

Bookends

Stuck for a present? Might I suggest a couple of books about children and childhood at Christmas.

Mollie Harris, was known to millions as Martha Woodford in BBC's 'The Archers'. Shortly before she died in 1995, she wrote '**Village Christmases**'. It takes us back to her home village of Ducklington between the wars. It's a compilation of seasonal, nostalgic anecdotes, poems, recipes and family photographs, carol-singing, bell-ringing, her sixpence pocket money spent on Christmas presents for the family, a pony trap ride to see her grandparents who lived in the Lodge of Sherborne Park, Christmas trees, fun in the snow, and stockings stuffed with apples, oranges and nuts.

Gervaise Phinn was a school inspector in his beloved Yorkshire Dales, where he was used to being invited to end of term primary school nativity plays. His 2005 book '**A Wayne in a Manger**' is a delightfully and sensitively observed collection of 20 reminiscences of such events. What happens when Mary drops the baby Jesus? What about the innkeeper who invites Mary in, but tells Joseph to get lost? A shepherd forgets his lines, and one of the Three Kings misses his cue.

You could of course treat yourself to Gervaise Phinn's latest collection, '**The Virgin Mary's got Nits**', just published (November 2016); tears of nostalgia, laughter and poignancy. 'Out of the mouths of ...'

All three books are a sheer delight, that you can just pick up, dip into, and put down.

Howard Brayton