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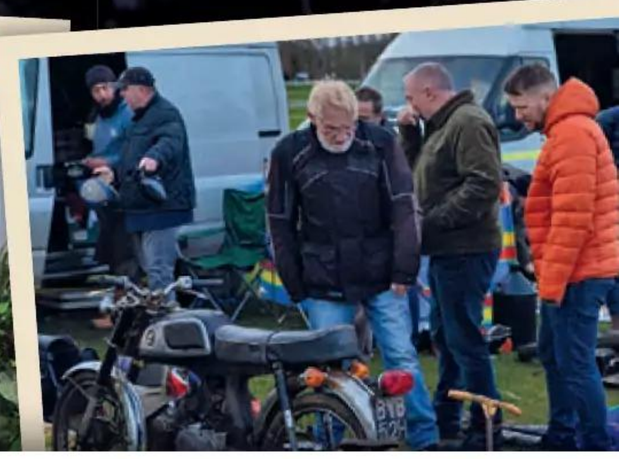
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EDITORIAL

PAULINE'S PERFECT PERFORMANCE

Although it's a little crass to suggest that some of our much-loved actresses are like buses, the sad fact is that three – all with names starting with the letter P – have died in close proximity to one another.

With the death of Pauline Collins being announced while were well into the production run of this issue, I am sorry to say that we have been unable to give her a full tribute in the same way as we have for Prunella Scales and Dame Patricia Routledge. However, you can find an in-depth celebration of her life and career in the February 2021 issue, and I would like to offer a few words of my own.

Like Prunella Scales and Dame Patricia Routledge, Pauline Collins was an accomplished actress best remembered for a standout comedy role. In Pauline's case, it was Shirley Valentine, a role she first played in the West End. After a Broadway transfer, she starred in the play's big screen adaptation, adding a Bafta and other film awards (plus an Oscar and Golden Globe nomination) to the Laurence Olivier Award and the Tony Award she had already won for the part.



Among her roles in several long-running TV series, Pauline was parlour maid Sarah Moffat in Upstairs, Downstairs – a character she would reprise alongside her co-star and husband, John Alderton, for the spin-off Thomas & Sarah – and Dawn, Beryl's (Polly James) flatmate in the first series of The Liver Birds.

Unfortunately, like its Comedy Playhouse pilot, that original series of The Liver Birds is missing from the archives, a fate that has befallen most of the first of her two Doctor Who appearances. In 2006, Pauline played Queen Victoria in the David Tennant story Tooth & Claw. However, 39 years earlier, she was Samantha Briggs in The Faceless Ones.

Only two of its six episodes are known to have survived but, judging from what we can see of Pauline's performance, you can see why she was asked to join Patrick Troughton and Frazer Hines on a permanent basis.

She turned the offer down, of course; which, as a Doctor Who fan, was a little disappointing. But, as Pauline's career went stratospheric without the need of the Tardis, she certainly made the right decision.

Simon Stabler

PICK A CARD, ANY CARD...

Cardinal Cox has a Christmas message for you

Back in the early years of this century, while I was the poet laureate of my home city, a couple of friends saw an advert from a greetings card manufacturer with a vacancy for someone to write the verse. I applied. To help sift through the applicants, the company set a poem for the candidates to write. To stretch us, I guess, they set something that would be difficult. I was given the task of writing the verse for a birthday card to a husband.

Aren't cards for blokes all either pints of beer, football or fishing, with a very occasional yacht? Mind you, those for women all tend to be either floral or prosecco. And why do card shops insist on giving you a receipt? Has anyone gone back in asking for a refund for a Congratulations on Your Wedding card because it has been called off?

The popularity of cards dates from advances in production such as printing in the 1850s, combined with the introduction of the penny post. And wars, be they Crimean, American Civil, Boer or Great helped boost the popularity of the pre-printed verse, speaking for those who could not find their own words.

There are two recent superstars of the greetings card industry in this country. Purple Ronnie with simple pictures and rhymes about internal gas. These first appeared at the end of the 1980s. Ronnie was followed by the more philosophical Edward Monkton who also wrote such works as The Pig of Happiness and Giraffes Can't Dance. Both of whom are actually Giles Andreae (who early in his career shared a flat with Richard Curtis).

I didn't get the job with the card company but, 10 years later, when I was poet-in-residence of a church, I wrote the following as an offering to the parishioners for something to put in their Christmas cards. As that time is approaching, I'd like to extend that offer to you:

A Christmas light at this dark time
Entwined within simple card rhyme
For though nights might be long and cold
And whether we are young or old
Whether we are far or near
Thoughts of you are with me here

We're told love came to walk on Earth
Symbolised by a virgin birth
Wise men gave gifts, shepherds had thoughts
And I, in turn, this card I bought
Cash to a cause, a picture to you
And all my best seasonal thoughts too

Next Issue: Spangles

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EDITORIAL

Editor
Simon Stabler
simon.stabler@kelsey.co.uk

Publishing Director
Dan Savage

Publisher
Tim Hartley

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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subscriptions@mortons.co.uk
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ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Advertising Representative
Craig Amess
01507 529537
craig.amess@kelsey.co.uk

Head of Customer Marketing (Subscriptions)
Claire Aspinall

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Cover: Clive Swift and Patricia Routledge promote The Father Christmas Suit, Keeping Up Appearances' 1991 Christmas special.

Photograph: BBC



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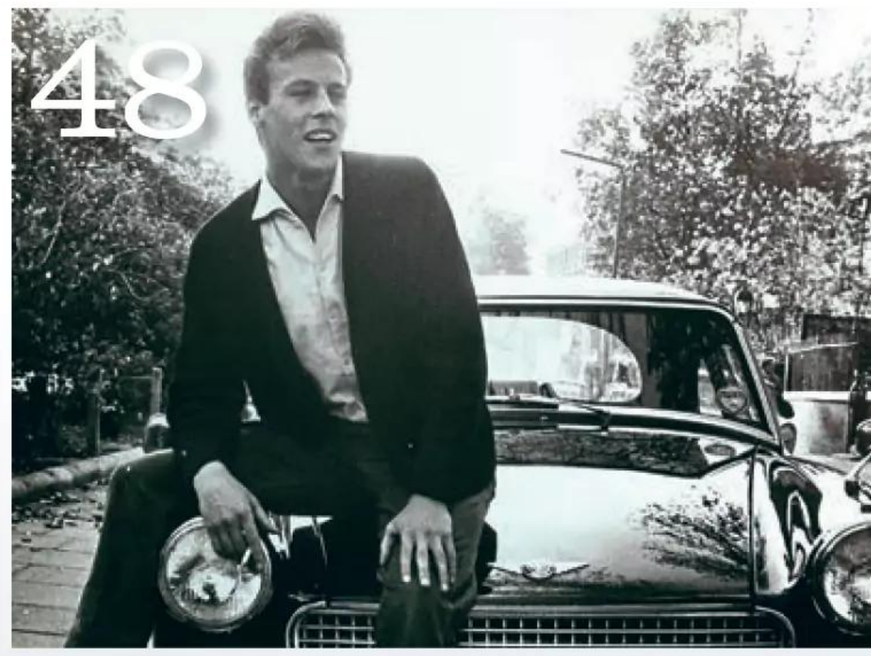
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Postbag

The Editor welcomes letters for this section. Pictures are appreciated. Letters may be edited so that we can include as many as possible

A Brucie Bonus

Dear Simon,

Reading the articles on ITV (September) reminded me of something that was featured on Sunday Night at the London Palladium in about 1959-60.

Bruce Forsyth was the compere, and he used to read a poem that featured titles of all the popular television programmes at that time. It began:

Bronco Lane had a pain
So they sent for Wagon Train
Wagon Train was no good
So they sent for Robin Hood

Bruce said he had received letters from headteachers complaining how pupils would recite it at every opportunity, which probably only encouraged the practice.

Regards

Derek Lamb
Potters Bar, Hertfordshire

A Lesson Learned



Dear Simon,

We are currently seeing pre-Christmas items in newspapers and on television, which remind me of my first Christmas party back in 1944.

At that time, I was a 14-year-old telegram boy who had recently left school and joined the Post Office, where I was allocated to the Hammersmith main office in west London. It was a difficult time as we were still enduring the German V1 and V2 rocket attacks on London.

I found that messenger life was very strange; I was named as "the Chisel", a strange tradition where the junior boy at all post offices was so named. Nobody knew why, it was just one of the things in my new working life.

I was paid £1 per week for a 48-hour period, which sometimes could include a Sunday. There were 20 boys at my office with ages ranging from 14 to 18 years and two of our most senior boys had just reached that landmark age and were being called up for army service starting in the new year of 1945.

These two were great big lads, well over 6ft. They had opted at the age of 16 to not go on as postmen but to remain as messengers prior to their call-up. One was Andy Wilson, the other was "Basher" Brandon and they wanted to mark their departure with a proper old Christmas party to include about 20 of our lady counter clerks, as well as the messengers.

The girls provided cakes and sandwiches and Andy – he was a bit of a spiv with contacts in the black market – promised to supply the beer and wines etc. Andy always seemed to have plenty of money, lots of cigarettes and supplied the girls with silk stockings. He also owned a battered old BSA motorcycle with a sidecar and, with his contacts, always had a supply of petrol.

For the party, we all chipped in with 2*s* 6*d* and Andy produced an old gramophone and dance records, and our overseer agreed to use our large rest room on the Saturday prior to Christmas. The special night proved to be great fun with plenty to eat and drink, then Andy and Basher decided the Chisel should get drunk and began plying me with various homemade wines. Apparently, I very soon passed out, and I was draped over a chair and placed in a corner.

The party ended at midnight, and Andy agreed to take me home in his sidecar and Basher carried me out. They knew I lived close by in Roehampton and off we went. My mother heard the clatter of the old bike while she was in bed – she got up, peered out the window and saw me stuck in the privet hedge by our front door, legs waving in the air. She soon got downstairs and found me out of it, trying to sing The Lambeth Walk.

Dad came down and helped get me in the house where they draped me on the sofe with a blanket over me. Mother was quite angry but my father merely said: "He'll learn".

The next day, I was so very ill, quite giddy with a dreadful headache and said I would not drink again. I went all through my entire working life without touching a drop of alcohol. Only now, in my senior years, have I been known to sip a small Baileys.

Yes, my father was right, I did learn my lesson about the demon drink.

Ron McGill
Worplesdon, Guildford, Surrey

Breaking the Sound Barrier



Dear Simon,

Bob Barton's Postcard from London (October) stirred up memories of my years in the capital working as a temp. In those days, I might be working in two or three different offices in the course of a week – and, naturally, they all had their own typewriters, which I had to master double-quick to get the work done. It was a bit like a rodeo.

I was not a professional typist, just a student of economics coping with cash flow in the holidays. I still can't type.

One memorable day, I was working for London Transport. In a great mausoleum of a place with remarkable acoustics, a cohort of typists were bashing out reports in an attempt to break the sound barrier. Pristine copies were mandatory.

Unfortunately, seven carbon copies were required and the office didn't run to white correcting fluid. Possibly this was still in the future, like those handy Tipp-Ex slips which often saved the day.

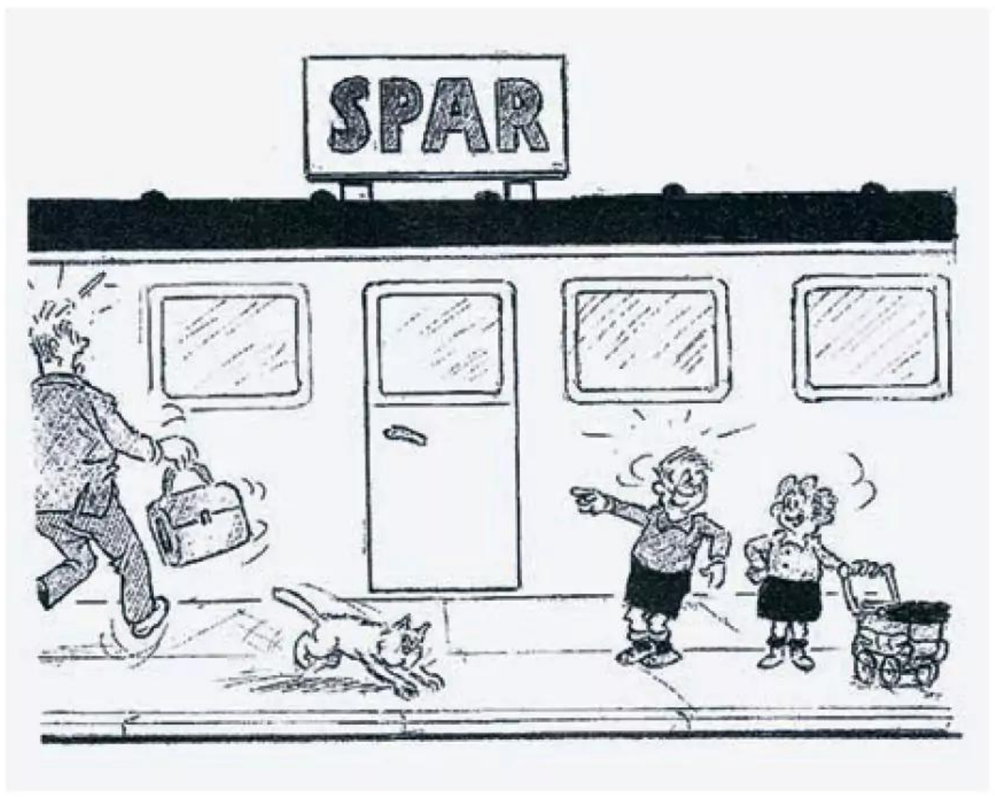
I set to work on a report on night blinds – the "concertina" fabric that hung behind the bus driver to isolate him from the noisy interior of the bus. Gripping stuff, you see.

Armed only with a heavy-duty eraser to correct any mistakes (eight times), I began my morning's work. They must have taken pity on me, or I would still be there, making holes in the "flimsies" and getting in a mess.

I still have my own faithful Olympia, unusable now I can't get ribbons, but in good working order. When they are a little older, I'll let my grandsons see the past in action.

All best wishes,
Susan Batten
Basque Country, Spain

Commerce in a Carriage



It had been an old railway carriage many years before. It was old, rotten inside and as you walked down the inside from one end to the other, some products would tumble off the shelf due to the vibrations.

Why on earth I ever agreed to be the manager of this store, I could not imagine. Well, that's strictly not true – a new store was being built right next to it. I would be the manager, so there was some hope for me as long as I survived my time where I was. This carriage-cum-shop wasn't old, it was ancient. However, set in a rural location, it had served its public well through the years and, here it was, with the keys in my had – my first store.

The company arranged for a very pleasant and informative lady to meet me at the shop, and she explained all the administrative procedures but left afterwards. I had to transfer a considerable number of cases from this old store to the new one. I also sold off a lot of old stock, which the company didn't want to go to the new, posh store.

I worked hard and was confirmed as the new manager.

We sold loose paraffin, dispensed in a large can. What an awful stink, but it served the customers well. We also sold spirits of salt in an old bottle, methylated spirit, kindling and bags of coal, which were delivered as requested.

Vim for cleaning, wooden scrubbing brushes and besom brooms, flypapers, mousetraps and shoe whitener. Even, would you believe, blotting paper.

Various brands of dog food including Good Boy dog chocolates.

Cigarettes included Craven "A", Capstan and fives of Park Drive – can you remember them?

If I thought all the customers would be pleased and happy, I could not have made a bigger error of judgement. They were in many cases critical and disappointed with the range the new store had. So much so, that head office had to listen and a fair number of lines held at the old store were brought back and added to the range.

This was something that pleased many but, gradually, the customers were introduced to new lines that replaced their old favourites, but they'd made their point.

I did not remain manager for more than six months, another challenge came my way, but never again would I accept managership of a shop I had not just seen.

Alan Penn
Braemar, Aberdeenshire

Photograph: Bob Barton

Craft in Crisis

Dear Simon,

Michael Montagu's article about the royal train (Royals on the Rails) in the October issue of BoB brought back many memories for me, because I served my apprenticeship as a coach trimmer at Wolverton railway carriage works. I moved to Vauxhall Motors, Luton when I was 21, because the railway works could not guarantee any apprentices employment after their training.

As I have benefited from both companies and witnessed the contrast in apprentice training, I feel qualified to pose the question: "Whatever happened to craft training?"

At the railway works, we were taught the old-fashioned way of doing things. The presence of the royal train and Queen Adelaide's saloon (pictured) in our midst were a constant reminder of the high standard required.

One example of our strict training was when I worked on an 8ft 3ins seat, hand-stitching the front roll. The section leader, armed with a measure, told me to undo my stitching about 4ft because one stitch was just over ½ins long.

When I moved to Vauxhall, I found it very easy. It was difficult to imagine a Vauxhall apprentice going the other way. My tools, which I had struggled to buy with my apprentice wages at Wolverton, were not required. The apprentice training was also very different as they followed a module system, ie spending time in all departments to gain overall experience until it was decided which trade suited them best.





I enjoyed my long career in Vauxhall's trim and finishing department, our work including prototype builds, experimental and show vehicle preparation. I always felt that my skills were appreciated and was successfully rewarded.

Using my usual approach to monitor progress by looking backwards, it's easy to see that the demise of craft apprenticeships can be blamed on successive governments and trade unions. They have failed to exploit the rich legacy left to us by Victorian engineers and craftsmen.

Terry Glenn
Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire

Good Dodd

Dear Simon,

I would like to congratulate Philip and David Williams for their excellent appreciation of the wonderful Ken Dodd (The Serious Side of Ken Dodd, June).

In 1965, when Ken was arguably at his peak, I was walking into the London heart hospital with my new wife. We were visiting her mother who had a hole in the heart and was facing an operation.

We were only a few yards from the entrance when I felt sure I had just seen Ken Dodd in a winter coat with his collar turned up, starting to walk the way we had just come from. I told my wife and darted off to catch him up.

I explained to Ken why I was there and said I'd be very grateful if he could let me have his autograph since my mother-in-law was a great fan of his. He was absolutely charming and, in no time, produced a photograph. He signed it: "To Diddy Doreen" and added his wishes for her recovery. We were thrilled to have this to give to her. We thought she'd be over the moon but it took my wife a lot to persuade her that it was real and that we really had met Ken and this was his special message to her.

When we finally got her to believe it, I took it round the three other beds in the ward to show the patients Ken's photo and massage. They were all fans of Ken and his songs, and it prompted conversation all round.

My mother-in-law survived eight years longer than expected. When she got home, Ken's photo was framed, and it sat above the fireplace until she died.

It was just another thing Ken did that he would never receive publicity for, but we loved him.

Colin Macleod
Beauly, Inverness



Photographs: (Saloon) The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum

Hot Wheels

Dear Simon,

Could I just correct and amplify the description of item No 5 in Treasures in the Attic (November)?

While General Montgomery had a famous Humber staff car known as Old Faithful, the vehicle illustrated is one of three caravans that he used but none of these were of that make. The one pictured is a Leyland Retriever, fitted with an Italian body which his troops captured from an Italian general in 1941 and which he used as an office and living quarters until 1943, when a second lorry, a Lancia, was captured from an Italian field marshal. This he then used as his sleeping quarters but there was, additionally, a third truck, a Ford articulated unit purpose-built for him which he used as a map room from 1944.

All four vehicles have fortunately survived and are in the care of the Imperial War Museum at Duxford or in London.

All the best
Martin Broadribb



Starr on 45

Dear Simon,

With regards question 16 in November's Twenty Questions, the drummer on the Beatles' first single was Ringo Starr not Andy White. The Andy White version of Love Me Do, recorded on 11 September 1962, was used on the Please Please Me LP and later replaced the Ringo version, recorded on 4 September 1962, on reissues of the single.



Andrew Hudson

Can you help?

Is there anyone out there who travelled with me in an old green doubledecker all the way from the steps of Manchester University Students Union building to Moscow and beyond in the summer of 1967? I'm trying to compile a memoir of that epic trip and would really appreciate your input. I was Maggie Collie in those days.
Maggie Cobbett, 6 King's Mead, Ripon, North Yorkshire HG4 1EJ Tel: 07969 381079 Email: maggiecobbett@gmail.com

Looking for a 4mm scale pottery model of a Leyland Titan TD5, assembled or unassembled, as produced by I Short Models of Blackpool.
Paul Hill, Tel: 07731 146185, Email: graham500@aol.com

Does anyone know the whereabouts of Peter Bonner. He has a brother, David Bonner. He went to Warren School, Chadwell Heath.
Sarah Cooke, Tel: 07354 406062

Is there anyone out there who took part in the Essex Senior Scout 4th European Expedition to Germany in the summer of 1959? If so, I would love to hear from you; I have a number of photos but no other paper records of our first ever visit abroad.
David Sansom, Email: davidwsansom@yahoo.co.uk

Looking for any relations descended from the Buttle family of Little and Great Sampford, Essex. Also, anyone related to the Dixon family of Cockfield and Raby Co Durham.
Lee Gibson, 124 Cantley Manor Avenue, Doncaster DN4 6TN Email: lee.gibson124@yahoo.com

Would like to contact June Hatcher who lived in Smalldale Road, Great Barr, Birmingham. This would be her maiden name, so she may have married. Her sisters were Dorothy and Jaquelline who went to Perry Beeches School. June went to Erdington Girls' County Grammar School.
John Chilton, Email: chiltonjohn2@gmail.com

Is there anybody out there who remembers the rock band Dumpy's Rusty Nuts? They were around in the early 1980s and earlier. I have a T-shirt with their name and a motorbike logo on it which is in excellent condition. Is anybody interested?
J Sales, 55 Nant Drive, Oban, Argyll PA34 4NL

Requests for information, friends and family searches and reunion announcements can be included here free of charge. Send any requests, written as concisely as possible, to Can You Help?, Best of British, Kelsey Media Ltd, Media Centre, Morton Way, Horncastle, Linconshire LN9 6JR or by email to info@bestofbritishmag.co.uk

Missing Out

Dear Simon,

My childhood was spent in Poole, Dorset. The Poole and Bournemouth area had everything a child would want. Well, that's not quite true. It was missing a decent minigolf course. Poole Park had a poor example, while Bournemouth had a novelty one.

So, my pal Mike Morton and I had to go further afield to hone our skills (or lack of them, in my case). We went to Swanage, just a few miles away. There were two courses, one near the pier and one on the outskirts.

We would go on our bikes and take the Sandbanks ferry. We both had secondhand bikes with poor brakes and would have to put our feet on the tyres to help us slow down.

There was a long hill down into Swanage and, one day, I was going too fast and my foot on the wheel wasn't slowing me enough, so I veered off into a sideroad. I still crashed but not at the speed I would have crashed if I had carried on all the way to the bottom.

Mike's interest in golf stayed with him as an adult. He played proper golf on full-size courses and would attend big tournaments. I watched golf on TV, that was my limit.

When we were 16 years old, we went to watch the final of the Ladies' British Open Amateur Championship 1951 between Kitty MacCann and Frances Stephens. It was held at Broadstone Golf Club, about four miles from Poole.



Broadstone Golf Club

We had our sandwiches and a camera. We watched the 14th hole and decided to miss out the 15th hole. We were tired, so went straight to the green on the 16th hole to give ourselves a rest. From our viewpoint, we could see the green on the 15th hole.

Suddenly, applause broke out. We could hear the clapping and assumed a great shot had been played. Then, to our great surprise, they all headed for the clubhouse.

We asked a man coming our way why they had not played the 16th hole. He said: "Mrs McCann had won 4 and 3." This meant nothing to us and he explained: "She was four holes up and as there were only three holes left, she could not be caught."

We hadn't known that rule and were unable to get a photo of the winner with the trophy.

David Sim
Normanby, Middlesbrough

The Dream Suit

Dear Simon,

I am not a follower of fashion. Before the weather took a downward turn recently, everywhere I looked men (and sometimes women) were wearing shorts (global warming maybe).

The man who delivers my post and the window cleaner wore shorts. I even saw a man coming out of the paper shop in pink shorts. I do have a pair of holiday shorts, but my legs look a bit skinny in them (see picture). It's just that when I was a child, only boys wore shorts and I remember the pleasure of getting my first pair of long trousers.

I've got a lot of suits. They've sort of accumulated over the years. There's a morning suit, and a dinner jacket (neither worn for at least 20 years), the suit I was wearing for work when I retired in 1996, and a smart suit I bought when I retired and now wear occasionally at a luncheon club. Also, there's a dark grey suit I bought for funerals from BHS when it was closing down. It was half price and isn't a very good fit.

Then there's what I refer to as my dream suit. About 10 years ago, I was invited to a 60th birthday party. A few days before the event, I woke up in the middle of the night realising that I hadn't thought about what to wear. When I eventually got to sleep, I dreamt I was wearing a grey suit and everyone was saying how nice it looked. So, I dashed out the following morning and bought one. While in my dream everyone had been complimentary, that didn't happen at the party as the suit had a sort of crumpled look to it.

Finally, there's the smart light grey suit I bought for a family wedding because the couple about to be married said it would be nice if the men could wear grey. Buying that suit was far from easy. The shop only had one in my size. It had a crease across the jacket so I asked if they could iron it out. I also wanted a large carrier bag to take it home in not a £6 suit carrier. They weren't keen to do either but reluctantly agreed.

Nowadays, most days are dress down days, so I don't need all these suits. Maybe



I should pension some of them off and buy some more shorts. What do you think?

Don Alcott
Shirley, Solihull, West Midlands

Photograph: (Broadstone) Creative Commons/Derek Harper

Time Gentlemen Please



Al Murray the Pub Landlord at London Weekend Television's studios on the South Bank. I remember driving up to LWT for my first meeting, stopping outside reception and asking where to park for the day. I had to reverse back but didn't realise that a retractable bollard had gone up behind me, leaving me with a nice dent in the back of my lovely new car. Not the very best of starts.

Dear Simon,

The latest edition of BoB set off a whole string of half-forgotten memories of my time working in television as a set designer, including a programme or two for LWT (Editorial and The Gentle Touch, November).

I worked for the BBC at Television Centre for 30 years on such shows as Open All Hours, Yes, Minister, Doctor Who, Blake's Seven, Miss Marple and many, many more. Happy times.

But, by the mid-90s, things were changing. It began with security and catering being outsourced and staff being made redundant, but then it widened to include other core departments. Luckily for me, I was working at Elstree on Eastenders when we were given notice, so I naturally went down to the production team to say goodbye. "What do you mean you are leaving?" said the producer, clearly appalled. "Don't clear your desk; you are staying. See you on Monday!"

And that was the start of my career as a self-employed designer, and art director with the BBC and various independent studios, with my work taking me to many leading studios including Shepperton, Pinewood, Twickenham and Teddington – where I was lucky enough to work on such great programmes as The Vicar of Dibley, The Green Green Grass and Only Fools and Horses.

One experience I recall very fondly was working on Time Gentlemen Please with Al Murray as the Guv, along with Rebecca Front as the brewery representative and Phil Daniels as Al's flatulent friend Terry. As Al is the great-great-great-grandson of William Makepeace Thackeray, the great novelist and illustrator, we of course had to include a nod to his ancestry by placing a bust of the author at the back of the bar.

In the episode King Barstewards, where Guv wanted to be the King Barsteward in the Order of Barstewards, the Order's committee was to come and inspect the pub at short notice. Imagine the scene. The ladies' toilet is immaculate with flowers, padded chairs and paintings, which was in complete contrast to the gents', which we had to make as disgusting as possible, with an inch of "urine" flooding the floor, filthy walls complete with paint spray graffiti and the rest. We laid a large clear plastic sheet on the studio floor and had the carpenter fit a 6 inch board around it to form a tank. The set was then constructed inside the tank which we then filled with water and gallons of apple juice and bottles of Tizer with bits of floating tissue. To say it looked disgusting is an understatement. Can you imagine the faces and comments of the makeup and costume ladies when they arrived in the studio?

As you can see by the photos of the cast and crew, we did have fun.



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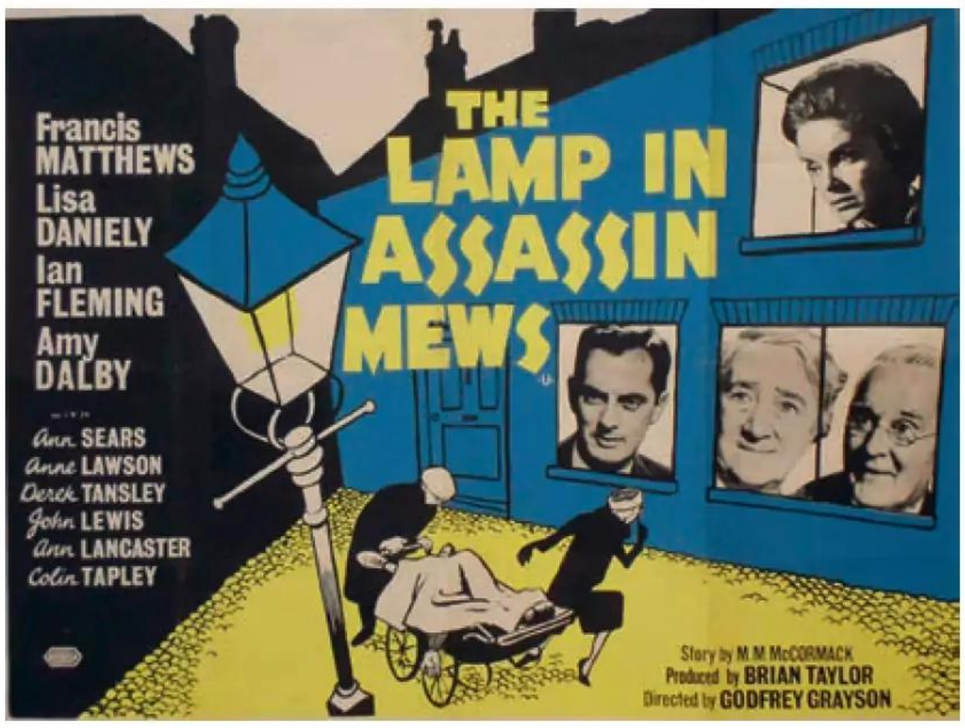
The Traitor (1957)
(Monday 1 December, 6.50am)
Drama. Director: Michael McCarthy. Starring: Anton Diffring, Donald Wolfit, Robert Bray and Jane Griffiths. Survivors of a resistance group meet at a country house to find out who betrayed their leader.

Sherlock Holmes: The Secret Weapon (1942)
(Monday 1 December, 2.55pm)
Mystery. Director: Roy William Neill. Starring: Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. Following the kidnapping of a Swiss scientist by Professor Moriarty, Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson have to crack a secret code in order to save the country.

Brighton Rock (1947)
(Wednesday 3 December, 9pm)
Crime. Director: John Boulting. Starring: Richard Attenborough, William Hartnell, Hermione Baddeley and Carol Marsh. Psychopathic young gangster Pinkie Brown desperately tries to cover his tracks after he murders a journalist.

Mark Saber
(Thursday 4 December, 8pm)
Death Needs No Cane Starring: Donald Gray, Teresa Thorne and Michael Balfour. A stockbroker seeks Mark Saber's help when he finds he has received £10,000 in counterfeit money.

Z Cars (1962)
(Friday 5 December, 8pm)
Stab in the Dark Starring: Jeremy Kemp and James Ellis. Steele and Lynch work overtime to find the villain in a case that brings top brass into Victor Division to investigate.

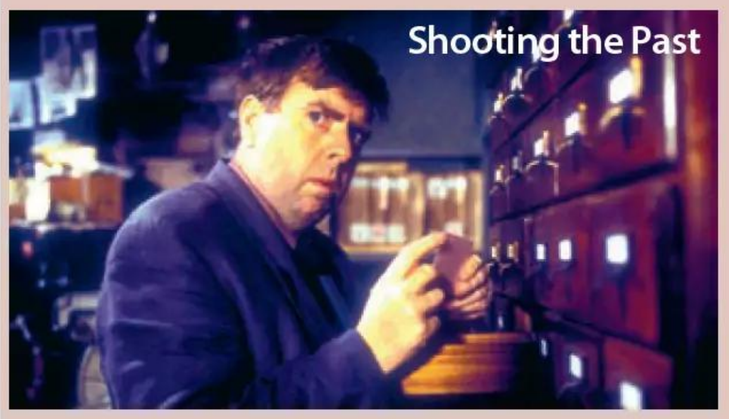


The Lamp in Assassin Mews (1962)
(Saturday 6 December, 5.40pm)
Comedy. Director: Godfrey Grayson. Starring: Francis Matthews, Lisa Daniely, Ian Fleming and Amy Dalby. Modernising councillor Jack Norton becomes the target of a couple of elderly serial killers when he supports plans to remove the last gas lamp in their street.

iPLAYER
bbc.co.uk/iplayer

Shooting the Past
When an American property developer arrives in London, he is perplexed at the warm welcome he is given by the employees of a vast photographic archive. It seems there has been a misunderstanding, and he tells the head of the collection that the 10m pictures will have to be sold or destroyed. A three-part drama serial by Stephen Poliakoff, starring Timothy Spall and Lindsay Duncan.

The War Game
Controversial drama that depicts the consequences of a nuclear attack on Britain. The terrible aftermath of a nuclear bomb in Kent is portrayed in the style of a news programme. Written and directed by Peter Watkins, The War Game won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 1966, even though the BBC decided not to show it when it was made as 'the effect of the film has been judged by the BBC to be too horrifying for the medium of broadcasting'. The film was finally televised on 31 July 1985.



Man Alive
The Office Party In a documentary, first transmitted in 1970, reporter Gillian Strickland and a Man Alive team take a typical office and film the preparations for the annual party, the spree itself and the aftermath.

itvX
itv.com

Fat Friends
Laugh-out-loud comedy drama, created by Kay Mellor and starring Alison Steadman, Gaynor Faye, Ruth Jones and James Corden. Welcome to the local slimming club, run by the formidable Carol. But everyone supports each other, come what may.

The Grand
Period drama series about a luxury hotel. It is New Year's Eve 1919, and the lavish reopening of the Grand Hotel soon turns sour for its owner John Bannerman.

Goodnight Mister Tom
Heartwarming World War Two drama starring John Thaw. A curmudgeonly widower living in a small village takes in a shy evacuee from London, and teaches him to read, write and draw.

Photographs: (Shooting the Past) BBC, (Cookson) ITV/YTV 1989

LEGEND

FREEVIEW 41, SKY 148, FREESAT 137, VIRGIN 149

Donnie Brasco (1997)
(Sunday 14 December, 9pm)
Johnny Depp stars as undercover FBI agent Joe Pistone, who infiltrates the mob as the "jewel man" Donnie Brasco. Manoeuvring his way into the confidence of aging hitman Lefty Ruggiero (Al Pacino) who enlists Donnie as his protégé. But, as Donnie moves deeper into the Mafia, he realises he's not only crossing the line between federal agent and criminal but also leading his friend to an almost certain death sentence.

Gold (1974)
(Friday 19 December, 11.30am)
Action with Roger Moore, Susannah York. After an engineer is appointed manager of a mine, he uncovers a conspiracy to boost the price of gold by drilling into an underground lake and flooding the mine.



Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger (1977)
Fantasy adventure with Patrick Wayne, Jane Seymour and Patrick Troughton, with effects by Ray Harryhausen. A fearless adventurer battles evil magic and terrifying beasts in his quest to rid a prince of a dreadful curse.

Starship Troopers (1997)
(Saturday 27 December, 9pm)
Johnny Rico volunteers for the mobile infantry to do his federal service. Far from having patriotic motives, Johnny has joined to win the heart of his girlfriend, Carmen, who has signed up to become a starship pilot. When a tragic training accident occurs while on his watch, Johnny realises that he joined up for the wrong reasons. He is about to resign when the earth is attacked by an intelligent race of alien bugs.

U&GOLD

SKY 110, VIRGIN 124, TALKTALK 310, NOW TV

Keeping Up Appearances
(Monday 1 December, 6.20pm)
The Father Christmas Suit Festive laughs with Hyacinth Bucket who decides Richard should distribute gifts to the old folk at the church hall dressed as Father Christmas.

Porridge
(Saturday 6 December, 8pm)
The Desperate Hours Comedy legend Ronnie Barker stars as Fletch in this Christmas special. Fletcher plans some festive spirit at Slade in the form of his very own homemade liquor.

U&DRAMA

FREEVIEW/YOUVIEW/BT/ TALKTALK 20, SKY 143, VIRGIN 130, FREESAT 158
(Wednesday 1 October, 3.20pm)

The Bill
(Monday 1 December, 11.55am)
S.A.D. Arresting drama with the officers from Sun Hill. The New Year sales bring more than Ashton bargained for, while Boyden's love of mince pies leads to a shocking revelation.

Catherine Cookson: The Fifteen Streets
(Sunday 7 December, 3.05pm) Sean Bean and Jane Horrocks star in a feature-length adaptation of the bestselling novel. What chance do young lovers have in the north-east of 1910?

U&YESTERDAY

FREEVIEW/YOUVIEW/BT/ TALKTALK 27, SKY 155, VIRGIN 129, FREESAT 159

War Factories
(Tuesday 2 December, 10am)
Dambuster Factory
How the Lancaster factory, one of the biggest buildings in Europe at the time, helped to create a truly war-winning weapon.

How Britain Worked
(Saturday 6 December, 9pm)
Guy Martin visits Llandudno in north Wales to try to return the seaside resort to its former Victorian glory, restoring its pier, and servicing its funicular tramway.


Catherine Cookson: The Fifteen Streets

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Hush-Hush No More?

An appeal has been launched to uncover any voice recordings of railway engineer Sir Nigel Gresley who is best known for designing the steam locomotives Flying Scotsman, Cock O' the North and Mallard. While numerous photographs and newsreel footage of Sir Nigel exist, no known recording of his voice has ever been identified. The Gresley Society Trust (gresley.org) aims to compile a comprehensive archive of Sir Nigel's life and work as part of the celebrations marking the 150th anniversary of his birth in 2026, and a voice recording would be a priceless addition.

"Finding a recording of Sir Nigel Gresley's voice would be to hear history speaking," says the trust's chairman, Philip Benham. "It would give us a direct connection to the man behind some of the world's greatest steam locomotives, and we urge anyone who might have such a treasure to come forward and share it with the world."



An appeal to find voice recordings of railway engineer Sir Nigel Gresley has been launched ahead of the 150th anniversary of his birth.

The Jag Is Back

A rare Jaguar car has returned to the Lakeland Motor Museum (015395 30400, lakelandmotormuseum.co.uk) after undergoing a marque specialist recommissioning. The 1937 SS Jaguar 100, one of only 200 vehicles of this model ever made, has been loaned to the museum by its owner in memory of her late husband who owned the car for more than 60 years. In its day, the SS Jaguar 100 reached speeds of 100mph and this particular car, which was tested by the Motor Magazine and Autocar, completed the 1937 RAC rally, helping to win the manufacturer's team prize.

"Many people regard the SS Jaguar 100 as one of the most eye-catching Jaguar cars ever made," says museum manager Chris Lowe. "We're thrilled to see it return to the museum as it was a popular part of our display the first time around, so we anticipate much excitement about its return."



The SS Jaguar 100, one of only 200 of this model made, has undergone a marque specialist recommissioning and is now in full working order.

My Must Farm

The history of the "Pompeii of the Fens" is to be brought back to life thanks to a £250,000 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. The grant, awarded to Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery (01733 864663, peterboroughmuseum.org.uk), will support a two-year initiative centred on the internationally significant bronze age archaeology of Must Farm in Whittlesey. The discovery of the Must Farm settlement in 2015 provided an extraordinary glimpse into everyday life in the bronze age due to the exceptional preservation of its artefacts. This newly funded project, made possible by National Lottery players, entitled My Must Farm, will encourage communities to bring these discoveries alive in imaginative and exciting ways for visitors from Peterborough and beyond.



Containing weapons, textiles, beads, fish traps, cooking items and Britain's earliest wheel, the Must Farm settlement archive offers an unparalleled insight into bronze age life.

Photograph: (Clock) Blenheim Palace/Pete Seaward

Golden Great

An 18th century clock tower, housing a rare timepiece made by the man behind St Paul's Cathedral's original clock, has undergone a seven-week restoration programme amid high winds, rain, and extreme heat. The restoration at the entrance to Blenheim Palace's Great Courtyard was a joint project between teams at Blenheim (01993 810530, blenheimpalace.com), The Cumbria Clock Company, Apex Scaffolding of Northampton, and John Naysmith of The Oxford Iron Company, who oversaw the painting of the clock face and the regilding of the clock hands and numerals, as well as the decorative golden sphere on the top of the tower, which took more than a thousand sheets of gold leaf alone to cover.

The clock in the tower is considered the finest surviving example of the craftsmanship of renowned clockmaker Langley Bradley. The movement, dated 1710, was made just a year after Bradley completed his masterpiece at St Paul's Cathedral. The Blenheim installation includes several distinctive features known to have appeared in the St Paul's clock, such as finely turned corner posts and fleur-de-lys motifs on various train bars. No other surviving Bradley clocks are known to incorporate these and other unique details.

"This has truly been a real team effort," says Chris Monaghan, clerk of works in the Blenheim Palace Built Heritage team. "The clock tower is now looking wonderful, back to working order with its beautiful capri blue clock faces, 23.5 carat gold numerals and surround, and a golden sphere that will shine for many years to come. It was a fantastic project to be part of, working with some amazing people to make it all come together in the end."



The restoration was carried out in difficult weather conditions, which included high winds, rain and extreme heat.

He added: "John Naysmith's work was carried out in some difficult conditions; we started with quite high winds that were causing too much draft whilst stripping the old paint and gold from the clock faces, and then we also had some extremely warm days where it would start to dry base layers too quickly for the gilding or painting to take place. There were also days of terrible sudden downpours of rain that penetrated through the scaffold wrap while the new painting process was underway."

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Gertcha!

Jon Askew raises a dimpled tankard to the kings of rockney

At the time of their chart success, spanning the late 1970s into the early 1980s, north London lads Chas & Dave must have been one of the most unlikely pop acts around. Already well into their 30s and not particularly stylish in appearance, how could these old boys flourish in the new wave/new romantic era? That they managed to do so, is testament to their often-overlooked musical talent and years of industry experience.

Hailing from the neighbouring towns of Edmonton and Enfield and both born during the war, lead singer/pianist Chas Hodges and bassist Dave Peacock had a string of self-penned hits based upon the cockney style of rock'n'roll they originated and named rockney, having grown tired of singing with American accents. Heavily influenced by early rock'n'roll, pub singalongs and skiffle, there was an engaging humour and infectious joy about their material as they faithfully stuck to their roots in a way that had never really been successful in the pop charts before, or since.

Backed by their long-time drummer Mick Burt, their first big chart hit came in 1979 with the song Gertcha, the title coming from a cockney slang term of outrage. This gave them their first appearance on Top of the Pops, the show that week also featuring fellow Londoners Squeeze, and Blondie at No 1 with Sunday Girl.

Chas & Dave followed this up with further hits such as Rabbit, The Sideboard Song, Ain't No Pleasing You, Snooker Loopy, Stars Over 45 and Ossie's Dream, to commemorate Spurs' appearance in the 1981 FA Cup Final. But, unless you're a Spurs fan, probably their most universally popular song is Margate, which celebrates a day trip to the seaside with buckets, spades and jellied eels. The long-term success of this number is no doubt due to it featuring prominently in the Only Fools and Horses 1989 Christmas special, The Jolly Boys' Outing.

Establishing themselves as a first-rate live act, they were awarded with a series on ITV called Chas & Dave's Knees Up, where they performed in a pub setting and played with numerous guests including Eric Burden, Linda Lewis and Lulu as well as close friends such as singer Mike Berry and guitar greats Eric Clapton and Albert Lee. In addition, they had the honour of opening for Led Zeppelin at their historic 1979 performance at Knebworth, twice performed at Glastonbury and then at the huge VE Day 70th anniversary concert held on Horse Guards Parade in 2015.

However, despite their achievements Chas & Dave were not always taken seriously and often dismissed as a novelty act or East End pub entertainers who just got lucky. Their stage attire of trilby hats, jackets and braces no doubt added to that perception, as did the lyrics to many of their songs, but they were simply singing about what they knew from their working-class London backgrounds and were, in fact, extremely talented musicians.

Chas Hodges had started out with a band called the Outlaws, which included Deep Purple guitarist Ritchie Blackmore, and, before teaming up with Dave Peacock, they were both renowned session players and support acts for a variety of artists, including Jerry Lee Lewis, Gene Vincent, Bill Haley and the Beatles.

They also received a huge boost to their credibility as songwriters when American superstar Tori Amos covered one of their compositions in 1996. While living in Swiss Cottage she decided to get into the heart and soul of the city by covering their song London Girls and delivered a very melodic, slowed down version that's a huge contrast to the boisterous rockney beat of the original and works remarkably well with her soulful vocals and sensitive piano playing. Among other acclaimed performers who've covered their songs are the likes of Joe Brown, Tom Jones, Graham Coxon, Elio Pace and the Libertines.

But without doubt their most unusual claim to fame came as a result of some session work they did with the great Labi Siffre on his 1975 song I Got the..., a track that featured Chas on guitar with Dave on bass. This went on to be sampled some 24 years later by the American rapper Eminem for his huge hit My Name Is.

Still performing and recording into their 70s, they released their final studio album in 2013, titled That's What Happens. But, very sadly, the double act of Chas & Dave came to an end on 22 September 2018 when Chas Hodges died. He was 74 years old. But with a catalogue of work that was uniquely British and proudly cockney, he left behind a musical legacy for which both he and Dave Peacock will always be fondly remembered. What a right old knees up.

Rock & Stroll: A Walk Around London's Greatest Hits by Jon Askew is available from Amazon.



Dave Peacock and Chas Hodges AKA Chas & Dave.

Photograph: ITV/Shutterstock

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The Lady of the House

Chris Hallam pays tribute to Dame Patricia Routledge

In October 1990, Keeping Up Appearances, a new situation comedy, aired on BBC One for the very first time. It was an instant success, attracting around 13 million viewers. The central role, that of suburban housewife Hyacinth Bucket, played by Patricia Routledge, was quickly elevated to the pantheon of all-time great British sitcom characters. Almost uniquely, however, unlike Fletcher, Steptoe, Rigsby or Del Boy before her, Hyacinth was a woman. There had been great British female sitcom characters before, of course – think Margot Leadbetter or Sybil Fawlty – but they had rarely taken the lead role. Jennifer Saunders and Dawn French would help to change this later, but before 1990, probably the only female lead sitcom character to have a similar impact was the similarly class-conscious Audrey fforbes-Hamilton, played by Penelope Keith in To the Manor Born, a decade earlier.

Hyacinth caught the public's imagination partly as a result of a popular recurring joke: she was so embarrassed by the common sounding effect of her surname, Bucket, that she found herself perpetually insisting to everyone she spoke to that it was, in fact, pronounced "Bouquet". This detail, along with the pretentious way she trilled "the Bouquet residence, the lady of the house speaking!" every time she answered the phone, told audiences everything they needed to know about her.

For Hyacinth was a snob, literally obsessed with keeping up appearances with respect to her perception of her own social status among her friends and neighbours. She was deeply embarrassed by the existence of her council estate-dwelling relatives, typified by her layabout brother-in-law, the string-vest wearing Onslow (Geoffrey Hughes), who serve as a constant reminder of her otherwise well-disguised working-class origins. The irony, of course, was that her efforts always ended up leaving her a much worse impression than she would have done otherwise, either by making life hell for everyone around her, notably her long-suffering husband, the mild-mannered Richard (Clive Swift), or by exposing her to situations (hanging off the back of a van or getting knocked off a boat into a river) in which she made a complete fool of herself.

Despite a long and successful career, it was the role of Hyacinth that finally made Patricia Routledge a household name for the first time in her early 60s. With the sitcom proving a popular BBC export throughout the world, she found herself a lot more famous during what turned out to be the final third of her long life than she had ever been before. While writer Roy Clarke and many members of the extended cast would have been happy to go on churning out the show for years, by 1995, Routledge recognising that the storylines were becoming increasingly repetitive and formulaic, quit the series. "I brought it to an end," she said, "which, of course, the BBC didn't care for very much." Whether she liked it or not, she will always be better known for Keeping Up Appearances than

Above: Clive Swift played Richard, the long-suffering husband of Keeping Up Appearances' Hyacinth Bucket, Patricia Routledge's best-known role.

Photographs: (Keeping Up Appearances/ Hetty Wainthropp) BBC, (Coronation Street) ITV/Shutterstock





Left: Pictured with Brian Rawlinson, who played plumber Joe Makinson, Patricia Routledge appeared in four episodes of Coronation Street as cafe owner Sylvia Snape. Right: Patricia Routledge was disappointed by the cancellation of Hetty Wainthropp Investigates, a crime drama that also starred Dominic Monaghan as Geoffrey Shawcross, her assistant, and Derek Benfield as her husband, Robert.

anything else. But there was a lot more to Patricia Routledge than just that.

She first discovered her love of acting while at the University of Liverpool. "I was fully alive and it frightened me. I was in a tremendous turmoil about it," she said later. "There is nothing like that audience response when it's working with you – nothing." Like Hyacinth, she had fairly humble origins: born in Tranmere, Birkenhead in 1929, her father had worked as a haberdasher. As a child, she received elocution lessons. As she grew up, Routledge decided she wanted to become a teacher, but then, her involvement in the university drama society changed everything. Post-graduation, Routledge took an unpaid position as an assistant stage manager at the Liverpool Playhouse. After a number of months, she joined the company, making her debut in 1952 as Hippolyta in A Midsummer Night's Dream. She made her London debut in 1954.

Patricia Routledge was fast becoming a major character actor, a strong singer with a talent for musicals. Alastair Sim, who she worked with twice at the Chichester Festival in 1969's The Magistrate and 1973's Dandy Dick, was an important early influence. She said: "From him I learnt that comedy is instinct, and that once you try to discuss why a laugh is dying, you kill it stone dead."

Going on to appear in more than 12 Chichester Festival Theatre productions, Routledge made her Broadway debut in How's the World Treating You in 1966 and won the 1968 Tony Award for Best Actress in a musical for Darling of the Day. Despite this personal triumph, the show itself closed early, and Routledge returned to the UK. Her long stage career nevertheless saw her appear in plays by Sheridan, Coward, Wilde and Shakespeare. In the 1980s, she appeared as Lady Margaret in Antony Sher's acclaimed RSC production of Richard III. She continued to appear in theatre productions well into her 80s. She was primarily a stage actress and, in truth, did more than can be fully detailed here. "I was never stage-struck," she said. "I'm not stage-struck now. Nobody's more surprised than I am that I have, in fact, spent my life doing this."

Her life in films, in contrast, was brief. Every film she appeared in is from the 1960s. These included To Sir, With Love (1967), The Bliss of Mrs Blossom (1968), starring Shirley MacLaine, and 30 is a Dangerous Age, Cynthia (1968). But her movie career never really took off.

Television was a different story. Routledge made her small screen debut in 1954 and appeared in four episodes of Coronation Street in 1961 as well as a number of Dickens adaptations in the 1970s. Two northern writers boosted her TV profile in the 1980s. Routledge starred in Alan Bennett's A Woman of No Importance (1982) and received a Bafta nomination for playing the author of a series of poison pen letters in Bennett's Lady of Letters (1988) part of his acclaimed Talking Heads series of monologues. She also received acclaim as Kitty, a recurring character in Victoria Wood: As Seen on TV (1985-86).

"Good evening. My name's Kitty," her first monologue began. "I've had a boob off and I can't stomach whelks, so that's me for you. I don't know why I've been asked to interrupt your viewing like this, but I'm apparently something of a celebrity since I walked the Pennine Way in slingbacks in an attempt to publicise mental health."

Routledge's first attempt at a sitcom, Marjorie and Men (1985), in which she played a divorcee in pursuit of love was not a success, however. But then, along came Keeping Up Appearances (1990-95).

Patricia Routledge's other big BBC show was Hetty Wainthropp Investigates (1996-98) in which she played a former post office clerk who takes to solving crime in her retirement. She had originally played the part in a one-off pilot, Missing Persons, which had aired on ITV in 1990. Routledge was disappointed when the show was cancelled after four series.

She was appointed OBE in 1993, advanced to CBE in 2004, and was made a dame in 2017.

Dame Patricia Routledge never married. "I didn't make a decision not to be married and not to be a mother," she once said. "Life just turned out like that because my involvement in acting was so total." She fell in love at least twice, including one relationship with a married man. "I felt guilt and an acute sense that there had to be loss," she confessed. "I suppose I convinced myself that it was all right for the time being because his marriage was not a living thing."

In later life, she enjoyed a close companionship with Hollywood actress turned theatrical agent Patricia Marmont who died in 2020, and was friends with Betty Boothroyd, the first woman speaker of the House of Commons. When Lady Boothroyd died in 2023, Dame Patricia sang the song Climb Ev'ry Mountain at her funeral.

Dame Patricia herself died in Chichester in October 2025 at the age of 96. Hers was a life well-lived. "When I approach the pearly gates," she once said, "I'd like to hear a champagne cork popping, an orchestra tuning up, and the sound of my mother laughing."

Keeping Up Appearances is broadcast regularly on U&Gold and, along with Hetty Wainthropp Investigates, is available to stream on Now.



Fun Hill

Oliver Crocker investigates The Bill's Christmas specials

In 1994, The Bill celebrated its 10th anniversary on ITV. Following 800 hard-hitting episodes and thousands of criminal investigations in and around the infamous Jasmine Allen estate, the producers of the groundbreaking police procedural had a go at cracking a new case they hadn't tackled before, making a Christmas special.

"There was talk that they wanted a Christmas episode," recalls writer Mark Holloway, who penned 30 of Sun Hill's finest scripts. "I pitched three ideas that all ended up in the episode – appropriately titled Stuffed." Holloway's hilarious half-hour begins on familiar ground, with officers responding to a burglary.

"At the time, the Met were cracking down on burglaries through Operation Bumblebee," reveals Holloway. "The Bill used to arrange for writers to go out with the real police and I went on an early morning raid, where I learned how burglars operated. This was useful knowledge that I kept up my sleeve until I could show off what I'd learned."

At the heart of the alleged burglary is the supposed theft of Christmas presents, reported by two children who send PC's June Ackland and Dave Quinnan on a wild goose chase. "The main crime in Stuffed had a slightly feel-good element to it; a family story where nobody ended up going to jail."

Meanwhile, back at the nick, PC Reg Hollis has been tasked with planning the station's first on-screen Christmas party. "Reg was a gift of a character," confirms Holloway. "Jeff Stewart really was the right actor for that part. The key was trying not to write funny lines for him but give him straight dialogue that he could put his own unique spin on and add extra value. It is always such a delight when an actor improves something that you have written and having Hollis in charge of a social function was a scenario I milked shamelessly."

Another copper Holloway couldn't resist setting up was PC Tony Stamp, who arrives late to the Christmas bash after being delayed by a traffic accident involving a van load of escaped turkeys. "Graham Cole always brought a slight Oliver Hardy quality to Stamp, and I enjoyed any opportunity where I could make life hard for him. He was probably the most popular character in The Bill, possibly because he was the kind of police officer you wanted to help you in real life. He was likeable and the character was big enough that you could play a gag on him

Writer Mark Holloway couldn't resist setting up PC Tony Stamp (Graham Cole) for The Bill's 1994 Christmas special, Stuffed.

Photographs: Fremantle





Left: Brian Murphy, who played a drunkard claiming to be one of Santa's elves, was a guest star in the station-bound story When the Snow Lay Round About. Right: Much of the cast seized the chance to get into costume for the 1997 Christmas special, Twanky, including Graham Cole (PC Tony Stamp), Iain Fletcher (DC Rod Skase) and Billy Murray (DS Don Beech) as the three dames.

and he wasn't going to buckle under it."

The episode's finale features an attempted prank on Inspector Cato (Philip Whitchurch) – the uncompromising senior officer nicknamed "the bald-headed bastard from Barton Street" – courtesy of a stripogram. "With one foot firmly in the 1970s, when the stripogram reaches the climax of her act, Reg Hollis misses it…" recalls Holloway. "He was too busy counting the number of pilau rice dishes delivered by the Khyber Pass restaurant, who earlier in the episode had wanted to know if Reg wanted the turkey 'on or off the bone'. Stuffed showed me that it was possible to do a lighter, comedic episode of The Bill that didn't need to be a grim, urban tale, which suited me as I preferred the series when there wasn't much crime."

The success of Stuffed inspired an annual tradition for a comedic Yuletide caper, with Robert Jones' Merrily on High being a highlight. This 1996 story gave Peter Ellis and Ben Roberts a chance to showcase their considerable comedy chops as Chief Superintendent Brownlow and Chief Inspector Conway, who have their hopes of a liquid lunch dashed after Sun Hill police station is declared a no alcohol zone by Area Command. Another gift came courtesy of guest star Brian Murphy, who memorably played a drunkard claiming to be one of Santa's elves in Chris Ould's station-bound story When the Snow Lay Round About.

But perhaps The Bill's most famous Christmas cracker was pulled in 1997, once again by Mark Holloway. "By this point, the producers trusted me to write a Christmas special that still felt like The Bill. I've always loved pantomime, and I pitched a half-hour episode called Twanky, where the relief were to stage a performance of Aladdin at the Sun Hill community centre for charity."

Pantomime proved to be a contentious subject for members of The Bill cast. While former regulars Chris Ellison (DI Frank Burnside), Jon Iles (DC Mike Dashwood) and Larry Dann (Sgt Alec Peters) were in demand to headline lucrative extravaganzas around the country, the current cast were precluded from taking a break from the programme's gruelling production schedule to commit to a seasonal stage show. Therefore, many of the actors seized the chance to get into costume for Twanky.

"It all went a bit mad once the cast heard there was a panto in the offing…" reveals Holloway. "There was a running gag in Twanky that Chief Superintendent Brownlow kept wanting to add things to Tosh Lines' script, which was based on what started happening behind the scenes. In the script, none of the coppers wanted to play the dame, whereas in real life, Graham Cole, Iain Fletcher and Billy Murray were all knocking on the script editor's door asking if they could play the dame. I then had to write a series of mishaps that meant we could have three in the shape of Tony Stamp, Rod Skase and Don Beech."

During development, Twanky was expanded to a one-hour special and producer Chris Clough, later to achieve

"Jeff Stewart really was the right actor for that part, and having Hollis in charge of a social function was a scenario I milked shamelessly."

phenomenal success with Mr Bates vs The Post Office, was determined to stage the pantomime at a larger venue. "They shot the episode at the King's Theatre in Southsea," reveals Holloway "I had to do a lot of rewriting to explain the episode's new, rather unlikely, theatrical setting. It was a lovely episode, but I think it got a bit silly and lost some discipline because everyone was having too good a time."

Away from the usual industrial estates of south London, the week's location filming along the south coast proved a welcome change of scene for the cast and crew. "The cast certainly made the most of staying in a hotel for a week…" confirms Holloway. "On the last day, the bar manager, almost in tears, thanked the actors for their custom, explaining they'd never made so much money in one week and that he was going to have a great Christmas. The actors were all very professional on set, but I think they all had a jolly good time off it as well."

Another scriptwriter who tickled the production team's funny bones was Lovejoy legend Chris Jury, who joined the writing team in 1998. "I'm a plumber's son from Coventry; I'm dyslexic and I

type with one finger, so to get my first commission as a screenwriter on The Bill is still one of the proudest moments of my career." After his hysterical debut Rebel Without a Licence, involving a speeding Pontiac and three unusual suspects all dressed as James Dean, the actor-turned-writer was invited to pen the 1998 festive special, S.A.D.

"Being asked to write an hour-long Christmas special for my second script was just incredible. I was very, very chuffed and knew it was an honour.

"My wife suffered with Seasonal Affective Disorder," explains Jury "She would get miserable during the dark months, especially during that weird period between Christmas and New Year when nothing much happened. I made this the setting for my story and gave each of the regular characters a different point of view on a range of issues."

In a richly layered script that the UK's finest sitcom writers would be proud of, Jury deftly combines comedy and tragedy; delivering belly laughs via a batch of contaminated mince pies and a heavily pregnant prisoner giving birth in the cells, and thought-provoking storylines from a harrowing dispute between neighbours to an old gentleman affected by dementia, tenderly portrayed by beloved comedy actor Peter Jones.

"Dementia was only just coming into the public consciousness at that time," remembers Jury. "I couldn't believe my luck when they told me that Peter Jones was going to play the part, he was wonderful at bringing to life the horror of that disease."

In a recent The Bill Podcast poll, S.A.D. was voted an all-time classic and is still enjoyed by fans around the world. "At the time, I was a new writer full of insecurity and self-doubt," reflects Jury, "I had no idea until recently that fans still watch S.A.D. every Christmas, I was very touched and moved by that. It was a joyous experience writing for The Bill, I was made to feel like part of the family by the actors and production team, who were all marvellous to me. I still have my bottle of Chateau Sun Hill, gifted to the cast and crew to commemorate the launch of the one-hour episodes. Mine is still unopened… though I'm open to offers!"

Classic episodes of The Bill including the Christmas specials mentioned here are available to stream via u.co.uk

The Voice of a Nation

Philip and **David Williams** recall the standout voice of Scotland's own pirate radio station

This year marks two significant anniversaries in Scottish broadcasting: 60 years since Radio Scotland first crackled to life from the high seas, and 30 years since we lost one of its brightest and most beloved voices, DJ Stuart Henry. To many who lived through the vibrant, restless energy of the 1960s, the name Stuart Henry still conjures warm memories of a charismatic voice with a deep Scottish lilt and a heart full of passion for music. Before his later fame at BBC Radio 1 and Radio Luxembourg, Henry was part of something far more rebellious and far more Scottish. He was the standout voice of Radio Scotland, a pirate radio station that defied the rules, dodged the government, and gave a nation something it had never had before: a radio station that actually sounded like Scotland.



Bringing performance, humour, and heart to his shows, former actor Stuart Henry quickly became offshore pirate station Radio Scotland's most popular DJ.

The man behind it was Tommy Shields, a former publicity manager for STV who decided that Scotland deserved its own voice on the airwaves. Back in the early 1960s, there was no such thing as legal commercial radio in the UK. The BBC had a monopoly, and while it did good work, it wasn't exactly bursting with youth appeal, especially in Scotland. Pop music was tightly rationed due to "needle time" rules, and regional representation was slim. Pirate radio changed all that.

Stations like Radio Caroline and Radio London were already causing a stir down south, broadcasting pop music 24/7 from ships anchored just outside UK waters. Shields saw their success and thought: "Why not us?"

In 1964, Shields formed City and County Commercial Radio (Scotland) Ltd with a group of businessmen and entertainers, including singer Callum Kennedy and former Edinburgh lord provost Sir Andrew Murray. They aimed to bring commercial radio to cities like Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, but when government support didn't come, they decided to go offshore, literally. After months of planning, searching for a suitable ship, and dodging more red tape than a government filing cabinet, Shields finally found what he needed: a decommissioned Irish lightship called the Comet. Built in Glasgow in 1904, the Comet was fitted with a powerful 50kw transmitter, a 200ft mast, and all the gear needed to beam music and entertainment across Scotland and into northern England.

Anchored just outside territorial waters, first off the Firth of Forth and

Illustration: (Comet) Bernard Finegan G



Former Light Vessel Comet, shown being rescued by the RNLI at Daunt Rock in 1936, was fitted with a 50kw transmitter and a 200ft mast to become the home of Radio Scotland.

then the Firth of Clyde, Radio Scotland finally went on the air five minutes before midnight on Hogmanay 1965. It was cold, chaotic, and very Scottish. During one of the first broadcasts, the then 22-year-old Stuart Henry joked live on air that the ship had sprung a leak. In truth, it was just condensation dripping on his head, but the moment summed up the improvised charm of the whole operation.

Radio Scotland wasn't just another pirate playing pop records. Shields and his team had bigger ambitions. Yes, there was plenty of chart music – the Beatles, the Beach Boys and Dusty Springfield – but the station also made space for Scottish entertainers, regional news, and local voices. Shields even brought back the cast of the STV show The One O'clock Gang for a new life in sound. This wasn't just about fun. It was about Scottish identity. For the first time, listeners heard accents that sounded like theirs, music that came from their own cities, and DJs who talked about things that mattered locally. It was grassroots broadcasting, beamed from a boat. Advertisers flocked to it, and audiences did too.

At its peak, Radio Scotland was reaching millions of listeners from Aberdeen to Newcastle. It was scrappy and a little unpredictable, but it felt alive in a way no one had ever heard before. At the heart of it all was Stuart Henry. Tall, charismatic, and blessed with a velvety voice that could warm even the coldest Scottish night, Henry quickly became the most popular DJ on the station. A former actor, he brought performance, humour, and heart to his shows. His tone was friendly, never smug. His playlists mixed chart-toppers with hidden gems. Teens loved him. Parents tolerated him. Musicians respected him. More than just a DJ, Henry was a connection point between the music and the listener, between the station and the people. He made you feel like the radio was talking to you, not at you. And in an era before social media or Spotify, that was pure magic.

But pirate radio was living on borrowed time, for while listeners adored Radio Scotland, the government viewed it with growing hostility. Concerns about frequency interference and a general discomfort with these unauthorised broadcasters led to the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act 1967. The law made it illegal for British citizens to work with or supply offshore stations. On 14 August 1967, Radio Scotland signed off for good. The final broadcast featured a haunting bagpipe lament, a fitting farewell to a station that had, for nearly two years, made Scotland feel seen and heard.

Radio Scotland's closure wasn't the end for Stuart Henry. In fact, it was just the beginning. Like many of the top pirate DJs, he was snapped up by the BBC and became one of the original voices of BBC Radio 1, launched later that same year. Radio 1 tried to replicate the pirate spirit with legal backing, but it never quite captured the same raw energy – the magic and romance had gone. Still, Henry thrived, bringing his warmth and wit to a wider audience throughout the 1970s. Eventually, he moved on to Radio Luxembourg, where he found more creative freedom. For Henry, it wasn't just about spinning records; it was about connecting with people, sharing stories, and shaping moods. That was something he never lost, even when life dealt him a cruel blow.

In the later years of his life, Henry was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a disease that gradually affected his speech and mobility. But he didn't stop broadcasting. With the support of his wife, Ollie, Henry continued to work as long as he could. His voice grew softer, more fragile, but it still carried that unmistakable spark. Listeners stayed loyal. They didn't just admire his music taste anymore; they admired his bravery, his honesty, and his humanity. Stuart Henry died in November 1995, at just 53 years old. Three decades on, he's still remembered not just as a great DJ, but as a pioneer, a friend, and the voice of a moment when radio dared to be something more.

Radio Scotland may have been short-lived, but it left a lasting impression, not just on music lovers, but on the entire broadcasting landscape. It paved the way for commercial radio in Scotland, challenged the status quo, and proved that people wanted to hear themselves reflected on the dial. It wasn't polished. It wasn't always legal. But it was real. And for a brief, shining moment, a rusty old lightship called the Comet became the heartbeat of a nation.

Today, in a world full of algorithms and streaming apps, it's easy to forget just how bold and how human radio used to be. Shields, Henry, and the crew of Radio Scotland weren't just playing records. They were making history, one song at a time. And while the waves are quieter now, the echoes remain whenever someone turns the dial and hopes to hear a little soul.



Eye-catching Enamel

Angeline Wilcox celebrates a weather-resistant and long-lasting advertiser's dream

Everyone knows that there is an art to advertising. All businesses depend on it as a way of generating sales, creating demand, promoting their brand and highlighting their products and services. No doubt the success of an advertising campaign is determined by a product's sales figures, but it's fascinating to discover the adverts that still engage with people many years after they were first launched.

Today, of course, we are bombarded by an incredible array of adverts from all forms of media: television, online, radio, print, cinema, social media and not forgetting the huge LED screens that dazzle high above London's Piccadilly Circus. However, there was a time when advertising had more charm and a gentler appeal, but it was just as eye-catching and effective.

From the end of the 19th to the mid-20th century, enamel advertising signs were a familiar sight across the country, appearing on corner shop walls, railway station platforms and garage forecourts. Even public transport, such as omnibuses and trams, displayed them. These colourful shiny standards featured every conceivable product from chocolate to cigarettes, medicines to mustard and starch to soap.

The signs were made using vitreous enamel and involved fusing different coloured layers of powdered glass on to rolled iron – although steel was later used – at very high temperatures. Lettering and designs were hand stencilled, and

Above: Vintage signs advertising everything from chocolate to cigarettes, medicines to mustard and starch to soap feature on the front of this Ross-on-Wye shop.

Photograph: (Main) Creative Commons/Jonathan Billinger, (Winner) Canterbury Auction Galleries





Left: This BP Winner sign was sold in 2005 for a record-breaking £28,000 – far exceeding its pre-sale estimate of £600 to £800. However, there are still more affordable signs out there. Above: Salt's Patent Enamel Works in Birmingham, where many early signs were created after its manager Benjamin Baugh developed and patented the production process.

the individual colours had to be fired separately. The intricate skills and expensive production techniques created a vibrant aspect of street furniture, which today chronicles our commercial, industrial and social heritage.

They were an advertiser's dream; weather-resistant, long-lasting pieces of artwork, which were prominently positioned in busy locations to guarantee maximum impact. Webbs' Seeds, Zebra Grate Polish, Huntley and Palmers Ginger Nuts, Brooke Bond Tea, Fry's Chocolate, Lyons' Cakes, Oxo, St Bruno Tobacco, Woodbine Cigarettes and Robin Starch were just a few of the products to be promoted in enamel.

Some signs, particularly the early designs, simply showed the product name and used very few colours because of the production costs involved. Later ones incorporated more colours, images and short slogans. A wealth of different typefaces and striking colours ensured the signs were noticeable and while the majority were square or rectangular in shape, others were very individual and matched the product they were advertising. Among these were the tea leaf for the Mazawattee Tea sign and the oil can for Shell Motor Oil.

Nowadays, we're likely to see the signs in museums, antique shops or auctions, where some command a high price among collectors, enthusiasts or interior designers who want to create that vintage look. But where did the idea of enamel advertising signs originate? Well, that takes us back to Britain's proud industrial heartland and Birmingham in the 1850s, when Benjamin Baugh, who ran Salt's Patent Enamel Works in the city, developed the process and subsequently patented his idea.

Baugh's business steadily expanded, and he opened a purpose-built factory, the Patent Enamel Company Limited, in 1889. However, with demand growing, Baugh's factory wasn't the only one as, three years earlier, the Chromographic Enamel Company in nearby Wolverhampton started production. Other manufacturers included Imperial Enamel of Birmingham, Stocal Enamels of Burton, JA Jordan & Sons of Bilston, the Falkirk Iron Company, and Garnier & Company Limited in London. In an increasingly commercial age, business was clearly booming.

Following World War One, however, orders for enamel adverts started to decline. In addition, by the 1920s, attitudes were changing with many people expressing discontent at the immense number of signs that were filling up wall spaces everywhere. Suddenly they became regarded as eyesores rather than eye-catching. Back then, it seemed that the durability of these adverts was seen as a distinct disadvantage.

"Nowadays, we're likely to see the signs in museums, antique shops or auctions, where some command a high price among collectors, enthusiasts or interior designers."

The industry was further affected by the steel rationing of World War Two and, by the 1950s, cheaper metals such as tin and aluminium were used in the production of the signs. At the same



While most enamel advertising signs were square or rectangular in shape, others – such as this leaf-shaped sign for Mazawattee Tea – matched the product they were advertising.

time – and most significantly – advances in printing techniques and photography led to the large-scale introduction of poster advertisements. These were less expensive to produce and often appeared on the vast hoardings surrounding wartime bomb sites. Posters had the advantage of avoiding certain planning regulations, which had been imposed on displaying enamel signs in the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. The fact that they weren't as long-lasting as their enamel predecessors also meant that they could be changed on a more frequent basis, which heralded an advertising industry that would become increasingly dynamic and inventive.

For many people, though, nothing beats nostalgia. The hobby of collecting enamel signs started in the 1970s and has continued. In the majority of cases, an enthusiast will want a particular sign because of the connection it provides to another interest, such as motoring, aviation, railways, retail or brewing. Prices vary with several factors determining a sign's value, these include its age, rarity, condition, size, shape, the product that's advertised, and the design.

Twenty years ago, an enamel advertising sign was sold for a record-breaking £28,000 – far exceeding its pre-sale estimate of £600 to £800 – at the Canterbury Auction Galleries in Kent. Dating from the 1920s, it advertised British Petroleum and is referred to as the BP Winner sign as it depicts a racing car speeding towards the finishing line. The design is relatively simple, but it epitomises a glorious motoring victory and the excitement of the race.

It emerged that this is a highly sought-after advert among collectors and, interestingly enough, 10 years later, another sign featuring this same design appeared on the BBC's Antiques Roadshow, where it was valued for an equally astonishing price. However, there are far more affordable signs out there and you never know where you might find them, so keep your eyes open.

Regardless of their individual monetary value, though, the enamel advertisements of yesteryear are treasures to be cherished. They bring the past vividly and colourfully to life, thanks to the skills, talents and ingenuity of the men and women who made them. Apart from their historical worth, these signs provide a wonderful advertisement for the magic of nostalgia and that is definitely something to be recommended.

Bargains By Post

Derek Lamb turns to the back pages to recall the delights of classified advertising

Growing up in the 1960s, Saturdays had many pleasures: Jack Jackson's Record Roundabout and Saturday Club on the radio, wrestling and Juke Box Jury on television. Meanwhile, popular newspapers, especially the Daily Mirror, offered pages of classified advertising for electronics, optical goods, clothing, toys and novelties. As a novice consumer, with a modest amount of disposable income, they were compulsive.

All these advertisements had a common style and appearance, irrespective of the size of the company. About the area of a cigarette card, larger ones were a multiple of this. To emphasise their affordability, prices were usually in shillings and pence, 47*s* 6*d* or 59*s* 11*d*. As with budget airlines today, there were supplementary charges for post and packing as well as accessories: carrying case, earpiece and batteries. These were often sent "on approval" in the hope that they would be retained rather than returned.

Easy terms were usual; readers' interest was often hooked by the need to send only 5*s*. Repayments were usually a few shillings a fortnight, little more than small change. Of course, the price did not include the postage or poundage on the postal orders that the easy terms required. It did not do to calculate the rate of interest on the loan; such details never seemed to bother the vendor or customer. It's doubtful that the advertisers conducted any credit checks and there must have been a proportion of bad debts. Perhaps with only a pound or two outstanding, it was not worthwhile to recover the money owed? Or maybe defaulters were backlisted?

The accompanying descriptions were accurate, if on the ambitious side. Claims included "offered at a fraction of its real value", "previously sold at three times the price" and "you could pay double". Perhaps the most intriguing was that this item was sold "on the condition that we do not mention the name you know so well." One outlet explained that their low prices were due to overordering and the need to clear the warehouse before the boss returned from holiday.

Finally, the products were always illustrated with line drawings, never a photograph, enabling the maximum creativity. A sledge is so fast that the users'



Flatpack furniture, some of which was sold by MFI before it became a national chain, and an attempt to cash in on Beatlemania were among the items to be found in the classifieds in the early 60s.





Left: Classified adverts were full of military surplus including US Army parkas which were snapped up by scooter-riding mods. Right: A train set and worldwide radio were available at the "lowest price" in convenient fortnightly payments.

"Repayments were usually a few shillings a fortnight, little more than small change."

hats are whisked off. If the capability of a worldwide radio was not entirely clear, the set was surrounded by images of Canadian Mounties, Russian Cossacks and Australian surfers.

In the immediate postwar years, most of the items sold were government surplus, especially military clothing. With many people employed in tough and dirty conditions, there was no shame in wearing naval duffel coats, army boots ("new and unissued") and leather jerkins. RAF overalls were "a must for every working man", while an army denim boiler suit at 9*s* 11*d* would be priced at 47*s* 6*d* by a civilian producer "if only he could get the material". US Army parkas were widely worn by scooter-riding mods. With money from my weekend job, I acquired a naval rating's jersey, leather gauntlets and a sheepskin lined waterproof two-way cap.

By the early 1960s, government surplus ads were joined by those for radios, tools and seasonal items. Many were imported. Since Britain was in a perpetual balance of payments crisis, these were often sourced from iron curtain countries where the exchange rate was more favourable and Hong Kong, which was within the sterling area. The worldwide radio was made in the USSR and not available domestically as Soviet authorities disapproved of its citizens listening to foreign broadcasts.

All advertisers monitored the response to a particular newspaper by including a code in their address. It was not difficult to work out that "Dept DH" referred to the Daily Herald or "Dept SN" was The Sun

Despite being very affordable, the products were generally considered to be good value and durable. A radio specialist was impressed with the Soviet worldwide radio. Built with communist practicality, it came with "a coloured radio manual", operating instructions and a circuit diagram. For an extra £1, the deluxe model could be used as an amplifier for record players, tape decks or public address systems. My father's 30x30 binoculars were remarkably powerful… and heavy. In fact, the only way to make effective use of them was to rest both elbows on a wall or car roof to achieve the necessary stability.

Rising standards of living were reflected in home improvement products and aspirational items. Draught proofing and door curtains were joined by wall mounted electric fires. There was a combined light and heat device that ensured "luxurious heat in your bathroom". The rising number of motorists were catered for with steering wheel and seat covers, battery chargers and prefabricated garages.

For those with wider horizons, fitted carpet, room dividers, venetian blinds and kitchen cabinets were available. Open fires were still the norm in the 1960s and MFI, yet to become a national chain, offered solid teak fireplace surrounds "with many room enhancing designs" at £6 19*s* 6*d*. It also stocked a writing bureau/bookcase at 57*s* 6*d* (carriage 7*s* 6*d*). This was an early flatpack item, as the description stressed the ease of assembly. For those entertaining over Christmas, the Fiesta cocktail bar was only 97*s* 6*d*, with 12 free cocktail forks, to ensure "your party goes with a swing".

Naturally, there were numerous adverts for toys with the approach of the festive season. In 1967, Headquarter & General Supplies was offering a children's sewing machine for 33*s* ("a thrilling gift") and a puppet theatre complete with puppets and plays for 79*s* 6*d* ("a fraction of its true value") and a Hansel and Gretel deluxe playhouse, "slashed to" 59*s* 6*d* ("what a gift").

Even to my rather gullible teenage intellect, sometimes the product was too good to be true. A phial of Legrain perfume was priced at 2*s* 6*d*, even though it cost "ten times as much in Paris". Hoping to cash in on Beatlemania, "beetle" jewellery was claimed to make an ideal Christmas present. I doubt that even the most ardent Beatles fan wanted to display an insect bracelet on her wrist.

By the early 1970s, bank accounts and credit cards were beginning to reduce the reliance on cash. Retail Price Maintenance had also ended by then. This had obliged all outlets to charge an identical price for a particular product be it groceries, petrol, records or domestic goods. The high street immediately became much more competitive, especially with the introduction of discount warehouses such as Comet and Argos. Off the page retailers like Headquarter & General were out of step with the changed retail environment and disappeared at about the same time.

Although there are few, if any, classified ads in the Daily Mirror or elsewhere, postal retailing remains busier than ever with Amazon and other online channels. However, their factual descriptions and customer feedback lack the glamour and promise of amazing products that are "worth several times as much" from a supplier "whose name cannot be revealed".

Getting the Most Out of Toast

Michael Montagu looks back on the history of toast, and how to eat it properly



Do you eat your breakfast toast properly? Perhaps you just stick a couple of slices of supermarket own brand sliced bread into the toaster, pile on the butter and jam, and then eat it on the run? Or do you have the oh so fashionable (although first recorded in 1885) smashed avocado on a toasted slice of artisanal sourdough? The great culinary queen Elizabeth David described toast as "a peculiarly English delicacy".

The origin of toast is the Latin word *torrere*, which means to burn something. The first reference to toast in England dates from 1430, with a recipe for Oyle Soppys. This was onions cooked in stale beer and with oil and toast added. Toasting was a good way of using up stale bread, but the toast wasn't eaten. In the 15th and 16th centuries, toast was used to flavour drinks and just thrown out when the drink had been consumed. In The Merry Wives of Windsor, Shakespeare has Falstaff say: "Go fetch me a quart of sack; put a toast in't." Toasting someone with a drink is derived from toast in drinks.

According to the writer Edward Lucas in his 1906 work A Word on Toast: "To set but a low value upon toast is to expose one's deficiencies in right appreciation." Humble toast, it seems, is a whole field of study. How you make it, the bread you make it with and how you cut it all apparently have their own etiquette, and like cream or jam first on scones, it can lead to heated debate.

The ideal (apparently) way to make toast is to let an unsliced loaf go slightly stale. Then, according to the 19th century chef Alexis Soyer, in his 1854 book A Shilling Cookery for the People: "Procure a nice square loaf that had been baked one or two days previously, then with a sharp knife cut off the bottom crust evenly, and then as many slices as you require, about a quarter of an inch in thickness. Contrive to have a clear fire: place a slice of the bread upon a toasting-fork, about an inch from one of the sides, hold it a minute before the fire, then turn it, hold it another minute, by which time the bread will be thoroughly hot, then begin to move it gradually to and fro until the whole surface has assumed a yellowish-brown colour, then turn it again, toasting the other side in the same manner; lay it upon a hot plate, have some fresh or salt butter (which must not be too hard, as pressing it upon the toast would make it heavy), spread a piece, rather less than an ounce, over, and cut the toast into four or six pieces. You will then have toast made to perfection."

Delia Smith gave her advice in the 1998 tome How to Cook: Book One. "The key to slicing bread is to use gentle, rapid saw movements with the knife and not to push down too hard on the loaf." She advocates using a toast rack, as laying toast on a plate will make it soggy.

How you eat your toast? That, again, apparently tells the trained observer much about you. The "right" way to eat it is bit by bit, cutting a piece, buttering it – enough but not too much – and then spooning your jam or marmalade on to it. I'm sure that I don't need to tell you this but never stab your buttery knife into the jam or marmalade. Which, of course, is in a dish, not just the jar plonked on to the table.

The shape into which you cut your toast will show your social status – according



Photographs: (Pudding Club) Three Ways House Hotel

Top: The way you cut your toast is, apparently, a sign of your social status. Right: Delia Smith recommends using a toast rack to stop your toast from getting soggy on the plate.

to experts in such arcane matters. Square, with no crusts is definitely upper crust. Diagonally is aspirant middle class and rectangular is what used to be called working class.

Cutting up your toast, rather than eating it whole, goes back a long way, right to the medieval period, when it was considered ill-bred to display your teeth when eating. We see the same stipulation in guides to good manners from the 18th and 19th centuries.

But perhaps the last word on toast should be left to our friend from the beginning of the article, Edward Lucas: "The noise from toast should reverberate in the head like the thunder of July."

Club Class



Dear Simon,

I was very interested in the pudding club (Food & Drink: In the Club, October). I did consider going there once, when it was one of the outings on our coach tours but chose something else instead. I certainly couldn't eat six puddings in one go now.

My mother cooked most of the hot puddings mentioned but only one a day, of course. On Mondays, washing day, we only had quick puddings such as boiled rice and treacle and, on Sundays, leftover trifle. But, all the other days, she cooked.

In the summer, because my father had an orchard on our smallholding, we had fruit puddings: apple pie and plum, raspberry and redcurrants, gooseberries and quince (which I didn't like).

But, when winter came, we had the old favourites: suet syrup pudding, jam roly poly, spotted dick, and bread and butter pudding, which we ate cold for tea as well.

Of course, in the autumn, we had blackberry pie, and then at Christmas, mincemeat (homemade) pies, puddings and tarts.

I don't remember her making sticky toffee pudding. Of course, after the war when we had bananas again, an easy pudding was bananas in custard. I don't think we ever had cream, only the top of the milk or evaporated milk. It was a wonder we didn't get fat, but we did walk and run a lot then.

Maisie Dance, Purley, Surrey

New Look Takes Off

A beer first brewed to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Britain has a fresh new look. Spitfire amber ale, Shepherd Neame's 4.2% ABV Kentish ale now features a design inspired by the wartime aircraft that gave the beer its name. The refreshed look, developed in partnership with creative agency Thirst, introduces gold detailing to the classic red, white and blue colour palette, highlighting Spitfire's royal warrant from His Majesty King Charles III, which was first granted in 2014 by the then Prince of Wales. Brewed using 100% Kentish hops, the finest malts and water drawn from a well deep beneath Shepherd Neame's Faversham brewery, the award-winning beer has held Protected Geographical Indication status (PGI) – the same protected status as Champagne – as a Kentish ale since 2007.



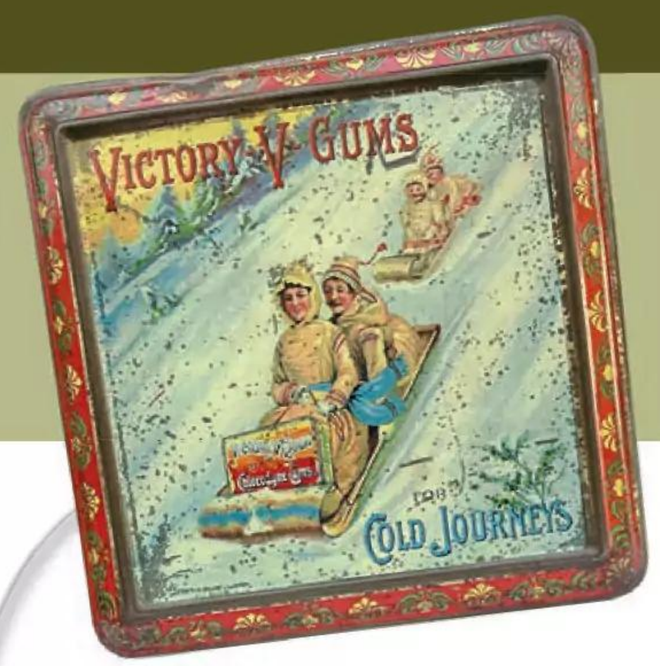
"We continue to invest in refreshing and expanding our award-winning collection of beers, and are proud to unveil this bold new look for our flagship Spitfire amber ale," says Jonathan Neame, Shepherd Neame's chief executive.

"It offers a confident, contemporary edge while celebrating everything that makes the beer special – its Kentish roots, British spirit, and quality craftsmanship. We hope that this redesign will reinvigorate the brand, and ensure Spitfire remains a flagship part of our portfolio for years to come."

If you know of a regional delicacy that has all but died out or would like to share your food and drink memories, then let us know via info@bestofbritishmag.co.uk or at the address given on page 4.

TREASURES *In the* ATTIC

Brian Howes unearths some nostalgic collectables that might be discarded as worthless junk but actually have a value to today's collectors. Can you estimate what each object might be worth and pick out which one is the big-money item? **The values are printed on page 80.**



1 Good old Woolies

Christmas seems to begin far too early these days with many shops starting to sell Christmas merchandise in October. Wrapping presents has always been one the great joys of Christmas and a trip to FW Woolworth was where we always went for our paper and tinsel cord. These colourful cards look just like the ones we bought from good old Woolies.





2 Fairground attraction

Fairgrounds have always been great places to show off your darts skills, and I once fondly remember taking home a goldfish from our local wakes, which happily lived to a ripe old age. This hand-painted darts stall sign dates from the 1960s and clearly shows the lettering skills of the old fairground signwriters.

3 Memories of Mum

Dating from the 1970s, this lovely coffee pot is part of a fully complete coffee set made by Royal Worcester. I still use it most days as it belonged to my dearly loved and much-missed mother and is something I will never part with. It was designed as part of the popular Palissy range and the pretty floral pattern was called Honeysuckle.



4 Have a Glow

Victory V Gums were created by Thomas Fryer and Dr Edward Smith at a factory in Nelson, Lancashire. The company also made the hugely popular Victory V lozenges which originally contained ingredients like chloroform, cannabis and ether, leading to the rather amusing marketing slogan: "Have a Glow". This lovely tin dates to the 1890s.

5 Matchbox magic

It always amazed me as a child how they managed to get those lovely little toys inside matchboxes, but that was the magic of Matchbox. This was one of my Matchbox favourites – Number 13a the Bedford O type breakdown truck which was first made in 1955. They had one of these in use at our local garage, always handy for recovering my dad's old bangers.



6 Famous crossing

The Beatles' Abbey Road was the 11th and also the last studio album recorded by the Fab Four, being released on 26 September 1969. The cover was the work of John Kosh and photographer Iain Macmillan. The photograph of the Fab Four crossing Abbey Road via its now iconic zebra crossing was taken at 11.35am on 8 August 1969. Have you ever walked across it?



10 Cornish blue

This sultana storage jar was made by TG Green & Co at its pottery in the Derbyshire village of Church Gresley. The blue and white banded Cornishware pattern was launched in the 1920s and proved extremely popular in modern British kitchens. In later years, Green's banded wares also appeared with yellow, red or black stripes.



7 Saucy show

This sheet music is from The First Lullaby, starring forces' sweetheart Dame Vera Lynn accompanied by Jay Wilbur and His Band. The song featured with enormous success in George Black's revue Apple Sauce at the London Palladium in 1941. The revue contained a host of popular performers of the times including Max Miller.



11 Victory keepsake

This lovely little brooch, in the shape of a British fighter plane, was made from scrap Perspex and Bakelite waste materials left over from the construction of aircraft during World War Two. Some were made as sweetheart brooches by serving military personnel, while others were made and sold as souvenirs after the war had ended.





8 Gardening greats

This Dinky Toys wheelbarrow was a hugely popular diecast toy, which was in production for 10 years from 1948 to 1958. It was one of several gardening toys introduced to the Dinky Toys series during the postwar years, which included a push along roller and an impressive working lawn mower.

9 Novelties of Christmas

What would Christmas be like without crackers being pulled around the dinner table to a crescendo of loud bangs and laughter. All these tiny novelties were discovered inside crackers alongside the standard hats and mottoes. These date from the 1950s and are mostly plastic, although early novelties exist in silver, porcelain and ivory.



12 Boxing clever

This wooden box originally contained three dozen tins of Zebra Grate Polish which was a much-needed household product when we relied on cast-iron cooking ranges and open fireplaces. Zebra Grate Polish was launched in 1890 as one of a host of popular cleaning products produced by Reckitt & Sons.



Churchill's Lost Labyrinth

Ronan Thomas is down in the tube station at midday

Winston Churchill called it "the burrow". Hidden 72ft beneath the well-heeled streets of Mayfair, unknown to most Londoners, is a spellbinding site of British history. Britain's wartime leader was a frequent visitor to its underground facilities at the height of the blitz.

Churchill's burrow (or "barn" as he also called it) is the disused Down Street Underground station, just off Piccadilly. Opened by the Great Northern, Piccadilly and Brompton Railway in 1907, on the new Piccadilly line, it had a short working life and closed in 1932. It was reclaimed as emergency government offices in 1939, just before the outbreak of World War Two. What's more, Down Street sheltered Churchill on eight occasions – from October to December 1940 – as German bombs fell across London.

Down Street was designed by renowned Edwardian architect Leslie Green. It was built to Green's signature art nouveau design – attractive oxblood glazed tile facades and half-moon windows – incorporated into 50 stations across the tube. But, from the start, Down Street was blighted. It was awkwardly sited, in a side street off Piccadilly rather than facing it. It was easy to miss. It was also not popular among local residents, who complained it lowered the tone of their affluent neighbourhood. Passenger numbers were never high and, after 1918, the station closed on Sundays. By the early 1930s, Down Street had become underused and uneconomic. After escalators were installed in the nearby, more popular Dover Street (now Green Park) and Hyde Park stations, Down Street was finally closed to passengers in 1932. The platforms and Otis passenger lifts were removed, the vacant space for the latter used as a ventilator shaft. The station operated a single train siding, otherwise hibernating for the rest of the 1930s.

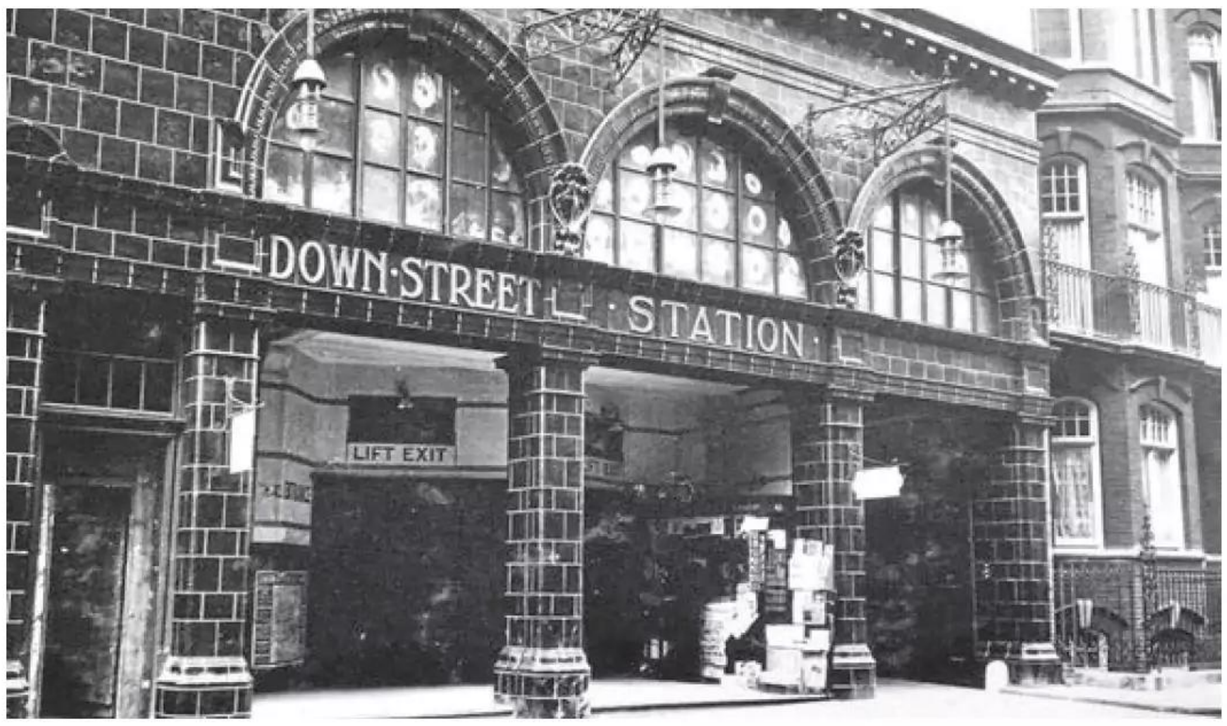
As war loomed in 1939, Down Street was repurposed as emergency government offices for the Railway Executive Committee (REC). The 11-member REC – formed in 1938 and headed by Gerald Cole Deacon – was responsible for coordinating all strategic movements by rail across Britain. Down Street became a vital secret communications hub with 40 members of staff, the pulsing nerve centre of British rail operations.

The station's refit was completed within months by Robert McAlpine Ltd and by the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS). The former station entrance was reinforced with a heavy steel door with brick surrounding. An armed guard, behind a steel blast door, watched the entrance through an observation slit. A wall mounted observation periscope monitored those entering and exiting. A lift for two people was installed next to the Edwardian spiral staircase leading 80 steps down to the passenger corridors. The interior was repainted yellow with handwritten directions on the wall tiling. Gas proof doors were fitted, opening out into a typing pool room with eight secretaries. The first ventilation passage was sectioned off into an executive committee room, meeting rooms and offices.

Staff lavatories, using a sewage extraction system, wash basins and bathrooms were added. Lower down, the station's platform faces were bricked up and converted into a 50-line telephone exchange, operations room, mail room, separate dormitories for men and women, and a kitchen with a large extractor fan. A wallpapered executive dining room seated eight. Basic air conditioning and filtration operated but the atmosphere became predictably close and pungent. It was a bunker-like environment. For security reasons, the staff worked underground,

Above: Passengers on the Picadilly line are oblivious to the disused station, which was used by Winston Churchill during World War Two.

Photographs: London Transport Museum, (Sign) Creative Commons/Andrew Gray





Left: Down Street station, featuring Leslie Green's signature art nouveau style of glazed tiles and half-moon windows, shortly after it opened in 1907. Right: The interior of the disused Down Street station was repainted yellow with handwritten directions on the wall tiling.

12 hours a day, staying for up to two weeks at a time. They were permitted brief periods of relaxation in a nearby apartment block at 23 Down Street. Senior staff left unseen, catching trains specially halted in the tunnels. Sleeping at Down Street was not easy. The meeting rooms and staff dormitories directly adjoined the Piccadilly line.

Churchill ran the war from 10 Downing Street, the underground Cabinet War Rooms at Storey's Gate and the New Public Offices (today's Treasury). But, in October 1940, the war came dramatically closer to the heart of British government. Air raids damaged both Whitehall and 10 Downing Street. While repairs took place and the Cabinet War Rooms were reinforced, Churchill was advised to use an additional, bomb-proof, location. Down Street and its underground facilities fitted the bill nicely.

A key witness to Churchill's subsequent visits to Down Street was his talented private secretary John "Jock" Colville. Aged 25, he acted as the prime minister's right arm at key moments during the war. In his diaries, he described Down Street as "the safest place" then available in London for the prime minister.

Wartime records and Colville's diaries suggest that the prime minister stayed overnight at Down Street eight times, during 23 October to 20 December 1940. He reportedly slept on a camp bed in Gerald Cole Deacon's REC office. The discomfort was short-lived. Besides, Churchill was no stranger to seeking refuge underground. In 1899, during his escape from a prison camp during the Boer War, he had been hidden for several nights 200ft down a coal mine.

From October to December 1940, Churchill held a number of meetings at Down Street with senior war cabinet, military and political colleagues. Colville recorded that Churchill also enjoyed several excellent dinners at Down Street, accompanied by 1865 brandy, Perrier Jouet champagne, caviar, a selection of fine cheeses and cigars. On 30 October 1940, Churchill dined at Down Street in the executive dining room with General Lord Ismay, General Crossman (commanding anti-aircraft defence in London) and Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour and National Service.

Colville wrote of a convivial, well-oiled, occasion after which Churchill and Bevin emerged from the lift into the street. They were confronted by a policeman, upbraiding them about showing lights on their car, parked in nearby Down Street Mews. As Colville remembered: "A policeman tried to arrest the PM for having too bright side lights and was finally dismissed with a loud 'Go to hell, man.'"

When Churchill finally left Down Street, on 21 December 1940, he donated £10 to the REC Christmas fund. After the war, the REC remained operational in Down Street until 1947, before railway nationalisation by Clement Attlee's new Labour government in 1948. In the following decades, the wartime fixtures were removed. Down Street was placed on life support once again. Its platform level offices and corridors were repainted grey and from the 1960s the empty station was used for tube line emergency exercises by London Fire Brigade. The most recent maintenance and lighting installation took place in the 1990s.

From 2016 until autumn 2024, London Transport Museum ran walking group tours of Down Steet, as part of its Hidden London events programme. On one of the last tours, I came face to face with Down Street's extraordinary history. Assembling outside, we noticed that no trace of the station's name lettering remains. Yet its heavy entrance steel door and brick surround pointed immediately to its important wartime role.

Entering though two separate reinforced blast doors, we descended 103 steps down the original Edwardian spiral staircase. We walked down past the curving tiled walls with their peeling wartime paintwork and faded 1930s direction lettering. From the foot of the staircase, we were literally following in Churchill's footsteps. We soon encountered signs of Down Street's wartime construction, now dismantled. Stencilled arrows pointed to former meeting rooms. Masonry ruts indicated ripped out gas protection doors. We passed through the former typing pool into the main, half lit, ventilation passageway. Original red tiling still adorned the walls, in places painted over or coated with a light layer of grey dust. In 1940 this area accommodated offices, the first being the REC committee room and the office of Gerald Cole Deacon. The outline of the committee room table was still visible on the passage floor, as was the approximate space where Winston Churchill slept overnight.

Further on, by the light of torches, we walked past former bathrooms, washbasins and stripped out lavatories. We picked our way gingerly through shallow pools of water. We descended to the former platform level, passing the remains of the telephone exchange switchboard, operations and mail rooms.

In between the east and westbound Piccadilly line, closed off by metal grilles, it was truly extraordinary to see lighted tube trains rumble past on both sides, their passengers just as oblivious to our presence as they were to the station's VIP occupant during wartime.

For more information on the Hidden London guided tours of disused Underground stations and how to book, go to ltmuseum.co.uk/hidden-london

Round the AUCTION HOUSES

Every week at auction houses up and down the country, a varied host of collectables are put up for sale at general and specialist events, offering everything from top-end treasures to more modest items. **David Brown** picks a selection of recent gems that have found new homes, and looks ahead to forthcoming sales.

LOT 2424 Cheffins – Cambridge Vintage Sale, 18 October (cheffins.co.uk)



A fully restored 1963 Fordson Super Dexta tractor was one of the highlights at the latest Cheffins Cambridge vintage sale, with all proceeds donated to the new Cambridge Children's Hospital. As part of the company's 200-year anniversary celebrations, the firm pledged to match the sale price, bringing the total donation to £80,560. The funds will support the creation of a new playroom for children receiving treatment at the hospital. The blue Fordson was purchased by Cheffins from Lincolnshire in June 2024 and restored by Young's Agricultural Services Ltd in Stretham, near Ely. The tractor was estimated at £15,000-20,000 and is going to a new home in Kent.

SOLD FOR £40,280

LOT 568 Vectis Auctions – Star Wars Auction, 21 October (vectis.co.uk)



The Vectis auction on 21 October achieved a total of £212,730 (inclusive of buyer's premiums), the highest figure ever realised for a single-day Star Wars sale in the company's history and reaffirming the strong demand for memorabilia associated with the film franchise. More than 800 registered worldwide buyers were drawn to the 609 varied lots, that saw 36 individual lots realising more than £1,000 each. One standout item was a Palitoy Stars Wars vintage 3.75ins figure Jawa with vinyl cape, on an unpunched card back. This was estimated at £8,000 to £10,000.

SOLD FOR £11,635

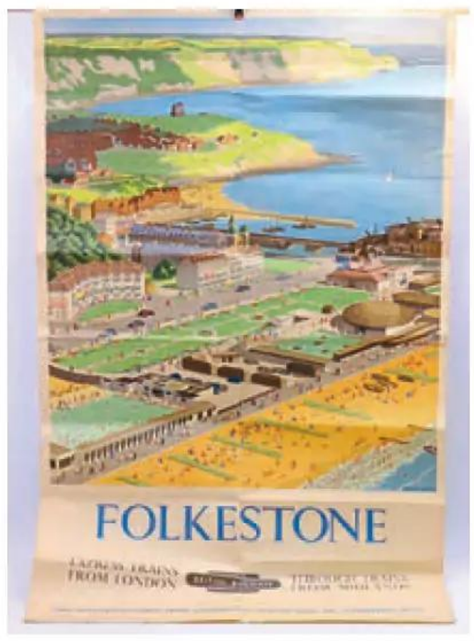
LOT 82 Charterhouse Auctions – Classic & Vintage Car Auction, 23 October (charterhouse-auction.com)



A 1956 Austin-Morris J-Type Milk Float, registration number OMR 824, a rare light commercial vehicle full of charm and patina, was a popular choice in the latest Classic & Vintage Car Auction at Haynes Motor Museum. In its blue over brown livery with a black interior, this vehicle first went to Goddards in Salisbury with the chassis cab on and was then sent to Poole to have the milk float body fitted. During its working lifetime, it was used by the dairy company Coward Brothers in Shaftesbury. This was the milk float used in the popular Heartbeat TV series.

SOLD FOR £12,000

LOT 53 Lacy Scott & Knight – Toys & Models, 24 October (lsk.co.uk)



A British Railways Southern Region original double royal holiday advertising poster circa 1953, depicting Folkestone from an original painting by Ronald Lampitt, provided one of the attractions in a small selection of railwayana in LSK's latest collector's sale. The unframed, folded example was described as being in excellent condition. The final Toys & Models sale of the year from LSK is to be held on Friday 12 December.

SOLD FOR £1,900

COMING UP

LOTS TBA Great Central Railwayana Auctions – Combined Sale, 6-8 December (gcrauctions.com)

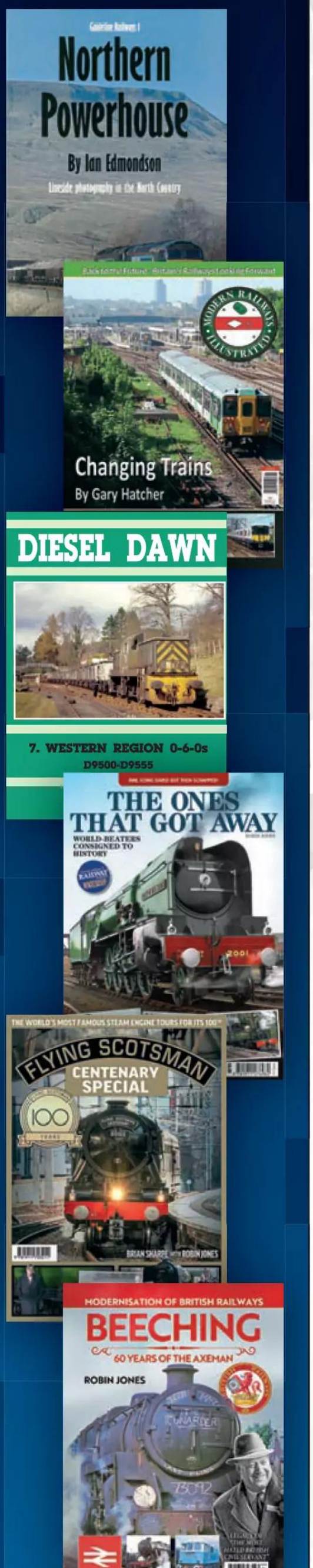


The popular Great Central Railwayana Auctions has announced a revised format for its future sales. The flagship auction on 6 December will be day one of a three-day event, with the usual quarterly two-day general railwayana auction (that was due to be held in early January 2026) to follow on 7 and 8 December. At the time of writing, some preview items for the 6 December auction are to be found on GCRA website, with more details to follow. Illustrated is the nameplate Arethusa from Jubilee 4-6-0 No 45696. "The new three-day arrangement will continue through 2026, enabling buyers to collect their purchases in one go and vendors to receive a single payout," GCRA commented.

When you are placing your bid(s) please be sure about what you are bidding for. Remember to take into account that on top of the hammer price, you will have to pay a buyer's premium (usually with VAT payable on the premium). Also, allow for post and packing with remote bidding.

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Yesterday Remembered

We welcome your memories of around 800 words and pay £20 for each story published. Don't forget to include pictures with your submission.

Pools Party



Sylvia Lee (nee Mower) of Earlsfield, London remembers:

On leaving school in the mid-50s, my friend Gloria and I began our working life at Cope's football pools, which was situated in Hackbridge, Surrey. Housed within a three-storey former snuff mill, set beside a river; a printing works, HL Vickery, occupied the lower floor, which also contained the works canteen. Cope's occupied the two upper floors, which also had use of the canteen. My sister-in-law, Elsie, was the cashier and it was due to her that we applied to join Cope's. We started work as the football season got underway. After a two-bus journey, we clocked in at 9 and out at 6.

Areas were split into sections; I was on part of Manchester and Gloria was on a different section. We soon got to learn the ropes, addressing, mailing, opening, sorting and, finally, checking coupons. And no, I never checked a jackpot winner.

Extra money could be earned on Saturday nights checking, and Thursday was our regular day off. A resident nurse was on site for all, and on nice days, it was lovely to have lunch breaks by the river.

Come Christmas time, the firm held annual staff dos at Hammersmith Palais. Coaches were laid on to transport staff there and back. Gloria and I attended its last one, with the magician David Nixon appearing as a special guest. It was a truly entertaining night but the dos were replaced with a Christmas bonus.

Gloria and I eventually decided to cycle to work, so we purchased bikes on HP, paying with what was saved on fares. This was fine in nice weather, but a no no for me on bad days. So, I gave it the heave-ho. Gloria, however, carried on. I can recall a time when leaving work one evening, a really thick fog descended while travelling home, which resulted in the conductor guiding the bus by walking in front of it with a lit beacon.

Another time, following on from a spat with Gloria, when the buses went on strike, Gloria took the train and I marched off to walk part of the way home, but kept walking for about 9½ miles, which took me nigh on three hours. Never again.

When our football season ceased, Australian pools took over. With the workload lessened, we were allowed music via the radio system and sang along to the hits of the day. Now and then, we could also leave work early.

On two separate occasions, visiting celebs came for a tour including singer Eve Boswell, and Bebe, Barbara and Richard – the mother, daughter and son of Life With the Lyons fame. Popular singer Michael Holliday was also seen on site, seated in his large car.

A lady named Hilda, on a nearby section, and daughter Jackie were the mother and sister of Johnnie Spence, pianist for singer Anne Shelton. He went on and formed his own orchestra and hit the charts with The Dr Kildare Theme. He was most associated with Matt Monro and they became close friends.

I got friendly with a girl, also named Sylvia, and we were known as big and little Sylvies for obvious reasons. But we lost touch when I left Cope's in 1959. I also knew a girl named Doreen, and we became close friends. After I'd left, she married and came to live in the next road to mine. We have retained out friendship for nigh on 60 years and have good memories of an enjoyable workplace.

Sadly, Cope's was destroyed by fire in 1964. I also lost touch with Gloria and would be pleased to hear from them or anyone who remembers me via BoB.





Left: Sylvia's friend Doreen, pictured right, receiving a prize from Mr and Mrs Cope at Cope's Pools' Christmas party. Right: Having met when they both worked at Cope's Pools, Doreen and Sylvia have been friends for more than 60 years.

Christmas With Doris

Bob Cooper of Macclesfield, Cheshire remembers:



Throughout my life, I have been a fan of Doris Day with her amazing films and, in particular, her music. Christmas has always been a special time for me regarding Doris and also my other favourite singer, Connie Francis.

When I was 21, I started writing to an American girl pen friend called Nancy Jaros who lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota. We exchanged reels of tapes, chatting for hours. Gradually, she realised how fond I was of Doris as I used to include some of her songs between the dialogue. Of course, being from Liverpool, I also sent Beatles tracks and she insisted that I sounded like George Harrison. I was not flattered as he was my least favourite Beatle.

In the early 60s, I used to see the Beatles often in mostly lunchtime sessions in the Cavern before they released their first single, Love Me Do. I always had to squeeze these visits into my lunch hour, but the group had a habit of starting their 20-minute slot late, because they were chatting and smoking. In exasperation, one day I said to John Lennon: "I've got to be back at work at half past one, John!" He stared at me for a few seconds then remarked: "All right, la. We're going on now, OK?" After that, if I was in the audience, they seemed to be more punctual.

Out of the blue in December 1964, Nancy sent me a 12ins LP called The Doris Day Christmas Album. It was particularly exciting as it was not released in England until the following year. Each Christmas, it graced my turntable over the holiday period, much to the annoyance of my two brothers. Around that time, another new format had emerged in the form of the cassette, so I bought that album and started playing it on my cassette player as well. This meant I could play it outside of the house, listening through headphones.

Each winter, during the 70s, 80s and 90s, I used to travel to Christmas markets all over the continent, so my trusty album always accompanied me to places like Amsterdam, Hamburg, Copenhagen, Riga, Stockholm and other destinations.

In 1982, a rerelease of Billy Joel's 52nd Street became one of the first albums to be issued on compact disc. I never bought that, but you can guess what I did buy. Yes, The Doris Day Christmas Album in yet another format. By now, extra tracks had been added from different sources, so the original track listing had expanded to 19 tracks officially, not 12. I was able to increase that by two more unrecorded titles myself that were featured in an episode of The Doris Day Show.

Later on, the laptop computer emerged and, of course, I had to invest in one of those. Yet another avenue to play music, so my CD player took a back seat on holiday as I was able to transfer all my Christmas music library on to it and play it wherever I liked.

The most bizarre playing of The Doris Day Christmas Album was in the huge square Rynek Glowny, within Krakow's Christmas Market. I sat at a table with a piping hot mug of glühwein and a giant hot dog, and pressed play on my laptop and listened to the sounds of Be a Child at Christmas Time and Silver Bells. Throughout many winters in England, I used to film school nativity plays and the former song was always included over the closing titles. Doris's wonderful voice was being heard by all those young children and their parents.

In 2007, I started subscribing to Friends of Doris Day magazine, which was distributed worldwide. I initially wrote three articles about a dog named Gypsy, which we brought to the UK from Thailand. (My book is available on Amazon should you wish to read it.) I subsequently became a writer on their editorial team for about four years. I used to receive emails from Doris occasionally and one time I mentioned to her hat The Doris Day Christmas Album was my favourite album of all time. Surprisingly, she told me that she hadn't listened to it since just after it was released but I found that hard to believe. Every home should have one in my opinion.

I still consider the original LP cover to be the best, but it has had many variations since. Since she passed away in 2019, I still religiously play it and, of course, it is even more meaningful since I had that close contact with her.



Having originally received a copy from his American pen friend, Bob has since bought The Doris Day Christmas Album on various formats and listens to it to this day.

The Power of Toys



Susan Batten of Eibar, Basque Country, Spain remembers:

The terrifying dark shape which loomed in the corner of my bedroom one night gave me a moment of panic, but it stayed put against the wall, a shadow darker than the others, draped in cloth down to the floor. At 4ft high and 2ft 6ins six across, I already suspected what it was and relaxed with relief. This was, after all, a very special night.

Of course I'd slept fitfully, waking every half hour to see whether Father Christmas had left me anything – and there had been nothing in that corner the last time I'd looked.

So, at some unearthly hour on Christmas morning, I pulled off the covering and was trying out my coloured chalks on the blackboard and eating a chocolate bar from the large Christmas variety pack lying on my bed. My Christmas was already complete.

My parents knew what kind of gifts would keep me happy. Anything that challenged my imagination would be a success. These were the days before the storm of plastic toys, aggressively pinned in giant shiny packaging. We didn't have elaborate, costly computer games or all-day TV, so we had to be proactive in our play and use what toys came our way.

I was lucky enough to receive personalised wooden presents from my dad, a carpenter.

The little cow shed he made was – surprisingly – ideal to accommodate my growing herd. There were few days when my farm wasn't scattered across the floor, and every outing to the shops somehow took us past the toyshop where I added pieces, one by one, to my collection. I cherished a particular black and pink pig – he got in on the act in every farmyard scene, with no danger of ever being sent off for bacon.

Another gift, thanks to my dad's carpentry skills, was a wooden cot for my dolls. I supposed it was intended for them, so that I could tenderly tuck them up at night in their own special bed.

It must say something for my psyche at the time that I immediately turned it upside down and created a cage, where I imprisoned any toy that had offended me: sheep which had run off, a teddy whose paw would not heal, a lorry which had shed its load.

This resource came into its own on the days I played ringmaster at my private circus.

Tiny lions, under-sized elephants and a few camels shared limited living space in there:

I never worried about the designs these animals might have on each other.

Another Christmas gift assembled by my dad was my theatre. Now, you might think this structure should have been the starting point for my career as a writer, but in fact it somehow created more logistical problems than satisfactory playlets. Before long, it had closed its red velvet curtains for good.

I think this was a matter of bad timing. The theatre, the farm and the circus were pretty much contemporary, but the sophistication of the theatre, with the invention of characters and the development of plots, would have been better suited to an older child.

I was still trying to cure an injury to a bear stuffed with straw.

The same was true of a Christmas gift I found half-congealed one day, sticking unpleasantly to some doll's clothes in the toy box: painting by numbers. I didn't realise how long oil paint takes to dry, and it was beyond my patience to find out. The activity proved infuriating and messy. No wonder it got tossed aside to dry out as best it could, while I passed on to more immediate satisfaction by beating my brother at Snap.

Why bother with toy kitchen utensils when I was encouraged to "work" in our own kitchen and was able to eat the results? Similarly, the garden beckoned, with real tools, and soon I'd learnt the names of the plants in the borders and rockery. When I was big enough to manage the shears, I was allowed to trim the hedge in the front garden, producing a wave effect like future football crowds did in the stadiums.

On winter evenings, stretched out on the sitting room floor before the two-bar, I was often engrossed in a game which consisted of coloured, metallic balls and a base with suitable dimples to hold them. Then, the sky was the limit. All the pictures painting by numbers should have produced could be set out here – a clean, non-sticky, colourful world of infinite possibilities.

Now I watch my grandsons playing, I think about the power of toys and remember those unsophisticated activities which shaped my life before books claimed my heart.



Every outing to the shops seemed to take Susan to the toyshop where she added pieces, one by one, to her toy farm.

The Mysterious Mr Morris

John Chilton of Spofforth, Harrogate, North Yorkshire remembers:



This story began when I would have been about three years old, so the beginning could have been hearsay, but I was a bright child with a good memory, so any subsequent details would have probably been my own recollections.

We were a mainly working-class family living in Small Heath, Birmingham and how Frank Morris came to join us is a little vague. It was just before the beginning of World War Two and, in the course of a few months, Frank met, courted and married my Aunty Rene who was about 27 years old. Frank didn't seem to have any friends or relations that were apparent. He was of a medium height and build with black slicked-back hair and a dark complexion and was always formally dressed in double-breasted, black serge suits. He had an air of quiet authority and competence and, in the common parlance, of those days would probably be classed as a gentleman.

World War Two had started, and Frank and Aunty Rene were married at a register office with an informal party reception afterwards at my parent's house in Whitehall Road. A short while after the wedding, the couple announced that they were going to move to Southport in Lancashire.

Our house in Whitehall Road, Small Heath was very near to the Birmingham Small Arms Company factory which manufactured rifles for the allied armies. The area was subject to lots of bombing raids by the German air force and several houses in our street and those around were destroyed. Rene and Frank suggested that my seven-year-old sister, Molly, and I would be safer with them in Southport and we were sent there as private evacuees.

The house was at 128 Balmoral Drive in Churchtown, a suburb of Southport, and seems to have been completed quite recently as, three sites down, there was the base of a similar house where building had been suspended for the duration of the war. A few minutes' walk through the fields beyond led to a factory making gun turrets and a smaller unit making ladies' stockings.

The gun turret factory was called Brockhouse, and Uncle Frank worked there for a while. Once, he brought home a component part from a gun turret. He also worked at the Ministry of Supply and was conscripted into the RAF but was released after a very short time, ostensibly with a stomach disorder. He also made frequent visits to Manchester for no apparent reason.

Despite the government restrictions, Frank always had a large supply of spirits and cigarettes and often entertained members of the local police force at his house, although he did not smoke or drink alcohol himself. My mother, sorting through the cupboards found sweets and an identity card which had a name that seemed to be a Hebrew version of Morris.

He didn't have much to do with me and my sister, leaving our nurture to Aunty Rene. However, one incident surprised and frightened me: like many children of my age, I practised drawing swastikas, Frank caught me drawing one in pencil on the outside of the house. He lost his temper, and I was afraid that he might hit me, but he just stood over me while I scrubbed it off.

Occasionally, items of furniture, cars, musical instruments such as a baby grand piano and a xylophone complete with felt covered hammers would appear for a while and move on. There were many grand houses in the area between Churchtown and Southport which had been closed for the duration of the war, while the owners fled to Canada and we speculated afterwards that Frank may have looted some of their possessions. The Regal cinema in Churchtown had a three-piece suite in the foyer; a settee and two armchairs upholstered in a material called moquette and one of the chairs appeared in the living room at 128. There was also a story that he had taken a carved stool from the Bold pub and, when surprised by a local constable, had put it down on the pavement and sat on it while they chatted.

One Thursday night in March 1941, there was an air raid on Churchtown and I felt the blast when a bomb exploded a few hundred yards from the house. The local newspapers reported the raid but only said that it was "on a suburb of a north-west coastal town" for security reasons.

"There were many grand houses in the area, which had been closed for the duration of the war, and we speculated that Mr Morris may have looted some of their possessions."

The winter of 1946 was very severe, lasting until well into 1947. Frank and Rene had come to our house in Birmingham for Christmas and, on the day after Boxing Day, Frank suggested that he go back to Southport to get the house warm before Rene returned. He made no further contact and when my mother's two younger brothers went to Churchtown, they found the house deserted. They found Frank at the Scarisbrick Hotel in Lord Street with another woman, drinking gin and smoking. He never explained his reasons for his previous actions.

Communication was not easy in those days: either by letter or face to face or very occasionally by telephone; so many questions remained unanswered: was Frank a spy? Who was he and where did he come from? Were the German bombers directed to Brockhouse by him? We will never know.



Had the mysterious Mr Morris directed German bombers to the Brockhouse factory?

My Best and Worst Toys

Sharon Haston of Falkirk, Stirlingshire remembers:



I didn't have to write a list for Santa as a child in the 1970s. My parents knew what I wanted by my reaction to the Christmas toy adverts on TV.

On Christmas Day, my presents were laid out on the sofa. Our tree sat on top of a little table at the window, so there wasn't much space for presents under it.

I always received a selection box. Sometimes it was in the shape of a stocking and contained gone but not forgotten goodies like Treets, Spangles, and a Texan Bar.

Book shaped presents were aways welcome, especially annuals. I loved Bunty, Mandy, Diana, Judy and Tammy. As a teenager, I progressed to Jackie, Blue Jeans and Look-In.

I was more of a Sindy than a Barbie girl. My Sindy doll wore a yellow tartan skirt and a white top edged with matching yellow. I loved her.

Other favourite toys I received over the years were a child's petite blue typewriter in a carry case, and a writing desk and chair. Yes, you heard that right, a desk and chair. I was a bit of a geek, so I used to play at being the teacher, lining dolls up as my pupils. The desk lid doubled up as a blackboard on which I'd chalk their lessons.

Continuing with the geeky theme, I also loved my toy post office set. It included papers, envelopes and a set of mini scales. I copied the lady in our village post office, officiously stamping everything I could.

One Christmas, I was given a lockable diary. It started a journalling habit I continue to this day.

Another memory is of receiving a doll's tea set from Santa when I visited him at the local department store called Young's. Once home, I set up my cafe by placing clothes pegs around the rug in front of the electric fire, leaving a space for the "door". I invited my dolls in for tea, placing the tiny cups and saucers in front of them.

I was content to make believe like this and play by myself for hours.

One time, I received a toy perfume making kit. I think this was prompted because I had pulled petals from my mum's beloved rose bed, mixing them with water to make perfume during the summer. She wanted to make sure it didn't happen again.

Of course, sometimes I received presents I wasn't so keen on.

Etch A Sketch was a huge disappointment. I had longed for it after seeing it advertised on TV. But the only thing I could ever draw on it was a wonky house.

I didn't like Lego bricks either. In those days, they were just brightly coloured rectangle and square blocks. The box showed pictures of boats, aeroplanes etc. But, again, the only thing I ever managed to build was a house.

> **"I was more of a Sindy than a Barbie girl. My Sindy doll wore a yellow tartan skirt and a white top edged with matching yellow. I loved her."**

Spirograph was another toy I disliked intensely. It reminded me too much of my most hated subject at school, maths. Every year, I received a gift from an auntie which I knew would contain a child's knitting, sewing, or embroidery set.

I think she chose these as she had three boys and thought this was a lovely girly gift. I tried my best, but my efforts were a disaster. To this day, I have an aversion to sewing and knitting which I can trace back to those presents.

Moving into the 1980s, as a teenager, my presents included vinyl albums by artists like Paul Young, Abba, the Human League and OMD. All of whom I still listen to and enjoy.

A 1980s toy icon is, of course, the Rubik's Cube which I received one year. A friend at school showed me how to do it and I became very proficient and quick. I think you had to do the corners first. Alas, the rest I've forgotten.

Board games were also popular. Our family enjoyed playing Frustration, Ludo, Happy Families, and Snakes and Ladders.

We got Twister one year, but Dad nearly put his back out trying to contort himself, so the mat was quickly folded away, never to be seen again.

One board game I always wanted and, for some reason, never received was Haunted House.

I told my husband, Robert, this recently and he surprised me by giving me the modern equivalent, Ghost Castle. We played it with our extended family last New Year and had great fun with loads of laughs.

And that's the whole point of Christmas, isn't it? It's not the presents. It's families getting together, sharing a meal, and having a laugh retelling much loved memories as well as making new ones.

All the same, if you're thinking of getting me a gift, please leave the knitting and sewing ones on the shelf.





Left: Sharon with mum Lily, brother Alan and the Christmas tree on a table. Right: Cousin Arlene and Sharon with typical 1970s Christmas presents, the Bunty annual and a Tressy doll.

Sheep Rearing Days

Colin Sweeting of Barkingside, Ilford, Essex remembers:



In the late 1980s, we heard that a couple of fields by the side of our house were on the market. Even though I had a full-time job, I had always fancied being a hobby farmer as well, so we decided to buy them with a view to raising sheep as a couple of our neighbours were doing.

I enrolled at an evening class at the local agricultural college on sheep husbandry and, once I felt confident enough, we purchased 10 Suffolk ewe lambs from one of our neighbours. There were bound to be some mistakes; the first one was to put the lambs in a field adjacent to the road, and within days one was rustled. We also noticed that one of the ewe lambs was in fact a ram lamb, so he had to be exchanged.

Things progressed well and, by the autumn, the lambs were ready to be introduced to a ram. We hired one and brought him home in a trailer which we drove straight on to the field.

Once the ramp was down, the ram went immediately over to the ewes and promptly served two and then proceeded to pursue a third which caused my then nine-year-old daughter to remark: "You've got a good one there, Dad. He knows his duty."

A ram, or tup as they are known in farming circles, would usually have around 25 ewes to cover, so he probably wasn't impressed with us having just nine and he showed his displeasure one morning by well and truly butting me up the backside.

We timed the ram's arrival for October, so after the roughly 145 days gestation period, the lambs would be born around the Easter school holidays for the children to enjoy the experience. The tutor at the agricultural college had said that as the ewes were going to be first time mothers, all the lambs would be singles.

How wrong he was, as the first ewe to lamb down was having twins. The first lamb arrived without trouble, but she was having difficulty with the second. She eventually birthed it but by then she had totally lost interest in the first lamb and rejected it so forcefully that she broke its leg.

The children were delighted at the prospect of having a lamb to bottle feed, so the lamb's broken leg was put in a splint, and he was promptly named "Pegleg" and became a family pet.

As soon as possible after birth, the lambs' tails on the lambs had to be ringed. Surprisingly, my young daughters were happy to assist with this. It was necessary to remove the tails to avoid their rear end wool getting soiled and attracting a fly strike where maggots would infest the dirty wool.



Colin's daughters helped him to rear the sheep.

To avoid this, all the sheep had to be regularly trimmed around their hind quarters during the summer months. I had a pair of dagging shears for this and would use them frequently as necessary. Despite my best efforts, the lanolin from the sheep's wool would remain on my skin and I was told at the office that, whereas the other men smelt of aftershave, I often had the lingering aroma of sheep.

Every year, the sheep had to be sheared and dipped. We didn't have a sheep dog, and our pet labrador certainly wasn't up to the task. However, we had the sheep bucket-trained and, with a good rattle of their food bucket, they would normally come running so could be corralled for the job in hand. However, there was always one that wouldn't play by the rules – usually the same one – that had to be individually cornered and taken forcibly to join the others for the shearer or dipper to do his job.



Rejected forcefully by his mother who broke his leg, Pegleg became a family pet.

While the sheep were being shorn, they were separated from their lambs for a couple of hours and the bleating between them was quite deafening and it always amazed us how quickly they all paired up again afterwards. To us, all the bleats sounded the same but they knew their individual calls.

Over the years we had the sheep, we sold off the ram lambs and retained the ewe lambs and eventually increased our flock to 35, hiring a different ram every year to avoid inbreeding.

It was an ideal life for the children while they were young, but it was hard work especially when combined with a full-time job. So, when the youngsters became teenagers and developed other interests, I accepted it was time to move on and leave sheep rearing behind.

Looking a Lot Like Christmas

Preparing for the big day, courtesy of The Francis Frith Collection

Market Day, Dorchester, Dorset

(Photograph taken in 1955)

To anyone local to Dorchester this was a familiar scene day in and day out for almost 50 years. My grandfather Ben Courtney started selling fruit and veg in 1947 from handcarts on the roadside. My father, Doug, started in 1950, and various members of the family helped through the week. This picture shows my Aunt Isabel serving a regular customer. Her father, Ben, is behind in his hat, serving, and her brother, my father, is extreme left, carrying a box. I always remember Christmas time was manic, we sold Christmas trees which had to be dug up and hauled to the store by the hundred. Nets and nets of piled up sprouts would disappear as fast as they were opened. Boxes of tangerines were stacked everywhere, and a sack-truck-full of brown paper bags would be used in a few days.

Trevor Courtney



Cranford, Middlesex

(Photograph taken around 1965)

I used to live in Cranford from birth (1953) to 1968. We lived at 703 Bath Road and my dad, Peter Wilson, owned the local butcher's over the other side of the road, Wilson & Sons. He used to make his own sausages, rissoles and dripping. At Christmastime, he used to try and get me and my sister, Elizabeth, to help pluck the turkeys but it used to make my fingers too sore. His favourite trick was to ask me to get something for him in the walk-in cold store and then shut the door behind me. The light would go off, and I would be walking around bumping into carcasses of beef, lambs and pigs. I'm surprised I didn't end up in therapy.

Sarah Wilson



The Crown Hotel, Blandford Forum, Dorset

(Photograph taken in 1955)



Over the few years I lived in Blandford, John and I would take his parents for a drink at the Crown Hotel, lovely relaxing evenings, great atmosphere, good company, what more could you ask for? On my first Christmas in Blandford, the hospital held its Christmas dinner at the Crown Hotel, food and service were faultless and it was a great evening.

Helen Nee Taylor

Kilburn High Road, Kilburn, Greater London

(Photograph taken in 1965)



As a young child in the late 30s and early 40s, a visit to BB Evans department store in Kilburn High Road was like a visit to Aladdin's Cave. Full of all kinds of clothes and household articles and a wonderful toy department, which had an ingenious Santa's grotto every Christmas. I was particularly taken with the pneumatic payment system, where your money and your bill were put in a cylinder, which was then placed into a vacuum pipe, from whence it was whisked off to who knows where and then, shortly afterwards, miraculously reappeared with your change.

Dennis Paul

The Francis Frith Collection

More than 150 years ago, pioneering Victorian photographer Francis Frith set up his company with the grand plan of photographing all the cities, towns and villages of Britain. His two sons, and later his grandson, continued Frith's massive task, and The Francis Frith Collection now contains more than 360,000 images taken between 1860 and 1970. Over 250,000 images are available to view online. Prints of the Frith photographs, as well as a wide range of other products and local history books, featuring these vintage images, are available from the website francisfrith.com

Share Your Memories

The Francis Frith Collection invites you to visit the website and add memories to the places featured in the photographs, or comment on others already added. Seeing a place from your past can rekindle forgotten or long-held memories. Why not add your story for others to read and enjoy – making your memories and stories part of this growing chronicle of British life?

POSTCARD FROM WORCESTERSHIRE



Bob Barton goes in search of wild cats and other mythical beasts, and discovers some Tudor tales and a wealth of industrial heritage

I'm sceptical about news stories you sometimes read of big black cats roaming the countryside. I was, however, tempted to don my boots for a hike I found on the internet titled In the Footsteps of the Beast. The location was Bredon Hill, a little-known stretch of upland near Evesham. Over the years, it has been the focus of sightings of a panther-like creature known as the Beast of Bredon.

Let me say straight away, I didn't come face-to-face with any oversize felines.

Top: Avoncroft Museum spans acres of lovely countryside and boasts a variety of historical buildings including this windmill which was relocated from Danzey Green. Right: Better known for its extensive collection of buses, Transport Museum Wythall is home to the UK's largest collection of battery-electric electric delivery vehicles.

But my morning on the hill revealed a host of unusual sights. They included weirdly shaped standing stones, bronze age barrows, a holy well, a deserted farm and, at the summit, a stone-built tower known as Parson's Folly. It was a cool, clear autumnal day: just as well as I'd read an old rhyme about the weather in these parts:

When Bredon Hill puts on its hat, ye men of the Vale beware of that.

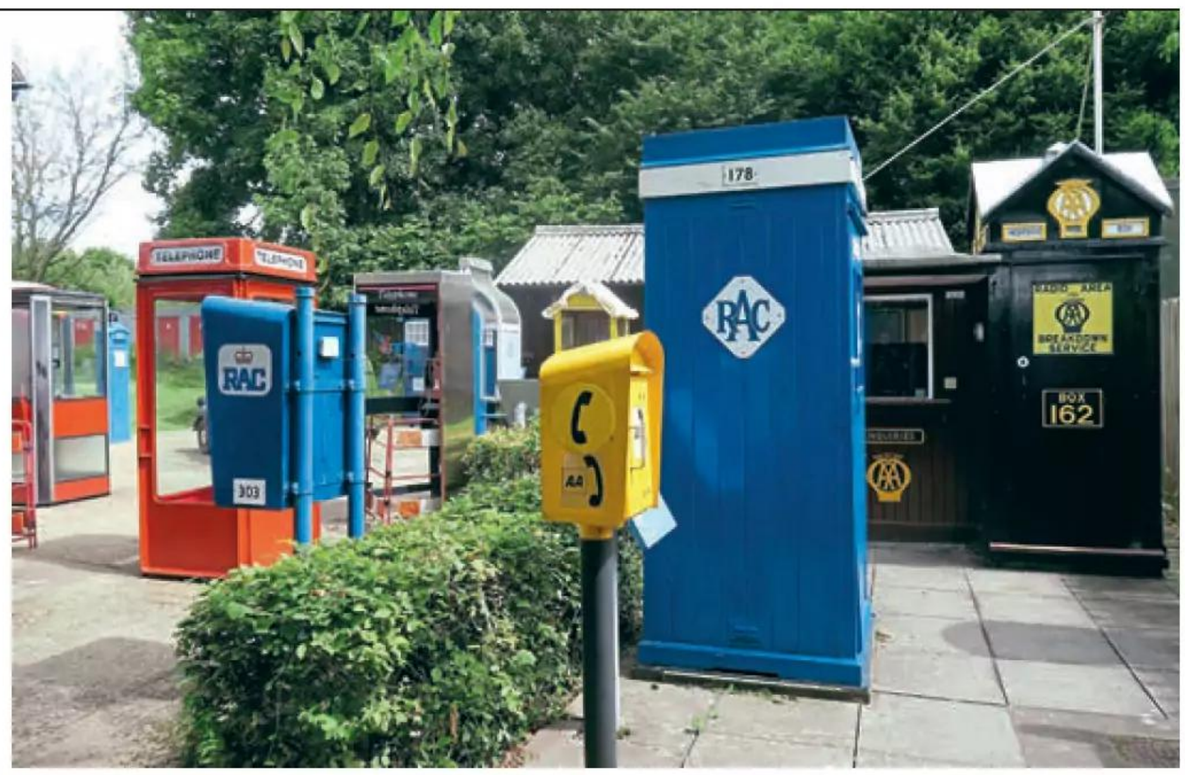
When Bredon Hill doth clear appear, ye men of the Vale have naught to fear.

Crossing a babbling book and passing a spooky-looking turreted house, my climb began. Soon, there were stunning views across the wide Vale of Evesham. Stunted trees, resembling skeletal figures, contrasted with others bright with rowan berries and dog-rosehips. I passed a couple of walkers descending who assured me they hadn't seen any wild cats. My relief was tempered, though by one telling me Bredon has lots of ghost stories. One recalls a wandering



Photographs: Bob Barton





Left: Bredon Hill has been the focus of sightings of a panther-like creature known as the Beast of Bredon. Right: The National Telephone Kiosk Collection at Avoncroft Museum features telephone boxes of all sizes and shapes, signs and a gallery of associated equipment.

dog dragging a heavy chain. In a village house, there's said to be a spectral nun. Her stock-in trade is snatching the bedclothes off the sleeping residents.

At the foot of the hill is an attractive village, Elmley Castle. Its main claim to fame is that Queen Elizabeth I visited in 1575 and nearly bankrupted her hosts in the process. The occasion is recalled in the name of the pub; a friendly, community-owned hostelry that also has a cafe. The inn sign is unusual in that it features a different depiction of the Tudor monarch on each side.

Before leaving, I was advised to look inside the church, which has some grand tombs with effigies of the local nobility. There's also a carving of a rabbit over the porch and, at the base of an ancient font, four serpent-like dragons. So, I add mythical beasts to my list of sightings in this other-worldly locality. I vowed to return and explore it further.

The county has a wonderful variety of museums with some unexpected exhibits. Though the older I get, the more often I recognise things in museums from my youth. Such as battery-electric milk floats and bread vans, as in the Transport Museum Wythall (01564 826471, wythall.org.uk). This friendly attraction majors on buses – and we enjoyed a bracing open-top bus ride around the surrounding countryside – but its collection of electric delivery vehicles must be unique. A volunteer explained there were once dozens of companies in the Midlands that built them.

Dairies and bakeries would deliver daily to our doors, their white-coated drivers offering a reliable service in all weathers. My local company was a branch of Express Dairy. Each morning, the hum and clink-clink of the cart would wake up the dozy schoolboy I then was. For others, the Co-op, Midland Counties Dairy or United Dairies would provide a similar reveille call, and many of these are represented.

My favourite exhibit is a 1953 Morrison-Electricar bread van in the livery of Birmingham Co-operative Society. Its shoe-box shape, central headlight and rectangular windscreen is so futuristic looking it appears to be straight out of a science fiction film.

Avoncroft Museum near Bromsgrove (01527 831363, avoncroft.org.uk) spans acres of lovely countryside and boasts a variety of historical buildings. They have been collected from miles around and reassembled. There's a windmill, a prefab house, a mission church and nail-maker's house, to name a few. But this is the place to bring a youngster and show them how we communicated before the mobile phone took over.

The reason? It boasts the National Telephone Kiosk Collection. I gazed in awe at a gaggle of telephone boxes, of all sizes and shapes, that look like they've gathered for a social get-together. From the earliest AA roadside box and police call-posts to the latest BT glass cubicle, signs and a gallery of associated equipment: the whole telephonic world is there.



The Queen Elizabeth at Elmley Castle is named after the monarch whose visit to the village almost bankrupted her hosts.



Control room gear from Droitwich Transmitting Station forms a hi-tech exhibition at Droitwich Heritage Centre.

The former spa town of Droitwich has a friendly heritage centre (01905 774312, droitwichheritagecentre.org.uk). It's on the site of brine baths where people "seeking the cure" would soak themselves in salty water pumped out of the earth. It has a hi-tech exhibit, dating from the early days of BBC Radio: the control room gear from Droitwich Transmitting Station. This relayed the corporation's MW and LW broadcasts throughout the West Midlands for 70 years, from 1934. I was tempted to use the famous BBC microphone to do my impression of comedian Tommy Handley on It's That Man Again (ITMA). The 700ft-high aerial masts outside town remain a landmark, easily spotted from the M5 motorway en route to Bromsgrove.





Left: Once a year, a ground floor room in the Tudor House returns to its original purpose as a beer house, where local beer and mulled cider is served. Right: The clocktower at St Peter's, Pirton has only one hand – reflecting an era when no one needed to know the precise time.

My favourite among Worcester's several museums is the volunteer-run Tudor House (01905 612309, tudorhouse.org.uk). Set in a wobbly-floored, timbered house dating from the 1520s, it was once a workshop for weaver-clothiers. They, I was told, had a lucrative sideline brewing beer. A ground floor room served as a beer house, and this is laid out as such. Once a year, it returns to its original purpose: local beer and mulled cider is served. Any "troublemakers" are sent to the stocks in the museum's courtyard. I enjoyed sampling the hospitality during the city's Victorian Christmas Fayre (next event 4-7 December). Nearby streets are festive with seasonal stalls and entertainers.

Winter can offer up some crisp, bright days, when nothing beats a country walk. A few years ago, I put on my boots to follow the Railway Trail at The Fold, a farm at Bransford that has become a community hub with an organic café (01886 833633, thefold.org.uk). The leafy path follows an old track-bed: the GWR's Worcester, Leominster and Bromyard line that closed in 1964. Mainly used seasonally by hop-pickers and horse racegoers at Bromyard, it never made a profit. A red-letter day was in 1957, when Queen Elizabeth II came through on the royal train. A chap who grew up on the farm said he was five at the time. Dressed up to the nines by his mum, he was thrilled when the train finally appeared. Prince Philip tapped the queen on her shoulder; she turned and waved as the carriages rattled past.

It's the chats with locals and passing walkers that I enjoy as much as the fresh air and views. Finding beautiful buildings is also a joy. One I recall is St Peter's church in the village of Pirton, when its churchyard grass crunched with frost underfoot. It has a half-timbered bell tower, merged with a nave of stone, as if two different buildings were spliced together by competing builders. A villager pointed out the tower clock has only one hand – reflecting an era when no one needed to know the precise time.



Oliver Cromwell was greeted with an abundance of joy and shouting at Ye Olde Anchor Inn, Upton upon Severn following the Battle of Upton in August 1651.

Then to the Royal Oak in Kinnersley, a local inextricably linked to the world of horse racing. Here are the Rimell family stables. The barman explained Fred and Mercy Rimell had a worldwide reputation as trainers (and Fred as jockey). The barman pointed to framed prints of Grand National winners from the stables. Gay Trip and Rag Trade among them. He offered to pour a pint of his best ale. Surely, this must be the only pub that serves Rimell's Tippler?

Another favourite is Ye Olde Anchor Inn in the characterful town of Upton upon Severn. A blue plaque indicates that "Oliver Cromwell was greeted here with an abundance of joy and shouting…after the decisive Battle of Upton (August 1651)". A fellow customer spoke of more reputed ghosts hereabouts. One is, apparently, a three-legged, one-eyed cat that danced his way from one pub to another in Cromwell's time.

I'm not sure if he was jesting but one thing is for sure. Cats seem to play a big part in the folklore of the county.

REFRESHMENTS

The Queen Elizabeth, Main Street, Elmley Castle WR10 3HS (01386 710251, queenelizabethinn.co.uk)

Ye Olde Anchor Inn, 5 High Street, Upton upon Severn WR8 0HQ (anchorupton.co.uk, 01684 593735)

Royal Oak, Kinnersley WR8 9JR (theroyaloakkinnersley.co.uk, 01905 371482)

All are Camra-listed pubs serving real ale and food.

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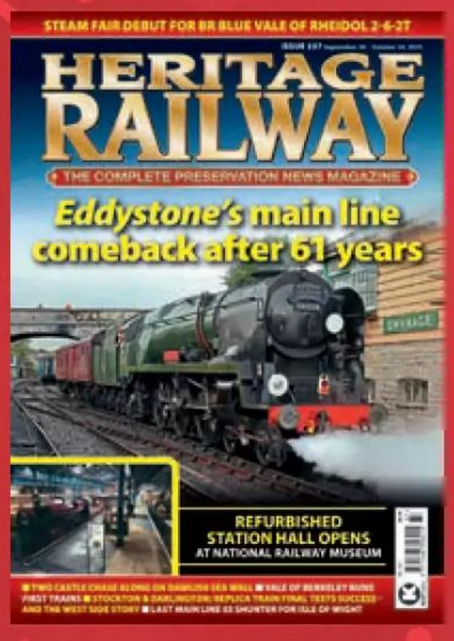


















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MAKING HIS MARK

Susan Brewer looks back on the career of pop singer turned actor Mark Wynter

It's a joy watching our favourite singers or actors, but though we might admire them and enjoy the happiness they bring, do we ever give a thought as to how precarious the world of entertainment actually is? This was recently brought home to me by a comment from singer/actor Mark Wynter, who pointed out that once the agreed performances are complete, the performer is out of work. I had never thought of it like that before. It's the equivalent of regularly being given your marching orders.

Mark began his rise to fame in the early 1960s, and his longevity of 63 years as a performer, covering a such a wide span of entertainment outlets is remarkable, especially when you consider it encompasses pop singing, leading roles in major musicals worldwide, plays ranging from Shakespeare through to Agatha Christie, and radio and TV work. Mark says: "No one else that I'm aware of has tackled successfully that range in a profession where at the end of every contract one is made redundant. It's a gossamer fractious way to make a living."

Music was in his blood from a young age; his parents both had fine voices. He was just eight when the headmaster of his primary school, Harry Gell, realised the young boy had a remarkably pure soprano singing voice. Harry was also head of music and would accompany Mark on the piano as he sang such songs as O for the Wings of a Dove, On Wings of Song and Where'er You Walk, and one day contacted Mark's mother suggesting she took him to her local church to ask if he could be accepted as a choirboy.

She did so. Mark was accepted, rising to head choirboy and singing at such locations as Canterbury Cathedral and the Royal Albert Hall. He left school at 15, worked in a shop and sometimes sang in local clubs and dance halls. By a stroke

Above: By 1963, and with a couple of Top 10 hits under his belt, Mark was able to buy his first car, an Austin Healey Sprite.

Photographs: (Conduct Unbecoming) Courtesy of Mark Gudgeon, (1964) Rave





Left: Mark as Arthur Drake, his first lead role, in Conduct Unbecoming at the Queen's Theatre, London in 1970. Right: Susan and Mark, who was intrigued by the pendant she was wearing, pictured in Coventry in 1964, where he was appearing in pantomime.

"Elvis Presley was quoted as saying: 'I know one of your best new ballad boys is a kid called Mark Wynter.'"

of good luck, one evening in 1959, talent scout Ray Mackender, looking for someone to promote, happened to be at the club. As they say, the rest is history.

Mark was born Terence Lewis, in 1943, in Woking, Surrey, but when he began his career, it was decided that Terry Lewis could be confused with the US rock star Jerry Lee Lewis. Consequently, he came up with Mark and picked Wynter from a phone directory. His first appearance using his new name was at a charity performance organised by Cliff Richard in Cheshunt. By 1960, word of this talented newcomer was spreading. Mark auditioned for a Decca record contract at Decca House in London. Soon, his first record, Image of a Girl, was released, rising to No 11 in the charts, leading to impresario Harold Fielding offering Mark a summer season in Bournemouth. He also made various radio and television appearances. That year, Mark received an endorsement that filled him with pride. No less than Elvis Presley was quoted as saying: "I know one of your best new ballad boys is a kid called Mark Wynter." In 1961, he was voted Most Promising Newcomer by the New Musical Express and was soon immersed in the world of entertainment.

I've followed Mark's career from his very first record. Other records soon followed, including Exclusively Yours, Dream Girl and Kickin' Up the Leaves, a song written by Lionel Bart.

As a teen, I had to spend several months at a time in hospital, and it was music that kept me happy. In 1962, browsing through Disc, a music newspaper, I discovered a list of pop stars, together with their agents' contact details, and among them was Mark, whose single Heaven's Plan had just been released. I wrote to several of the stars and, in some cases, received a reply in the form of a photo, but Mark not only sent me a signed photo, but he also wrote a letter. I was thrilled, and we are still in contact today.

Mark's singing career escalated later that year, when he changed labels from Decca to Pye. Hit followed hit with Venus in Blue Jeans, Go Away Little Girl, It's Almost Tomorrow and others. Soon, he was a regular performer on pop programmes such as Thank Your Lucky Stars and in all had nine Top 20 singles. Perhaps the most memorable event of the decade was when Mark appeared in The Night of a 100 Stars at the London Palladium in 1964, alongside Judy Garland, Shirley Bassey, Marlene Dietrich, Cliff Richard and the Beatles. A year later, he joined Morecambe and Wise for a sell out summer season in Blackpool. However, with the rise of the Beatles, the music scene changed, especially for solo singers and, by the late 60s, the charts were dominated by groups.

It was around this time that Mark was involved in a tragic accident. In 1968, he was Australia bound, booked to play cabaret in Melbourne and perform in a Sydney night club with comedian Dave Allen, when the Boeing 707 BOAC in which he was a passenger crashed at Heathrow airport shortly after take-off. The plane suffered an engine failure, quickly leading to a major fire with the engine detached in flight. Although the aircraft made a successful emergency landing, five people of the 120 on board died, including flight attendant Jane Harrison. She pushed out passengers too frightened to jump and was last sighted turning back into the plane in an attempt to rescue the remaining four passengers, among them a disabled woman and an eight-year-old girl. Jane was posthumously awarded the George Cross for heroism during the accident. Just over a quarter of the passengers were injured, including Mark who sustained broken bones in his foot after leaping from the burning wing.

Mark had already developed a taste for acting while appearing in pantomimes such as Aladdin, Jack and the Beanstalk and Robin Hood. Now, it was time to branch out even more playing character roles, and, guided by his agent Ian Bevan, Mark did just that in 1969, starring alongside Stanley Baxter and Evelyn Laye at the Palace Theatre in London, in the musical Phil the Fluter. It was based on the life of Irish composer Percy French. Soon, Mark's acting career was in full swing.

He has played leading roles in too many musicals to list here, but among them are Hans Christian Andersen, The King and I, Robert and Elizabeth, Charlie





Left: Cast as Monsieur Andre, Phantom of the Opera also saw Mark understudy the Phantom himself. Right: Mark, bottom right, played the parts of Gus, Growltiger and Bustopher Jones in Cats from 1990-93. His eldest son, Josh, then four years old, is also pictured.

Girl and Annie. He was also in the Lloyd Webber productions of Cats at the New London Theatre in 1990 for two years and Phantom of the Opera, at Her Majesty's, in 1994, for a similar period. In Cats, he played the parts of Gus, Growltiger and the foppish Bustopher Jones, the cat about town, who was gluttonous and so plump that he waddled.

Phantom of the Opera saw Mark playing the role of Monsieur Andre, manager of the Paris Opera House, but also understudying the Phantom, which he did get to play many times – and may I say, he was excellent. However, without a doubt, the most challenging of the musicals in which he took part was in Johannesburg where he starred in Barnum, the story of the American showman. Mark had to learn to walk the tightrope and to ride an extra tall unicycle, among other skills such as juggling.

As well as his work in musicals, Mark's ability as a fine actor has led to appearances in numerous plays, the first of which was Conduct Unbecoming (1970) at London's Queen Theatre where he took a lead role as 2nd Lieutenant Arthur Drake. Other plays have included several Agatha Christie mysteries including And Then There Were None, Witness for the Prosecution, Murder on the Nile and The Unexpected Guest. Mark recently played Mr Paravicini in The Mousetrap in South Africa and New Zealand. He also played the title roles in Shakespeare's Macbeth and Henry V, Lord Windermere in Oscar Wilde's Lady Windermere's Fan and Elyot in Noël Coward's Private Lives.



Friends since the 60s, Mark and Susan are pictured here in 2017.

Mark's first film was Just for Fun (1963), a showcase for various pop performers of the time, centred around a storyline in which Mark and actress Cherry Roland lead youngsters into forming their own political party after the prime minister reduces the allowed quota of televised musical programmes. This film has now become a cult movie for that era. There was a complete change of image in 1969 when he portrayed the character Gary Scott in The Haunted House of Horror who ends up being stabbed to death. He also appeared briefly in the 1978 film Superman.

Among his television and radio work were the popular 1980s series Once Upon a Time and Tell Us a Story programmes for children. He also appeared in Emu's Wide World, playing Bonnie Prince Duncan McQuartle.

Other programmes included Call in on Wynter, It's Mark Time, the drama series The Cedar Tree, several episodes in the comedy series According to Dora, plus A Tale of Two Rivers, Doctors and Sally

Ann, which focussed on the daily lives of a Salvation Army group.

For a long while it seemed as if we would never see Mark singing hits such as Venus in Blue Jeans again. Then, in 2009, a show called Dreamboats and Petticoats premiered, filled with pop hits and, in November 2012, Mark joined the West End cast at the Wyndham's Theatre. He took the part of Phil Croft, a youth club leader, and father of Bobby, a wannabe pop star. To his supporters' delight, at the end of the performance, Mark was in the spotlight performing as himself, singing his hits once more after five decades. This was just one of the many Bill Kenwright productions in which Mark performed.

A year later, he was touring the country with Dreamboats and Petticoats, a happy, feel good musical show. However, Mark points out: "Showbusiness is not always a glamorous fun-filled roller coaster. One's personal life often has distressing situations, the same as everyone else, and needs to be dealt with outside of the spotlight. My stepfather died in 1967 aged just 56. As the eldest of six children, I then became head of the family, my mother having five other children aged 16 down to the age of three years."

Mark himself is married to Emma, a professional dancer. The couple live in Sussex and have three children, all of whom seem to have inherited Mark's aptitude for music.

For the moment, there are still enough of us 1960s teens around loving music from that era. Singer Marty Wilde played a big part in making that happen when in the early 2000s he began touring with a group of singers from the era, including Eden Kane, Mike Berry and John Leyton. Later, Mark joined them, and once more we could hear his hit songs, feeling awed that he, as well as Marty and the other veteran performers, were still in such good voice.

Nowadays, Mark spends quite a lot of time in Cape Town, South Africa with his eldest son, Josh, an award-winning composer who now has a son of his own. Mark has always been a keen swimmer and recently told me that he keeps fit by swimming a kilometre every day. It certainly seems to work.

Let's leave the final comment to Mark who says: "With hard work and a good agent who can see potential, it's a wonderful way to journey through life. Lady Luck also plays a big part."

Photographs: (Main) Pete Silver, (1974) Ian Dickson/Shutterstock



All About My Hits

Peter Robertson speaks to Maddy Prior, lead singer and co-founder of Steeleye Span

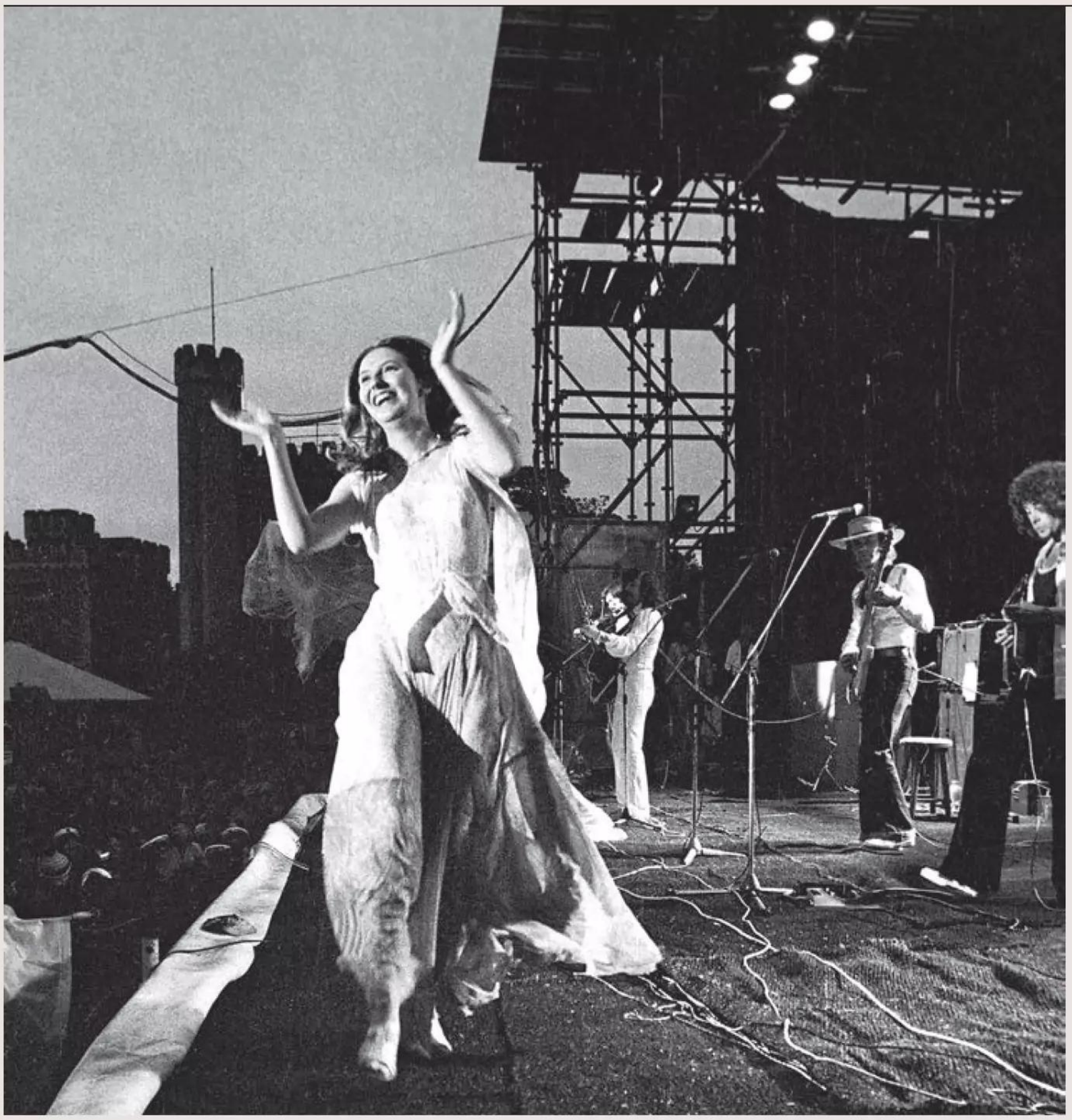
Fifty years ago, the English folk-rock group Steeleye Span had their second and biggest unlikely Christmas hit single.

All Around My Hat, written in the 19th century, peaked at No 5 in the UK singles chart, two years after Gaudete, composed in the 16th century, made No 14.

Steeleye Span's lead singer and only consistent member of an oft-changed lineup since 1969 – except when she took a break between 1997 and 2002 – has been Maddy Prior, who has sung and spoken about their catchy hit so often that she just calls it "Hat".

"We had no idea at all that they'd become hits. Certainly Gaudete. Everyone was stunned by that. The engineer hated it. It's a very particular sound with a very high voice on the top and male voices underneath. It's unmistakable. You never know with songs. Who knew Hat was going to be popular? Hat was a hit at

Above: With the exception of a break between 1997 and 2002, Maddy Prior has been part of Steeleye Span since its formation in 1969.



Maddy on stage with Steeleye Span in 1974, a year before All Around My Hat became an unexpected Christmas hit by reaching No 5 in the singles chart.

Christmas and we've always tended to tour around that time."

Of their heyday with hits, Maddy says: "In some ways it feels like yesterday, and in other ways it's like another world. It was a different world then. To be on Top of the Pops then, there is no equivalent to that now. And we went to America which was like: 'Wow!' As a serious band, we were surprised by it all and found it so funny that we laughed right through the 1970s. It was just great fun."

Indeed, Maddy is rarely seen performing without a big smile on her face. "I don't think of myself as smiling that much, but I am an optimistic and outgoing sort of person when I'm in that world. I've also got another side to me, as we all have. But what's not to like? It's beautiful music, great songs and people clap – what more can you want? With 24 albums, we have got a massive repertoire now yet there are some people who know all our material. There's a website called steeleyespanfan.co.uk and he knows more about us than I do!"

Although still a recognisable name, at 78 with her long dark hair now white Maddy insists she's rarely noticed offstage.

"I've never been someone people recognise in the street. Occasionally someone will come up to me in Boots the day after a gig and say: 'I saw you last night'. People usually tell me our music is part of their lives. Someone described it as 'six decades in unpopular music!' That sums it up perfectly for me."

Born Madeleine Edith Prior on 14 August 1947, her father, Allan Prior, made a name for himself as the co-creator/writer of the police drama series Z Cars.

"I remember that was quite a big deal, but I didn't grow up around celebrity. Dad once got us into the audience of a New Year's Eve Top of the Pops and we knew the actor Philip Madoc well. Dad knew Terry Nation and wrote some of Blake's 7. Dad found it all quite easy because he just made it up."

Maddy and her then husband Rick Kemp sang the title song for her father's series Stookie, and a Steeleye Span version of the traditional Liverpool folk song Johnny Todd was used by Z Cars as its theme for a while.

Born and initially raised in Blackpool, Maddy explains: "I first sang Tennessee Wig Walk at the Saturday matinee and won the competition. I went to singing lessons where we learnt songs, but I never learnt any technique – I just opened me mouth and it came out."

Maddy was 11 when she moved with her family to St Albans in Hertfordshire. Years later, at the Cock pub there, she befriended the folk-pop star Donovan, and the musician Mac MacLeod with whom she formed the duo Mac & Maddy. For three years, she was performing and recording with Tim Hart before they became founding members of Steeleye Span in 1969.

"I've always been happier in a band. I've been so lucky to play with fantastic musicians. I stand up there with all this wonderful music around me," Maddy says. "But we didn't set off in traditional music to be popular – I was quite embarrassed talking about it to my friends who couldn't understand why we were doing it.

"I'm not ambitious strangely enough and a [career] trajectory never occurred to me. I literally went from song to song and outfit and to outfit and did what I did. At times the world hasn't noticed at all and at times it's done very well, particularly in the 70s, of course."

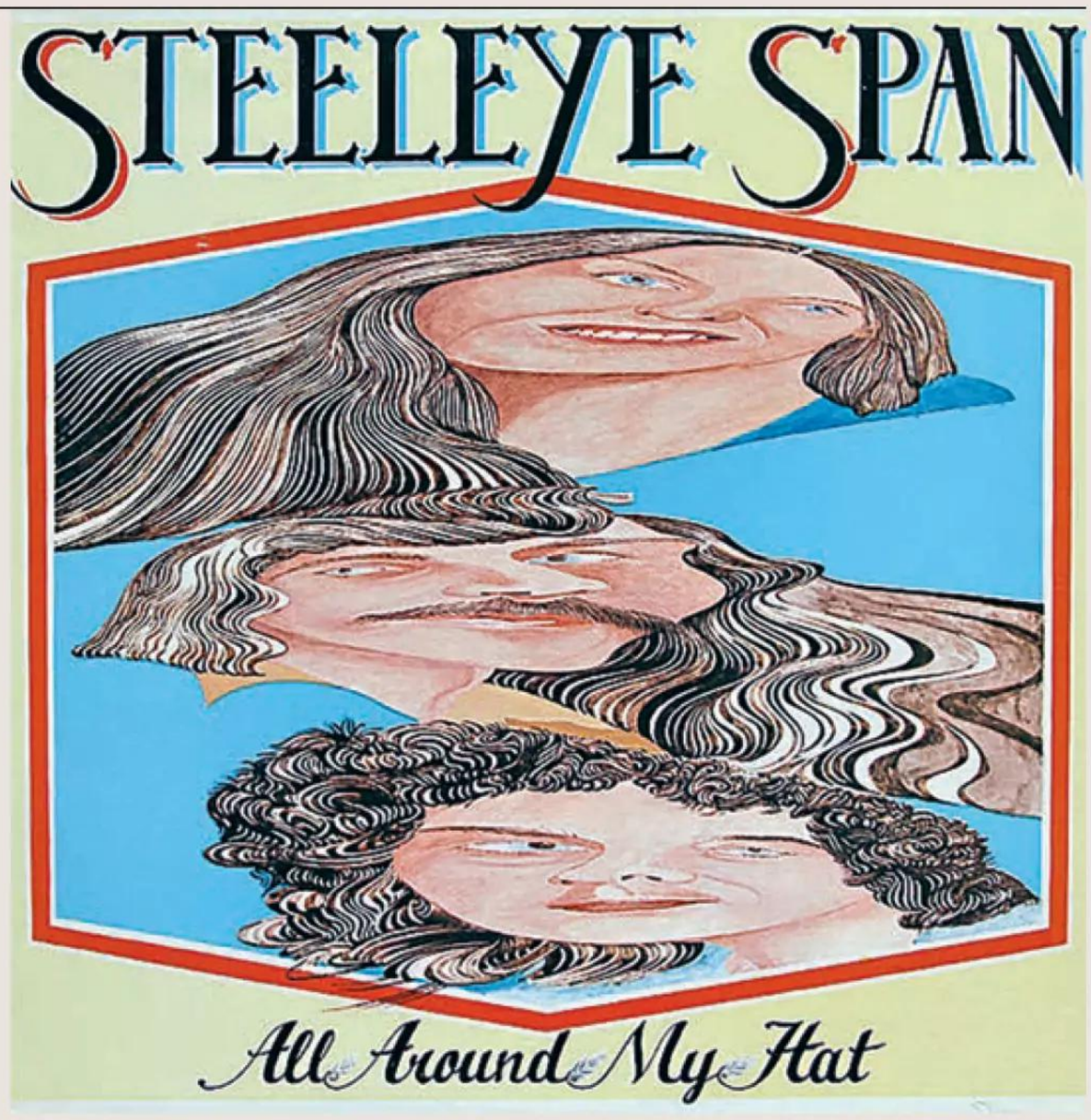
David Bowie played saxophone on the group's cover of To Know Him Is to Love Him, and Peter Sellers contributed ukelele and extra spoken vocals on their track New York Girls. "Nobody had ever asked Peter Sellers to play ukelele before," remembers Maddie. "I think he was terrified. Once he realised we were fans, he did a load of Goon voices over the track. I don't think David Bowie was asked to play sax often either. He was very nice but he came with an entourage, so we sat in the background and watched this all going on."

Both the single and album All Around My Hat were produced by Mike Batt.

"Rick, Pete and Bob from Steeleye Span also got to perform with Mike as Wombles – Rick was Great Uncle Bulgaria – but I didn't. I was given to understand the Womble costumes were quite smelly!"

"Rick, Pete and Bob also got to perform with Mike Batt as Wombles but I didn't. I was given to understand the Womble costumes were quite smelly!"





Left: The current lineup of Steeleye Span: Roger Carey, Athena Octavia, Liam Genockey, Maddy Prior, Andrew "Spud" Sinclair and Julian Littman. Right: Both the single and album All Around My Hat, which reached No 7 in the albums chart, were produced by Mike Batt.

Many years later, Status Quo did a lively cover of All Around My Hat which featured Maddy, after they met performing at festivals, and she remains friends with Francis Rossi.

Maddy even got to do session work on Mike Oldfield's 1978 album Incantations. "Mike was pretty strange at the time because he'd just done Exegesis [a self-awareness seminar] and that brought him out of his shell because he was incredibly shy. That live tour is a whole story which I don't want to get into. But it was a lovely tour to do, we went right through Europe, and Mike was really good and a great performer."

Steeleye Span's success has not been confined to these shores. "We toured in America quite a lot, and we toured in Australia. We went through the Middle East a bit: UAE and various places. But we've always been a bit niche, which I like. I have to say it's been great for me; I wouldn't want all the pressures of a massive band."

When the stage musical Blood Brothers was launched in the 1980s, Maddy turned down the starring role of Mrs Johnstone. "The idea of being in the same venue for six months doing eight shows a week. I didn't want to do that. I didn't mind the idea of acting, but I wasn't very good. Too shy, you see, and I had no training."

It's hard to believe that Maddy can be shy yet a lead singer since for more than six decades. "I know, it's weird" she concedes. "It takes a lot. I have to really prepare and psyche myself up to do it, even now, starting at 10am and thinking all day about what I've got to do. I've always been a nervous performer, so I've always had plenty of adrenaline. I have had to run offstage to be sick and run back on again, but that was only because I had a bug. But it doesn't affect me like that; I just get the shakes.

"Drink was a thing – I liked brandy – but at that point everybody was drinking, so I didn't notice I was drinking more. But then I stopped drinking. I was never a drugs person; they affected my voice too much."

From 1972 until 1986 and from 2000 until 2016, Maddy's husband, Rick, played bass for the band as well as being a vocalist, songwriter, and record producer. "Our relationship was never straightforward. It made it quite fiery probably. But the band was like that anyway. It was a pretty outrageous band in many ways. We were all strong characters, and we would fight and laugh in equal measure. We actually came to blows on various occasions and poured beer on each other and stuff like that. It had its moments. But I wouldn't have missed it for all the nonsense and rubbish that went on. It was an exciting time. And then things settled down. We had children and that changes everything."

Although Maddy and Rick divorced, they have a daughter, Rose, who is a singer and musician and a son, Alex, who's a hip-hop artist known as Kemp.

"I'm quite enjoying it again now with the children all grown, and I've got grandchildren" she says. "I certainly enjoy the touring."

For 40 years, Maddy has been based at an old farmhouse in Cumbria. In a barn there she teaches singing, sometimes with Rose.

Of her own singing voice at the age of 78, Maddy says: "It's not bad. I've got plenty of power but the range is limited. It's an ongoing process. You just have to work with the voice you've got today – that's what we all do.

"I do two tours a year now with Steeleye, and some festivals in the summer. We don't record quite as often, but that's not a bad thing."

In 2014, Maddy received an honorary fellowship from the University of Cumbria. More importantly, in 2001 she was appointed MBE for services to folk music. "The then Prince Charles presented it to me at Buckingham Palace. We said something about how the room would be a good venue with nice reverb. I remember once meeting the queen [Elizabeth II] after a charity do at the Royal Albert Hall and she said: 'Such jolly tunes!'"

Maddy has no plans to retire. "I will bop till I drop!" she declares. "I want to live while I can still function. I'm not fussed about dying; it's the how you go, that's the problem.

"I'm having a brilliant life. I have always done what I wanted, which has been great. Not many people get to do that. And if I'm remembered best for Gaudete and Hat, so be it. We've done a lot of other good work, but how I'm remembered after I've gone is not my business."



Pru... I know!

Chris Hallam pays tribute to Prunella Scales

One day in 1974, actress Prunella Scales travelled to Hyde Park Gardens to visit John Cleese in his flat to discuss a potential role in a new situation comedy called Fawlty Towers. As it happened, Cleese was in bed where he was recovering from a bad cold. "Did you like the scripts?" he croaked. "I think they're brilliant," she replied. This must have been a relief. Actress Bridget Turner had already rejected the part on the grounds that the "apple pie" script for the pilot written by Cleese and his then wife, Connie Booth, was, in her view, "not funny enough". But Scales had her own question about Basil and Sybil: why had such a mismatched couple ever got married in the first place? "Oh, God!" Cleese replied, laughing and groaning simultaneously. "I was afraid you'd ask me that!"

Having formally accepted the role, Scales put into practice her own ideas about Sybil Fawlty, partly basing her on a woman who had ran a hotel which her mother used to stay in. "I've found that if you get the accent right and the speech patterns, you very often find things underneath the surface," she said later. "I don't know how [Cleese and Booth] had seen Sybil, but I think it was my idea that she was a cut below [Basil] socially – not very well educated, but ambitious, and very careful about her speech. What she had fallen for was Basil's "poshness", and he had fallen for her because she was attractive in a blowsy kind of way." Scales went on to create her own comprehensive backstory for Sybil. She also perfected Sybil's unique look, including outfits and gravity-defying hair and, finally, her awful, cackling, gurgling laugh, probably half-remembered from an audience member from one of Scales' many stage performances.

Cleese and Booth were uneasy: they hadn't expected Sybil to be quite like this. But they quickly grew to realise that whatever Scales was doing was working brilliantly. She and Cleese quickly developed an easy rapport. Across two series of Fawlty Towers in 1975 and 1979, Prunella Scales established Sybil Fawlty as one of the defining characters in British TV comedy history. Whether batting her "ageing, brilliantined stick insect" husband Basil with an umbrella, indulging in lengthy phone conversations with her girlfriends ("oooh…I know!") or sending incompetent builders on their way ("O'Reilly, I have seen more intelligent creatures than you lying on their backs at the bottom of ponds! I've seen better organised creatures than you running round farmyards with their heads cut off!") Sybil was the most famous role Prunella Scales ever played. Privately, she was always very proud of the character but did feel it restricted the range of parts she was offered afterwards.

Prunella Margaret Rumney Illingworth was born in the Surrey village of Sutton Abinger in June 1932. Her father was a Yorkshire-born cotton salesman, while her mother, Catherine, known to friends and family as "Bim" had also been an actress. A bright girl, Prunella won a scholarship to attend Mora House private school during the war and soon started appearing in school plays. She then won another

Top: Although she was always very proud of the character Sybil Fawlty, Prunella Scales felt it restricted the range of parts she was offered afterwards.

Photographs: (Sybil) BBC, (GCJ) Spun Gold TV and all3media international





Left: As Elizabeth II in Alan Bennett's A Question of Attribution, which was performed at the National Theatre in 1988 and adapted for television in 1991, Prunella Scales became the first person to play a reigning English monarch on stage. Above: Prunella Scales and Timothy West were widely praised for talking frankly about Scales' dementia during their time on Great Canal Journeys.

scholarship enabling her to train at the Old Vic Theatre School in London (1949-51), before enrolling at the repertory company at the Bristol Old Vic. Now adopting her mother's maiden name, Scales made her professional stage debut in 1951.

The next decade saw her make a wide variety of appearances on stage, TV and film. She played Lydia in a 1952 BBC production of Pride and Prejudice and was Vicky Hobson in the David Lean film Hobson's Choice (1953) starring Charles Laughton and John Mills. An important formative experience for her came when she travelled to New York when The Matchmaker, Thornton Wilder's West End comedy, transferred to Broadway in 1955. More theatre followed on her return to Britain. In 1961, she took on a brief recurring part as a bus conductor in Britain's newest soap opera, Coronation Street. In a generally very busy career, Scales endured her last ever period of "resting" between acting jobs when she spent three months wrapping margarine in unmarked paper for testing by Which? magazine in 1962.

It was around this time that she met the man who would become her husband, Timothy West. The two young actors first felt an attraction when they got in the habit of doing the daily crossword puzzle together during the long breaks during production of an unpromising TV play. West's first marriage was already in serious decline and the couple married following his divorce in 1963. By the time of the wedding, Scales was enjoying her first flush of fame with the success of the sitcom The Marriage Lines which would run for five series between 1963 and 1966. Scales played newlywed Kate Starling opposite Richard Briers.

> **"Cleese and Booth hadn't expected Sybil to be quite like this. But they quickly grew to realise that whatever Scales was doing was working brilliantly."**

Scales and West would have two sons, one of whom, Samuel West is now a successful actor himself currently appearing as Siegfried in the revamped All Creatures Great and Small. The West/Scales marriage coped well with the long periods of separation which their profession forced upon them, both keenly writing letters to each other, a habit they had developed during their first days together. Occasionally, they worked together, for example, when voicing the audio version of Roald Dahl's Revolting Rhymes. The year 1975 was a notably good year from them both with West starring in the historical drama Edward VII and Scales taking up the mantle of Sybil Fawlty for the first time. Both were keen supporters of the Labour Party throughout their lives.

In 1988, Scales made history by playing Queen Elizabeth II in Alan Bennett's, A Question of Attribution. It was the first time anyone had played a reigning English monarch on stage. The play (a dramatisation of the Anthony Blunt spy scandal) was later adapted for TV in 1991. Scales received widespread acclaim and a Bafta nomination for her performance.

Among other highlights of her later career were her performance alongside Geraldine McEwan and Nigel Hawthorne in the well-received TV version of EF Benson's Mapp and Lucia (1985-86), her appearance (alongside her son Samuel) in the film Howard's End (1992) and her role as widow and bookshop employee Sarah France in the sitcom After Henry (1988-92) in which she co-starred with one-time Fawlty Towers guest Joan Sanderson. Scales also became known for playing the interfering Dotty Turnbull alongside Jane Horrocks in a series of TV commercials for Tesco between 1994 and 2004.

In the early 2000s, Scales started to notice she was struggling to remember her lines when going over her scripts. This turned out to be one of the early symptoms of the vascular dementia which she would eventually be diagnosed with in 2014. The public knowledge of Scales' illness added a whole new element to the 10 series of Great Canal Journeys (2014-19), in which both Timothy West and Prunella Scales appeared. While many people with dementia are inclined to shun the limelight, the couple received widespread praise for their decision to highlight a condition which has become increasingly prevalent.

West remained positive about his wife's illness. "We have exactly the same conversation every day of the week and it's something I never tire of," he said. "Repetition doesn't really exist in Pru's world and the look on her face when she enters the room and sees me sitting there on the sofa waiting for her makes me realise just how much I love her." He died in November 2024 at the age of 90, less than a year before she herself died at the age of 93, in October 2025.

Fawlty Towers is available to stream on Now and BBC iPlayer, while Great Canal Journeys is available from u.co.uk



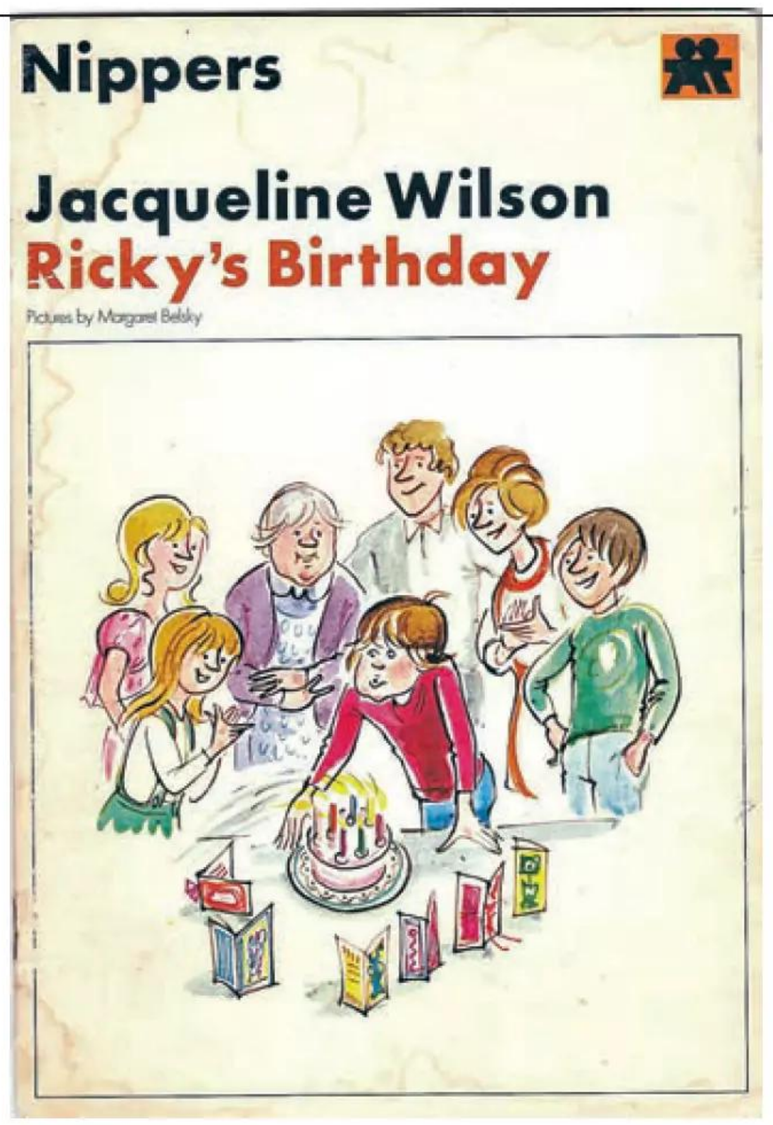
The Story of Dame Jacqueline Wilson

Chris Hallam celebrates one of Britain's greatest ever children's authors

Photograph: (Main) Creative Commons/Roger Green, (Tracy Beaker) BBC

Jacqueline Wilson was well into her 40s when she produced the most important book of her life. She had been browsing the local paper when her eye fell upon a campaign piece appealing for more foster parents. She remembered: "I just looked at these heartwarming but really upsetting photos of all these kids smiling bravely or occasionally crossing their eyes and pulling a face and I thought: 'God, what must it be like to be one of these children?' And almost immediately, I thought: 'OK, there's my book.'"

The resulting novel, The Story of Tracy Beaker (1991), was written from the point of view of a 10-year-old girl who has been moved into a children's residential home as a result of a period of neglect and domestic violence inflicted upon her by her mother. Tracy is unhappy: despite everything, she misses her mother and feels resentful when a couple considering fostering her decide to reject her. The book (the first of Wilson's to be illustrated by frequent collaborator Nick Sharratt) deals with weighty subject matter, but is undeniably still a children's book, exploring serious social issues through the medium of juvenile fiction. It was also a huge success, establishing Wilson forever as a major children's author. To date, Wilson has penned six literary sequels to the novel, most recently We Are the Beaker Girls (2019) although has stated publicly that she is unlikely to visit the character again. In the 21st century, the books were adapted into a





Left: Published as part of Macmillan's Nippers series for early readers, Ricky's Birthday was Dame Jacqueline's first book. Right: The Story of Tracy Beaker and its sequels have been adapted by the BBC with Dani Harmer, sixth from right, starring as the title character.

successful collection of TV series launching in 2002 with child actor Dani Harmer in the title role. TV versions of the books were still being made well into the current decade.

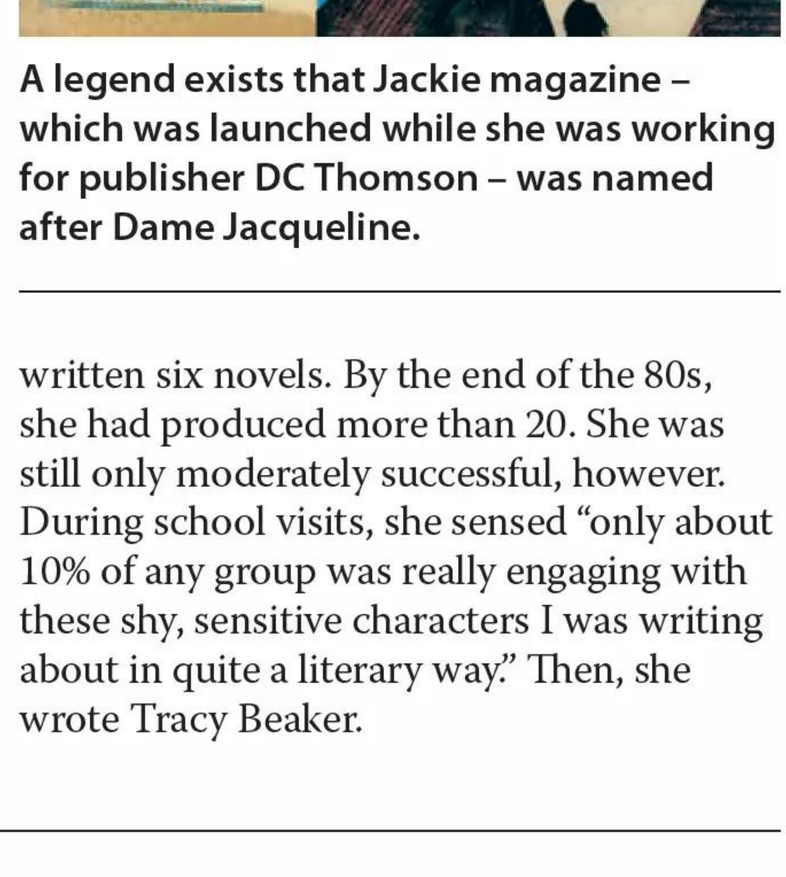
Although very different from Tracy Beaker's experience, the childhood of her creator was not entirely happy either. Born in Bath in December 1945, from an early age, the young Jacqueline Aitken threw herself into reading everything her 1950s childhood could offer her: Little Women, What Katy Did, The Secret Garden and more. She was a particular fan of Nancy and Plum, an American novel by Betty MacDonald, about two sisters who run away from an orphanage, as well as the works of Noel Streatfeild, now best known for Ballet Shoes. She was also exposed early to two fine cinematic examples of social realism, the Ealing drama Mandy, about a deaf girl ("What I think I didn't realise at the time… is it's made from the child's point of view") and A Taste of Honey by Shelagh Delaney ("It's about a character who's sensitive but quite fierce, the sort of character I'm really interested in").

Having decided before she reached the age of six that she was going to be a writer, Wilson devoted hours to filling pages and pages of notepads with a seemingly endless parade of stories and characters. She received little encouragement at school where her constant fantasising earned her the nickname Jacky Daydream (later the title of Wilson's own memoir of this period). Her parents didn't encourage her writing either, seeing it only as an unnecessary distraction which would never make her any money (her mother, at least, lived long enough to see Jacqueline dramatically prove this theory wrong). Her parents were, in fact, very unhappily married, having got together amid the chaos of war. Their daughter remembers them arguing constantly and bitterly, eventually divorcing only after she had grown up. "There were endless rows… Even on holiday you never knew when one of them would trigger the other," she said. Though reasonably well-provided for, it was certainly not a happy home. Jacqueline once said, she was afraid of her father right up until the moment of his death. As it happened, this occurred early: her father, Harry Aitken, a civil servant, died in his 50s.

At 16, she left school to train as a secretary. She was already sending out samples of her writing, however, and at 17, she was taken on by DC Thomson, the famous publisher of The Beano and The Dandy based in Dundee. Legend has it that Wilson herself inspired the title of DC Thomson's new girls' comic and magazine, Jackie, which launched in January 1964. The name was very nearly dropped due to its association through Jackie Kennedy with the recent American presidential assassination. The popular weekly was a success, especially during the 1970s, before eventually folding in 1993.

Jacqueline married printer Millar Wilson at 19. "I wouldn't recommend getting married at 19," she says. "Because you don't know who you are." At 21, she became a mother. Her daughter, Emma, is now a successful academic. With her husband often busy or preoccupied, Jacqueline often felt like a single mother. Despite this, she still managed to produce pieces for magazines, typing busily away while Emma was at nursery. Her first novel, Ricky's Birthday, was published in 1969, when she was 23. By the end of the 70s, she had written six novels. By the end of the 80s, she had produced more than 20. She was still only moderately successful, however. During school visits, she sensed "only about 10% of any group was really engaging with these shy, sensitive characters I was writing about in quite a literary way." Then, she wrote Tracy Beaker.

"Her books have been ranked among the most popular books ever published in the UK."



A legend exists that Jackie magazine – which was launched while she was working for publisher DC Thomson – was named after Dame Jacqueline.

The book's success encouraged Wilson to tackle more challenging themes. In The Illustrated Mum (1999), the heavily tattooed mother has bipolar disorder (the book's sequel, Picture Imperfect came out in 2025). The family in The Bed and Breakfast Star (1994) teeter on the verge of homelessness, while in Love Lessons (2005), the main character develops a crush on their art teacher in response to her father's violent mood swings. Vicky Angel (2000), meanwhile, concentrates on a child's grief after she loses a friend in a car accident.

In 1997, Wilson wrote Girls in Love, the first of the Girls sequence of novels. In 2024, Think Again, the fifth book in the series, picked up the stories of the young characters' lives in adulthood.

In the early 21st century, Jacqueline's husband left her for another woman, and, in 2004, the Wilsons divorced after nearly 40 years. Around this time, she entered into a civil partnership with bookshop owner Trish Beswick who she lives with to this day.

The 2000s represented something of a boom period for recognition of Wilson and her achievements. In addition to the Tracy Beaker series, many of her other books were also adapted for TV. Wilson herself was given an OBE and a damehood as well as honorary degrees by five different universities. As of 2025, she was promoted to Dame Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire. In 2003, she saw four of her books (The Story of Tracy Beaker, Double Act, Girls in Love and Vicky Angel) ranked among the 100 most popular books ever published in the UK in the BBC Big Read poll. From 2005 until 2007, she succeeded Michael Morpurgo to become the fourth children's laureate.

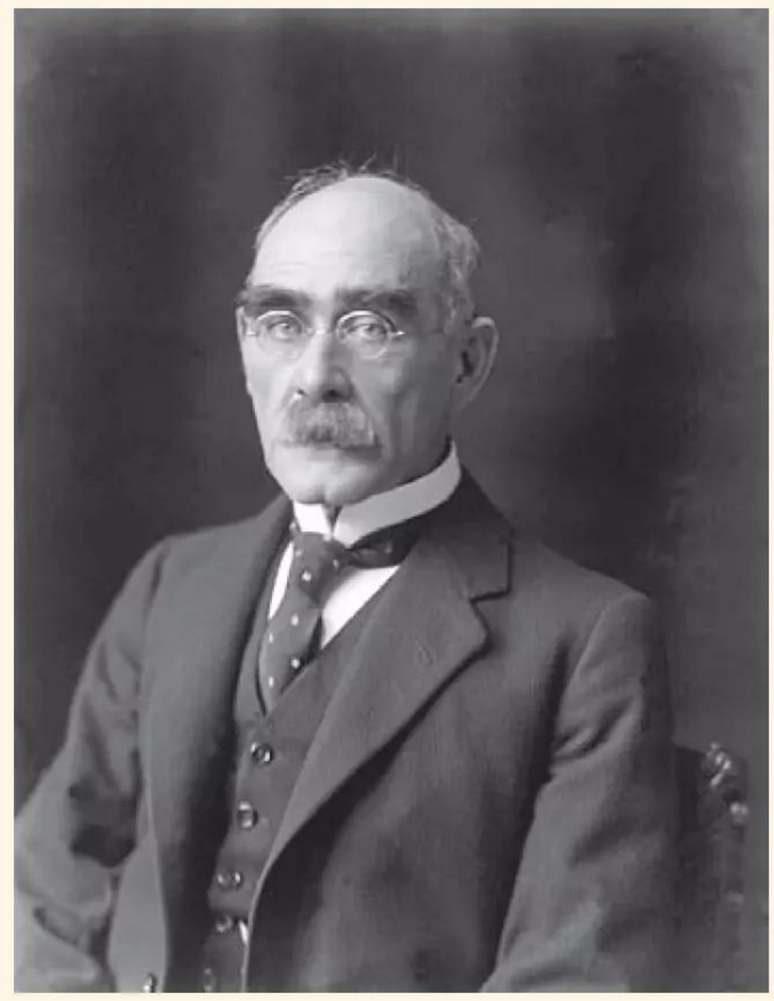
As of 14 December 2025, Dame Jacqueline will be 80 years old. In 2001, she described herself as "small and skinny with very short spiky hair and silver glasses. I nearly always wear black and I have a big ring on every finger." The description still fits. She has written more than 100 books (mostly, though not entirely for children), which have sold 40m copies in 30 different languages. She continues to write roughly two books a year. She remains one of Britain's greatest ever children's authors and shows no signs of stopping yet.

The Story of Tracey Beaker and its sequels are available to stream via BBC iPlayer.

Exceedingly Good

Margaret Brecknell looks back on the life and career of author Rudyard Kipling

At the height of his popularity during the early 20th century, Rudyard Kipling emerged as the standout literary star of his generation. Adored by the British reading public for his vivid storytelling and his unswerving ability to tap into the cultural norms of the era, Kipling was also highly regarded by his literary contemporaries for his versatility as a writer and his masterly command of the English language. Such was his standing that, in 1907, he became the first British writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Yet, in later life, the author became an increasingly controversial figure, whose outspoken views on topics like British imperialism continue to divide opinion today.



Kipling was born on 30 December 1865, in Bombay (now Mumbai), during the early days of the British Raj. His unusual forename was inspired by Rudyard Lake, a favourite local beauty spot back home in Staffordshire where his parents had begun their courtship.

In his autobiography, Something of Myself, Kipling reminisced about the particularly close bond he formed with the local woman employed as his nanny, or ayah, who entertained him with "stories and Indian nursery songs all unforgotten". Indeed, he and his younger sister, Trix, became so accustomed to speaking in the local vernacular that they had to be warned to remember to speak English when they were in their parents' company.

When Kipling was just five years old, the family returned home to the UK for an extended visit, but he and Trix did not return to Mumbai with their parents. Instead, they were sent to live at Lorne Lodge, Southsea, with the Holloways, a couple who acted as foster parents for the children of British families stationed in India.

The young Rudyard experienced a truly miserable existence in what he later called "the House of Desolation", enduring regular beatings from the god-fearing Mrs Holloway who treated the defenceless young boy as if he were the spawn of the devil. The truth only came to light when his mother eventually returned to England after six years, at which point she hastily removed both her children from Mrs Holloway's care.

Kipling was then sent to board at the United Services College in Devon, whose headmaster, Cormell Price, was a friend of his father's. Life in a Victorian boarding school presented a whole new set of challenges for the traumatised boy, but he eventually settled down there and his later collection of popular school stories, Stalky & Co, was inspired by his time at the college.

Despite later being described by one of his classmates as being "too clever for us", Kipling was deemed unlikely to succeed in winning a scholarship to Oxford University and so, at the age of

The standout literary star of his generation, Rudyard Kipling was the first British writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Photograph: (Main) National Portrait Gallery London, (Bateman's) Creative Commons/DeFacto





Left: Now a National Trust property, the Grade I-listed Bateman's in Burwash, East Sussex was Rudyard Kipling's home from 1902 until his death in 1936. Right: Second Lieutenant John Kipling, Rudyard Kipling's only son, died at the Battle of Loos in September 1915.

16, finally joined his family in India. Having already displayed his exceptional writing ability as the editor of the school magazine, he immediately began work as a journalist at the Civil & Military Gazette in Lahore, where his parents were now stationed.

The budding author worked long hours at the newspaper, but any spare time he had was devoted to writing poetry and prose. His literary output during this period may be best described as prolific, but never at the expense of quality. A well-received poetry anthology, Departmental Ditties, was published in 1886, followed by a short story collection, Plain Tales from the Hills, two years later. A further six short story collections were then published in quick succession as part of the Indian Railway Library series, which was designed to provide cheap reading material for travellers. One of these collections included The Man Who Would Be King, which later inspired a popular 1975 film starring Sean Connery and Michael Caine.

After seven years in India, Kipling decided to quit his job and return to England to further his literary ambitions. There, he began a collaboration with a young American publisher named Wolcott Balestier which proved fruitful, both from a professional and personal point of view. Kipling was introduced to Balestier's sister, Carrie, and was on hand to comfort her when the American unexpectedly died of typhoid.

The couple subsequently married in 1892 and decided to settle in Carrie's native Vermont. Kipling later reminisced that "a good deal of verse and prose saw the light" during his time in North America. However, the couple's time there ended abruptly after just four years, as the result of a bitter family feud with Kipling's brother-in-law Beatty Balestier.

The origins of Kipling's engaging Just So Stories date from the time of his early married life in Vermont. Kipling later explained that they were first created as bedtime stories to amuse his daughter Effie. "They had to be told just so," he recalled, "or Effie would wake up and put back the missing sentence." Sadly, his beloved eldest child died from pneumonia at just six years of age. Kipling's perennially popular Jungle Book stories were also written during his time in New England, although they owe much of their inspiration to the traditional folk tales learned from his ayah in those far-off days of early childhood back in India

The Kiplings returned to England in 1896 and, six years later, purchased Bateman's, a grand Jacobean mansion set in the heart of the Sussex Weald. He later tapped into the rich history of the local area for two children's fantasy books, the second of which, Rewards and Fairies, is now better remembered for the first appearance in print of If. Written in the guise of a father giving advice to his son, this poem extols the virtues of self-control, integrity and stoicism in the face of personal difficulties. During World War One, in the words of Kipling, these famous verses "escaped from the book, and for a while ran about the world."

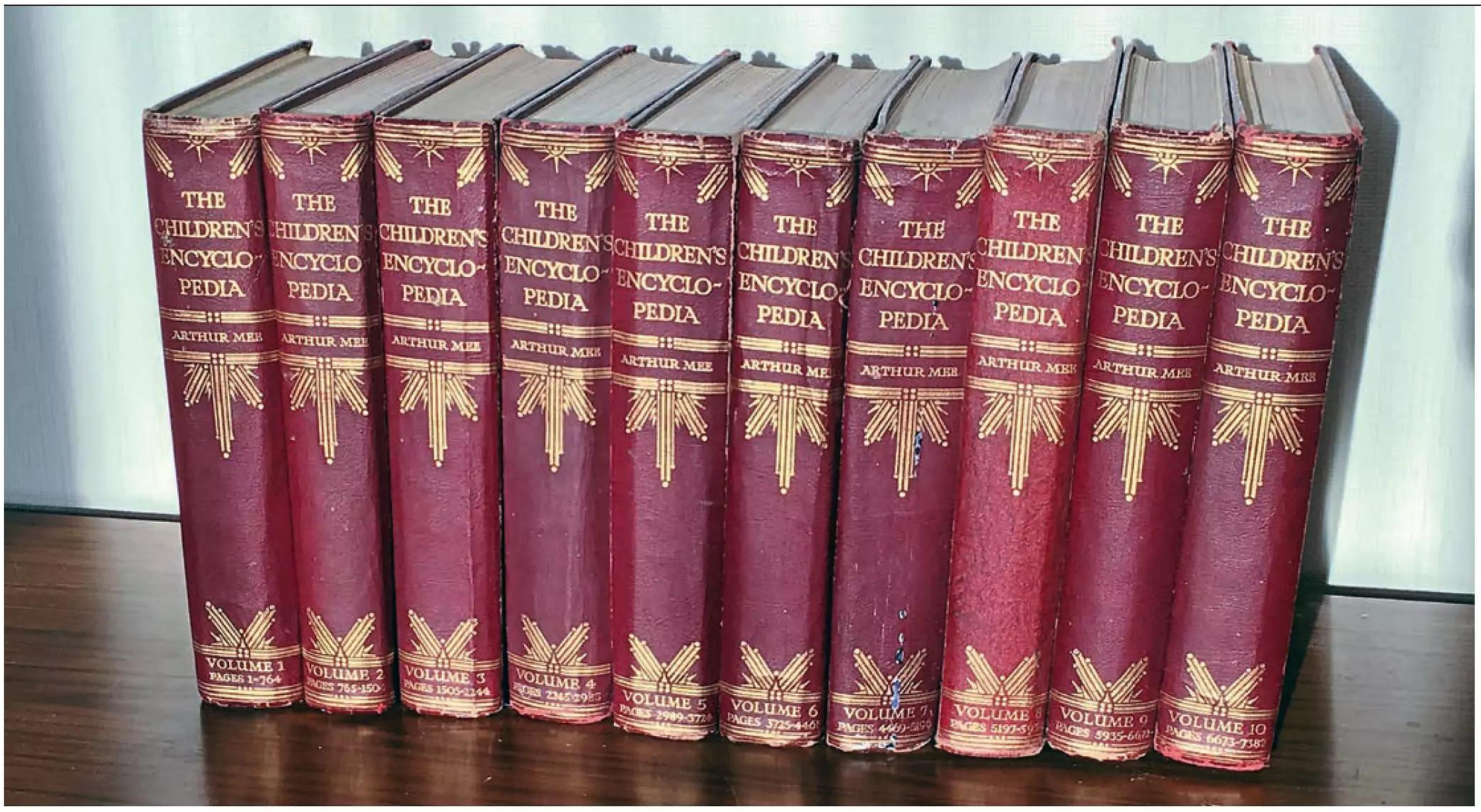
On the outbreak of war, Kipling's teenage son, John, volunteered for military service, but was initially rejected because of poor eyesight. The author then utilised his considerable influence to obtain a commission for his son as a second lieutenant with the Irish Guards. Eighteen-year-old John had only recently arrived in France when, in September 1915, he was dispatched to the front to take part in the Battle of Loos. He was never seen alive again.

For the following four years, the author made strenuous efforts to discover what had happened to his son, believing that he may have been captured by the enemy, but to no avail. In April 1919, John Kipling was officially declared missing in action and presumed dead.

Kipling found an outlet for his personal grief in his work for the Imperial War Graves Commission. In his role as honorary literary advisor, it was he who suggested the poignant phrase, "Known unto God", as the epitaph to be inscribed on the gravestones of the thousands of unknown soldiers laid to rest in the war cemeteries of northern France and Belgium. He also selected the evocative three-word inscription "The Glorious Dead", for the Cenotaph in London.

Yet, despite this important contribution to the commemoration of Britain's World War One casualties, Kipling's personal reputation diminished considerably in his later years. His trenchant and oft-quoted views on topics such as the British empire and the need for compulsory military service reveal a man increasingly embittered with life. By the time of his death in January 1936, the once national treasure was dismissed in many quarters as outdated and no longer relevant.

Kipling remains a deeply divisive figure today, but paradoxically, amid all the criticism, the likes of The Jungle Book and If continue to resonate with modern audiences. If nothing else, this illustrates the extraordinary and enduring ability of this flawed literary genius to engage with his readers.



THE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE

Glenys Adams flicks back through the pages of a treasured cast off

When I was a child in the 1950s, I often visited by grandparents, and played with the neighbours' children, all older than me. They passed down to me things that I still treasure. Richard gave me his wonderful Bayko set. My lifelong companion Teddy was a cast off from David, and then there was Judith, who gave me her complete Arthur Mee's The Children's Encyclopedia. I began reading through it from Page 1 but didn't get very far. However, it sparked a desire to know more, and I loved its smell and the illustrations, and often dipped into the mix of fact and fiction, lessons for life and daring adventures. And I still have these wonderful books, a maroon covered set in 10 volumes.

Volume 1 begins with a frontispiece entitled Brothers and Sisters Are We All. A tissue overlay states these are "your little friends in other lands", and names the nationalities, led by the white sailor-suited American, flanked by Spanish and French girls. Facing this is a long letter from Arthur Mee. He begins by addressing his "little friends" and describes a girl who is fascinated by the world around her and who is constantly asking questions. "So the questions would come until the mother was more puzzled than the little maid herself… until she cried out for a book that will answer all the questions.

"This", says the compiler, "is the book she called for. It is a big book for little people, and it has come into the world to make your life happy and wise and good. That is what we are meant to be. That is what we will help each other to be. Your affectionate friend, Arthur Mee."

Arthur Henry Mee (1875-1943) was a writer and journalist, whose daughter Marjorie was seven years old when the first version appeared in 1908, so it is possible that she was the "little maid", and his wife, Amelia, the beleaguered mother mentioned in the introduction. In Volume 10, there is a long, personal farewell to the "little travellers", who have been with him on "this journey through the realms of knowledge".

The Children's Encyclopedia was first published in fortnightly sections by the Educational Book Company, which produced the first bound collection of eight volumes in 1910. Subsequent editions were updated and published, with different coloured bindings, until 1964, by then in 10 volumes, with around 7,500 pages. Each volume of The Children's Encyclopedia is divided into 19 groups, covering different areas of knowledge, all listed in the extensive index. Subjects cover astronomy, Bible stories, modern technology, magic tricks and everything in between. There is a separate index for poetry, ranging from Old Mother Hubbard to Shakespeare's sonnets.

As with all editions, my set is not dated, but a little detective work places it in early 1945. Exploration in Volume 6 reveals a paragraph headed Germany's Design for the Domination of Europe. It describes the "powerful tyrant Herr Hitler" and outlines the atrocities of his regime, ending with the following: "Nazi Germany, indeed, as we write these words is waging war on civilisation itself, seeking to banish liberty and right from the face of the earth for ever. This will not happen for, led by Britain, the millions who love freedom will fight on until the Nazis, and all they stand for, are overthrown, never to rise again."

Above: A full set of The Children's Encyclopedia, which Glenys was given by her grandparents' neighbour in the 1950s.





Left: The frontispiece Brothers and Sisters Are We All begins Volume 1. Above: Following the success of The Children's Encyclopedia, Arthur Mee launched the weekly The Children's Newspaper. Bottom: Detailed illustrations of steam engines from around the world are among the colour plates found inside The Children's Encyclopedia.

Pages 7076 A-D, appear to have been added to update the situation, slotted into Volume 10, just before the atlas of the world and the index. It refers to the years 1939 to 1945, but talks in the present tense, asking: "Why is our country, tireless in its efforts to bring about disarmament and to settle the problems of nations by discussion, involved in another war?" Although the encyclopedia is aimed at children it doesn't pull any punches.

The names of many countries in the atlas are different from those we know today, but even in 1945 some of the maps were out of date. The map entitled "Ireland" does not reflect its partition in 1921.

The British empire was still intact in 1945, with large parts of the world marked in pink, including India and its surrounding nations, before they gained independence in 1947. Much of Africa was still part of the empire, plus islands in the Caribbean. Empire Day, which was instituted in 1902, was still marked, on 24 May, the anniversary of the birth of Queen Victoria, Empress of India, who had died the previous year. According to the encyclopedia: "Its aim is the promotion in schools of training for empire citizenship."

The encyclopedia is crammed with facts, on double columned pages, often in answer to questions like: "When did newspapers begin?", "Can our brain ever get filled up?" and "How did men learn to speak?" Another question is: "Will all the people on the world ever speak the same language?" The answer given is "Probably not", but refers, undiplomatically, to the

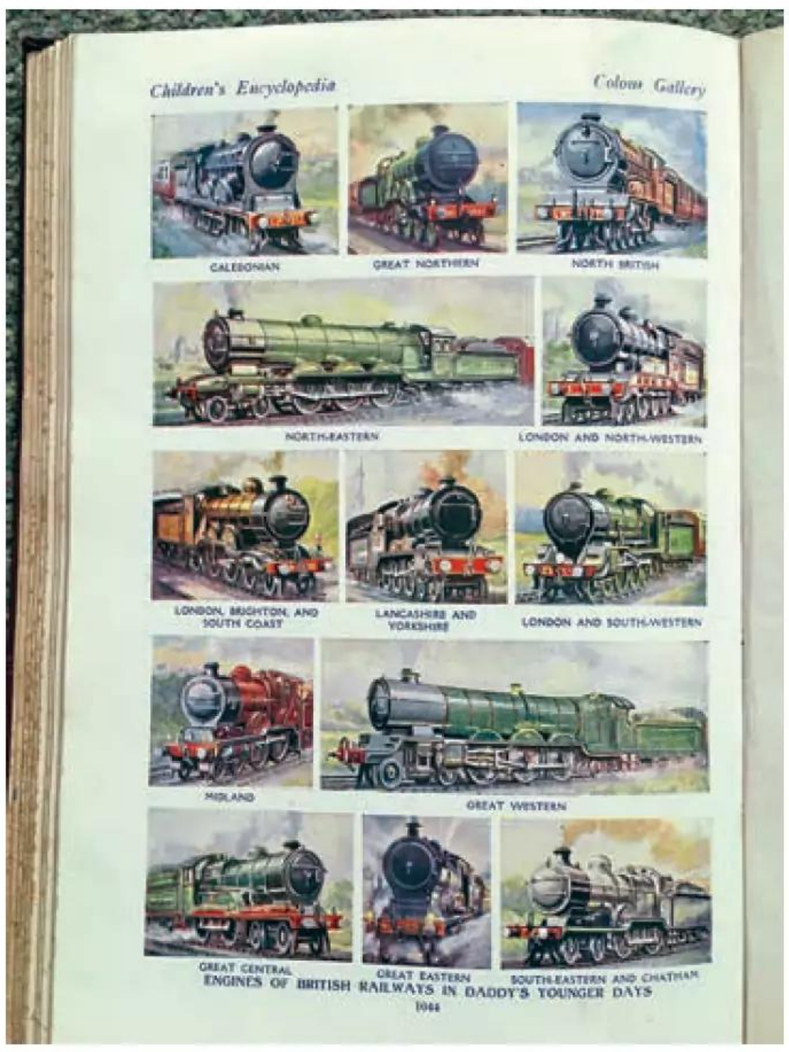
> **"Nothing beats holding a real book, inhaling its smell, turning its pages, and feeling the weight of its knowledge."**

widespread use of English "without all the clumsy and unnecessary changes of gender, case and time which many languages are burdened with."

Most pages include pictures. One photo shows a family clustered around a small screen, and a description of how cathode-ray tubes, transmitters and receivers have "made possible the high-definition television transmissions of the BBC today."

Other illustrations range from full colour reproductions of sections of medieval manuscripts and the Bayeux Tapestry to simple diagrams of 3D shapes, from photographs of famous buildings to illustrations of nursery rhymes. The most eye catching are the full colour plates of the natural world, painted by unknown artists, showing butterflies and beetles, seaweeds and shells, flowers and edible plants, to name but a few. Other plates show detailed illustrations of steam engines from around the world, past and present. There are black and white photos of works of art, including Michelangelo's David, modestly airbrushed, and images described as "Photogravure", reproduced in green, blue or brown tones, by a combination of photography and etching.

Space does not permit me to share more of the fascinating information contained in these books. Now it is so easy to find information online, maybe typing in a question like those found in The Children's Encylcopedia, such as: "Money, why do we use it?" and "What happens when we get tired?" Looking up answers in printed matter has been largely superseded by the internet, but nothing beats holding a real book, inhaling its smell, turning its pages, and feeling the weight of its knowledge, even if much of it is now out of date. Sets of Arthur Mee's The Children's Encyclopedia are available to buy online, ranging from £35 to many hundreds of pounds, but to me they are priceless. The fact that I still have the treasured encyclopedia, after all these years, speaks volumes.





Who, Me?

Russell Cook speaks to a writer and collector whose life was transformed by Doctor Who

Any long running television show will, in time, develop a fanbase not to say a cult following the longer it continues. This certainly seems to apply to any ongoing science fiction adventure series. Step into any bookshop and almost certainly there will be various tomes dedicated to the extraterrestrial worlds of Star Trek, Gerry Anderson and Doctor Who to name but three. However, now sharing the shelves is a memoir Who Me! How Doctor Who Changed My Life. This isn't a theatrical memoir by one of the many cast members who has graced the series over the past 62 years, instead it's the engaging story of celebrated writer, publisher and Doctor Who historian David J Howe and how a Saturday night television show literally shaped his life. From collecting that first toy Dalek in the 1960s to being the proud owner and curator of one of the largest collections of Doctor Who merchandise in the world, there are some tales to tell.

David kindly spared time to talk about his memoir beginning with how the idea of committing his memories to paper came about.

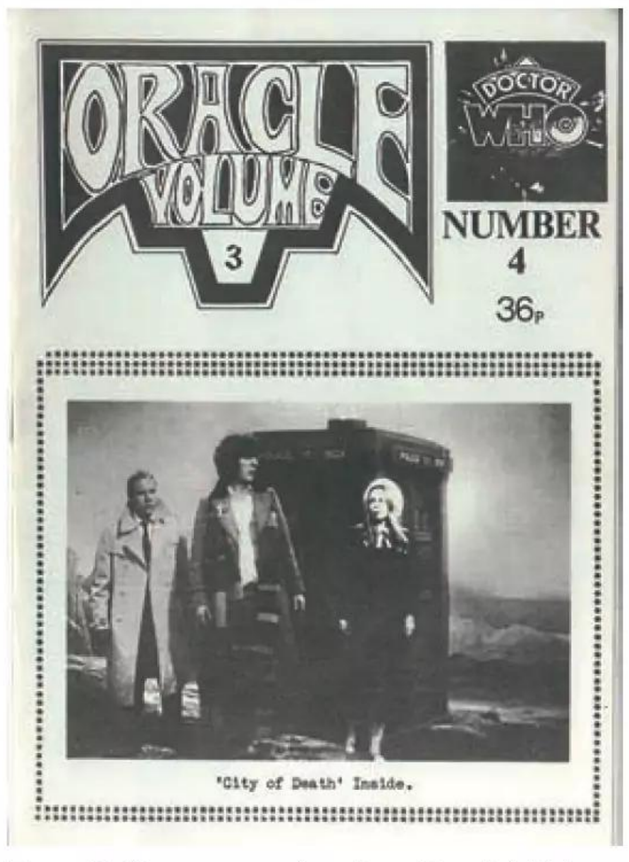
"The memoir came about through Maxim Jakubowski, he's an author who once ran the shop Murder One which used to be on Charing Cross Road in London. He also helped set up the first Forbidden Planet store and Virgin Books too when Richard Branson started that. He's a man of many talents including being an accomplished crime erotica writer. I've known Maxim for years and my company Telos Publishing had published a couple of his crime novels which had done really well.

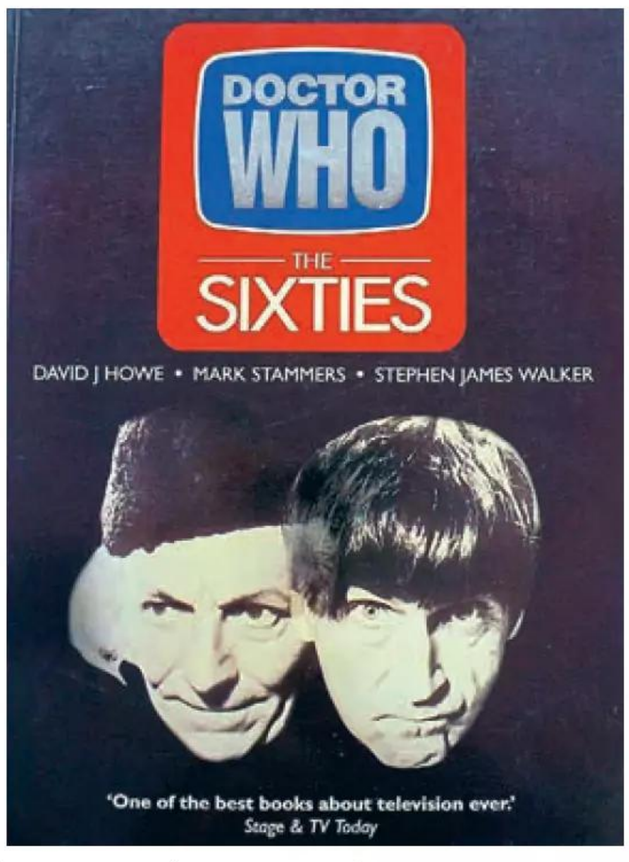
"One day, I got an email from Maxim saying he'd like to commission me for a book as he was working for the publisher Bedford Square and they were looking to expand their range of titles and they would like a Doctor Who book. Obviously, that's quite a broad church as there are quite a lot of books that I could potentially write about the series, I asked if he could be more specific? Maxim came back saying that he wanted my story, a memoir. My first reaction was 'Who, Me!' which ultimately became the title of the book. Maxim said that I'd been involved in the many worlds of Doctor Who for years, was there at the beginning of fandom, written fanzines and ultimately published books as well as being all over the world attending conventions. Time to put it all down on paper."

Who Me! is the result. David's love of Doctor Who begins with the final episode of The Evil of the Daleks transmitted on 1 July 1967. At the time, this episode was regarded as the final end of the Daleks as their literary creator, Terry Nation, wanted to break into American television and thought the Daleks would be the prefect vehicle. For David, episode seven of this story was just the beginning of a journey that continues to this day. Fans of a certain age will certainly identify with the memories of watching Doctor Who and, in the days before video recorders, the trauma at missing an episode.

Nowadays, Doctor Who conventions and events are commonplace as are science fiction get-togethers the world over. In August 1977, at a church hall in Hammersmith, the first Doctor Who convention took place. Attended by just 200 fans, David was there, selling his first fanzine and also helping the Doctor Who Appreciation Society team that organised the one-day event.

"It was quite amazing





Top: Collector and writer David J Howe has created a personal museum containing a lifetime of Doctor Who collectibles. Above: From editing Oracle, one of the very first Doctor Who fanzines, David has gone on to write many respected reference books about the show.



Having collected his first toy Dalek in the 1960s, David has built up one of the largest collections of Doctor Who merchandise in the world.

“Working with Jon Pertwee on the second and final volume of his memoirs proved to be a bittersweet experience, as Jon died after completing work on the book.”

to think that on that day in 1977 was the first ever convention and we had Tom Baker and Louise Jameson as guests who were the current Doctor and companion. Jon Pertwee was there, as was [writer and former script editor] Terrance Dicks,” remembers David.

“They came along and spent the day with us as did visual effects designer Mat Irvine who brought along props from the series. There were photos on display covering all eras of the programme most of which hadn’t been seen before. These were the days before the big reference works and even Doctor Who Magazine, which didn’t begin until 1979. To us it was all new and exciting and a great day. What a legacy we started then.”

The legacy continued into the 1980s, Who Me! chronicles David’s life and the positive effect that Doctor Who had on him and his family. In the early 1990s, a short while after the show was put on indefinite hiatus in 1989, he along with Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker established a strong relationship with Virgin Books which resulted in the first of many commissions for the threesome beginning with the large format hardback book Doctor Who: The Sixties. The success of this resulted in two follow up titles The Seventies and The Eighties. Over the next few years, many more titles followed, establishing the three of them as well-respected chroniclers of the evolving history of the famous Time Lord.

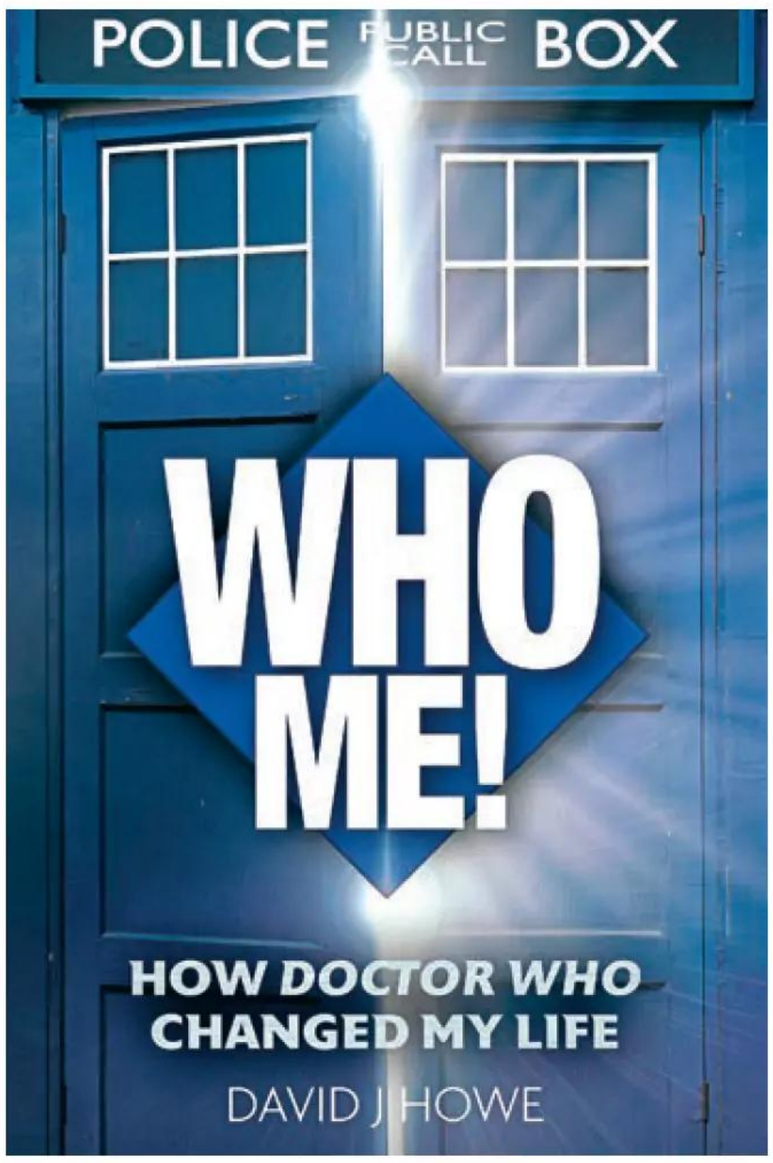
One standout title, Doctor Who: I Am the Doctor!, was the result of a two-year collaboration with Jon Pertwee on the second and final volume of his memoirs. It proved to be a bittersweet experience as Jon died in May 1996, shortly after completing work on the book.

“I really enjoyed working with Jon on his autobiography,” remembers David, “The last time we met, he approved the photos for the cover and went to the States on holiday with Jon saying to me that we would catch up when he got back, sadly, we never did.”

David has always been an avid collector of Doctor Who merchandise and over the past 62 years there has been plenty released. When David and his wife, the celebrated author Samantha Howe, moved to their current house, they realised that the outbuildings that came with the property were ideal for setting up a museum, so a lifetime of collectibles could be on display, and they now host open days so fans can enjoy looking through the collection.

“I’m delighted that we can now show it to a wider audience,” enthuses David, “being a collector, I’ve always loved the box art and the packaging. One of the great pleasures of having the collection is being able to share it with other people. It has been my aim for many years to find a way to display it and I’m very proud of what we have achieved.”

Who Me! covers David’s life up to the present day, so what of the future? “I’d love to actually work on the show itself, and I’d love to write a Target book, that would be terrific!” Who knows? Perhaps he does.



WHO ME! is published by Bedford Square Publishers (bedfordsquarepublishers.co.uk) at £22 (hardback), £16.99 (paperback) and £7.99 (eBook).



A Christmas Ghost Hunt

John Stoker shares a few ghost stories for Christmas

You might be surprised to learn that there are more ghost sightings on Christmas Eve than there are at Halloween, so what better time for a ghost hunt? The festive season has always been favoured by literature ever since Charles Dickens penned A Christmas Carol back in 1843. The writer was buried, against his wishes, in Westminster Abbey. His chosen resting place would have been Rochester and that's where his ghost can be seen strolling between the tombstones on Christmas Eve. He makes another appearance just before midnight outside the Corn Exchange as he checks his watch.

Rupert Brooke was a writer who knew much about folklore and even left a reference to a seasonal event in his poem Grantchester: "And things are done you'd not believe At Madingley on Christmas Eve."

Brooke never explained this reference but it does in fact concern Madingley Hall in Cambridgeshire, which Sir John Hynde had begun building in 1543. His son, Francis, completed the construction with the use of wood and stone from St Ethelreda's Church in nearby Histon. He also stripped the roof of lead and sold it together with the bells. His mother, Lady Ursula, was so shocked by this desecration that her ghost appears on Christmas Eve wringing her hands as she walks from the hall to the church.

Many bells are rung on this night but not for as long as those at Dewsbury Minster in West Yorkshire. One of the bells, "Black Tom", is named after Sir Thomas de Soothill who had led a far from blameless life. In order to atone for his sins, he donated the bell, and it now has to be rung on Christmas Eve for the number of years since Christ's birth to protect parishioners from the devil. But the ringing must finish before midnight.

One of the most curious and unique Christmas ghosts appears at the Nottinghamshire church of St John the Baptist in Boughton Green for the sex of the ghost depends on the gender of the witness. A man will see a beautiful woman and a woman will see a handsome man. But if the spectre asks for a kiss, do not be tempted, for in 1875, William Parker complied with the wishes of a ghostly girl and died within the month.

Graveyards should certainly be avoided on Christmas Eve. In North Leigh in Oxfordshire, three girls set out to perform

Above: Ebenezer Scrooge's grave, a prop from the 1984 TV movie adaptation of A Christmas Carol, starring George C Scott, can still be found in the churchyard of St Chad's, Shrewsbury.

Photograph: (Strata Florida) Cadw





Left: On Christmas Eve, a ghostly monk is said to appear in the ruins of Strata Florida Abbey in Ceredigion, making a vain attempt to repair the altar. Right: The ghost of Catholic martyr George Napier is said to roam Sandford-on-Thames in search of his missing head.

a ritual which they believed would reveal the faces of their future husbands. They brought with them a handful of hempseed which they threw over their shoulders while reciting the words: "Hemp-seed I scatter, hemp-seed I sow; He that is my true love, come after me and mow."

The story goes that the first girl saw absolutely nothing and died a spinster. The second was even unluckier, saw a coffin and died a few months later. The third girl decided that predicting the future was not for her and ran from the graveyard.

It's certainly a busy night for clergy, both living and dead. The Reverend Nathaniel Templeman was a strict priest and his death in 1813 did not prevent him from keeping a watchful eye on his flock at St Peter's, Dorchester. The following year, two church wardens sneaked into the vestry to sample the communion wine. They were confronted by Templeman's ghost and fell to the ground in shock. His hands were raised, and he was snarling at them before making his way to the altar and vanishing. He still makes a seasonal appearance.

Templeman is not the only ghostly cleric to return on this night, for a monk appears at Strata Florida in Ceredigion. He can be seen on Christmas Eve in the ruins of the abbey as he makes a vain attempt to rebuild the altar.

George Napier is another priest who makes an annual appearance but with a specific purpose. In 1610, he refused to take the oath of allegiance to the crown, was executed and his body dismembered. Some of his bones were returned to the

"So shocked by this desecration, her ghost appears on Christmas Eve wringing her hands as she walks from the hall to the church."

village of Sandford-on-Thames, but his head was missing. So, on this night, George Napier climbs into his ghostly coach and sets out to find his head. But let's just hope that you don't see him as a farmer who glimpsed the coach died, as did two other men.

Other ghosts are on the move and seem to favour Christmas Eve. A coach driven by a headless coachman and pulled by four headless horses has been seen at Roos Hall in Beccles. It is said that it is there to collect some doomed soul for, inside the house, the devil's footprint was found in one of the bedrooms and there is a window which refuses to stay locked.

In the Essex village of High Lever,



Black Tom, a bell inside Dewsbury Minster, is rung on Christmas Eve for the number of years since Christ's birth to protect parishioners from the devil.

another ghostly coach carries Abigail Marston to the site where her house once stood and then vanishes. But there are other spectres who prefer to ride their horses such as Sir Geoffrey de Manderville whose sinful life culminated in an excommunication from the Pope who denied him a Christian burial. On this night, he can be seen galloping through Oak Hill Park in East Barnet before he heads for a local church where rider and horse vanish through a wall. Other ghosts, such as Anne Boleyn, prefer a gentle stroll at Hever, over the bridge across the river Eden, where she was courted by Henry VIII in the surrounding countryside.

However, our current royal family is not immune from the world of the paranormal. Sandringham is the centre of some seasonal poltergeist activity as lights are switched off and on and objects such as Christmas cards are moved around. Footsteps have been heard, and a mysterious black shape has also been seen. All this activity is said to continue throughout the holiday.

There is a theory that a violent event can be imprinted on certain natural materials which, if the conditions are right, can be replayed. So, don't be surprised if you're walking past Buckingham Palace on Christmas Day and you hear a gunshot from the building. Major John Gwynne, the private secretary to King Edward VII, had been involved in a divorce scandal and was excluded from society. He went to his office and put a bullet through his head in a shot that can still be heard.

The king's mistress, Lillie Langtry, also makes an appearance in the dining room of the Cadogan Hotel which was once her private quarters.

We began our seasonal search for ghosts with Charles Dickens and his appearances in Kent. But another site that he might like to consider is the churchyard of St Chad's in Shrewsbury. Did the great author visit the town? Probably not. However, if his ghost chooses to do so he will find the grave of Ebenezer Scrooge is a fitting place for him to haunt. Yes, the tombstone is inscribed with the name of literature's most famous miser. But truth be told, it was a prop given to the church by the production company who made the 1984 television movie of A Christmas Carol in which the town of Shrewsbury stood in very convincingly for Dickensian London. What better place for a new Christmas haunting?

Christmas Cheers

Philip and **David Williams** recount the history of football's festive fixtures

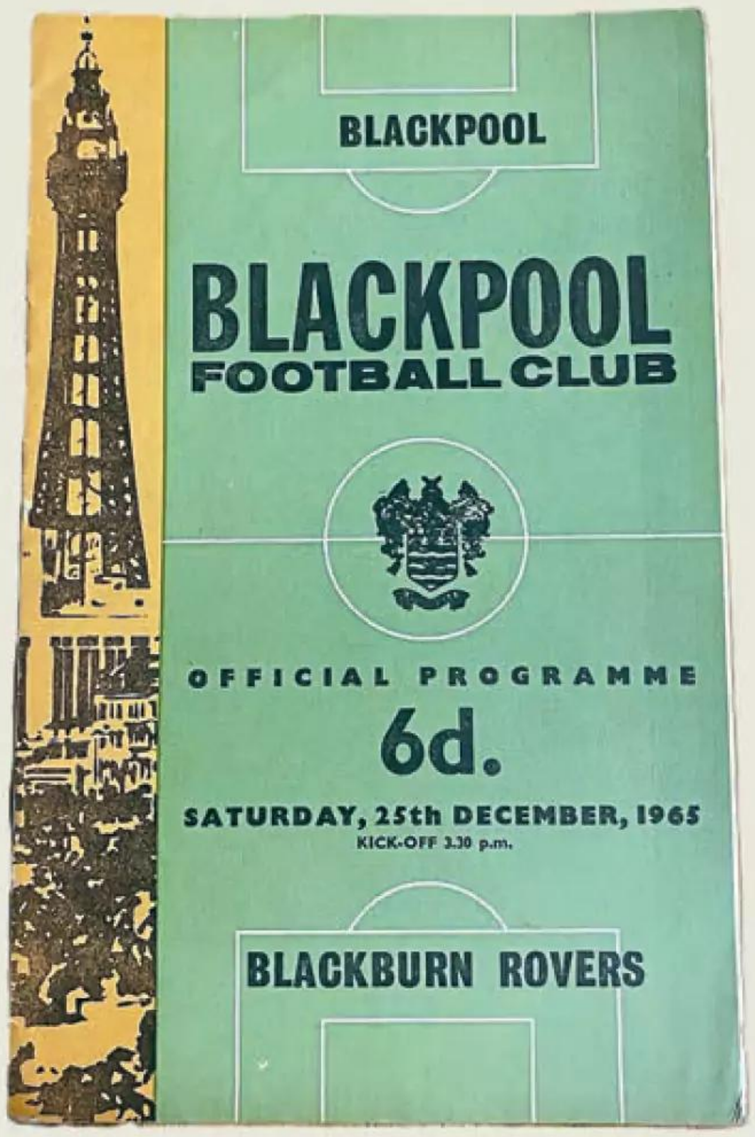
Football has long been a cherished and integral part of Boxing Day festivities in Britain, a tradition stretching back to Victorian times. For many, the association between the sport and the holiday season is as natural as indulging in turkey and mince pies or gathering around to watch the king's Christmas message. The beautiful game has become deeply woven into the fabric of a traditional British Christmas, carrying a sense of community, rivalry, and festive cheer.

Those of a certain age may remember a time when football matches were not confined solely to Boxing Day but were also played on Christmas Day itself. Up until the 1950s, it was customary for teams to take to the pitch on both days, offering fans a double helping of festive football. Teams often faced the same opponents on consecutive days, with one match at home and the other away, adding extra excitement to the holiday period. Local derbies, where teams from the same city or region clashed, were a popular feature of Christmas and Boxing Day fixtures, drawing huge crowds eager to witness the intensity of these encounters.

The earliest recorded Christmas Day football match dates back to 1889, only the second season of the newly established Football League. Reigning champions Preston North End hosted Aston Villa, who had won the previous meeting between the sides. The match attracted 9,000 spectators, a significant number for the fledgling league, and ended in a thrilling 3-2 victory for Preston. This fixture set the tone for Christmas Day football in the years to come and highlighted the sport's growing importance during the festive season.

At this time, the Football League was still in its infancy, featuring a single division made up of just 12 teams, primarily from the Midlands and northern England. As the league grew, festive derby matches became increasingly popular with fans. In 1896 and 1897, Manchester City faced off against their fierce local rivals, Manchester United, on Christmas Day and Boxing Day, thrilling supporters with back-to-back battles.

One of the most hectic festive schedules on record occurred in 1913. Liverpool faced Manchester City on Christmas Day at Anfield, securing a 4-2 home victory. The next day, the teams met again in Manchester, with City claiming a narrow 1-0 win. Defying modern standards of player welfare, Liverpool then played a third match on 27 December, drawing 3-3 with Blackburn Rovers. Three games in three days: something unimaginable by today's standards.



Blackpool v Blackburn Rovers, played at Blackpool's Bloomfield Road in front of 21,000 fans on 25 December 1965, was the last Christmas Day league match ever played in England.

Photograph: (WWI) Crown Copyright





Left: Officers and other ranks of the British 26th Divisional Ammunition Train play football on Christmas Day 1915, near Thessaloniki, Greece, a year after the more famous game during the Christmas truce in no man's land. Right: Local derbies, where teams from the same city or region clashed, were a popular feature of Christmas and Boxing Day fixtures.

Perhaps the most iconic football story associated with Christmas Day is not one of league competition but of humanity and peace. During World War One, in 1914, an unofficial football match took place between British and German soldiers during the famous Christmas Truce. Amid the horrors of trench warfare, troops from both sides ventured into no man's land to exchange gifts and good wishes. Someone produced a football, and an impromptu match unfolded. Although some historians question whether a formal match occurred, substantial evidence indicates that it did.

In the same era, women's football began to rise in prominence, especially during the First World War when many men were away fighting. In 1917, the newly formed Dick, Kerr Ladies drew a crowd of 10,000 to Deepdale in Preston for their first match. The team, made up of women working in the Dick, Kerr munitions factory, became pioneers in the women's game. On Boxing Day 1920, they attracted 53,000 spectators at Everton's Goodison Park to witness their clash with St Helens Ladies. The Dick, Kerr Ladies became the unofficial England women's side, producing stars such as Lily Parr, who scored more than 1,000 goals. The team inspired generations until disbanding in 1965.

Christmas Day fixtures remained a regular feature until 1957. By the late 1950s, the tradition waned. In 1958, only three matches were played, and by 1959 just one remained. The 1960s saw the disappearance of Christmas Day league fixtures, with one exception. On 25 December 1965, Blackpool hosted Blackburn Rovers at Bloomfield Road. In front of 21,000 fans, the Seasiders triumphed 4-2 in what would be the last Christmas Day league match ever played in England. After that, Boxing Day became the prime festive football day.

"For many, the association between the sport and the holiday season is as natural as indulging in turkey and mince pies."

For David Williams, co-writer and lifelong Oldham Athletic follower, no Boxing Day fixture shines brighter than the one during the big freeze of 1962–63. That winter was the coldest Britain had seen since 1940, with deep snow covering much of the country. Between Boxing Day 1962 and March 1963, almost no football was played. So, it surprised many when Oldham's Boundary Park was declared fit for a Boxing Day match against Southport. Despite icy conditions, the Latics cruised to an astonishing 11-0 victory, a club record that still stands today. The frozen pitch, more suited for skating than football, made the win even more remarkable.

Boxing Day 1963 brought unforgettable football drama. Across all four Football League divisions, 160 goals were scored, a staggering tally showcasing attacking flair. Manchester United, trailing leaders Liverpool by four points, suffered a humiliating 6-1 defeat at Burnley. Liverpool thrashed Stoke City by the same scoreline, intensifying the title race. Other thrilling matches included a 4-4 draw between West Brom and Tottenham, a 3-3 draw between Nottingham Forest and Sheffield United, and Blackburn's 8-2 demolition of West Ham at Upton Park. Fulham recorded the day's biggest win, a 10-1 rout of Ipswich Town. In the Second Division, Manchester City scored eight against Scunthorpe, completing an extraordinary festive feast.

Though Christmas Day fixtures are now consigned to history, the Boxing Day schedule still gives fans a reason to emerge from the excesses of turkey, leftover trifle, and Christmas pudding. Gone are the days of three matches in three days, icy pitches, and players warming up in woollen scarves. Festive football may look a little different now, a bit slicker, a bit shinier, and considerably more televised, but it remains a reassuring constant amid the seasonal chaos.

Because if there's one thing more predictable than soggy sprouts or a disappointing cracker joke, it's that someone, somewhere, will be shouting at the referee on Boxing Day.



A High Note at Cragside

A globetrotting piano, missing for a century, has returned to the Northumberland National Trust property. **Claire Saul** learns more

Celebrated pianist Arabella Goddard gained international acclaim during the 19th century. Born to an English expatriate family in Brittany in 1836, she had demonstrated an extraordinary talent for music from a young age. After studying piano under Frédéric Kalkbrenner in Paris and later under Lucy Anderson, pianist for Queen Victoria, she performed for the royal family at Buckingham Palace while still only nine years old. Victoria was so impressed that Arabella was introduced to Sigismond Thalberg to complete her musical education. She made a triumphant public debut at Her Majesty's Theatre, aged just 14.

Famed for her refined technique and expressive interpretations, Arabella's career flourished, taking the pianist to perform around the globe. In the 1870s "the queen of pianists" embarked on a tour with her favoured Broadwood grand piano to promote the new rosewood model.

"In today's world of streaming and digital playlists, it's easy to forget how central live music and home instruments once were to everyday life," says Daisy Gibbs, National Trust research officer and music historian. "For middle-class Victorian families, having a piano in the home was normal – but owning a luxury model, like a Broadwood, was a true status symbol, and it was a piece of product placement as Arabella toured the world. Favoured by royalty and celebrated composers such as Chopin and Beethoven and referenced by Jane Austen in her novels, these instruments represented both cultural refinement and social prestige."

But Arabella's tour was somewhat troubled, starting in June 1874 when she found herself marooned off the Australian coast, a storm causing the RMS Flintshire to run aground on part of the Great Barrier Reef. The passengers, including Arabella Goddard – and her piano – spent a harrowing night in open lifeboats before being recovered.

Afterwards, she bravely began to recommence her planned itinerary, but more bad luck came her way. Towards the end of a series of concerts at the Royal Victoria Theatre in Sydney, Arabella refused to share the bill with a music hall singer Mrs Hilton, also known as Miss Liddle, and received threats that her final Sydney concert would be disrupted with "cabbages, carrots, turnips and

Top: Owning a luxury piano, like a Broadwood, was a true status symbol for Victorian families.

Photographs: The National Trust, (Hatchlands Park) National Trust Images/James Dobson





Left: Famed for her refined technique and expressive interpretations, Arabella Goddard would perform around the globe from an early age. Right: Having survived shipwreck, scandal and a hostage situation, Arabella's Broadwood grand piano has now returned to Cragside, where it was first housed in the 1870s following its purchase by the inventor and industrialist William Armstrong.

eggs", and a riot caused. Arabella, in the words of a newspaper from August 1874, "skedaddled from Sydney under suspicious circumstances", heading to Melbourne on a steamer, under a different name. The disgruntled manager of the Sydney theatre, and organiser of the proposed countrywide tour, announced her departure from the Royal Victoria's stage by reading a letter supposedly by Arabella, in which she insulted Australian performers and audiences. The resulting howls of public protest forced her to issue an indignant denial.

Alas, in her haste to leave the city, she had been forced to abandon her beloved Broadwood piano. The aggrieved theatre manager held it to ransom and allowed other performers to use it. While her agent negotiated with him, Arabella used a loaned substitute for the remainder of her Australian concerts.

Arabella's performing career was eventually capped with final concert in 1882. After a spell teaching at the Royal College of Music, she returned to France, dying in Boulogne-sur-Mer at the age of 86, in 1922.

But back in the mid-1870s, her Broadwood piano had gained a new lease of life. After resurfacing in London in May 1875, it was purchased by visionary inventor and industrialist William Armstrong for 250 guineas and transported to his Northumberland home. Cragside was famous at the time, as the first house in the world to be lit with hydroelectricity (see The Modern Magician, June 2025).

Inventory reports show that Arabella's piano remained at Cragside until at least 1901. Its subsequent whereabouts are unknown for the following century, but in 2006 the piano reappeared again and was sold to private buyers. Intrigued by its history, they conducted extensive research and confirmed its provenance as Arabella Goddard's piano, and the very instrument once housed at Cragside. Under the piano's cover is a sticker that reads: "Sir Wm Armstrong" alongside pencilled dates, believed to show when it was tuned.

Now, a generous donation has seen the globetrotting piano – which has survived shipwreck, scandal and a hostage situation – return to Cragside, 150 years after its original purchase by William Armstrong. It is proudly redisplayed in the property's elegant drawing room, where it once held pride of place.

"It's entirely plausible that William Armstrong admired Arabella Goddard as a performer, and he may even have intentionally chosen this piano for his visionary home – just as iconic instruments once belonging to rockstars are sought after today," says Claire Teasdale, Cragside's collections and house manager. "We're excited to bring it home to Cragside and share its remarkable story of resilience and survival with visitors for generations to come."

Cragside, Rothbury, Morpeth, Northumberland NE65 7PX (01669 620333, nationaltrust.org.uk/cragside)

The Cobbe Collection

Like all great properties of age, Hatchlands Park in Surrey has enjoyed a rich and varied history since first being built in the 1750s for Admiral Edward Boscawen and his wife, Fanny. Since the late 1980s, the mansion has been a family home, and visitors have been able to enjoy tenant Alec Cobbe's collection of art and furniture.

Today, Hatchlands is most admired for the Cobbe collection of keyboard instruments, the largest in Europe of its kind and one of the largest groups of composer-related instruments globally. The collection features more than 40 instruments, 18 of which were owned or played by some of the most famous names in the world of music, among them Mozart, Bach, Chopin and Elgar.

For more on Hatchlands Park and the Cobbe Collection, and to download a digital guide in which you can hear some of the instruments being played, visit nationaltrust.org.uk/hatchlands-park



BEST OF BRITISH
puzzle page

Twenty Questions

How well do you know Britain – Past and Present? Test your knowledge with our December quiz

1. Who was the bassist in the Jimi Hendrix Experience?
2. Which former Hawkwind bassist was the founder and only continuous member of Motörhead?
3. Which singer and actor played Colin Lomax, grandson of Ena Sharples, in Coronation Street?
4. Which actress and radio presenter is best known for playing Yvette Carte-Blanche in 'Allo 'Allo!?
5. Who was the first female poet laureate?
6. Which coin ceased to be legal tender after 31 December 1960?
7. Which former BBC Breakfast presenter is now the lead presenter of ITV's Good Morning Britain?
8. Which seven-time World Snooker Champion has won a record eight Masters titles?
9. Which co-founder of the Rolling Stones was demoted from the lineup to become the band's road manager?
10. Who played Mrs Huggett in the films Holiday Camp, Here Come the Huggetts, Vote for Huggett and The Huggetts Abroad?
11. Which British film-maker married American pop star Madonna on 22 December 2000?
12. Who was the first cricketer to make 100 appearances in Test cricket?
13. Which actress and writer wrote Whistle Down the Wind, which was adapted as a film, starring her daughter Hayley Mills?
14. Who created the Wombles?
15. Who played gentleman thief AJ Raffles in Yorkshire Television's 1977 series Raffles?
16. Which actor was best-known for playing Mr Rumbold in the sitcom Are You Being Served?
17. Which actress was best-known for playing Edna Birch in Emmerdale?
18. Who played bounty hunter Boba Fett in the films The Empire Strikes Back and Return of the Jedi?
19. By what name was spy author David John Moore Cornwell better known?
20. Who was the first English person to reach the summit of Mount Everest?

And I quote…

"Although physically tiny at 4ft 10in tall," who did the Guardian call "a giant of the British entertainment industry, conquering films, theatre and television in a career that spanned 60 years, 50 of them as a top star?"

Dialect Detective

Britain has many wonderful regional dialects. Can you spot the correct definition for each of these examples?

1. Birtle (*Norfolk/Suffolk*)
a) Cloudy
b) Brittle
c) Ashes

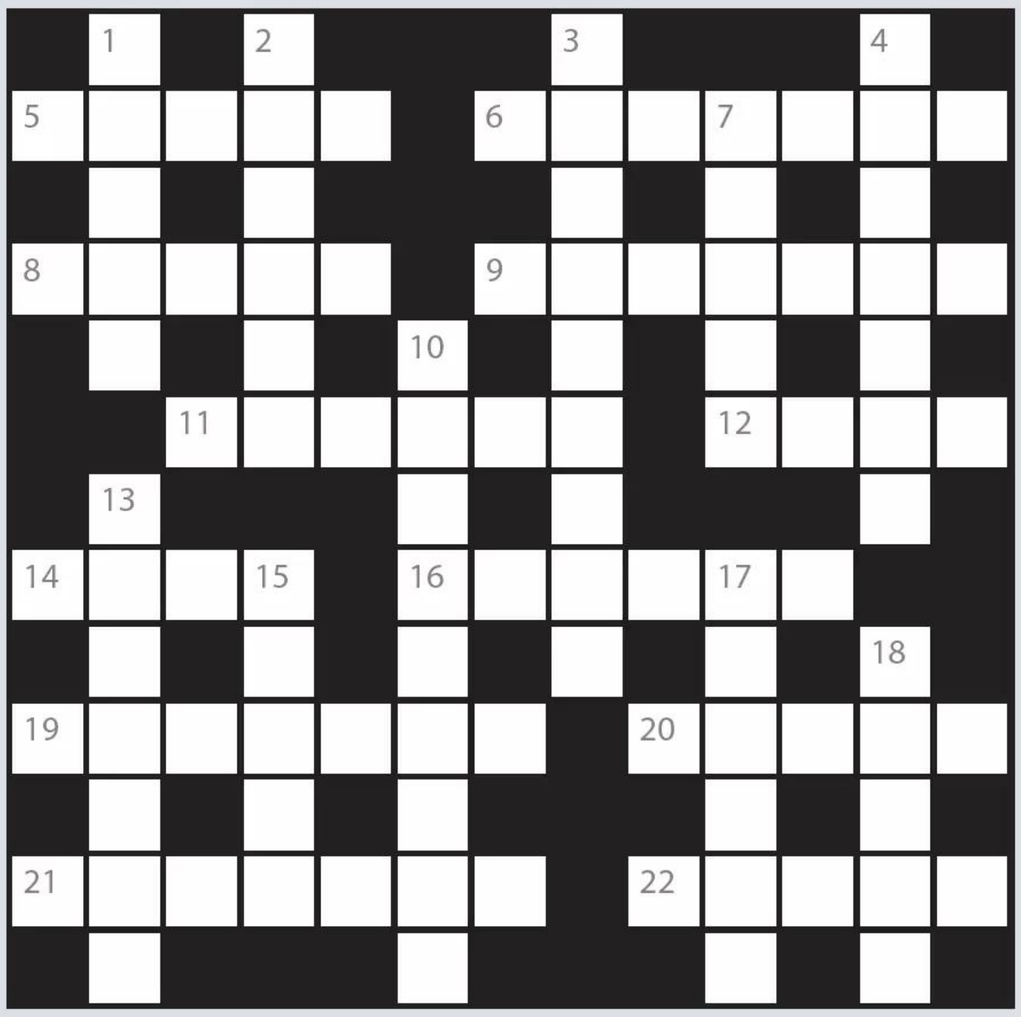
2. Little-silver (*Norfolk/Suffolk*)
a) A spoiled child
b) A low price
c) A piece of skin

3. Office (*Somerset*)
a) The eaves of a house
b) Ill-tasted or ill-scented
c) very plain and old fashioned

4. Scug (*Hampshire*)
a) To throw a stone
b) A cormorant
c) A squirrel

Cryptic Crossword

Compiled by CADOC



Across

5. Strange ant is Nicholas for example (5)
6 and 9 Across. Change clerks cashed in for creator of 19 Across (7,7)
8. Was Buddy rather prickly around Christmas time? (5)
9. See 6 Across
11. Would it help a snowman smell .... a vegetable? (6)
12. " . . . . he lives a good league hence" (Carol) (4)
14 and 2 Down. Sat in a gale uncomfortably in part of England (4,6)
16. Endless mess as inky letters sent initially but now these replace them (1-5)
19. He was very small time endlessly this 3 Down and 1 Down character (4,3)
20. A cold house facing the wrong way in the middle of schoolgirls (5)
21. Five eating out – and finding such wine? (7)
22. "And his cradle was a . . . . ." (Carol) (5)

Down

1. When written by 9 Across, this song is a 3 Down one (5)
2. See 14 Across
3 and 10 Down. Unusual star signs get me rich – I wish you glad tidings (9,9)
4. Cribbins say and after 5 Across it rescued you with good cheer (7)
7. Artist, film and garden implements (5)
10. See 3 Down
13. A stretch of water that isn't stormy apparently (7)
15. Attempt to go over 5 Across for an agreement to meet (5)
17. Do your 3 Down ones switch you on? Quite the contrary (6)
18. "Stood a . . . . . cattle shed" (Carol) (5)

What is it?

Finish with a flourish, it's a wrap



The solutions to this month's puzzles are on page 80

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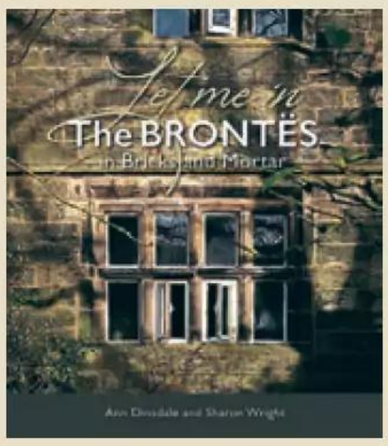
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Bookshelf

David Brown checks out the latest releases

BOOK OF THE MONTH



Let me in: The Brontës in Bricks and Mortar
By Ann Dinsdale and Sharon Wright, Great Northern Books, paperback, £25

Not only do the literary works of the creative members of the Brontë family continue to fascinate readers, an entire industry has grown up around every aspect of their lives from everyday details to wilder behaviour.

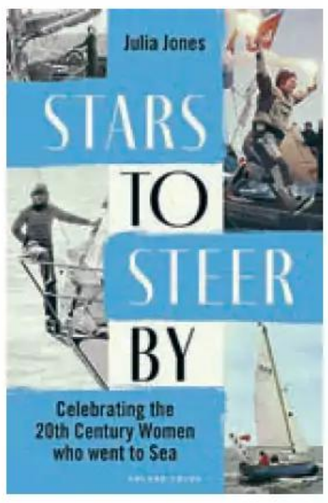
While everyone knows at least something about the Haworth Parsonage in West Yorkshire, there are more details discussed here to keep dedicated followers and regular visitors going back for more.

The father figure, Patrick, had humble beginnings in County Down as Pat Brunty, born on St Patrick's Day 1777 in Emdale. After a spell at St John's College, Cambridge, the aspiring reverend, reinvented himself and established the famous surname.

The mother figure was born Maria Branwell in Penzance, Cornwall in 1783. We are told that, even on her deathbed, aged 38, the mother of six was keen on watching the fireplace being cleaned "as it was done in Cornwall".

Our knowledgeable guides to the buildings associated with the family and those featured in their writings are Ann Dinsdale, principal curator of the Haworth Parsonage, and Sharon Wright, an award-winning journalist and author of a best-selling biography of Maria. The photography in this large format study is splendid throughout with historic and contemporary images relating to many aspects of the family history and varied locations.

While the creative sisters kept themselves busy writing behind closed doors, we are invited to join their brother Branwell on a pub crawl of his haunts well-known and more obscure.



Stars to Steer By
By Julia Jones, Adlard Coles, hardback, £22

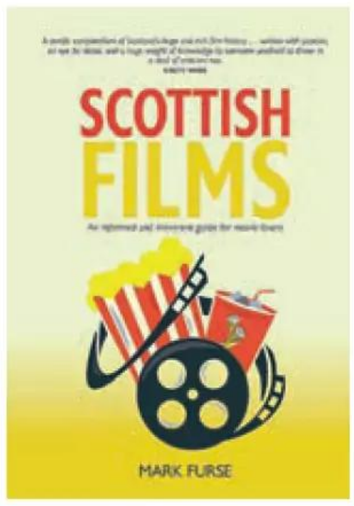
Subtitled "Celebrating the 20th century women who went to sea", the ever-thoughtful maritime author Julia Jones sets out to put the records straight by writing about 100 women sailors who turned the tide when it came to achievements in a world traditionally dominated by men.

The author was spurred on by the great advances made by female footballers in recent years to report on the determined female sailors who have achieved so much.

Traditionally, women were not welcome onboard ships, certainly not in a professional manner. Students of folk song will find ladies on ships disguised as males, who may end up marrying the captain on the way to Van Diemen's Land and presumably living happily ever after without actually steering the vessel. The comedy of Carry On Jack tells a similar tale, while Wren Chasen in the long-running Navy Lark radio series is mostly there for Leslie Phillips' lusty advances.

In real life, welcome to the achievements of the likes of Clare Francis and Ellen MacArthur, who were primarily out to prove for themselves what they were capable of. Naomi James became the first woman to have sailed single-handed around the world via Cape Horn, and Nicolette Milnes-Walker, became the first woman to sail single-handed non-stop across the Atlantic. There are several examples of less well-known female sailors whose achievements are none the less impressive.

Julia introduces readers to many great achievers and independence in the maritime world that will inspire further adventurers, female and male.



Scottish Films
By Mark Furse, Luath Press, paperback, £16.99

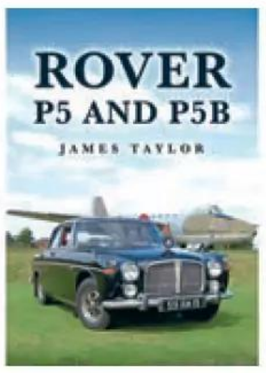
Back in the days when my hometown still had a cinema, I recall going to see Greyfriars Bobby: The True Story of a Dog, a sentimental 1961 film with some elements of truth engrained in the plot.

The Prime of Miss Brodie, from 1969 also impressed, introducing me and doubtless others to the artistry of Maggie Smith.

While I never particularly set out to specialise in "Scottish films", I remember with great pleasure several filmed stories set north of the border and continue to enjoy watching them. The Scottish scenery was a great attraction in the different versions of The 39 Steps, which I viewed out of sequence. The story of a "puffer", The Maggie is a black and white gem from 1954, that became one of my Sunday afternoon TV favourites, likewise some of the six versions to date of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic tale Kidnapped.

The rich diversity has continued into more recent works such as Braveheart, Local Hero and Trainspotting.

Mark Furse's "informed and irreverent guide for movie-lovers" highlights more than 400 films across 400+ pages, with concise plot and other details, plus informed insight and critical consideration. He insists that "your opinion is equally valid". Mark lists his favourite 100 films and his 10 worst. Gregory's Girl (1980) makes it into the first list, while Gregory's Two Girls (1999) is included in the latter.



Rover P5 and P5B
By James Taylor, Amberley, paperback, £15.99

The sight and sound of a Rover P5 today continues to impress with its stylish combination of power and good looks.

When it first appeared in the late 1950s, the P5 marked a powerful successor to Rover's popular P4 range, being larger with a bigger 3-litre engine, which in time was increased from 1967 to 3.5-litre as the P5B. The latter had a lightweight V8 engine originally designed by Buick from the US, providing increased efficiency and better fuel economy.

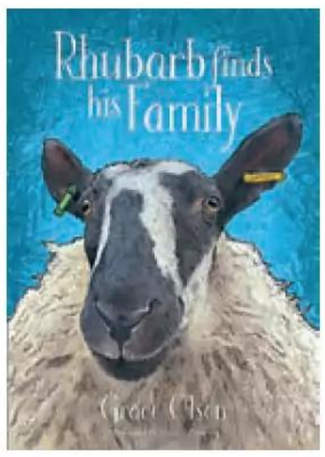
It was also the first Rover to incorporate an integrated body and frame/chassis, featuring a comfortable and impressive interior.

In the early 1960s, their power attracted the attention of rally drivers, who were not afraid to get them dirty.

Much has been made generally of the P5Bs being the cars of choice for politicians and royalty with an appeal that transcended party politics, a subject that the author puts into perspective. P5Bs were used to transport prime ministers from Labour's Harold Wilson through to Conservative PM Margaret Thatcher. Some late examples were used in government and MoD service, including some armoured cars.

Another user was Elizabeth II, who owned at least two P5B Saloons for personal use, including JGY 280 that is among the exhibits at the British Motor Museum at Gaydon, Warwickshire.

James Taylor provides an informative introduction to this worthy British classic.



Rhubarb Finds His Family
By Grace Olson, Brown Dog Books, paperback, £9.99

Commencing with the classic opening line: "It was a dark and stormy night…", we are introduced to the world of Rhubarb the sheep, who wonders why he is alone when other young lambs in the barn are being looked after by their mums.

Ignoring the pleas of other, more patient orphan lambs, he asks mums if they would like him as an additional family member. When they say they have their quota, Rhubarb pushes his way out into the world at large, determined to find a mummy.

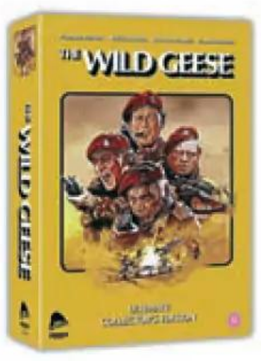
Guided by the light of the moon, plus a helpful pony and a young girl, our hero wanders the countryside – meeting all kinds of birds and animals before satisfying his inquisitive nature about this Mother Nature that everyone keeps on about.

Anyone with a knowledge of the Channel 5 documentary series The Yorkshire Vet will know that Rhubarb is a real animal, who is learning to be a therapy animal as part of the author's flock to help her do her therapy work at no cost for people on low incomes.

In addition to Grace's lovely story, the artwork by Andrew Prescott adds more magic to this book with a fine attention to detail of many aspects of the countryside. It appears that Rhubarb even managed a ride in a Morris Traveller.

Young readers with a love for animals will enjoy this and further stories about other lovable characters.

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT



The Wild Geese – Ultimate Collector's Edition
UHD/BD/CD Box Set, Severin Films

Following its theatrical reissue on 14 November, Andrew V McLagen's 1978 action thriller The Wild Geese in its brand-new 4k restoration, is available for home viewers from 8 December in a box set packed with extras.

When first released, the film gained many column inches as a result of its three main stars – Richard Burton, Roger Moore and Richard Harris – all regarded as actors with a wild reputation on and offscreen. Harris almost didn't get the job because of that reputation, but Moore commented that his two co-stars were "on the wagon" at the time.

They are the leaders of a team of mercenaries hired by a wealthy industrialist (played by Stewart Granger), to carry out a deadly mission to rescue a deposed African president, imprisoned in a heavily guarded camp.

There's a lengthy sequence showing the leads getting their old gang of mercenaries back together. The financial reward is one appeal, but so is the thought of being with old mates, doing what they are good at.

After intensive training, the 50 men are parachuted into the unstable African nation to free the ailing president. All seems to go well, but there's treachery afoot and explosive violence at every turn with bullets and grenades punctuating the soundtrack.

The box set includes more than nine hours of new and archive special features, a 316-page book Fifty Men in the Valley of the Shadow by Tony Earnshaw, including script extracts, behind-the-scenes photographs and interviews with cast and crew members, an original soundtrack CD by Roy Budd, plus six UK lobby card reproductions.



Hilary and Jackie
Blu-ray, BFI, BFIB1522

The much-lauded 1998 biographical film of world-famous cellist Jacqueline du Pré and her sister, Hilary, has been released remastered in 2K as a high-resolution presentation on Blu-ray for the first time by the BFI.

Directed by Anand Tucker, the two-hour film features Emily Watson as Jacqueline and Rachel Griffiths as Hilary, both of whom were nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress respectively.

The story follows their family life with their mother encouraging the two young girls with Hilary's study of the flute and Jacqueline with the cello. Initially, it was Hilary that was in the spotlight, but, after her early rebellion, Jacqueline's supreme artistry propelled her to greater fame.

This creative rivalry was just one of the complex strands of their relationship. The idea that Jackie allegedly had an affair with her sister's husband, Christopher Finzi, pushed things to the limit.

Jacqueline's struggle with multiple sclerosis from her late 20s onwards is a major part of her fateful story. She was sure that she could beat it, but the disease progressed rapidly, making it impossible for her to play, and Jacqueline died aged just 42.

It is an impressively presented story with a strong cast, with the cello played and synchronised by Caroline Dale to Emily Watson's movements.

The Blu-ray package includes several short supporting films, plus a newly recorded audio commentary by Neil Brand.

OUT&ABOUT

Places to go, people to see

Costume Couture: Sixty Years of Cosprop

A once-in-a-lifetime exhibition celebrating a costume house specialising in period costume for film, television and theatre continues at the Fashion and Textile Museum, London. Costume Couture: Sixty Years of Cosprop is a unique opportunity to see behind the scenes of London-based Cosprop, which was founded by Oscar and Bafta-winning costume designer John Bright in 1965. Through stunning costumes, many never seen in public before; accessories and sketches, visitors will learn the design and making process from script-to screen. From Helena Bonham Carter in A Room With a View and Meryl Streep in Out of Africa, to Maggie Smith in Downton Abbey and Colin Firth as Mr Darcy in Pride and Prejudice, Cosprop is synonymous with dressing iconic characters in award-winning films and television. Running until 8 March, Costume Couture is accompanied by a beautiful, richly illustrated book, The Costume House: The Inside Story of Cosprop, written by former V&A film curator Keith Lodwick, with a foreword by Dame Judi Dench.
020 7407 8664, fashiontextilemuseum.org



From A Room With a View, to Downton Abbey and Peaky Blinders, the exhibition features some of the most famous costumes from film and television.

Richard Burton: Man of Fire

A celebration of the commanding and charismatic performer Richard Burton takes place at London's BFI Southbank throughout December. Richard Burton: Man of Fire launches on 2 December with the illustrated panel discussion Look Back at Richard Burton, which will explore Burton's contribution to film both through his performances and his stardom. The season will feature a selection of classics and rarities that reflect Burton's formidable acting range and the magnetic, multifaceted characters he portrayed. Films playing throughout the month include The Last Days of Dolwyn, introduced by Burton's daughter Kate Burton on 2 December; The Spy Who Came in from the Cold and Boom! – both introduced by Burton's granddaughter Charlotte Frances Burton on 8 December. Other films in the season include Look Back in Anger, Where Eagles Dare, Villain, Equus and 1984 – many with introductions.



Richard Burton as the gangster Vic Dakin in 1971's Villain, one of a selection of classics and rarities that reflect Burton's formidable acting range.

Christmas Spectacular Circus & Water Show

The Hippodrome, Great Yarmouth's historic fixed circus is returning for another magical Christmas show. Running from 6 December to 5 January, the Christmas Spectacular Circus & Water Show combines the breathtaking magic of circus with the festive spirit of Christmas. Enjoy comedy from ringmaster Jack Jay and former Britain's Got Talent contestant Ben Langley, plus a lineup of more than 60 world class circus performers, aerialists, acrobats plus numerous daring stunts. The mesmerising show culminates with a water spectacular featuring synchronised swimmers and giant fountains, which come into their own as the historic central stage transforms into a giant swimming pool.
01493 738877, hippodromecircus.com/christmas



Great Yarmouth's historic fixed circus return for a magical Christmas show.

Photographs: (Richard Burton) BFI National Archive, (Cosprop) Merchant Ivory/Goldcrest/Kobal/Shutterstock

NOT TO BE MISSED

Tracks Through Time: The Story of Hull's Railways

(Until 11 December)
An exhibition exploring different aspects of the railways in Hull, from the opening of the first line in 1840, to the privatisation of the industry in the 1990s.
Hull History Centre, Hull 01482 317500, hullhistorycentre.org.uk

Secret Maps

(Until 18 January)
Step into the shadows at Secret Maps, a major new exhibition revealing the stories hidden in some of history's most mysterious maps.
British Library, London 01937 546060, events.bl.uk/exhibitions/secretmaps

A Magical Night Before Christmas

(Until 30 December)
Guests will be transported to a Christmas fairytale of colour and opulence as soon as they enter the early 19th century historic home decorated with elaborate and festive adornments.
Belvoir Castle, Grantham, Leicestershire 01476 871001, belvoircastle.com

Alfred Wainwright

(Until 20 December)
A display of unique, never-before-seen by the public objects linked to the history of the man behind the 214 Wainwrights and the Pictorial Guides to the Lakeland Fells.
The Armitt Museum, Ambleside, Cumbria 015394 31212, armitt.com

Future of Food

(Until 4 January)
An exciting new exhibition exploring how science is creating more sustainable ways of growing, making, cooking and eating food.
Science Museum, London 033 0058 0058, sciencemuseum.org.uk

Prince of the Rocks: JMW Turner and the Avon Gorge

(Until 11 January)
A display of four rare watercolours painted during Turner's first visit to the city in 1791, aged 16. These early works reveal his growing skill in architectural detail, natural observation and dramatic composition. Fragile by nature, this is the first time these watercolours have been shown in over a decade.
Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, Bristol 0117 922 3571, bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-museum-and-art-gallery

ATTRACTION OF THE MONTH

Jane Austen
Celebrating Bath's most famous resident

Character actors take you on an entertaining and educational journey through the life of Jane Austen in Regency Bath, revealing how living there affected the celebrated author and her writing. Taste some Regency food, have a go writing with a quill pen and ink, dress up using the extensive collection of dresses, bonnets, coats and accessories, and make sure you have your picture taken with the world-famous Austen waxwork.

What to eat: The Regency Tea Room serves a selection of cakes, teas, coffees and soft drinks, plus Champagne and Prosecco. A popular menu item is Mr Darcy's Afternoon Tea, a serving of cakes, finger sandwiches and warm scones served with Dorset clotted cream and seasonal jam. Booking is recommended for the Regency Tea Room and can be done online via janeausten.co.uk/pages/the-regency-tea-rooms

Disabled access: Located in a Grade II-listed Georgian townhouse, which doesn't have a lift, there is a step to the front door and a second step to the entrance. However, a ramp is available, and the greeter at the front door will be happy to assist. There are four steps leading to the exhibition entrance on the ground floor and it can also be accessed via a ramp in the reverse direction. The talk room, where your visit begins with a 20-minute talk about Jane Austen's life, is on the first floor. Unfortunately, this part of the exhibition and the Regency Tea Room on the second floor are not accessible for wheelchair users. Private accessible tours, where the introductory talk about Jane Austen's life is held downstairs, are available for walk-in visitors after 11am, depending on the actors' availability. Toilets are in the basement, one flight of stairs below the main exhibition and gift shop. A baby changing facility is available in the ladies' toilets. Registered assistance dogs are welcome. A free access companion ticket is available from the gift shop with any full price ticket.

How to get there: Situated between Queen Square and The Circus, The Jane Austen Centre is an eight-minute walk from the city centre, and approximately 15 minutes from Bath Spa railway station (0345 700 0125, gwr.com). Bath Hop On Hop Off (city-sightseeing.com/en/84/bath) bus tour passengers should get off at Stop 8 – Queen Square. The nearest car park is at Charlotte Street (BA1 2NE, bathnes.gov.uk/parking-and-travel), which is a five-minute walk to the museum.

Opening times and admission: Open Sunday to Friday, 10am-4.30pm and Saturday, 10am-5.30pm until 4 April. Daily, 9.45am-5.30pm from 5 April to 31 June, 9.45am-6pm from 1 July-21 September, 10am-5.30pm from 22 September-2 November. Admission £17 (adult), £15.50 (students/over 60s), £9.50 (child, six-16 years) and £39 (family: two adults and up to four children).

The Jane Austen Centre, 40 Gay Street, Bath BA1 2NT (01225 443000, janeausten.co.uk). For more information on attractions, accommodation and food and drink in Bath, go to visitbath.co.uk



DIARY DATES
GREAT BRITISH EVENTS

SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND
Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire, Channel Islands

SOUTH EAST OF ENGLAND AND LONDON
Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey, Sussex, Isle of Wight

WEST OF ENGLAND
Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire

EAST OF ENGLAND
Cambridgeshire, Essex, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk

MIDLANDS
Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland, Staffordshire, Warwickshire

NORTH OF ENGLAND
Cheshire, County Durham, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Yorkshire, Isle of Man

WALES

SCOTLAND

NORTHERN IRELAND

SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND

06-07 CHRISTMAS AT STEAM (10AM-5PM)
Enjoy plenty of sparkles as you step into a wonderland of more than 50 Christmas market stalls, set amid STEAM's award-winning museum displays and iconic GWR locomotives.
STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway, Swindon, Wiltshire
01793 466646, steam-museum.org.uk

11-12 CHRISTMAS CONCERT UNDER CONCORDE (7-10PM)
Join HMS Heron Royal Navy Volunteer Band under Concorde 002 in hall four for a concert featuring classics and festive numbers. Tickets include refreshments. Booking recommended.
Fleet Air Arm Museum, RNAS Yeovilton, Ilchester, Somerset
01935 840565, nmrn.org.uk/visit-us/fleet-air-arm-museum

17 STORE TOUR (2-3PM)
Join the collections team for an opportunity to explore behind the scenes in the museum's state-of-the-art collections discovery centre. Booking essential.
Dorset Museum & Art Gallery, Dorchester, Dorset
01305 262735, dorsetmuseum.org

26 BOXING DAY BARBECUE
Make your Boxing Day extra special with free entrance to the village and a festive barbecue by the quay. Gather your family and friends to enjoy delicious food and live music by the sea.
Clovelly, Bideford, Devon
01237 431781, clovelly.co.uk

SOUTH EAST OF ENGLAND AND LONDON

05-07 VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS
Immerse yourself in the charm of a beautifully decorated Victorian farmhouse, sing along as carols fill the air around the pianola, and indulge in mince pies and mulled wine.
Milton Keynes Museum, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire
01908 316222, miltonkeynesmuseum.org.uk

06 GUIDED TOUR: CIVIC CENTRE CLOCK TOWER TOUR
Climb all 215 steps and discover the incredible story of its construction as well as gaining unparalleled views of the city. Booking essential.
SeaCity Museum, Southampton, Hampshire
023 8083 4536, seacitymuseum.co.uk

12-14 SHUTTLEWORTH IN LIGHTS
Explore the Swiss Garden's quirky features aglow in vibrant colours. Iconic aircraft, vehicles and machines will be bathed in light in the collection hangars.
Shuttleworth, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire
01767 627927, shuttleworth.org

20 CHRISTMAS LANTERN TOURS (5-6.30PM, 7-8.30PM)
Step into Christmas past for a festive walking tour with guide Andy Skinner. This lantern-lit tour will explore the Old Town, including hidden medieval vaults. Booking essential.
Tudor House & Garden, Southampton, Hampshire
023 8083 4242, seacitymuseum.co.uk

29-31 NEW YEAR'S STEAM-UP & ROUTEMASTER BUS SHUTTLE (10.30AM-4PM)
End the year in spectacular style as the mighty triple-expansion engine steams back to life. With a special joint ticket, you can also explore London Museum of Water & Steam and travel between them aboard a classic Routemaster bus.
Kempton Steam Museum, Hanworth, Middlesex
01932 765328, kemptonsteam.org

WEST OF ENGLAND

03-23 CELEBRATING A VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS (10AM-4PM)
Step back to the Victorian era and to the origins of the festive traditions we know and love today. Around the town, streets and buildings will be decked with traditional decorations.
Blists Hill Victorian Town, Telford, Shropshire
01952 433424, ironbridge.org.uk

05-06 CANDLELIGHT TOURS
Travel back to the heart of Elizabethan England as your costumed guide takes you through the rooms and secret hiding places under candlelight. Booking essential.
Harvington Hall, Kidderminster, Worcestershire
01562 777846, harvingtonhall.co.uk

12 GHOSTS & GIGGLES: FAMILY TOUR OF HAUNTED GLOUCESTER (5-7PM)
Join a ghostly adventure through the past, uncovering haunted objects, unheard stories, and mysterious corners of the museum before heading out on foot past the ruins of Greyfriars.
The Museum of Gloucester, Gloucester, Gloucestershire
01452 396131, museumofgloucester.co.uk

19-20 CAROL TRAINS (7-10.20PM)
Enjoy a musical journey as you experience the magic of after-dark heritage train travel, going from Kidderminster to a festive concert among locomotives at The Engine House, Highley.
Severn Valley Railway, Kidderminster, Worcestershire
01562 757900, svr.co.uk

28 WINTER WARMER RUNNING DAY
Join a day of diesel running over a line with GWR No 5619 and perhaps a VIP diesel locomotive.
Telford Steam Railway, Telford, Shropshire
telfordsteamrailway.co.uk

EAST OF ENGLAND

03-07 LINCOLN CASTLE ILLUMINATED (4-9PM)
Enjoy the castle grounds bejewelled with festive lights and illuminated festive features.
Lincoln Castle, Lincoln, Lincolnshire
01522 554559, lincolncastle.com

06 BUILDING HISTORY & UNDERCROFT TOUR (11-11.45AM, NOON-12.45PM, 2-2.45PM)
Explore the heritage of the museum site, including a closer look at the medieval flint wall and a behind-the-scenes walk around the city's largest vaulted undercroft.
Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell, Norwich, Norfolk

01603 629127, MUSEUMS.NORFOLK.GOV.UK/MUSEUM-OF-NORWICH
13-14 Dickensian Christmas (10am-5pm)
Kentwell turns the Christmas clock back to the year 1869 and the age of Dickens to create a rich tapestry of lively and enjoyable activities for all ages.
Kentwell Hall, Sudbury, Suffolk
01787 310207, kentwell.co.uk

20 CATHEDRAL CHOIR CHRISTMAS CONCERT (7PM)
Experience the wonder of the season as the cathedral choir, youth choir and festival chorus come together to fill the cathedral with the timeless beauty of seasonal favourites.
Peterborough Cathedral, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire
01733 355315, peterborough-cathedral.org.uk

27-31 EPPING ONGAR LIGHTS EXPRESS
Experience an incredible light show on and in a steam train, consisting of thousands of coloured LED lights and wristbands, creating a kaleidoscope of colours and flashing patterns.
Epping Ongar Railway, Ongar, Essex
01277 365200, eorailway.co.uk

MIDLANDS

05 DRACULA BY NIGHT – A GOTHIC CHRISTMAS AT PICKFORD'S HOUSE (7-9PM)

Explore the exhibition Dracula Returns to Derby: 101 Years and Counting and the house as night falls. Adults only, booking essential and costume encouraged.

Pickford's House, Derby, Derbyshire
01332 641901, derbymuseums.org/pickfords-house

06 A WARTIME CHRISTMAS (10AM-4PM)

Featuring Christmas crafts, meet the Tammy Land Girls in the afternoon to sing festive songs, Christmas Truce re-enactment on the field, meet the troops in the trenches and join in carols.

Staffordshire Regiment Museum, DMS Whittington, Lichfield, Staffordshire
01543 434394, staffordshireregimentmuseum.com

18-20 CANDLELIGHT TOURS

Enjoy a glass of mulled wine before the Banqueting Hall fire before setting off with your guide to explore the rooms in all their festive beauty, lit by candlelight. Booking essential.

Haddon Hall, Bakewell, Derbyshire
01629 812855, haddonhall.co.uk

20-23 GLAD TIDINGS (6.30-10PM)

Gather around open fires, sing along with traditional carollers and 50s favourites, and enjoy traditional Christmas treats to get into the festive mood.

Black Country Living Museum, Dudley, West Midlands
0121 557 9643, bclm.co.uk

31 THE NIGHTRIDER

Enjoy a memorable journey through the night, hauled by the visiting Hymek Class 35 and Stanier 8F locomotives, ending with a celebration at Leicester North as we welcome in 2026.

Great Central Railway, Loughborough, Leicestershire
01509 632323, gcrailway.co.uk

NORTH OF ENGLAND

02-07 FESTIVE TOURS AT TEMPLE NEWSAM

Enjoy a festive tour of Temple Newsam House and take in the beautiful decorations. Followed by festive refreshments in the spectacular Dining Room. Booking essential.

Temple Newsam House, Leeds, West Yorkshire
0113 336 7460, museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/temple-newsam

11-12 CHRISTMAS EVENINGS 2025 (5-9.30PM)

Immerse yourself in an extra-special enchanting evening at Beamish. Enjoy twinkling lights, festive entertainment, and seasonal treats under the night sky.

Beamish Museum, Beamish, Stanley, County Durham
0191 370 4000, beamish.org.uk

13 & 20 CASTLE BY CANDLELIGHT (4-6PM)

Step back in time to experience a traditional family Christmas. For the first time in more than 50 years the ground-floor rooms will be dressed for the festive season. Booking essential.

Raby Castle, Staindrop, Darlington, County Durham
01833 660202, raby.co.uk

24 FAMILY CHRISTMAS CAROLS (11-11.45AM)

This relaxed and family-friendly service is filled with Christmas choral music and the perfect way for families with young children to celebrate the season together.

Liverpool Cathedral, Liverpool
0151 709 6271, liverpoolcathedral.org.uk

26 BOXING DAY CLASSIC DRIVE & RIDE-IN DAY (10AM-1PM)

Join classic vehicle owners as they bring their private vehicles to display at the museum. You don't have to own a classic vehicle to attend, just simply come along and join in the fun.

Lakeland Motor Museum, Ulverston, Cumbria
015395 30400, lakelandmotormuseum.co.uk

WALES

03 TROPICAL HOUSE TOUR (11.30AM-12.30PM)

Join one of the senior horticulturists to discover fascinating facts about the ethnobotanical collection. Meet outside the Tropical House. Booking essential.

National Botanic Garden of Wales, Llanarthne, Carmarthenshire
01558 667177, botanicgarden.wales

05-06 A TUDOR CHRISTMAS (11AM-3PM)

Discover how the Tudors have influenced our Christmas celebrations at this small historic house nestled in the streets of Tenby. Admission applies. No booking required.

Tudor Merchants' House, Tenby, Pembrokeshire
01646 623110, nationaltrust.org.uk/tudor-merchants-house

13-14 VICTORIAN SANTA'S GROTTO (10.30AM-3.30PM)

See a wonderfully festive Victorian Father Christmas in his vintage Christmas grotto at the Ironworks and make unique memories with the whole family. Booking essential.

Blaenafon Ironworks, Blaenavon, Torfaen
01495 792615, cadw.gov.wales

20 THE CAROL TRAIN

Journey begins at Tywyn Wharf at 6.15pm with mulled wine and mince pies. Train departs at 6.45pm for Abergynolwyn, where carols will be sung. Returns to Tywyn Wharf around 10pm.

Talyllyn Railway, Tywyn, Gwynedd
01654 710472, talyllyn.co.uk

31 MARI LWYD WALK (10PM)

A short torchlight walk from the town square, returning for traditional midnight celebrations in the square to welcome in the new year. No entry process – just turn up.

Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys
01591 610666, green-events.co.uk

SCOTLAND

04 MUSEUMS COLLECTION CENTRE STORE TOUR (2PM)

Join Nico on this tour to look at some of his favourite stories from the collections. See the work the team are doing to record and store everything. Free but booking essential.

Museum Collections Centre, Edinburgh
0131 556 9536, cultureedinburgh.com

06 CHRISTMAS MARKET AT THE MCMANUS (10AM-4PM)

Join a special day of festive fun at this free, drop-in event. Featuring the market, Christmas tales for families, festive crafts, plus lots of festive cheer. The McManus cafe will be open.

The McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery and Museum, Dundee, Angus
01382 307200, mcmanus.co.uk

12 TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS (NOON-4PM)

Step back in time to celebrate a Georgian Christmas. Dive into Leith's maritime history and explore this elegant Georgian house's nautical treasures. Free and no booking required.

Trinity House, Leith, Edinburgh
0131 554 3289, historicenvironment.scot

28 GUIDED TOURS (NOON, 2PM)

See the Glasgow Vintage Vehicle Trust collection of more than 120 buses, fire engines and commercial vehicles, from fully restored vehicles to those under restoration. Booking essential.

Bridgeton Bus Garage, Glasgow
0141 554 0544, gvvt.org

31 HOGMANAY SPECIAL (10PM-1AM)

Depart Keith Town 10pm, arrive back 1am. Enjoy live accordion music, much merry entertainment and festive fare with stovies. Booking essential.

Keith & Dufftown Railway, Dufftown, Banffshire
01340 821181, keith-dufftown-railway.co.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

06-07 CHRISTMAS AT THE ULSTER FOLK MUSEUM

This Christmas, wander the snowy, cobbled streets of the museum for a festive season filled with memories and traditions.

Ulster Folk Museum, Cultra, Holywood, County Down
028 9042 8428, ulsterfolkmuseum.org

11 ROYAL ULSTER WINTER FAIR

With more than 200 trade stands and 5,000 visitors this is a festive highlight for many families as exceptional dairy cattle compete for the supreme interbreed championship title.

Eikon Exhibition Centre, Lisburn, County Antrim
028 9066 5225, eikonexhibitioncentre.co.uk

12-13 CHRISTMAS IN THE POOR HOUSE

Christmas in the Poor House will often stir scenes of Scrooge and other classics. Original research tells a very different tale. Booking essential.

Clifton House, 2 North Queen Street, Belfast
028 9099 7022, cliftonbelfast.com

19 GEORGE BEST HOUSE PUBLIC TOUR (2PM)

Step inside George Best's family home, as it would have been in the summer of 1961 when the 15-year-old left to follow his dreams in Manchester. Booking recommended.

16 Burren Way, Belfast
028 9045 1900, georgebesthouse.com

21 BELFAST STREET ART WALKING TOUR (NOON)

A gently paced, two-hour walk around the ever-changing face of Belfast street art, leaving from the red benches on Commercial Court (beside the Duke of York). Booking essential.

The Black Box & Green Room Bar, 18-22 Hill Street, Belfast
028 9024 4400, blackboxbelfast.com

• Details correct at time of going to press – please confirm with event organisers before travelling.

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PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

Twenty Questions

1. Noel Redding who was born on 25 December 1945.
2. Ian "Lemmy" Kilmister who was born on 24 December 1945 and died on 28 December 2015.
3. Davy Jones who was born on 30 December 1945.
4. Vicki Michelle who was born on 14 December 1950.
5. Dame Carol Ann Duffy who was born on 23 December 1955.
6. The farthing.
7. Susanna Reid who was born on 10 December 1970.
8. Ronnie O'Sullivan who was born on 5 December 1975.
9. Ian Stewart who died on 12 December 1985.
10. Kathleen Harrison who died on 7 December 1995.
11. Guy Ritchie.
12. Colin Cowdrey who died on 4 December 2000.
13. Mary Hayley Bell, Lady Mills who died on 1 December 2005.
14. Elisabeth Beresford who died on 24 December 2010.
15. Anthony Valentine who died on 2 December 2015.
16. Nicholas Smith who died on 6 December 2015.
17. Shirley Stelfox who died on 7 December 2015.
18. Jeremy Bulloch who died on 17 December 2020.
19. John le Carré who died on 12 December 2020.
20. Doug Scott who died on 7 December 2020.

And I quote…
Dame Barbara Windsor who died on 10 December 2020.

What is it?
A gift wrapping bowmaker.

Dialect Detective
1b, 2b, 3a, 4c



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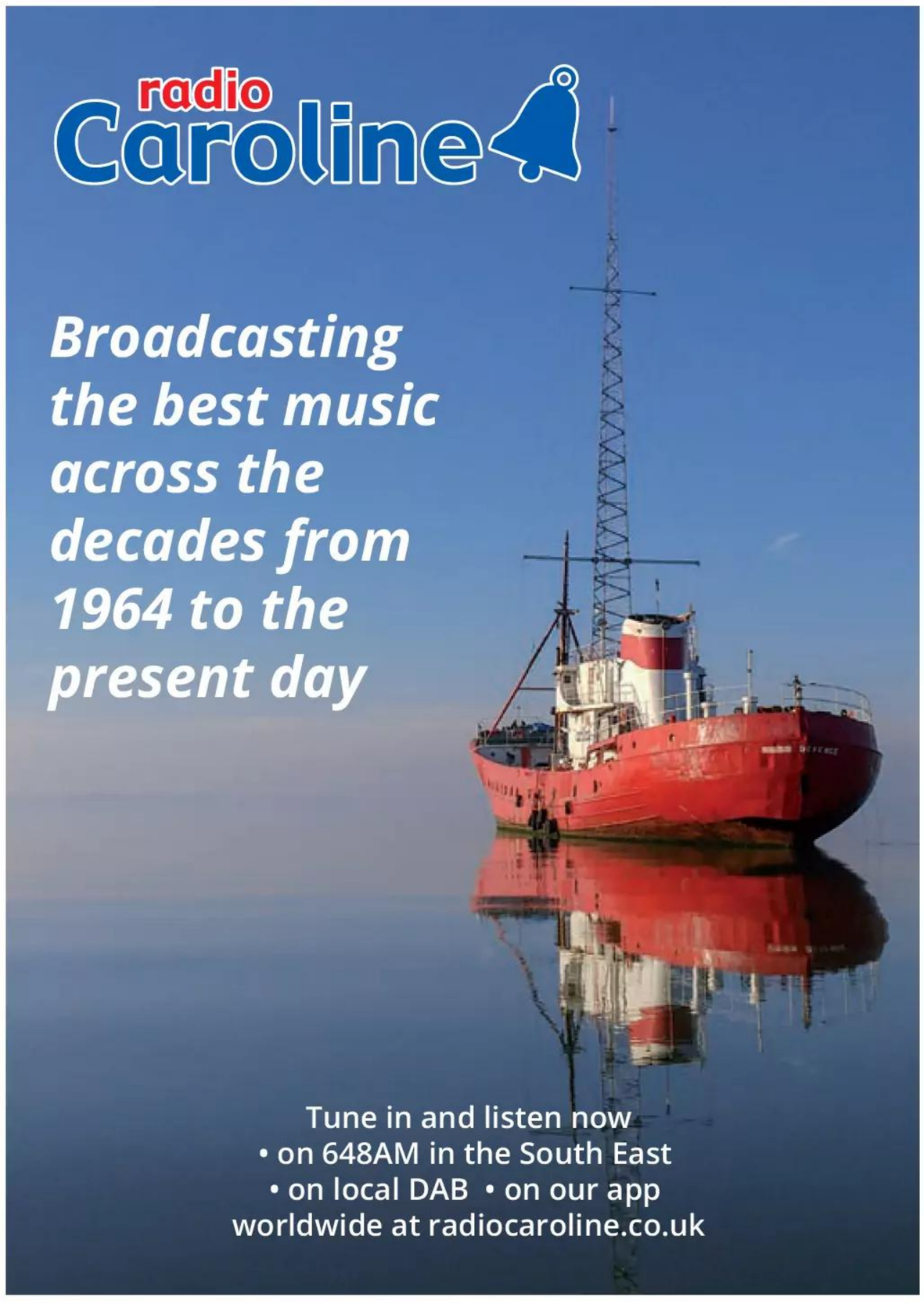
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BACK IN TIME WITH COLIN BAKER

BoB's very own Time Lord recalls the influence Rudyard Kipling had on his Doctor and how there's one ghost story he's happy to retell time and again

You may be surprised to learn that the great Rudyard Kipling played quite a significant part in my time on Doctor Who.

When John Nathan-Turner, the producer, asked me what costume I would like in the show, I suggested that something dark and sombre might fit the bill, given the Doctor's frequent and urgent need to slip away into the background unobserved when faced with imminent disaster or threat. JNT, however, demurred. He felt my sixth incarnation should be, in his words, "totally tasteless". It was the 1980s after all, and his wish was granted.

What I was ultimately presented with was so far removed from my initial desire as to make me wonder why he asked me in the first place. I suppose if I had come up with the idea of execrable taste he could thereafter have blamed me rather than take the inevitable flak himself. But I did contribute.

Having seen Peter Davison sport a mysterious and unlikely sticky of celery on his lapel throughout his tenure, I thought I should at least offer an alternative decoration for mine. I suggested a cat badge – on the basis that the Doctor, in many ways, resembled the cat immortalised by Rudyard Kipling in the Just So stories – always a favourite of mine. The cat declined to be domesticated like the dog, horse and cow in the story, saying: "I am the cat who walks by himself and all places are alike to me."

I have always seen that as a strong characteristic of the nation's favourite Time Lord and, a bit like the Lone Ranger or many heroes of myth and legend, the Doctor always rides out of town after it has been saved. Simply add "and times" after "places" and you have the archetypal Gallifreyan buccaneer.



Photograph: Chris Capstick/Shutterstock

Inspired by a line in the Just So Stories, Colin had badges made in the likeness of his own cats to wear on the lapel of his Doctor Who costume.

So, the cat badge was duly approved and, being a fond cat owner myself, I had badges made in the likeness of my own cats and changed it for every story. Eric, Lolita, Tatty Weeble, Morris and Tamora are thereby immortalised in my adventures. The fans apparently approved and I received many gifts of cat badges. When I did the stage show in 1989, I wore a different one of their gift cats for each show as a thank you for their generosity.

Names are fascinating aren't they – you don't get a lot of Rudyards these days, do you? In fact, I have never heard of another one. Indeed, Kipling is not that usual either, and has given rise to that terrible gag: "Do you like Kipling?" "I don't know I've never kippled!"

Another name you don't hear much today is Ebenezer which, until Charles Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol, may well have been a more common name than it is now. I have just finished playing the aforesaid Scrooge in a production alongside my friend Peter Purves who was a definitive and magisterial Charles Dickens, telling the story of my character's evolution from miserable skinflint to benevolent old man at the behest of a series of ghosts who show him the error of his ways.

In that respect, it is one of the best ghost stories ever written, especially as the spirits concerned are nudging him in the direction of rectitude. It is one of the stories that we all know so well, but continue to delight in the retelling. I am delighted to report that successive audiences appeared to share that opinion. So, I am now happy to put "Bah Humbug!" behind me and join dear Tiny Tim in saying to you all: "God Bless us, everyone!" Happy Christmas.

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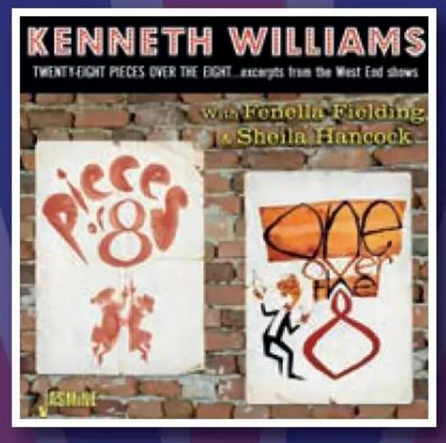
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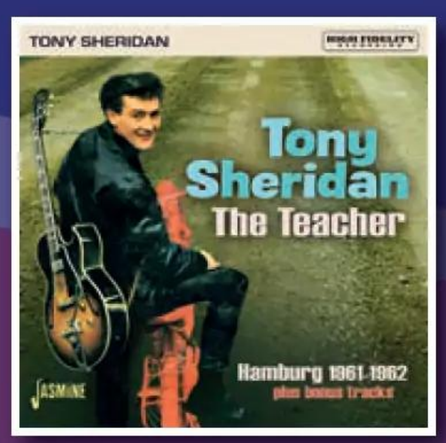
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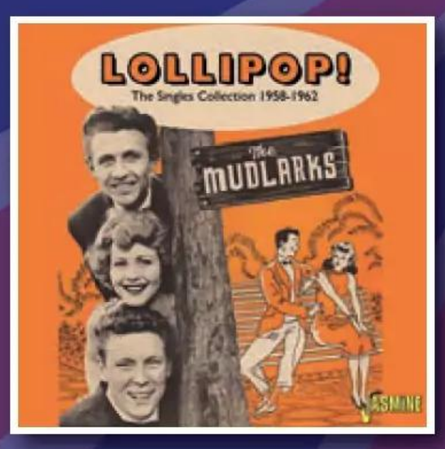
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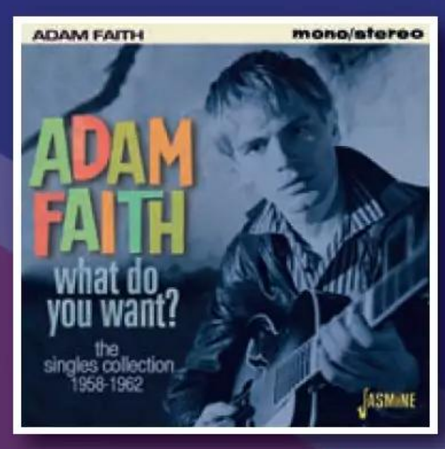
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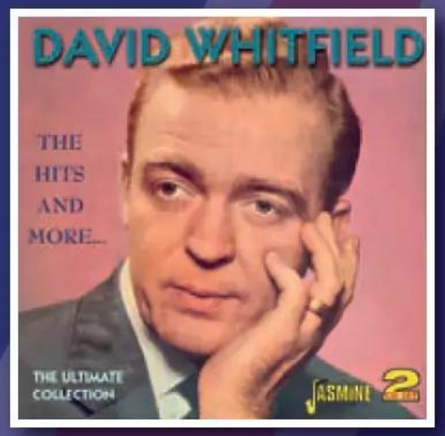
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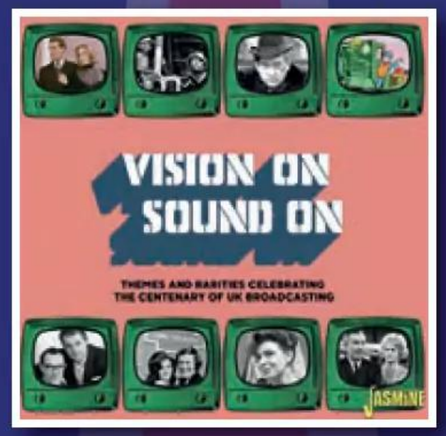
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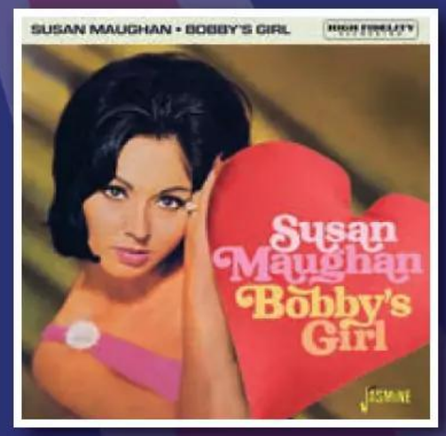
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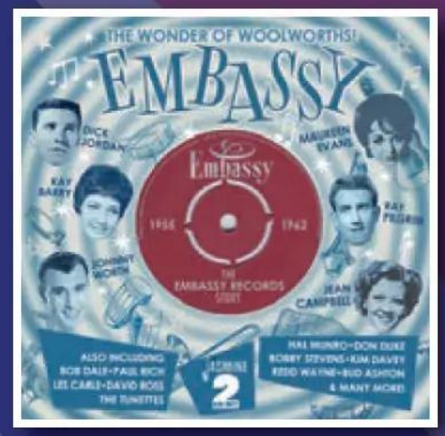
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