

ILLINGWORTH, LESLIE GILBERT (1902 - 1979), political cartoonist

Name: Leslie Gilbert Illingworth

Date of birth: 1902

Date of death: 1979

Parent: Richard Frederick Illingworth

Parent: Helen Illingworth (née MacGregor)

Gender: Male

Occupation: political cartoonist

Area of activity: Art and Architecture; Politics, Government and Political Movements

Author: Chris Williams

Leslie Illingworth was born on 2 September 1902 in Harbour Road, Barry, the youngest son of Richard Illingworth, a quantity surveyor from Cheshire, and his wife Helen (née MacGregor), a teacher from Yorkshire. Uncle Frank Illingworth was a minor cartoonist who published in *Punch* in 1914. The family moved in 1904 to Cadoxton, where Illingworth attended Palmerston Road Infants School. In 1912 they moved again to Gileston in the Vale of Glamorgan and he attended St Athan School, subsequently winning scholarships to Barry County Boys' School (where a contemporary was Ronald Niebour, later to work as 'Neb' as a fellow cartoonist alongside Illingworth), and then to the City of Cardiff Technical College.

By 1920 Illingworth was working in the lithographic department of the *Western Mail*, and began to draw sketches and sporting cartoons for its sister publication the *Football Express*. When J. M. Staniforth, venerated as 'the Welsh Tenniel', died in 1921 Illingworth took over as the *Western Mail's* political cartoonist, and worked on and off for the *Mail* until 1927. Although as a young man he held socialist views, reading Marx and Engels, he was reconciled to drawing to the *Mail's* political line, and continued to work through the General Strike of 1926, stating later 'I knew which side of my bread was buttered'.

During the 1920s and into the 1930s Illingworth combined political cartooning with freelance work, drawing for a range of London publications including the *Strand*, *London Opinion*, *Punch* and *Tit-Bits*, studying at the Slade School of Fine Art, and travelling to Paris and to the United States. From 1925 living in St Athan, in 1936 he left Wales permanently, moving to London. In 1939 he replaced 'Poy' (P. H. Fearon) as political cartoonist with the *Daily Mail*, a position he continued to hold until 1969. By the time he joined the *Mail* Illingworth no longer held radical views. Seeing himself as a lower middle-class man drawing for a lower middle-class readership, he was aligned with the *Mail's* right-wing editorial stance, and his work preached to the converted rather than trying to challenge their prejudices.

During the Second World War Illingworth served in the Home Guard and as an anti-aircraft gunner in Hyde Park. On the death of Bernard Partridge in 1945 he became second cartoonist at *Punch*, and then principal cartoonist in 1949. He continued to draw for the weekly magazine until 1968. From 1940 until 1963 he lived in Knightsbridge with his housekeeper and companion Enid Ratcliff, later moving to Horley in Sussex. He never married. He was voted political and social

cartoonist of the year by the Cartoonists' Club of Great Britain in 1962, was first President of the British Cartoonists' Association in 1966 and received an honorary doctorate from the University of Kent in 1975. He appeared on BBC Radio's *Desert Island Discs* programme in 1963. He continued to work sporadically up to 1976 for the *News of the World* and the *Sun*. He died in hospital in Hastings on 20 December 1979.

Unlike many major cartoonists of the time, Illingworth did not publish collections of his work, although more than seventy of his *Daily Mail* cartoons appeared in a 1944 compilation volume and the American cartoonist and cartoon historian Draper Hill celebrated Illingworth's career in *Illingworth on Target* (1970). A large collection of Illingworth's work has been made digitally available by the National Library of Wales.

Retaining a pronounced Glamorgan accent, no-one could mistake Illingworth for anything other than a Welshman, and he was the inspiration for the Welsh farmer 'Organ Morgan' in Wally Fawkes's 'Flook' comic strip. Yet there was little of Wales in Illingworth's work for *Punch* and the *Daily Mail*. He did not invent any national stereotype or everyman figure and displayed no sympathy for leading Welsh figures in politics, such as [Aneurin Bevan](#), whom he loathed, far preferring Winston Churchill.

A fine and powerful draughtsman, Illingworth exercised less control over his subject matter than most leading cartoonists, with his editors often choosing the topic he was asked to illustrate. Malcolm Muggeridge, for five years his editor at *Punch*, felt that although Illingworth was not 'a political animal, and has little or no spirit of partisanship where politicians and their policies are concerned, yet he reacts profoundly to a political situation seen as part of the drama of life' ('Introduction' to *Illingworth on Target*, 6). Illingworth's doughty, patriotic Second World War cartoons, when almost all enemies were without rather than within, are the most effective monument to his art. 'The Combat' (*Punch*, 6 November 1939), depicting a single Spitfire fighter aircraft preparing to engage an enormous bestial representation of Nazi Germany, remains an evocative reminder both of the existential nature of that conflict, and of the important role assumed by political cartoonists in stiffening public resolve during its most difficult phases.

Author

Chris Williams

Sources

NLW: [Illingworth Collection](#)

400 famous cartoons by 5 famous cartoonists: Neb, Lee, Moon, Gittins, Illingworth, from the Daily Mail, The Evening News, Sunday Dispatch (London 1944)

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Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Leslie Illingworth](#)

Additional Links

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