

# The History of Christmas Traditions

Christmas is a time for traditions. Your family might have their own traditions. However, many traditions have been going for years but do we really know how they started?

## Going Christmas Crackers!

The sight of a Christmas cracker lying on the dinner table has been a British tradition for many decades.

Crackers began around 1845 with a London sweet maker named Tom Smith. He tried selling sweets in individual wrappers but they did not do very well.

One night, he was sitting in front of his open fire, listening to the crackle of the wooden logs as they burned. He had the idea to add a snap to the wrappers of his sweets so they would crack when they were pulled apart. This resulted in the early versions of the Christmas cracker.

### Did You Know?

Crackers were originally called 'cosaques' after the Cossack soldiers, known for their love of firing guns into the air when riding their horses at speed.



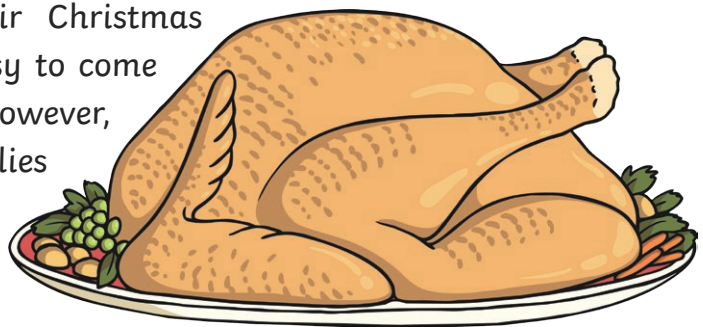
## Christmas Pudding

Christmas puddings began in medieval England. Sausages were stuffed with fruits, grains and spices to preserve the meat for longer. In 1647, Oliver Cromwell was leading England, as the king had been removed from the throne. Cromwell supported Parliament banning carol singing, Christmas puddings, Yule logs and nativity scenes as it was seen as wrong and ungodly. In 1660, there was a king back on the English throne and Christmas was celebrated again.



## The Roasted Bird

Many people had goose for their Christmas dinner as they were cheap and easy to come by. Only rich people had turkey. However, by the end of the 1900s, most families had turkey.



### The Victorian Christmas

When Queen Victoria married Prince Albert (who was from Germany) in 1840, he brought with him some traditions we continue now.

Although Victoria was brought up decorating a tree indoors at Christmas, her German husband was very enthusiastic about the tradition and decorated the Christmas tree with wax candles and sugared plums.

Victoria and Albert made Christmas a time for family, spending the day having feasts, giving presents and playing games. These traditions still form an important part of modern Christmas celebrations.



# Questions

1. When were Christmas crackers first made? Tick one.

- ☐ 1845
- ☐ 1945
- ☐ 1854

2. Find and copy one word from the text which is an example of onomatopoeia.

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3. Why were crackers originally called **cosaques**?

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4. Tick true or false for each statements.

	True	False
Oliver Cromwell led Britain in 1647.		
Christmas puddings began in Victorian Britain.		
Parliament stopped people from carol singing.		
Christmas was celebrated again in 1660.		

5. Why did most people have goose for their Christmas meat? Tick one.

- ☐ It was small.
- ☐ It was tastier.
- ☐ It was less expensive.

6. From which country was Queen Victoria's husband from? Tick one.

- ☐ France
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Spain

7. Which word closely matches the meaning of **enthusiastic**? Tick one.

☐

impatient

☐

keen

☐

indifferent

8. Which traditions trace back to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Tick two.

☐

giving presents

☐

pulling crackers

☐

eating goose

☐

playing family games

☐

watching films

# Answers

1. When were Christmas crackers first made? Tick one.

☒

**1845**

☐

1945

☐

1854

2. Find and copy one word from the text which is an example of onomatopoeia.

**snap or crackle**

3. Why were crackers originally called **cosaques**?

**Crackers were originally called 'cosques' after the Cossack soldiers who liked to fire their guns into the air as they rode their horses at speed.**

4. Tick true or false for each statements.

	True	False
Oliver Cromwell led Britain in 1647.	✓	
Christmas puddings began in Victorian Britain.		✓
Parliament stopped people from carol singing.	✓	
Christmas was celebrated again in 1660.	✓	

5. Why did most people have goose for their Christmas meat? Tick one.

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It was small.

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It was tastier.

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**It was less expensive.**

6. From which country was Queen Victoria's husband from? Tick one.

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France

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**Germany**

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Spain

7. Which word closely matches the meaning of **enthusiastic**? Tick one.

- ☐ impatient
- ☒ **keen**
- ☐ indifferent

8. Which traditions trace back to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Tick two.

- ☒ **giving presents**
- ☐ pulling crackers
- ☐ eating goose
- ☒ **playing family games**
- ☐ watching films



# The History of Christmas Traditions

Christmas is a time for traditions; whether it be food, gifts and present giving, attending church services or playing games. It is a time for family, friends and for everyone showing compassion towards others. But it wasn't always so.

## Going Christmas Crackers!

The tradition of the common Christmas cracker lying on the British dinner table has been around for many decades.

They began around 1845 when a London sweet maker named Tom Smith tried selling sweets in individual wrappers, after seeing them in France. In England, however, he did not manage to sell very many.

### Did You Know?

Crackers were originally called 'cosaques' after the Cossack soldiers, known for their love of firing guns into the air whilst riding their horses at great speed.



One night, Tom was sitting in front of his open fire, listening to the crackle and snap of the wood as it burned. Suddenly, he had the idea that customers would find it a wonderful surprise if they heard a snap when pulling apart the wrappers of his sweets. These 'crackers' became very popular and after Tom Smith's death, his sons continued the business, adding hats and small gifts to the sweet parcels.

## Christmas Pudding

Christmas pudding, also known as figgy pudding, began in medieval England as sausages stuffed with fruits, grains and spices to preserve the meat for longer. In 1647, Oliver Cromwell was leading England as the king had been executed. Cromwell supported Parliament banning carol singing, Christmas puddings, Yule logs and nativity scenes as it was seen as a time of riotous and ungodly behaviour by people celebrating. In 1660, there was a king back on the English throne and Christmas was celebrated once more.



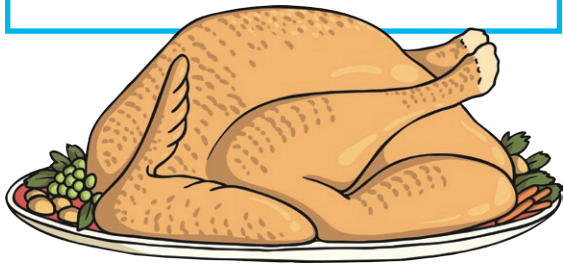
## The Victorian Christmas

When Queen Victoria married Prince Albert (who was from Germany) in 1840, he brought with him some traditions we continue now.

Although Victoria was brought up decorating a tree indoors at Christmastime, her husband was already very keen on the tradition and decorated the Christmas tree with wax candles and sugared plums.

### Did You Know?

Many people had beef or goose for their Christmas dinner, as it was cheap and easy to come by; only rich people had turkey. By the end of the 1900s, most families chose turkey.



By the 1860s, many Christmas trees were being sold and decorated with cinnamon sticks, oranges with clove spices poked into the peel and pine cones.

Before the Victorian era, giving presents usually occurred at New Year. These were usually homemade and hung on the tree. However, the tradition took off and as the gifts became larger in size, they had to be displayed beneath the tree rather than on it.

Queen Victoria and her husband are also responsible for Christmas being a time focussing on the family. They delighted in the time they spent with everyone at the festive time of year. They had nine children and Christmas was a time to get together, feast and play parlour games.





# Questions

1. Identify three traditions that people might engage in during Christmas.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Find and copy one word which means **a familiar sight**.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. How and when did Tom Smith's crackers change?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What do you think it was about the Cossack soldiers that caused crackers to be called cosaques?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Why was sausage meat mixed with fruit and grains? Tick one.

- ☐ to improve the taste
- ☐ to make them look better
- ☐ to preserve the meat for longer

6. Match the sentences.

In 1647,

Oliver Cromwell died.

In 1653,

Oliver Cromwell allowed Parliament to ban Christmas.

In 1660,

Christmas was celebrated again.

## Questions

7. The author writes that Christmas “was seen as a time of riotous and ‘ungodly’ behaviour”. Write a definition for the word ‘riotous’.

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8. It could be said that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert enjoyed Christmas. How do we know?

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9. Tick true or false for these statements.

	True	False
Before marrying Prince Albert, Queen Victoria did not decorate a tree indoors at Christmas.		
Before the Victorian era, people exchanged gifts at New Year.		
During the Victorian era, people decorated their Christmas trees with cinnamon sticks.		
Traditionally, before the end of the 1900s, only the wealthy had goose for Christmas dinner.		

# Answers

1. Identify three traditions that people might engage in during Christmas.

**Accept any three of the following: gifts and present giving, attending church services, playing games, food and drink.**

2. Find and copy one word which means **a familiar sight**.

**common**

3. How and when did Tom Smith's crackers change?

**Crackers changed after Tom Smith's death, as his sons started to put paper hats and gifts in the sweet parcels.**

4. What do you think it was about the Cossack soldiers that caused crackers to be called cosaques?

**Children's own responses, such as: I think it was the sound the guns made when the Cossack soldiers fired them that made crackers be called cosaques.**

5. Why was sausage meat mixed with fruit and grains? Tick one.

☐

to improve the taste

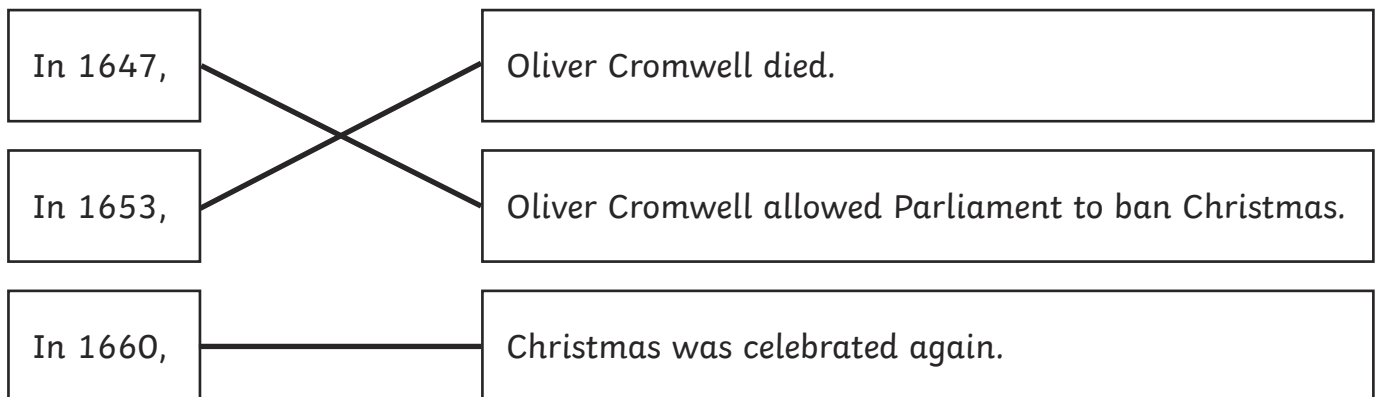
☐

to make them look better

☒

**to preserve the meat for longer**

6. Match the sentences.



7. The author writes that Christmas "was seen as a time of riotous and 'ungodly' behaviour".

Write a definition for the word 'riotous'.

**Children's own responses, such as: Riotous means the people were behaving in a disorderly, rowdy, unruly way.**

8. It could be said that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert enjoyed Christmas. How do we know?

**Children's own responses, such as: We know that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert enjoyed Christmas because the text says "they delighted in the time they spent with everyone at the festive time".**

9. Tick true or false for these statements.

	True	False
Before marrying Prince Albert, Queen Victoria did not decorate a tree indoors at Christmas.		✓
Before the Victorian era, people exchanged gifts at New Year.	✓	
During the Victorian era, people decorated their Christmas trees with cinnamon sticks.	✓	
Traditionally, before the end of the 1900s, only the wealthy had goose for Christmas dinner.		✓



# The History of Christmas Traditions

Christmas is a time for traditions; whether it be food, gifts and present giving or games. It is a time for family, friend showing compassion, peace and goodwill towards others. It is a time of giving and sharing, and decorating our houses.

## Going Christmas Crackers!

The humble Christmas cracker (with its paper hat, silly gift and terrible jokes) has graced the British dinner table at Christmas for hundreds of years.

They began between 1845 and 1850, when a London sweet maker named Tom Smith travelled to France and was intrigued with the sight of sweets in individual wrappers. Upon his return to England, he tried to sell a similar product, but they did not prove to be terribly popular.

One cold night, Tom was sitting in front of his open fire, listening to the crackle and snap of the wood as it burned. He came upon the idea of adding a snap to the sweet wrappers so that his customers would have a wonderful surprise when opening them. These 'crackers' became very popular. After his death, Tom Smith's sons continued the business, adding hats and small gifts to the sweet parcels.



## Christmas Pudding

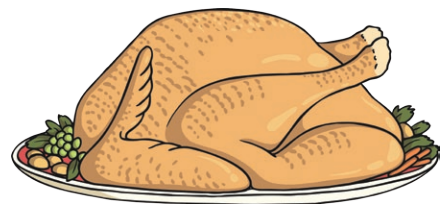
Christmas pudding, also known as figgy pudding and plum pudding, date back to 15th century England. Sausages were stuffed with fruits, grains and spices to preserve the meat for longer. This was known as plum pottage and was served at the beginning of a meal.



In 1647, King Charles I was executed and Oliver Cromwell led Britain as Lord Protector. Parliament did not approve of the merrymaking which occurred at Christmas so Cromwell supported Parliament banning carol singing, Christmas puddings, Yule logs and nativity scenes. In 1660, King Charles II was on the English throne and Christmas was restored.

## Turkey or Goose?

Goose was the usual choice of meat for the Christmas table, as this was cheap. Only the wealthy enjoyed turkey. Many households did not own an oven so would take their bird to the local butcher who would cook it ready for Christmas Day.



### Did You Know?

Mistletoe is a parasitic plant which means it grows on other plants and feeds off their nutrients. There is a tradition of hanging a piece of mistletoe above a doorway so that couples may exchange a kiss as they pass through. This tradition led to the superstition that if someone had not been kissed beneath the mistletoe, they would not marry. These days it is used as a festive decoration, but beware: the berries are poisonous.



### The Victorian Influence

Although Queen Victoria was brought up decorating a tree indoors at Christmas, her German husband (Prince Albert) was already very keen on the tradition and decorated the Royal Christmas tree with wax candles and sugared plums. By the 1860s, it was common practice for people to buy Christmas trees and decorate them with cinnamon sticks, oranges with cloves and pine cones.

Before the Victorian era, giving presents usually occurred at New Year. These were usually homemade and hung on the tree. However, the tradition took off and, as they became larger in size, the gifts had to be displayed beneath the tree rather than on it.

Queen Victoria and her husband are also responsible for Christmas being centred around the family. With their nine children, they made Christmas a special time to feast together, exchange presents and have fun playing parlour games. This idea was reinforced by Charles Dicken's novel, *A Christmas Carol*, where a selfish and miserable old man, named Ebenezer Scrooge, learned the true meaning of Christmas.



# Questions

1. Explain why the author has written that Christmas is a time of **compassion**?

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2. What sort of person would you say Tom Smith was? Explain your thoughts.

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3. Explain what you understand plum pottage to have been.

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4. Match the sentences.

Oliver Cromwell

allowed Christmas to be celebrated.

Parliament

was the Lord Protector of Britain.

Charles II

did not allow Christmas celebrations.

5. Tick true or false for these statements.

	True	False
Those without ovens would ask the butcher to cook their Christmas meat.		
Only the poor had turkey for Christmas dinner.		
Mistletoe uses other plants to get its food.		
If someone was kissed beneath the mistletoe, it meant they would marry someone in the future.		

6. Rewrite the sentence below using a synonym for the bold word.

Prince Albert was already very **keen** on the tradition of decorating a Christmas tree.

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7. It could be said that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert enjoyed Christmas. How do you know?

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8. What could Ebenezer Scrooge have learned from Queen Victoria and Prince Albert?

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What traditions are important to you and which do you have in common with Queen Victoria?

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# Answers

1. Explain why the author has written that Christmas is a time of **compassion**?

**Compassion means being sympathetic towards other people. Christmas is a time to think of others and be sympathetic towards them.**

2. What sort of person would you say Tom Smith was? Explain your thoughts.

**Children's own responses, such as: I think Tom Smith was a clever and inventive person who didn't give up. The text says that his sweets wrapped in paper were not popular which means they did not sell well. Tom Smith was inspired by his fire to invent the crackle into his sweet wrappers, and made a new invention.**

3. Explain what you understand plum pottage to have been.

**Children's own responses, such as: Plum pottage was something served at the start of a meal. It was made from sausage meat and fruits and spices. It was an early version of Christmas pudding.**

4. Match the sentences.

Oliver Cromwell	allowed Christmas to be celebrated.
Parliament	was the Lord Protector of Britain.
Charles II	did not allow Christmas celebrations.

5. Tick true or false for these statements.

	True	False
Those without ovens would ask the butcher to cook their Christmas meat.	✓	
Only the poor had turkey for Christmas dinner.		✓
Mistletoe uses other plants to get its food.	✓	
If someone was kissed beneath the mistletoe, it meant they would marry someone in the future.	✓	

6. Rewrite the sentence below using a synonym for the bold word.

Prince Albert was already very **keen** on the tradition of decorating a Christmas tree.

**Accept any word in place of keen with similar meaning, such as: enthusiastic, eager.**

7. It could be said that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert enjoyed Christmas. How do you know?

**Children's own responses, such as: We know that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert enjoyed Christmas because the author has written that their Christmas was centred around family and that they made Christmas a special time to feast together, exchange presents and have fun playing parlour games.**

8. What could Ebenezer Scrooge have learned from Queen Victoria and Prince Albert?

**Children's own responses, such as: Ebenezer Scrooge could have learned how to enjoy Christmas (by giving people gifts, eating with them and playing games altogether) instead of being selfish and miserable.**

9. What traditions are important to you and which do you have in common with Queen Victoria?

**Children's own responses.**