

HER BEST SELLING CHRISTMAS BOOK

Margaret's Christmas beach party book

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO
KNOW AND DO
FOR CHRISTMAS

EDITED BY
DON GILLESPIE

Dedicated to

**Barry and Mari McGuire
John and Sumi York.**

Thank you Mari for all the laughter

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**Recipes and contents are a mix of personal recipes and modifications of
traditionally accepted recipes from a combination of sources, adapted to what
Margaret prefers. Research for traditions were extensive from a number of
sources including Wikipedia. For further reading on any of the subjects we
suggest you visit Wikipedia.**

Photography from Istock and Don Gillespie.

And so this is Christmas

Many thanks to all those who have helped put this little book together. There have been numerous edits, and I've said more than once, ". . . but wait! Just one more recipe!" Or, "Hang on, I want to use a different picture!"

Thanks to all those who followed the silly, ridiculous Facebook posts about me during Don's walks along the beach. (I usually roll my eyes.) Walking can be boring, and it started as a joke. Then people kept bugging Don to continue. He's gotten grayer as a result, I think.

The idea for any kind of books, posts, or comments started years ago when Don was touring Barry McGuire (of "Eve of Destruction" song fame) and Mari, his wife, along with John York (ex-Byrds) and his wife, Sumi. Barry was doing his *Trippin' the Sixties* show in Australia. Anyone who's ever been on an extensive road trip will understand. Stir crazy, we laughed and joked from Brisbane to Adelaide and back again, with stops along the way to do shows, radio and TV interviews, and a spot on the ABC's TV show *Spicks and Specks*.

So thank you once again to everyone who has encouraged and supported this project. I couldn't have done it without you.

Margaret



Introduction

I never ever expected I'd write a book, but here it is. It's probably one of the more crazy things I've done, but hey, why not? I just feel things in my gut and do them. Is it fun, exciting interesting scary, if yes then do I do it.

And yes sometimes its a case of "Well shit Margaret!" Life is short, don't stew on it, move on. There's a whole life out there to enjoy.

So here's my first book. It's a celebration. Things I've discovered along life's journey from people I've met or admire. Drinks and food to enjoy and a little bit of history about our Christmas traditions and of course a few little comments from me.

I trust it brings a smile. In these crazy times, I'll leave you with a quote from one of my favorite authors.

"I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes. Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world."

You're doing things you've never done before, and more importantly, you're doing something."

Neil Gaiman





Traditional Christmas Food

Traditionally Christmas is when you forget the diet, families get together, and in Australia you enjoy the following:

Roast turkey with cranberry sauce

Leg of ham

Gravy

Roast vegetables

Many folk throw in a few kilos of cooked prawns, oh, oysters, don't forget them.

Copious bottles of bubbles. Plum pudding with brandy sauce, ice cream and cream. Later on, Christmas cake. All this with bonbons and party hats.

The adults then proceed to fall on a couch clutching their overfilled stomach, wondering why they did what they just did and take a nap, while the kids play with their new Christmas presents.

On a sober note, Christmas can also be one of the loneliest times in a person's life, and remembering those loved ones that have passed away. If you know someone is on their own, remember to invite them around.



New Zealand

- Cherries
- Christmas pudding
- Christmas mince
- Ham
- Lollies such as warheads and candy canes
- Pavlova
- Peanuts
- Potato salad
- Strawberries
- Trifle
- Turkey
- Wine

Australia

- Champagne
- Christmas cake
- Christmas cookies
- Christmas damper served with butter, jam, honey or golden syrup.
- Christmas pudding
- Cold ham and cold turkey
- Custard
- Eggnog
- Gingerbread in Christmas shapes
- Lollies, such as rocky road; rum balls; candy canes
- Mince pie
- Pavlova
- Prawns
- Roast chicken, ham and turkey
- Seafood and salads
- Stuffing
- Trifle
- White Christmas

India

- Allahabadi cake
- Aloo Dum
- Bebinca - a dessert popular in Goa
- Biryani
- Candy canes
- Chhena Poda
- Chocolate covered fruit
- Christmas cake
- Cupcakes
- Dumplings filled with Indian spices and a sweet or savoury filling
- Gulab Jamun
- Fruits, such as apple, orange, guava
- Kheer - boiled rice cooked with milk, sugar, saffron and garnished with nuts such as almonds and pistachios
- Mathri
- Mixed nuts
- Neureos - a kind of dumpling made of semolina, khoa and nutlet
- Roast chicken
- Stew prepared with chicken, mutton, fish
- Tarts
- Vindaloo

U.K.

- Beef Wellington
- Brandy butter
- Bread sauce
- Brussels sprouts
- Candy canes
- Chocolate yule log
- Christmas cake
- Christmas ham (usually honey or marmalade glazed)
- Christmas pudding
- Cranberry sauce
- Devils on horse back
- Dundee cake (traditional Scottish fruit cake)
- Gingerbread
- Gravy
- Hot chocolate
- Mince pies
- Mulled wine
- Pigs in a blanket
- Roast turkey
- Roast beef
- Roasted chestnuts
- Roast duck
- Roast goose
- Roast pheasant
- Roast parsnips and carrots
- Roast potatoes
- Spiced beef (traditionally served in Northern Ireland and Eire)
- Stuffing
- Trifle
- Tunis Cake
- Twelfth Night Cake

USA

- Apple cider
- Boiled custard
- Candy canes
- Champagne, or sparkling apple cider
- Chocolate fudge
- Christmas cookies
- Christmas ham
- Cranberry sauce
- Eggnog
- Fish as part of the Feast of the Seven Fishes
- Fruitcake
- Gingerbread, often in the form of a gingerbread house or gingerbread man
- Hot buttered rum
- Hot chocolate
- Mashed potato
- Mixed nuts
- Oyster stew, composed of oysters simmered in cream or milk and butter
- Persimmon pudding
- Apple pie
- Pecan pie
- Pumpkin pie
- Sweet potato pie
- Yams/sweet potato casserole (with marshmallow)
- Red velvet cake
- Roast turkey, less often roast duck, goose, chicken or pheasant
- Russian tea cakes
- Stuffing
- Tom and Jerry

France

- Almond
- Bûche de Noël
- Champagne
- Crêpes
- Chapon (roasted chicken)
- Dinde aux marrons (chestnut-stuffed turkey)
- Fougasse (Provençal bread)
- Foie gras
- Fruit - Apple, pear, orange, winter melon, raisin
- Ganzeltopf (goose)
- Quince cheese
- Kouglouf
- Nougat
- Oysters
- Smoked salmon
- Scallops
- Walnut
- Thirteen desserts - the traditional Christmas dessert in the region of Provence. The Christmas supper ends with thirteen dessert items, representing Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles.

Cocktails

Margarita

Nothing better on a hot summer day.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 shot of tequila
- 1 shot of margarita mix
- 1 shot of cointreau

Pour into a cocktail mixer a scoop of ice and shake it like crazy.

Pour the mix into a salt rimmed cocktail glass.

In a hurry? Just pour the whole lot into a glass and drink, ready for the next one.

Pina Colada

Lets make it simple and quick

INGREDIENTS

- 50 ml Malibu Original
- 75 ml Pineapple juice
- 25 ml Coconut cream

Add Malibu , pineapple juice & coconut cream Add ice, into a cocktail shaker, shake then strain into a highball glass

Garnish with coconut & pineapple leaves

Corpse Reviver

INGREDIENTS

- Ice
- 1 ounce gin
- 1 ounce Lillet Blanc
- 1 ounce Cointreau
- 1 ounce fresh lemon juice
- 1/8 teaspoon absinthe
- Maraschino cherry for garnish

Add ice to a cocktail shaker. Pour in gin, Lillet, Cointreau, and lemon juice. Add absinthe to a separate cocktail glass and swirl to coat sides of glass. Shake cocktail, and then strain into the glass. Garnish with a cherry.

Margaret's Espresso Martini

INGREDIENTS

- 1 shot of vodka
- 1 shot of coffee
- 1 shot of Kalua Maria

Pour into a cocktail mixer with a scoop of ice and shake it like crazy.

Pour slowly into a cocktail glass to ensure a nice crema on top, decorate with three coffee beans.

Tia Maria? Yes. Traditional recipes call for sugar syrup. Too sweet for me. Tia Maria just adds that little magical taste - but watch it - this drink is a killer, but oh so delicious, and my recipe so named after me!

Dark and Stormy

Another favourite - great with just rum and Sarsaparilla

INGREDIENTS

- 60mL dark rum
- 20mL Lime Juice
- Ginger Beer or Sarsaparilla
- Bitters

Pour rum into a tall glass. Top with ice, and fill with Ginger Beer / Sarsaparilla. Squeeze in 20mL of Lime Juice.

Garnish with a dash of bitters.

Mai Tai

I like pineapple juice and Cointreau.

INGREDIENTS

- 45 ml white rum
- 25 ml Cointreau
- 25 ml fresh lime juice
- 15 ml almond syrup
- 50 ml fresh pineapple or orange juice
- 15 ml dark rum

DIRECTIONS

Fill a cocktail shaker with ice, combine the rum, Cointreau, lime juice, syrup and fresh juice. Shake. Strain into a glass filled with cubed or crushed ice and top with the dark rum. Garnish with whatever takes your fancy - a maraschino cherry, pineapple slice or lime.





Wine

What can you say about wine? I like all colours, white, red and pink. Rule of thumb - the best wine is the one you like, regardless of brand or price.

Note: Cheap wine may give you a headache, and life is too short to drink bad wine.

Also, certain wines go better with certain foods and there's nothing better than mating the right wine with the right food. I could give you my guide but maybe that's for another book.

Basic rules:

White meat, white wine

Red meat, red wine



Champagne

If you're never sure - go with bubbles. Bubbles go with everything. You can get cheap Sparkling Wine, a Prosecco or French Champagne. My all time favorite is Perrier-Jouet Grand Brut, however Mumm, Taittinger, Billecart-Salmon, Veuve Clicquot, Bollinger, and Moët & Chandon are all totally acceptable.

I have tried champagnes in the \$200+ range, very nice but I don't think they're worth it.

PLEASE NOTE:

I joke a lot about alcohol however there is a serious side. PLEASE drink in moderation. Far too many folk, including myself, can get into strife when they over indulge. Marriages, families, and relationships can be destroyed and lives can be changed forever.

Kombucha

It's sparkling and has no sugar. It's the drink I have when I don't want alcohol. It has a number of health benefits apparently, although none have been substantiated.

ALSO: Never drink and drive or swim. Far too many lose their lives this way. If you see a friend who has overindulged, get them home the best way you can.

The Turkey

In England, the evolution of the main course into turkey did not take place for years, or even centuries. At first, in medieval England, a main course of boar was often served.

Through the 16th and 17th centuries goose or capon was commonly served, and the rich sometimes dined upon peacock and swan. The turkey appeared on Christmas tables in England in the 16th century, (1526) and popular history tells of King Henry VIII being the first English monarch to have turkey for Christmas.

The tradition of turkey at Christmas rapidly spread throughout England in the 17th century.

Turkeys were eaten instead of cows and chickens because the farmers needed their cows for their milk, and needed their chickens for the eggs, which back then were more expensive than they are today.

The good thing about Christmas Day and turkeys is that Christmas is a family time, and turkeys are family size! In the UK, Australia, and New Zealand people believe that Christmas would not be the same without a traditional roast turkey.

COOKING

While an entire turkey looks great on the table, I usually order turkey breast from the butcher and cook it the day before Christmas. Your butcher should be able to tell you how much you'd need, depending on how many people you'll be having.

Simply heat it in the microwave to serve.

Stuffing seems to be used less and less but I always make it.





Christmas Pudding

I always remember my grandmother making Christmas pudding and of course being absolutely delighted when I found a sixpence in my serving.

I used to think it was just luck, but now I realise she would have made sure that all the kids got one in their pudding. The usual choice was a silver threepence or a sixpence.

The big bonus, of course, was if you got a wishbone in yours. As kids we would squeal with delight.

The coin was believed to bring wealth in the coming year; the wishbone was believed to bring good luck.

There is a popular legend that plum pudding's association with Christmas goes back to a custom in medieval England that the "pudding

should be made on the 25th Sunday after Trinity, that it be prepared with thirteen ingredients to represent Christ and the twelve apostles, and that every family member stir it in turn, from east to west, to honour the three wise men and their journey in that direction”.

However, recipes for plum puddings appear mainly, if not entirely, in the 17th century and later. One of the earliest plum pudding recipes is given by Mary Kettlby in her 1714 book, *A Collection of Three Hundred Recipes in Cookery, Physick and Surgery*.

There is a popular and wholly unsubstantiated myth that in 1714, King George I (sometimes known as the Pudding King) requested that plum pudding be served as part of his royal feast in his first Christmas in England.

INGREDIENTS

90g (3oz) self raising flour
125g (4oz) grated chilled butter
30g (1oz) blanched almonds, shredded
125g (4oz) grated carrot
250 g (8oz) raisins
125g (4oz) currants
125g sultanas
125g (4oz) breadcrumbs
1/4 tsp grated nutmeg
60g (2oz) chopped mixed candied peel
90g (3oz) muscovado sugar
Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
2 eggs beaten
75ml (3.5 floz) brandy

125 litre (2 pint)
pudding steamer bowl



METHOD

1 In a large bowl, combine the flour, butter, almonds, carrot, raisins, currants, sultanas, breadcrumbs, nutmeg, candied chopped peel, sugar and lemon zest. Add the lemon juice and eggs, and stir until well combined.

2 Lightly butter the pudding steamer bowl. Place a buttered baking paper sheet cut to cover the bottom of the bowl. This will keep the top of the pudding from sticking to the bottom of the bowl when cooked. Spoon in mixture and level the surface.

3 Cover with buttered baking paper, then foil.

4 Put the bowl into your slow cooker with

boiling water half way up the bowl. Top up the water as you go along. Cook for about 6 hours.

5 Remove the bowl from the slow cooker. Remove the lid, foil, and paper and make a few holes in the pudding with a fine skewer. Then pour in the brandy.

6 Seal the lid again and place in a cool place for up to three months.

7 To reheat for serving, steam the pudding again for 2 to 3 hours. Serve immediately with brandy butter.

Brandy Sauce

Traditionally people use brandy butter, which is basically a thick concoction of butter with sugar and brandy.

I prefer a runny sauce like custard, so I make up a brandy custard instead.

Keep it simple. Just buy ready made custard and gently add brandy to suit your taste. Be careful, because the brandy can quickly overpower the taste of the custard, and you still want that custard flavor to be there.

Heat the custard on the stove or in the microwave (do not boil) and serve with a dab of cream and ice cream. Total yum.

NOTES: Once the Christmas Pudding is baked, make holes with a skewer and add more brandy periodically prior to serving it on Christmas Day.

It helps having a margarita while making it, and don't forget to put on good Christmas music to get you into a full on Christmas mood.



Christmas Cake

The Christmas cake is a relatively recent addition to Christmas festivities dating back to the middle of the 19th century.

It developed from the plum pudding, and the contents were modified so that it would set solid.

Christmas cake is an English tradition that began as plum porridge. The cake is made with rich, moist currants, sultanas and raisins which have been soaked in rum. Some folk cover it in icing, I'm not a fan.

A Scottish specialty is the traditional Christmas cake, the “Whisky Dundee”. As the name implies, the “whisky” cake originated in Dundee, and is made with Scotch whisky. It is a light and crumbly cake, and light on fruit and candied peel—only currants, raisins, sultanas and cherries.

INGREDIENTS

425g (14 oz) currants
250g (8oz) sultanas
250 g raisins
300 g (10 oz) cherries, rinsed dried and quartered
150g (5oz) dried apricots roughly cut into small pieces
75g (2.5 oz) mixed candied peel roughly chopped
300g (10 oz) soft butter
4 tbsp brandy plus more for soaking
300 g (10 oz) plain flour
1 tsp ground mixed spice
1/2 teaspoon grated nutmeg
300g (10 oz) muscovado sugar
5 eggs
60 g (2 oz) whole unblanched almonds roughly chopped
1 tsp black treacle
Zest of 1 lemon
Zest of one orange

METHOD

1 Combine the fruits and candied peel in a large bowl. Add brandy, and stir to mix well. Cover and leave overnight.

2 Put the remaining ingredients into a large bowl and beat well with an electric mixer until thoroughly blended. Stir in the soaked fruits and any liquid.

3 Grease the cake tin with butter, line the bottom and sides with a double layer of baking



paper, and grease the paper. Spoon in the mixture, level the top of the cake and cover with baking paper.

4 Bake in the oven at 140c for 4 to 5 hours. Keep an eye on the cake through the oven door. If it browns too quickly cover the surface with tin foil.

The cake is ready when it's firm to the touch, and a skewer inserted into the cake comes out clean. Leave the cake to cool in the tin.

White Christmas



5 When the cake has cooled, pierce it in several places with a fine skewer and pour over a little brandy. Remove cake from your cake tin, wrap the cake in baking paper and then completely cover in tin foil. Place the cake in a cool place for up to three months to mature, unwrapping it from time to time and spooning more brandy over the top (1 - 2 tbsp).

INGREDIENTS

250g (8oz) Copha
1 cup Rice Bubbles
1 cup full cream milk powder
1 cup coconut
1 cup icing sugar
60g (2oz) glace cherries
1/4 cup mixed dried fruit
1/2 cup ginger chopped
1/2 cup crystallised fruit chopped

METHOD

Melt chopped Copha in saucepan over low heat. Combine in a bowl Rice Bubbles, powdered milk, coconut, sifted icing sugar, chopped fruit and mix well.

Pour mixture into 28cm x 18cm (11in x 7in) tin which has been lined with greased greaseproof paper, press down with fork. Refrigerate until set; cut into squares.

White Christmas is a traditional Australian treat for many households during the festive season. I Love it!





Chocolate

What's Christmas without chocolate? In fact what's life without chocolate?

Christmas and chocolate: quite a history.

A Yule log or bûche de Noël is a traditional Christmas cake, often served as a dessert near Christmas, especially in France.

The famous chocolate log has an origin linked to the winter solstice, which dates back to the Middle Ages. The day when the sun is at its lowest on the horizon is a sign of the harsh winter season. Therefore each fireplace burns large pieces of wood to heat homes, creating a fire around which the whole family would gather.

From the 12th century, the Catholic Church started this tradition again, introducing various rituals such as the sprinkling of holy water, salt, cooked wine, or oil. It had to be used for three days, on pain of bad omens.

During the 19th century, heating appliances such as cast iron stoves replaced fireplaces. Logs of wood became decorative; then some pastry chefs had the idea of turning them into pastry logs.

The chocolate icing looks like the bark of the natural log once used.

Note that chocolate is present in Christmas traditions all around the world, like in Mexico where the turkey has a layer of chocolate on top, or in Italy where children receive pieces of chocolate from the witch Befana.



yule log or bûche de Noël



Ingredients

For the chocolate sponge

4 large free-range eggs
100g (3½oz) caster sugar
65g (2½oz) self-raising flour
40g (1½oz) cocoa powder

For the chocolate ganache topping

300ml (½ pint) double cream
300g (10½oz) Lindt 70% dark

chocolate broken into small pieces

For the cream filling

300ml (½ pint) double cream, whipped
to decorate
Icing sugar, for dusting

Method

Step 1

Preheat the oven to 200C (400F).
Lightly grease a 33x23cm (13x9in)
Swiss roll tin, and line with non-stick
paper or baking parchment, pushing it
into the corners.

Step 2

For the sponge, in a large bowl whisk
the eggs and sugar using an electric
hand whisk until the mixture is pale in
colour, light and frothy. Sift the flour
and cocoa powder into the bowl and
carefully cut and fold together, using
a spatula, until all the cocoa and flour
are incorporated into the egg mixture.
(Be careful not to beat any of the air
out of the mixture).

Step 3

Pour the mixture into the lined tin and
spread evenly out into the corners.
Bake in the middle of the preheated
oven for 8–10 minutes, or until well
risen and firm to the touch and the
sides are shrinking away from the edge
of the tin.

Step 4

Place a piece of baking parchment
bigger than the Swiss roll tin on the
work surface. Dust with icing sugar
generously. Carefully invert the cake

onto the paper and remove the bottom
lining piece of paper.

Step 5

Cut a score mark 2.5cm (1in) along
one of the longer edges. Starting with
this edge, begin to tightly roll up the
sponge using the paper. Roll with the
paper inside and sit the roll on top of
its outside edge to cool completely.

Step 6

While the cake is cooling, make the
ganache topping. Heat the cream in
a pan, just so as you can keep your
finger in it. Remove from the heat and
add the chocolate, stirring until it is
melted. Cool to room temperature, then
put into the fridge to firm up (this icing
needs to be very thick for piping).

Step 7

Uncurl the cold Swiss roll and remove
the paper. Spread the whipped cream
on top, and re-roll tightly. Cut a quarter
of the cake off from the end on the
diagonal. Transfer the large piece of
cake to a serving plate and angle the
cut end in to the middle of the large
cake to make a branch.

Step 8

Put the chocolate icing into a piping
bag fitted with a star nozzle. Pipe long
thick lines along the cake, covering
the cake completely so it looks like the
bark of a tree. Cover each end with
icing or, if you wish to see the cream,
leave un-iced. Alternatively, just use a
palette knife to spread on the icing and
create rough bark texture with a fork.

Dust with icing sugar.

Chocolate Chilli Truffles

INGREDIENTS

125ml (1/2 cup) pouring cream
1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom
1/4 teaspoon chilli powder
300g (10.5oz) Lindt 70% dark chocolate, finely chopped
50g (1.7oz) butter, at room temperature
30ml bourbon whiskey

METHOD

Step 1

Combine the cream, cardamom and chilli powder in a small saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a boil. Add the chocolate and butter, and remove from heat. Set aside, stirring occasionally with a metal spoon, for 5 minutes or until the chocolate melts and the mixture is smooth.

Step 2

Add bourbon and use a metal spoon to stir until smooth.

Step 3

Pour the chocolate mixture into a small container (make sure the chocolate mixture is at least 3cm deep). Place in the fridge for 4 hours or until firm.

Step 4

Place the cocoa in a deep plastic container. Use a melon baller and scoop out 1 ball from the chocolate mixture. Tap the truffle directly into the cocoa. Gently shake the container to evenly coat the truffle in the cocoa. Transfer the truffle to a small paper case. Repeat.

Homemade truffles are fun to make and you can also coat them in dark chocolate, nuts, coconut or grated chocolate just to add a little pizzazz.

Chocolate Cheesecake

Ingredients

350g (12 oz) milk chocolate wheaten biscuits
100g (3.5oz) butter
300g (10.5oz) cream cheese
1 can of sweetened condensed milk
Juice of 2 lemons
200g (7oz) Lindt 70% dark chocolate

Method

Step 1

Blitz the biscuits in a food processor into fine breadcrumbs.

Step 2

Melt the butter then combine with the crushed biscuits.

Step 3

Spoon the biscuit mixture into a loose-bottomed 25cm tart tin, then use the back of a spoon to spread it evenly over the base and up the sides of the tin until it's completely covered.

Step 4

In a blender, combine the cream cheese, condensed milk and lemon juice until smooth, then gradually beat in the melted dark chocolate.

Step 5

Pour the mixture into the cooled tart case.

Refrigerate for at least 2 hours, or until set. Cut into slices and serve.



Fancy Fruit & Nut Cake

Preparation time: 30 mins
Cooking time: 3 - 3½ hours
Serves: 12

Ingredients

1/3 cup Sunbeam Dry Roasted Almonds
¾ cup Sunbeam Brazil Nuts
1 cup Sunbeam Macadamia Halves
400g (14oz) mixed glacé fruit – pineapple rings, whole apricots and whole figs
200g (7oz) Sunbeam Mixed Glacé Cherries
1 cup Sunbeam Raisins
1½ cups Trident Pitted Dates, halved
½ cup plain flour
¼ cup self raising flour
1 tsp cinnamon, ground
2 eggs
1/3 cup dark brown sugar, firmly packed
1/3 cup brandy
2 tsp orange rind, finely grated
½ cup apricot conserve

Method

Preheat oven to 150°C

Grease a standard loaf tin (21 x 13cm or larger). Line base and sides with baking paper, extending paper 6cm above rim to form a collar. Coarsely chop half the nuts, glacé fruit and cherries and place in a large bowl (reserve the remainder of each for topping). Add raisins and dates and stir to combine.

Sift flours and cinnamon, then stir 1/4 cup into the fruit mixture.

Beat eggs, sugar, 2 tablespoons of brandy and rind together until light. Add remaining flour and stir to combine, then fold through fruit mixture.

Spoon into prepared tin/s and press down with back of a spoon.

Cut remaining glacé fruits into quarters. Press gently on top of cake along with whole nuts and whole cherries.

Cover top of cake with paper bag or baking paper, resting on the collar. Bake large cake for 1.5 - 1.75 hours or until an inserted skewer comes out clean. Cool in tin.

Place apricot conserve and remaining brandy in a small saucepan. Simmer, stirring for 3 minutes. Strain, then brush over cake. To serve, cut into thick slices.



This is so yummy and makes a perfect Christmas gift when done in ramekins



Mince Pies

The mince pie, (a mincemeat pie in New England, and fruit mince pie in Australia and New Zealand) is a sweet pie of English origin, filled with a mixture of dried fruits and spices called “mincemeat”, that is traditionally served during the Christmas season in much of the English-speaking world.

Its ingredients are traceable to the 13th century, when returning European crusaders brought with them Middle Eastern recipes containing meats,

fruits and spices; these contained the Christian symbolism of representing the gifts delivered to Jesus by the three wise men. Mince pies, at Christmastide, were traditionally shaped in an oblong shape, to resemble a manger and were often topped with a depiction of the Christ Child.



INGREDIENTS

360g (2 cups) dried mixed fruit
200g (1 cup, firmly packed) brown sugar
50g (1/3 cup) slivered almonds, finely chopped
1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, quartered, cored, coarsely grated
40g (1.5oz) butter, melted
2 tablespoons brandy
3 teaspoons finely grated lemon rind
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon mixed spice
Pinch of ground nutmeg
1 egg, lightly whisked
White sugar, to dust
PASTRY

300g (2 cups) plain flour
70g (1/3 cup) caster sugar
160g (5.5oz) chilled butter, chopped
1 egg yolk
2 tablespoons iced water

METHOD

Step 1

Finely chop half the mixed fruit. Place in a large bowl. Add the brown sugar, almond, apple, butter, brandy, lemon rind, lemon juice, cinnamon, mixed spice, nutmeg and the remaining mixed fruit. Stir until well combined. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside overnight, stirring occasionally to macerate.

Step 2

Transfer the fruit mixture to a fine

sieve over a bowl and stir to remove excess liquid.

Step 3

To make the pastry, place the flour, sugar and butter in the bowl of a food processor and process until mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Add the egg yolk and water, and process until the mixture just starts to come together (see Tip 1). Turn onto a clean work surface. Shape into a disc. Cover with plastic wrap. Place in the fridge for 20 minutes to rest.

Step 4

Preheat oven to 180C. Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured surface until 5mm thick. Use an 8.5cm-diameter round pastry cutter to cut 20 discs from the pastry. Use a 5cm-diameter star-shaped pastry cutter to cut 20 stars from the remaining pastry.

Step 5

Line twenty 80ml (1/3-cup) capacity muffin pans with pastry discs (see Tip 2). Divide the fruit mince among the pastry cases. Top with pastry stars. Brush the stars lightly with the egg and sprinkle with white sugar. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until light golden. Set aside in the pans for 5 minutes to cool before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

NOTE

Tip 1: Process the pastry until it just starts to come together in large clumps. Don't over-process or your pastry will be tough.

Tip 2: To make the pastry cases, use the balls of your fingers to press the pastry discs neatly into the edge of each pan



Shorthead

INGREDIENTS

250g (9oz) butter,
softened
3/4 cup (155g) caster
sugar
Pinch of salt
2 cups (300g) plain
flour, sifted
1/2 cup (90g) rice
flour, sifted

METHOD

Step 1

Preheat oven to 160°C. Grease 2 oven trays. Line with baking paper. Using an electric mixer, beat butter and 2/3 cup sugar until light and fluffy. Stir in sifted flours.

Step 2

Divide dough into 2 portions. Shape into 2 discs. Roll 1 portion between 2 sheets of baking paper to form a 20cm round. Carefully transfer to prepared tray. Repeat with remaining dough.

Step 3

Using a small knife, score each round into 8 wedges, being careful not to cut all the way through. Pinch edges of rounds to form a scalloped effect. Prick top of rounds with a fork. Sprinkle with remaining sugar.

Step 4

Bake for 20 minutes or until golden, swapping the trays halfway through cooking. Cool on the trays and then serve.

NB: I used Christmas cookie cutters, surprise.. they turned out great.



A red fabric advent calendar shaped like a Christmas tree. The tree is green with a white star at the top. Various Christmas-themed ornaments are attached to the tree, including a drum, an angel, a teddy bear, a cake, a penguin, a reindeer, a candle, a snowman, a house, and a camel. Below the tree is a grid of 24 numbered pockets, each with a red background and a green number.

In fact I just realised the origin of the word holiday was Holy day. So if you don't believe in Christmas, you're screwed.



Noel

Simply, Noel is the French for Christmas.

The original French word was nouvelle meaning 'the good news' because this is what Jesus brought to the world. Of course the Christmas carol 'The First Noel' is an all time classic.

It is a traditional English Christmas carol with Cornish origins, most likely from the early modern period, although possibly earlier.

I love the song, especially sung with gusto with a whole bunch of friends around a fire on the beach with a bubbles in hand of course.

Go celebrate!



Xmas

Ohh, in some Christian circles its has been considered a bastardization of Christmas. Silly.

It actually comes from Roman and ancient Greek practice. In Greek, the letter 'x' was the initial letter of Xristos, meaning Christ.

Early parchments were costly and people didn't have the resources, so this is how they came to use just the letter X.

The fact is, it was one of the earliest renderings of 'Christ'. It was also thought that often people were too scared to write 'Jesus Christ' in full, hence X. It always gets me when folk come up with strange ideas about the origins of words.

Christmas

The word Christmas is derived from the word 'Christ Mass' the first Christian celebrations which honoured Jesus' birthday.

The Bible does not indicate an actual date for Jesus' birth. Christ Mass was originally celebrated in April or May. In the Gospel of Luke, he states that at the time of Jesus' birth, "the Shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks by night in the fields". This would have been unlikely during the winter period as traditionally, sheep were kept indoors.

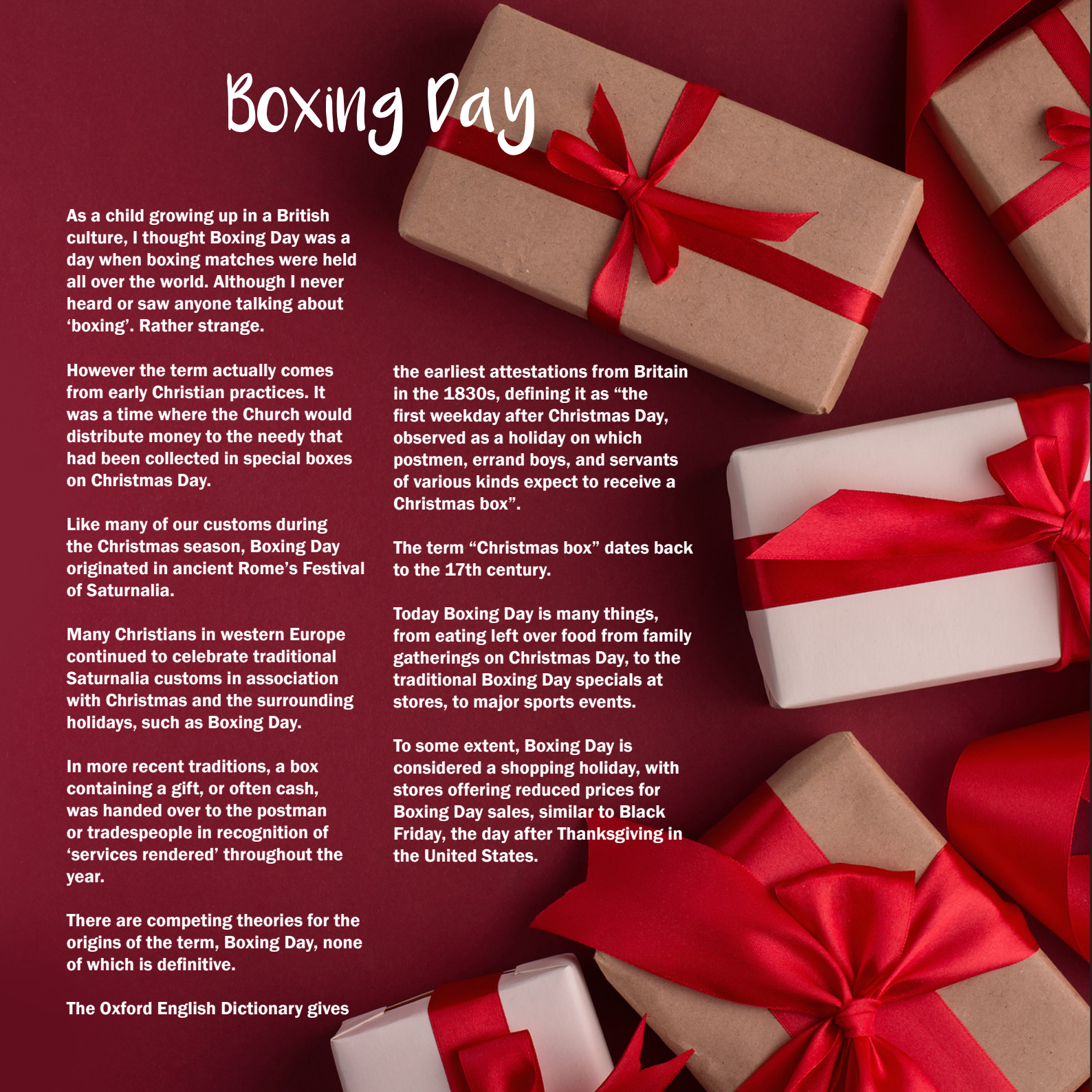
... unless of course Jesus was born in Australia or New Zealand. It's summer there in December and indeed, shepherds would have been watching their sheep in the fields. I rest my case.

However, in AD350 Pope Julius I designated 25 December as Christmas Day. This was done mainly to replace the popular feast held in honour of Saturn - Saturnalia - which occurred in winter. Much of the merrymaking was adopted from the early pagan practices and was Christinised. He may have also been influenced by the idea that Jesus had died on the anniversary of his conception; because Jesus died during Passover and, in the third century AD, Passover was celebrated on 25 March, he may have assumed that Jesus's birthday must have come nine months later, on 25 December.

So hence we have Christmas on 25th December which was really a pagan festival. Hmmm. I prefer my story that the birth of Jesus took place in Australia or New Zealand, because it fits perfectly with the Luke account - unless of course you accept that Jesus' birth took place in the Northern hemisphere in April or May.



Boxing Day



As a child growing up in a British culture, I thought Boxing Day was a day when boxing matches were held all over the world. Although I never heard or saw anyone talking about 'boxing'. Rather strange.

However the term actually comes from early Christian practices. It was a time where the Church would distribute money to the needy that had been collected in special boxes on Christmas Day.

Like many of our customs during the Christmas season, Boxing Day originated in ancient Rome's Festival of Saturnalia.

Many Christians in western Europe continued to celebrate traditional Saturnalia customs in association with Christmas and the surrounding holidays, such as Boxing Day.

In more recent traditions, a box containing a gift, or often cash, was handed over to the postman or tradespeople in recognition of 'services rendered' throughout the year.

There are competing theories for the origins of the term, Boxing Day, none of which is definitive.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives

the earliest attestations from Britain in the 1830s, defining it as "the first weekday after Christmas Day, observed as a holiday on which postmen, errand boys, and servants of various kinds expect to receive a Christmas box".

The term "Christmas box" dates back to the 17th century.

Today Boxing Day is many things, from eating left over food from family gatherings on Christmas Day, to the traditional Boxing Day specials at stores, to major sports events.

To some extent, Boxing Day is considered a shopping holiday, with stores offering reduced prices for Boxing Day sales, similar to Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving in the United States.

Best Selling Christmas Music

Best selling albums ever

1. **Elvis Presley:** Elvis' Christmas Album (10,000,000)
2. **Kenny G:** Miracles: The Holiday Album (7,370,000)
3. **Nat King Cole:** The Christmas Song (6,000,000)
4. **Mannheim Steamroller:** Mannheim Steamroller Christmas (6,000,000)
5. **Mannheim Steamroller:** A Fresh Aire Christmas (6,000,000)
6. **Josh Groban:** Noël (5,890,000)
7. **Mariah Carey:** Merry Christmas (5,500,000)
8. **Celine Dion:** These Are Special Times (5,440,000)
9. **Barbra Streisand:** A Christmas Album (5,370,000)
10. **Johnny Mathis:** Merry Christmas (5,240,000)

Best selling singles ever

1. **Bing Crosby:** White Christmas (1942) (50million)
2. **Bing Crosby:** Silent Night (1935) (30million)
3. **Mariah Carey:** All I Want For Christmas Is You (1994) (16million)
4. **Gene Autry:** Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer (1949) (12million)
5. **Band Aid:** Do They Know It's Christmas Time (1984) (11,7million)
6. **Bing Crosby and The Andrews Sisters:** Jingle Bells (1943) (6million)
7. **Harry Simeone Chorale:** The Little Drummer Boy (1958) (6million)
8. **Wham!:** Last Christmas (1984) (5.8million units)
9. **Tino Rossi:** Petit Papa Noël (1946) (5,7million)
10. **The Chipmunks and David Seville:** The Chipmunk Song
(Christmas Don't Be Late) (1958)(5million)

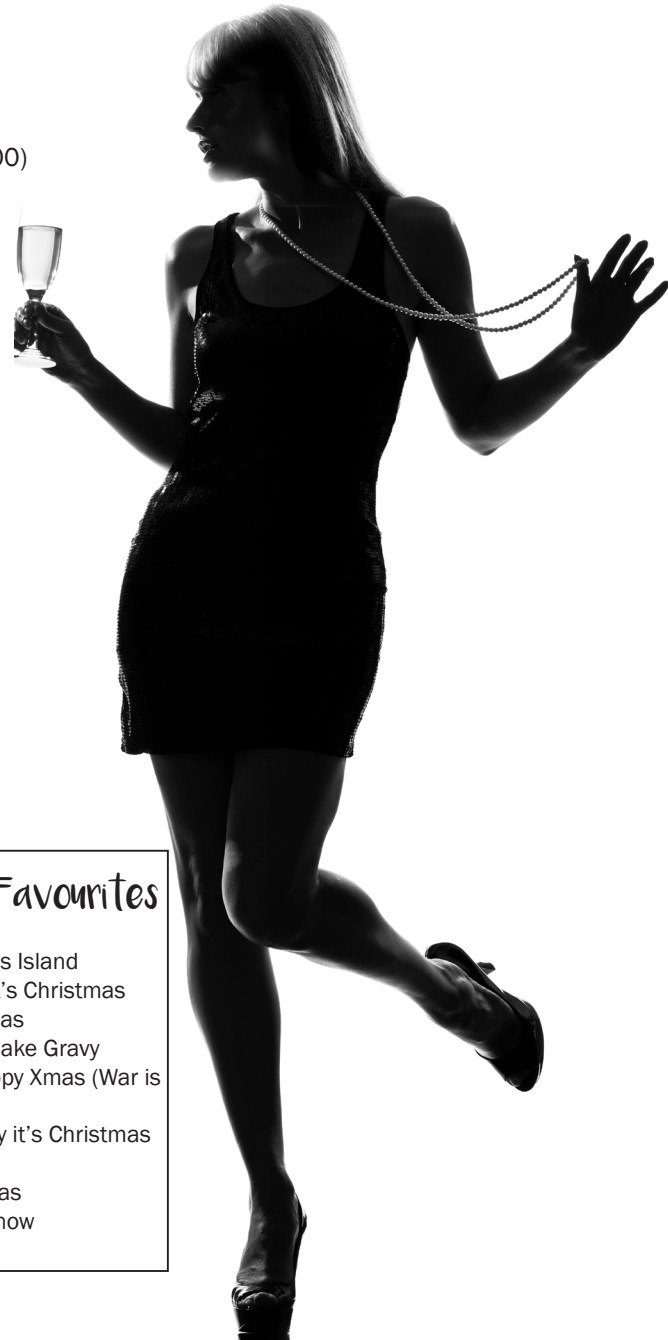
Most downloaded

1. **Mariah Carey** - All I Want for Christmas Is You
2. **Frozen** - Do You Want To Build A Snowman
3. **Trans-Siberian Orchestra** - Christmas Eve
4. **Justin Bieber** - Mistletoe
5. **Brenda Lee** - Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree
6. **Trans-Siberian Orchestra** - Christmas Canon
7. **Faith Hill** - Where Are You Christmas
8. **Jose Feliciano** - Feliz Navidad
9. **Bobby Helms** - Jingle Bell Rock
10. **Wham** - Last Christmas

Lists from Nielsen Music data

My Christmas Favourites

1. **Bob Dylan** - Christmas Island
2. **Queen** - Thank God It's Christmas
3. **Wham** - Last Christmas
4. **Paul Kelly** - How to Make Gravy
5. **Bailey Rushlow** - Happy Xmas (War is Over)
6. **David Gillespie** - Baby it's Christmas Time.
7. **Wham** - Last Christmas
8. **Boyz II Men** - Let It Snow





The Stockings

I always wondered what the story was behind Christmas stockings. Nowadays they are usually stacked with sweets or simple knick knacks.

The idea of the Christmas stocking is thought to have originated in the life of Saint Nicholas. While there are no written records of the origin of the Christmas stocking, there are popular legends that attempt to tell the history of this Christmas tradition.

One such legend has several variations, but the following is a good example: A widower had three daughters who were of an age to be married. At that time brides had to bring a dowry to their husband, but the widower was very poor.

Without a dowry his daughters could not expect to be married. Saint Nicholas happened to overhear the villagers

talking about the widower and his three daughters. Saint Nicholas wanted to help, but knew that the old man would not accept charity.

He decided to help in secret. After dark Saint Nicholas threw three bags of gold through an open window in the widower's house. One of the bags landed in a stocking that was drying by the fire. When the girls and their father woke up the next morning, they found the bags of gold and were overjoyed. The girls were able to get married and lived happily ever after.

When the tradition of the Christmas stocking began in European countries, children simply used one of their everyday socks, and they were hung by the fire on Saint Nicholas Day (19th of December). But eventually special stockings were created for this purpose, and in the early 1800s came to be used on Christmas Day.

Christmas parties and hats

Christmas crackers are festive table decorations that make a snapping sound when pulled open, and often contain a small gift and a joke.

Typically these contents are a coloured paper hat, a small toy, a small plastic model or other trinket, and a motto, a joke, a riddle or piece of trivia on a small strip of paper.

The paper hats, with the appearance of crowns, are usually worn when eating Christmas dinner. The tradition of wearing festive hats is believed to date back to Roman times and the Saturnalia celebrations, which also involved decorative headgear.

Christmas Crackers

Tradition tells of how Tom Smith (1823–1869) of London invented crackers in 1847.

He created the crackers as a development of his bon-bon sweets, which he sold in a twist of paper. As sales of bon-bons slumped, Smith began to come up with new promotional ideas. His first tactic was to insert love messages into the wrappers of the sweets (similar to fortune cookies).

Smith added the “crackle” element when he heard the crackle of a log he had just put on a fire. The size of the

paper wrapper had to be increased to incorporate the banger mechanism, and the sweet itself was eventually dropped, to be replaced by a trinket: fans, jewellery and other substantial items.

The other elements of the modern cracker—the gifts, paper hats and varied designs—were all introduced by Tom Smith’s son, Walter Smith, to differentiate his product from the rival



cracker manufacturers which had suddenly sprung up.

Christmas cards

How is it, whenever you go to a card shop to buy a card, you can never find a card you like? There are some around of course but it can be very frustrating.

The first recorded Christmas cards were sent by Michael Maier to James I of England and his son Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales in 1611. This was discovered in 1979 by Adam McLean in the Scottish Record Office.

The card was laid out to form a rose, and the words said – “A greeting on the birthday of the Sacred King, to the most worshipful and energetic lord and most eminent James, King of Great Britain and Ireland, and Defender of the true faith, with a gesture of joyful celebration of the Birthday of the Lord, in most joy and fortune, we enter into the new auspicious year 1612”.

The next cards were commissioned by Sir Henry Cole and illustrated by John Callcott Horsley in London on 1 May 1843. The central picture showed three generations of a family raising a toast to the card's recipient: on either side were scenes of charity, with food and clothing being given to the poor.

Sir Henry Cole was a British civil servant and inventor who facilitated many innovations in commerce and education in the 19th century in the United Kingdom. In 2001, one of Cole's first Christmas cards, which was sent to his grandmother in 1843, sold at auction for £22,500.

Early British cards rarely showed winter or religious themes, instead favoring flowers, fairies and other fanciful designs that reminded the recipient of the approach of spring.

Humorous and sentimental images of children and animals were popular, as were increasingly elaborate shapes, decorations and materials. At Christmas 1873, the lithograph firm Prang and Mayer began creating greeting cards for the popular market in Britain. The firm began selling the Christmas card in America in 1874, thus becoming the first printer to offer cards in America. Its owner, Louis Prang, is sometimes called the “father of the American Christmas card.”

By the 1880s, Prang was producing over five million cards a year by using the chromolithography process of printmaking. However, the popularity of his cards led to cheap imitations that eventually drove him from the market.

The production of Christmas cards was, throughout the 20th century, a profitable business for many stationery manufacturers, with the design of cards continually evolving with changing tastes and printing techniques. The now widely recognized brand Hallmark Cards was established in 1913 by Joyce Hall with the help of brother Rollie Hall to market their self-produced Christmas cards.



The Wreath

The one I have is a million years old I think, but I love it and it always brings back fond memories.

In Christianity, wreaths are used to observe the Advent season, in preparation for Christmastide and Epiphanytide, as well as to celebrate the latter two liturgical seasons.

These wreaths, as with other Advent and Christmas decorations, are often set up on the first Sunday of Advent.

The Advent wreath was first used by Lutherans in Germany in the 16th century, and in 1839, Lutheran priest Johann Hinrich Wichern used a wreath made from a cart wheel to educate children about the meaning and purpose of Christmas, as well as to help them count its approach, thus giving rise to the modern version of the Advent wreath.

Christmas wreaths are constructed of evergreens to represent everlasting life brought through Jesus and the circular shape of the wreath represents God, with no beginning and no end.

Advent and Christmas wreaths are now a popular symbol in preparation for and to celebrate the coming of Christ, with the former being used to mark the beginning of the Christian Church's liturgical year and both serving as

décor during Advent and Christmas festivities.

While Advent wreaths are erected on stands or placed on tables, Christmas wreaths are often hung on doors or walls.



The Nativity

Once upon a time you used to see them everywhere at Christmas. It has been a major subject of Christian art since the 4th century.

One of the most visible traditions during the Christmas season is the display of manger scenes depicting the nativity, usually in the form of statues or figurines, in private homes, businesses and churches, either inside or outside the building.

This tradition is usually attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi who was described as creating such a display at Greccio, Italy, in 1223.

Before the manger scene tradition developed, there were paintings depicting the subject. The earliest artistic depictions of the nativity were in the catacombs and on sarcophagi in Rome. As Gentile visitors, the wise men and kings were popular in these scenes, representing the significance of the arrival of the Messiah to all peoples.

The ox and ass were also used to symbolize the Jews and the Gentiles, and have remained a constant since the earliest depictions. Mary was soon seated on a throne as the wise men and kings visited.



Holly

Holly symbolises eternal life. Christians have adopted the holly tree as a symbol for Christmas. The sharp leaves are said to symbolize the crown of thorns worn by Christ, while the berries represent his blood. The evergreen quality of the tree is metaphoric for eternal life.

Traditionally, it was used to protect newborn babies from harm by bathing them in the water from the leaves. Before holly was hung in houses to accompany Christmas trees, it was considered to be a sacred plant by the Druids. The Druids regarded holly as a symbol of fertility and eternal life, thought to have magical powers.

In the Harry Potter novels, holly is used as the wood in Harry's wand.

But look out - holly berries can cause vomiting and diarrhea. They are especially dangerous in cases involving accidental consumption by children attracted to the bright red berries. Ingestion of over 20 berries may be fatal to children.

Holly leaves, if eaten, might cause diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, and stomach and intestinal problems.

Holly plants might be toxic to pets and livestock.



The Christmas Tree

A Christmas tree is a decorated tree, usually an evergreen conifer, such as a spruce, pine or fir, or an artificial tree of similar appearance, associated with the celebration of Christmas, originating in Northern Europe. The custom was developed in medieval Livonia (present-day Estonia and Latvia), and in early modern Germany where Protestant Germans brought decorated trees into their homes.

The Catholic Church had long resisted this Protestant custom and a Christmas tree stood for the first time in the Vatican in 1982.

The earliest known firmly dated representation of a Christmas tree is on the keystone sculpture of a private home in Turckheim, Alsace (then part of Germany, today France), with the date 1576.

Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we now know it in the 16th century when devout Christians brought decorated trees into their homes.

It is a widely held belief that Martin Luther, the 16th-century Protestant reformer, first added lighted candles to a tree. Walking toward his home one winter evening, composing a sermon, he was awed by the brilliance of stars twinkling amidst evergreens.

To recapture the scene for his family, he erected a tree in the main room and wired its branches with lighted candles.

The tradition was introduced to North America in the winter of 1781 by Hessian soldiers stationed in the Province of Québec (1763–1791) to garrison the colony against American attack. General Friedrich Adolf Riedesel and his wife, the Baroness von Riedesel, held a Christmas party for the officers at Sorel, Quebec, delighting their guests with a fir tree decorated with candles and fruits.

Most 19th-century Americans found Christmas trees an oddity. The first record of one being on display was in the 1830s by the German settlers of Pennsylvania, although trees had been a tradition in many German homes much earlier. The Pennsylvania German settlements had community trees as early as 1747. But, as late as the 1840s Christmas trees were seen as pagan symbols and not accepted by most Americans.

It is not surprising that, like many other festive Christmas customs, the tree was adopted so late in America. To the New England Puritans, Christmas was sacred. The pilgrim's second governor, William Bradford, wrote that he tried hard to stamp out "pagan mockery" of the observance, penalizing any frivolity.

The influential Oliver Cromwell preached against “the heathen traditions” of Christmas carols, decorated trees, and any joyful expression that desecrated “that sacred event.” In 1659, the General Court of Massachusetts enacted a law making any observance of December 25 (other than a church service) a penal offense; people were fined for hanging decorations. That stern solemnity continued until the 19th century, when the influx of German and Irish immigrants undermined the Puritan legacy.

Both setting up and taking down a Christmas tree are associated with specific dates. Traditionally, Christmas trees were not brought in and decorated until Christmas Eve or, in the traditions celebrating Christmas Eve rather than the first day of Christmas, 23 December, and then removed the day after Twelfth Night (5 January); to have a tree up before or after these dates was even considered bad luck.

It all sounds a bit crazy today.



Santa Claus

Also known as Father Christmas, Saint Nicholas, Saint Nick, Santa Claus, or simply Santa, is a legendary character originating in Western Christian culture who brings gifts to the homes of well behaved children on the night of Christmas Eve.

I was always worried as a kid, because we didn't have a chimney and I knew Santa stopped on the roof and came down a chimney. I wondered how he got into a locked house with no chimney.

The modern character of Santa Claus was based on traditions surrounding the historical Saint Nicholas, a fourth-century Greek bishop and gift-giver.

Santa Claus is generally depicted as a portly, jolly, white-bearded man—sometimes with spectacles—wearing a red coat with white fur collar and cuffs, white-fur-cuffed red trousers, red hat with white fur, and black leather belt and boots and carrying a

bag full of gifts for children.

This image became popular in the United States and Canada in the 19th century due to the significant influence of the 1823 poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas." Caricaturist and political cartoonist Thomas Nast also played a role in the creation of Santa's image. This image has been maintained and reinforced through song, radio, television, children's books, films, and advertising.

In modern folklore, Santa Claus lives at the North Pole and makes lists of children throughout the world. He categorizes them according to their behavior. He then delivers presents, including toys and candy, to all of the well behaved children in the world. Misbehaving children receive coal on the night of Christmas Eve. Santa Claus is said to accomplish this feat with the aid of his elves, who make the toys in his workshop.



He typifies the spirit of good cheer at Christmas, bringing peace, joy, good food, wine and revelry. As England no longer kept the feast day of Saint Nicholas on 6 December, the Father Christmas celebration was moved to 25 December to coincide with Christmas Day.

Images of Santa Claus were further popularized through Haddon Sundblom's depiction for The Coca-Cola Company's Christmas advertising in the 1930s.

The popularity of the image spawned urban legends that Santa Claus was invented by The Coca-Cola Company or that Santa wears red and white because they are the colors used to promote the Coca-Cola brand.

Earlier still, Santa Claus had appeared dressed in red and white and essentially in his current form on several covers of Puck magazine in the first few years of the 20th century. A man dressed as Santa Claus did fundraising for Volunteers of America on a sidewalk in Chicago, Illinois, in 1902. He is wearing a mask with a beard attached.

The image of Santa Claus as a benevolent character became reinforced with its association with charity and philanthropy, particularly by organizations such as the Salvation Army. Volunteers dressed as Santa Claus typically became part of fundraising drives to aid needy families at Christmas time.

The Chimney Tradition

The tradition of Santa Claus entering through the chimney is shared by many European seasonal gift-givers. In pre-Christian Norse tradition, Odin would often enter through chimneys on the solstice. In the Italian Befana tradition, the gift-giving witch is perpetually covered with soot from her trips down the chimneys of children's homes. In the tale of Saint Nicholas, the saint tossed coins through a window, and, in a later version of the tale, down a chimney when he finds the window locked (from the *The Feast of Saint Nicholas* by Jan Steen, c. 1665).



Calvinist and Puritan Opposition

Some Christians, particularly Calvinists and Puritans, disliked the idea of Santa Claus, as well as Christmas in general, believing that the lavish celebrations were not in accordance with their faith. Other nonconformist Christians condemn the materialist focus of contemporary gift giving and see Santa Claus as the symbol of that culture.

Various psychologists and researchers have wrestled with the ways that young children are convinced of the existence of Santa Claus, and have wondered whether children's abilities to critically weigh real-world evidence may be undermined by their belief in this or other imaginary figures.

Typical objections to presenting Santa Claus as a literally real person, rather than a story, include:

1. That lying is normally bad.
2. That parents intentionally lying to their children promotes distrust.
3. That Santa's gifts promote selfishness, greed, and materialism.
4. That the Santa story associates good behavior with being materially rewarded with presents.
5. That tricking children into believing falsehoods interferes

with the development of critical thinking.

Others, however, see little harm in the belief in Santa Claus. Psychologist Tamar Murachver said that because it is a cultural, not parental, lie, it does not usually undermine parental trust.

The New Zealand Skeptics also see no harm in parents telling their children that Santa is real. Spokesperson Vicki Hyde said, "It would be a hard-hearted parent indeed who frowned upon the innocent joys of our children's cultural heritage. We save our bah humbugs for the things that exploit the vulnerable."

Some children have reacted poorly, including rejecting the family's religious beliefs on the grounds that if the parents lied about the unprovable existence of Santa Claus, then they might lie about the unprovable existence of God as well.

By contrast Kyle Johnson of King's College wrote, "It's a lie, it degrades your parental trustworthiness, it encourages credulity, it does not encourage imagination, and it's equivalent to bribing your kids for good behavior."

So. Is Santa real?

Son: "Dad, I think I'm old enough to know now. Is there a Santa Claus?"

Not being the world's fastest thinker, I stalled for time.

Dad: "OK, I agree that you're old enough. But before I tell you, I have a question for you. You see, the truth is a dangerous gift. Once you know something, you can't un-know it. Once you know the truth about Santa Claus, you will never again understand and relate to him as you do now. So my question is: Are you sure you want to know?"

Brief pause. Son: "Yes. I want to know."

Dad: "OK, I'll tell you: Yes, there IS a Santa Claus."

Son: "Really?"

Dad: "Yes, really, but he's not an old man with a beard in a red suit. That's just what we tell kids.

You see, kids are too young to understand the true nature of Santa Claus, so we explain it to them in a way that they can understand.

The truth about Santa Claus is that he's not a person at all; he's an idea.... Think of all those presents Santa gave you over the years. I actually bought those myself....

I watched you open them. And did it

bother me that you didn't thank me? Of course not! In fact it gave me great pleasure. You see, Santa Claus is THE IDEA OF GIVING FOR THE SAKE OF GIVING, without thought of thanks or acknowledgment.

When I saw that woman collapse on the subway last week and called for help, I knew that she'd never know that it was me who summoned the ambulance. I was being Santa Claus when I did that."

Son: "Oh."

Dad: "So now that you know, you're part of it. You have to be Santa Claus too now. That means you can never tell a young kid the secret, and you have to help us select Santa presents for them, and most important, you have to look for opportunities to help people. Got it?"

Anonymous author



The Reindeer

In traditional festive legend, Santa Claus's reindeer pull a sleigh through the night sky to help Santa Claus deliver gifts to children on Christmas Eve.

The common names of the eight fictional reindeer are Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen, although Donner is often called Donner. They are based on the names used in the 1823 poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (commonly called "The Night Before Christmas")

by Clement Clarke Moore, arguably the basis of the reindeers' popularity.

Rudolph's story was originally written in verse by Robert L. May for the Montgomery Ward chain of department stores in 1939, and published as a book to be given to children in the store at Christmas time.

According to this story, Rudolph's glowing red nose made him a social outcast among the other reindeer. Santa Claus's worldwide flight one year was imperiled by severe fog. Visiting Rudolph's house to deliver his presents, Santa observed Rudolph's glowing red nose in the darkened bedroom and decided to use him as a makeshift lamp to guide his sleigh.

Rudolph accepted Santa's request to lead the sleigh for the rest of the night, and he returned home a hero for having helped Santa Clause.



Carol Singing

Did you ever join with a bunch of friends and go around the streets singing carols? It's a lot of fun.

The idea of singing at Christmas time stems from the thought that the angels sang when they appeared to the shepherds at Bethlehem to announce Jesus' birth.

The present day carol as Christmas music, however, is far removed from its original usage. A carol was once a secular dance which was performed at any time of the year. People held hands and formed a ring, and as they circled around they joined in song.

Carols were first sung in Europe thousands of years ago, but these were not Christmas Carols. They were pagan songs, sung at the Winter Solstice celebrations as people danced round stone circles. The Winter Solstice is the shortest day of the year, usually taking place around 22nd December.

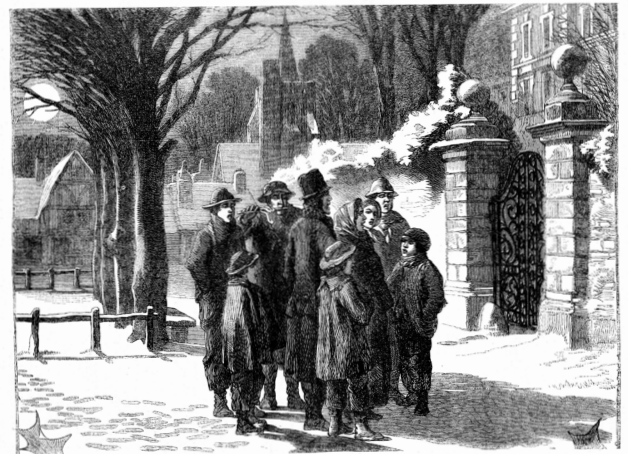
When the Puritans came to power in England in the 1640s, the celebration of Christmas and singing carols was stopped. However, the carols survived as people still sang them in secret. Carols remained mainly unsung until Victorian times, when two men called William Sandys and Davis Gilbert collected lots of old Christmas music from villages in England.

The first carol service is believed to have been held at Truro Cathedral, Cornwall, in 1880. It was organised by Edward White Benson, the First Bishop of Truro, who later became the Archbishop of Canterbury.

A separate tradition of 'wassailing' also existed as far back as Anglo-Saxon times. The word 'wassail' probably comes from the Old Norse 'ves heill' meaning 'be well and in good health' and was a toast. But by the Victorian period wassailers were caroling groups who went round the town and would be rewarded with a hot, spiced (often cider-based) drink, known as 'wassail'.

Today, carol singers can more usually be found in town squares, shopping centres, and visiting hospitals and old people's homes; and rather than waiting to be rewarded with a cup of wassail, modern carolers are more likely to ask for donations to charity. That said, a glass of mulled wine is often very welcome!

Mmm, I like the idea of the mulled wine. Guess it's a winter thing? A glass of bubbles will do or a wine, and both colours are acceptable, red or white.



THE CAROL SINGERS.

Margaret of Main Beach



I love listening to people's stories. Everyone has a story. I've sat with rich and famous, young and old. I've sat with the unknowns in mud huts in Africa and India, the slums of Thailand, and the favelas in Brazil. Everyone is fascinating.

I've asked several folk in their 90's what their secret to a long life is. The common thread? Be yourself, be stress free, keep busy, be curious, don't lose that sense of childlike wonder. Use your brain not your smart phone. As you get older, be more active, embrace the joint pains, walk, use it or lose it.

"Life is to be lived. If you have to support yourself, you had bloody well better find some way that is going to be interesting. And you don't do that by sitting around."

Katharine Hepburn

Blink and life is over. Middle age is not 50. It's 35 or 40 as most people live to 70 or 80. No one gets out of here alive, so have fun, be kind and remember to laugh. Life can be beautiful if you make it beautiful.

You can't change yesterday, you don't know what tomorrow will bring. So just deal with the present moment. Every moment is precious and one that you never get back.

A positive attitude towards life doesn't mean that you ignore life's less pleasant situations. It just means that you approach life in a positive and productive way. You expect things will always work out for the best, and maybe not always the way you planned or thought. Look for the best in people and things.

Have a wonderful Christmas.
Margaret

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a white bikini top and a straw hat, is swinging happily on a swing set. The swing is made of two white ropes hanging from a thick palm tree trunk. She is barefoot and has a joyful expression. In the foreground, a white dog with black spots sits on the sandy beach, looking up at the woman. The dog is wearing a red Santa hat with a white pom-pom and a black and white striped collar. The background features a clear blue sky with scattered white clouds, a turquoise ocean, and a distant shoreline with green vegetation. Another palm tree is visible on the right side of the frame.

Be yourself,
be stress free, keep busy,
be curious,
be prepared to laugh at
yourself and don't lose
that sense of childlike
wonder."

Merry Christmas