

Editor's Chin-wag

Wow. I don't know about you, but this holiday season sneaked up on me. Downside? Totally unprepared. Upside? The season of cheer is here, so in that spirit, I am dedicating the bulk of this issue to the topic as it relates to our beloved British comedies.

Christmas "specials" and themed episodes have always been a staple of the Britcom genre – and we will celebrate them here in this issue. But going a little further, I wanted to allocate part of the issue to the history behind traditional English Holiday customs to promote a greater understanding of their terminology and background – often surfacing in Britcom episodes.

Additionally, for those Britcom fanatics (like me) who would like to incorporate some English tradition, in whole or in part, to your holiday celebrations, I have included some recipes for some traditional English holiday pies, cakes and puddings and side dishes along with resources for finding the many of the trimmings to make the experience authentic.

So I hope you enjoy this installment that I am dubbing a "Very British Christmas." Safe and happy holidays to all!"

N. Scott Jones, Editor

**To The Manor Born:
In a Class of Its Own**

To the Manor Born aired on BBC1 from 1979 to 1981, starring Penelope Keith and Peter Bowles, and received high audience figures for many of its episodes. In 2004, it came 21st in *Britain's Best Sitcom*. The first 20 episodes were written by Peter Spence, the creator, and the 1981 finale by Christopher Bond, the script associate. The BBC have confirmed that *To the Manor Born* will return for a one-hour Christmas special in 2007.

In *To the Manor Born* Penelope Keith, who had become famous for playing Margo Leadbetter in the suburban sitcom *The Good Life*, plays Audrey fforbes-Hamilton, an upper-class woman who, upon the death of her husband, has to move out of her beloved manor house. The manor is then bought by Richard DeVere, played by Peter Bowles, a nouveau riche millionaire supermarket owner. DeVere and fforbes-Hamilton have a love-hate relationship which is eventually resolved in the 1981 finale, in which they marry.



*Penelope Keith and Peter Bowles
Central Characters in To the Manor Born*

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***Ronnie Hazlehurst, who wrote many
of our favorite comedy theme tunes
has died aged 79***

His death came following a stroke he suffered this October. According to the *BBC* website, he died in hospital in Guernsey, where he moved to ten years ago from Hendon, north London and had undergone a heart bypass operation last October.

The Manchester-born composer was formerly a musical director at the BBC, and penned the themes to *Yes, Minister*, *The Two Ronnies*, *Are You Being Served?* and *Some Mothers Do 'Ave Em*. The BBC's head of comedy, Jon Plowman, said: "He was the composer of many of the best-loved signature tunes of the last 40 years of television - and some of his work is still heard today. He's associated with some of the best-loved shows of our lives," he added.

A musical innovator, Ronnie often applied novel twists to these themes; one example is that he used a piccolo to spell out the title to *Some Mothers Do 'Ave Em* in Morse code! "I wouldn't prostitute a tune, to bend it every which way to fit the title," he once said, "but if I can make it so, I do".

Ronnie was also musical director of the Eurovision Song Contest three times, and famously conducted the UK entry in 1977 using a rolled-up umbrella! In 1999, he received a Gold Badge award from the British Academy of Composers and Songwriters. Ronnie Hazlehurst, we salute you!



The Insider welcomes all correspondence, story ideas and requests for contributed articles. Send letters via e-mail to Editor N. Scott Jones at scott@bbcinsider.net or by snail mail to: The Insider, c/o Kate Livo, BBC Worldwide Americas, Sixth Floor 747 3rd Avenue, New York, NY. 10017 - 2803. All letters are assumed to be for publication unless marked otherwise. The Insider reserves the right to edit letters for reasons of space or clarity. Let us know what you think!

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News, Trivia & Naughty Bits



Heard on the Grapevine

Okay, okay...not the "grapevine" – I know this for a FACT.

Most *PBS* stations will begin their spring pledge drives in the March and April timeframe (please no eye-rolling, it is important). And if you are reading this newsletter, it is highly probable that your local station, and viewers like you, support British comedies in your *PBS* market.

WELL, despair not with the pledge breaks because a new treat is likely heading your way in the form of a new pledge special built around the widely popular Britcom *Keeping Up Appearances!*

Hosted by Geoffery Hughes, who portrayed our favorite lay-about Onslow in the series, viewers are in for treat with discussions about the episodes, behind the scenes perspectives and character insights.

I admit some bias in that *KUA* is one of my top favorites of all Britcoms. I have ADMITTED to owning a full set of "Royal Doulton with hand-painted periwinkles." Wouldn't it be nice if you had the same tea cup set in YOUR hand as you watched the special? Yes, my offer is renewed to share a set with anyone who would like to write a short article about their favorite Britcom for this newsletter. (See details on page 9).

Well, look forward to the spring issue of *The Insider* where we will feature in-depth coverage of this new and exciting pledge special.



ViewerPoints: From and For Viewers Like YOU

Grace and Favour aka Are Being Served? AGAIN



Although it only produced a two series, 12 episode run reuniting many of our favorite department store characters, the idea of a spin-off was originally suggested by the cast of *Are You Being Served?* almost immediately after the original series ended in 1985. Writers Lloyd and Croft liked the idea, but agreed that the department store format was exhausted, and any spin-off would require a change of location. Despite the enthusiasm of the original cast, it would be almost seven years before Lloyd and Croft brought them back to television.

The plotline that brought the cast from the store to the manor was considered remarkably topical, since it aired just a few months after the death of British publishing tycoon Robert Maxwell, who was revealed to have borrowed heavily against his own employees' pensions. *Grace and Favour* was different from *Are You Being Served?* in that it involved a continuous story arc, with the plot unfolding over several episodes. Some episodes, within the timeline of the show, begin almost immediately after the previous episode ends. This device allowed Lloyd and Croft to craft more complex storylines and subplots than were allowed in *Are You Being Served?* and allowed guest characters to make return appearances.

Out of the cast of the original series when it ended, only Mike Berry (Mr. Spooner) chose not to return. Though Mollie Sugden had met with limited success in

her own television serial *Come Back Mrs. Noah* she agreed to reprise her popular role of Mrs. Slocombe. Wendy Richard, successful since the original *Are You Being Served?* as Pauline Fowler in *EastEnders*, returned as Miss Brahms. Also returning to their roles were John Inman, who played the effeminate Mr. Humphries, Frank Thornton, who played the floorwalker Captain Peacock, and Nicholas Smith as the former head of the department, Cuthbert Rumbold.

Several new repeat characters were added to the show. Joanne Heywood as Miss Lovelock, Billy Burden as farmer Maurice Moulterd, and Fleur Bennett as his daughter, Mavis, all made appearances in each episode. Michael Bilton, as Mr. Grace's solicitor, Mr. Thorpe, and his assistant, Miss Prescott, played by Shirley Cheriton also held key roles in several episodes.

The new series has the elderly and womanizing Young Mr. Grace, head of Grace Brothers Department Store, recently deceased. He has died while scuba-diving on holiday in the Caribbean with his personal secretary, Miss Jessica Lovelock. As per the instructions in his will, the remaining workers at Grace Brothers' closing sale (coincidentally, most of the staff who were present in the original series) are named co-beneficiaries in his will.

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BritCom Holidays: Moments in Pictures



bbc.co.uk/comedy/christmas



**ViewerPoints
In The Post**



Dear Insider,

I just read your piece on my favorite British comedy "May to December" and I have a question I have been trying to get an answer to ever since I watched the series. What ever happened to the original Zoe Angel? The red headed actress who played the part was perfect and I couldn't see the next gal in the part at all, although I did get used to her.

I would like to know the name of the first actress as well, if possible to find out if she ever did any other comedic roles.

Thank you very much,

**Judith R.
Somewhere in America**

Judith,

The general consensus is that Eve Matheson did not want to be tied to a series long term from a career perspective. She is widely regarded as an accomplished stage actress. Near the conclusion of the second series, it is believed she was offered a role by the National Theatre in a production of King Lear and opted to take the part. I hope this helps. Scott

Scott,

Thank you for sending me the Summer issue of *The Insider*. I am so glad I didn't miss this one because it has info on all of my favorites! My PBS station said I received it before they did!

**Jean U.
Somewhere in America**

You are welcome Jean. Feedback and support from readers like you are what keep this newsletter going. Cheers! Scott

British Holiday Traditions, Terms and Their History

You've Seen Them in Your Favorite Britcom

What Does That Mean and When Did it Start?

Ever wonder what a “panto” is? Christmas pudding? Where did Christmas crackers originate? Who is “Father Christmas?” Mulled wine and mince pies anyone? We seek to enlighten and decode English Christmas traditions for our Britcom lovers. Enjoy this stroll through tradition, food and history.



Traditional Father Christmas

Father Christmas or Santa Claus?

In the United Kingdom the traditions are quite similar to those of Australia, North America and New Zealand, and all other commonwealth traditions as they stemmed from Britain. Christmas is very special to many Britons, as it is a mainly religious festival, which everyone can enjoy. The Christmas season starts at Advent, where holly wreaths are made with three pink and one purple candle, however many shops sell Christmas decorations beforehand, and lasts until January 6, as it is considered bad luck to have Christmas decorations up after this date.

On Christmas Eve, presents are delivered in stockings and under the Christmas tree by Father Christmas, who previously had been something like The Ghost of Christmas Present in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, but is now become mainly conflated with Santa Claus. The two names are now used interchangeably and equally known to British people, but Father Christmas tends to be used more often, and some distinctive features still remain. Most notably, a hood versus a hat, and the history of the character traced back hundreds of years.

Traditional Christmas Events and Activities

Most know that many of our American holiday traditions found their roots from our UK and continental European ancestors and neighbors. Some were adopted in total, and some evolved. Despite this heritage, there are still many holiday traditions in England that didn't make the trip to America, or developed there after the Revolutionary War. In any event, viewers of British comedies always detect both the subtle and not so subtle differences during various Christmas specials and episodes. Moreover, some often scratch their heads at both the slang and formal terminology applied to these differences. In this section we will cover traditional events and activities around Christmas Eve and Christmas Day – with a section following focusing on the traditional food items and other culinary fare that make the holiday truly British.

Normally, it is cold, wet, and foggy in England at Christmastime. Families welcome the warmth and cheer of a Yule log blazing on the hearth. They decorate their homes with holly, ivy, and other evergreens and hang a mistletoe "kissing bough."

Throughout the holidays, carolers go from house to house at twilight ringing handbells and singing Christmas songs. "The Holly and the Ivy" and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" are English favorites. People give the carolers treats, such as little mince pies (see recipes article in this edition).

The day before Christmas is very busy for families in England. They wrap presents, bake cookies, and hang stockings over the fireplace. Then everyone gathers around the tree as someone tells the favorite story, *A Christmas Carol*.

After hearing their favorite Christmas story, children write a letter to Father Christmas with their wishes. They toss their letter into the fire so their wishes can go up the chimney. After the children fall asleep on Christmas Eve, Father Christmas comes to visit. He wears a long, red robe, carries a sack of toys, and arrives on his sleigh pulled by reindeer. He fills the children's stockings with candies and small toys. Alternatively, children who wish to mail their letters to Father Christmas can do so. In England, those addressed to Father Christmas are sent to the post office in Edinburgh – those addressed to Santa Claus at the North Pole are sent there, because the place in fact exists.

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On Christmas Day, everyone sits down to the midday feast and finds a colorful Christmas cracker beside their dinner plate. A Christmas cracker is a paper-covered tube. When the end tabs are pulled, there is a loud crack. Out spills a paper hat to wear at dinner, small trinkets, and a riddle to read aloud to everyone at the table.

History of British Christmas Crackers

Christmas Cracker is a brightly colored paper tube, twisted at both ends. There is a banger inside the cracker and when it is pulled by two people, the cracker snaps in half making a loud bang. Inside there is a paper crown made from tissue paper (see photo on left), a joke on a slip of paper and a little gift.

Christmas crackers were invented by Thomas Smith in 1846. During a visit to Paris he came across the bonbon, a sugar almond wrapped in tissue paper (with a twist either side of the centrally placed sweet). Thomas decided to try selling similarly wrapped sweets in the lead up to Christmas in England. His bon-bons sold well at Christmas but not at other times of the year.

In the early 1850s Thomas came up with the idea of including a motto with the sweet. As many of his bon-bons were bought by men to give to women, many of the mottos were simple love poems.

In about 1860, Thomas added the banger, two strips of chemically impregnated paper that made a loud noise on being pulled apart. At first these novelties were called 'cosaques', but they soon became known as 'crackers'.

Unfortunately for Thomas, his 'cracker' idea was copied by other manufactures and so he decided to replace the sweet with a surprise gift.

When Thomas died his two sons took over the business. The paper hat was added to the cracker the early 1900s and by the end of the 1930s the love poems had been replaced by jokes or limericks.

The family enjoys a feast of turkey with chestnut stuffing, roast goose with currants, or roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Brussels sprouts are likely to be the vegetables. Best of all is the plum pudding topped with a sprig of holly. Brandy is poured over the plum pudding and set aflame. Then family members enjoy a dramatic show as it is carried into the dining room.

Whoever finds the silver charm baked in their serving has good luck the following year. The wassail bowl, brimming with hot, mulled wine, tops off the day's feast. It is said that all quarrels stop when people drink wassail.

After dinner, the family gathers in the living room to listen to the Queen of England deliver a message over radio and television. At teatime in the late afternoon, the beautifully decorated Christmas cake is served.

The day after Christmas is called Boxing Day. This day has nothing to do with fighting. Long ago, people filled church alms boxes with donations for the poor. Then on December 26, the boxes were distributed. Now people often use this day to give small gifts of money to the mail carrier, news vendor, and others who have helped them during the year.

Beginning on Boxing Day, families can enjoy stage performances called pantomimes. This activity originally meant a play without words, or actors who mimed or entertained without speaking. Pantomime now refers to all kinds of plays performed during the Christmas season. Such familiar children's stories as "Cinderella" and "Peter Pan" delight young and old alike. In some towns, masked and costumed performers called mummers present plays or sing carols in the streets. These "pantos" traditionally run from Boxing Day through two to three months at major and community theaters around the country.

John Inman (*Are You Being Served?*) was a beloved regular during the pantomime season for decades as the "dame" in various productions. These plays, along with "puds," "crackers," "pantos," "mulled wine," and other references appear throughout most of our favorite British comedies. Most have a unique history and are steeped in British tradition.

If YOU would like to add a touch of traditional British flair to the upcoming holiday season, we urge you to read the related article in this issue: *Traditional English Holiday Recipes*. There you will find a guide to preparing some of the oft mentioned traditional favorites that are both part of English tradition and our favorite British comedies. Happy cooking!



To The Manor 'Reborn' Christmas Special in the Works

Filming has begun on the new one-off Christmas special episode of To the Manor Born, the episode which is reuniting the cast of the hit sitcom for the first time in 26 years.

The show is set to star Penelope Keith and Peter Bowles as aristocratic Audrey Fforbes-Hamilton and millionaire businessman Richard Devere, as they celebrate their silver wedding anniversary. The episode joins the couple as a major event threatens to disturb life at the estate and Audrey, with the help of school friend Marjory, goes into battle to defend the community.

Filming on the new episode began at Cricket St Thomas Manor House in October. The production is expected to be on location at the Somerset village, which was also the setting for the original series, for about a week.

Frances Pardell, spokesman for Warner Leisure Hotels which acquired the manor in 1999, told the local newspaper: "There will be some disturbance, but we will ensure that there is minimal disruption for our guests. The guests are the hotel's priority but I think a lot of people are excited they are here at the same time as filming - we had 50 people watching on the first day."

To the Manor Born, which started life as a BBC Radio 2 series, was broadcast on television between 1979 and 1981. The sitcom followed the story of the once wealthy Audrey fforbes-Hamilton who is forced to sell her stately home to supermarket owner Richard DeVere. She tries to teach him 'nobility' whilst coming to terms with her own reduced status as his tenant.

Millions tuned in to watch romance slowly blossom between the unlikely couple. In fact, To the Manor Born was the fourth most watched TV series in the 1970s. The final episode, in which Richard and Audrey finally got married, was seen by a massive 24 million viewers making it the second most watched British sitcom episode of all time (beaten only by the 1996 Only Fools and Horses special).

The new special, To the Manor Reborn, will be shown this Christmas on BBC1.



BritQuotient Trivia ANSWERS

The Thin Blue Line

In *The Thin Blue Line*, what is the actor's name who played a junior CID officer and went on to star in the US sitcom *Still Standing*?

ANSWER: Mark Addy

In a number of episodes, DI Grim is always on about his wife – what is her name?

ANSWER: Tina

Insp. Fowler has a creed that describes the perfect police officer, including being regular of what?

ANSWER: Bowel

In one episode, Insp. Fowler's son comes to stay for a fortnight – what is his son's name?

ANSWER: Bill

James Dreyfus, the actor who played the hapless Constable Goody, went on to replace Ardal O'Hanlon in what currently running Britcom?

ANSWER: My Hero

Name the town in which the police station in the series is located.

ANSWER: Gasforth

Name the character in which Insp. Fowler had a high school crush on, and still goes goofy when she appears.

ANSWER: The town's Mayoress

Series Profile

My Family



Created by American Fred Barron, *My Family* is about the fictional Harper family, and stars Robert Lindsay and Zoë Wanamaker as Ben and Susan Harper, a middle-class couple who live in Chiswick, West London. Their three children, Nick, Janey and Michael are played by Kris Marshall, Daniela Denby-Ashe and Gabriel Thomson. In later series more characters appear including Ben's cousin Abi (Siobhan Hayes), Ben's fellow dentist Roger Bailey (Keiron Self) and Nick's friend Alfie (Rhodri Meilir).

My Family is about the life of the Harpers, a fictional English family. Ben is a dentist, and Susan, a tour guide who later works for an art gallery have three children, all of whom cause problems in their own way. While Susan is a control freak, Ben prefers to leave the children to it and tries not to get involved. Janey later goes to University, but drops out and moves back in later, while Nick finally gets his own place. In the third series, Abi Harper, the daughter of Ben's cousin, comes to live with them, and she eventually falls for Roger, Ben's neighboring dentist. The humor, like most domestic sitcoms, derives from the relationships of the family members and the situations they end up in.

The main characters in *My Family* are parents Ben and Susan Harper. One child, Nick, is a regular character until the 2003 Christmas special, and makes one appearance in 2004's fifth series before making his final *My Family* appearance in the 2005 Comic Relief short as actor Kris Marshall wanted to do other projects and avoid being type-cast. Janey is a regular until the 2002 Christmas special and does not appear in Series Four (2003), while the character is at University. Janey returns as a main character in Series Five.

Abi Harper first appears in Series Three as the daughter of Ben's cousin Richard. Series Three also see the first appearance of Roger Bailey, Jr. Roger, who becomes a main character in the fourth series, is a dentist and the son of Ben's former mentor. In the 2005 Christmas special Alfie Butts, a friend of Nick's, moves into the Harper household.

My Family also features several recurring characters. In the first series Ben's dental assistant is Brigitte. In the second series "Stupid" Brian appears as Janey's boyfriend. Series Four features played Fiona, Michael's girlfriend. That series also sees the introduction of Hubert, a friend of Michael's, and Grace Riggs, Susan's mother, both of whom appears in subsequent series.

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The first episode aired on September 19, 2000, and seven series have so far been aired with six specials, including four Christmas specials. The seventh series ended on June 8, 2007. A Christmas special will air in 2007. The eight series filmed from September through November of this year with a ninth planned to begin filming in March, 2008.

The BBC and UKTV refuse to re-broadcast the series four episode "Blind Justice" due to an upheld Ofcom complaint. Although no reason was given, it is likely that was considered offensive to blind people. This episode is banned from British TV, but it is still on the Series Four UK DVD release and has been screened on BBC America.

The episodes are recorded in front of a live audience in Pinewood Studios, Iver, Buckinghamshire, except where the set used is too large, this is then filmed, and played out to an invited audience 'as-live'. Also, the show, unlike most British sitcoms but in common with most American television comedies, has no location footage.



Call For Contributed Articles

Yes, I am at it again! Once again I am asking all you suppressed writers and lovers of British comedies to submit a contributed article on your favorite British comedy. What's in it for you, you ask ??? Well once again I have obtained an actual cup and saucer from England in the notorious Hyacinth Bucket's "Royal Doulton with hand-painted periwinkles."

You have seen it, heard about it and you know you love it from the British comedy hit *Keeping Up Appearances*. This cup and saucer, along with a small tin of Earl Grey will go to the writer whose submission is selected to run in the next issue of *The Insider*.

So don't be shy. 500-700 words on your fave comedy could get you in the social strata of the Bucket residence! Deadline for submission is February 15, 2008.



Editor's Note: All submissions become the property of *BBC Worldwide Americas* for its unrestricted use, and free of copyright. Submissions selected are at the sole discretion of *BBC Worldwide Americas* and editors of *The Insider*.

Actor Profile in Depth

Molly Sugden: The Lady Behind The Multi-Colored Hair



Mary Isobel “Molly” Sugden (born July 21, 1922), is best known for playing Mrs. Slocombe in the popular and long running British sitcom *Are You Being Served?* from 1972 to 1985. She later reprised this role for *Grace & Favour*, which ran from 1992 to 1993. Sugden has also appeared in *The Liver Birds* and *Coronation Street*.

Mary Isobel Sugden was born in Keighley in Yorkshire in 1922. When she was four years old, she heard a woman reading a poem at a village concert and making people laugh. The following Christmas, after being asked if she could "do anything", Sugden read this poem and everyone fell about laughing. She later remarked that their response made her "realize how wonderful it was to make people laugh". Shortly after she left school, the Second World War broke out, and Sugden worked in a munitions factory in Keighley making shells for the Royal Navy. However, she was later made redundant so she attended the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

When Sugden graduated from the Guildhall School of Drama, she worked in rep for eight years with a company that included Eric Sykes and Roy Dotrice. She also had work in radio and made her television debut in a live half-hour comedy show. Sugden's other appearances before *Are You Being Served?* included parts in *Benny Hill*, *Just Jimmy*, *Z-Cars*, *Up Pompeii!*, *The Goodies*, *Steptoe and Son* and five episodes of *Jackanory* in 1968. Later in 1973, she had a 23 week stint on *That's Life!* and also appeared in *Son of the Bride*.

Mollie Sugden's first regular sitcom role was from 1962 to 1966 when she played Mrs. Crispin in the sitcom *Hugh and I*. *Hugh and I* was written by John Chapman and when he got involved with *The Liver Birds*, he suggested Sugden for the role of Sandra's mother, Mrs. Hutchinson. She portrayed Mrs. Hutchinson from 1971 to 1979, and years later in 1996, when *The Liver Birds* was revived Sugden reprised the role, despite being on steroids at the time due to suffering from polymyalgia.

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However, Sugden's big break that gave her nationwide fame was the part of Mrs. Slocombe in the popular and long running *Are You Being Served?* that ran from 1972 to 1985. In 1978, when it was thought that *Are You Being Served?* was over, she was the lead star in *Come Back Mrs. Noah*, a sitcom that is regarded by some as one of the worst ever made. From 1965 to 1976, she intermittently played Nellie Harvey, the land-lady of The Laughing Donkey pub, in *Coronation Street*. In this she often appeared opposite Annie Walker, landlady of the Rovers Return.

Mollie Sugden also played main roles in other sitcom, including *That's My Boy*, that ran from 1981 to 1986 and *My Husband and I*. *My Husband and I* ran from 1987 to 1988 and she played opposite her husband William Moore, who she married on March 29, 1958 having met him at Swansea rep. They had twin sons, Robin and Simon. Moore died in 2000.

Seven years after the end of *Are You Being Served?*, five of the original cast came together, including Sugden, and made *Grace & Favour*, where the staff are left a manor house in the country, which they have to live in. This lasted for two series until 1993. Other recent appearances include *Just William*, *Oliver's Travels* and *The Bill*. Sugden has also made a cameo appearance in *Little Britain*, where a regular character always claimed to have been Mollie Sugden's bridesmaid, eventually throwing a knife at her back after Sugden revealed that her only bridesmaid was someone else. In 2002 a tribute program called *Celebrating Mollie Sugden: An Are You Being Served? Special* aired on American PBS stations featuring many of the *Are You Being Served?* cast.



To The Manor Born (Continued from page 1)

Peter Spence first thought of the idea behind *To the Manor Born* in the early 1970s when he was working for *BBC Radio* as a gag writer. One of the programs that Spence wrote for featured a Cockney comedian, who had recently bought a manor house in an English country village. When holding a housewarming party, the comedian invited the previous occupant, a widow who could not afford to keep the house up and had moved to a smaller house in the village. The comedian's account of the lady, and the conversation he had with her, Spence later described as a "perfect description" of Audrey.

A few years later, following the success of *The Good Life*, Spence was asked by *BBC Radio* to come up with an idea for a program to feature Keith. Thinking of Keith's character in *The Good Life*, Spence had the idea of an upper-class version of Margo Leadbetter, and from the account from the comedian, came up with Audrey fforbes-Hamilton. Instead of a Cockney comedian as the new owner of the manor, Spence decided on an American who sees the manor while in England looking for his roots. The American later discovers he is descended from the fforbes-Hamiltons. This was made into a radio pilot in 1976 with Bernard Braden as the American, but was never broadcast due to the interest to make it into a TV series.

When writing the TV series, Christopher Bond was brought in as the script associate and helped to adapt the series from radio to television. The American character was changed, and the idea of a character who appeared to be an English gentleman but turns out not to be, was thought of. It was then decided that this character needed someone who could reveal his real background, and his mother was created, although it was not until Spence had nearly finished the first series that she was written in from the beginning. The characters of Brabinger and Margery followed soon after. The first episode aired on September 30, 1979, a year after Keith had played Margo Leadbetter for the last time in *The Good Life*.



Are You Being Served? AGAIN (Continued from page 3)

Young Mr. Grace has invested their pension funds in a multitude of antiquated businesses, the largest of which is a country manor house called Millstone Manor. The will stipulates that they can't sell the house and split the profits, but can use the property in the manner of their choosing. After a trip to Millstone Manor to view the property, where they also learn their pensions are minuscule, they decide to live in the manor in order to run it as an inn and live off the proceeds. Miss Lovelock, given accommodations in the grooms quarters and charge of the horses, also lives at the manor much to the distress of Mrs. Slocombe and Miss Brahms. Captain Peacock is not so distressed, however.

The series begins just after the funeral of Mr. Grace, and quickly brings the cast to Millstone Manor. There they find Mr. Rumbold having trouble trying to find new staff after telling the previous staff "in no uncertain terms" that if they didn't straighten up they could leave...and they left. With time running out, the old Grace Brothers employees are obligated to "stand in" for the staff in order to have their picture taken as the inn staff for a travel brochure. Soon they find that they are running the inn themselves with the help of Mr. Moulterd, who manages the manor's farm, and his daughter Mavis, who helps out at the manor.

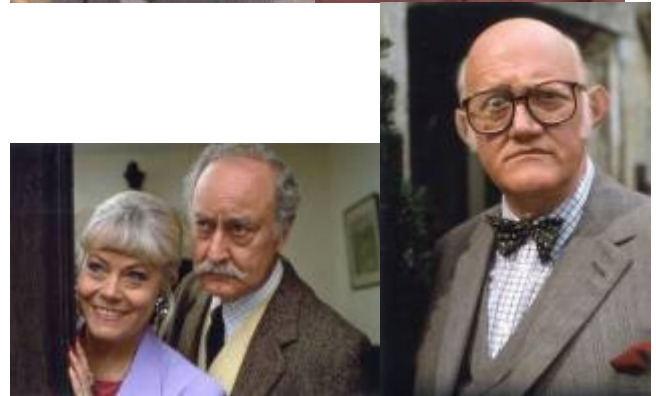
With Mr. Humphries forced by circumstance to share a bed with Mavis, he finds that she develops a bit of a crush on him. This series of events leads all of the cast to assume they are having an affair, which flatters Mr. Humphries, though he denies any such goings-on. Despite these events, Mr. Humphries continues to be rather ambivalent to the idea of a relationship with anyone. A young man from the village vies with Humphries for Mavis' affection, and frequently attempts to intimidate him by threatening him with violence.

On her first day in the country, Mrs. Slocombe tries to move a gypsy's wagon that blocked the road and ends up charged with wagon theft, narrowly avoiding a charge of indecent exposure since there was "just a flash" as the out-of-control wagon raced past the post office. At her trial, all of her colleagues are called as witnesses, but Mr. Moulterd who ends up winning the case for her. Mrs. Slocombe is grateful, despite her irritation that he brings up their sexual relationship during the War, which she insists never happened. Also notable, is the unexpected appearance of the oft alluded to, but never-before-seen Mr. Slocombe, from whom Mrs. Slocombe seeks to hide her identity.

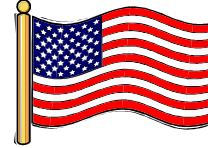
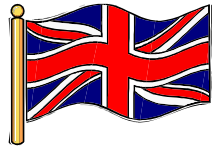
Other events include the staff putting on a traditional harvest festival dance for octogenarian American visitors, and putting on a showcase of British arts and culture for a tour group from Mongolia.

All in all, the series lends itself to a softer, more charming portrayal of the merry band of characters from Grace Brothers department store. While the writing and wit are less biting in the series, maybe due to the country air, that little twinkle of edginess emerges occasionally and reminds us all why the original series was most loved, both in the UK and in America.

As many know, and as covered here in a previous issue, we all mourned the most recent loss from "the department" with the passing of John Inman. Both his character of Mr. Humphries, and Molly Sugden's portrayal of Mrs. Slocombe were integral to the series' successes. These roles reprised in a country setting, *Are You Being Served? AGAIN* is well worth watching and/or owning on DVD in that it offers a nostalgic charm, and fond memories of the original series.



New DVD/Video Releases



Absolutely Fabulous – White Box Release Date: 10/16/2007

Edina and Patsy are back and devastatingly divine in this extra fabulous special, with a hilarious guest appearance by Nathan Lane! Edina has been bitten by the home makeover bug and wants to redecorate the kitchen. The trouble is, she's awfully fuzzy on the specifics. At wit's end, Eddy and Patsy shop for inspiration -- under threat from Saffy to make a decision -- but will they fail and have to resort to redecoration regression therapy?

The regular supporting cast is on hand, as are several guest stars making cameos, including Laurie Metcalf as a charlatan past-life "regressor" and Nathan Lane as a campy decorator. The extras are also notable, including the original skit that launched *Ab-Fab*, and a great behind-the-scenes mini-doc hosted by Saunders. Champas, darlings?

Dr. Who – The Complete Third Series Release Date: 11/6/2007

The third installment of Doctor Who is full of new thrills, new laughs, new heartbreak and some terrifying new monsters. From the moment the Doctor walks into the life of medical student Martha Jones he changes it forever. In Elizabethan London, they meet William Shakespeare at the Globe Theatre while back in present day London, 76-year-old Professor Lazarus recaptures his youth with consequences that threaten Martha's entire family. And, the Doctor's sworn enemies, the Daleks, who have been hiding in 1930's New York, return with a terrifying plan for humanity.

The Vicar of Dibley: A Wholly Happy Ending Release Date: 10/9/2007

Dawn French dons her cassock and collar once more for two very special episodes of *The Vicar of Dibley*, one of the BBC's most popular comedies. It boasts the brilliant comic writing of Richard Curtis (*Love Actually*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*) and a gifted ensemble cast including Emma Chambers (*Notting Hill*) and Richard Armitage (BBC's *Robin Hood*). The Handsome Stranger - Gerry is fed up with all the "townies" buying weekend cottages in Dibley -- that is, until she meets one particularly charming newcomer. Could he be the one? Or is it Gerry's destiny to end up heartbroken in another 6-foot deep puddle? The Vicar in White - After presiding over the marriages of hundreds of other people, it appears Gerry's big day has finally arrived. Appearances can be deceptive, however, especially when the eccentric residents of Dibley are doing the planning!

'Allo 'Allo: Series Six and Seven Release Dates: 11/20/2007, 1/15/2008

The zaniness continues as Rene Artois, a simple man, runs a quiet cafe in Nouvion, France, and his only desire is to keep his trysts with the cafe's two beautiful waitresses secret from his wife. But ever since he was drafted by the Resistance to be hero of all France and was shot dead by the Germans, Rene's life is in constant turmoil. The Germans have captured the British airmen and only Rene can save them. But not before he becomes impaled upon a 20 foot radio tower, disguises himself as the hunchback of Notre Dame, and brokers a clandestine deal involving a solid gold cuckoo clock and the Portrait of the Fallen Madonna with the Big You-Know-Whats. What a tangled web of deceit, distress and double entendre! Will things ever sort themselves out? Find out in the sixth season of this outrageously funny sitcom from the BBC.

Traditional English Holiday Recipes

For the adventurous Britcom fan or Anglophile, we have included some traditional English holiday recipes you may want to try. The shortbread cookies look great, and mince pies were a staple for me growing up, even here in America (definite English heritage in my family though).

Some of the other recipes may be adventurous but for me, experimenting with new recipes and doing something a little special for the season is always an enjoyment. We hope YOU enjoy this traditional fare.

Uncle Bill's Scotch Shortbread Cookies

Makes approximately 48 cookies.

8 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
4 cups butter, softened
2 cups granulated sugar
1 teaspoon almond extract

Preheat oven to 350°F. In a large mixing bowl, sift flour with baking powder and salt.

In a separate mixing bowl, mix together butter, sugar and almond extract; beat until very light and fluffy.

Combine butter mixture with flour and mix by hand until dough is very smooth.

If dough is too hard to handle, refrigerate for about 1/2 hour to chill.

Form dough into 1 inch balls. Place dough balls on un-greased cookie sheets. Flatten to desired thickness, about 1/4 inch thick using the bottom of a drinking glass preferably with a pattern on the bottom.

Bake in preheated 350F oven for 20 minutes or until light golden brown.

DO NOT OVERBAKE.



Mini Mincemeat Pies

Makes 12

Filling

8 oz (about 12 tablespoons) mincemeat

Pastry

8 oz plain flour
Pinch of salt
2 oz butter
2 oz lard or vegetable shortening
1 oz caster sugar
1 egg yolk
A little water

Sift the flour and salt into a mixing bowl. Cut the fat into the flour and rub into a breadcrumb consistency. Mix in the sugar. Beat the egg yolk with 2 tablespoons water and stir in to bind to a fairly firm dough, adding a little more water as necessary. Knead lightly until smooth but do not overwork it. Leave to rest in the refrigerator or cool place for at least 30 minutes before rolling out.

Assembly

Roll out the pastry very thinly, 2.5 mm / 1/8 inch thick. Cut out 12 rounds with a plain or fluted cutter and grease the pastry trays / tins. Place a round in each section of the pastry tray / tin. Prick the bottom of each pie and put a teaspoon of mincemeat in each one. Damp the edges. Cut out 12 more rounds with a smaller cutter, cover the filling in each tart. Press down with the blunt end of the smaller cutter so the lids are secure. Cut a small cross in the centre of each lid to allow steam to escape.

Place the tarts on a baking sheet and bake in a preheated hot oven at 425°F for 12 to 15 minutes or until well risen and golden. Dust generously with icing sugar and serve hot. When cold the tarts can be stored in an airtight container, or frozen.



English Christmas Puddings

Makes two puddings

- 2 cups sultanas (golden raisins)
- 1 1/2 cups raisins (chopped)
- 1 cup prunes (chopped)
- 1 cup mixed peel, chopped (mixed candied fruit)
- 1 lemon, zest of
- 1 orange zest
- 1/2 cup blanched almonds, chopped
- 1 large carrot, grated
- 250 g butter
- 2 cups soft white breadcrumbs
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup plain flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon pumpkin spice
- 4 eggs
- 1/2 cup milk
- 200 ml stout beer (Guinness is OK)
- 50 ml brandy

Grease 2 large pudding basins. Bring two large saucepans of water to the boil with a trivet or rack in the bottom of each. (I actually use two old pottery saucers in the bottom of mine)

Mix all dry ingredients together. Rub butter into dry ingredients with your fingertips, add prepared fruit and grated carrot.

Mix egg, milk, stout, brandy and rinds together. Mix the moist and dry ingredients together. (I find this easier to do with my hands).

Place mixture in basins, allowing a little room at the top of the basins for the puddings to swell. Cover with wax paper, then two thicknesses of aluminum foil. Tie securely with string. Place the puddings into the prepared saucepans-- water should reach halfway up them-- and boil steadily for 5 hours. As the water boils away replace with more boiling water.

On the day the pudding is to be served, boil for 1 hour more. Serve with cream, ice cream, custard or brandy sauce (or all of these!) with a sprig of holly on top.



'Smoking Bishop' aka Mulled Wine

- 5 unpeeled sweet oranges
- 1 large unpeeled grapefruit
- 1/4 lb sugar (a little over 1/2 cup)
- 30 cloves
- 1500 ml strong red wine (2 bottles-about 51 oz)
- 750 ml port wine (1 bottle-about 25.6 oz)

Wash the fruit and bake it on a foil lined baking sheet until it becomes pale brown, turning once.

Heat a large earthenware bowl and add the fruit. Stud each fruit with five cloves.

Add the sugar and the red wine, and store covered in a warm place for about a day. Squeeze the fruit to extract the juice, and strain into a saucepan. Add the port and warm thoroughly, but don't boil.

Serve in heated glasses with or without cinnamon sticks.



Postscript

I hope you enjoyed this holiday filled issues of *The Insider*, mulled wine recipes and all. It was quite a challenge researching the British Christmas traditions and translating them to things you might hear in our British comedies. So much history and so much evolution over time, one struggles where to draw the line on information. It was so interesting, with some dating back to around 650 A.D.

I want to thank Mandy Barrow from the Woodland Junior School in Kent, England for her kind permission to use information from their web site on English Christmas traditions in this issue. So very helpful and much appreciated.

Happy and safe holidays all!

N. Scott Jones, Editor