

From Out of the Past

Mike Ripley breathes new life into an old favourite

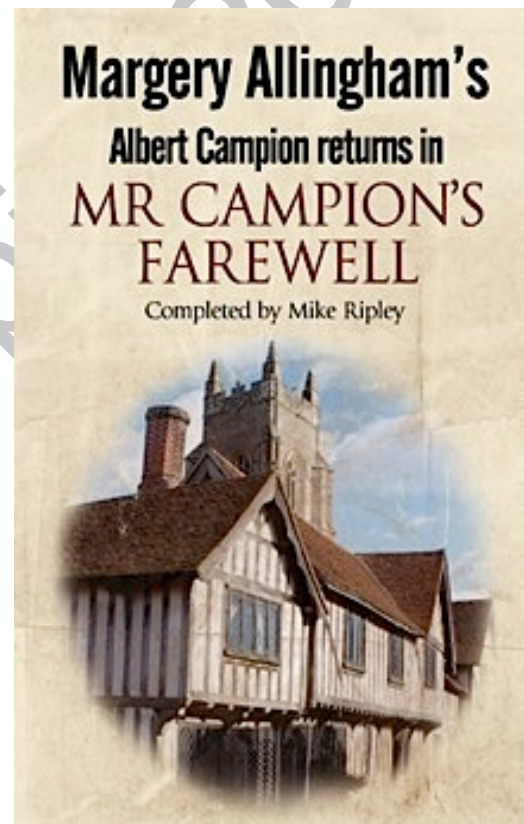
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Beginning in 1920 and continuing for half a glorious century, British crime writers spawned an impressive array of distinctive protagonists, including Agatha Christie's flamboyant Hercule Poirot, her self-effacing amateur sleuth Miss Marple, and Dorothy Sayer's gentleman investigator, Lord Peter Wimsey. But none was more effectively portrayed than Margery Allingham's bespeckled, deceptively bland Albert Campion – who, like Wimsey, could trace his family roots to their aristocratic origins. Together with his gruff manservant (and ex-burglar) Magersfontein Lugg, Campion featured in eighteen novels by Allingham, and in a further three finished or written by her husband following her death in 1966.

Now Severn House has released a new entry in the Campion canon. British novelist Mike Ripley has been authorized to “finish”—the word hardly does the task justice—the latest chronicle in the series, *Mr. Campion's Farewell*, a novel begun by Margery Allingham's

husband “Pip” Carter, and left unfinished at his own death. It would have been Campion's twenty-second outing, and Ripley



found himself working only from fragments, and entirely lacking a plot outline or character synopsis. Not one to be easily daunted, Ripley has drawn on his own forty-year love affair with Allingham's sleuth in fashioning a novel that

features characters drawn from other Campion novels, and is entirely worthy of a place alongside Allingham's own work.

In the pastoral Suffolk village of Lindsay Carfax Albert Campion has decided to visit his wife's niece, Eliza Jane Fitton, a talented but wayward artist who makes her living by knocking out paintings for the local antiques dealer, who may or may not pass them off as something more valuable.

The village is presided over by the Carders, a small group of men who trace their origins to the four-hundred-year-old guild system in the region's wool industry. They have attracted the interest of Superintendent Charles Luke of Scotland Yard. Noting that the Carders have their fingers in a lot of local pies Luke suspects they are up to no good, and he asks Campion to look into them during his visit. Not least among the village's many quirks, an uncommon number of things seem to turn on the number nine. From sporting Nine Days' Wonders and nine oaks by the village church, to nine steps to the Carders Hall and a schoolteacher gone missing who turns up suddenly after nine day's absence, resolutely refusing to discuss where he's been.

Shortly after Campion arrives and begins poking around his cherished Jaguar is vandalised,

marooning him in the village. An invitation to join some of the locals in a shooting party seems an agreeable way to pass the time while his car is being repaired, but things take an ominous turn when Campion himself is hospitalized with birdshot received in what used to be called the nether regions, and tumbles down an embankment, very nearly dying in the process.

Visiting her husband in his hospital room, Lady Amanda Fitton grudgingly provides him with a new set of clothing, and warns him to cease his investigations; but ignoring her ministrations and Lugg's dire predictions he sets off for his old haunts at Cambridge to consult an old mentor, determined to unravel the curious goings-on involving the mysterious Carders. Before it is ended Campion's journey will include a visit to Lady Prunella Redcar (a distant relative in the south of France), the discovery of not one, but no less than four secret passages in the heart of the village, and an appreciation for the lost art of owling.

Reprises of a popular series by original authors are not always successful, let alone those attempted by others. Happily, this is not the case with author Mike Ripley's informed work. From the requisite village map provided in

the frontispiece to the sharp and witty dialogue rendered perfectly for its time, and not forgetting a cast of eccentric characters who wouldn't look out of place in a Dickens novel, all of which is wrapped around an engaging puzzle mystery, *Mr. Campion's Farewell* perfectly juxtaposes the frivolous atmosphere of the day

with the chilling events of a small rural village under the control of a small group of mysterious men. Marking Campion's first outing in over forty years it is great fun and a welcome addition to the series, and will, I understand, be followed by yet another from the talented pen of Mr. Ripley, *Mr. Campion's Fox*.

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Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetingler*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, the *Montreal Review of Books*, the *Ottawa Review of Books*, and *Amazon.com*, as well as on his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com



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