

# DECEMBER

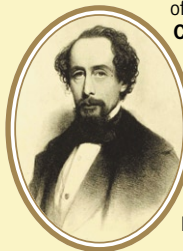
4 December 1937 saw the first issue of **The Dandy**. Despite featuring from the start, **Desperate Dan** only lumbered onto



the front cover in 1984, still shaving with a blow torch and dining on cow pies complete with horns poking through the pastry. 4 December is also the feast of **Saint Barbara**, patron of all who work with explosives. Appropriately enough the **Nobel prizes**, funded by dynamite manufacture, are awarded each December.



The **Christmas Cracker**, invented by Tom Smith in 1847, rapidly developed its traditional contents of paper hat, lame joke and a small toy. The Tom Smith company survived a 1941 air raid and stayed in family ownership until 1998.



Despite his reputation as the entertainer who codified our idea of Christmas, **Charles Dickens** almost always looks glum. **Mr Pickwick**, however, seems to have enjoyed the Christmas festivities at Dingley Dell...



Born on Christmas Day 1899, **Humphrey Bogart** won his only Oscar for *The African Queen*, but is best remembered as the world-weary owner of Rick's Bar in *Casablanca*. Dooley Wilson – in real life a drummer – mimed his piano playing while singing *As Time Goes By*, having been told to 'Play it, Sam – play it for me'.



Larger than life in every way, **Fats Waller**, who died on 15 December 1943, made hundreds of small group jazz recordings during the 1930s. In 1926 he was kidnapped and taken to play as the surprise guest at Al Capone's birthday party. According



to legend, Waller played non-stop for three days. When he finally left he had thousands of dollars in cash given to him by Capone and party-goers as tips.



Born on 16 December 1770, **Ludwig van Beethoven** began to lose his hearing during his twenties, but continued to compose, perform and conduct while totally deaf. Fittingly, the first biopic of his life, made in 1909, was a silent movie...

Forty five years after its first appearance in 1963 – the record had the misfortune to be released on the day of President Kennedy's assassination – **Phil Spector's Christmas Album** still sells to a new audience each year, the 'wall of sound' maintaining its relentless assault on the eardrums.



One of the most frequently painted subjects, the **Nativity** has inspired artists for 2000 years. Mainly the work of the Limbourg brothers, **Les Très Riches Heures** – the greatest illuminated manuscript of the 15th century – was commissioned by Jean, Duc de Berry in 1410.

Winning a power struggle over Leon Trotsky following Lenin's death in 1924, **Josef Stalin**, born in Georgia on 21 December 1879, emerged as the



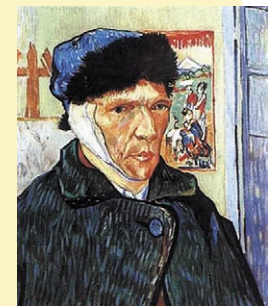
dominant figure of the post-revolution Soviet state. Only after his death in 1953 were the scale and brutality of his crimes revealed.

Born on Christmas Day 1642, **Isaac Newton** described universal gravitation, developed calculus, and formulated his three laws of motion, forming a basis for modern engineering. He built the first practical reflecting telescope and developed a



theory of colour based on the visible spectrum. Newton appeared on the last £1 banknotes, before their replacement by coins.

Following a falling out with Paul Gauguin, **Vincent van Gogh** cut off part of the lobe of



his left ear on 23 December 1888 – the start of a period of mental distress lasting until his death in July 1890.