



Dear Everyone,

Happy New Year! We all hope you had a happy healthy Christmas and are feeling tanked up and ready to embark on whatever 2026 throws at us!

Most immediately it's going to be cold weather, so this newsletter is a belated Christmas stocking of comforts and suggestions for survival in the next chilly weeks.

There'll be time to get acclimatised to the lower temperatures before the next singing! December was a five-week month, so the next sessions are:

[Norwich Millennium Library](#) on Tuesday January 13th

[Earlham Library](#) on Friday, January 16th

[Millennium Library](#) on Tuesday, January 27th

Keep cheery and well, and we'll hope to see you then. If the weather is especially bleak, we might have the bells again to cheer us all up!!

With best wishes for 2016 and with much love from Come Singing



Dear All,

So, it's January, and the beginning of the journey to Spring, daffodils and the feeling of warmer sunlight on our backs...

People have always felt the need to keep spirits up in the long dark months with celebrations, warming food or ingenious ways to stay warm. One traditional custom which brought communities together and created cheer was wassailing,. There were - and are - two distinct types: in the first merrymakers armed with a wassail bowl for warming festive grog went from house to house singing traditional songs or carols and spreading good cheer. Sounds very appealing - perhaps we could do our own Come Singing (non-alcoholic) version in the first January sessions?? The second involved drinking and singing the health of cider apple trees in the hope of a good autumn harvest. Traditions varied from county to county but in most a King and Queen led other revellers, often farmers, from orchard to orchard, singing and shouting to drive away evil tree spirits. When they found the best tree. the Queen would then dip a piece of toast into the wassail cup and out it in the branches as an offering.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CeQBbUKgSI>

Those of us who don't go for nighttime revels in winter orchards might prefer to stay home, tucked up in bed or with a hot water bottle! Bed heaters have long been used in colder countries, and began as solid lidded containers, often of brass or copper, filled with embers from the fire.



Often very decorative, but they may have been uncomfortably hot at times, the fumes were unpleasant and potentially noxious, and they were sometimes the cause of terrible accidents:

**London Chronicle or Universal Evening Post, May 19, 1774**

*On Monday last the following accident happened at Spalding as an elderly gentlewoman was going to bed, attended by her servant maid. Near the top of the stairs her foot slipped, when she fell upon the girl who was so terribly burnt by the coal in the warming pan, that she expired in 24 hours.*

Pottery filled with water was a much safer option, or hot bricks wrapped in cloth, but it must have been a godsend when rubber hot water bottles, patented by the Croatian inventor Slavoljub Eduard Penkala, came into use in the late 19th century.. Few things can be more comforting - with or without furry covers - on chilly days or for a tummy ache... There's always the risk of a leak (don't use boiling water!) or a stopper working loose (remember the motto 'stopper upwards') but they're unbeatable.

Did you know that select Holiday Inn locations offer the service of a staff member dressed in a full-length fleece who will roll around in your bed for five minutes - presumably before you get in (?!). This idea may have a long and informal history in England and elsewhere but perhaps the less said about that the better...



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5fW7sERw7I>

This is the season when it feels legitimate to reach for comfort foods - home-made soups, hearty stews and steamed puddings (figgy pudding?) - so here's a quiz with a few songs celebrating soul food and cooking!

1. What food did Peter Sellers miss when he married Sophia Loren, and what did she cook instead?
2. What Cajun cuisine is on the menu on the Bayou?
3. In 'Tea for two' what sort of cake will be taken in for all the boys to see?
4. A song focused on cholesterol intake?!
5. What pastry is 'one of my favourite things'?
6. In 'Oliver', the orphans dreamed of 'Food, glorious food'. How many of their fantasy foods can you think of?
7. In the Beatles song, what was much sweeter than wine?
8. 'Put on the skillet, slip on the lid, Momma's gonna make'...what??
9. Yes, we have no bananas, but what do we have?
10. Improbable food for weaning: Don't live like vegetarians on food they give to parrots - blow out your kite from morn' till night on

.....

My guilty craving, apart from proper porridge made with water, is for Birds custard! It reminds me of school dinners, where it came in different colours to match the different claggy sponge puddings, and was made with sterilised milk which tasted deliciously caramelised! Even now a cup of custard seems one of the most comforting treats imaginable!

And custard powder does have an honourable past! It was developed by Mr. Alfred Bird in 1837 for his wife who was allergic to eggs in the 'real thing' but longed for a sauce to go with desserts. It soon became popular and was marketed commercially, spawning some terrific advertisements over the- years such as this deliciously sexist one!



In 2008 Jon Tickle even proved that it was possible to walk on the surface of a swimming pool filled with custard! If you don't believe me, watch this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iz9KnPZW0gs>

When revelling, hot water bottles and comfort food still don't hit the spot, we may dream simply of hibernating. Sadly that's not an option for humans - only bat species, hedgehogs, dormice, reptiles and amphibians have that luxury. But did you realise that there are other forms of inactivity?

**Torpor** (or dormancy) makes a creature less active, with reduced metabolic rate and body temperature. It happens to badgers and squirrels when conditions are too harsh, and they then emerge more easily than from hibernation.

Reptiles and amphibians experience **brummation** - episodes of very minimal activity and lethargy to conserve energy in cold spells.

**Diapause** is different again: it's where an insect responds to adverse conditions by simply stopping development until 'good' weather returns. Very clever!

Lastly, **aestivation** happens in hot weather, mainly to fish and amphibians, and they quickly emerge when things change for the better.

So many ways of escape, and none available to us, although torpor sounds very familiar to me!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IvDeHp5BQY>

Do you remember, before the days of homogenised milk, when the cream on top of the milk used to freeze and blow the bottle tops off? And in the summer, how the blue tits used to love piercing the silver foil tops to cream? Here's a short 1950's item from about the 'epidemic of blue tits'! Not quite Alfred Hitchcock... <https://www.bbc.co.uk/videos/cg309xvqx61o>



So with this we wish you warmth, comfort and joy well after the Twelve Days of Christmas, and hope to see you safe and well in the New Year!

With love from all at Come Singing

## **The food quiz...**

1. Bangers and mash. Macaroni minestrone  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGFpVN2xwXU>
2. Jambalaya, crawfish pie and a file gumbo  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5ImncN-rQc>
3. Sugar cake <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0MtzQDItr0>
4. Jack Sprat could eat no fat, his wife could eat no lean...  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Cv2OtlrH3o>
5. Crisp apple strudel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bACiODIbf84>
6. Hot sausage and mustard, Cold jelly and custard! pease pudding and  
saveloy, a great big steak - fried, roasted or stewed, Piled peaches and  
cream , about six feet high!  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEQDIIvuy1I>
7. A taste of honey <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkQ1eOcl5ug>
8. Shortenin' bread <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Y28w2ErHj4>
9. String beans, and onions, Cabbageses, and scallion: old fashioned to-  
mah-to, a Long Island po-tah-to (and more!)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QqkrIDeTeA>
10. Boiled beef and carrots  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8GCTqB0oY0>