

## Milligan's Writing and Norma Farnes

The early days of Spike Milligan's script writing career were somewhat chaotic. He was mixing with a lot of fellow comedians and writers. In January 1951 he scored a pilot of a radio show called *Those Crazy People* with Peter Sellers, Harry Secombe and Michael Bentine. The BBC took up the show and eight weekly episodes went to air from May 1951. Spike was the script writer and a performer in the show. The BBC kept commissioning further series and the name changed to *The Goon Show*. It ran for ten series finishing in 1960.

In 1952 Spike and three other writers, Eric Sykes, Alan Simpson and Ray Galton, established a writer's cooperative which became Associated London Scripts (ALS). Graham McCann's excellent book, *Spike and Co.* chronicles the ALS story. ALS was very successful and by 1962 had its own building at 9 Orme Court Bayswater. Spike had commenced writing and publishing books, amongst other things, to the point where he needed his own staff.

### Enter Norma Farnes - 22 August 1966

Originally employed as Spike's secretary (he had had five secretaries in 18 months previous to her). Norma Farnes tells the story of her life with Spike in her engrossing book, *Spike An Intimate Memoir*.

Spike and Eric Sykes parted company with ALS remaining at Orme court and buying out Galton and Simpson's share in the building. In this circumstance Norma Farnes found herself acting as Spike's agent and manager and remained with Spike in these roles for the rest of his life. She still manages Spike Milligan Productions Limited.

Norma Farnes claims Spike had only written two books when she came to work for him (Farnes, 2003). This claim is not quite correct; the publication dates suggest there were five Milligan books published before she arrived. *Silly Verse for Kids* (1959), *A Dustbin of Milligan* (1961), *Puckoon* (1963), *The Little Pot Boiler* (1963) and *A book of Bits or A Bit of a Book* (1965). In this period there were also four paperback editions published. Someone else at Orme Court was working on Spike's publishing ventures pre Norma.

This is not to diminish in any way Norma Farnes' work with Spike. The bulk of his output happened under her watch. A flick through these pages will show the number and complexity of the output in the written word. At the same time she looked after his film, TV, and live show and personal appearances

While working for Spike Norma Farnes also wrote and/or edited a number of Milligan books.

*The Spike Milligan Letters* (1977), *More Spike Milligan Letters* (1984), *The Goons - The Story* (1997).

After Spike's death in 2002 Norma Farnes has continued producing Milligan Books. In the period since his death she has overseen, edited or written these books. *Spike An Intimate Memoir* (2003), *The Compulsive Spike Milligan* (2004), *Box 18: The Unpublished Spike Milligan* (2006), *The Magical World of Milligan* (2009), *Memories of Milligan* (2010), *Milligan's Meaning of Life* (2011). In the latest edition of the Penguin paperback, *The Bible According to Spike Milligan* (2016) she is credited with the cover design.