

"My Christmases were not quite so good because we were in business. My Father and brothers had the horse and the cart to deliver the parcels then. They used to hire that horse and cart to deliver. We didn't have our Christmas till later in the evening so we could all be together. But I still had a stocking filled with some things . . . some nuts in the toe and there was chocolate and any little toys that were going. I had a lovely toy doll and pram one year . . . I wasn't very motherly at that time I used to let the other children play with it".

We didn't have stockings. We used to have parcels on the end of our bed. It was terrible because you would wake up and feel, but you weren't allowed to put any lights on yet. As we got older my Mother thought it was all a bit much, so we had 2 or 3 presents upstairs and the rest put in various points around the room, and we weren't allowed to open them till we had our breakfast.

My favourite toy was a 2/6 ¼d shop, with two bottles full of sweets, and scales, and then when they were gone my Mother used to fill them with rice and raisins.

My Grandmother called me. "Come here I've got something for you," and I went up. It was a great toy doll like that but it was all undressed; it had a straw body and a wax face, and all the rest was sawdust, filled with sawdust and all with straw. I went back home and showed my Mother, we were only about 6 doors away. She gave me a shawl to wrap round it and I sat down in front of the fire and 'sat it up' and put it to sleep, singing to it in a way. Then I looked and I screamed, 'Mummy, quick come 'ere,' she said "What," and I said "Look at my dolly" . . . and it had all melted, all melted all on the shawl and everything . . . It was a big one 'cos my Mother was going to dress it, see for Christmas.

I can't remember presents . . . didn't have the money to buy them. Well, a friend of where Bet worked — she worked in a factory — and he made — do you remember the wooden Indian he made — they got the wood from somewhere and they made this big Indian man. It was as big as this table — to give to David for Xmas. Bob brought him home — he had a fort made in the army and he brought it all the way home from — I think he was up in Newcastle, and then he didn't play with it. They're the things that sticks out in my mind . . .

I remember Dad saving up to get us a gramophone, but he was saving up cigarette coupons, Ardath cigarettes. He nearly smoked himself to death trying to get enough coupons, as he'd promised us a gramophone, you know, a windup one. He was really smoking till he dropped. We got it!

I remember one year, I thought I wasn't getting many presents and I was feeling very upset about it. My Father had been very busy building a rabbit hutch outside and I didn't take much notice of this. And I saw this very small pile of presents and I began to feel terribly sorry for myself. Then came this colossal doll's house which he'd made. It transpired that this was what he'd been building, I hadn't a clue that that was going on. It was so big that when we moved we had to get it out through a window.

Do you remember the large decorated tins of biscuits? If you put 2 or 3 together you got a model fort.

We used to wear a white blouse with a sailor collar and a pair of short trousers, well actually they were long only as you got taller they got shorter. That was our best Sunday suit — we never wore that any other time, only on Sundays and Christmas Day and we used to have straw boaters.

We were a big family, there was eight of us children. Christmas Day was a day when your parents said everybody had to be there. You could do what you liked after Christmas dinner but we all had to have that together. On Boxing Day we carried on just the same but if you wanted to go out on Boxing Day, you could. But Christmas Day was special. I think that was the same with every family.



A cousin brought me a beautiful doll and all the clothes were hand made — night dress and everything — really a beautiful doll, I called her name Molly. We had Christmas pudding with money in it. We always had to save it. I used to like painting, and used to spend Christmas afternoon painting, Christmas cards, holly and so on.

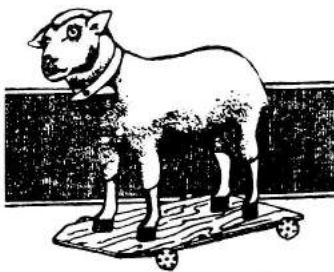
We used to hang black stockings up and find a newly minted penny in there in the morning. We had an apple and an orange, a bit of coal, some chestnuts. We had a new white pinafore every Christmas, and we used to go and show them off to other children in the Street.

I remember I was getting dressed, and I couldn't find my socks and I looked under the bed and to my surprise I found a pound note under there. Well, I put that in my pocket and went off to school. I called in at Jo-Ann's, a shop in Blackwall Lane that was a stationers, and they had those torches which had slides on the top. They were 1/3d each, complete with battery, so I bought 3, one for me, one for Frankie and Ronnie my 2 cousins.

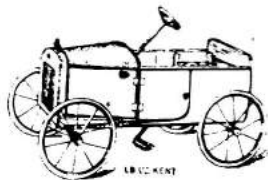
I bought 1/2lb slab of Peter's chocolate, and gave some to Frankie and Ronnie. Anyway, I was caught in school eating and the teacher confiscated them. I got them back later, though.

What I didn't know was that Frankie and Ronnie had been home and told my sister-in-law where they got the torches from. So, whilst I'm playing in the street she's made a visit to my home, and the truth is out. The pound note, it transpired belonged to my brother who'd missed it some weeks earlier and assumed he'd lost it elsewhere. My Father said to my brother Charlie: "Give him a bloody good hiding" and Charlie said: "I've got a better punishment for him. He's had his Christmas presents. He won't get anything else". I was ordered to bed straight away. I'd rather have had the good hiding and got it over with.

By the time Christmas came, I really believed I was going to get nothing, but I did. The proverbial stocking was full up with toffees, apples and oranges. I got an 'O' shaped meccano set, from my brother Charlie.



Animals on Wheels, a large assortment. **6d.**



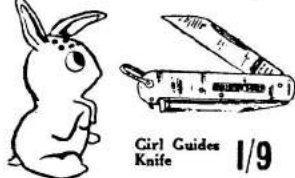
The 'Kent' Motor. A low built, speedy looking Auto, with side door, metal radiator, motor, two side lamps, instrument board and adjustable seat. **44/3**



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Girl Guides Knife **1/9**

Going back to presents, the pencil box that swivelled open at the top, or the Japanese one with the sliding back roller lid, brightly coloured like a shutter. Also "Girls Crystal" was a book, and also a magazine, paint boxes — otherwise it would have been underwear, which was strictly necessary or socks which were always wearing out. They were wrapped in decorated paper, but not as lavish as now.

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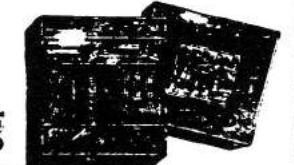
Gramophone. Reliable models, compare with all others. Large range of tones. **3/6, 5/6, 7/11, 16/6, 23/9, 32/9, 38/9, 51/9**



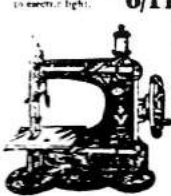
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At the age of five just before I was due to go to school, I was scalded from my toes to my stomach, and I spent a year in bed, which included the Christmas. What I particularly wanted was a Jack-in-a-box, and I got a Jack-in-a-box, only when I opened it, it was like a monkey's head and it popped up only about 2 inches, and I had wanted one like in the comics, that came up high — and I was most disappointed.

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Christmas Fayre

We used to take our meat to the bakers because it was too big for the oven. The food was tastier then. Pig's fry — liver with fat round it. It was lovely. Bottle of whisky 12/6. There were chittlings too — pig's insides! Chicken. H-Bone of Beef 4d a pound. We used to give a shilling a week into a fund and then draw it out. Loan Clubs or Slate Clubs they were called, many a time someone ran off with the money!

Another thing Mother did, I would love to have the recipe, was Ginger Wine. She made it from her own recipe from things she bought from Boots and sugar. It was made in one of those washstand bowls, it was made by the gallon in that, and that would be our drink and it was beautiful.

I do remember that there was a butcher in the High street — he was more a less a benefactor to the poor people in that area. We used to pay six pence a week from early June to December and at the end of the year that bought an H-bone of beef — six pence a week worked out at about 14/6 or 15/-. Sometimes we got as a supper a small turkey and an H-bone of beef.



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Fresh poultry was all you got in those days. Ours were usually drawn by an uncle who came to stay, as Dad didn't relish the job.

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Dripping — there used to be lots over and the kids used to make themselves sick on it! We used to have Nestles' Milk on our bread, or a sauce sandwich.

I remember having cake at Christmas and it had plenty of spice and flavour. It was years later that I discovered that it was bread pudding or currant duff. If you got one of them you was dead lucky.

My mother used to make the lemonade wine-elderberry and dandelion . . . parsnip, rhubarb. She never used to have any herself . . . not when we were kids. I don't think we used to have a bottle of lemonade.

Every year the parents used to send the kids to get a jug full of ale, and this particular Christmas the youngest went. Well, after a while he came back and said "I'm sorry, Ma, I've broken the jug", but instead of the jug, all he had in his hand was the handle!

Our best days was Christmas Day I think; we had the left-overs on Boxing Day — the joint and the vegetables and all that, bubble and squeak and pickles — course my father made his own pickles so we were lucky then.

Sometimes you'd ask your neighbours in to come and have a drink at Christmas, if you were lucky, mostly beer. You did used to hear of people getting drunk Christmas Day — it was good stuff then, beer was beer — it was good and strong. The children used to get one of those big hard-looking biscuits — arrowroot biscuits they'd give you, that with a glass of lemonade and say, "We won't be a moment, we're just going out for a drink."

For a half a crown we used to be able to get a big quart bottle of Tarragona port, and then they used to buy a small barrel of beer and you used to have a lovely party with that.

Christmas Puddings

We helped Mum make the Christmas puddings well before Xmas, always looking forward to stirring the pudding and having a wish.

Mum and Auntie were busy making the stuffing for the chicken or turkey and getting it ready for the oven. The Christmas pudding was heated up and mince pies also.

My uncle always poured brandy over the Christmas pudding and set it alight which was a bit scary for us when we were young, but as he had been a waiter at a hotel in London he thought it was the thing to do.

There was the Christmas pudding which mother give us the job of stoning the big raisin. Of course one went in the dish and one went in our mouth — which we all did — but of course she wasn't looking. But on the whole they was good Christmases — really happy Christmases.

Every Christmas the old bloke used to knock out the Christmas puddings. He couldn't do them at work so he used to do it of an evening. He used to boil the pudding in the big copper pots. One Christmas, however, he had a little drop too much out of the barrel, and the water boiled away while he was asleep. In the morning there was hell to pay. We enjoyed that Christmas but I don't think the old man did!

Christmas puddings always had to have 3 penny pieces in, and I still possess those 3 penny pieces.

My Father was a sea-faring man and he was often away. One year we had a Christmas pudding that my Mother made and he went away and said: "We'll divide it up into 4 pieces". There was one for my Mother, one for him, one for my brother and one for me. Well time went by and I began to sneak to the cupboard and cut a little slice off for myself, just a little at a time. Anyway, my Father came home, and since he never asked for his slice I thought he mustn't want it, so I began taking little slices off his slice till one day, in fact, Christmas Day, the pudding was called for, and there was hardly anything left of his or mine. I wasn't allowed any more pudding that Christmas!

We used to put half a pint of stout in the Christmas pudding to make it go black, and then put a little brandy on it to make it go on fire.

*Ginger Wine: Ingredients: 1½ ozs ginger (whole)
2 oranges, 2 lemons, ½ g. yeast, a slice of toast,
3 lbs. sugar, 1 lb. raisins, 1 gallon water.
Method: Bruise the ginger and put in pan with
zest of oranges, lemons and sugar. Bring to
boil and simmer for 30 minutes, strain and
allow to cool. Add the chopped raisins, juice of
oranges and lemons and the yeast spread on both
sides of the toast. Leave to ferment 14 days, then
strain and bottle.*

Christmas Eve Mother would put the puddings in the copper, that we use to boil the clothes in, and we used to have to stay up and watch them boil, nearly all night, to keep the water, and adding more water so that they boiled. We put the cake in the oven, and we used to have to keep an eye on that, take it in turns. We did wonder since if it made them taste of the washing! That was big enough, as there were so many puddings made, they were stored for certain times of the year, Whitsun or Easter, when a pudding would come out, so they were lined up in the kitchen, what we used to call the scullery on a shelf. Then we'd have to go to bed, but the copper would still have to be kept.

My Father used to pour over the pudding — was it brandy? and set light to it, and it all used to flare up and frighten me.

I remember stirring the Christmas pudding, we all had to be called up to share in the stirring, and have a wish. Nobody had to be told what the wish was or it wouldn't come true.

I was the only one who helped with the Christmas puddings because I didn't like the fruit, so I wouldn't pinch any. My mother wouldn't let any of my brothers and sisters help. I used to stone the raisins.

We always had silver threepenny bits to stick in the Christmas Pudding — they didn't used to put Christmas Puddings much in basins in those days, they used to have a pudding cloth — put it in a big cloth, a big round one and there'd be a bit of holly in the middle of it.

'Xmas Puddings without Eggs!

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All kinds of steamed puddings, cakes and buns are perfectly made with

Bird's Egg Substitute

BIRD'S EGG Substitute, "One Spoonful, One Pudding."



For Christmas pudding, they gave this austerity recipe. I think it was when we first got married, we were still using it, even though it was 1952. You still had ration books and, and that recipe book that I've still got, had an alternative austerity recipe using reconstituted egg, and grated potato. You couldn't get suet. You had points in the ration book, so if you gave up points, you would get suet. Dried egg was horrible.

CHRISTMAS PUDDING (Alternative Austerity Recipe).

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 4 oz. breadcrumbs. | 4 oz. suet or fat. |
| 2 oz. flour. | 3 oz. sugar. |
| ½ teaspoon baking powder. | 1 oz. marmalade. |
| ½ teaspoon salt. | 2 reconstituted eggs. |
| 1 teaspoon mixed spice. | ½ pint milk, ale or stout. |
| | 1 lb. mixed dried fruit. |

Mix flour, salt, baking powder and spice together, add the sugar, fruit and breadcrumbs, grated suet or melted fat. Mix with the marmalade, eggs and milk or ale. Stir thoroughly. Steam for 2 or 3 hours. Store in a cool place.

When reheating either of these puddings allow them to steam for about 1½ hours before serving.

After Dinner

My Father used to read "A Christmas Carol" to us and my husband did the same. He always used to get Dickens out and read, "Pickwick Papers". We always had to hear about Scrooge.

In the afternoon, the grown-ups snoozed, while the children played quietly. When evening came, we went off to a neighbour's house for a jolly party which lasted into the early hours of Boxing Day morning.

Boxing Day was an anti-climax, Christmas Day was over for that year, and it was a long time before the next one. We finished off the festivities, though, with another party in the evening.

My father was terrible — when they played God Save the King he stood up, 'course he was an old army man, and he used to stand up and then we all had to 'hush', not a sound.

And then of course we had the old wireless and an accumulator fitted to it — with batteries you know — and then of course we always had to listen to the King or Queen or whoever was on the throne, we always had to listen to the speech of a Christmas afternoon. We always had to do that and had to sit very quiet and behave ourselves.

"We used to put the chestnuts on a shovel, put it on top of the fire — and Grandad used to play the tiny little accordion and play the hymns, a concertina. My brother used to have a violin".



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LEWISHAM POOR CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS TREAT.

Lieut.-Colonel Assheton Pownall, M.P. has forwarded a donation to the fund being raised by the Lewisham Unemployed Organisation for the purpose of giving a tea and entertainment to 40 children of unemployed men in the borough. Mr. W. G. Toull, 81, Elswick road, S.E.13. is organising secretary.

Hard Times

Everybody belonged to clubs for Christmas, it was the only way you could do things. You belonged to them all the year round — you used to start January for next Christmas.

I remember one Christmas we all had the whooping cough really bad. All four of us kids had to stay in the one room with the fire burning away night and day. We were so hard up that my Mother and Father had to rip up the lino off the kitchen floor and throw it on the fire. That's a true story to show you how hard up we were.

My parents used to belong to what they called the goose Club and paid so much a week.

My Father was out of work and we had a very bad Christmas. The stocking was full of coke and it had an apple and an orange and a farthing at the bottom. I cried my eyes out and my Mother said — “What d’you expect? Your Father’s out of work. It’s all we can afford!”

“Well it’s when I was married and we was very on the rocks, kind of thing, we used to put 2d or 3d a week in the Christmas Box. I said to my Mother “I’ve got to go and get some meat,” I said, “I won’t be able to get much,” I said “but if I can get a bit of pork or something like that you know.” So I went to the shop, it was late at night, I went to the shop, and I got this half a leg of pork and as luck would have it my husband nearly always used to win the turkey at a whist drive — so we got this bit of pork. She went home to her place and I went back to mine, and when I got home I undone this meat and there’s a pound note sticking on the bottom — a £1 note was a lot of money then. They must have rolled it up in the box. Of course it was too late to go back. A £1 note! Oh that was lovely that was, it was like £10 now, Oh it was beautiful you know!

I remember having cake at Christmas and it had plenty of spice and flavour. It was years later that I discovered that it was bread pudding or currant duff. If you got one of them you was dead lucky.

I never got a thing at Christmas. My Father died when I was six years old and it was only the old lady and me younger brother — the other two was married and had left home. You hung your stocking up and if you got anything in it you were dead lucky. We used to have what the other people chucked out afterwards. The only thing I can remember was a skimmer. I had that for five or six years. It was a piece of iron with a hook on it and you rolled the wheel with that. It was a wooden handle with a piece of steel sticking up and bent over like a hook and you held it behind the steel wheel and skimmed it along the road.

An appeal is made for gifts of toys, children’s books, Christmas cards, tennis balls, etc. Toys which are damaged, but not beyond repair, can be mended by boys attending the centre, and old Christmas cards will be quite acceptable. Our readers are asked to look out such things as would appeal to the children—many of whom are of the very poorest—and to communicate either with Miss Newton or with Miss Flaherty. Gifts should be sent to the latter at the Play Centre, Frankham-street.

I remember my father piling fruit up on the chest of drawers. Later on there were six of us children, and I can remember sitting at the table waiting for the people upstairs to bring our Christmas dinner down. My Father was out of work you see. The neighbours were very friendly. You’d walk in one another’s houses up and down the street and have a sort of a sing song.

There was only 3 of us at home, and the old lady was crippled up with rheumatism from taking in washing. We had to have what we was lucky to get hold of. I’d a married sister lived down the road and we used to go down there for dinner. Never knew what a Christmas tree was till 1916-17. Never had a turkey, you was lucky if you got a stew.

One Christmas I’ll always remember is one back in the 30’s when the Relieving Officer came round and asked to search the house. Well, he looked all over the place; in the cupboards, even under the beds! Well, anyway, he never found anything and he left without saying a word. My Mother said he was a bad man.

I think the first Christmas I was away from home, the old lady went to her sister’s for the day and the cook went to her friends — poor little me. I was left, I think I cried my eyes out. And I was scared stiff ‘cos you know — it wasn’t very good of the cook to tell me about the white slave trade and all that sort of thing. And I was scared to open the door. I never opened the door unless it was on the chain. I can remember that Xmas — it’s come back to me. Fancy going and leaving me on my own.

Although you were hard up, you made the best of what you’d got. We never knew any different. You always knew that the chap next door was just as hard up as you were! That was a pleasant feeling . . .

When I had a family of my own, I always had one thing in mind — to let your kids have something better than you had yourself — never to have to let your kids put up with what you had to put up with. They had things like bikes and doll’s prams, which we’d never heard of.

DISAPPOINTMENT!



Long ago a Child of poverty was found in a stable in Bethlehem’s crowded city.

To-day from this city’s crowded slums comes the cry of the child or poverty living in conditions worse than that stable.

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**Rev. HAROLD WESTLAKE,
Central Hall, Creek Road,
DEPTFORD, S.E.8.**

Christmas . . . 1938 . . . 1939

When I began to recall 1939, the previous Christmas came very clearly into my mind, the last Christmas of Peace, and I thought it would be interesting to compare the two, and observe what a difference a year made . . .

To me, the 1938 Christmas was memorable for many reasons. In the first instance, the years 1937 and 1938 marked an upturning following the lean years. There seemed to be less unemployment, cost of living was low, textiles very cheap (it is only with the benefit of hindsight that one realises this was doubtless due to sweated labour, at the age of nineteen I was less aware of these things than to-day's nineteen year olds would be!!). Another indication of better times was the fact that more young people about to get married were able to scrape together the deposit for a house on one of the many estates being built on the outskirts. So, all in all, we were all more relaxed.

Furthermore, we had recently undergone the trauma and anxiety of the Munich crisis, and the feeling of being reprieved, although, underneath it all I think we were somehow aware that it was just a reprieve. I know my father was very much of that opinion, and he, in particular, seemed determined that this would indeed be a good Christmas, possibly with the thought that we did not know what lay ahead.

Shopping was done during the last two or three weeks, Cakes and puddings having been made well before-hand. Not having a 'fridge' perishable food were left until the last possible minute.

The week leading up to the day, the house was given a thorough cleaning, lots of 'spit and polish', including cutlery etc.

There was, I remember, a feeling of excitement in the shops, which, in those days stayed open much later, and the feeling of 'bustle' was infectious. (We, I regret to say, did not spare a thought for the poor shop assistants). The High Streets were always well decorated.

My father really went to town on our own decorations, he laboriously cut out scores of leaves from tissue paper, painted them in autumn colours and, having erected a trellis, interweaved them with fairy lights, it was most effective. It was a 'white' christmas, which somehow added to the occasion.

Christmas eve was spent in last minute cooking (sausage rolls, mince pies, etc) and the Turkey was stuffed. Members of the family hid in various parts of the house wrapping up presents. Parcels had been posted earlier, and cards, not so profusely as to-day, usually close relatives and friends. A few days earlier my mother had taken me out shopping to choose her main present to me, which was a new dress. I remember even now what it looked like, rust-coloured with a mandarin collar edged with gold, skirt would doubtless have been 'cut on the cross' (the very devil if you wanted to alter the hem!!) It was bought in C.&A and cost 9/11d. We had a game regarding my father's present to mother. He asked me to find out what she wanted, and it was a dress length of material which she knew precisely where to get. so . . . my father gave me the money to buy it, which I in turn gave to my mother who bought just what she wanted, and gave it to me to give to my father. She looked suitably surprised and delighted when she opened it on Christmas morning.

I went Carol singing with the Church latish on Christmas Eve, it was lovely walking home through the snow with a real feeling of Christmas and all that it meant.

Christmas morning my father, as was the custom in our house, made the early morning cup of tea, lacing his and my mother's with whisky (another custom).

As we were now older, there was not the very early morning awakening, and after a leisurely breakfast (the pudding and turkey already put on to start cooking) we went into the front room to open our presents. Again, they were of a more 'affluent' standard, than, say, ten years previously. My father bought me a watch, a clock and matching vases for my bedroom.

By the time all this was over, it was time to serve the first drinks, my father was a dab hand at wine-making, (barley, potato, parsnip etc) which was quite potent. There was the usual bottle of sherry, port, and a small one of whisky, plus cider and soft drinks, we had the radio on, and records on the radio-gram, mother coming in and joining us from time to time after popping out to supervise the mid-day meal.

We all had special 'party hats' which were a must, they were carnival hats which my father had got hold of. We had the same ones every year: my mother's was a sort of crown effort, mine was a gold cardboard tiara, my father had a red 'fez'.

At 12 noon we had our traditional toast, a habit which has only been broken, I regret to say, in the last dozen years. This was, that wherever we were on Christmas day, we drank this toast to 'absent loved ones and friends'. My father took this very seriously.

After the mid-day meal, usually we over-ate, and this was no exception, washing up was done (invariably, and on this occasion, by my parents and myself . . . why not the boys I often asked myself . . .) a cup of tea and the King's speech, my father with his Christmas cigar. The afternoon was fairly lazy, my younger brothers went out for a while to have a snowball fight. Then tea, we seemed to find room for it, it always included celery, and the cake just had to be cut.



After tea we played games, cards and boxed games, my younger brother had a conjuring set as a present, so we had to join in being tricked by him. We also listened to the radio and put on records. And so to bed, after a night cap. Not, one might say, a hilarious Christmas, but we enjoyed it, it was the feeling of togetherness and, to use a perhaps hackneyed term 'good will'.

The next day we had a party at our house. A ramble out to Shoreham had been arranged in the morning in the snow, but as I had a cold my parents persuaded me not to go (and, in those days, we accepted their advice . . .)

The party consisted of friends of my parents and some of my own friends, but the mixture of age groups caused no disharmony, on the contrary. We played games (all joining in) such as Murder, Truth or Dare, Forfeits, Lucky Dip and trick games, such as Mummy and Nelson's Eye. Records were put on to suit all tastes, and I remember the feeling of enjoyment which seemed to be shared by all, lots of fun, laughter, and banter.

The following day we went to a party at some friend in Ladywell, run on similar lines, and I remember walking back over the Hilly Fields in the moonlight and snow, throwing snowballs at each other.

Apart from the fact that it was the last Christmas before the war, or perhaps because of it, this Christmas does remain quite vividly in my mind even after all these years. There really never has been one to quite equal it, for, indeed things were never quite the same again. I suppose it would seem dull to some people to-day, but it is one of my very happy memories.

Christmas 1939

Again, it is only with hindsight that one appreciates the difference, I cannot remember making any comparison at the time.

Once more, it was a white Christmas, the war had been on for nearly four months, things were already beginning to change.

We had not, as expected, been 'blown to bits', and there was an air of unrealism about.

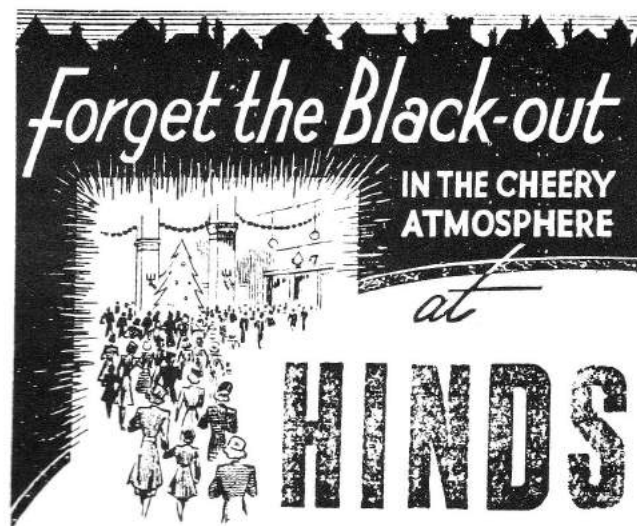
I was not aware of any particular food shortage, mothers probably shopped around, but I have a vague feeling that fruit, in particular oranges and nuts were not very much in evidence.

As far as my own family were concerned, we had moved to a smaller house in Ladywell, (one of the 'jerry built type) with a very small third bedroom. I was cross about the move (which was to please my elder brother, who was now back in England, and home for that Christmas) as I had to have this little box room, which meant I had nowhere to put my clothes (I was, by now, beginning to amass a few). To placate me, my mother offered to buy me a small combination wardrobe as my Christmas present, I remember she purchased it from Wheatlands at Lewisham on the H.P. system.

We had a Christmas cake, therefore sugar could not have been in short supply, as it was *iced* (not like my wedding cake in 1942 which had a white cardboard cover!!)

My younger brother was evacuated to E. Sussex, and it was deemed unwise as far as his school were concerned, to disrupt the boys by having them home for Christmas, furthermore, there was a feeling that raids could start any time.

On Christmas eve we had a telegram (12 words for sixpence!!) to say my great uncle had died, they lived at Sicup, and as this meant my great Aunt was alone, it was decided that I should go over and help her as mother had so many last minute things to do. I remember the journey, a long walk from the station, and this was the first time I



CALL AND SEE THE REMARKABLE ARRAY OF CHRISTMAS GIFTS

had seen a dead body (in those days they did not normally remove the corpses to Hospitals or Chapels of Rest). On the way home I had a list of vegetables to buy for the Christmas. I remember very little about Christmas Day, except that my mother went over to Sidcup for a couple of hours. As far as presents went I remember a 'Chubby' umbrella from my father, bedroom slippers and a hot water bottle from my mother, and a nightdress case in the shape of a scotty dog from my brother, there must have been others, but I cannot recall them. We did have a friend of mine in for the evening, but, whether I imagine it or not, I feel there was a sort of muted air about that Christmas. We doubtless missed my younger brother, he was the baby of the family, and rather doted on. I remember the agonising decision we made as a family to let him be evacuated (he thought it a bit of an adventure at the time).

The house in which he was evacuated happened to be the billeting officer's home, she had four boys there, and invited parents down for lunch on the Boxing day and the school were to lay on tea and entertainment in the late afternoon. As my mother was involved with my great aunt's affairs, my younger brother, who was nearly eighteen years old, and I were sent.

I remember the journey (trains on time, despite the snow. . .) and my young brother waiting for us. We had a very pleasant time, but I remember very well when we said goodbye how our 'baby' brother clung on to us, and how it tugged at my heart strings to leave him there.

We travelled back with the other parents, and made some sort of promise to all meet on the steps of St. Pauls when the war was over . . . I often wonder if anybody did . . . we had no idea at the time of course how many years away that was to be.

My brother did in fact come home about three weeks later, he was so home-sick.

So, it is clear that there was a great difference in the two Christmas times, and I do not think that it was all to do with our particular circumstances at the time, we were I am sure all aware that there were people losing their lives, and our own future was uncertain . . . in a wierd sort of way I think families were already beginning to break up. I can remember bits about other Christmas's in the war, but none of them are so vivid as my memories of 1938 . . .

Margaret Kippin

Christmas at War

One Christmas, Christmas 1919 I think it was, my husband and I sat down to our dinner, and we were about halfway through the meal when all of a sudden my husband burst into tears and got up from the table.

I said "Whatever is the matter luv?" And he told me that in Christmas 1916 he and three of his best friends were in the trenches in France, and they had been ordered to man a gun. But at the last minute he was ordered to go somewhere else down the line. And he heard that Nobby, Bill and George, the three best friends he had in all the world had been blown to bits on Christmas Day. And *he* should have been there with them.

To this day he still feels sad on Christmas Day.

I remember one very sad year when my brother came home from the front. He came straight out of the trenches and he was covered in mud. He came home about two o'clock in the morning because all us kids woke up when we heard the noise. We went down into my parents' room. There was my brother standing there. He wouldn't go to bed that night. He just lay on the kitchen floor. The next morning he had a thorough good bath, trying to get rid of all those lice and burnt all his underclothes and dressed as quick as he could into civvies. And he only had about four or five days before he had to go back again. That was a very sad Christmas that was.

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I remember one Christmas. We were in France during the 2nd World War and the landlady asked us to stay for Christmas. We said we couldn't, but she showed us a great big fat pig in the backyard that she was fattening for Christmas! We booked our seats then, I can tell you!

1939, for us it must have been a very quiet Christmas time, we were so worried, I think it must have passed without much celebration. There was nothing spectacular about it, like there was in past Christmases, it was very subdued.

All I can recall about the first Christmas of the war is a sort of brooding quiet. A kind of "calm before the storm". The weather was wintry — snow and ice covered practically the whole country.

I cannot remember whether rationing had begun in earnest but I believe a shortage of certain things was evident. The blackout was in operation — no street lighting and, when it was dark, the windows of buildings covered by blackout curtains. A lot of people had their glass window panes criss-crossed with brown sticky paper tape as a protection against bomb blast.

1939. Despite the war, most people tried to make it a normal Christmas. I think we all knew it would be a long time before there would be another and as at that time shortages had not really made themselves felt almost everybody had a few things at the back of the cupboard with which to augment what could be found in the shops. Those families that had fathers or sons called up were no doubt more aware of the war than the rest of us but at that time they were in a minority as the big build-up of armed forces had not really got under way.

The most common complaint was the "Black Out". It had to be born by rich and poor alike, no black market to get round that. This of course meant travel was a nightmare; blinds drawn on the trains made them stuffy and prevented one judging the progress of the journey, stations were so ill-lit as to defy identification and public address systems non-existent except at a terminus or main junction.

This of course put a stop to many of the family gatherings which were normal at Christmas.

There was little talk of unemployment. In fact one began to hear of people who had been retired for a year or two being invited to return to the fold providing their health was good.

Factories were working day and night. STC (Standard Telephones and Cables), where I was employed, worked 11 ½ hour shifts 13 days on (8.30am to 8.00pm) then 14 nights (8.30pm to 8.00am). In winter with blackout of course ventilation was inadequate and with only thirty minutes between shifts even putting lights out and opening doors and windows did not ensure a complete change of air and one was always breathing partly used air. Those in supervisory positions often had to stay to liaise with their opposite numbers, this meant an hour's overtime could be claimed but you never had time to spend it. One of the highlights of that Christmas was a show put on in the works canteen by members of the entertainments group of the Athletic and Social Club. How they found time for rehearsals I'll never know but they gave us two hours of songs, dances and sketches, which they repeated the following week so that both shifts had a chance of seeing it. The charge was purely nominal, proceeds to provide a Christmas party for employees' children, a function which has long been a tradition with STC.

A live show was really something in those days, there was no television-Radio was the main diversion, "Can I do you now sir" or "Phoomph speaking" would take the memory back quicker than any excerpt from a Churchill speech. I almost forgot, the barrage balloon. If you've never seen the sun lighting the underside of a barrage balloon, the sun still below the horizon with its promise of a fine day to come, then you have never been out for a breath of air at five o'clock in the morn after a night of fire watching in a stuffy pump room trying to ignore snores and the smell of Harry's sweaty feet.

Christmas Afloat

It was three weeks to Christmas and I was an Able-Seaman on board a submarine depot ship moored at Scapa Flow; not a very pleasant place to be especially at that time of the year there wasn't much to go ashore for plenty of snow-mud and a canteen not much to write home about.

Well a submarine depot ship's duties is to service the torpedoes, recharge the batteries and to supply fresh stores — also to give the submarines a rest and comfort such as hot showers and film shows etc.

So the boys on board the depot ships decided being it was near Christmas to put on a show. Having received permission from the Captain they started to get organised. The chippy and painter agreed to do the scenery etc and sparks would take care of the lighting. Then all that was left to do was the rehearsals which were held in private and out of bounds to the rest of the crew etc.

We were very fortunate some of the boys had a bit of talent one especially playing the harmonica. He was as good as Larry Adler.

On Christmas night the curtain went up at 8 o'clock and the show had started the opening scene which was the chorus girls: they were some of the boys dressed in drag. It was really funny — it was a job to hear what they were singing what with the wolf whistles etc, then on came the comedians — a couple took off the Weston Brothers. Later in the show the girls came on again dressed as fairies; also three of them did an impersonation of the Andrew Sisters miming to a record, of course the lad who played the harmonica did his turn.

The show was a great success and was enjoyed by everyone. The captain got up on the stage at the end to thank every one concerned for taking part. "Its a pity we were not moored in the Thames," he said. "We could have put the show on in the West-End".



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I remember one Christmas, during the Second World War it was, when I was doing the washing a few days before Christmas day. A telegram came, and I opened it up, not really daring to think what might be inside it. It said — "Hello Mum. Am in U.K." I don't know what came over me but I ran outside in our tenement block and I waved the telegram in the air and shouted "He's alive! He's alive!" at the top of my voice. What a Christmas present that was!



Games and Parties

We used to sing 'If those lips could only speak' and 'Waiting at the Church', 'My old man', all Marie Lloyd's and 'Knees up Mother Brown' always with all the actions. Course, there'd be somebody that was funny there and they'd do a little tap dance, or something you know. We used to have old Santa Claus come round, cos we believed in it then.

I must mention this bit; the old barrel organ used to come round on Xmas Day — with the old carols and that and then you see some of the neighbours would dance and that — in the street — the old barrel organ — that was nice!.

My Dad loved to sing 'The Old Rustic Bridge' 'When your hair grows whiter' 'The Old Folk at Home' and 'My Old Dutch'.

A bloke called Grandad Pawn: his favourite song was 'Fighting with the 7th Royal Fusiliers' and he'd bang on the floor with his walking stick. 'Goodbye Dolly Grey'; 'The Little Shirt me Mother made for me'.

Dad used to do a monologue about these gentlemen who used to come to Beresford Square to sell patent medicines. It used to go 'It cures corns, warts, tightness of the chest and liver complaints' and it would end 'And I'm here to address you not to undress you'. It was always very funny.



Christmas time was round a piano with all the family, we sang the old-fashioned songs and we enjoyed that as children because you made your own enjoyment, everything wasn't ready-made as it is now. You all made your own fun.

So many families had a piano — or there'd be a banjo or a violin — then there was the washboard or mouth organ. We had a zither — we was allowed to play that Saturdays and Sundays and Christmas. On Christmas night we'd have a sing-song. You always went to bed earlier on Christmas Eve.

There used to be a draught curtain on the door, and when I had to do my piece, I used to get behind so they could hear me but not see me. It was usually a recitation.



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your
Home
bright & merry
this
Christmastide*



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A Favourite song was:

The Miner's Dream of Home

Out in the wilds of Australia
Out in the coalfields there once was a man.
The miners were made up of all sorts of classes
With many a scrapegrace and many a scamp
When into their midst came a young man from England,
And with him he brought a small thrush in a cage
To hear the bird sing they would crowd round in dozens
Till the sweet little songster became quite amazed,
There fell a deep hush as the song of the thrush
Was heard by the motley throng
And many a tough fellow's eyes grew dim
As the bird sang the beautiful song
Eyes brightened up with a bright yearning look
As the bird sang his beautiful song
It brought to their minds dear old England and home
Thousands of miles away.

Another was:

Little Dolly Daydream — part of Idaho,
So now you know, so now you know.

You used to sing 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles', 'Bye Bye Blackbird'. Parties were not very common. We used to walk to my Aunty's who had a record player. Kids used to do a recital, or a monologue. Every person used to have a song that they were known for singing, and every year people used to say "Come on, Joe, give us 'It's a long way to Tipperary'" and he'd stand up and belt it out with the best of them.

My Mother always had her special song — 'The Gypsy's Warning' — "Lady shun the dark eyed stranger I've warned thee now beware" — of course it's a long one. And my Father had his song — 'My husband came home late one night', and that had yards to it. It ended up with saying "Whiskers on a baby's face I never did see before".

My younger brother had a very nice singing voice and he used to sing 'The Little Boy that Santa Claus Forgot' and brought everybody into tears.

The little boy that Santa Claus forgot,
And goodness know he didn't want a lot,
He sent a note to Santa for some soldiers and a drum,
And he nearly broke his heart when Santa didn't come.

In the street he envies all those other boys,
Then wanders home to last year's broken toys,
Would you feel sorry for that laddie,
He hasn't got a Daddy,
He's the little boy that Santa Claus forgot.
I think it came out about 1935-36. He had these big blue eyes and blond hair, he was a horror really, but he'd stand there singing this. He brought everyone to tears. He sang it with such pathos, he usually did well with tips.

We had a great big musical box in the convent and it had bells along the bottom. I heard 'The Lost Chord' on that, it was marvellous. You wound it up and it started. It played large steel records.

We always used to sit round in a circle and sing a song or do a party trick, and if you didn't do one you had to do a forfeit. I used to do Gungha Din.

There was always someone on the street that used to have an old piano, and one of those gramophone things with a horn. You'd get that out on the street and you'd make a party, especially New Year's Eve. Everybody, our neighbours, used to form a ring out on the pavement and you'd get your knees up, and dustbin lids — anything to make a noise. And your street doors was always open. You used to roam in and out and you used to say, "Let the New Year in!" People opened the doors to let the New Year in. That was done by everybody.

Let's put out the lights and go to bed
You'll never stop humming this says
RUDY VALLEE
"When my friend the composer first played this one over to me I begged him not to put it into a show. To-day my American home is at my special signing off number. They're crazy about it. Just as you'll be. On the other side I give you 'Say it isn't so' and the number is Ch 534—Get it quick!"
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We had a good Christmas once. My Father used to work in the Military Academy and they always used to have a party for all the children. You had a big round bowl

which had electricity in it and it had money in it and you was allowed to dip your hand in quickly and see what you could pick out. You always got a lovely present.

Also the Christmas parties and a big old gramophone with a trumpet. I asked to be told the name of the record I was told it was 'Cinderella' but there was no story. These grown-ups clutched each other and marched up and down. That was called a Foxtrot — but I didn't see any foxes! So I sat under the table and kept quiet and thought a lot!

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We did quite well for parties. We went to Sunday School morning and afternoon, they had separate parties. Then there was the school party, when the teachers would occasionally unbend . . . we also had a party run by my father's place of work.

Another Christmas we had a party in our flat and it went on until about 4 in the morning. Bill, who was quite a joker, put a white sheet over his head and pretended he was a ghost. Everyone fell about laughing, but then he slipped outside and started dancing about on the grass! Well, there was a postman in our block who used to have to get up really early to go to work, and he was washing at the sink when he happened to look out of the window, and when he saw what he thought was a ghost he gave a yell and nearly fainted! He called his wife in, but she said "Ach, don't be so daft, it's only old Bill larking about". He didn't half feel a fool!

One Christmas I had a huge shock. We went to a party at Mr. Baker's. We used to play party games. Mrs. Baker this particular year started a game off, that I'd never seen before. All the ladies would sit on the stairs, and we children had to pull their legs. Now if we got the 'right' one we got a prize, but if we got the 'wrong' we got a forfeit. Anyway, the game had been going on for a few minutes. I chose Mrs. Baker who was so sedate and well-mannered. Everyone said "Go on, pull it. Pull harder". And as I pulled, her whole leg came off, shoe and stocking and all. I got the fright of my life. I thought she was coming apart. What she'd done was put her leg up behind her back and put a false one full of sawdust and covered with a black stocking so you'd never know the difference. Well, I bet that was the first time she'd had her leg pulled.

Fathers at Xmas



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at conjuring tricks?*

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We had parties — good parties too. You made your own band and you went right on till about three or four o'clock in the morning.

Christmas was a day Mum and Dad never grumbled at us. My Father said "You can do whatever you like as long as it's fair, there's only one thing, if you're sick, you clean it up!"

The door was always open for neighbours to come in. Everyone pitched in and helped each other. When you had a party you borrowed knives and forks, chairs anything. No one begrudged lending anything. On Christmas Eve we used to go out into the streets and stay there all night, singing.

We used to dress up — we used to have all different kinds of you know — Mother would dress me up once as Rhubarb and Custard. That was very funny that was — I was only a youngster then and we had competitions. She dressed me up as rhubarb and custard — green, yellow you know.

Games! Postman's Knock, Find the Thimble, Plates on the Table; one would have salt, vinegar and the other one sugar. They blind-folded you and of course you saw the plates before you were blindfolded, and then you might have been unlucky and you dipped your tongue in the salt or the vinegar, and then you used to have little prizes you know!

'How Green You Are' . . . Do you remember that? It's got to be a very large party. You send a couple out and you decide on an action they're got to do. It's almost like transference of thoughts. And you sing 'How green you are?' to the tune of Auld Acquaintance and as they get nearer you get louder and as they go away you get softer and it's surprising how often they do what you want. The example taking a vase and putting it on the piano, then as they get near the vase you get louder and you get louder still if they pick it up. It can be really very funny.

There were forfeits, there was Murder of course, and Charades, Postman's Knock, Squeak Piggy Squeak, sticking the tail of the donkey, Nelson's eye, Passing the Orange. There was one wicked one, I can't remember the name of it. If you've got a fair sized party, you visit the King and Queen. The King and Queen are seated on a chair and there's a space between these chairs and a thick blanket. You sit in the middle on this blanket. You're asked a question: "What is the last thing you do at night?" Whatever your answer is, immediately after you've answered, somebody tucked away behind there has got a large sponge over a bowl of water, squeezes the sponge over the water. And while you've suffused in dread, wondering what to say, the two either side get up, releasing the blanket, so as you finished up in a heap between the two chairs.

'Family Coach' — everyone was given a portion of either the Coach or the horse — you're the reins, you're the coach wheels, you're this and that and then someone told a story and everytime your portion was mentioned you got up and twisted round and everytime 'family coach' was mentioned you all stood up and twisted round and that was bedlam, especially if you had a good story teller.

We played 'Blind Man's Buff' or 'Postman's Knock'. I think it was the one, one went outside and called out who they wanted to go out too. When they'd gone out there they'd have a big kiss and then that one stayed behind. 'Course we used to get, you know, sort of "Er — Oooh! We know who you like!" . . . You used to hide something and then somebody would have to find it.

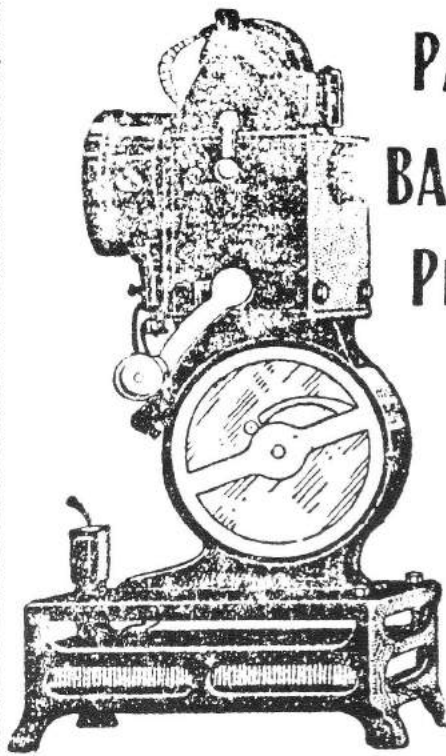
Do you remember 'Jack's alight' You'd have a piece of firewood and it was put in the fire to smoulder and then it was passed round and you blew on it and said 'Jack's alight'. You had to keep it alight, and if it had gone out, whilst it was in your hands, you were out.

We used to bet a penny on 'horses', little pieces of paper that we'd race. My Dad used to put a half penny in his fist and then we all used to pass it from one to the other, all 8 of us, then my Dad used to guess who had it.

We used to play Postman's Knock. We always used to have a singing competition. We used to sit round and they'd say, "Now you give a song." Anything to keep us amused, that sort of way.

Does anyone remember a magic lantern? You had slides and you pushed them through past a paraffin lamp — it was smelly!

I remember going to a party just after the Christmas. We went to a school and we'd all queue up outside to go in and we'd get a marzipan fish and an apple and an orange in a bag. And then we'd go in and see 'Magic Lantern' or something like that on the screen and they showed us different little things like that; it was quite nice, what we used to have. They used to put on the stage a huge big sheet and then they used to show different pictures with a magic lantern — we used to call it magic lantern — that showed it on the screen. We used to say, 'Ooh, this is magic' because it was something we hadn't seen before; it was magic to us, to see figures up on this screen. They used to have usually cetylene lamps in the opening of the magic lantern.



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In 1920 The Pathe people produced the 'Imp' I think it was called, and that was a hand turned projector. It had a 6 volt lamp on it, and you could buy a transformer and run it off the mains for power, or you could even run it off a small car battery. Then you just turned at a steady old 2 turns per second. The main thing was to get a sufficiently well blacked out place, so that with the miserable amount of light you got, you could still see the pictures. That was the old 9 m.m. film.

I had a lovely Father and Mother and their wedding day was Christmas Day. They attended St. Pauls Church which was bombed during the second world war so you see they kept their wedding day celebrations up and I remember one Christmas, I think I must have been about 5 years old — Nobby Clarke a policeman was a great friend of my parents, and we all gathered round on the floor with a bowl of snapdragon (that was raisins covered with brandy and lit up). My sisters and brothers were enjoying it all but I could not put my fingers in and pull one out, so Nobby Clarke came and sat next to me and did it for me. We all had a lovely Christmas.

Mother has time to enjoy Christmas now!

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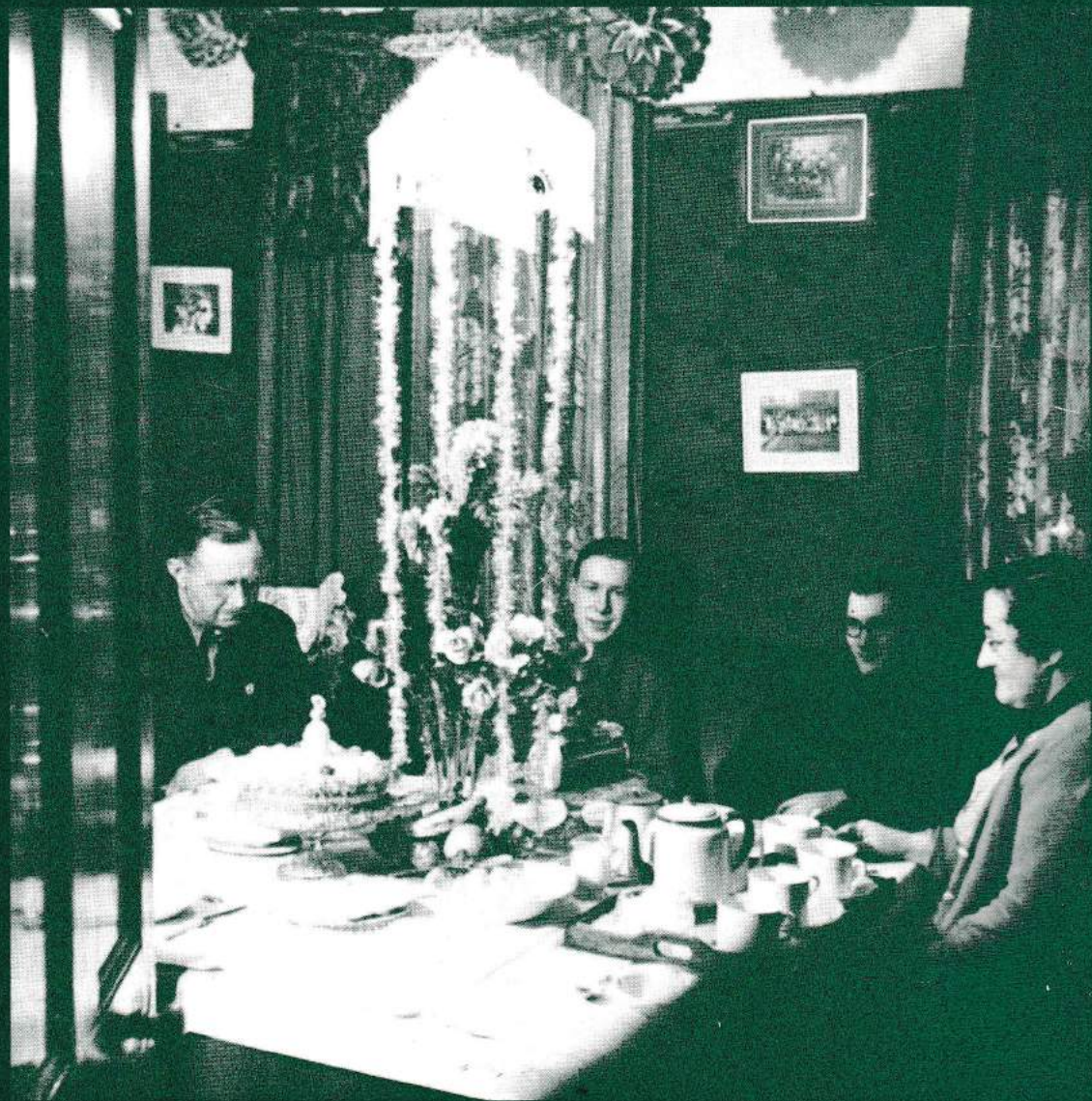
A Family Christmas

About the only thing I can contribute is that prior to Christmas, we used to have a lot of antagonism amongst the families — the sons, the daughters, the in-laws Aunts and Uncles — “Will you come to my place at Christmas” or “Will you come to my place on Boxing Day”. This used to go on and on, and caused a lot of bad feeling. Arguments in the family, about who was going to do what. And after a lot of chat about it, we did manage to master it and it was 100% success. We hired the Village Hall. Every adult had to put 10 shillings in the hat, as we called it, to go towards the drinks and the eats and the rest of it, and nobody outside the family was allowed to go. The first part of the evening, when there was quite a number of children full of life, the first aim was to tire them out, so we gave them the first part of the evening, musical chairs, and they used to tire themselves out. Finally we used to find them squatted down behind chairs, and laying on the floor. The rest of the evening was Mum and Dad’s. We use to buy a very large Christmas tree and everyone contributed towards it. This was in Erith, the hall belonged to RACS. It was a large family, cousins, Uncles and Aunts — about 70-80 people in all, of all ages. All the food was laid on with the RACS, they provided all of that, and it all

came out of the 10 shillings everybody contributed. It covered food and drink. It all came prepared, and it was 100% success. It went on for many years. There was none of this disco business at that time, and we employed a band, a 4 piece band, this all came out of the 10 shillings. We made a habit of playing music to suit all tastes — it was lovely and everyone was happy.

I’d like to add one small piece to my little story, most important. Having said what I said about the family party in the RACS Hall, we never used to leave lonely people out. If we knew of a person, or persons that were entirely on their own, we used to go round and collect them, even if they weren’t members of the family, we always did that. Thinking of poor old Jack Jones sitting there on his own, we used to go round and get him, much against his wish “I want to spend Christmas in my own place” that was the story, but nevertheless, we used to win: “Come on Jack, come round and enjoy yourself”. And we used to pick up half a dozen people like that, to join in the party. We did that every year. I thought that worth mentioning, to me that’s very important.





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