

# Christmas Celebrations

## Through Time

When looking back and learning about how Christmas has been celebrated through time, you might notice some similarities and differences between then and now. Here is a taste of how the festive season has been celebrated at different points in history.

### Medieval Times (end of 5th century to 1485)

Decorating the home with evergreens was a way of symbolising everlasting life. Holly, ivy and herbs such as rosemary were the most popular. Before mistletoe, there was the kissing-bough which was a ball of greenery and twigs. It was also decorated with fruit.



You may have been offered a piece of Yule log before. You wouldn't have wanted to eat a piece of medieval Yule log because it was an actual wooden log! On Christmas Eve, it was brought into the house and put in the fireplace. It was lit with a saved piece of the log from the previous year and burned for the whole twelve days of Christmas. Fire played an important part in brightening and warming up dark and dreary days.

### Elizabethan Age (1558-1603)

When Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne, Christmas was all about eating, drinking and being merry for the families that could afford it. A beautiful and extravagant feast would take place in the home, full of colourful delicacies. Sugar was very expensive and thought to have medicinal properties so it was used in different dishes as a symbol of status. Foods such as eggs and walnuts were specially made to look realistic but tasted of something else!

### Georgian and Regency Period (1714-1837)

For affluent families, the twelfth and final night of the Christmas season was an opportunity for a party. This special night involved playing games, eating and drinking.



A special cake was baked (what we know as Christmas cake today) and shared between everyone who lived in the home; servants were offered a piece too. The cake would contain a dried pea and a dried bean. Whoever found the dried pea became a queen for the evening and whoever found the bean would become the king. If one of the servants found the pea or bean, they would get the night away from their duties and receive special treatment from their masters.

## **Victorian Era (1837-1901)**

We have Tom Smith to thank for the invention of the Christmas cracker. The first of their kind contained sweets. Christmas cards were also introduced during the Victorian age. They became a popular way to communicate as postage was cheap at this time. Cards included images of Father Christmas, snowy scenes and robins.



Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, made Christmas trees very fashionable to have in the home.

## **The Second World War (1939-1945)**

During this difficult time, many people felt that celebrating Christmas was an opportunity to escape from the horrors of war. They tried not to let the war dampen their spirits however there were reminders everywhere. Travelling to see family at this time of year could be dangerous due to constant bombing threats.

Rationing meant that food was limited so substitutions were made, e.g. grated carrot was used instead of sugar to sweeten cakes. Homemade decorations such as paper chains were made to brighten up the home.

# Christmas Celebrations Through Time Questions

1. Give an example of a decoration used to symbolise everlasting life during the winter in medieval times.

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2. What do people use today that is similar to a kissing-bough?

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3. Why wouldn't you have wanted to eat a piece of Yule log in medieval times?

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4. Today we are discouraged from eating sugar but how does this compare to how it was viewed during the Elizabethan period?

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5. How might a dinner guest have been tricked when feasting at Christmas time during the Elizabethan age?

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6. What would happen if you found a dried pea or bean in the special cake baked for the twelfth night party?

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7. Why did Christmas cards become popular to send during the Victorian age?

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8. What was the name of Queen Victoria's husband and what did he make fashionable?

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9. In your opinion, which of these periods in time celebrated Christmas the best?  
Explain your answer.

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# Christmas Celebrations Through Time **Answers**

1. Give an example of a decoration used to symbolise everlasting life during the winter in medieval times.  
**Various answers which include evergreen plants such as holly and ivy and herbs such as rosemary.**
2. What do people use today that is similar to a kissing-bough?  
**Today, the closest thing to a kissing-bough is mistletoe.**
3. Why wouldn't you have wanted to eat a piece of Yule log in medieval times?  
**You wouldn't have wanted to eat a piece of Yule log in medieval times as it was a wooden log, not a chocolate cake.**
4. Today we are discouraged from eating sugar but how does this compare to how it was viewed during the Elizabethan period?  
**During the Elizabethan period, sugar was thought to have medicinal properties so it was put into many dishes. It was also very expensive so it was used as a symbol of status.**
5. How might a dinner guest have been tricked when feasting at Christmas time during the Elizabethan age?  
**During the Elizabethan age, certain foods such as eggs and walnuts were specially made to look realistic but tasted of something else.**
6. What would happen if you found a dried pea or bean in the special cake baked for the twelfth night party?  
**If you found a dried pea or bean in the cake, you became the king or queen for the night.**
7. Why did Christmas cards become popular during the Victorian age?  
**Christmas cards became popular during the Victorian age as postage was cheap at this time, making them an inexpensive way to communicate.**
8. What was the name of Queen Victoria's husband and what did he make fashionable?  
**Queen Victoria's husband was called Prince Albert. He made Christmas trees fashionable to have in the home at Christmas.**
9. In your opinion, which of these periods in time celebrated Christmas the best? Explain your answer.  
**Various answers.**

# Christmas Celebrations

## Through Time

When looking back at different points in time and learning about how Christmas has been celebrated, you might notice some things that are the same and some that are different between then and now.

### Medieval Times

Decorating the home with evergreen plants and herbs such as holly, ivy and rosemary was a very common tradition. Before mistletoe, there was the kissing-bough. This was a ball of different green plants and twigs which was decorated with fruit.

On Christmas Eve, a Yule log was brought into the house and put in the fireplace. It was lit with a piece of the log from the previous year and burned for the whole twelve days of Christmas. Fire played an important part in brightening and warming up dark and cold days.

### Elizabethan Age

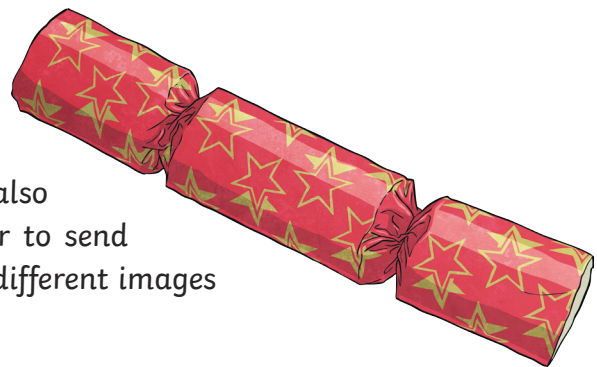
When Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne, Christmas was all about eating, drinking and being merry for the families that could afford it. A grand and colourful feast would take place in the home. Different foods such as eggs and nuts were specially made to look realistic but tasted of something else!

### Georgian and Regency Period

For rich families, the twelfth and last night of the Christmas season was the time for a party. People would play games, eat and drink. A special cake was baked (what we know as Christmas cake today) and shared between everyone who lived in the home; servants were offered a piece too. The cake would contain a dried pea and a dried bean. Whoever found the dried pea became a queen for the evening and whoever found the bean would become the king.

### Victorian Times

Tom Smith invented the Christmas cracker, during the Victorian era; the first crackers contained sweets. Christmas cards were also used for the first time and became popular to send as they were cheap to post. Cards included different images including Father Christmas and robins.



### The Second World War

Due to the war, people were only given a certain amount of food each week. Sugar was limited so grated carrot was used instead of sugar to sweeten cakes. Also, people made their own paper decorations to cheer up the home. Families made the best of what they had to celebrate this time of year the best they could.

# Christmas Celebrations Through Time Questions

1. During which period were holly, ivy and herbs first used to decorate the home at Christmas time?  

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2. Why did fire play an important part at Christmas time during the medieval age?  

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3. During the Elizabethan period, some foods were specially made to look realistic but tasted of something else. Can you give two examples?  

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4. What would happen if you found a dried pea or bean in the special cake baked for the twelfth night party?  

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5. Which Victorian invented the Christmas cracker?  

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6. What was used to sweeten cakes instead of sugar during the Second World War? Why?  

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7. When did sending Christmas cards first become popular?  

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8. In your opinion, which of these periods in time celebrated Christmas the best? Explain your answer.  

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## Extension Research Task:

Find out about how Christmas is celebrated in another country.

# Christmas Celebrations Through Time **Answers**

1. During which period were holly, ivy and herbs first used to decorate the home at Christmas time?  
**Holly, ivy and herbs were first used to decorate the home at Christmas time during medieval times.**
2. Why did fire play an important part at Christmas time during the medieval age?  
**Fire played an important part at Christmas time during the medieval age because it brightened and warmed up dark and cold days.**
3. During the Elizabethan period, some foods were specially made to look realistic but tasted of something else. Can you give two examples?  
**Two examples of foods which were specially made to look realistic but tasted of something else include eggs and nuts.**
4. What would happen if you found a dried pea or bean in the special cake baked for the twelfth night party?  
**Whoever found the dried pea became a queen for the evening and whoever found the bean would become the king.**
5. Which Victorian invented the Christmas cracker?  
**Tom Smith invented the Christmas cracker.**
6. What was used to sweeten cakes instead of sugar during the Second World War? Why?  
**Sugar was limited so grated carrot was used instead of sugar to sweeten cakes.**
7. When did sending Christmas cards first become popular?  
**Christmas cards first became popular in Victorian times.**
8. In your opinion, which of these periods in time celebrated Christmas the best? Explain your answer.  
**Various answers.**

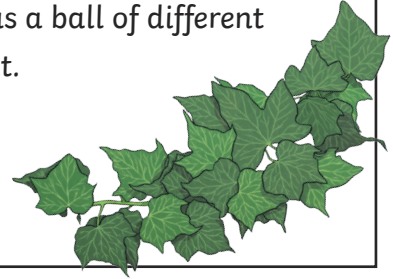


# Christmas Celebrations Through Time

Let's take a look back at how Christmas has been celebrated at different points in history.

## Medieval Times

- Green plants such as holly and ivy were used to decorate the house.
- Before mistletoe, there was the kissing-bough. This was a ball of different green plants and twigs which was decorated with fruit.
- On Christmas Eve, a Yule log was brought into the house and put in the fireplace. It burned for the whole twelve days of Christmas.



## Elizabethan Age

- When Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne, if you were rich, Christmas was all about eating, drinking and being merry.
- There were huge feasts and different foods such as eggs and nuts were made to look real but tasted of something else!

## Georgian and Regency Period

- For rich families, the twelfth night of Christmas was a time for a party. People would play games, eat and drink. A special cake was baked (what we know as Christmas cake today) and shared between everyone who lived in the home; servants were offered a piece too.



## Victorian Times

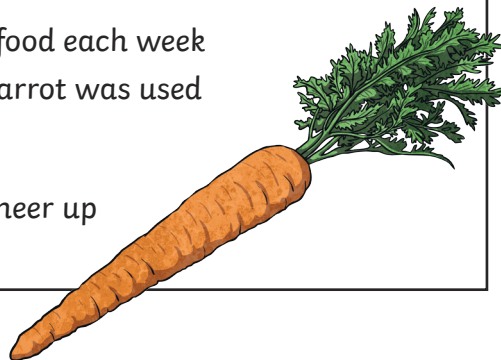
- Tom Smith invented the Christmas cracker during the Victorian era. The first crackers had sweets inside.
- Christmas cards were used for the first time and became popular to send as they were cheap to post. Cards included different images including Father Christmas and robins.





## The Second World War

- Families were only given a certain amount of food each week during the war. Sugar was limited so grated carrot was used instead of sugar to sweeten cakes.
- People made their own paper decorations to cheer up the home.



# Christmas Celebrations Through Time Questions

- 1. Give an example of a plant used to decorate the home in medieval times.  

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- 2. What was a kissing-bough?  

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- 3. When was the Yule log brought into the house?  

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- 4. What would people do on the 12th night of Christmas during the Georgian and Regency period?  

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- 5. Name one Christmas tradition which became popular in Victorian times.  

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- 6. What was often used instead of sugar when baking cakes in the Second World War?  

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**Extension Research Task:**

Find out about how Christmas is celebrated in another country.

# Christmas Celebrations Through Time **Answers**

1. Give an example of a plant used to decorate the home in medieval times.

**Answers will include either holly or ivy.**

2. What was a kissing-bough?

**A kissing-bough was used before mistletoe. It was a ball of different green plants and twigs which was decorated with fruit.**

3. When was the Yule log brought into the house?

**The Yule log was brought into the house on Christmas Eve.**

4. What would people do on the 12th night of Christmas during the Georgian and Regency period?

**On the 12th night of Christmas during the Georgian and Regency period, rich families would play games, eat and drink. A special cake was shared between everyone who lived in the home. Servants were offered a piece too.**

5. Name one Christmas tradition which became popular in Victorian times.

**Answers will include either sending Christmas cards or having Christmas crackers.**

6. What was often used instead of sugar when baking cakes in the Second World War?

**Grated carrot was often used instead of sugar when backing cakes in the Second World War.**