



DECEMBER '25 NEWSLETTER



Greetings to all Come Singing friends

Dear everyone,

There are lots of different opinions when it comes to Christmas later this month. Love it or hate it, it's difficult to ignore though. Here are some thoughts about the topic from famous writers.

"Where art thou, Mother Christmas?
I only wish I knew
Why Father should get all the praise
And no-one mentions you"

Roald Dahl

In *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, Scrooge first refers to Christmas as "Bah, humbug!". But later comes to say: "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year".

Winnie the Pooh

"Christmas is a together sort of holiday."

"Our hearts grow tender with childhood memories and love of kindred, and we are better throughout the year for having, in spirit, become a child again at Christmastime."

Laura Ingalls Wilder

"I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Christmas time can make us feel quite nostalgic. Some of us remember quite clearly our Christmas celebrations when we were young. Thinking perhaps about the 1960s when celebrations were not so lavish as they are today. It was not very long after the second world war and the rationing that it caused, and money was tight.

Christmas had to be much simpler then. Home made and brightly coloured paper chains were often looped across the living room and fixed with drawing pins. The paper chains might have been adorned with honeycomb like paper or foil decorations shaped like bells or stars. We used to put holly sprigs or greenery behind pictures hanging on the walls. On children's television programmes like Blue Peter or Magpie would give instructions on how to make Xmas decorations.



Blue Peter's Advent Crown



Remember the *Blue Peter* music?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4lb0gXOq4I>

Then there was also the music for Magpie

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDNoSi1vbEO>

There had to be a real Christmas tree of course! Planted in a suitable tub which was probably covered in crepe paper, the tree was hung with tinsel, glass baubles or maybe strips of silver lametta. In pride of place on the top would probably be a Christmas fairy. Electric fairy lights were rare then. The needles that dropped off the branches seemed to get everywhere!

The fairy on the Christmas tree <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMAzEr5mmu4>

Although the food at Christmas in the '60's wasn't as elaborate as it is today, preparations began earlier with the making of puddings and the cake. As early as November, housewives shopped for all the essential ingredients, usually carrying them home in a shopping basket. Children in the family helped to stir the pudding and even the cake, while making a wish. After cooking both were wrapped carefully in greaseproof paper and stored to improve the rich flavour.

With no freezers or supermarkets fresh food for the celebrations had to be bought as close to the holiday as possible. Orders were taken by butchers, grocers and bakers and all the family would be recruited for their collection.



On Christmas Eve at bedtime many parents put out a mince pie and a glass of sherry for Santa - not forgetting a carrot for Rudolph!!

I saw mummy kissing Santa Claus https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= EzDUBT_Ocw
Rudolph the red nosed reindeer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44bL90HP0Ys>

Stockings and pillowcases were in place by children's beds ready to be filled for "good" children. It was traditional to include a tangerine or chocolate coins and small gifts such as crayons, puzzles, and small toys. Even main presents were not elaborate in those hard times.

Popular gifts could be Annuals like *Beano*, *Girl* or *Dandy*, Meccano sets, dolls or board games.

All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wl02_UJ1C6I



The main event was usually the Christmas Dinner. It would be a turkey or a chicken (a luxury too before factory farming) or a large joint of meat, accompanied by roast potatoes and the inevitable over cooked brussel sprouts. It was quantity not quality! The “best” tablecloth and tableware were brought out of storage for such a special occasion and the highlight might be Christmas crackers. The

paper hats they contained would be worn by everyone throughout the meal. After the main course, the Xmas pudding would arrive dramatically lit in blue brandy flames.

It was then time for a rest or playing with presents and relaxing in front of the TV. There were just two channels in the early 1960s, BBC and ITV, joined by BBC 2 in '64. After the Queen's Speech the companies would rival each other to broadcast *Billy Smarts Circus*.

The first Queen's Speech to be broadcast on television was in 1957:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxT_HESEiI

After this interlude and maybe some board games like Ludo, Scrabble, Monopoly or Cluedo or family card games it would be time for more festive food! Supper was cold meats often accompanied by traditional pickles and followed by trifle or tinned fruit and tinned cream. All this culminated in the presentation of the Christmas cake decorated with snow, a Father Christmas, perhaps a reindeer, a robin or two and even a sprig of holly.

By the end of Christmas day everyone was very happily tired and ready for bed.

Whatever your plans for Christmas, it has been said that "The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear".

The word carol probably comes from the French “*carole*” which means “a song for dancing” and has pagan origins. As early as the 13th century there are manuscripts of carols written for socialising at Christmas. These songs were sung in monasteries and ale houses alike and were simple with repetitive refrains. They had nothing to do with church services at this time.



The *Boars Head Carol* (the first English carol to be printed) is sung in December in The Queen's College, Oxford, when the boar's head is brought into the dining hall (see *Note at the end*). The last verse refers to the hall of The Queen's College:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZ1N4Flm7Ko>

Latin phrases were often included in the earliest carols, such as *In Dulci Jubilo*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ob0B5zlpR8A>

By the 18th century their popularity meant that carols were beginning to be heard in churches too. Some of the first to appear were *While shepherds watched* and *Hark the Herald Angels sing*.



Carols were being collected in the 1800s and printed in broadsheets for everyone to sing. An example of one of these is *I saw three ships*. Victoria and Albert famously promoted a family Christmas and understood the importance of singing together. Victorians often had a piano in the home, and this too helped spread the popularity of carols at the time. Singing carols outdoors also became more common and, inevitably, carol services were introduced in churches.

The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, now so well known, was held originally in 1880 at Truro cathedral. It was introduced in an attempt to lure people away from carolling in public houses! It was instituted at Kings College Cambridge in 1918 on Christmas Eve and has been held annually ever since (even through Covid!).

Today carols are firmly established as part of our culture and new ones are often written. John Rutter's *Candlelight Carol* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2C4aHEh0j1U>

Try the **quiz** to find out how well you know your favourite carols.

1. What carol was written by Charles Wesley and has the words "*Light and life to all he brings*"....?
2. This carol suggests we go to the place where Jesus was born and "*adore Him*".
3. Which carol contains the line "*And he shareth in our gladness*"?
4. In this carol "*Sleep in heavenly peace*" is sung twice.
5. Another carol telling the story of the birth of Jesus and including the line "*Born is the King of Israel*".
6. This jolly carol brought "*Tidings of comfort and joy*".
7. A carol which describes a very cold night when "*frosty wind made moan*".
8. The next carol talks about trees and especially one that "*bears the crown*".
9. What was "*deep and crisp and even*"? Name the carol these words come from.
10. Describing the place of Jesus' birth, this carol uses the words "*the hopes and fears of all the years are...*"
11. What is the title of the carol that ends "...*Good will henceforth from heaven to man, begin and never cease*"?
12. Which carol describes three travellers from the East and mentions gold, frankincense and myrrh?

**Happy Christmas to
everyone at
Come Singing!**



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtYhr4VDmOo>

Answers to the Carols Quiz

1. Hark the Herald Angels sing <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Bwn0k0k8xI>
2. O Come all ye Faithful https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1wHyMR_SCA
3. Once in Royal David's City <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtICLJvyePw>
4. Silent Night <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POcDlbYiF9c>
5. The First Nowell <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mltWsC8RtM>
6. God rest ye Merry Gentlemen <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlfHyb397VY>
7. In the Bleak Midwinter <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTzqMi2AQF8>
8. The Holly and the Ivy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7eHtDtZ7hs>
9. Good King Wenceslas <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1FEFPthZN0>
10. O Little Town of Bethlehem <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRuXdOb6TrA>
11. While Shepherds watched <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GHRNhcqse8>
12. We Three Kings of Orient are <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANXV46f3jo0>

Note: to read about the legend behind the Boar's Head ceremony, go to
<https://www.darkoxfordshire.co.uk/explore/christmas-traditions-at-queens-college/>

**Your contributions to future newsletters, in any form, will be
very welcome. Please send them to:**
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