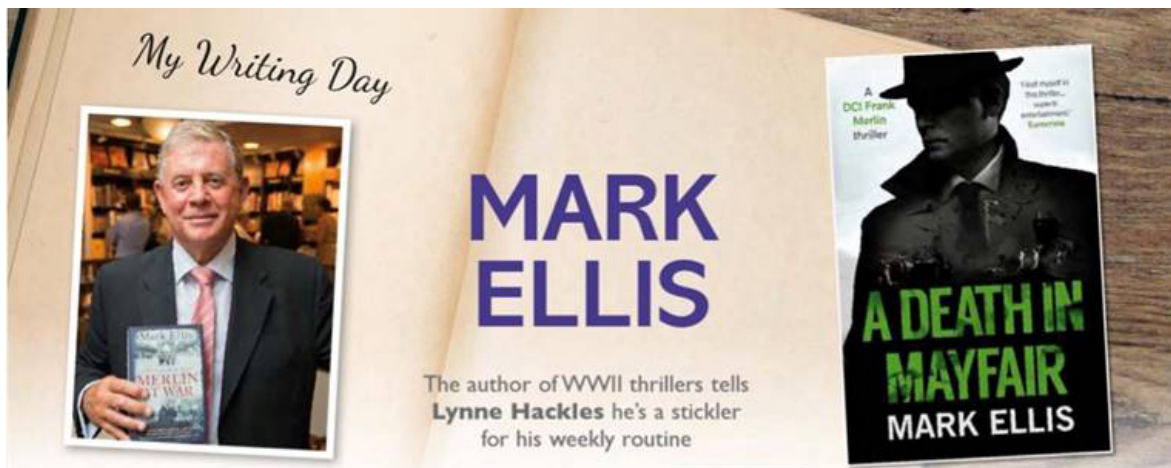


MARK ELLIS

CREATOR OF WORLD WAR II DETECTIVE, FRANK MERLIN

Lynne Hackles, Writing Magazine



Mark Ellis is a thriller writer from Swansea, and the creator of WWII detective Frank Merlin.

'When I was about thirteen an English teacher encouraged me and I wrote stories up until I finished in university,' Mark says.

'Thereafter I had careers as a barrister, a merchant banker, a corporate executive and as an entrepreneur (co-founded a computer services company). I didn't write while working as I was too busy but I always harboured the ambition of writing at some point. Eventually, when the computer business was sold to an American company, I had the time to do so and made writing my priority.

'I've a set routine from Monday through to Friday. Each day begins at 7.30 when I take my son to catch the school bus. For an hour after that you'll find me at the gym. Breakfast is at 9.15 and by 9.30 I'm writing. I allow myself a lunch hour from 1.30 to 2.30 then I start writing once more. I stop around 4pm and go to collect my son from the school bus at 4.30. My evenings are free.

'I do a lot of research before starting my books. When I do start writing I am wholly committed. The first draft is written in longhand in an A4 notebook. I do this Monday to Friday then over the weekend I transfer the week's output onto Word.

'I set myself a target number of words per week, usually 6,000, and generally hit that target. I spend a lot of time on social media, an hour a day perhaps, and sometimes more. I don't really blog at any length but I post things to do with my book and reviews of other people's books.

I'm reasonably well organised but sometimes feel the need to do more edits than I really have time for.

'When I need a change of scene, I go to Kensington Public Library, which is a ten-minute walk away and has a nice atmosphere. I'm also a member of the London Library but only go there very occasionally as the hour round trip journey from home eats too much into my working day.


'When it comes to promoting my work I enjoy going to crime book festivals, Crimefest, for example. I'll also do bookshop signings. Last year I went to the Crickhowell Book Festival and was on a panel with some other Welsh crime writers. As well as being a member of Crime Cymru and the CWA, (Crime Writers' Association) I belong to the HWA (Historical Writers' Association), the Society of Authors and ITW (International Writers Association based in America). I go to some events organised by these groups but if I went to them all I'd never have time to write.

'I'm engaged in writing a series of books about Frank Merlin, a London Scotland Yard detective in WWII London. The latest book is the fourth in the series and I'm already at work on the fifth. My aim is to take Merlin through to the end of the war. *A Death In Mayfair* is set in December 1941 so I have a way to go. The first three books were set respectively in January 1940, September 1940, and June 1941. Contrary to what many people think, WWII was a boom time for criminals with the black-out, the black market, rampant gang activity and prostitution, and an overstretched police force.

'*A Death In Mayfair*, published by Headline, revolves around the death of a glamorous film star, Laura Curzon,



whose body is found on the pavement beneath her Mayfair apartment, an apparent suicide. A mile away the body of a strangled young girl is discovered in the rubble of a bombed out building. Merlin and his team investigate, encountering fraudulent film moguls, philandering movie stars, depraved Satanists and brutal gangsters as they battle through a wintry London in pursuit of the truth.

'When I started the series I'd spend time in the Kew Public Records Office, reading old newspapers and other wartime sources. Now, pretty much everything can be found on the internet or the considerable library of WWII history books, biographies and diaries I've built up. Sometimes I travel to places like Moscow or Warsaw to get a bit of atmosphere and do on-the-spot research. I begin writing after several weeks of researching a specific period – December 1941 for the latest book. I usually have an idea but don't plan the story. I start and see where my pen takes me.' 

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Writing place

'I have three principal writing places – our London home, Kensington Public Library and our French home. In our London home in Kensington, there's a studio at the end of the garden. It's where I do most of my writing. I've a comfortable chair and desk on a mezzanine level which gives me a pleasant view of the back of our house across the garden. We're lucky enough to have another home in Provence where we spend around three months each year. When I'm there I often write in the open at a long bench table, trying to ignore the alluring sea view.'