

NEWS FLASHES

To celebrate the Day of Epiphany (known as Befana Day) Rome goes all gay. The people who come out of it best are (believe it or not) the traffic cops. A traditional character is a very old woman who goes about the town distributing gifts -- yes, it's a proper copper's benefit.

But the kids are not forgotten either. Like Father Christmas, the old woman will come down their chimneys (complete with her broomstick). But only those who have been good in the past year get nice gifts - the rest get coal.

All the kids are wide-eyed with amazement at the heaps of toys but the biggest selection is to be found in the all-night markets. The sights there are enough to make any kid behave himself - for the rest of the year.

Willis Parker, a Californian rancher, receives the first batch of Shetland ponies, the very latest, and smallest, in British exports. The ponies are just the job for the cowboys of tomorrow for even when they're fully-grown they stand only about thirty inches in height. Americans call them living examples of British understatement. Plans are already being made to star these little chaps in American films. It'll make a change for Hollywood - they usually do things in such a big way out there.