

CHRISTMAS OVERSEAS

By Detective Inspector Mike Lucas,
Liaison Officer London

By December the cold is really starting to bite and so is the festive season.

The month brings a spate of invitations to various Christmas functions, which is almost on a tit-for-tat basis, because one generally sees the same round of faces at each venue.

The AFP Liaison Office in London is no exception and holds a Christmas function at the Australian High Commission.

Guests include members from all levels from the U.K. police service, mainly from the Metropolitan Police owing to the geographic location, H.M. Customs and the High Commission.

Life is a bit tougher on the home front. The schools only close for three weeks over Christmas and so shopping tends to be concentrated in the two weeks before Christmas and verges on the frantic.

The London shops rise to the occasion grandly and the main shopping streets such as Oxford, Regent and Bond are a blaze of coloured lights and decorations for miles.

Such is the spectacle that tourists and locals join shoppers in thronging the streets just to gaze unashamedly at the display. During the evening the streets are bumper to bumper with



Liaison Officer Mike Lucas (left) and former Senior Liaison Officer Adrien Whiddett

cars, the occupants enjoying the spectacle of the glittering exhibition they have driven miles to see.

One of the larger stores, Selfridges, decorates its 12 main store windows with an animated display for the benefit of children and adults alike. Even I must admit, the trip into town and the struggle through the crowded footpaths with the family, specially to see the window display at Selfridges, is well worth the effort.

Christmas Day itself brings the children up at the usual ungodly hour

The Lucas Children enjoy a white Christmas



to open their presents. Following breakfast there will be telephone calls to relatives and friends in Australia (never mind the cost) and the realisation once again, of not being able to see them as usual. Then it's time to drive to colleagues' houses to celebrate the day together and enjoy the traditional Christmas Day Dinner.

A fire burning in the grate further adds to the old European traditional Christmas feeling that many Australian's feel from their parents' methods of celebrating Christmas Day and as shown on the Christmas Cards of our childhood.

New Year

Trafalgar Square is still the Mecca for New Year's Eve revellers and the fountains nearby are a magnet for some of the more hardy in the crowd.

The common sense and maturity of the AFP liaison officers does not allow them to brave the trip by British Rail to take part in these celebrations. They prefer to limit themselves to the comfort of their own homes for the event.

In the mind of this Liaison Officer, Christmas and New Year in England will be long remembered.