

BALLEA WRITERS

Sound Advice for Christmas

By **Dr Mike Whelton:**
President of Ballea Writers

The returned emigrant was hard of hearing. His brother asked him if he ever had the problem checked out.

"Indeed I did," he said. "I saw a specialist in Harley Street. He had a long white beard. Most peculiar, I thought. When I walked into the consulting room he asked me what the problem was and cupped his ear with his hand."

"What's the problem?" I said. "I'm going deaf."

The doctor reached across his desk and shook my hand. "Join the club. How did it happen Old Boy?"

"Can I ask how it happened to you?"

The doctor flexed his arm and crooked his finger. "Shooting. Army. Falklands. And you?"

"Blasting tunnels," I said.

"Building funnels. How interesting. At Harland and Wolfe I presume?"

"No. Tunnels. As in the Blackwall Tunnel."

"Never use them. Claustrophobia. I should do something about it. Maybe see Trickcyclist. What do you think?"

"Sounds like a good idea," I said. "Well that will be that Old Boy," he said as he twiddled his bow tie.

"But doctor I have a ringing in one of my ears."

"That is called Tinnitus," he said. "Don't worry you will soon have it in both ears."

"But what can I do about it?"

"You'll love it as I do. Your own private orchestra. What What. You couldn't wish for better company. Have a good Christmas. Just pay my secretary on your way out."

"And a Ho Ho Ho to you," I said and cupped my ear.



Something of a Mince Up

By **Bernadette Branagh-Hegarty**

"A few mince pies, a few mince pies, a few mince pies for John," Betty sang as she inched her way along the icy footpath. She carried a package wrapped in Christmas paper in one hand and patted her new hair-do with the other.

My home baking will be a treat to the widower, and I've such a light touch with pastry, she thought. My mince pies are marvellous. They are bound to be superior to what his late wife Mary, God rest her, could have made for him.

Since Mary had passed away John had become a recluse. He lived alone in a dark and dreary house.

But Betty had made up her mind that it was time for changes and the tarot cards had promised her romance this Christmas. And about time too, she thought. It wasn't natural for the two of them to be on their own forever, and hadn't John and she known each other since schooldays. If only Mary hadn't come to the town to work when she did, Betty thought. She was so distracted by her thoughts that she nearly slipped off the pavement.

Light was streaming out of John's house and into the street. Betty peered in the window holding onto the wall for support. She was astonished to see a gaily-decorated Christmas tree in the front room. A couch was pulled over in front of a roaring fire. It illuminated bewitching flickers of movement on the couch. Gripping a stem of Virginia creeper she leaned further into the window and craned her neck to see the reflections in the mirror above the fireplace.

"Glory be to God, what is that? I must need new glasses. It can't be John on the couch kissing that redhead. I've seen her before the bitch. She's the widow Flaherty who's just moved home from America."

Betty lost her footing and let out a scream as she wobbled on her perch. She swung precariously to and fro, trying to regain her balance. The branch snapped and Betty fell down.

She hit the ground in a hail of her own minced pies.



Classified Adverts: Jerusalem Star

by **Michael Mernagh** of Ballea Writers

Accommodation Wanted urgently by young couple up from the country. Wife heavily pregnant. Arriving in Jerusalem late on 24th December. Room with heating preferred. All offers considered. Replies please to Joe and Mary Carpenter.

2. Three foreign Astrophysicists travelling from the East require a good geositional satellite navigation system. Must be able to function accurately in cloudy conditions. Will pay well (in gold). Replies please to Prof. Casper, Prof. Melchior or Prof. Balthazar. Arriving 6th January.

3. Missing Child. Up from the country. Twelve-years-old. Very courteous and well spoken. Last seen in the city during recent celebrations. May be sleeping rough. Possibly frightened, cold and hungry. Mother and father distraught. Replies please to the local Centurion station.

4. Lost: Small Lamb. Family pet. Very temperamental. Willful. Selfish. Lazy. Woolly-headed. Skittish. Bullies other sheep. Voracious appetite. Follows anyone. Sorely missed by caring owner. Please contact local animal rescue centre with news of any sightings. Generous reward promised.

5. Have you seen this man? City Council warns of contact with a rabble-rouser of idiosyncratic ideology. Provocative ideas: claims to perform healings and other impossibilities. Travels with a gang of undesirables. Be on your guard at all times and avoid approach from this man. He could be dangerous if challenged. All information to Their Excellencies Chief Councillors Annas and Caiphas.

6. Take Note that I, Zaccheus, ex-debt enforcer and collector of taxes, hereby cancel all monies formally due to me. If I overcharged or underpaid you, I will refund any such monies at four times the difference. Widow's assured of proper family income assistance. Under my instruction, my foremen now give training and work in my vineyards to unemployed persons. Travellers to my home treated kindly: may break journey, wash, relax, be well fed, and all at my hospitality. New platform sandals and silk togas for every visitor.



Lapland: An Experience of One's Lifetime

By **Bernadette Branagh-Hegarty**

"Kate, Kate, wake up, you'll miss the plane."

Kate awoke with a start. She couldn't believe she had slept late when she was supposed to be up early to travel to Lapland. Usually she had no trouble dressing herself but today she was so excited that she needed help to lace her red boots.

It was a frosty morning and she shivered with excitement as she got into the car to take her to the airport. But wedged between Rob and Sally, the six-year-old twins, she soon warmed up.

"Kate," she heard. "Its Molly, are you going to Lapland as well?"

Kate turned round to find that a friend from her old school was standing behind her at the flight gate.

They screamed in excitement, grabbed hands and didn't let go until the plane had landed. "Look Molly, snow. And a sleigh. And husky dogs. I can't wait to ride on a sleigh. Bags I sit up front with the driver."

The sleigh whooshed over the snow to the Elves' workshop where little folk of all sizes in multi-coloured garments sawed and hammered and glued and painted. One little old elf with a wizened face kept winking at Kate and making her giggle.

"Isn't he naughty, Molly?" she said. "But I like him."

At Santa's house, Santa and Mrs. Claus came to the door to welcome them. Santa had twinkly blue eyes that reminded Kate of her Granddad. The resemblance made her sad because her Granddad had died and she missed him terribly.

Rob and Sally sat on Santa's lap but Kate felt she was a bit too old for that.

Back home that night it was an exhausted Kate who started to get ready for bed.

"Did you have a good day Kate?" The care assistant asked her as she helped her off with her red boots.

"Oh it was wonderful and my grandchildren enjoyed it too."

