

12 Christmas in many of his novels. Lillian recalled, in particular, the scene of the wedding in Dingley Dell on Christmas Eve.

After this breath-taking introduction, Lillian came to her own Christmas memories. With no television and no wireless, Christmas started on Stir-up Sunday, when Lillian and other members of her family sat down to take the stones out of the raisins. When there were 20 stones on the plate she could eat one raisin. The family had never heard of turkey and chicken was expensive. Meat was rabbit or pork. Decorations were evergreens and paper chains, homemade with paste.

On Boxing Day the family walked to the grandparents at Riverdale, where, on arrival, the first job was to dig the horse radish, then wash it under the pump and scrape it, with much weeping! At River they had beef for dinner. Grandfather always said grace - at least twice - and, one year, three times! Rhubarb wine was the only potent drink. The Christmas pudding was filled with thrupenny bits and there was cake! Afterwards there were games like tippet, snakes and ladders, ludo and draughts, then the long walk home.

On the day after Boxing Day everyone descended on Lillian's family. There were more games: spin the plate and many card games. They had one bottle of port wine and one bottle of sherry. They never had many presents. There was not enough money for presents.

She remembered Christmases in school, Christmases with friends, and one Christmas which she spent alone and ate a tin of sardines. She felt that, in a way, television has spoiled Christmas. People do not play as many games together on Christmas Day. Nowadays cards and letters constitute one of the joys of Christmas. After reflecting on the meaning of Christmas and what it means to different people, Lillian ended by reading John Betjamen's popular Christmas poem.

John Gerrard, in giving his vote of thanks to Lillian, reminded us that he lived, for many years, at the foot of her garden and that at Christmas time, when she could see the lights from the Gerrard's tree, she referred to them as "the fairies at the bottom of the garden".

THE DECEMBER MEETING

The Christmas Feast

By Valerie Mason

AGAIN THIS YEAR the Christmas Feast was a highlight of December as members of the Society gathered in the refectory of Dover College. At the start of the proceedings our two guests, the Town Mayor, Margaret Sansum, and Councillor Tranter, were officially welcomed by our chairman, Jeremy Cope.

We very much enjoyed the splendid spread prepared by the catering staff of the college - a wide choice of meats and fish with delicious salads. The desserts were certainly topical, some in the shape of the Millennium Dome, and much appreciated by the chocoholics among us.

While we were enjoying our coffee, Terry Sutton and Derek Leach, our two Vice-Chairmen, were busy selling raffle tickets. Our thanks go to them and to Sheila Cope for organising the raffle and to all those who donated prizes. Where would societies like ours be without the proceeds of raffles?

We were very grateful to Mike Aylen who stepped in at the last minute to accompany the carol singing so ably on his accordion. It was quite tricky playing "The Twelve Days of Christmas" with different tables singing for the various days. Our other accompanist, Lillian Kay on the wineglasses, added to the festive feel of the occasion. Our thanks to Nicholas who encouraged us all to sing heartily.

Such an enjoyable evening is not possible without a lot of hard work beforehand. I know that all those present would like to thank Joan and Dick Liggett.