certainly larger than the items listed in Appendix I.

II Periodicals Consulted

(It will be obvious from the list below that there is still more work that could be done in this area if all the reprints of Allingham's work were to be traced. For the purpose of this study I have focussed my reading on the periodicals in which first publications of his stories usually took place and where his work might be assumed to have had most impact.)

Boy's Cinema 1919, 1920

Boy's Friend 1907, 1927

Boy's Own Paper 1886

The Boys' World 1883 – 1886 (scattered issues)

The British Boys' Paper 1888 - 9 (continued from *New Boys' Paper*)

The Butterfly 1906 – 1917 1919 – 1926

Cheerio 1920 (continues as *Kinema Comic*)

The Christian Glow-worm 1874 (continues as *The Christian Globe* 1875)

The Christian Globe 1875 – 1880, 1885 – 1887, 1890 - 1892, 1895, 1900, 1909, 1910, 1912 – 1916

The Christian World 1875

Comic Cuts 1906 - 1908

Chips 1906, 1907, 1908

Dreadnought 1913, 1914

The Family Journal 1909, 1928, 1930 - 1937

The Favorite Comic 1911 - 1917 (amalgamated with *Merry & Bright* 1917)

Film Fun 1921-1923, 1925-1929

The Firefly 1913 - 1917 (Previously *Fun & Fiction*, incorporated into *The Butterfly* 1917)

Fun & Fiction 1911 - 1913 (renamed *The Firefly* 1913)

The Happy Home 1914 – 1921 (Previously *Sunday Hours*, continues as *The Mascot* 1921)

The Home Companion 1897, 1930, 1931

The Home Mirror 1926, 1927 (discontinued 1927)

The Jester 1906, 1907, 1910

The Jolly Jester 1922

The Kinema Comic 1921 – 1931

The London Journal 1888 – 1906 (continued as *The New London Journal*)

The Mascot 1921 – 1926 (previously *The Happy Home*; discontinued after strike)

Merry & Bright 1910, 1911, 1919 – 1928

The Miracle, 1935

My Weekly 1913, 1914, 1915, 1917, 1918, 1923, 1924, 1926, 1928 - 1932

The New Boys' Paper (first series) 1886-7 (continued as *The British Boys' Paper*)

The New Boy's Paper (second series) 1906-7

The New London Journal 1906-1909

The People's Journal 1915, 1919-1926

The Picture Show 1919 – 1924, 1926-1928, 1936

Poppy's Paper 1931, 1932, 1933

Puck 1906, 1907, 1910, 1911,

The Oracle 1933, 1934, 1935

Our Boys' Paper 1881

Red Star Weekly 1929, 1930

Shurey's Illustrated 1900

Spare Moments 1892, 1898

Sunday Companion 1894, 1897

Sunday Hours 1913, 1914 (continues as *The Happy Home*)

True Blue Library 1904, 1905

Thomson's Weekly News 1928

The Weekly Welcome 1928 - 1931

Woman's Weekly 1915-1920

Yes or No 1905 – 6

Young Folk's Paper 1886

III Material from other collections

Public Record Office:

- Sells Advertising Agency BT 31/3749/23372
- The Christian Globe BT 31/14535/9609
- Best for Boys Publishing BT 31/4930/32866
- The Christian Million BT 31/3234/18944
- Aldine publishing BT 31/31391/44339
- The Popular Publishing Company BT 31/20134/116926

Northcliffe Papers (in British Library):

- Northcliffe to Hamilton Edwards ADD 62182A & B
- Northcliffe to Sir George Sutton ADD 62184 A 62186, 62187 62183

Opie Collection (in Bodleian Library):

- Boys World 1881, 1882
- Our Boys' Paper 1881
- New Boys' Paper 1887
- Boys of England 1867, 1870
- Boys Own Magazine (Samuel Beeton) 1863
- Peter Parley's Magazine 1850
- Young Pickwick's Schooldays
- The Blue Dwarf (Hogarth House c1880)

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