England--Land of "Traditional" Christmas

England is a land of history and tradition, in which old customs die hard. This is especially true at the Christmas season, when various parts of the country have their own peculiar observances which have come down through the past centuries.

Historically, England has observed Christmas as a time of merry-making and goodwill, and even in these modern, materialistic days that spirit is preserved at the festive season. And in many communities old legends and stories of the past are closely associated with the local customs which have survived the passing of time.

Boar's Head

One custom which is peculiar to the north of England, but which is also featured at Queen's College in Oxford, is that of carrying in the boar's head for the Christmas banquet. This custom has featured banquets in the north of England for hundreds of years. It is believed to have come down from an old Norse custom in which a boar was sacrificed at Yuletide feasts in honour of Frier, the Scandinavian god of peace and plenty.

In the town of Dewsbury, in Yorkshire, a custom known as "Tolling the Devil's Knell" has been carried on for 700 years. Each year, a team of bell-ringers tolls the tenor bell of the parish church once for each year since the birth of Christ, so that this year, it will be rung 1962 times. It is timed so, that the final stroke will ring at exactly the hour of midnight.

Like many other customs there is an old legend behind this one. It is that in the 13th century a local baron killed one of his servants, and as a penance he gave a bell to the church and ordered that it be rung each Christmas, to remind him of his crime. For many years the people of Dewsbury believed that the tolling of the bell would keep the devil away from the parish for the next 12 months.

Burning the Ash

At Dunster, Somerset, the ancient custom of burning an ashen faggot is carried out on Christmas Eve. This has been going on for more than 1,000 years. In the Battles of Wessex of the year 878, the West Saxon warriors built fires of ash branches to keep themselves warm. Ash, they found, was the only wood that would burn when green. The ashen faggot, is still burned at Dunster as a prelude to a Christmas Eve dance.

Christmas mummers perform in the streets and public houses of many of the West County villages. At some villages in the Cotswold Hills, these mummers perform a masque depicting two men fighting and the loser being raised from the dead by a doctor,— symbolizing death and resurrection.

Grotesque Carollers

The Mummers of Longparish and Overton in Hampshire wear costumes to make them appear like grotesque birds with monstrous heads and tour the village, singing carols.

Most widespread of all English Christmas customs is one which has spread to many other countries, including Canada. This is the custom of carol singing by young people known as "waits" who go from house to house singing the old familiar Christmas carols and songs. In modern days, however, this has become somewhat commercialized by young people who indulge in it solely for the purpose of collecting money from the occupants of the houses at which they stop to do their singing.

Occasionally, the money thus collected goes to a worthy cause, but in a great many cases it simply goes into the pockets of the young singers.

Sincere Christmas Wishes

We see for you and yours, every joy and blessing of this happy season . . . all in great good measure. Merry Christmas!

HARVEY LAVERTY HEATING
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Main St. N. 854-9934 Rockwood

Tips on Trees

Take no Chances on Fires

Here are some tips on erecting your Christmas tree.

1. Choose a fresh tree — Scots pine lasts longest — and leave it outdoors until needed. A moist tree is less likely to catch fire.

2. Cut off an inch above the original cut and set it up in a stand with a water cup in the base. Keep the cup filled with water — it will need some daily.

3. Place tree well away from fireplace, radiator, television set, powerful electric lights and other sources of heat.

4. When choosing new Christmas tree lights make sure you have CSA (Canadian Standards Association) or UL (Underwriters' Laboratories) insignia of approval. These meet safety standards. Check old strings of lights for defects, frayed wires and broken sockets.

Pick on Circuit

5. If fuses blow, plug into another less overloaded circuit. Avoid splicing, this is a very dangerous practice.

6. Remove defective sockets. They may cause overloading and thus serious fire danger. Leaving your tree lights on for a long time can also cause overheating. This can be avoided by using an adapter that makes lights go on and off.

7. Don't leave the tree lights on overnight or while away from home. Arrange the lights so they won't touch any of the branches.

8. Get fireproof decorations for your tree.

9. On Christmas day dispose of gift wrapping as soon as possible.

10. On New Year's Day or on twelfth night at the latest strip your tree and dispose of it. A dried-out tree is a serious hazard.

Silent Night

We sing our warm greetings and best wishes for a very joyous Christmas!

CUSTOM CLEANERS

Greetings

Every good wish for your Yuletide happiness.

BERT'S GROCETERIA
Young St. Acton, Ont.

Bells ringing, carol-singing tell the joys of Christmas. We wish you all the best of a merry season, with warm thanks for your good will.

AL'S SNACK BAR
and
RELIABLE TAXI
A. LABELLE

On this anniversary of the birth of our Blessed Saviour, accept our most sincere good wishes for a joyous Christmas to you and yours.

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WHITHAM'S GARAGE
42 Young St. Acton, Ont.

Games for Your Christmas Party

Matches — like children shun soap and are attracted to sugar. Try it.

BENSON'S SHOES

Take a large bowlful of water and on the surface arrange about a dozen matches, star wise.

Now sharpen a piece of soap to a point and dip it into the water at the centre of this set piece.

The matches will disperse to the side of the bowl.

Now, having removed the soap, hold a piece of sugar in the water in the centre of the bowl. The matches will flock toward it.

NOT SO EASY

Get any boy in the party to stand against the wall, both heels pressed against the wall. Put down a piece of paper at the floor within easy reach of him and ask him to see if he can bend over and pick it up without removing his heels from the wall.

He'll say, "That's easy," but will find it impossible.

BALLOON GLIDING

Played by gently propelling an inflated balloon along a given space by tapping it with a walking stick. The goal is a waste paper basket some distance away.

The players are divided into two teams of equal size. The team having the lowest number of forfeits wins.

Each player is allowed one minute to place the balloon in the basket. No player must touch the balloon with his hand and the balloon must not touch the floor. A forfeit is given for either of these offences.

The players form a large circle. Each of the children then takes the name of a place. One child represents Captain and stands in the centre of the circle.

The Captain says aloud, "My ship sails from Bombay to England."

As soon as the Captain has said that the two players who have taken the names of Bombay and England run to change places, and the Captain runs too to take one of their places before them.

The player who is left out of a place now becomes the Captain and has to give the command this time taking two other names of places.

This game be repeated until all have had a chance to be Captain.

Dowries Filled Early Stockings

St. Nicholas, the early bishop who was the first Santa Claus, is also credited with originating the custom of hanging up Christmas stockings.

According to legend, he wished to provide dowries for the three daughters of a bankrupt merchant. Since he wished the gifts to be anonymous he tossed bags of gold down the merchant's chimney. Accidentally the gold fell into stockings the girls had hung by the fireplace to dry.

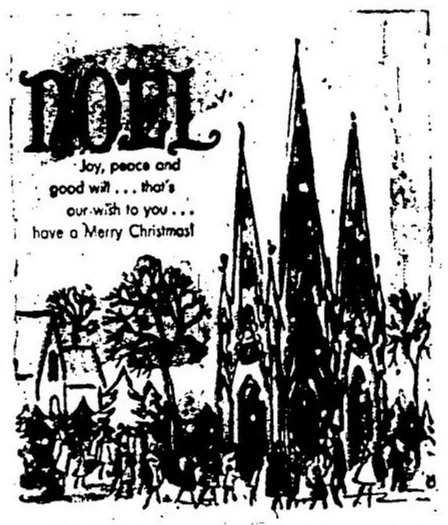
Factual handicap is that though St. Nicholas lived in the fourth century, stockings weren't made with feet until the 15th century — but the Christmas stocking story is still a happy legend.

KISSING CUSTOM

Secular and religious Christmas customs met in the old English kissing bunch. This evergreen ball had mistletoe for kissing hung from the centre. But it also contained small dolls to represent Jesus, Mary and Joseph, as well as an array of fruits and colorful ornaments.

GROWING HOLLY

A holly tree grows 15 years before it produces, but its life may be as long as 125 years.



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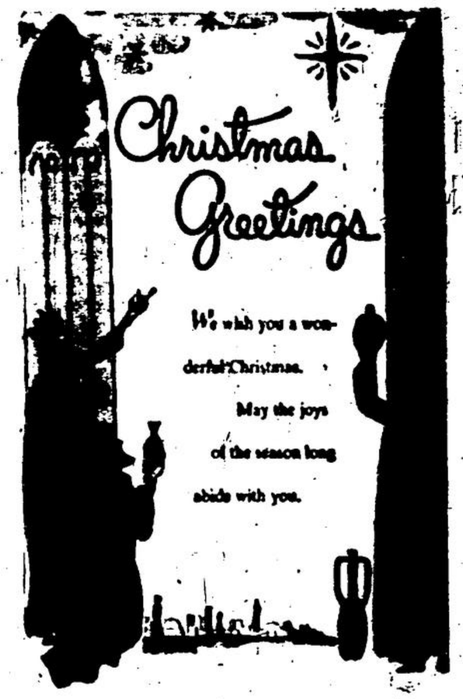

COMPLIMENTS OF
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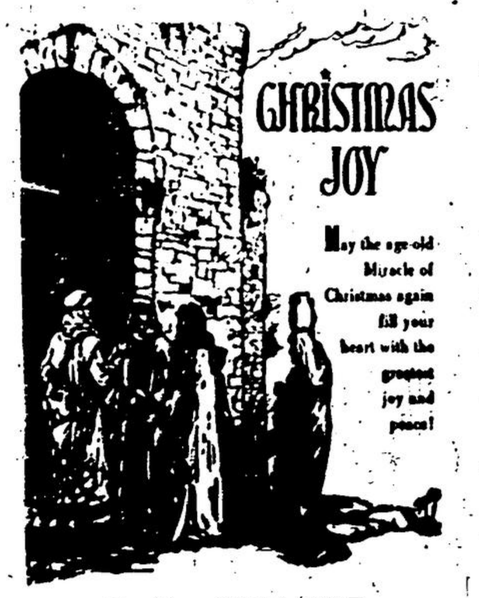

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