

## **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 dreadfuler.' 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 dreadfulers'. '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. Berridge (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 Berridge, 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 Berridge'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 unremitting 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. Berridge *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.