



## The History of Christmas Traditions

Christmas is a time for a variety of traditions: Christmas cards, pantomimes, Christmas carols, decorations and a Christmas feast. Surprisingly, some of these traditions started off very differently to how we see them today.

### Christmas Cards

In 1843, Sir Henry Cole, a **Public Record Office** worker, and John Horsley, his artist friend, created the first Christmas card. They became increasingly popular over time as the train network expanded, mass printing methods improved and stamps became cheaper.



### Pantomimes

In the 1720s, John Rich, a famous stage artist, created the harlequinade: a short chase scene with traditional **masque** characters and little to no dialogue. Building upon this idea, performer David Garrick expanded the harlequinade by using English folk stories and dialogue. He also limited their performances to the Christmas season. Over time, colourful scenery, numerous costume changes and witty dialogue were added.



### Christmas Carols

Various historians believe that carols can be linked back to **winter solstice** songs that many people sang during their celebrations long ago. Written records from the first Christmas celebration show that the Bishop of Rome announced that an old carol from AD 129 called the Angel's Hymn should be sung. It is now commonly thought of as the first carol.

As Christianity grew, more Latin Christmas carols were written and sung in religious houses all over Europe. During the Middle Ages, many popular Christmas carols were written in both Latin and English. In 1880, the first Christmas carol service was organised by Edward White Benson in Truro, Cornwall.



### Did You Know...?

The first Christmas celebration on record took place in Rome on 25<sup>th</sup> December AD 336.

### Christmas Decorations

As an ancient tradition sometimes linked to **Pagans**, Christmas trees became popular after 1848. This was because Prince Albert started to have evergreen trees shipped from Germany for his annual family Christmas celebrations. Soon, the idea became popular and spread throughout England and the world.

Martin Luther, a famous 16<sup>th</sup>-century Protestant reformer, is often credited with being the first person to add candles as lights to his Christmas tree. In 1880, Thomas Edison created the first set of electric Christmas lights and it didn't take long for people to use them on their houses and trees.



### Christmas Feasts

Many historians believe that the traditional Christmas meal can be traced back to ancient winter solstice feasts.



Roasted, stewed or minced meats, fruits and sweet treats were enjoyed from around 4000 years ago, right through the Middle Ages and up to the present day. Early feasts often included venison and pork but soon changed during the Georgian and Victorian eras to include birds, such as turkey and goose.

Since the Middle Ages, mince pies have changed from large and often rectangular meat-filled pies to the small, dainty fruit pies of today. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Christmas pudding grew out of a porridge called frumenty or a stew called pottage. It wasn't until the 17<sup>th</sup> century that our modern version began to take form.

### Glossary

<b>masques:</b>	Costume parties where people danced, sang songs and acted out stories.
<b>Pagans:</b>	People that don't follow any of the world's main religions.
<b>Public Record Office:</b>	An early version of the Post Office.
<b>winter solstice:</b>	The shortest day of the year.