

Ho Ho Ho!

WORKSHEETS

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by Janet Sandford

With Christmas just around the corner, we go back to the days of yore to find out how the Victorians passed the festive season.

No Rest for Bob Cratchit

Christmas preparations start as early as September in England. Yes, you can see shelves piled high with chocolate selection boxes, Santa's sacks, fairy lights and Christmas crackers. By the time October arrives, mums and grans have already started writing their shopping lists for the festive dinner and are drawing designs for how their living rooms and outside gardens will look with trees and colourful eccentric lighting, but has it always been so?

At the start of the 19th century, an English Christmas didn't follow this pattern. In commercial terms, the special day wasn't even celebrated as a holiday and if you had a job you would find yourself trailing off to work as usual; many businesses didn't recognise Christmas Day as a day off.

It wasn't until the end of the century that things all changed and people celebrated Christmas like they had never done before. However, it was Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, the German husband of Queen Victoria, who was mainly responsible for making Christmas Day special and introducing aspects that became prominent then, and still are today.

The Tree Takes Centre Stage

Let's take the Christmas tree for example. Until a drawing of the Royal Family stood around a fully decorated tree was noticed in a copy of 1848's Illustrated



London News, nobody had thought of positioning a six foot fir tree decked with candles and baubles in their homes. However, there was another person, or let's say his work, that contributed to the popularity of Christmas. The book is Christmas Carol and the author Charles Dickens. The book illustrates the goodness of mankind, and how people can pull together to make the celebrations happy and family orientated. Christmas Carol epitomises the spirit of Christmas in Victorian times and how family values have been carried through to modern times.

The scented fir tree held prime position in the front parlour in the 19th century, and a beautiful sight it was, with candles glittering and an angel or star twinkling away on the top branch. Decorating the parlour, or front room, also became a more elegant task. In December the Victorian household started to decorate, covering every part of the house with greenery, sprigs of spruce, laurel, cedar, mistletoe, and holly embellished tables, stairs, lamps and chandeliers, hallways and furniture. Mistletoe could be found dangling from the ceiling in the hallway or over the front entrance. Every picture frame and mirror would be wrapped with evergreen and delicately woven wreaths could be seen hanging from doors or behind windows.

0 **days of yore** | dawne czasy, zamierzchna przeszłość

1 **shelf** | półka

piled high | zapelniony

sack | worek

gran = grandma | babcia

at the start of sth | na początku czegoś

to follow a pattern | powielać wzór, postępować tak samo

to trail off | *tu*: rozejść się

until | aż do

prominent | znaczący

Christmas tree | choinka

to notice sth | zauważyć coś

2 **fir tree** | jodła

decked with sth | udekorowany czymś, przystrojony czymś

bauble | świcidelko, błyskotka

however | jednak, jednakże

to pull together | współdziałać, zmobilizować siły

to epitomise sth | być uosobieniem czegoś, być typowym przykładem czegoś

scented | wonny, pachnący

prime | główny

sight | widok

to glitter | skrzyć się, mienić się

to twinkle | migotać

branch | gałąź

household | gospodarstwo domowe

sprig | gałązka

spruce | świerk

laurel | wawrzyn

cedar | cedr

mistletoe | jemiola

to embellish | ozdabiać, upiększać

chandelier | żyrandol

to dangle | zwisać, dyndać

frame | rama

to weave sth | wyplatać coś

wreath | wieniec, wianek

Turkey Rules the Roost

The Christmas dinner or feast can be loosely traced back to the Middle Ages, but the dinner we know in England now took shape in Victorian times. If you look at old recipes like the one you find in Mrs Rundle's book, Modern Domestic Cookery, you will find that mince pies date back from Tudor times and were actually made from chopped sirloin steak and not the mixture made up from sultanas, currants, raisins, candied peel and brown sugar, as in the recipes used today.

Roast turkey became popular as the main meat dish served on Christmas Day in the 19th century, and still is today in the UK. Goose, pork and beef were the favoured pieces of meat cooked before this era and still some households prefer these forms than turkey.

Cards Take Off

Nowadays Christmas cards are sent to relatives and friends all over the world, and used to decorate walls by threading cards on ribbons and hanging them on walls. This idea was introduced in 1843 when Henry Cole, an English civil servant, commissioned an artist to design a family Christmas card. The card did indeed show a family group around a table and contained a Christmas message. The card retailed at a shilling a copy, quite expensive for most Victorian parents. Even though the card wasn't accessible to all families, the idea was popular and soon caught on. Victorians were inventive and artistic, and it wasn't very long before children were making their own Xmas cards. Technology used to print coloured cards became more advanced in this era, making it easier and cheaper to produce Christmas cards and at the same time, the halfpenny stamp* was introduced. By the 1880s sending Xmas cards was popular and the card industry was well on its way to becoming a commercial success.

What About the Pressies?

Although most Brits like to celebrate Crimbo, they do sometimes complain about the commerciality of the season getting out of hand. Looking back a hundred years or so, it started to get commercial very early on, with the introduction of Christmas crackers. These red and gold packages, filled with

gifts, paper hats and secret messages were invented in 1848 by Tom Smith, an Englishman who made sweets and confectionery. He had been over to Paris and seen sugared almonds wrapped in paper that twisted at both ends. These sweets inspired him to design the Christmas cracker, which he first filled with sweets and later replaced with Christmas goodies. Christmas crackers are still very popular today, and a lot of fun to pull on Christmas Day. I'm not so sure about the jokes or the paper hats but sometimes the gifts can be very inventive and unusual.

As for Christmas pressies, did the Victorians put them under the tree? Not at first. Initially, Victorian presents were very simple items like pieces of candied fruit, nuts, oranges and handmade gifts, which were hung on the tree. It wasn't until later on that people spent a lot more money on buying gifts and the more popular Christmas became, the bigger the presents were.

Imagine the scene, all the tempting gifts wrapped in bright, coloured paper, topped with flowers and bits of greenery, some with taffeta ribbons, piled high under the bottom twigs of the spruce tree, pretty glass lamps and lit candles casting shadows on the walls forming a warm, festive glow. The log fire blazing, crackling away, knitted stockings hung from the fireplace bursting with treats, a toy train sat on the top of the mantelpiece and the smell of pine and cedar wafting through the room.

The Victorians certainly knew how to put on a show, but I think the important thing to remember is that they introduced the family concept at Christmas. The preparation of the food and eating of the feast, decorating the parlour, giving gifts and the glittering tree were essential to celebrate Christmas and were shared by all family members.



* The halfpenny stamp was the smallest British postage stamp measuring 17.5 x 14mm. It was called the Halfpenny Rose Red, first issued on October 1st, 1870 and emblazoned with a bust of Queen Victoria on the front. It was replaced ten years later by the Halfpenny Green stamp.

- 1 to rule the roost | *pot.* rządzić
- to trace back to sth | wywodzić się z czegoś
- recipe | przepis
- mince pie | babeczka z kruchego ciasta nadziewana bakaliami
- chopped | posiekany
- sirloin | polędwica wołowa
- sultanas | rodzynki sułtanki
- currants | rodzynki greckie z drobnych, ciemnych winogron
- raisins | rodzynki np. cybeby
- candied peel | kandyzowana skórka (pomarańczy/cytryny)
- roast turkey | pieczony indyk
- pork | wieprzowina
- beef | wołowina
- to take off | *pot.* przyjąć się, chwycić (o pomysły/modzie)
- to thread sth | nawlekać
- ribbon | wstążka, taśma
- to commission sb to do sth | zlecić komuś zrobienie czegoś
- accessible to sb | dostępny dla kogoś
- advanced | zaawansowany, udoskonalony

- stamp | znaczek
- Crimbo | *slang* Święta Bożego Narodzenia
- to get out of hand | wymknąć się spod kontroli
- 2 confectionery | wyroby cukiernicze
- almond | migdał
- to wrap sth | owijać coś, pakować coś
- to twist sth | skręcać coś
- goody | coś słodkiego, smakołyk
- pressie | *pot. BrE* podarek
- tempting | kuszący, przyciągający
- twig | gałązka, witka
- log fire | płonące polana
- to crackle | skrzypieć, trzaskać
- knitted | zrobiony na drutach
- mantelpiece | półka nad kominkiem
- to waft | rozchodzić się, unosić się w powietrzu
- parlour | *tu:* salon
- emblazoned with sth | ozdobiony czymś

