



Christmas past and present - around the world



Xmas c.1957 - our own John Dearing is hiding behind the boy on the left!

Ghosts of Christmas Past

By John Dearing

Christmas has now become a formulaic feast of consumption, and it is difficult to imagine it any other way. However some of our more mature readers tell us how Christmas times have changed.

Without modern cooking appliances, Christmas dinner was often prepared over wood or coal burning ranges. Turkey and chicken was much more expensive then, so pork or beef was common and goose also very popular. All the Christmas puddings, cakes and mince pies were made at home. Wine was a once-a-year Christmas treat.

Few had cars so Christmas travel was by bus or train, and most stayed overnight, often sharing four or five to a bed! Foreign travel was most unusual; people spent Christmas with the family.

Everyone would listen to the King's speech on the radio, at 3 o'clock on Christmas afternoon - many remember poor George VI and his painful stutter!

It always seemed to snow at Christmas, even in southern England, so the children would make snowmen while dinner was being cooked. Later everyone would gather around the fire, as there was no central heating and in the mornings the bedroom windows would be covered in frost.

Fun and Games

With no TV, families

would play games after dinner. Presents were generally small and seldom expensive. The children's stockings would contain nuts, an orange and maybe a trinket. All toys would be left by Father Christmas.

Many more people worked on Christmas Day, such as the

legions of telephone operators; buses and trains would operate a Sunday service. Tradesmen would have horses to tend on Christmas Day. Most people worked on New Years Day which only became a public holiday in the 1970s.

Christmas in Cyprus in the 1930s & 40s

By Erini Rodis

Georgina Rodis, of Bedford Road talks about Christmas in Morphou.

At Christmas time Grandad would get up at 5 a.m. and with the help of a neighbour would kill the year's fattened pig. Boiling water was used to help remove the bristles, then we would all muck in to prepare different parts of the pig so nothing was wasted!

A very piggy reminiscence
First the liver was cooked with onions and that would get eaten pretty quickly.

To make a delicacy called *Zaladina*, the head was washed and boiled in a stock of water, fresh rosemary, cinnamon bark and bay leaves. When the meat was cooked we'd add the trotters to release gelatine. All the liquid was then drained off,

vinegar and lemon juice were added, and it was boiled to reduce. In the meantime all the head meat was laid out in a dish. The reduced liquid was poured over it all and it was left to set for a couple of days. It's supposed to keep in a fridge for up to 6 months - but it never lasted that long in our house!

Fried pieces of pig skin were folded into a dough mix with sugar and cinnamon to make a loaf called *Ditsiropitta*, a bit like olive bread but with pig skin instead of olives.

The rest of the pork was soaked in a wine and coriander marinade, for a week.

Big pieces were then dried out in the sun to make *basta* and smaller morsels were minced up and stuffed into the small intestine to make *loukanika*.

The rest of the fat was stored and used for cooking, or spread onto bread, with a sprinkle of sugar as a sweet treat. People don't eat like this any more; we didn't know about cholesterol - but we wouldn't have cared anyway, it was too delicious!

Christmas Past or Present?

By Diana Cormack

For years now I have been hoping that a law will be passed which bans anything to do with Christmas from being put on sale or display before 1 December. This year I spotted the festive season's first cards on a sweltering August afternoon. By Bonfire Night they had taken over almost completely.

The same goes for food. As soon as one shop starts showing Christmas goodies, all the others join in. Perhaps there is an unwritten retailers' rule that says "One out, all out"? People can only buy so much. Then there are the streetlights and decorations.

Some places already had their lights up before the clocks went back.

I've given up on the charity gift catalogues that arrive in July and can do nothing but moan at the television adverts that assault our screens as soon as September is over.

A Tropical Christmas

By Sonia Singham

My childhood memories of Christmas in Antigua have never been forgotten even after many years of living in this country. Many of the customs are similar, but the imagination was often stretched by thoughts of Father Christmas coming down the chimney and Christmas cards with snow scenes.

However with a few variations the Christmas meal was the same. My grandmother would bring in a capon specially reared for the big day. The cook would then slaughter the poor bird and prepare it for the meal along with rice, baked sweet potatoes, carrots, and string beans. This was followed by a fruit salad and if we hadn't indulged too much on the first courses, the pudding, filled with fruit that had been soaked

in rum for months. We always invited one of my parents' friends who lived alone.

Before fir trees were imported the Christmas tree was the local cherry tree, bedecked with lights and 'angel hair' which made the skin itch.

Now when the sun shines on Christmas day, and even if it doesn't, I'm transported back to that tropical island of my childhood.

The Best Moment

By Daphne Chamberlain

I have vivid memories of sitting up in bed on Christmas morning, clutching my bulging pillowcase and deliberately not opening it. All through the night I had woken up at intervals, feeling that pillowcase with my feet, disappointed when it lay flat and empty, and elated when at last I prodded solid, rustling shapes.

It would have ruined it all just to have torn it open immediately. However nice the presents, the great pleasure was to sit there, trying to guess what they were, and then slowly and deliberately to open each one, delaying as long as possible the time when none

were left.

I used to hold the very last unwrapped present in my hand, thinking that it would be another whole year before another Christmas. But I was lucky. There was one consolation. I had only six weeks to wait until my birthday.

Childhood Christmases in East Finchley

By Robert Kent (b 1905)

East Finchley was a bustling place as the shops prepared for the festive season.

Starting at the northern end there was Bradshaw's, a department store which was bombed in the Second World War. Santa Claus held sway in his grotto, and there was a frock-coated shopwalker to direct Madam to the right department. It sold toys made from painted tin. We were pleased to get them, but the varnish smelled horrible!

Greengrocers kept a display of Christmas goods out

on the pavement all night, often guarded by old men walking up and down all night to keep warm.

The shops made their own decorations. Every Christmas we pressed our noses to the windows of Lacey's, near the station, to see their electric train set running round the shop.

I also remember a skating scene, complete with snow, all made from sugar and sweets, which appeared in a shop window opposite the police station in Fortis Green.

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