

The Conscientious Choirboys

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'The One They Owed' – Fred Greenway's story of three conscientious choirboys.

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With Christmas fast approaching thoughts turn to time-honoured traditions, one being the singing of carols. Ewelme Church once boasted a large choir membership, now sadly dwindled to a handful. Postmaster Fred Greenway's heart-warming story of three conscientious choirboys at Christmas 1950 illustrates the choir's heyday.

Below: Brook Cottages



"About a fortnight before Christmas our Church choir begins its organised carol singing. The choir is a large one of about 40 voices which includes 25 children - boys and girls. The choir travels to outlying farms and country houses by bus which is especially chartered. During this fortnight there may be an odd evening when there is no engagement, and it is on these odd evenings that the boys and girls split up into small sections and do a little itinerant singing of their own.

It was on such an evening that Peter [Harwood] and John and Micky [Smith] sang for Ruth [Billing]. From inside her small cottage, [Brook Cottages] she heard them debating 'what they should give her' and ignoring the other two, John decided on Oh! Come let us adore Him'.

Either they pitched the wrong note or the other two didn't co-operate, for they didn't even complete the first verse. Ruth opened the door and asked them inside to sing. To this they readily agreed, but after a hasty look round decided that 'they would rather sing outside.' From the darkness Ruth heard them debate, and then decide to sing 'Hark! The Herald Angels'. This they sang reasonably well and then followed one verse of 'While Shepherds Watched'.

Ruth from her 'odds' box gave them 9d – (3d each) quickly analysed Peter. They strode off into the darkness to the door of another 'victim', and Ruth knowing of our village 'bush telegraph' sensed that the news of such easy money would quickly spread, and that soon she would have countless repeat performances. And when on the following night she heard three small boys begin 'Oh! Come all ye faithful' she was not surprised. She opened the door to give a further 3d, but her offering was refused! 'That's alright Miss,' said one of them 'that was one we owed from last night.'

'One they owed?' A debt of honour? But Ruth thinks that she is the one who owes the debt. For if 'goodness' is 'worship' this extra carol was something of both'.

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