

THE DIARIES OF ALLEN GROVE

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I first met Allen Grove in the early 1960s and, as our friendship grew, I learnt that he kept a diary with daily entries and had done so for some time. In later years he showed some of them to me, and realising the full, rich and varied life that he had led, I thought them to contain much fascinating material from his experiences and observations. I said as much to him on more than one occasion, when he and I sipped Malmsey wine in the parlour of his beloved cottage at Hollingbourne. Many years later, in the evening of his life, he told me that he had arranged to leave his diaries to me, and in due course they came into my hands as part of the legacy relating to all his manuscripts.

Allen apparently kept a diary during his youth but only fragments remain transcribed into later volumes. The volumes which exist cover the years 1923 (part), 1926 (part), 1929–30, 1930–34, 1934–37, 1938, 1948, 1965–69, and, thereafter, a full series, one volume for each year until mid-1990, when Allen died. I cannot trace a 1939 diary though I believe there to have been one because of the consistent daily record which continued to the last day of 1938. However, the war years are another matter. In the light of us knowing that Allen joined the navy, and that members of the armed services were forbidden to keep diaries, it is no surprise that diaries for that period have not come down to us. However, the veil of darkness is lifted momentarily on several occasions by comments and reminiscences that occur in later diaries. What is perplexing is the absence of diaries for the years 1946 to 1959 with the exception of 1948. Having sight of the unbroken series of later diaries, especially their size and the tremendous output from his pen, I at first thought that we had lost similar large volumes belonging to the late 1940s and 1950s. But we have three clues which suggest otherwise.

First, the 1948 diary. This is quite unlike any other volume which I at first took to be a rough notebook, or at least an appointment book such were its irregular jottings, yet its contents have a parallel with pre-war volumes. It has the same mixture of subject-matter of personal,

topographical, contemporary events, museum business, meetings, etc., in other words the entries by their very nature and presentation confirm that this was a diary essentially the same as earlier ones though very much smaller. Furthermore quite a number of the original pencilled entries have been inked over and further notes added which, according to one annotation, were made by Allen in 1984. This more or less proves that this was his definitive 1948 diary.

The second clue which suggests that the 1948 volume was his *modus operandi* in the immediate post-war period comes from the 1965–69 volume, which starts the final unbroken series. This volume was a present from Allen's relations and is believed to have encouraged Allen to go back to the habit of keeping more detailed journals or diaries. Both the word-count and the daily capacity of the 1965–69 volume is intermediate and complementary in evolution terms between the 1948 diary and the volumes produced from 1970 onwards.

The final clue comes from the first entry in the 1970 diary.

[1 Jan. 1970] *For the past five years I have written a few lines each day in a Five Year Diary. It has been amusing to look back to see what I was doing on a similar day two or three years before but space in such diaries is restricted and one cannot indulge in long descriptions or purple patches.*

And so we may conclude with some confidence that Allen limited himself to small pocket diaries during the late 1940s and 1950s, but nearly all of them have been lost.

The volume of manuscript material in Allen's diaries is very large. As the years passed, he tended to write more each day and the odd shapes and duration of his early pre-war diaries gave way to separate annual volumes from 1970, initially A4 and later, from 1977, A5. The rate of writing increased through the late 1960s and 70s and reached a considerable output following his retirement. I estimate that less than 5 per cent of all his diary writings occurred pre-war: the equivalent of one of his volumes from the 1980s. In the 1960s, a typical year's diary contained 15,000 words, in the 1970s 44,000 words and by the 1980s a typical volume holds 108,000 words. At a conservative estimate there are some 1.8 million words in his diaries.

On a few of the diaries the spines are badly damaged and delaminated, but the pen-work through them all is very legible, invariably executed with an oblique nib in a court or copper-plate hand. Allen had a curious habit of converting any ink blots, which occurred now and then, into figures and shapes according to his fancy and imagination including heads, human figures and animals.

The diaries contain a plethora of material including his museum

work, nature observations, meetings, hobbies, especially his pre-occupation with music, references to contemporary events, topographical and biographical notes. They form a record of a perceptive observer leading a very busy and varied life who was, moreover, a trained historian and naturalist.

For those of us who befriended Allen, not a difficult thing given his gregarious and helpful nature, or listened to Allen giving formal talks, they will recall his fondness of anecdotes invariably used with good effect for demonstrative or humorous purposes. Conversation is the natural milieu of the anecdote, and it is not surprising that entries in many of his later diaries take the form of anecdotal memoirs or reminiscences. These reflective records sometimes provide valuable information of earlier darker periods or give an insight into his personal views and beliefs.

Family relationships thread through these diaries, but they are entirely concerned with appointments, comings and goings, celebrations and health. In such entries personal health and more private matters are rarely mentioned, and then only in the briefest terms relating to himself or Eva, his wife.

Although Allen was quite capable of expressing derogatory views of other people, such occasions were fairly rare. Only once in his pre-war diaries did he vent his feelings against another person, words clearly written whilst in a pique. Later in life, when his friendships and acquaintances numbered many hundreds, and he experienced as curator of a busy museum all the vicissitudes and moods of the public, and as chairman overseeing political and polemic debates, his diary entries were rarely personally targeted. His writings reflect his phlegmatic and rather sanguine temperament.¹

Researching in diaries has a parallel to archaeology; sifting through a mass of dateable material to learn about human activity, but in this case a person rather than people. It is not possible to do justice to such a great volume of personal history by extracting blocks of entries for, even with time windows of a few days, the entries give a bewildering range of subjects changing all the time like a slowly revolving kaleidoscope. The reader might sense his daily pace of life, the press of business, people and changing scenes but there would be no synthesis of subject and the developments and general changes which Allen experienced through time would be smothered.

An obvious way to present extracts from a diary is to give them in strict chronological order, but the great disadvantage in doing it this

¹ Allen would probably have been amused to be categorised by two of the four classical temperaments defined by the fifteenth-century philosopher Galen.

way, especially having regard to the range of subjects and the time duration of the records, is that particular subjects will appear in a fragmented and episodic manner dispersed amongst all other material. I have, therefore, decided that Allen's life story, as reflected by his diaries, is best presented by providing for each phase of his life, a summary of the major features that were common to that situation. Rather like the sequential scenes of a stage play, where each scene is made up of a number of features. Hopefully this has the advantage of making the story more interesting, allowing the mind of the reader to dwell and reflect and provide flexibility in its telling. Furthermore, there are times when the diary extracts require bonding with introductory or scene-setting material, or by developments which were occurring, but which cannot readily be captured or represented by extracts.

However, the disadvantage of this method of presentation is that it sometimes fails to preserve features native to the informality of the diary although I have kept excision to a minimum. This is balanced in part by the fluidity of the autobiographical elements which bind together the diary extracts.

One question which came early in the researches was what criteria should be used in the selection of material to illustrate Allen's life? The minutiae of a person's life are of little interest to other people for each of our lives is different from all others, unique with a myriad experiences. Perhaps, we should attempt to illustrate the essence of Allen's life with a patchwork of pro-active experiences balanced with his reactive observations, reminiscences and reflections. Should we not also record his achievements and his works together with his thoughts and feelings on them? But this is not enough. If this work is to act in some way as a biography, then it must reflect his personal qualities that we came to know him by and respect him for, especially his learned and endearing qualities. I recognise the danger of subjectivity distorting the view when writing of a close friend, especially a backward-looking view that is dimmed by passing time and an unremitting fondness for the man. For this reason I have sought the views of friends on this study.²

Another question which presents itself, but intriguing and difficult to answer is: Are there aspects of Allen's character or life which are missing from or not reflected in the diaries, and if so, why? There are,

² I am most grateful for the general comments and valuable suggestions provided by Natalie Coney made during the drafting of this paper. Having never met Allen Grove, her discernment and objectivity of this work are unaffected by physical sensibilities and personal memory. I am also indebted to Michael Connolly for editorial comment, and especially to Dr Peter Draper and Paul Oldham whose long-standing friendship with Allen has helped to produce a balanced and fair record of his character.

of course, several private and personal subjects which need not concern us because they did not form part of the image he gave to the world. But one area of his life which is barely recorded in his diaries are his writings and publications. Few are mentioned. Another area, which is surely larger, was his commitment to paper of his knowledge, enquiries, observations, etc., on all things relating to his curatorship and his innumerable interests. Such writings can be found in separate volumes sometimes devoted to particular subjects such as places or themes. Most of these volumes are to be found in his legacy of manuscripts, but there is evidence of missing volumes.

On at least two occasions in his diaries Allen touches upon the reason for keeping them, and they confirm that he intended them primarily to provide solace in his old age. I suspect also that he knew they were likely to be read by other people, and we must, therefore, bear in mind that his writings may have been influenced, perhaps subconsciously, by what he wanted people to read. One tenuous clue to this is that, just occasionally, there are to be found lines of writing which he obliterated and rendered indecipherable, which I believe was done at a later date, probably to remove indiscretions or views which he did not want readers to see.

His marriage in 1938, combined with the onset of war, formed the first natural division in his life. Youth, university life and his early career moves, his professional and personal development, all occur in this period. I have identified this as the *Formative Years*. The next phase of his life, once the darkness of war had lifted, was dominated by his *Curatorship* at Maidstone. As the years passed his diary entries steadily increased, but his writings were greatly concerned with his museum work. The last phase of Allen's life commenced with two of the greatest changes that man experiences, the loss of his wife Eva and retirement. With the changing circumstances of his private life his writings underwent a thematic change marked by a substantial increase in production. I have called this period the *Evening of Life*.

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

In Allen's diaries there are comments which tell us a little about his ancestors. Apparently he had male ancestors by the surname of Allen, his third christian name, which he adopted and was known by. They were fishmongers in Woolwich³ and his grandmother Grove, his uncles and his father were raised at Plumstead and Woolwich.⁴

³ 25 Aug. 1972.

⁴ 10 Oct. 1989.

[10 Oct. 1989] *Bought a horizontal sugar-loaf cutter similar to the example which Grandmother Grove had in her shop at Abbey Wood and which she used for cutting up plug tobacco. Purchased 'in memoriam Evae et Mariae Annae Grove'.*⁵

[22 Sept. 1974] *Visited St. Nicholas's Church, Plumstead. I spoke to the Vicar about my great grandfather Christopher Allen's gravestone in the churchyard. The probability is that it was destroyed by the V2 which fell there.*

[14 Dec. 1989] *We had some talk about Fred Karno's activities and the presence of Charlie Chaplin in Kent. I told him about my grandfather's conviction that Chaplin had stayed in his Mount Pleasant, Plumstead, house when he took in theatrical boarders. My grandfather Allen was not one to imagine things or to romanticize.*

Leonard Robert Allen Grove was born 27 November 1910 at Northfield Cottage, Gillingham Green.⁶ We know very little of his childhood but we glean from later reminiscences that he lived for a while at Nigg, Scotland, near to Nigg Point below Dunskaith Castle.⁷

[27 Aug. 1981] *Later in the morning we set off for Maxstoke where we had a picnic luncheon and looked at the church of St. Michael. In the churchyard is a memorial to Captain Eric Coventry Pack who was blown up and drowned when HMS Natal sank off Invergordon in 1915. I was grateful to see this as it was due to this incident that I owe my love of Scotland. A while after the disaster the Government built a submarine boom defence between the North and South (Cromarty Firth) Sutors. My father, having been trained in the submarine's electrical techniques, was taken off HMS Euryalus and put in charge. In 1917 my mother, brother Evan and I took the long journey to Nigg and stayed there until the War's end. At low tide we used to see the Natal's mast above water and frequently after rough weather we collected sailor's hats and electric light bulbs by the water's edge. I am most grateful to the shades of Captain Pack.*

[21 Jan. 1977] *I saw the pipers and sword dancers of the first battalion of the Black Watch, my favourite Scottish regiment. Some of the soldiers of this regiment were kind to a small English boy in Nigg (Ross & Cromarty) during the closing years of the 1914-18 War. They took me to school on the backs of their bikes and treated me as an equal.*

[23 June 1974] *I suppose that with two of my most impressionable*

⁵ Allen's wife Eva had died in 1973 and his mother in 1978. See below.

⁶ 25 June 1973.

⁷ 27 June 1981; 8 Nov. 1974.

years spent in Scotland amongst the Highlanders I cannot help being a Jacobite.

During the remainder of his youth Allen lived at Mount Pleasant, Plumstead, with his parents and his brother Evan. In 1922, he started school at St. Olave's in Southwark. His diaries suggest that he remained an Olaverian all his life, keeping in touch with his old school.⁸

The oldest diary of Allen's in my possession commenced in 1929 but towards the back are three entries from earlier diaries. It seems likely that Allen kept a diary from boyhood days, but those early volumes have disappeared, perhaps discarded by Allen himself after he transcribed parts into the 1929 volume. One of the transcriptions was made in February 1933 and another, much later probably in 1963, showing that Allen, at that time, still had some very early diaries. The 1933 transcript is the first evidence we have of Allen's habit of reading his older diaries, which he often did in later life judging from the annotations scattered through them, which were always dated. The earliest evidence of a diary note by Allen was made when he was nearly twelve years old.

[19 Sep. 1922] *Personal Notes collar size 13½*

Hat 7"

height 4' 7"

Date 19 9 22

weight 5st. 3 oz. 19 9 22

The next entries in chronological order come from a 1923 diary transcribed on 9th February, 1933. They cover the period 1st January to the 14th September, 1933, and are very irregular with a gap between 11th February and 19th June. These entries, written by Allen when he was twelve years old, are made in the briefest of terms.

[1 Jan. 1923] *Went to the pictures*

[2 Jan. 1923] *Piano Practice*

[3 Jan. 1923] *Choir Pay Allen 5/- Evan 2/6d.*

[5 Jan. 1923] *Choir Practice. Went to the Natural History Museum & the 2 Science Museums at S. Kensington.*

[6 Jan. 1923] *Bought a Magic Lantern. Bought Mother a present of 3 handkerchiefs & a bottle of scent.*

[7-9 Jan. 1923] *Ill.*

⁸ 27 August, 1975. He continued to receive *The Olavian* until his death.

- [1 Feb. 1923] *Election for School Parliament*
- [3 Feb. 1923] *Saw 'Dick Turpin's Ride to York' on the Pictures.*
- [19 June 1923] *Went to school ground at Dulwich for cricket. Caught for 0.*
- [20 June 1923] *Went Swimming*
- [21 July 1923] *Had Smut our cat, destroyed in the Lethal Chamber.*
- [25 July 1923] *Sang at Southwark Cathedral*
- [26 July 1923] *Prize giving. Free buns & lemonade after the prize distribution.*
- [1 Aug. 1923] *Visited Priory Park Museum.*
- [7 Aug. 1923] *Went to the fields. Caught 57 butterflies & 40 fish. (what a little swine I must have been)*
- [15 Aug. 1923] *Bought some coins at an antique shop in Southend High St.*
- [16 Aug. 1923] *Visited Hadleigh Castle Made some sketches of it.*
- [21 Aug. 1923] *Went for a tramp to Hadleigh Woods.*

In these entries we can already see appearing the primary interests of music, old buildings, sport and the countryside, which were to develop through his formative years and remain with him for life. The following extracts, which he copied from a 1926 diary covering the period March to June, are typical of this period, which is devoted almost entirely to sport, attending the theatre, buying and reading books and walking.

- [18 March 1926] *Read some of Bacon's Essays of a story about Charles & Buckingham's called the Spanish Match.*
- [19 March 1926] *Went to the pictures with Phyllis Rumble.*
- [20 March 1926] *Match with Garrison Church Football cancelled. Took P.R. over the Common with us.*
- [24 March 1926] *Went to church to hear organ recital. Met Phyllis afterwards.*
- [26 March 1926] *Went to the Globe to see Dicken's 'Little Dorrit'.*
- [12 April 1926] *Literature exam at School. Did well.*
- [19 April 1926] *Went to Gamages. Bought small volumes of Modern Essays.*

Two-thirds of this small diary are devoted to the period 10th January 1929 to 13th September, 1930. It covers the last two terms at St. Olave's and the first year at University. This diary is a record of the music which he heard nearly every day, filling page after page, with every entry beginning '*Heard on the wireless*' or '*Listened in*' which he later shortened to '*L.I.*' Every piece of music is listed with title, composer, conductor and orchestra detailed, sometimes with Allen's comments included. Interspersed amongst these manuscript

records and glued to the pages are newspaper cuttings of the music critics' work.

Later entries show other interests and towards the end of term academic focus takes over, followed by holidays.

[29 Jan. 1929] *Heard at school, at a select gathering a gramophone recording of 'The Emperor' Concerto.*

[2 Feb. 1929] *Went to see Macbeth at the Old Vic.*

[2 March 1929] *Saw Merry Wives of Windsor at the Old Vic.*

[13 April 1929] *'Henry VIII at the Old Vic'.*

[June & July] *Solid swatting for the Oxford and Cambridge Higher Cert. Gained entrance to University College, London.*

[1-15 Aug. 1929] *Camp at Bridport. Visited Lyme became lost in a swamp which a farmer kindly told us he would not enter, with even his leggings on, for a guinea because of the "wipers". Gave the pubs a wide berth this time only had three lots of cider.*

[7 Oct. 1929] *Started at University College.*

[3 July 1930] *Passed special Intermediate Exam.*

During Allen's first year at University his diary was largely devoted to recording music, including all the BBC Promenade Concerts conducted by Sir Henry Wood, but in the next volume, which starts in September 1930 and ends in January 1934, other activities are recorded as well as some personal notes. In the last two years at University reading understandably occupied much of his time.

[11 Nov. 1930] *I find lately that I am dipping into books instead of reading them right through. Henceforward I shall only note here the books I thoroughly read. Infrequency of entries will not mean therefore that I am getting lazy but that I am becoming a better research student. (Oh yes!)*

Numerous lists of books which he had read occur both before and after the above entry showing that his consumption and capacity of literature was enormous.

Late in 1930 he lost both his grandparents.

[11 Oct. 1930] *Grandfather died, this evening from peritonitis. My grandfather, Christopher Allen, apparently went about for a week or so suffering intense agony and mind (for his wife was in St. Nicholas' Hospital slowly dying after a severe stroke), yet saying not a word. His death really came at an appropriate moment, for he did not see his wife die and she was never told of his death. Besides which, he had lost the solace of his old age his violin, for his sight was becoming dim, so that*

he could not see his music, and his fingers were stiff and swollen through rheumatism.

[21 Nov. 1930] *Grandmother died.*

[26 Nov. 1930] *Grandmother buried. Raining all morning but soon shone the moment the coffin went out the door. Half an hour after we went back, it started to rain again. Enough to make a weak mind superstitious or religious.*

Whilst at University he continued walking and kept up swimming especially during the summer holidays. In July 1931, he swam on fourteen days in the month.

[16 Sep. 1930] *Went botanizing with Leslie Gibbon in Castle Woods.*

[27 Nov. 1930] *My birthday now left my teens behind.*

[31 March 1931] *Did some gardening and dug up a backache.*

[23 June 1931] *Went to Lister's Swimming Club*

[4 April 1931] *Went to Baths. Reggy, Mary & Evelyn all there. Met Hilda King in the evening.*

[29 Mar. 1931] *Concert at the Albert Hall.*

[8 May 1931] *Went to the Flickers to see an American film called 'Whoopee'.*

[6 April 1931] *Went to Blackheath Fair & Borstal Hill Fair. Both very muddy after the week end rain. All the fair people seemed depressed through such a wretched Easter.*

[11 Feb. 1978] . . . *dancing, a practice in which I do not indulge as I have had little training. My parents did not encourage such cavortings as my brother Evan and I were supposed to concentrate on our studies. We were only allowed the consolation of swimming, football, cricket, music and church socials. Later we added young ladies and tennis to this list.*

The earliest reference that I have found of Allen playing the organ in public occurs in July 1931 but more engagements followed.

[26 July 1931] *Played the organ at the morning service*

[25 Dec. 1931] *Played the organ at 8'oclock Mass. Noticed quite a few youngsters of about 15 or 16 drunk early in the afternoon.*

[24 July 1932] *Mr. Pope LRAM organist of St. John's went away on holiday, so I played the organ all day there (for ten shillings).*

[21 Aug. 1932] *Played organ at St. Matthews.*

In the same period references to singing became regular.

[20 Aug. 1931] *Was introduced to Bishop Taylor Smith, who came in whilst I was teaching the Holy Trinity Choir Boys to sing a plainsong.*

Stibbings made us entertain him with some descants etc. The Bishop was delighted and made his exit exhorting the boys to sing 'Carefully and prayerfully'.

[25 Sept. 1931] *Went to the Institute to join the choir which is conducted by Hubert Horden, lay-vicar Westminster Abbey.*

[8 Jan. 1932] *Sang in Holy Trinity Choir.*

In June 1932 his parents moved.

[8 June 1932] *Moved from 10 Mount Pleasant to 61 Whitworth Road Plumstead. Managed to transfer my herbarium & the inmates of the pond.*

In the same month Allen took and passed the B.A. Honours Examination in History but despite his academic success Allen was unable to find work for a few months and he turned his hand to other things.

[31 July 1932] *I sent some poems off to the London Mercury but apparently with no effect.*

[20 Oct. 1932] *Stibbings engaged me to write the centenary history of Holy Trinity.*

But early in 1933 his calling was beckoning.

[31 Jan. 1933] *Met Mr. C.H. Grinling for the first time. He is going to get me some museum work.*

[13 Feb. 1933] *Made a survey of all the historical material in the Plumstead Museum. Met Mr. Luke the Plumstead Librarian.*

[17 Feb. 1933] *Went botanizing for the Museum in the morning and afternoon.*

Although there was no mention in the diaries of Allen being given a post in the Museum, it was clear that he was working there by the rota work that he mentions. Years later he confirmed that he had been an Honorary Assistant at Plumstead Museum.⁹

On the 15th March, 1933, Allen met his future wife.

[15 Mar. 1933] *8pm. Choir Committee meeting at King's Warren School (Plumstead Literary Institute Choral Society). Met Eva Walker. Had a*

⁹ 11 Sept. 1972.

long talk. She is going to be transferred from the Psychology class to the Choir.

Allen naturally became involved with other organisations.

[11 May 1933] *Attended the Annual Meeting of the Woolwich Historical & Scientific Society. Dr. R.E. Mortimer Wheeler, M.A., (retired president) was present.*

[24 Oct. 1933] *Meeting of the Museum Executive Committee. Elected representative of WH & SS on the Council of Social Services.*

[6 Dec. 1933] *Appointed Minute Secretary of Meteorological Committee.*

[27 Nov. 1933] *23 today & still a nonentity except in Woolwich, where I am rapidly becoming well known thanks to Grinling & Stebbings.*

In these formative years Allen's love of music continued to grow and by 1934, when Allen was 23 years old, he was apparently well established as an organ player of some repute.

[18 March 1934] *Played the organ for evensong at St. John's Plumstead.*

[22 March 1934] *Played for a funeral at Holy Trinity.*

[20 May 1934] *Played organ at Mass at Brook Hospital.*

[16 Sept. 1934] *Played organ for Mass & Evensong at St. Augustine's Slade Green. (Mr. A.L. Lyons, the organist, on holiday).*

His listening to the wireless, which he recorded once or twice a week, appears to have been limited entirely to music and only rarely did he record momentous events.

[11 Dec. 1936] *King Edward's broadcast Apologia pro sua abdicatione. A very fine speech in the best tradition of British rhetoric.*

Allen was an active member of Plumstead Literary Institute Choir and also attended lectures, which were a common feature of pre-war suburbia and the provinces.

[21 Feb. 1934] *Went from CHG's to the Polytechnic for a lecture by the Hon. Mrs. Victor Bruce on 'Flying alone round the World'. Mrs. Bruce has the usual futile, aimless, mind of the idle rich. Not one fact she told us, not one picture she showed us, has the slightest interest. It was as if one was listening to the society column of a newspaper being read aloud.*

[13 May 1936] *Acted as steward at the lecture by Fl. Lt. 'Tommy' Rose at the Large Town Hall. (on his record flight to the Cape and back).*

But there were darker brooding themes in many of the lectures reflecting developments in Europe.

[27 June 1934] *Lunch Club Reginald Reynolds on No More War. Good talk, pointing out the dangers of the League of Nations & International Air-Forces.*

[30 May 1934] *Lunch Club Speaker Mrs. B. Paddon on 'The Private Manufacture of Arms'.*

[17 Oct. 1934] *'Pooled Security' a talk by Mrs. B. Duncan Harris on an International Air Force.*

[21 Nov. 1934] *Lunch Club; Frl. Margrit Weidmann (speaking delightful, broken English) on 'War Resisters' International 1934 Conference'.*

Allen's duties at Plumstead Museum frequently involved outside activity.

[16 Mar. 1934] *Went to the County Hall with Philpot to take the N. Woolwich Tidal Readings.*

[18 May 1934] *Walk with CHG¹⁰ on Woolwich Common.*

However, the incidence of nature observations in the diaries throughout this period is so great that it is not possible to determine how much came from official duties. Observation permeated his life, daytime, evening and night, every day of the week.

[9 Feb. 1934] *2 Tree Sparrows in Birdy Bill's (nr. Dockyard entrance). Birdy Bill is a wretch who traps wild birds and sells them.*

[25 Jan. 1934] *2 Greenfinches in Birdy Bill's shop. I suppose this scoundrel will continue to put all heaven in a rage until next May when the new Bill comes into force. I have seen Bullfinches, Linnets, Chaffinches, Yellowhammers, Brambling's, Skylarks, Song Thrushes and Goldfinches.*

[7 Mar. 1934] *Brown owl in a tree opposite Perseverance Inn, Woolwich Common.*

[25 Mar. 1934] *Frogs in love-embrace.*

[29 July 1935] *Evan found several female Lampyrus nocticula. Kept the one with the most powerful glow as a nightlight & let the others go.*

Allen regularly walked through all the local parks, woods and green spaces, making lengthy lists of all that he saw, invariably in Latin,

¹⁰ Mr. C.H. Grinling.

sometimes with the common name. If the list of observations was long he would sub-divide it into crustacea, insects, mammals, algae, myxos, lichens, fungi, liverworts, mosses, ferns and flowers. Now and then he devoted a walk to '*fungi forages*'. On rare occasions in these jottings Allen mentions other notebooks, but it is not clear if these were private or museum records. To confuse matters, he sometimes listed in his diary the contents of a particular collection in the Museum.

In 1934, Allen was apparently restless and actively seeking another post. There is no indication that his relationship with his aged boss, the Rev. Grinling (74 years old in 1934) was anything but harmonious. Indeed, Grinling was apparently much respected for a few years later, after Allen had moved on

[3 May 1937] *CHG made the first Freeman of the Borough of Woolwich a fitting recognition after some 40 years work in Woolwich (spending not a little of his own money in the doing).*

It seems likely that Allen was looking for a career move and was prepared to move away, if necessary, from Kent and his family.

[20 March 1934] *Went to Leicester Museum to be interviewed by Dr. Lowe for the post of museum assistant. Got in the last two. A friend of Charles Foster named Lane, a B.Sc. (Botany) of UCL, obtained the post; if he had died on the spot, I should have had the job.*

[10 May 1934] *At Museum all day. Was interviewed by St. George Gray as a prospective filler of the vacancy at Taunton Castle Museum. Had tea with Gray, Luke & CHG.*

Early in the following year Allen was successful.

[19 Feb. 1935] *Appointed Senior Museum Assistant at Reading Museum & Art Gallery. Had lunch with Mr. Smallcombe, the Curator.*

[25 Feb. 1935] *Started work at the Reading Museum.*

During the following months Allen settled down to travelling home to Woolwich at odd week-ends, combined with letters passing between Eva and him. Being in a completely new social and natural environment the content of his life and its pattern went through some change. His organ playing literally disappeared and his listening to the wireless lessened noticeably. New activities occurred and some old ones continued.

[21 July 1935] *Went to the Lido with Jack Edwin. We were the only two swimmers there for quite a while. Reading produces fair weather swimmers.*

[8 June 1935] *Played for Reading Corporation N.A.L.G.O. against Park Prewett C.C. Park Prewett is an asylum just outside Basingstoke. The lunatics all turned out to see the game and cat-called their own keepers and doctors. We lost by 134 to 48. Not a very successful day for me but I enjoyed watching the antics of some of the lunatics – especially one who was flying a kite.*

[17–18 Mar. 1935] *Travelled overnight to Liverpool to attend the Diploma Course of the Museums Association.*

[16 Sept. 1935] *To Bristol . . . to attend a week's course (advanced) for the Museums Association's Diploma.*

Once again Allen became involved with several local organisations;

[29 April 1935] *Joined Reading Natural History Society.*

[8 Jan. 1936] *Preliminary meeting of the Reading Nat. Hist. Soc. Discussion Group.*

[24 Feb. 1936] *Attended Committee meeting of Berks. Local History Recording Scheme. Co-opted on to this.*

[7 May 1936] *Discussion Group walked to Sonning. I took the dog & consequently was chased by a bull.*

Allen obviously enjoyed films.

[18 Jan. 1936] *Greta Garbo & Frederick March 'Anna Karenina'.*

[30 Jan. 1936] *Jack Hulbert in 'Jack Ahoy'.*

[30 April 1936] *Robert Donat 'The Ghost Goes West'.*

[9 May 1936] *Cherry Kearton's 'Big Game of Life'.*

[21 May 1936] *Errol Flynn in 'Captain Blood'.*

In the autumn of 1936 Allen's attention was drawn to a vacancy which was due to appear in York.

[8 Oct. 1936] *Dr. Kirk wrote to Mr. Smallcombe about the vacant curatorship in York Castle Museum.*

[25 Oct. 1936] *Up to York to meet Dr. Kirk.*

[26 Oct. 1936] *Provisionally appointed Curator of York Castle Museum & Kirk Collection of Bygones.*

[29 Oct. 1936] *Received note from Town Clerk of York & gave in my notice at Reading.*

In November Allen resigned as Honorary Secretary of the Reading Natural History discussion group and left Reading with a parting gift from Mr. Smallcombe, the Curator, of a Dallmeyer (x8) pocket lens. At the end of this month Eva and Allen became engaged and he gave her an opal ring.

[30 Nov. 1936] *Caught 1.20pm for York. Eva came to see me off. Said goodbye to her out of the ventilating window of one of these new carriages with the 'view' windows.*

[1 Dec. 1936] *Started my duties as Curator of the Castle Museum, York at the temporary address, Houndgate, Pickering. Dr. Kirk, my Hon. Director, sounds formidable but his bark is much worse than his bite. His passion for cats & his kindness to them betrays him. His bedside manner, when he was in practice, must have been disconcerting.*

Whilst Allen was living at Pickering he was preparing the Castle Museum for its opening.

[6 Jan. 1938] *Interviewed Miss Violet Rodgers of Bradford to come for a month's trial. She will live at Thornton-le-Dale for the present until we transfer permanently to York.*

[8 Mar. 1938] *Art Gallery Committee Meeting. Decided to retain Miss Rodgers for 6 months as pupil assistant at £1 per week and to have another museum attendant.*

[6 April 1938] *Appointed Pink to the post of assistant caretaker former Minster choir-boy.*

Allen also found time to advance his qualifications.

[30 March 1937] *Elected a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society.*

[3 April 1937] *Elected a Member of Yorkshire Museum's Federation.*

[28 Mar. 1938] *Started specialised course for the Museums Diploma at London Museum. Dr. Wheeler told us how he ran the museum.*

This was not the first time that he had met and talked with Dr. Wheeler, later Sir Mortimer Wheeler.

[1 Sept. 1936] *Maiden Castle was our next port of call. Dr. Wheeler showed us over the main section.*

[2 April 1938] *To St. Albans. Lunch with Dr. Wheeler at the 'Fighting Cocks'. All listened to the boat-race, the results of which pleased Wignall & Morty much.*

[30 Oct. 1938] *Sent Museum Diploma thesis off.*

[18 Nov. 1938] *Learnt that my Museum diploma thesis had been accepted.*

Many years later Allen wrote:

[22 July 1976] *Sir Mortimer Wheeler died today, aged 86. I have lost touch with him since the last War. In my early museum days, in the mid-*

30's, he helped me very much. He acted as my tutor for the museum diploma and gave me my viva voce. His active encouragement probably provided the incentive for my becoming one of the first seven to pass the examination.

Allen kept his hand in with music.

[23 Jan. 1938] *To Dr. Kirk's for tea. Mrs. Kirk and I played Grieg's Cello Sonata.*

[20 Feb. 1938] *Temp. conductor of Snape Prize Silver Band.*

He stayed as conductor of the Snape Band throughout the year. I can remember him once telling me how he went into the wilds of Yorkshire, conducting a group of men who were predominantly red-headed. He was convinced that they represented an enclave of Viking descendants. About this time Allen formed his view of northern wit which may have come from working with the band.

[10 March 1938] *I am slowly but surely coming to the view that North Riding folks have a peculiar sense of humour. They are definitely not quickwitted and do not appreciate subtle wit. And there are very few exceptions.*

Allen took up another interest related to music, one of the pleasures which had been denied him by his parents.

[13 Jan. 1938] *After my tea, we went up to the deserted Newton Road and Donald showed me some new dance steps he had learnt during Christmastide. At 9 o'clock an unusual spectacle was to be seen two figures engrossed in dancing the West Riding form of the Palais Glide.*

[19 Jan. 1938] *Had my first lesson in the art of ball-room dancing in the old barn at the back of Maud's in Houndgate. Petrol-lights, 2 portable gramophones, a dozen men, half-a-dozen women, fish and chips and beer supper. A delightful evening.*

The Castle Museum opened on 23rd April, 1938, and shortly afterwards Allen moved from Eastgate Lodge, Pickering, into York.

[12 May 1938] *Took up my new 'digs' at 3 Ninthorp Avenue, York.*

In June a development occurred in his life which he never regretted when he married the woman that he loved for the rest of his life.

[10 May 1938] *Had the banns put up at St. Mary Bishophill senior with*

St. Clement for my marriage to Eva. Mrs. Turner, the verger, was abrupt to me at first but grew gracious when she knew I came from Kent, like herself.

[4 June 1938] *Met London party at 1.30 at York Station. Wedding at St. Clement's Church, Scarcroft Road, York at 2.30. Went off very well.*

[20 June 1938] *Went after a house in Beckfield Lane, Acomb & decided to take it.*

[23 June 1938] *Got possession of our new house at 51 Beckfield Lane.*

In the middle of the year there are large gaps in Allen's entries and among the last few are the following.

[14 Sept. 1938] *Queen Mary, the Princess Royal, the Earl of Harewood to the Museum. Royal party arrived at 3.45.*

[30 Sept. 1938] *Anglo-Viking bone hair piece in the ARP trenches in front of the Museum.*

[17 Dec. 1938] *Eva bought me Aymer Vallance's Old Crosses & Lytchgates for a Christmas present.*

During the war, although Allen would have been discouraged from keeping diaries; it appears that he kept some sort of records either during or immediately after those years. I have found only one reference to war-time records, made many years later, when Allen was taking part in formal discussions about wartime experiences.

[31 March. 1989] *I described operation 'Zipper' in Malaysia with extracts from my notebook diary.*

Unfortunately these notebooks are not among the manuscripts which came to me; however, there are several entries in Allen's later diaries which provide us with reminiscences of his war-time experiences. Allen records that he served six years in the Royal Navy¹¹ which apparently commenced with him being stationed near Great Yarmouth¹² at Caister.¹³

[12 July 1972] *'Our old bungalow still standing at Caister'.*

[25 June 1985] *I met him when I was a naval stores assistant at Great Yarmouth at the beginning of the 1939 war.*

[25 May 1971] *I can remember the sinking feeling I had when the Hood disaster news came through to HMS Watchful at Great Yarmouth.*

¹¹ 7 Feb. 1981.

¹² 20 April, 1986; 28 March, 1981.

¹³ 2 Oct. 1972.

A comment following the sinking of the battleship Bismarck 27 May 1941.

[14 Aug. 1966] *On the TV saw service from Great Yarmouth parish church where I once played the organ and which I saw go up in flames during the war. (preference was given to fighting the Distillery fire!)*

Thereafter Allen's active service appears to have been associated with a particular type of invasion vessel called, Landing Ship Tanks (LST), which took him to several wartime theatres.

[1 Feb. 1986] *Went through five wartime invasions in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Normandy and Malaya.*

Many years after these experiences odd references to them occur in his diaries.

[31 March 1971] *Graeco-Italian bucchero ware oinochoe [c. 250BC] which I obtained at Nisida in 1944.*

[30 Nov. 1975] *I saw on television an American film about Anzio. Not much resemblance to the Anzio I experienced.*

[1 April 1980] *On invasion day we were laying off Ostia and had a RAF team with direction finding apparatus with us. Our crew lived in as remote a world as some of the soldiers ashore. We knew of the sinking of the allied hospital ship (St. David) but of little else.*

[10 Nov. 1974] *I rushed back home to listen to readings of Edward Thomas's poems and extracts from the diary he kept almost to the moment he died, killed by a passing shell. I can understand the feeling of hopelessness he felt before going in to action I have experienced it myself. The compensation is an enhancement of the sensibilities, a passionate approach to the manifestations of Nature and, with Thomas, the production of real poetry. I wonder if he wrote anything so revealing when he lived at Bearsted.*

[24 Jan. 1978] *It vividly reminded me of my wartime trip in a landing ship (tanks) from New York to Mostaginem.*

[6 June 1984] *40 years ago today I was on board HMS LST 430 and waiting to leave The Solent and sail to Normandy. I cannot recall much of the occasion beyond the sight of so many ships around us. I suppose I was too busy doing my chores below decks.*

[4 May 1985] *VE Day 40 years on. It didn't do much for the crew of LST 280 who stored ship at Port Said in the stinking heat. The bunting-tossers dressed the ship overall and the Egyptians sounded their hooters and horns as if they had done some worthwhile job. All on board knew we were heading east to tackle the Japanese. What joy!*

[7 July 1981] *For supper I had a simple meal of curried vegetables and boiled rice. Almost like wartime days in India.*

[25 Oct. 1981] *On television I saw a film about the railway from Bombay to Poona, Guntakal, Bungalow, Ooti and Coclim. Coclim looked much better than I remember. Georgina says that the smell which intoxicated us when LST 280 was almost a mile off shore came from the Bombay duck industry at the fishing village.*

[4 April 1989] *I was reminded of the auspicious occasion when I, supervised by the coxswain, took HMS Landing Ship Tanks 280 into Singapore harbour (we had a depleted crew and that's why I had the job).*

There was one anecdote coming from his war years which Allen related to me though I never heard him repeat it in private or public. I have not found it in his memoirs but I make no apology for including it because it is a singular demonstration of his observational powers and objectivity. The experience he described was strange, and had it been related by anyone else I would have doubted it. He had found himself in a village in India whilst on shore leave and he and a ship-mate came upon a gathering of people obviously excited by something taking place in their midst. Allen and his friend pushed through the standing observers at the back until they could see the cause of the commotion. Sitting on the ground, cross-legged, was a holy man, a *fakir*, with his back against a tall wall. In front of him on the dusty ground lay a wooden stick-doll or manikin in a collapsed state. Circled around the little arena were his audience, the nearer ones seated. After some while and incantations from the holy man, the stick-doll became animated, stood up and walked around. No one stood near the doll nor were there trees or anything overhanging the arena. Allen had no explanation as to how this occurred and made no attempt to fabricate one as others might when faced with something beyond experience.

The war had an everlasting effect on Allen which is reflected in the following diary entries:

[10 April 1988] *After my trip I was glad to sit down and see again (on television) Noel Coward's 'In Which We Serve'. How many times have I seen this film? And yet it still upsets me. Nostalgia overtakes me. I am proud to have been a sailor in the Royal Navy.*

[9 Dec. 1989] *I saw once again Noel Coward's film 'In Which We Serve'. For me nostalgia and sadness. Of my naval family I am sadly the only person left all dead, my mother and my father¹⁴ (RN), my brother Evan RN (HO), Mary his wife and my Eva. But of course I have my nephews and nieces.*

¹⁴ I have failed to find within Allen's diaries the dates of his father's death and that of his brother Evan.

In the front of his 1971 diary Allen wrote:

'All that is necessary for the complete triumph of evil is that good men should do nothing'

THE CURATOR

Twenty years of Allen's life, from 1938 to 1959 inclusive, are not covered by him in extant diaries except for one year, 1948, the year that he became the Curator of the Maidstone Museum and Art Gallery. The entries in the first two months or so are very sparse but later it settles down to approximately half the days having entries but with occasional gaps of several days. In the first three months' entries there is evidence suggesting that Allen was at a museum called Bankfield at Halifax.

[23 Jan. 1948] *To Halifax Barracks with Councillor Robinson to see Colonel Baker about the transference of the Duke's Museum to Bankfield.*

[15 Mar. 1948] *Lord Mackintosh came to Bankfield to see his pictures. He seemed to look on them as only investments.*

[22 Mar. 1948] *Museum Cttee. held at Bankfield. Mayor & Mayoress came at 5 & they & the Cttee spent an hour looking over the improvements at the Museum.*

[31 Mar. 1948] *To Maidstone.*

[1 April 1948] *Started work as Curator of Maidstone Museum.*

We have no record of how Allen obtained his post, but we can speculate that he had his eyes on Kent and wished to move back into his native county close to his family and where his ancestors had lived. There is more than one reference in his diaries to the fact that his brother Evan had been a teacher at Northborough School in Maidstone¹⁵ but there is no indication when, except that all the references refer to it in the past tense, so that he may have been there at the time Allen came to Maidstone. No matter whether or not this influenced him, Allen surely saw the vacancy at Maidstone, the County town of Kent, as attractive. At that time Maidstone was still the premier market town of Kent, commanding as it had done for centuries, the development and produce of the Weald. By the late 1940s Kent still enjoyed the title of Garden of England, though more by tradition than fact. Maidstone's legacy of historic buildings, such as it was, was

¹⁵ 4 May, 1970.

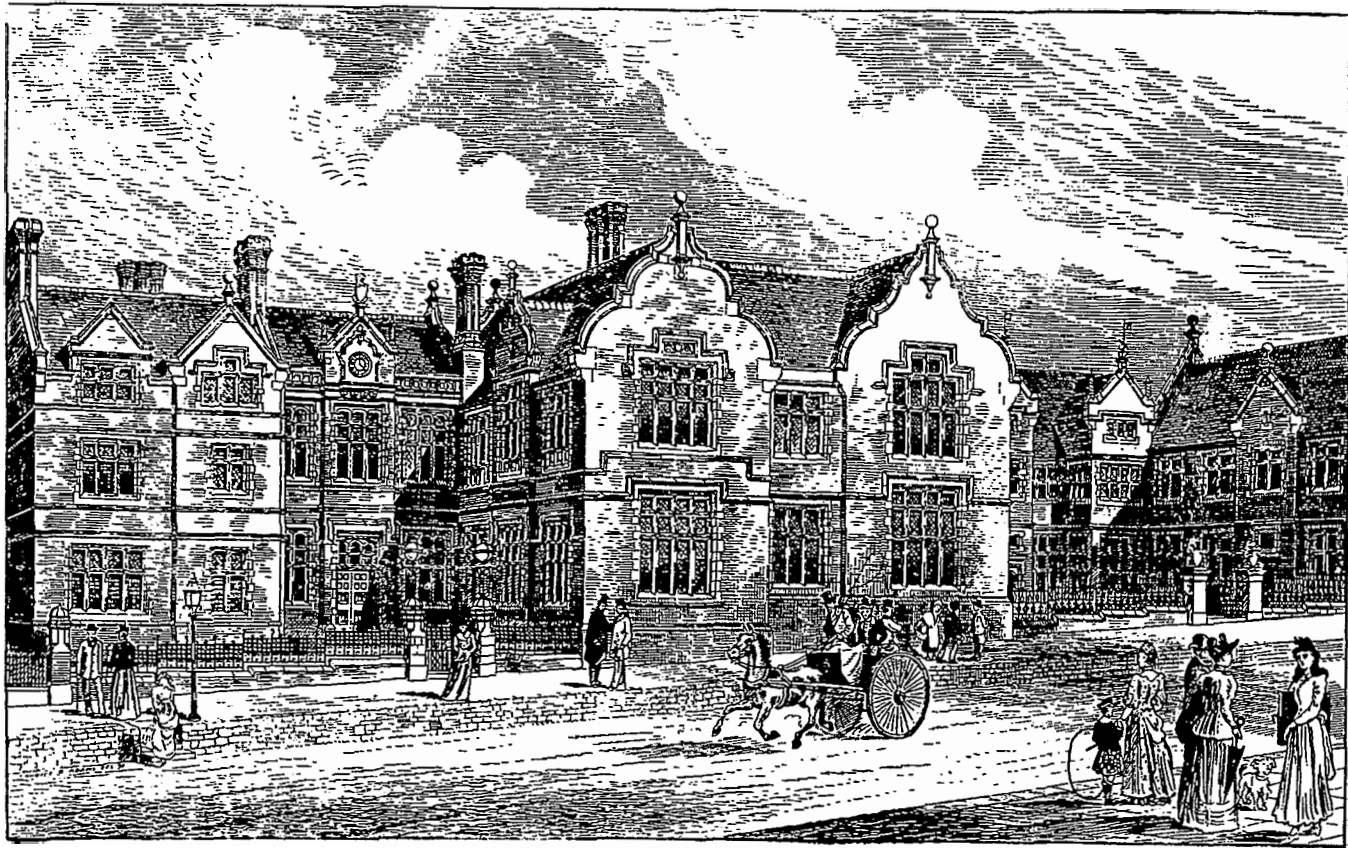


Fig. 1. The Museum, Art Gallery and Public Library, St. Faith's Street, Maidstone. 1897. Curator's House on the extreme left, c. 1900. Given to LRAG by Dr Peter Draper.

largely intact being relatively unscathed by war and untouched by developers, central government and the town council.

When Allen first moved to Maidstone he lodged at a house in Greenside whilst improvement works were being undertaken to his flat at the Museum.

[10 June 1948] *Corporation workmen started on house (flat) (plumbers).*

[14 June 1948] *Slept at Museum (instead of at Greenside).*

[1 July 1948] *Eva & furniture arrived.*

[16 July 1948] *Plumbers all day at flat.*

Allen quickly learned that much was expected of him.

[9 April 1948] *Sir Edward Harrison came to see me. Agreed to act as Curator for K.A.Soc.*

[10 April 1948] *Spent an hour at the coach museum with Sir Garrard.*

[22 April 1948] *App. Hon. Sec. of Museum Auxiliary Fund Comm.*

[28 April 1948] *AGM of KAS appointed Soc. Curator.*

[15 July 1948] *Morning Sir Garrard & self arranged layout for upper floor of Coach Museum.*

His first recorded involvement with a local group occurred in May.

[22 May 1948] *With Bearsted Local History Group under leadership of Elliston-Erwood, to Thurnham Church, Goddard's Castle, Allington Church.*

Allen's title, according to a membership card of the National Art Collection Fund was '*The Curator & Librarian The Museum & Public Library*'.

We learn from his early diaries that Allen was responsible for overseeing the Museum at Hythe, which he visited once a month. Regular contact was also maintained with most of the other museums in Kent, especially Rochester, Tunbridge Wells, Cranbrook and Folkestone. The Curator's responsibilities included arranging displays of the Museum's art collection – over 1,000 pieces – in the gallery which had a capacity of approximately 100 pictures. Maidstone Art Society and the local photographic club held competitions and displays each year, and additionally, at Allen's discretion, local artists held their own shows in the gallery. Throughout his curatorship at Maidstone Allen helped many up-and-coming local artists to enjoy the experience of a public show and become established.

The Curator's office at the Museum was a large high-ceilinged room

with tables and tall glazed cabinets overburdened with books, documents and maps giving it a studious and Dickensian air. To a newcomer entering through the large oak door, with its imposing sign 'Curator's Office', the senses, which had already been assaulted by the distinctive smell of oak, stone and ancient fabric when entering the darkened entrance hall of the Museum, were further entranced by the indiscriminate collection of curios and *objets d'art*, statuary and other artifacts scattered in the office.

In 1965, Allen started a five-year diary, a present from his relations.

[10 May 1965] *Started reading Wilfrid Blunt's book on Sir Sydney Cockerell. 'The pity is that by using a printed diary with a fixed space allotted each day, he could permit himself no more than the smallest rubato when memorable occasions demanded expanded treatment'. (page 7) verb sap!*

Allen's diary shows that there were occasions when most of his working day was taken up by visitors, sometimes by appointment, especially parties and groups, but often individuals coming without warning which could affect his other commitments.

[25 May 1974] *A woman brought a patent candle snuffer and asked me what it was. I informed her. She denied my attribution. I told her that I wondered why she bothered to consult me if she didn't want to listen to my advice. She calmed then I clinched the affair by showing her the illustration of a similar example in Seymour Lindsay's book.*

One of the endearing qualities that Allen possessed was that of encouraging and patronising youngsters and those who were on a path of learning. Whether it was a first venture or someone on an established career, casual or intense, his willingness to guide and help was constant. There are very few people who have worked with Allen, regardless of circumstance, that can deny attributing some of their learning, knowledge and personal development to him, such was his legacy to us. He tended to be an open person and never saw his protégés and others who became successful as a threat to his reputation or work.

He displayed this quality as Curator and throughout his later life, and I suspect it was a characteristic present in earlier years, though I have no oral traditions or written evidence of it.

[4 Nov. 1974] *Examination for Girl Guide Local History Badge.*

[20 Nov. 1970] *Helped Colin Martin of Oldborough Manor School to make a map of Maidstone to show the distribution of ancient buildings.*

[21 Nov. 1970] *Colin Martin in again this morning. He is 11 years old and has just started at Oldborough Manor School. He is diabetic and injects himself with insulin every day. On Fridays he tests his blood and if the sugar content is wrong he takes a sample to the West Kent Hospital.*

[13 April 1966] *Helped Miss Drummond with her thesis on medieval pottery kilns in the SE, with especial reference to Rye.*

[12 July 1966] *Occasionally I obtain much pleasure in taking school parties round the Museum for anything up to two hours. Today I had a good deal of fun with the pupils of North Secondary Girls School, Ashford, and their mistress, Aline Beckwith.*

There seems little doubt that the Museum was popular.

[5 Jan. 1966] *Attendance for 1965 nearly 100,000.*

Allen's museum life was busy and varied.

[27 Dec. 1966] *Went into Museum and replenished the water bowls of the bank and field voles.*

[5 Feb. 1967] *To B.B.C. rehearsal.*

[15 May 1968] *Became Chairman of the vetting comm. of the autumn Maidstone Antiques Fair.*

[22 April 1969] *Caught 12.45 train to Broadstairs. Met Mr. Denne, Clerk to Broadstairs UDC and went with him to Dicken's House (Betsy Trotwood's) to see the tenant, Miss Gladys Waterer, who was sick in bed. Inspected the house in order to make a report on its suitability as a museum (for Area Council). Miss Waterer gave us green ginger wine and biscuits.*

[22 June 1967] *Made Chairm. of Antiq. & Hist. Advisory Panel of the Area Mus. Service.*

[18 Jan. 1965] *Eric Philp and I went out to see Lady Mellor at Ulcombe Place and to collect the 10 pieces of Delft which she has given the Museum. All the rest of Sir Gilbert's collection is to be sold at Christie's to pay for estate upkeep.*

Meetings related to the museum occur regularly in the calendar.

[14 Nov. 1970] *I attended a committee meeting of the Queen's Own Royal West Kents at the increment Room in the Barracks. Sir William Oliver ('General Bill') was there.*

[27 Jan. 1965] *The great day!! Visit of the members of the SE Federation of Museums to Maidstone. My last meeting as President and I feel that it was a great success. I was nominated for the Council of the Museums Association.*

[5 July 1966] *Welcome by Lord Mayor of Sheffield, the University Vice-Chancellor and Sir Frank Francis. Afternoon AGM of Society of Museum Officers. Took chair for first part until Mitch [Bruce-Mitford] was elected President. I become a Vice-President.*

[5 Dec. 1966] *4 committee meetings from 5 till 7 (Bentlif, Fine Arts, Brenchley and Full Museum). Safely negotiated the extra estimate needed for the Carriage Museum booklet.*

[3 April 1968] *Attended the informal opening of the new Powell Cotton Museum.*

Other diary entries touch upon the industries and trades of Maidstone and remind us of the changes that were taking place.

[28 April 1969] *Mr. Poole brought for the Museum some implements from Hugh Baird and Sons Ltd, maltsters, who are moving from Maidstone. These include a malt plough and a plough plane.*

[16 May 1969] *To the Cooper's Wheelwrights' shop in Upper Stone Street to have another talk with Mr. Cooper (who is selling the business and site) and to collect some more of his tools.*

[5 June 1969] *The hop dolly arrived from Faversham.*

[13 June 1969] *. . . to Plantation Lane Bearsted, to see Mr. F.W. Guppy (aged 93; formerly Maidstone's Postmaster) and the antiques he is leaving to Maidstone Museum.*

The Curator's work also involved the management of staff. There were twelve in the Museum and a further two in the Carriage Museum.¹⁶ He kept detailed notes in his diary of their health and absences, and various happenings in the Museum.

[8 Mar. 1974] *The museum store officially handed over to the Corporation.*

[22 Dec. 1970] *Museum sub-committee and Museum & Library committee discuss appointment of junior assistant to learn my trade of local historian before I retire.*

[15 Jan. 1974] *Beneath the floor of the Archaeological Gallery branches of gorse have been found today. Later Alice Clark told me that her grandfather put gorse under floors in order to absorb damp.*

Burglary and thieving were a problem,¹⁷ and in 1971 the museum suffered the loss of several Japanese prints¹⁸ valued at £7,000. Hardly

¹⁶ 9 April, 1974.

¹⁷ 4 Oct. 1971; 15 Jan. 1971; 13 Oct. 1970.

¹⁸ June 1971; 17 July, 1971; 20 Aug. 1971.

surprising that close circuit TV with twelve cameras and monitors were installed in the museum and the Carriage Museum during 1970.

The museum life was never dull.

[21 Aug. 1970] *An army bomb disposal squad arrived to take away the bomb sent in to the Museum with a box of miscellaneous material.*

[7 June 1970] *This morning the museum bees swarmed (under one of the seats in the Adult School's forecourt) and soon afterwards retreated into the museum hive.*

[8 June 1970] *At approximately the same time as yesterday the museum bees put on a repeat performance.*

[9 June 1970] *This morning the bees repeated their swarming performance.*

[20 May 1974] *As I took my rubbish down to the dustbin a grey squirrel landed with some noise near my front door. He must have come from the Adult School roof – some thirty feet. I bet his feet are bruised.*

[9 Mar. 1966] *Mr. Cripps came in. Told me about his father who used to collect vipers on the N. Downs, kill them and take them home where they were cut into sections. These pieces were tied on a line in the sun and the vipers' fat melted into pots. Used for whooping cough relief (taken orally).*

[26 June 1972] *0005 (five minutes past Sunday midnight) burglar alarm sounded. A spider was on the face of the sonic device.*

Afternoon – warm and sunny (two girls caused a sensation in Brenchley Gardens by stripping to the waist in order to sunbathe).

Borough meetings and social events featured heavily in Allen's working life.

[29 May 1970] *Called on the Mayor and went with her to the Royal Star to meet Sir Charles and Lady Ponsonby, Lord Cornwallis, Sir William Mullens and representatives of the West Kent (Queen's Own) Yeomanry . . . Sir Charles then presented the Mayor with a collection of yeomanry books and records for the Museum.*

[24 May 1967] *Attended the Mayor's breakfast at the Royal Star and Mayor-making ceremony at the Town hall.*

[21 July 1966] *Eva and I had an invitation to the Mayor's tent at the Mote Cricket ground.*

[3 Nov. 1967] *Eva and I attended the Mayor's Banquet at the Royal Star. Norman Cook¹⁹ proposed a toast of 'The Mayor and Corporation' and mentioned that Elgar²⁰ had told him about the 19th century banquets in the Grammar School at Corpus Christi Hall.*

¹⁹ Sub-Curator of Maidstone Museum in 1936, later Curator of Guildhall Museum, City of London.

²⁰ Curator of Maidstone Museum, 1924–31.

[15 Jan. 1967] *Eva and I went to Cobtree to have tea with Lady Edna Tyrwhitt-Drake. Walked both ways.*

[4 June 1967] *Mayor's Sunday. Procession to All Saints.*

[12 Nov. 1967] *Armistice Day services in Town and Brenchley gardens.*

Allen became involved with numerous other organisations outside of his curatorship. These included:

Antiquities and History Committee

Kent Field Club – Allen held the Honorary Editor's post for many years under the chairmanship of Sir John Best Shaw

Woolwich & District Antiquarian Society – Allen retained membership since before the war.

Kent Numismatic Society – Allen was the Chairman for many years.

Maidstone Antiquarian Society formerly **Maidstone Scientific and Antiquarian Society**.

Maidstone Area Archaeological Group – Allen was its first Chairman from April 1969 to April 1971 and remained a member for many years.

Kent History Teachers Association – Allen was Vice-President from February 1966 at least until 1972–73.

County Local History Committee, later **Kent History Federation**. Allen was Chairman for at least ten years from June 1976.

Kent Buildings Preservation Trust.

CPRK/KAS Joint Committee, from 13 October 1972 **Kent Historic Buildings Committee**.

Society of Antiquaries. Allen was a Fellow at least from 1965 and remained a Fellow all his life.

Friends of Rochester Cathedral.

The Iris Society. Allen's favourite flower.

Kent Archaeological Society, President, 1986–87.

In 1966, well before his intended retirement, Allen and Eva became interested in finding a cottage.

[28 Aug. 1966] *Morning walk on the N. Downs. After we had lunched went to look over a cottage just below the Old Forge.*

[30 Aug. 1966] *Saw Haydon Parker and Sid Diggle about buying the cottage at Hollingbourne.*

[4 Sept. 1966] *To Hollingbourne to see the house we have bought.*

[16 Oct. 1966] *Eva and I signed all the documents needed for taking over Hollingbourne house.*

In the back of his 1975 Diary Allen wrote, 'Miss Wratten told me

THE MAIDSTONE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY
 (incorporating THE FRIENDS OF OLD MAIDSTONE)
 wishes to show its appreciation for the valuable help
 given over the past twenty seven years by Mr. L.R. ALLEN
 GROVE B.A., F.S.A., F.M.A., F.R.E.S., both as former
 President, as Honorary Curator, and organiser for
 various excursions, as well as lecturer on several
 occasions. In addition, his friendly help to those members
 who have wished to carry out research work has always
 been forthcoming, and this Special Meeting, held in the
 Town Hall on Wednesday 19th November 1975, wishes, on
 his retirement as Curator of Maidstone Museum,
 to record the thanks of the Officers and members by
 presenting him with a cheque for fifteen pounds

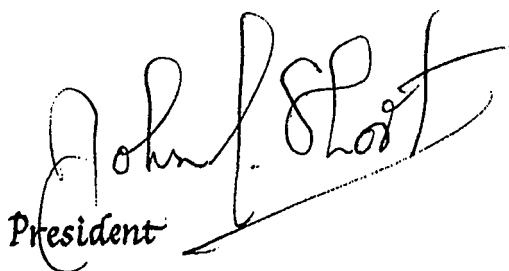


Fig. 2.

(November 1975) that Mr. Deakin of Hollingbourne Manor House built the cottage for his chauffeur Hodson in 1909. [Later learnt that she is in error – the date is more likely to be 1912].

[13 June 1977] Manor Cottage was built by Mr. Gibbon of Leeds in 1912.

During 1967 and 1968 they did a great deal of work at the cottage planting up the garden with flowers, shrubs, weeping willow, Japanese quince, herbs, loganberry, honeysuckle, etc.

[7 April 1969] Caught the 13.20 train for Hollingbourne. Brimstone butterflies on the wing here. The Railway Station honeybees busy. Gardening all the afternoon. Planted the lesser periwinkle. Eva made a marrow bed.

[11 June 1970] *A pair of swallows has nested in the porch.*

[2 Feb. 1971] *Caught the 11.20 bus for Hollingbourne. Eva and I cleared the northern front room and the bedroom over it in readiness for the builder who is going to remove the chimney breasts.*

[18 Nov. 1971] *We received today all the legal documents concerning our Hollingbourne cottage. Our mortgage has been paid off and the house is ours.*

[15 July 1971] *Eva and I walked to the amphitheatre (Eden's Hole). Plenty of butterflies on the wing. A kestrel among angry rooks.*

Allen's mother-in-law Mrs. Walker, apparently lived with them at the museum until the end of 1970. Allen's mother lived at Ramsgate which they visited regularly, often maintaining her garden for she was 85 on the 15 November, 1972. In December her memory became hazy and in the same month Allen recorded her as collapsing into a paroxysm.²¹ She survived independently for several more years being admitted to St. Augustine's Ward of Hill House Hospital, Minster, on 16 March, 1976, at the age of 88 years. She died on the 25 January, 1978, aged 90.

Late in 1972, Allen's wife Eva became ill²² and, after two operations in February, Allen records on the 14 March, 1973, that she relapsed and died after a peaceful half-hour under heavy sedation. Allen never got over her death.

[19 Oct. 1983] *To have had a splendid wife such as my Eva I deem to have been a special favour of the Gods.*

[4 June 1988] *I married Eva in York 50 years ago. Her death in 1973 was a blow from which I have not fully recovered. She successfully kept me on the narrow path.*

As Allen approached retirement, life in the museum was changing.

[7 Mar. 1974] *At the main Museum and Library committee meeting proceedings were rather gloomy as it was the winding-up of the old system before the new district set-up takes over. The close association of the museum and library for over a century is finished as the Library goes over to the KEC.*

[18 Mar. 1974] *I was told that at the committee meeting last Friday evening my present salary was considered to be too much and the post was to be downgraded when my successor was appointed. I am going to protest about this decision because I think (and can prove) that Maidstone has fallen behind the other museum-possessing authorities.*

²¹ 29 Dec. 1972.

²² 31 Dec. 1972.

- [26 Mar. 1974] *Last council meeting of the Maidstone Corporation.*
[27 Mar. 1974] *I attended the Mayor's reception to celebrate the end of the present local government regime. I thought it was most thoughtful of Lord Cornwallis to come.*
[2 April 1974] *Joan Fletcher told me that in future I would not be given invitations to functions such as Mayor-making and Mayor's Sunday. So much for the benefits of local government reform.*
[11 June 1975] *The routine work of the department is increasing at too rapid a rate. I do very little real museum work these days.*
[9 Sept. 1975] *Preparing the advertisement for my successor.*
[30 Oct. 1975] *Candidates interviewed for my post.*
[5 Nov. 1975] *Went to the White Horse Inn at Bearsted. I thought I was going to have a quiet evening. Nothing so simple! I found myself in the midst of a farewell dinner with all my assistants past and present . . . together with wives, husbands and friends. A memorable day.*

During November Allen was packing and moving his possessions to Hollingbourne ready for his retirement. He received a presentation on Wednesday, 26 November, and records on the following day, his 65th birthday, that he had retired. A few days later he wrote:

[3 Dec. 1975] *Went to the Town Hall for the 1830 Council Meeting. At the opening of the proceedings the Mayor paid tribute to my 27 and a half years at the Museum. This was followed by a round of applause. Finito!*

THE EVENING OF LIFE

Hollingbourne is situated between the spring-line and the ancient Pilgrims' Way, hard under the scarp slope of the North Downs where the chalk hills reach their peak of over 650 feet within walking distance of the village. Hollingbourne is barely a village – more a hamlet – whose landscape is dominated by the Manor House, the church, watermill and one or two ancient hostleries. Here Allen was close to some of the best landscape views in Kent, the historical ambience of buildings and without the bustle and commerce of modern life.

[1 June 1983] *Text for today from Hardy's Far from the Madding Crowd . . . 'It was the first day of June . . . God was palpably present in the country, and the devil had gone with the world to the town'*

Its drawback, which would have been equally obvious to Allen, was the absence of shops – the nearest were all in the lower village of Eythorne Street a mile or more down the road – and so he had to rely on

transport, both public and private, for his shopping trips which he usually made weekly to Maidstone. Remoteness was never a problem to Allen who regularly walked great distances. He had never learnt to drive a car, which I think he came to regret later in life, but he had no difficulty in maintaining a busy life dominated by travelling. Throughout his life he relied heavily on British Rail, and being a patient and tolerant man had no real problem with the vicissitudes of public transport, although occasionally the disruption they caused in his life was vented in his diaries. Hollingbourne station lay south of Manor Cottage more than half a mile away through the churchyard and the fields beyond.

There are in many English villages social orders and groups which by tradition delay the acceptance of newcomers, where a subtle alienation has to be dissolved over many years by the establishment of social roots, integration into the village hierarchy and demonstrable service to the community. Allen settled at Hollingbourne with ease for he had prepared himself well. His intentions at Manor Cottage were manifest to the community; his background was impeccable and his interests of organ playing, singing and love of the countryside were already well known. He could count among his friends many of the villagers and their families and was clearly well thought of by many of them. In his diaries I can detect no difficulties in his change of life from curator to retired gentleman and antiquarian. He took to it as though it were his destiny; the botanist had come home to the countryside. His observations of nature tended to increase for he was better placed to observe, study and fulfil his life-long interests of flora, fauna and entomology.

Every morning he would look to the outside world and observe the weather, commenting accordingly in his diary giving the time of the entry, temperature, wind strength and direction – he could see the wind vane on the church tower – and state of the sky. So often, the hills above the cottage, which dominated the micro-climate, would be described as misty, especially in winter months.

[8 Feb. 1981] *I suppose that some people would imagine me to be obsessed by the weather. I excuse myself by pointing out the pleasure I obtain by turning back to previous diaries and noting the phenological condition at parallel times.*

In the evenings Allen would often describe the night sky as he walked across the church meadows home, or by a final look from his bedroom window before retiring.

[8 Nov. 1975] *At nearly midnight I looked out of my bedroom window into a starry night – Orion was sharply defined. But I could not pick up*

Halley's Comet (my birthday comet, last seen by my pregnant mother) even though I had my Watson X6 prismatic binocular (1916 vintage – bequeathed to me by my father).

[16 Dec. 1986] *As I approached the village I saw the full moon looking like a monster golden platter perched on the apex of Hollingbourne Hill.*

Several of his interests which regularly featured in his life of retirement can be identified back to his youth including, listening to music on the wireless, playing the organ, singing, walking, botanizing and reading. One new development not to be seen in his youth was television but, interestingly enough, he very often used it to pursue his life-long interest in sport and films. I have found no record of Allen seeing a live film in his retirement, but he did quite frequently record television films often naming the stars. He also liked programmes of literature and the arts.

[20 Oct. 1989] *I saw the obsequies of Lord Olivier in Westminster Abbey. I wonder if any of his myriad audiences missed a word of that marvellous diction. Two memorable interludes at the service – Peggy Ashcroft with Milton's 'Lycidas' (which I so liked as a youth that I committed it to memory and even now in my dotage I quote from it) and Gielgud with John Donne's clash with Death. Concluding bonne-bouche – William Walton's Coronation Te Deum.*

[3 Sept. 1978] *I played the organ at morning prayer at Hollingbourne Church. For preludes and postludes I used music by Maurice Green, Stanford and Wagner. Adrian, our priest, has considerably reduced the musical content of some services – this morning we had no psalms, responses or canticles sung – so I have taken it upon myself to add what flourishes I can.*

[6 April 1980] *I played the organ at Hucking Church for the Communion Service. Perhaps organ is too grand a term for that instrument of torture. Adrian had been informed that it had been refurbished so goodness knows what it had been like before receiving attention. The 'principal' stop had a cipher, whether drawn or not. The pumping of pedals nearly beat me because however hard my legs went up and down I could barely make a sound of any consequence as there was no air pressure.*

[19 July 1980] *Adrian Bell and I drove to St. Margaret's Church, Hucking. We set up the organ (electronic) lent to us by Mrs. Moore. The inhabitants of Hucking will be thunderstruck tomorrow at the patronal festival when I give them the full power of the four stops – bass, piano, honky-tonk and harpsichord.*

[5 Mar. 1983] *I suppose I am old-fashioned in my outlook but I am still*

convinced that since the good Queen's reign England has produced nobody as great as Elgar and Hardy unless it be Vaughan Williams. They were men with depth of feeling for humanity.

[20 Feb. 1982] *Discussion on the various recordings of Vaughan William's Fantasia on a theme by Tallis (1910). If I were asked which two works best revealed the make-up of Englishmen I would without hesitation say the Fantasia and Elgar's Introduction and Allegro for Strings (1905). I am amused that both are of my generation (? Edwardian – I insist that I am such as I was in being on 6th May when Edward VII died).*

Allen's love of music was a strong influence throughout his life and it returned to prominence during his retirement. His organ playing became a permanent feature when he became organist at Hollingbourne Church. The work facilitated and was coincident with another of Allen's great interests, churches. He was by then an acknowledged authority on the history of buildings. His diaries contain numerous pen sketches and plans of timber-framed buildings of Kent. But Allen's favourite building of the landscape was the church, not so much for any religious reasons but rather its ancient fabric and, I suspect, the challenge it gave his investigative and interpretational skills. He often acted as a guide in many local churches and I remember him once telling me there was only one church in Kent that he had been unable to enter to study.

After his retirement Allen tended to record his main meals every day. This would come as no surprise to those who knew him for he was a gourmet and his passion for Chinese food was well known in all corners of Kent. From his early diaries there appears to be little evidence that his palate had become discriminating, although there are entries where he would list his foods and wines following some prestigious event. Later, when he had retired and moved to larger diaries he often took advantage of embellishing the descriptions of his meals with mouth-watering excitement.

One interest of Allen's which grew to become a permanent feature of his retirement was his buying of books. It is no surprise that over the years his library at the cottage became full and eventually jam-packed with volumes.

[20 Jan. 1978] *I seem to have bought an excessive number of books during the last month. But I quell my conscience by remembering that I do not smoke, take drugs, run after loose women or over-indulge in alcohol. I suppose my opiates are reading and listening to music.*

Allen's retirement appeared to have little effect on his involvement with organisations. Aside from those associated with his curatorship,

we can identify from his diaries several organisations where he progressed to the prime position and then became a back-bencher, but he only withdrew from some later in his retirement. Indeed, the time he devoted to such organisations may well have increased, bearing in mind his sustained involvement with the Bearsted and District Local History Society, his becoming a Governor of Hollingbourne School (1977–86), Governor of both Maidstone Grammar Schools (1977–86), Archives Fellowship Committee from July 1984, Member of the Cobtree Charity Trust, and the Hollingbourne Village Preservation Society Committee, President of the Isle of Thanet Archaeological Unit²³ and, from April 1979, a member of Hollingbourne PCC and its Church Fabric Committee.²⁴

[18 July 1980] *To Leeds Castle . . . to discuss whether I should take over the Castle inventory, bring it up-to-date and consult with Sotherby's about real insurance values. I have agreed to do this. A most gentlemanly meeting – no mention of a fee.*

Allen's capacity for work was very great for, in addition to his involvement with numerous organisations, he was continuously being asked to give talks. For several years before and at the commencement of retirement he had organised and managed a series of WEA courses on local history at the Adult Education Centre next to the Museum in St. Faith's St. But throughout his retirement his diaries are full of letters, either pasted in or loose between the pages, of enquiry, appointment and thanks relating to his lectures, from all parts of Kent. Of the many organisations which Allen became involved with, it was the Kent Archaeological Society for which he had the highest regard. When, in 1986, the Members created him their President at the Council's behest, he felt greatly honoured and very pleased. I believe he considered this event a high point in his life of which he was justly proud.

Every year Allen would take advantage of holidays arranged by those organisations to which he belonged, sometimes more than one a year. These packaged holidays, half of which were on the Continent, were full of visits to historic buildings and sites all of which were recorded in considerable detail, complete with information on food, entertainment, transport, hotels, etc. Diary pages devoted to his travels are unmistakable, being full of close-written pen work with the

²³ Resigned 23 May, 1980.

²⁴ On the 9 March, 1980, Allen was asked if he would take the role of Churchwarden at Hollingbourne Church but he refused, considering himself too old.



Fig. 3.

occasional post-card, menu or other memento pasted between the leaves. He thoroughly enjoyed these trips.

Despite all his travels Allen loved his home at Hollingbourne. The front aspect of Manor Cottage was largely hidden from the road by hedges of yew, dogwood and privet on the roadside bank, for there was no pavement here where the road narrowed as it approached the Pilgrims' Way. Steps up from the road brought the visitor under the

open porch, supported by two classical style turned wood pillars. Inside the central hall, were stairs to the bedrooms above, and on each side of the hall, doors, one to the library on the left and the parlour to the right, leading to the kitchen at the back.

The library was full of books from floor to ceiling on every wall except where a Hammond organ stood. A high double-sided bookcase ran down the centre of the room, and on each side the floor was heaped with more books and pamphlets, making it near-impossible to find floor space to browse the shelves. The library reflected Allen's scholarship, especially the humanities of literature and arts together with natural sciences. In one room the printed word, the other crammed with artifacts.

His parlour was as full as his library, dominated by dark wood furniture. In the centre, a seventeenth-century oak refectory table with baluster turned legs and moulded stretchers and beside it an oak bench. Against one wall an old English oak box settle with cresting carved serpents each side of a 1683 date. Against other walls were glazed mahogany bookcases. The room appeared full of treasures small and large of all ages; ceramics, wood, ivory, silver, on the table, the sideboard and on the cabinet shelves. I could never resist inquisitive examination. To a young mind it must have seemed like an Aladdin's cave – to others a small museum.

His diaries show that he continued to buy *objets d'art* and two or more books every month, which were all placed somewhere in his cottage. In truth, Manor Cottage was barely big enough for all his and Eva's belongings when they first moved in, but as time passed it developed an air of congestion absent of a woman's touch.

I feared for Allen and his valuables and several times expressed this to him, expecting that burglars would one day discover his treasures for they had ample opportunity with all his travelling. I thought that a recently retired curator must have surely been high on their list, but it never happened. He seemed very nonchalant about the whole thing and gave no sign of taking any precautions with the exception that the neighbours and nearby friends always knew of his movements and no doubt kept an eye on the cottage. Allen was well looked after.

[25 April 1988] *Caller from Edinburgh got no response, and a local policeman pursued me. Assumed that I lay expiring on a doormat.*

[12 May 1988] *Bought my first microwave. I have at last succumbed to the persuasive arguments of Mary Waters and Aase Temple²⁵ who are quite convinced no home can survive without one.*

²⁵ These ladies were neighbours.

A cottage in the country can have small problems.

[5 Dec. 1980] *Very cold and overcast. Trying to snow in Hollingbourne. This weather brings in mice from outbuildings. One in my trap this morning (House Mouse – Mus musculus).*

[7 Jan. 1983] *This season's no. 3 house mouse caught in the traps.*

[9 Feb. 1989] *Another vole in the trap. I have examined thoroughly, close to, and, fairly certainly, it is a bank vole and not the short-tailed. My example today is over three inches in length and the tail two inches approximately, with a pencil of hairs at its tip. Whiskers nearly an inch long. This specimen likes apple. It was released on the road bank. A fine leap from the jam jar.*

Later in the day. Another bank vole in the trap.

The next day two more were caught and the day after a further two including one Allen describes as 'filling the trap'.

[19 Feb. 1982] *I haven't spoken to a soul all day. I might as well sign on at a Carthusian house. Most of my neighbours are out all day at work – from the crack of dawn until after dark at this time of year. If I want human contact I have to court the postman and milkman.*

[28 May 1984] *Another sorry start to the day, weatherwise, with a sullen leaden sky but brightened up by a mallard and his mate who came and eat breadcrumbs from my front steps.*

[23 Feb. 1985] *Later in the morning whilst I was in the kitchen I heard some ominous sounds and saw there was a crack across the ceiling. A few minutes afterwards half of the ceiling fell down with a mighty noise. Radio Invicta reported an earth tremor along a line from Headcorn, through Hollingbourne and Harrietsham, to the Medway Towns. Pauline Manwell was arranging flowers in Hollingbourne Church and was startled by windows rattling.*

Allen had recorded an earthquake once before long ago.

[7 June 1931] *Earthquake this morning at 1.30. Shaw the West Bromwich seismologist says it was the worst English one on record. I, of course slept through it.²⁶ A woman a street away was thrown out of her bed; yet our landlord, who was sitting writing his accounts, did not notice it.*

[15 Jan. 1978] *I met a jackdaw on the path across the Church Field. He*

²⁶ In the back of his 1980 diary Allen has made a note of other earthquakes which have occurred in Kent. They are, 1 Oct. 1134, 21 May, 1382, 23 April, 1449; 6 April, 1580; 18 Sept., 1692; 18 Feb. 1750; 15 Sept., 1862; and 22 April, 1884.

seemed to be friendly as he followed me along at a respectful distance of two feet from my heels. He then disgraced himself by attacking my shoes.

Allen loved his cottage garden which he developed and filled with his favourite flowers and shrubs. His diaries contain all his plant purchases and gifts and throughout the seasons he would list, invariably with both common and Latin names, all the plants and shrubs in flower. These included:²⁷

Anonyme	Iris reticulata	Roses
Amelanchier	Iris danfordiae	Snowy Mespilus
Bluebells	Iris stylosa	Snowdrops
Broom	Japanese iris	Solomons Seal
Buddleia	Japonica	Spiraea
Candytuft	Kaffir liles	Snowflakes
Ceanothus	Kerria	Squills
Columbine	Ladies Tresses	Trachystemon
Chrysanthemums	Lambs Lettuce	Tamarisk
Christmas roses	Lavendar	Tree peony
Crocuses	Lungwort	Tulips
Chionodoxa	Lilac	Veltheimia
Daffodils	Mahonia	Violets
Dianthus	Marguerites	Veronia
Epimedium	Megasea	Virginia Stock
Forsythia	Muscari	Wallflower
Flags	Nerine	Weigela
Fritillaries	Orientalis	Wood Spurge
Forget-me-not	Philadelphus	Wild rose
Flowering currant	Pilewort	Winter aconite
Greater Celandine	Primrose	Winter jasmine
Hearts Delight	Periwinkle	Wild violets
Helenium	Pansy	Yellow archangel
Hellebore	Primula	Yellow crocus
Incarvillea	Purple flag irises	Yellow loosestrife
Indian Strawberry	Purple hellebore	

²⁷ I have combed these from Allen's diaries and make no apology for listing them. I have done this partly because of Allen being a trained botanist and also because I believe that in some ways the choice of garden plants reflects a person's character, though in truth, I am at a loss to suggest how. Incidentally, his diaries refer to his borders being numbered, nearly twenty of them, though I have not discovered an indexed plan.

The garden also had several trees including sycamore, spindle, willow, a Bramley cooking-apple and a Worcester apple. Vegetables were also grown, including horse radish, potatoes and asparagus, and fruits including Japanese quince, blackberries, loganberries, gooseberries, a Morello cherry and a grape-vine. His garden gave him great pleasure.

[27 May 1984] *Outside all was gloom – grey sky, mist on the Hill and wet underfoot. But when I opened my front door I saw two flower beds glowing with the colours of flag irises, forget-me-nots, bluebells, columbines and shining cranesbills. Above them laburnum and Spek's Yellow blooms.*

[3 Jan. 1979] *My robin, second in command of my garden after me, has hardly left the apples I have put down at the backdoor. Thrushes, blackbirds, hedgesparrows, great tits and sparrows, occasionally are allowed to partake. I have also been distributing currants, sultanas and raisins which disappear immediately. Blackbirds swallow them as if they were pills.*

[4 Feb. 1988] *Let joy be unconfined – one fully-out Iris stylosa flower in my front garden.*

[23 Feb. 1983] *Gnats dancing in the Sun's beams in my garden this afternoon. 'Gnats did whiver' (William Barnes).*

[2 Aug. 1978] *The birds have eaten all the gooseberries and the loganberry has been ruined by aphids dripping from the sycamore. Dug up some new potatoes and picked six kinds of herbs to flavour our turkey (including thyme, marjoram, fennel and chives).*

[6 Jan. 1979] *When I returned home I took a turn round the garden and found that there had been a Witches' Sabbath of rabbits under the Guelder Rose during the snowy weather of the past few days.*

The Downs have always held a special magic for ramblers and botanists. Near to Maidstone, in the parishes of Boxley and Detling, the scarp slope is clad by near-impregnable ancient woodland that has never been touched by man. Moving eastwards along the Pilgrims' Way through Thurnham, the scarp softens and at Hollingbourne, where it is at its highest, it merges into rolling downland. Here above the village the south face of the hills is clad in soft springy turf that has never felt the blade of the plough. In places wild thyme provides a fragrant carpet which perfumes the air and on the more exposed hillsides, where the wind-hover scouts, the yew trees and juniper bushes are wind-clipped. On hot summer days, when the successive horizons of the Weald are lost in the

cobalt blue of the artist's pallet,²⁸ the breezes and thermals of the scarp face can be seen playing with hang-gliders and the kites of children.

Allen loved this environment, never ceasing to observe the beauty and workings of nature. The following extracts have been presented generally in subject rather than chronological order, involving birds and animals, plants, butterflies and food from the wild.

[12 Mar. 1990] *Skylarks singing.*

[5 Sept. 1986] *The upper slope of the hill alive with grasshoppers. I caught about a dozen and let them go having ascertained they were all Chorthippus parallelus.*

[22 Nov. 1981] *Moles on top of Hollingbourne Hill.*

[4 Aug. 1985] *Sparrowhawks on the downland.*

[28 July 1980] *I walked up the Hill and rested awhile above the Chalkpit. As I was returning from the field towards the Bank I spotted a hawk on a stunted hawthorn. It didn't see me. I stood still and at one time was within 20 yards of it. Its colour and habits – flitting from bush to bush – afforded no dispute about it being a Sparrowhawk. From time to time it settled in the long grass – in hopes! A few days later Bob, Christian and Diccon Spain saw a sparrowhawk on the Hill and identified it as such.*

[18 May 1989] *Little Owl in High Wood.*

[11 Nov. 1978] *I saw a car-squashed hedgehog and rat and a live weasel all on the Pilgrims' Way.*

[24 June 1977] *Sandy and I went for a walk over the S.W. slope of Hollingbourne Hill this morning. Saw some more lizards but they are too wily for me to catch. They lie sunbathing on the dried rough grass and quickly disappear into the thick tussocks on feeling vibrations.*

[18 Feb. 1983] *Saw a hare on the south side of High Wood.*

[17 July 1983] *A leveret in Bicknor Park.*

[12 May 1980] *On the way to Tudor House, Bearsted, this morning I walked through a swarm of bees at Whiteheath (by the Old Hollingbourne Workhouse). No harm done to me possibly because I smelt like a friend.*

[15 Feb. 1980] *I went for a walk to Old Mill Farm by the River Len. On the way there I saw a splendid sight – about two hundred lapwings wheeling over Beale-Poste's Bronze Age tumulus.*

[31 Aug. 1980] *I started to walk to Langley . . . My first find was a newly dead Pipistrelle Bat on the stretch of road between Joan*

²⁸ When a rising or setting sun tints the landscape a suffusion of scarlet lake or vermillion occurs.

Richardson's cottage and Hollingbourne Corner. Then a decaying kestrel corpse near the Leeds Road (Len bridge) entrance to Leeds Castle. At the bottom of Portobello Hill, Langley, a youngish hedgehog was trying to commit suicide by crossing the road so I gathered it up in my handkerchief, threw it back over the hedge and hoped that the shock would make it amend its ways.

[15 Aug. 1982] *A young man rang my doorbell and asked whether he might use my telephone for a 999 call, on behalf of another handglider [sic] who had crashed by the large chalkpit on Hollingbourne Hill.*

[25 Apr. 1985] *By the stile south of Frogshole Farm I rested a while and a stoat almost tripped over my foot. He was intent on running down to the Farm and missed seeing me. Cowslips on the slopes.*

[1 Sept. 1979] *As I turned into the northern end of Drake's Lane I had the good fortune to see a stoat chancing on a rabbit. The stoat spotted me – and so lost the rabbit.*

[24 May 1981] *We went almost to Eden's Hole and then came back via the Chalk Pit . . . On the way, in the large field, we saw a live adder. Joyce wanted to kill it but I would not allow her to do so.*

[9 Aug. 1981] *I learnt that whilst I was on holiday in Durham Julie (the dog) had been bitten by an adder – apparently the self same adder which had frightened her last 24 May (subsequently Nicky killed it). She was bitten on the left side of her mouth. Julie had to have treatment.*

[9 Sept. 1980] *Dozens of swallows on the power cables by the Station. They are probably replete with our complete fiasco of a climate and eagerly awaiting a northerly wind to blow them South.*

[10 Feb. 1980] *. . . walked by a circuitous route to Eden's Hole. Several men were working the warren at the foot of the glider slope so we gave them a wide berth in order to allow their ferrets full scope.*

[4 Oct. 1981] *On Hollingbourne Station this morning I saw a cream coloured ferret. Query – an escape from the rabbit hunting expeditions which I see occasionally on the North Downs?*

[15 Nov. 1981] *We flushed a barn owl from a yew at the south west corner of the large chalkpit field.*

[16 Mar. 1987] *Walked at modest speed to the top of Hollingbourne Hill. The recent snow has brought down the steep roadside banks and revealed a section at the top of the chalk. One particular clear example with a band of reddish marl under the top layer of clay-with-flints. The fields north of Hollingbourne House have been recently ploughed down into this layer or a Lenham Bed lenticle and show up a striking red amidst the normal soil. After geology I switched to Botany. I continued my observation on *Arum maculatum* L. and noticed but half-a-dozen spotted-leaf examples. There is considerable variation in the shape of the leaf lobes.*

On the hill running down to Broad Street the western banks below the large beeches (the roots of which run almost to the road) I looked for truffles but found none.

Notes at the back of the 1971 Diary.

During a re-reading of Andre Lannay's Caviare and After p. 77 I noted the following about truffles:

'In England a variety has been found with no aroma at all, which is, however, edible, and, in olden-times, truffle-hunting was a recognized pastime. The late Lord Winchelsea employed trained hogs, muzzled, to hunt for truffles over the chalk lands of Kent, and during the war truffled dishes served in some Soho restaurants were the outcome of exhausting excursions to Epping and Hainault'.

Soon after I obtained the curatorship of Maidstone Museum in 1948 I found the truffle (black and of golf-ball size) where the bank of the road has slipped on the chalk escarpment above Hollingbourne.

[24 June 1989] By the stile above Frogshole Farm is as good a patch of typical chalk flora as one is likely to find anywhere in the County.

[20 Mar. 1989] I walked via the Pilgrims' Way and Frogshole to High Wood. Bramble, wild Rose, Hawthorn and Wayfaring Tree all bursting into leaf. High Wood was dominated by a six-inch-or-so-high carpet of Dogs Mercury with plenty of bluebells (some containing a burgeoning flower head amongst the leaves). Hardly a fern to be seen. In the woods gnats pirouetting in the Sun's rays.

[1 May 1987] The Pilgrims' Way was bright with the whiteness of the flowers of white dead nettle hedge garlic and cow parsley helped out by the wayfaring tree, greater celandine, herb robert and greater stitchwort for variety.

[8 May 1987] From the beginning both sides of the pathway were girded with ground ivy until along the Allington Farm track the bluebells take over. Wordsworth's daffodils for me would take second place to the colour sensation from a coppice of bluebells next to a field of glowing, yellow rape. There were two highlights on my walk – finding a small colony of early purple orchids and winking out a common lizard. Slope of the North Downs covered with cowslips – a thrilling sight.

[14 May 1985] A fine sight looking towards Upper Street from High Wood – patches of yellow rape flowers, green burgeoning trees and the white blossom of plums and cherries.

[24 May 1986] The banks of the Pilgrims' Way are white with the flowers of Chervil (Cow Parsley or Wild Chervil) and Jack-by-the-Hedge sprinkled with the red of Herb Robert and the Dandelions' yellow. The Ash breaking out with leaf. Most of the Hawthorns are still without buds so the month is surely going to end with the wise amongst

us casting no clouts. The spindles' buds are no longer than a peppercorn.

[27 June 1987] *The hedges white with elder, white campion, bladder campion, Dog roses, Hogweed, Dogwood and White Dead Nettle – tintured with the yellow of buttercup, the red of Field Poppies, the purple of Woody Nightshade and the dark mauve of Hedge Woundwort.*

[7 Aug. 1983] *The neighbourhood of Hollingbourne is golden with fields of corn. Barley has been partly abandoned and wheat takes its place. Oats appear only as a casual rogue.*

[1 July 1987] *I went up Drake's Lane today to 'the Target' chalkpit. I saw about thirty orchids – approximately ten pyramid orchids and twenty fragrant – some of them splendid specimens.*

[26 May 1985] *Birds nest orchid (Neottia nidus quis.) seen.*

[5 June 1985] *Man Orchid at the junction of Pilgrims' Way and Drake's Lane.*

[20 June 1986] *D. Fuchsii*

Dactyborhiza fuchsii

Fragrant orchis Gynadenia canopsea.

[26 June 1985] *We toiled up Drake's Lane to the plateau of High Wood and then stayed a while with the Twayblades and the group of orchids (fuchsii) by the Frogshole stile.*

[13 Aug. 1986] *The richness of the chalk downs is inclined sometimes to give me a surfeit's indigestion. Today the large whites made a cloud over the creeping thistle.*

Allen often recorded the butterflies and moths which frequented the hills above his cottage. These included:

Large Bombi	Six-spotted Barnet
Speckled Woods	Marbled Whites
Meadow Browns	Small Skippers
Small Heaths	Large Skippers
Small Tortoiseshells	Peacock
Brown Argus	Large White
Painted Lady (Garden)	Orange Tips
Red Admiral	Brimstones
Common Blue	Ringlet
Graylings	Walls
Gatekeeper	

Every year when nature yielded its wild food, Allen would go on 'Autumn fruits' expeditions and 'fungi forages' as he used to call them.

[7 July 1982] *On the slope up to Eden's Hole marbled white butterflies were in plenty and in numbers totally outstripped the few large whites,*

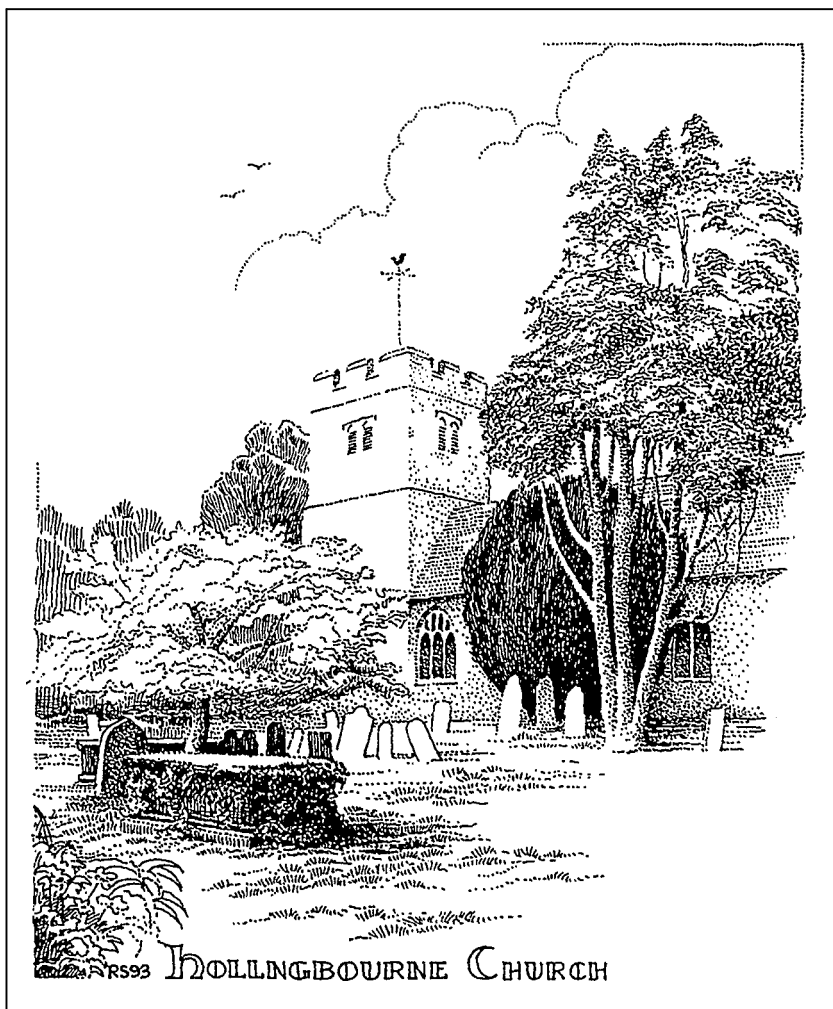


Fig. 4.

ringlets, small heaths and meadowbrowns. There were about half a dozen small tortoiseshells at the hilltop but their caterpillars in hundreds were eating the nettles there. I brought about a dozen back to my garden and placed them on the nettles and hoped they would do a good job for me.

[16 Oct. 1978] Nature was slightly aloof this morning but still decorative with plenty of centaury, yellow wort and scabious. Several partridges about and one small tortoiseshell.

[9 July 1982] . . . I then climbed the slope above the south side of Frogshole. The patch of ground between the stile and High Wood is virtually untouched grassland at about 500 feet. It is packed full of centaury, blackstonia, ragwort, St. John's wort and other chalk plants and alive now with butterflies.

[12 Oct. 1982] This morning I went along the path by the Hollingbourne Church tower I was entranced by the sight of literally hundreds of spiders webs embellished with dew. They were on the yew hedges bordering the path and gave a little idea of the numbers of arachnids who keep down the fly population and earn our thanks.

[10 Sept. 1985] Chalkpit and downland, my two special terrains . . . where the hazel nuts normally are in plenty and in the butterfly glade where the blackberry bushes have inch-long fruits.

[1 Nov. 1983] I walked via Frogshole to High Wood. I had a small tasting of edible chestnuts there.

[4 Sept. 1978] Water Lane delayed my swift progress as there were blackberries and dewberries to pick in plenty. But only four hazelnuts – hardly a feast. I don't agree with David McClintock and Fitter who say that the dewberry's fruit is insipid. The only snag is that the fruit does not come away easily from the 'never turned down' sepals.

[5 Sept. 1979] As it was such a delightfully sunny afternoon I took a book and walked to the topside of the field above Little Allington Farm. A Common Lizard enjoyed the sun with me. The brambles at this height (approximately 550 feet) are not yet ripe. Nor are the hazelnuts – I sampled some half-dozen and found them wanting. The only birds I saw were yellowhammers. The butterfly population has again changed – whites, blues, small coppers but no peacocks or tortoiseshells.

[28 Oct. 1979] The chestnuts and damsons between the Magpie Caves and the Old Mill Farm provided me with some provender, and near Brogden the hedges yielded me with plenty of ripe, nutty blackberries.

[9 Oct. 1985] I went on an 'autumn fruits' expedition to High Wood via Frogshole. As such it was a failure as I found no hazelnuts or chestnuts only a handful of blackberries and a half-a-dozen young puffballs for frying.

[15 Oct. 1980] I walked up the Hill and along to Eden's Hole. It was a profitable journey because I collected a pocketful of hazel nuts, some beech nuts, black wild plums, sloes and a large bunch of spindle branches, bearing fruits.

[23 Sept. 1978] Blackberries, ripe in plenty on all the route. I sampled many of them and was amazed at the variety of flavours which Nature gives them. Texture too adds to their attractiveness.

[23 Oct. 1986] Field mushrooms picked.

[26 April 1979] The wet weather has brought on the Jew's Ears on fallen Elder. I picked a bag of them for my supper and added them together with cultivated mushrooms to chicken soup. Delicious!

[18 Jan. 1989] . . . a clump of *Agaricus bisporus* which I will have for my supper. They are delicious with a slice of bacon.

[5 Dec. 1989] Picked *Clitocybe geotropa* *Quei* for supper – three of.

[23 May 1985] At 0900 I took Julie (the neighbour's dog) along the Pilgrims' Way eastward as far as Drake's Lane crossing. Whilst I was looking for the white helleborine I came across two large specimens of *Morchella esculenta* which later formed the foundation of my mid-day meal.

Occasionally, Allen would touch on religion in his diary but more often, especially in later life, we have insights into his personal philosophy.

The first extract given below shows that he was intelligently questioning this subject for most of his life.

[23 Feb. 1931] *An anthropomorphic God which is about all this world thinks God to be can neither be impressed nor gratified by hearing and seeing millions praying to him. I should not be surprised if thunder should turn out to be ironical & dispirited laughter.*

[27 Mar. 1970] *Good Friday. Eva and I went into the Town and found that there was not much regard for the sanctity of the day. Many shops open and queues outside Sainsbury's in Gabriels Hill. I was reminded of the money lenders in the Temple.*

[19 Feb. 1983] *I was tempted into buying 'The Cloud of Unknowing' as I was attracted to the sentence 'you know well that God is a spirit, and that whoever would be made one with him must be in truth and in depth of spirit far removed from any misleading bodily thing'.*

[27 May 1982] *In my reading during the past week I found in George Orwell's 'The Collected Essays' the following which I think would serve me well for an epitaph or a description:*

'So long as I remain alive and well I shall continue to feel strongly about prose style, to love the surface of the earth, and to take pleasure in solid objects and scraps of useless information.'

[18 Jan. 1985] *J.B.S. (JBS Haldane's book Fact and Faith) would probably have regarded me as a hypocrite as I go to church without much faith except in the historic goodness of Jesus and in the doctrine of Love as it affects mankind. I also attend because I like music, ecclesiastical architecture and the company of other human beings. Like JBS I agree that religion is 'a very important social phenomenon'. I think that there is a concept of God which changes from generation to generation, possibly in an evolutionary way. At long last intelligent people do not believe in a bearded figure sitting on a celestial throne.*

[4 Sept. 1983] *It astonishes me that in 1983 so many people still*

believe in an anthropomorphic God instead of in an idea, continually being evolved.

[2 March 1985] *'The days of my youth left me long ago;
And now in their turn dwindle my years of prime.
With what thoughts of sadness and loneliness
I walk again in this cold deserted place!
In the midst of the garden long I stand alone;
The sunshine, faint; the wind and dew chill.'*
[Po Chu-I, AD. 812]

[10 Dec. 1986] *Started reading Barbellion's Journal. I like his 'During the past twelve months I have undergone an upheaval, and the whole bias of my life has gone across from the intellectual to the ethical. I know that goodness is the chief thing.'*

I always thought that Allen followed the principles of a humanist, living an honest meaningful life without following a formal religious creed, having respect for others irrespective of class, race or creed and having faith in man's intellect and spiritual resources.

[In front of the 1990 Diary]

*I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
And nothing, not God,
is greater to one than one's self is. . .*
[Walt Whitman]

[1 Oct. 1978] *Meditation and relaxation are relatively useless unless they are connected with Love and the Heaven we must find in ourselves.*

[23 Sept. 1983] *On a gravestone in Evesham Abbey churchyard,
To Anne wife of James Grove died 9 December 1773 aged 63
Afflictions sore long time I bore
Physicians were in Vain
Till death gave ease and God did please
To free me from my pain.*

[4 Sept. 1978] *I have a theory that Christians would do much better if they seriously tackled the sentence 'The Kingdom of God is within you.' To my mind that is Jesus's greatest contribution to the History of Religion. 'There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man' St. Mark, vij.15.*

[15 Oct. 1988] *I am coming to believe that you enter heaven when Death relieves you of pain, fear and trouble and much more besides.*

In October 1987 Allen entered hospital to have an operation and was back in again for another in December.

[28 Nov. 1988] *My 78th birthday for which I am profoundly and sincerely grateful (at lasting so long) has come and gone. So away to the 79th!*

[23 Feb. 1979] . . . *Like me he does not fear death for himself but only for others. . .*

On the first day of January 1990 Allen wrote that he was very ill suffering bad stomach disorders and spasms and wrote:

When I am really ill I begin seriously to consider my religious position. For several years past I have taken the stance that I must follow Charles Darwin and see where an evolutionary view of God is taking me.

During late 1989 and early in 1990 his health deteriorated and further tests were undertaken. In June 1990 Allen's doctor visited him at his cottage to tell him he had cancer of the liver. On the same day he learnt of the birth of a baby to a friend and wrote '*so one comes into the world and another prepares to depart*'.

His last diary entry, of music, was dated 27th June, 1990. He moved to his relations in Bromley where he died a few days later. Beside him were found love letters that he had sent his wife years ago.

Hollingbourne Church was full of his friends who witnessed his last journey on Friday, 27 July, 1990. Here he rested for a while in the chancel, clad in oak, close to the organ where he toiled so often.

*Once more the cauldron of the sun
Smears the bookcase with winy red,
And here my page is, and there my bed,
And the apple-tree shadows travel along.
Soon their intangible track will be run,
And dusk grow strong
And they have fled.*

*Yes: now the boiling ball is gone,
And I have wasted another day . . .
But wasted – wasted, do I say?
Is it a waste to have imagined one
Beyond the hills there, who, anon,
My great deeds done,
Will be mine alway?*

'*The Sun on the Bookcase*' by Thomas Hardy, 1870.