

CHRISTMAS SHOW 1987SCRIPT 21.11.87.

OPENING CAROLS: "Deck the Halls" and "God rest ye"

CHARLES: 1937. Britain's bright Christmas. (OVALTEENY SONG DURING THE FOLLOWING BREEZY SPEECH.) There is every indication that the country as a whole is going to have the best and most cheerful Christmas it has had for years. Last year Britain had a good Christmas, after twelve months steady improvement in trade; this year, following a notable period of further industrial recovery, Christmas is going to be better still, with more people in employment and more money about.

ANNA: I remember Dad saving up to get us a gramophone. 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 wind-up one. He was really smoking till he dropped.

ALEX: I joined the Christmas club. It was a shilling a week for twenty weeks. Whichever number you drew out, that would be the number week you'd get the pound. If you drew number three, you'd get your pound the third week.

CHARLES: Following the lean years, I had a good little job in a greengrocery. Nice old chap, Harry Samuels, Blackheath. I was in line to take over the business.

ALEX: When I walked past the shop, Mr. Samuels used to say "Won't be long now. I'll be retiring and Bill can take over the shop." He had no children of his own. He was very fond of Bill.

CHARLES: Before the war, you was getting all this lovely food and fruit and that from Australia, New Zealand.

ALEX: Lovely jams they made, and I made my own pickles for Christmas.

SONG: Xmas is coming.

ALEX: The weeks leading up to Christmas, the house was given a thorough cleaning, lots of spit and polish. There was, I remember, a real feeling of Christmas in the shops. The feeling of bustle was infectious.

ANNA: I'll tell you something that sticks in my mind. My mother kept chickens, and we knew very well that one or two was going to be killed off. And my father would say:

CHARLES: You going off out today?

ANNA: And we'd say yes we were...

CHARLES: What time will you be back?

(CHICKEN CHASING AND KILLING PANTOMIME.)

ANNA: Then when we came back we'd see the chickens hung up out in the garden. My mother'd say..

ALEX: No, no they wasn't ours, but they needed plucking.

ANNA: They were still warm. We said, "How did they keep warm then when you brought them home?" And she said:

CHARLES: Well.....they just do, don't they.

ANNA: And they'd pull the feathers off. (SONG REPRISE)

ALEX: At Christmas time, you could go shopping till very late, midnight even. You had the old gas lights in the street, naked naphtha flares on the market stalls.

ANNA: Mother would go out about eight o'clock on Christmas Eve when they started selling off.

CHARLES: Whole hand of bananas. Only tenpence-ha'penny. Oranges three a penny.

ALEX: Of course they were blood oranges, the little ones, you know.

ANNA: I can remember I went with her once, but then she never took me no more, cos I think she had to wait so long.

ALEX: You should be in bed.

CHARLES: You could always more or less rely on having snow at Christmas.

ANNA: The carol singers were lovely.

ALEX: They used to come and stand where there was a lamp post and we joined them.

CHARLES: We all went out there and then we used to sing.

(CAROL SINGING.)

ANNA: Christmas was a magic time. We used to walk about in hushed

silence wondering what we were going to get. I was so excited.

CHARLES: For my daughter that year I made a doll's house with a Tudor type frontage. I achieved this by covering the surface with glue, then shaking sawdust over, painting it white and inserting mock beams.

ANNA: 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. I saw this very small pile of presents and I began to feel terribly sorry for myself.

ALEX: (TO ANNA) Come and help me with the Christmas pudding. We'd all stand over the Christmas pudding and stir it.

ANNA: I helped Mum make the pudding. We all had to be called up to share in the stirring and have a wish.

CHARLES: Christmas puddings always had to have silver threepenny pieces in.

ALEX: Puddings were wrapped in a cloth, a coarse muslin, tied up and put in the copper that we used to boil the clothes in. We used to have to stay up and watch them boil, nearly all night, adding more water.

CHARLES: We used to have to keep an eye on that, take it in turns.

ALEX: Father really went to town on the Christmas decorations that year. He cut out scores of leaves from tissue paper, and painted them in autumn colours.

CHARLES: I erected a trellis and interweaved the leaves. It was really most effective. It was a white Christmas which somehow added to the occasion.

ANNA: Father would be busy doing the decorations, and that would be kept a secret. I didn't see that till the morning. I was put to bed early on Christmas Eve.

ALEX: Put up your stocking, and don't you dare wake up till the morning, or Father Christmas won't leave you anything.

ANNA: It was a special Christmas stocking, a net one, with a Father Christmas on. I used to hang my head over the bannister. I was so excited.

CHARLES: (TO ANNA) Go to bed. (TO ALEX) See you later.

ALEX: Dad would be off to the pub.

ANNA: Any shooting star that went past, you'd think it was Father Christmas.....

ALEX: I crept in to see if she was asleep, and the little devil had got out of bed and was searching all around for her Christmas stocking. (TO ANNA) It's not even midnight.

CHARLES: You'd roll out of the pub, a bit tiddly like, and go to the fish stalls, jellied eels and whelks, and buy yourself a bag of shrimps to go on into midnight mass.

ALEX: They'd eat the shrimps and leave the heads and tails under the pews.

CAROL: It came upon a midnight clear.

CHARLES: I remember walking back over the heath in the moonlight and the snow.

CAROL ENDS

ANNA: I woke up early to see what Father Christmas had brought me. In the stocking there'd be cracker nuts, brazils, almonds, an apple, a tangerine, you didn't get them the rest of the year. Then there was a lump of coal for luck, a shiny new penny and a sugar mouse.

ALEX: The children shopped for us at Woolworths--nothing over sixpence.

ANNA: Phulnana card for Mum, a scented card with a picture on. Dad liked photography, so for him I got a packet of adhesive corners.

ALEX: And she bought me a packet of salt, bless her heart. I suppose she thought it would be useful.

ANNA: Then came this colossal dolls house which my father had made. This was what he'd been building and I hadn't a clue what was going on.

CHARLES: It was so big that when we moved, we had to get it out through the window.

ANNA: I remember for the ash can to go with the stove he used a small oxo tin, cutting the lid in half and fixing it to the bottom, and painting it black.

ALEX: Christmas Day was always for the families.

CHARLES: We all used to congregate at my mother's house.

ALEX: Bill's mother went to endless trouble, and how we got through all those meals I don't know.

CHARLES: The table was always extended. We had about three tables put together, and the children all sat on the ironing board across two chairs.

ANNA: We always had our special place on the ironing board, and I sat between my two favourite cousins.

ALEX: And the table was absolutely laden.

CHARLES: My mother had an eperne, it was a glass dish with apples and oranges in it, quite wide, with three or four trumpets of glass where she put artificial flowers. I think this eperne was our central decoration.

ALEX: Another thing, she had her own recipe for ginger wine. She made it in one of those washstand bowls, it was made by the gallon in that, and that would be our drink, and it was beautiful.

CHARLES: We always stood up for the king's speech.

ANNA: We all had to hush. Not a sound.

(FREEZE AS IF HEARING SPEECH)

ALL: The King.

ANNA: And then in the afternoon, the grown-up snoozed while the children played quietly. We always had to do that, sit very quiet and behave ourselves. We'd play games out of boxes, snakes and ladders, ludo, that sort of thing. My cousins had a game. It was horse-racing, all lit up with a battery in it.

CHARLES: We put ha'pennies and farthings on there.

ANNA: Well, my grandmother, that was one thing she didn't allow--gambling.

CHARLES: If she came in the room, we'd swipe the ha'pennies and farthings off the board, and when she went out, it was all...

ANNA: I bet that one..

CHARLES: You never!

ALEX: I seed it. I bet that one.

ALL: Sshhh..

ANNA: One of my cousins had a conjuring set as a present, so we had to join in being tricked by him. (MIME) The Christmas tea I used to enjoy most of all.

ALEX: Of course the Christmas cake had to be cut.

ANNA: There was always jellies, bowls of fruit.

CHARLES: And blancmanges.

ANNA: My grandmother used to make lots of blancmanges in moulds.

ALEX: She'd turn them on to a plate, and she'd surround them with mashed jelly of a contrasting colour.

ANNA: I don't know how we found room for it all.

(PAUSE WHILE THEY THINK ABOUT IT)

ANNA: Then at night, there'd be the party.

SONG: make yourself at home.

ALEX: It was open house. The door was open for the neighbours to come in. Everyone pitched in and helped each other. When you had a party you borrowed knives and forks, chairs, everything.

ANNA: Gran opened up the front room, the parlour.

ALEX: It was very rarely used. Only for courting, weddings and funerals, and Christmases.

CHARLES: The men would roll back the carpet and put the children behind the settee to keep them safe. Out would come the drink. We all enjoyed a jolly good sing-song round the piano. There was always someone who could plonk out a tune.

ANNA: Or there'd be a banjo, or a washboard or a mouth organ. You made your own fun. We sang the old-fashioned songs. It went on till three or four o'clock in the morning, and Mum and Dad never grumbled at us to go to bed.

CHARLES: You'd do your party piece. Everyone had a song that they were known for singing.

ALEX: You 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.

ANNA: Grandad's favourite was "Goodbye Dolly Grey", and he'd bang on the floor with his walking stick.

(SONG: Dolly Grey, AND BANGS)

ANNA: There used to be a draught curtain on the door, and when I had to do my piece, I used to get behind it, so they couldn't see me. It was usually a recitation.

(ANNA STARTS "Daddy wouldn't buy me a bow-wow" BEHIND MIMED CURTAIN AND GRADUALLY EMERGES AS CONFIDENCE GROWS. APPLAUSE)

CHARLES: Mother always had her special song: "The Sheik of Araby".

ALEX: Every Christmas, we used to finish off with my Dad's version of "The Road to Mandalay."

SONG: Mandalay, MERGING INTO In the bleak midwinter.

CHARLES: Christmas 1940. We're going to make it a bright Christmas in spite of Hitler scattering our nearest and dearest across countryside and sea. No-one this Christmas should be quite alone. Maybe it's only a letter, a little word of greeting, some small helping hand. And remember, war or no war, children look for something extra at Christmas.

END SONG. CHARLES EXIT TO CHANGE INTO NAVAL GEAR.

ANNA: I was evacuated to Somerset, a little village called Mudford, just outside Yeovil. The family in my billet were lovely. I liked them immediately. I never went without and they treated me like one of their own.

ALEX: (COUNTRY WIFE) At Christmas we had a marvellous pork dinner. We thought about the poor people in London. They probably got one rasher of bacon.

ANNA: All the food was home-made. You had butter. Course we never had that in London. There was lots of cheese, home made jams. And at Christmas we had a tree. I made things to go on it.

ALEX: I made the little girl some doll's house furniture from matchboxes. And out of an old greatcoat I made her a big elephant, big enough to sit on, with a curly trunk.

ANNA: That was lovely. But I missed the family gathered together. No-one read to me like my father did.

ALEX: I remember listening to Princess Elizabeth broadcasting to

the children on the wireless that Christmas.

PRINCESS ELIZABETH (ANNA): Thousands of you in this country have had to leave your homes and be separated from your fathers and mothers. My sister Margaret Rose and I feel so much for you, and we know from experience what it means to be away from those we love most of all. To you living in new surroundings, we send a message of true sympathy and at the same time we would like to thank the kind people who have welcomed you to their homes in the country.

ALEX: Winter evenings we'd knit comforts for the soldiers, cardigans and mufflers.

ANNA: I couldn't knit at all, but I was determined to knit my dad a balaclava helmet and a pair of gloves for Christmas. I was weeks doing it. The balaclava, I'd picked up too many stitches round the face part and it was just like a frill round the face. And the gloves were so long the size of a man's gauntlet up to the elbow.

CHARLES: (IN ABLE-SEAMAN GEAR) They pulled my leg for weeks about it. October 1940, I'd got my call-up papers. Chatham. In the Navy. I done my training in Plymouth. I always remember that first Christmas at Torpoint. The Chief Petty Officer served the men their Christmas dinner, and he did the washing up afterwards. As soon as I'd finished, within twelve weeks, I was at sea.

SONG: Now is the hour.

CHARLES: We were so in demand. They needed sailors. I hadn't a bloody clue what I was doing. Twelve weeks training, and I was up on deck trying to find the Geremans. My run was from Gibraltar to West Africa and back.

END SONG: Now is the hour.

CHARLES: Christmas at sea, well I think everyone used to get bloody miserable being so many thousands of miles away from home. All your mates and what have you. You'd have your spirits up, your tot of rum at ten o'clock in the morning as usual: "The King, God bless him", but if it was your turn to go on watch, well you went on watch whether it was four o'clock in the morning or whatever. You was up to your neck in bloody war. Christmas time was just another day.

SONG: I'll be seeing you in all the old familiar places.

ALEX: Christmas wasn't the same. There wasn't much to celebrate. As you listened to the king's message in the afternoon, you'd think: "I wonder what Bill's doing now?" A long while



beforehand I'd made up a parcel for him. A wallet. Something light that wouldn't break.

CHARLES: It followed me from port to port, that wallet did, before I finally got it. Gibraltar, Malta, Algiers. I used to send presents home from Gib for the wife. A bit of money, and .....

ALEX: (GETTING THEM) Silk stockings. When we got silk stockings, that was sheer luxury. I was working as a cook in the ambulance service. It was a lovely job. There were plenty of us working there. Women and men. It all had to be ready because the ambulance people used to suddenly get called out and it was a very busy service. We served shepherd's pie with carrots. Meat pie. Things like that. I remember the decorations one Christmas. Somebody had a brainwave and asked one of the office girls:

CHARLES: Can I have some of those pads of bills.

ANNA: I nearly got the sack for giving them to him. All the bills for different jobs were different colours. Green, pink, blue, red. He folded them, snipped them and twisted them all up and they made scallops. We hung them up and they looked really great. But the safety man came round over night, and next morning the director asked:

ALEX: 'Ere, where did you get them?

ANNA: Well, we said, they'd been used (HE LOOKS UNCONVINCED)

CHARLES: They were reject pads.

ANNA: Ooh they looked lovely though.

ALEX: After work, I'd go firewatching. Parading round the streets with my tin hat on. Most people didn't have the nerve for it, but I had no fear at all. We had plenty of good times. We used to go dancing. I liked a tango or a slow foxtrot. (DANCE MUSIC BEHIND THIS "You'll never know") If the chance came for a ladies excuse me, you picked out the fellow who danced to the four corners of the room. Of course the soldiers had big boots on, but if someone's got the ability to dance they can dance in anything. (END SONG)

ALEX: When the siren went, we'd make for the shelter. You'd go down the shelter and there you'd stop. Once the all-clear went, you'd run up and get a cup of tea, and then you'd run down again quick cos there was another batch coming over.

CHARLES: When I came home on leave, I thought it was terrible. They was coming over all the time. The sirens would go and

you'd be in the shelter all night.

ALEX: We had a gun emplacement on the heath, and on the railway near the house there was a truck with a mobile ackack gun and it sounded terrible. Bill found it very very difficult.

CHARLES: I felt worse here than I did at sea. You see, in the navy, I had something to hit back with. I was a gunner. You felt helpless stuck in the ruddy shelter all night.

ALEX: He used to say to me:

CHARLES: You know you're in the firing line here. You're more dangerous here than what we are.

ALEX: He was so frightened. (THEY LAUGH AND SHE CUDDLES HIM)

ANNA: Occasionally, my parents could get down from London to Somerset when my father was home on leave.

CHARLES: We stayed with the family down there in Mudford, round Christmas time. And the chap, he was a farm labourer, he had a couple of guns. He said:

ALEX: Shall we go out and try to get a hare for dinner?

CHARLES: Right. He went his way and I went mine. I took a shot at a couple of these ruddy hares, and missed both these so-and-sos, and I thought: Damn it, I'd better get back. It was getting a bit dark. Then I see this young boy, couldn't have been no more than about 12 or 14, and he'd got this hare. So I said: Where d'ya get that, son?

ANNA: I caught it with the trap.

CHARLES: Do you wanna sell it?

ANNA: Yes.

CHARLES: How much?

ANNA: A shilling.

CHARLES: I give him a bob. I put this thing across my shoulder and walked back. "See what I got?" We had it Christmas day. Jugged hare. Lovely. That night, me and this chap went down the village pub, I was made to feel very welcome there, and he said to me over a pint:

ALEX: I don't know how you could've shot that. I found no pellets in it. (THEY BOTH LAUGH)

CHARLES: The day before we had to leave, we got the bus into Yeovil and took our Ellen to see the film "Pinocchio". She loved it. I remember very well, when we said goodbye to her, how she clung on to us. It tugged our heart strings to leave her there.

(SONG: ANNA SINGS "When I wish upon a star")

CHARLES: I had to go straight back from leave to Chatham. My name'd been piped up. Able Seaman Jenkins muster on the quarter-deck with your bag and hammock at once. I phoned Elsie from outside the barracks. I said: "I can't tell you where I'm going. I don't even know myself. So I'm off...somewhere." That was it. You went. In fact I was at the back of the Atlantic for about two and a half years.

SONG: "Thanks for that lovely weekend."

ALEX: When Bill was away at sea, I used to stay with the in-laws at Christmas because they were near. My husband's mother had a piano and we'd have a sing-song at Christmas. Pa used to sing "Home on the Range" that was his favourite, and "Money is the root of all evil". The blackout was in operation and a lot of people had the glass in their window panes criss-crossed with brown sticky paper tape as a protection against bomb blast.

ALEX: The very first night they dropped flares, and they lit up the whole area, lighting up their targets, it was like in daytime. My father-in-law said:

CHARLES: Get under the table. I think there's going to be an invasion.

ALEX: He bolted the back door, bless him, to keep out the Germans, he was in such a panic. Mostly though, we used to make light of it. People made a great effort.

ANNA: Falling over in the blackout on your way to a Christmas party was all part of the fun. Everybody giggled and called out to each other:

ALEX: All right Rose?

ANNA: C'mon Charlie. Here's the pavement.

ALEX: You know everyone was so convivial and helped one another.  
SONG: Mr. Wu's an air-raid warden now.

ALEX: I had no fear at all until I had the baby. I had a little boy, a brother for Ellen. Bill was away at sea when he was born. I used to be sitting giving him a feed. Then, all of a sudden,

the soot would come down the chimney with the vibration of the bombs. I'd pick the baby up in me arms and run, and say, "Please God don't let anything happen to the baby." I went through such a lot to get him, see.

ANNA: Mrs. Peeks Christmas Puddings by Peek Freaan.

CHARLES: Oh Mummy, we must have Christmas pudding.

ANNA: I just haven't the heart to make any Christmas puddings. Everything is so dear and so difficult to get.

CHARLES: But Mummy....

ANNA: Oh dear, the children are so **upset about it**, but I really think we'll have to do without **Christmas puddings**.

CHARLES: Mummy, go and meet Mrs. Peek.

ANNA: Who is Mrs. Peek?

CHARLES: Inside every Mrs. Peek's pudding tin is a delicious completely made Christmas pudding. More than enough for three people. All you do is place the tin in boiling water and simmer for one hour.

ANNA: I'll get in some of Mrs. Peek's Christmas puddings.

CHARLES: (SPOON RAISED) Three cheers for Mrs. Peek. Oh Mummy, I'm so glad you found out about Mrs. Peek's puddings.

CHARLES EXIT TO CHANGE INTO DEMOB SUIT

ALEX: We didn't wait till Christmas Eve to do our shopping those years. You knew once your ration had started you couldn't go back and get any more. My sister worked in a shop and she used to crack the eggs so that people could have them. You couldn't sell them then you see. She used to say:

ANNA: Oh blow, we've cracked them two. You'd better take them.

ALEX: You did a lot of harmless fiddles to keep you going. You'd swap your coupons..sweet ones for a quarter of tea, because a cup of tea was very important.

ANNA: Once after we'd had a raid, I said to someone, "I'll go home and see if my house is still standing". Well the wardrobe had fallen on the bed, and it was lucky I wasn't in it. We got two ounces of tea a week, and I'd brought it home with me and I was intending to put it into the little caddy. But I was in such a state, I opened the bag and tipped it all straight into the teapot. Then I spread it out on

newspaper and dried it all. I had to cos that was my allowance for the week.

ALEX: Over Christmas though, there'd be two days peace. That happened every year of the war. When I queued up for a rabbit at Christmas, if the baby was crying the butcher used to call you to the front of the queue and serve you, cos he couldn't stand the baby's crying. One and ninepence for a whole rabbit. You'd soak it in salt water till the meat went white, cos they used to be all red then, the rabbits, and you'd have rabbit stew. It used to do you a couple of days that. You never went hungry, never saw people starved.

CHARLES: Good luck with your Christmas cookery, housewives. May the sirens be kind to you and let you get on with it. Be sure of this anyway, that we at Mc Dougalls have done all we can to give you the very best results, just as in peace time.

ALEX: I'll miss my gay bowl of fruit on the Christmas table.

CHARLES: Not if you have a bowl of salad in its place. Vegetables have such jolly colours, a cheerful glow of carrot, the rich crimson of beetroot, the emerald of parsley. Dip your greenery in a strong solution of Epsom salts. When dry, it will be beautifully frosted.

ALEX: What about my Christmas turkey?

CHARLES: There won't be turkey on many tables this year, but the Christmas atmosphere will be there and the children's eyes will sparkle at Christmas treats served gaily. Above all, if they are borrowed children, go out of your way to make them feel really loved and wanted.

ANNA: It was difficult to write home. You could only talk about the good things. And your parents when they replied never ever mentioned that anything in London was bad. It was all good things, and at the end, everyone always put how much they were missing one another. I think that always come over.

ALEX: One year Woman's Weekly did a pattern for a WAAF doll. I knitted that for Ellen and stuffed it with whatever I could get hold of. And I sent it down to her for Christmas.

ANNA: I'd gone away as a little girl, and when I came back, I'd grown up. You had to grow up. Coming back to London was very difficult. Nobody could understand a word I was talking about. I remember talking, and my mum and gran looking at each other and then collapsing in fits of laughter. They found it very hard to hold a conversation with me because I

was broad Somerset. Still, I was glad to be home.

SONG: Home sweet home again. ENTER CHARLES IN DEMOB SUIT

ANNA: By the time my father got home, he was really remote. I remember before the war how he'd play the piano for us and I used to sing, and how he used to read to me, always always Rudyard Kipling. But by the time he'd got back, I'd grown up that much, that the relationship wasn't there. It was quite difficult really. I'd grown up without him.

CHARLES: We had to get to know each other again. She couldn't talk to me at first. I was a stranger you see. It was a bit grim altogether, because the first lot of demobbed men filled the jobs. By the time I came out, it was a different kettle of fish. Of a night I couldn't stand to be indoors. I'd go for a walk on the heath. Six years I'd been in the navy.

ALEX: The women had a job to settle down too after being out to work. You've got to go through it to know what it's like. We'd been bombed out and I'd lost everything. You didn't realise what you'd lost till years after. You just took it in your stride and thought, "I'm lucky. I'm here." But it was six years out of your life.

CHARLES:

ALEX: We had to go up to the Town Hall and they gave us a prefab in Lee. We started from scratch again. You had furniture coupons, units they called them, to buy your bits and pieces like a chair and a table, all the basics and a bed.

CHARLES: But gradually you picked yourself up and found your way. It took me a couple of years to settle down and become a family man again.

ALEX: It was such a relief to be together again. Utter relief.

CHARLES: When my gratuity money came through from the Navy, sixty-seven pounds, I came in, it was Christmas and I said to Elsie, "I've bought a television". Sixty pounds, and three for the aerial, a massive aerial. I know I was the only bloke in our road with a television.

ALEX: I'd never have had the nerve to do it, but I've always thought how right it was. We didn't have much, and we didn't have money to go out. If you'd had your husband and little girl away all the time, except for brief spells, and you'd had a baby, and then they're home, you've got a house and you've got a television, you're a little unit. Those first Christmases after my demob, we wasn't bothering about what

went on outside our own front door.

FREEZE IN FAMILY UNIT: I'm dreaming of a white Christmas.