

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.



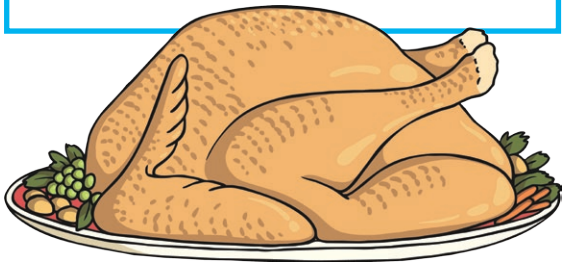
The Victorian Christmas

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.

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

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

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.

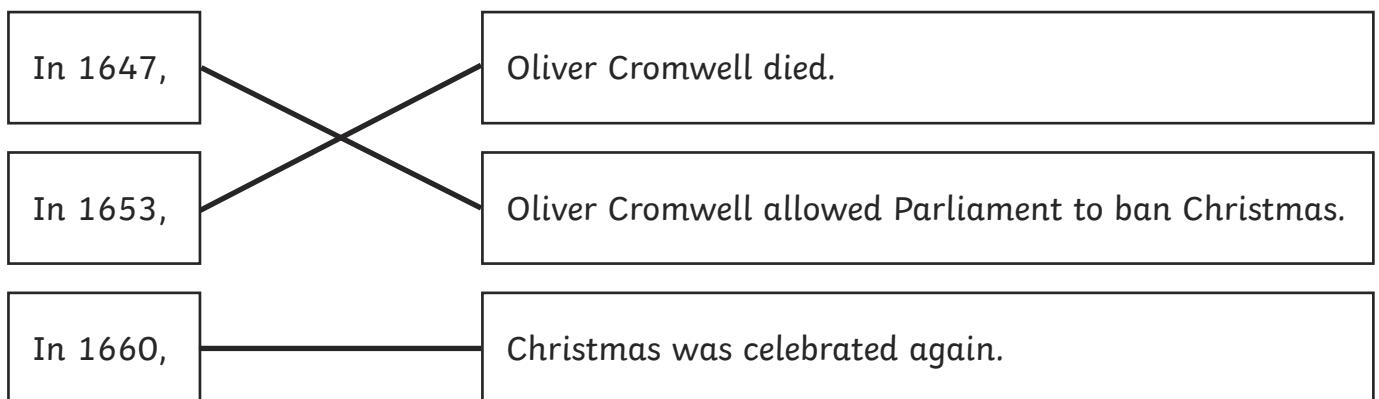
5. Why was sausage meat mixed with fruit and grains? Tick one.

to improve the taste

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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.		✓