

Lay Gently on the Coals, is a deliciously vivid and sardonic account of the trials and tribulations of a family at war, set in the heart of England on the eve of the Second World War.

The family of ex-Sergeant Jack Fulthorpe struggle to make ends meet. Jack is a Protestant, his wife Margaret a devoted Roman Catholic, and on Friday nights the evening meal is invariably interrupted by the local priest, calling to collect the family's weekly contribution to the Poor Relief Fund, and warning them that they're headed for purgatory.

'Funny you should mention purgatory,' says Jack. 'I work there myself.'

'Good preparation for the fires of hell,' says the priest.

'Aye!' says Jack. 'I'm a stoker in the gasworks, Father, and I make firebricks of fallen priests to line the furnace – *but defrocked priests I lay gently on the coals.*'

Life for the Fulthorpes in Northampton follows a pattern of conformity from which there seems no escape, but the outbreak of war is to change all that as, one after the other, the Fulthorpe children – all barely old enough to serve – don uniforms and enlist in the Royal Navy, the Army, the ATS and the WAAF.

When peace returns, their duty done, the one-time warriors put away their medals and get on with their lives. And the devoted daughter of Holy Mary, Mother of God, finds redemption for the fury she invoked in producing a brood of little heathens.

**'Full of rollicking good humour and Dickensian characters ...
A celebration of the comic grace of ordinary people during a time of
hard knocks.'**

James Clarke, author of How to Bribe a Judge

'As good as any book I've read since *The Good Soldier Schweik*.'

Brian Marley

Front cover painting:
Workmen in the House

by Stanley Spencer

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