

Christmas spirit - 1953 style

Twist's Deborah Wain has flicked through the pages of an old school magazine to learn how local young people rated Christmas 63 years ago

Do you love the sparkle of Christmas or do you find yourself identifying with Charles Dickens' Scrooge?

The merits and irritations of the festive season were the focus of a debate in a 1953 edition of the old Chesterfield Grammar School magazine, 'The Cestrefeldian'.

The magazine came our way thanks to Tom Roberts, who was a pupil at the school between 1957 and 1964. It followed publication in last month's *Twist* of extracts recounting life at the town's girls' grammar.

In a short essay 'I Like Christmas', J. Dyson argued that he liked Christmas as "I love excitement, crowds of jolly people, bright lights, cheerful crackling fires, and like Billy Bunter, lots of good things to eat."

Dyson told of the build-up during which time mincemeat is made, puddings stirred and garlands are crafted and hung.

On Christmas Eve, as many relatives gathered at his house, he seemed to enjoy having to sleep on the settee next to an "occupied camp bed".

About Christmas Day itself, he wrote: "The whole house is filled with noise of two different kinds, for our company resolves itself into two categories – the ladies gossip in the dining room, while the men are busy on the sitting room floor playing with my electric train.

"Tea time arrives; the table looks so attractive, almost a pity to disturb. There are crackers to pull and, of course, everything that is Christmassy to eat. What a jolly lot we look; there is Grandpa in his baker's hat and Grandma in her mortar board, reading out their verses. Of course we eat too much; who does not at Christmas?"

In a response entitled 'I Hate Christmas', P.J North had an altogether different view of the celebrations.

He described Christmas as a time of "false goodwill to all men".

"Shops, houses and schools are proclaiming it with brightly-coloured, almost vulgar, garlands and balloons, and overloaded miniature fir trees. All of the shops are crowded by people buying Christmas presents, most of them useless."

North was irked by some of the gifts he received - shoddy home-made ones from "craftless aunts" and especially "Gaudy, multi-coloured colossal ties which would shock even our Atlantic neighbours."

Over-eating at parties and childish parlour games were also on his moan-list and his final rant was aimed at the British weather.

"Instead of the heavy snows and hard frosts portrayed by romantic calendars and cards, Christmas is in reality characterised by vile weather," he concluded.

While the pieces are a nostalgic snapshot of life in the 1950s, some of the sentiments expressed will certainly resonate today!

