This book began from a very simple question, which, like many simple questions, has turned out to have a very complicated, and not entirely clear, answer. That question arose from being introduced to the BBC’s series of dramas from the 1970s that went under the umbrella title of *A Ghost Story for Christmas*. This introduction revived memories of other spectral programmes, and particularly of episodes of ongoing series that were not usually concerned with the supernatural, but which would take on a tinge of horror in those particular episodes. These episodes transpired, from some quick research, to have mostly been originally broadcast at Christmas or Halloween, which led back to the obvious question arising from the *Ghost Story for Christmas* label: why show a ghost story at Christmas? And why does this appear to be a British tradition, with US programmes showing their ‘horror’ episodes at Halloween?

It is not just the BBC that perceived a connection between the ghost story and Christmas, or this would have been a rather different, more focused book. As with so many apparently minor, ‘everyday’ cultural practices, once the notion of their existence has been raised, they start being noticed more regularly. A review of Hilary Mantel’s career by John Mullan notes that Mantel’s fiction ‘often involves what we might call “ghosts”’. These are not the spectres engendered by a special kind of literary entertainment, best tasted at Christmas, but psychological realities’ (2015, p. 4), indicating that there is an association between a particular kind of ghost and Christmas. Anthologist Richard Dalby claimed that ‘Christmas has always been associated with ghosts and chilling tales’, but offered no evidence or argument for why this should be so beyond a claim that, ‘The winter solstice – the darkest time of the year – produced a legacy of folklore and superstitions from early pagan times’
That may well be true, but superstitions and folklore do not mean that people told ghost stories. Granted, Dalby was writing for a general audience, but the fact that he was creating the anthology in which these comments appeared for the general audience, and that it was a follow-up volume to a previous anthology entitled *Ghosts for Christmas* (1988), suggests that there was a popular connection between ghost stories and Christmas that he could rely upon his target audience to make. Similarly, Michael J. Hallowell has collected newspaper reports of ghosts under the title *Christmas Ghost Stories*, suggesting that the connection between the two is made largely because ‘The veil between the past and the present suddenly seems almost paper thin’ at that time of year, and that the ambiance of a northern European Christmas is conducive to ghost stories (Hallowell 2008, p. 12). Dalby does point to the popular connection of Christmas with Victorian ghost stories in particular, such as those of Dickens, Thackeray and Irving, and this is an idea that will be seen to recur through the Christmas ghost stories considered as part of this book. But could this tradition really only date back to the Victorians? If it did, why did it start then? Where did the idea come from?

Moving across to American publications finds a wider tradition of connecting ghost and horror stories to available holidays, to the extent that Scott David Aniolowski’s *Horror for the Holidays* (2011) is able to present tales related to fourteen seasonal occasions. However, not only does Aniolowski state in his introduction that the original idea for the collection was to produce an anthology of Christmas horror (and it seems appropriate to British stereotypes of American culture that Aniolowski openly admits that the reason for producing a broader holiday horror anthology was that he perceived it to be more commercially viable), but the holiday with the largest number of stories attached to it in the anthology is Christmas, particularly if you add the ‘Yule’ and ‘Christmas’ tales together. Aniolowski traces his interest in seasonal horror to his childhood pleasure in Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, with an added enjoyment of Halloween as a preferred holiday (2011, p. 6), linking the apparently dominant UK and US holidays connected to horror tales. Isaac Asimov, on the other hand, looked to the long historical view in his introduction to the anthology *The Twelve Frights of Christmas* (1986), connecting Christmas to the winter solstice and concepts of a new beginning, as the sun has reached its lowest point, and the nights their longest duration, and the year begins anew. In other words, the winter holidays are a point of transition, the most fear-filled and dark time of the year, yet carrying the promise of better times to come, and