

A Marriage of Hysterical Proportions

Mike Ripley pairs with Margery Allingham

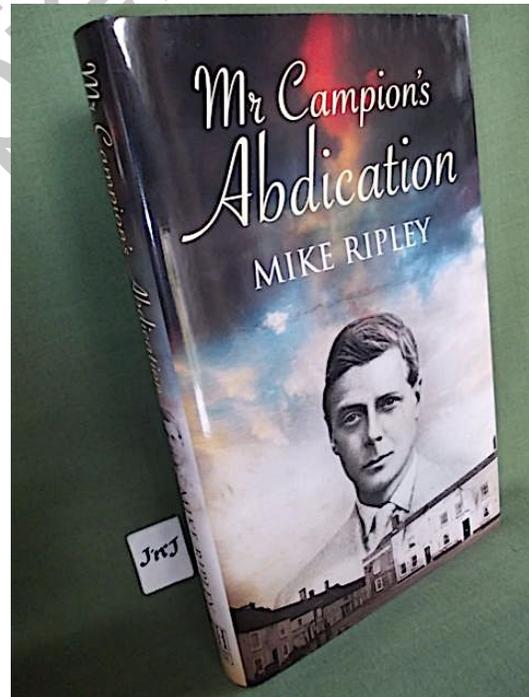
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

First, a tidbit of history: Margery Allingham was a leading light during what is often referred to as Britain's Golden Age of crime writing. Between 1929 and 1947 she penned well over a dozen best-selling mysteries featuring her iconic gentleman sleuth, Albert Campion, and his incongruous manservant (and co-conspirator in crime) Magersfontein Lugg. When she died Allingham left a number of unfinished manuscripts, some of which were completed by her husband, Youngman Carter, and after his death by award-winning crime writer Mike Ripley. Drawing on his own formidable understanding of Golden Age crime-writing, coupled with a personality that can only be described as High British Eccentric, Ripley has continued the popular series with his own inimitable take on Allingham's still-loved characters.

Today the Margery Allingham Society curates the late author's papers, amongst which are her thoughts on the relationship between Edward VIII and the American divorcée Wallis Simp-

son, and the possibility (which later turned out to be fact) of his abdication as king; and it is these events which form the cornerstone of Ripley's entertaining story of a hypothetical visit by the famous couple to an archeological site in Suffolk during the weeks leading up to Edward's abdication.



And an engaging story it is. Having had a brief visit with Mrs. Simpson kept from the press by local villagers, Edward allegedly sent them a valuable gift, which later became known as the Abdication

Treasure. Fast forward to 1970, when a certain Lord Breeze, who now owns the Elizabethan pile where the couple stayed, is confounded to learn that his son-in-law, Oliver Bell, is in quest of the rumoured Abdication Treasure. The Royal Family is not amused. Complicating things, an Italian film company is making a film about Edward and Mrs. Simpson, and Albert Campion has wrangled roles in the production for his son Rupert and his daughter-in-law Perdita. Lord Breeze is convinced that Campion is also in quest of the treasure, and asks Commandeer Charles Luke of Scotland Yard to quash his efforts. Fat chance, of course, with Campion on the case. We're off, then, in a madcap comedy of errors and intrigue after

a treasure that may or may not exist, and involving a cast of characters that includes sinister foreigners, innocent (or is that canny?) locals, sophisticated members of the aristocracy and a retinue of others with dubious or bizarre pasts. It all makes for a highly entertaining romp through a series of events that seemed much more portentous at the time. Fans of the Campion stories will revel in having yet another fine tale to entertain them, and newcomers to Margery Allingham will find reason to return to the originals for hours of pleasurable reading. Kudos to The Margery Allingham Society, Severn House, and not least to the inventive (not to say twisted) Mr. Ripley, in creating a delightful addition to the canon of Golden Age mysteries.

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Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on various crime fiction and literary websites. His own crime novel, *Legacy*, was published in the Spring of 2017. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com

