

# Christmas Past

What was Christmas like when you were a youngster? I'm sure it was very different to how we celebrate today but our families had their own customs and traditions that we grew up with and which we have brought into our own family celebrations. Decorations were often made at home with crepe paper and tinsel and there was always a real Christmas tree. We would look forward to having a Christmas stocking on our beds on Christmas morning filled with small gifts – an orange, some nuts, maybe some chocolate coins. The whole family would then go to church to celebrate with friends and neighbours. Christmas dinner was usually a capon with all the trimmings much as we have today and always a large Christmas pudding. Most of us will have happy memories of Christmases spent all those years ago.

I started to wonder how Christmas would have been spent by the people of Kirby Muxloe over 500 years ago in the 1480's. It was the most important occasion in the year when everyone, humble or rich, celebrated the birth of Jesus. Of course, how you celebrated depended on a person's status – how different was it if you were a peasant living off the land, a tenant farmer or one of Lord Hastings' family living at the Castle - how did they celebrate Christmas during the medieval period?

As a peasant, probably living in the village in a small wooden house that you would have shared with the animals, you would have worked nearly every day during the year but at Christmas you were able to take a break from hard physical labour during the 12 days of Christmas. These lasted from Christmas Eve until Twelfth Night. There would be little work to do this time of year on your strips of land in the common fields in the village. Take a look at some of the fields around the village and you can still see evidence of 'ridge and furrow' where the peasant farmers grew their crops in medieval times. Food would have been saved in order to celebrate Christmas – if you were fortunate, maybe beef, a leg of mutton or pork, maybe a chicken, fruit, nuts and cheeses, probably the predecessors to our modern Red Leicester and Stilton cheeses, could be looked forward to. Stilton cheese is of course still a traditional food eaten at Christmas.

Since the Black Death, peasants were able to earn a little more money to spend on extra food although living was still very hard. Holly, Ivy and evergreens were used to decorate the house – reminiscent of the Pagan festival once celebrated at this time of year and there would be a Yule Log burning in the grate. The Yule Log, a large tree trunk, would be lit on Christmas Eve and would be kept burning for the 12 days of Christmas. Today, we often enjoy a Yule Log in the form of a chocolate log. Peasants would enjoy drinking either 'church ale' or 'lambswool'. Church ale was a strong brew saved for Christmas and its drinking led to much singing and dancing in the church! Lambswool was milder and was a hot concoction of beer with apples bobbing on top.

A tenant farmer would have lived in a more substantial house with several rooms and would have decorated the

house much the same, with greenery and a Yule Log. At their Christmas, they would have been expected to give the lord gifts of butter, extra bread, eggs or a couple of hens. The more important workers on the estate, such as the shepherd or swineherd, would receive presents from the lord such as food, drink, firewood and clothes. He may have been invited to join in with the celebrations with the lord and his family but was expected to bring his own food and drink. A tenant farmer would have been able to enjoy more meat, fish and dairy products at Christmas than the lowlier peasant workers as his life was more secure.

Members of Lord Hastings' family would have enjoyed a very different Christmas, which often lasted much longer than the 12 days. Imagine a long wooden table laid out in the Great Hall with tapestries adorning the walls and Yule logs burning all day in the huge fireplaces. On it would be wooden platters, knives and spoons and the table would be laden with a sumptuous array of dishes such as a boar's head or even a gilded peacock. There would be venison, joints of meat, fish such as salmon, trout, eels and oysters, accompanied by bread, butter and cheeses. There would be wine to drink brought from London but imported from France and Germany. After several courses of savoury dishes, sweetmeats and fruit such as oranges were brought out and a pudding (frumenty) made from wheat and spices and then boiled in milk was eaten. Gradually eggs, mace, dried prunes and minced meat were added and eventually, as the meat was left out, it became more like the Christmas pudding we eat today. Left-over food was often distributed to the poor of the village on Boxing Day. During the meal you would be entertained by musicians playing flutes, lyres, and drums and mummers would perform plays celebrating stories, perhaps from the bible or the story of St. George and the dragon.



Medieval Banquet

Many of us back in the medieval period would never have experienced such feasting and merriment at Christmas but would still have enjoyed a time of rest, going to church, somewhat better food and spending time together as a family, even if we were a poor peasant family. If we were to go back in time to the 1480's, I think we would recognize many of the traditions and food enjoyed then that we still enjoy today.

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Are there any history-related subjects that you would like us to cover? Talk to a Committee member or send us an email – see right:

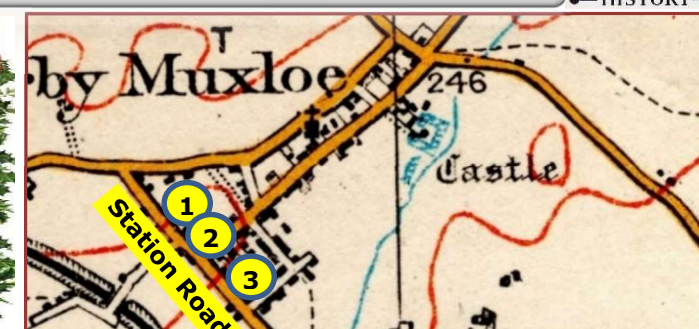


Hi and welcome to our eighth Kirby Muxloe Local History Group Newsletter. If you are new to our list – Welcome.

Your Committee wishes you a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Safe New Year.

We do not anticipate any meetings before May 2021, but we will continue to review the situation.

Mike Gould (Chair) Val Knott (Secretary)  
 Kate Trill (Treasurer) Judith Upton (Archivist)  
 Kerry Burdett



known as "Roundhill Maternity Home". "The Cliffe" had previously been the home of Major Reid, a Squadron Leader in the Royal Flying Corps during WWI. JU

## There's been a Murder! (continued from last month)

A couple of weeks after the murder, the Mercury reported that the police "entertained suspicions" of one George Frederick Ashton, a phrenologist and galvaniser. This meant that he read people's character from the bumps on their head and that he could use an electric current to stimulate them – both techniques that are now discredited. It appeared that Ashton had absconded and that the police had been looking for him. He had now been arrested and was being questioned.

Ashton was soon charged with maliciously and with intent murdering Samuel Adcock. At a hearing before magistrates, the various witnesses who had made statements to the inquest repeated their stories, but Thomas Adcock, Samuel's brother, also reported that the prisoner, Ashton, had come to their house on 19<sup>th</sup> June to ask how they were and say how sorry he was for them. It then transpired that Dorothy Adcock, sister to Samuel and Thomas, had visited Ashton two or three times. Another witness reported that Ashton had told him about seeing Samuel Adcock on the night of the murder and saying that Samuel didn't appear to have any money, as he asked his friend to pay for their drinks.

The case seemed to hinge on showing that Dorothy believed in Ashton's methods but the rest of her family did not, and so there was some animosity between the male members of the Adcock family and Ashton. Then the policeman who apprehended Ashton stated that two bloody handkerchiefs had been found in Ashton's bag. The accused claimed that his nose had been bleeding (today's DNA testing might have proved interesting!).

Fortunately for Ashton, he was able to produce two witnesses who could place him in Nottingham on the evening of the murder. The magistrates deliberated and decided that there was insufficient evidence for him to be brought to trial on a charge of murder, although from what they had heard, one of fortune telling for Miss Ashton might be more successful! He was duly brought to trial on this charge, but when Miss Ashton did not wish to pursue the matter, Ashton found himself cleared of all charges – much to the delight of a large crowd, who saw him now as a popular hero! No-one was ever charged with the murder of poor Samuel Adcock. MG

Continuing our stroll in 1945 - as we exit Gullet Lane and turn right, we come to the start of Station Road.

① Starting on the opposite side of the road, we arrive at number 2, a small bungalow. The next house we arrive at is number 4, The Chalet. By looking at the design and consulting the census returns, it appears that the house was probably built in the Edwardian era. During the bombing of 1940, a 500kg parachute bomb dropped into the garden, the house being saved by a substantially built chimney stack, which took much of the blast. Geoffrey Stafford and his wife, who were living in the house at the time, were badly injured, but fortunately the injuries were mainly cuts and bruises. They were treated at Leicester Royal Infirmary. At present and for many years to come, it will be a private residence, at one time the home of the Goode family. By the 21st century it will become a Care Home (named Famille House) for up to 16 people with learning disabilities.

② Following on the same side of the road, we then come to number 6, a house named "Milber". The house at present is owned by Miss Adela Clarke and she lives there with her domestic servant, Alice Page. In two years' time, this house will become the Vicarage of St Bartholomew's Parish Church. The Old Vicarage, which was formerly the National School (situated on the corner of Ratby Lane and Glenfield Road), is now in 1945 thought to be too large and too expensive to run for a Vicar without private sources of income to supplement his stipend. When "Milber" becomes the vicarage, the first vicar in residence will be the Reverend H. Paige Hudson.

③ Finally, we reach the house on the corner of Station Road and Barwell Road. Now, in 1945, this is Newland's Nursing Home, a private maternity home, run by Ruth Whytock. Mrs Whytock had previously been a teaching sister at Leicester Royal Infirmary. This year, on September 2nd, the garden will be decked with coloured fairy lights, celebrating the end of WWII. In later years, the Winkless family will live in the house for many years. In 1957, needing to expand, the maternity home will move to much larger premises in a house formerly named "The Cliffe" on Kirby Fields. The building will become



## Christmas Quiz

- 1 Which carol is also known as "the counting song"?
- 2 How many ghosts appear in A Christmas Carol?
- 3 Which real life person is Santa Claus based on?
- 4 Which classical film features the song "Walking in the Air"?
- 5 Which Reindeer name means lightning?
- 6 How many tips do traditional snowflakes have?
- 7 In December 1851 which famous charity started their Red Kettle Campaign?
- 8 Where does the tradition to hang gifts on the tree come from?
- 9 What is "Smoking Bishop"?
- 10 Robin Hood & Maid Marion appear in which pantomime?
- 11 Who invented the Christmas cracker?
- 12 In which century was the carol "Once in Royal David's City" composed?
- 13 What was the highest grossing Christmas film of all time?
- 14 Which ancient people started the tradition of exchanging gifts?
- 15 What is "sent to me" on the 11th day of Christmas?
- 16 Where was Mommy kissing Santa Claus?
- 17 Who was Ebenezer Scrooge's partner?
- 18 What is the name of the boy in the filmed story "The Snowman"?
- 19 When was the first Christmas card printed?
- 20 In which year did the first chocolate advent calendar appear?
- 21 What took place on Christmas day 1864 in London's Hyde Park?
- 22 Which play was written by Shakespeare for Elizabeth 1 as a Christmas present?
- 23 How does Santa climb up the chimney after leaving presents?
- 24 How many gifts in total were given in "The Twelve days of Christmas"?
- 25 Which Christmas toys come to life in the Nutcracker ballet?
- 26 In the 1970's a Leicester band were "lonely this Christmas" Who were they?
- 27 What was taken from Westminster Abbey on Christmas day 1950?
- 28 The first Royal Christmas broadcast - which monarch made it?
- 29 What might a naughty child find in their stocking on Christmas Morning?
- 30 The Wallace & Grommit Christmas film won the 1995 Oscar for the best animated short film. Which film?



## Christmas Quiz - continued

- 31 Which rock band released "Merry Christmas Everybody"?
- 32 Who wrote "The Snowman"?
- 33 Why are robins so popular on Christmas cards?
- 34 How many of Santa's reindeer begin with the letter D?
- 35 Where in Britain did Eggnog originate from?
- 36 Dumbledore gave Harry Potter what for his 1st Christmas at Hogwarts?
- 37 What name is given to the last ghost who visits Scrooge in a Christmas Carol?
- 38 Who banned Christmas in England between 1647 & 1660?
- 39 In which modern day country was St Nicholas born?
- 40 In the song "Winter Wonderland" what do we call the snowman?
- 41 What cake do Italians often eat at Christmas?
- 42 In which oceans are the two Christmas Islands located?
- 43 What is wassailing?
- 44 In Which century are turkeys thought to have appeared in Britain?
- 45 Which Christmas carol gives comfort and joy?
- 46 Who wrote the first broadcasted Royal Christmas Message?
- 47 What is it lucky to find in your Christmas pudding?
- 48 Ralphie in a Christmas Story only wants 1 thing. What is it?
- 49 Which popular Christmas song was actually written for Thanksgiving?
- 50 In which country is a spiders web placed on Christmas trees for good luck?
- 51 What article of clothing brings Frosty the Snowman to life?
- 52 What country did poinsettias originally come from?
- 53 On Xmas day 1986, 3 million people watched a TV programme. Which one?
- 54 Which childrens author wrote Little Miss Christmas & Mr Christmas?
- 55 In northern England, what is Christmas cake often eaten with?
- 56 Where did the first wooden advent Calendar originate?
- 57 In the 12 days of Christmas what were there eight of?
- 58 Which Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale inspired the film "Frozen"?
- 59 Who wrote "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas"?
- 60 What carol can you use to demand a figgy pudding?

Answers next Month!



KT