

## Christmas Celebration in Edinburgh

*Christmas only came to Scotland after the war because I came here in 1947 and I'll be quite honest, I thought you were all a lot of heathens. Christmas Day my husband had to go to work and I thought this was terrible.*

*I put my Dad's stocking over the fireplace. I'd get a mandarin orange, a little bag of chocolate coins, and apple and a new penny and a thrupenny bit.*



These reminiscences come from the People's Story Reminiscence Groups formed in 1987 to provide oral testimony as part of the research undertaken prior to the establishment of the People's Story Museum in the Canongate. I was brought up in Scotland but born in the north of England. My father was teetotal having 'signed the pledge' so was not a devotee of Hogmanay and consequently with my mother being English we celebrated Christmas. I have always been curious as to whether the Scots not celebrating Christmas in the past is myth or truth. While evidence is scanty, from an examination of newspapers from as early as possible some interesting and surprising facts have emerged.

In the mid-sixteenth century Scotland experienced a religious reformation. Following the death of the Queen Regent Mary of Guise in June 1560, in August the Scottish Parliament passed a series of Acts which ended the Pope's authority, abolished the Mass and established a system of church government by ministers, deacons, and elders gathered in local Kirk Sessions

and Presbyteries and the annual General Assembly of representatives of the churches. Bishops, however, continued to function. Further the First Book of Discipline of 1561 declared:

*the holy-days invented by men, such as Christmas, Circumcision, Epiphany, Purification, and other fond feasts of our Lady; with the feasts of the Apostles, martyrs, and virgins, with others... we judge utterly to be abolished forth of this realm, because they have no assurance in God's word.*<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless complete reform did not happen overnight and the existence of the continuation of old customs and traditions has been argued from Mill in 1927 to Hutton in 1996 and Todd in 2000.<sup>2</sup> The Presbyterian system had by no means been uniformly and firmly established in Scotland by the 1590s; hundreds of parishes lacked ministers or kirk sessions and the episcopal office of bishop had not been abolished. Notwithstanding opposition largely in the Lothians, Fife and Ayrshire, when James VI and I died in 1625, episcopacy remained in Scotland. It is small wonder that other pre-Reformation practices survived. Repeated actions by kirk sessions and presbyteries attempted to suppress 'ungodly' customs such as pilgrimages to sacred wells, midsummer bonfires, Yule carols and football in places as diverse as Elgin, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Stirling and Glasgow. Yule was the name for Christmas.

In 1575 the General Assembly demanded civil enforcement of the abolition of Yule day and saints days with penalties for all who celebrated Yule and twelfth night or indulged in other rituals such as ceremonies, banqueting, playing, fasting and *sick vther vanities*'.



---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/important-documents/the-first-book-of-discipline-1560>

<sup>2</sup> Anna Jean Mill, *Medieval Plays in Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1927); Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*, (Oxford, 1996); Margo Todd, Profane Pastimes and the Reformed Community: The Persistence of Popular Festivities in Early Modern Scotland, *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Apr., 2000).

An Act of Parliament of 1581 prohibited the observing of the festival days of the saints but old habits died hard. In spite of an Act of Parliament of 1592 which abolished the holding of Yule and Pasch (Easter), a General Assembly survey of 1595 found among other iniquities:

*superstition, and idolatry maintained which utters itself in keeping of festival days and bonfires, pilgrimages, singing of carols at Yule*<sup>3</sup>

King James VI enjoyed Yule festivities and in 1598 and 1599 the Edinburgh Presbytery tried unsuccessfully to stop the Royal Court's celebration of Yule.



The Union of the Crowns in 1603 and the departure of James for London removed this problem for the Kirk but when James returned briefly to Scotland in 1617 he reinstated the religious celebration of holy days as part of his Five Articles of Perth. When he died in 1625 Scotland still had bishops and many customs continued to the extent that on 13 February 1645 the General Assembly passed an Act censuring the Observers of Yule and other superstitious days:

*The Generall Assembly, taking to their consideration the manifold abuses, profanitie, and superstitions, committed on Yule-Day, and some other superstitious dayes following, have unanimously concluded, and hereby ordains, That whatsoever person or persons hereafter shall be found guilty in keeping of the foresaid superstitious dayes, shall be proceeded*

---

<sup>3</sup> Todd, 126.

*against by Kirk censures, and shall make their publick repentance therefor in the face of the congregation where the offence is committed.*<sup>4</sup>

This was the period of the National Covenant, civil war, the execution of Charles I, Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate - decades of civil and religious upheaval. The Restoration of Charles II in 1660, joyfully celebrated in Edinburgh, meant the reinstatement of bishops within the Scottish Kirk. On 25 December 1660:

*Being Yule day was solemlie kept in Edinburgh. The Biscop tacht that day in the Eister kirk, guhairin their was much pepill assembled.*<sup>5</sup>

Further in spite of Kirk fulmination against plays and the like, Edinburgh played host in the 1660s to travelling troupes of players who performed plays, dancing and tight rope acts at the 'Croce of Edinburgh to the admiration of many'.<sup>6</sup>



With the accession of the Catholic James VII and II in 1685 came more uncertainty until the 'Glorious Revolution of 1688 when William of Orange and his wife Mary, James' daughter became joint monarchs.

The 1690 Scottish Act of Settlement abolished episcopacy in Scotland and established a Presbyterian Scottish Church. In 1711 the Scottish Episcopalians Act allowed for some exemption from the penal laws against the Episcopal Church of Scotland. Episcopalians observed the traditional

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/church-scotland-records/acts/1638-1842/pp111-135>.

<sup>5</sup> John Nicoll, *A diary of public transactions and other occurrences: chiefly in Scotland from January 1650 to June 1667*, ed. David Laing, (Edinburgh, 1834), 375.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 385.

Christian days such as Easter and Christmas; and interestingly 'A sermon preached upon Christmass day, wherein the obligation that lies upon all Christians to solemnise the anniversarie festival of our Saviour's birth, is clearly proved' was to be sold by Mr Henry Knox in the Luckenbooths and Mr Robert Freebairn in the Parliament Cross and other booksellers.<sup>7</sup> Ironically these booksellers operated in the shadow of St Giles, but in the Scottish Kirk, however, Christmas Day remained uncelebrated with no carols being sung.



Nevertheless certain customs must have continued for them to be mentioned in the early eighteenth century. In 1640 and 1690 the Scottish Parliament had abolished the Yule 'vacance' observed by the law courts. Part of each act was repealed in 1686 and 1712 respectively; the Yule vacation being restored in 1712. Later eighteenth-century newspapers reported the dates that the Court of Session rose for the Christmas vacation. Christmas remained as a recognised date from which lettings commenced and insurance premiums began. Poems, hymns and odes on Christmas appeared not infrequently in publications such as *The Scots Magazine* certainly in the second half of the eighteenth century. Years earlier, on 21 November 1682 the Marquis of Queensberry wrote to the Earl of Arran expressing surprise at the Duke of Hamilton's intention of spending Christmas in Edinburgh: while on 24 December 1709 John Campbell wrote from Edinburgh to his grandfather

---

<sup>7</sup> Eighteenth-century Collections online:  
[link.gale.com/apps/doc/CB0131988078/ECCO?u=nlibscot&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=95f8e996&pg=1](http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CB0131988078/ECCO?u=nlibscot&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=95f8e996&pg=1).

concluding with wishes for a happy Christmas.<sup>8</sup> Nearly a century later, in January 1801 Mrs and Miss Tait informed their friends and the public that they would open their school for the 'Education of Young Ladies' after the Christmas vacation.<sup>9</sup> On 25 December 1806 the *Caledonian Mercury* reported that:

*This day being the festival of Christmas, the same was observed as a holiday by those of the Episcopal persuasion and also at Banks and Public Offices.*<sup>10</sup>

Newspapers continued to mention the Christmas Day closure of banks and public offices throughout the nineteenth century and in 1871 bank closure on Christmas Day became statutory. In 1828 the *Scotsman*, a year before the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act which freed Catholics from discrimination and civil disabilities, devoted a substantial number of words to describing the Christmas service in the Catholic chapel which 'was crowded to excess and we observed many protestants of distinction present'.<sup>11</sup>



The Theatre-Royal regularly closed on Christmas Day but on 23 December 1811 it announced a production for the Christmas holidays never attempted in Scotland namely the 'Melodrama of THE CARAVAN OR THE DRIVER AND HIS DOG CARLO – the last scene with Real Water for the Dog'. By 1813, however, a Grand New CHRISTMAS HARLEQUIN PANTOMIME was in rehearsal. Pantomimes in Britain developed from the sixteenth-century Italian entertainment 'Commedia dell' Arte featuring stock characters including the mischievous Harlequin; and they were generally performed throughout the

<sup>8</sup> National Records of Scotland, GD406/1: GD112/3.

<sup>9</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 22 January 1801.

<sup>10</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 25 December 1806.

<sup>11</sup> *Scotsman*, 27 December 1828.

year after the main play or dramatic items. Thus in 1781 the Theatre-Royal offered 'Robinson Crusoe or Harlequin Friday'; and in 1782 'Harlequin's Invasion or the Taylor without a Head'.<sup>12</sup>



Harlequin in various guises – Harlequin Sinbad, Gretna Green or Harlequin and the Blacksmith, Harlequin and the Fairy of the Silver Shell or even Harlequin and the Golden Gnome of the Californian Gold Mines - continued to appear in special Christmas pantomimes until the 1870s but by this time he had mainly been supplanted by Goody Two Shoes, Aladdin, Boy Blue and Babes in the Wood!



<sup>12</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 24 December 1781, 18 December 1782.

In 1855, however, the grand Christmas pantomime bore the title of 'Jack and the Bean Stalk or Harlequin and the Magic Cow and the Fairies of the Enchanted Grotto'. Britain had been fighting the Crimean War since 1853 and in this 1855 pantomime:

*as a specimen of what may be done by perseverance and assiduity and with a view to carrying on the war with vigour, a Grand Demonstration of Allied Troops will be displayed composed of 200 children drilled expressly by Mrs Wyndam – "though Christmas comes but once a year, hoping to make all happy here."<sup>13</sup>*

Eating a special meal on Christmas Day survived into the eighteenth century - or revived. Allan Ramsay, Edinburgh painter and poet penned an 'Elegy on Lucky Wood', innkeeper in the Canongate, in May 1717:

*She gae us aft hale Legs of Lamb  
And did nae hain her Mutton Ham  
And Aye at Yule when e're we came  
A braw Goose Pye*



When on 13 November 1734 Alexander Brodie wrote to the laird of Craigalachie he expressed his intention of eating his Christmas goose with the laird's son in Edinburgh.<sup>14</sup> Robert Fergusson in his 1773 poem 'The Daft Days' commented:

*When merry Yule-day comes I trow  
You'll scantlins find a hungry mou;  
Sma' are our cares, our stamacks fu  
O' gusty gear  
And kickshaws, strangers to our view  
Sin fairn-year.*

<sup>13</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 22 December 1855.

<sup>14</sup> NRS, GD248/47/3.



The sentiment that such Christmas fare should be shared with the less fortunate seems to have continued. On 28 December 1771 and 1772 'charitable gentlemen of this city whose goodness is experienced on the return of every Christmas' gave a Christmas dinner to the prisoners in the Tolbooth.<sup>15</sup>



Another charitable gentleman contributed one guinea in the latter year to be used for the purchase of coals for them 'which proved a very seasonable relief as the frost set in on Christmas eve and has continued very intense ever since'.<sup>16</sup> In wishing its readers a 'Merry Christmas' in 1794 the *Caledonian Mercury* urged them not to overindulge but to remember the less fortunate instead; while in December 1800 the *Scots Magazine* published a poem entitled *Christmas An Exhortation to the Rich and the Humants in favour of the poor during that inclement season*.<sup>17</sup> On Christmas Day 1814 'a lady very generously sent a good dinner for the poor of the Canongate Charity Workhouse'; while in 1816 Captain Sibbald received two guineas from a gentleman in Charlotte Square to provide a Christmas dinner to the poorest of the prisoners under his charge.<sup>18</sup> This seems to have been an annual occurrence for some years with the *Caledonian Mercury* reporting on 27 December 1834 that the Calton Hill Jail had received the usual two guineas from a benevolent gentleman to provide a Christmas dinner for the inhabitants.

---

<sup>15</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 December 1771, 1772.

<sup>16</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 December 1772.

<sup>17</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 27 December 1794; *Scots Magazine*, 1 December 1800.

<sup>18</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 31 December 1814, 23 December 1816.



'A benevolent lady' again donated a 'plentiful dinner' on Christmas Day for the Canongate Charity Workhouse while in 1824 it fell to the Magistrates of the Canongate to provide the meal.<sup>19</sup> The practice of providing a dinner on Christmas Day for poorhouse inhabitants or prisoners seems to have continued over the next few years with donations in kind and cash; and another example of individual Christmas charity was announced in 1837 courtesy of Andrew Ducrow, famous circus rider, before his final Edinburgh performance at the Royal Arena.

*At twelve o'Clock on Saturday forenoon, Mr Ducrow will distribute 150 cards to the OUT-DOORS POOR which will entitle the Bearer of each, to 150 CHRISTMAS DINNERS.<sup>20</sup>*



By the mid-nineteenth century newspapers had begun to report the Christmas meals given to children in charity schools and residents in institutions. In 1848 and 1849 Christmas dinners of mutton and beef stew, plum cake, oranges, apples, dried fruit and lemonade were served to the children in the United Industrial School in South Gray's Close. In the following year after the 'usual

---

<sup>19</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 26 December 1822, 1 January 1824

<sup>20</sup> *Scotsman*, 20 December 1837

fare' had been served to about 220 scholars of the Greyfriars Vennel school 'six plumb-puddings of rather gigantic dimensions were placed upon the table' and these disappeared rapidly.<sup>21</sup> Pupils of the Deaf and Dumb Institute had Christmas dinners provided for them and the generosity of Mr Clemens of Malaga enhanced the proceedings of the annual Christmas Festivals of the Edinburgh Asylum for the Industrious Blind. He supplied wine and fruit as early as 1851 and was still doing so in 1870. Local dignitaries attended these Christmas dinners and the proceedings included items by Blind Asylum performers and the choir.

There is no evidence as to the extent to which Edinburgh residents enjoyed a special meal on Christmas Day in the years following the Reformation until the eighteenth century although in other parts of Scotland especially the north, people continued to make Yule bread or bannocks and to engage in festivities on Christmas Day in spite of Kirk dictates. By the beginning of the nineteenth century however, some enterprising Edinburgh shopkeepers had recognised the power of the press in advertising their seasonal wares. There is no suggestion in the adverts of any novelty in having special food for Christmas. On 10 December 1808 James Weddell and Co. of the Confectionery Warehouse North Bridge begged leave to remind their friends and the public that:

*as the season is again commencing for the consumption of CHRISTMAS CAKE, BUNS, SHORTBREAD etc. they can now be supplied, in greater variety and of that quality which has hitherto ensured them a liberal share of Public patronage and have to assure those persons wishing to send presents to their friends, they can have them so pack'd to go perfectly safe and good to any part of the United Kingdom<sup>22</sup>*

Baxter's Italian Warehouses at 4 South Bridge and 36 Hanover Street assured potential purchasers of a complete Christmas supply of 'matchless collections of LUXURIES of all kinds' imported from France, Spain, Portugal and Holland in 1826.<sup>23</sup> Items included raisins, almonds, grapes, figs, green truffles, ginger, German and Lyons sausages, cheeses, bonbons, Christmas cakes and shortbread. John Stenhouse of the High Street and South St Andrew Street and John Keillor of South Bridge Street and Princes Street

---

<sup>21</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 26 December 1850

<sup>22</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 10 December 1808.

<sup>23</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 December 1826.

advertised Christmas buns, cakes and bannocks in the 1820s; and Christmas cakes of all kinds and mince pies of all sizes could be had from Mrs Montgomery of 30 Princes Street in 1833. Those who wished to 'eat out' had a choice of Christmas fare at Morton's Coffeehouse at 7 Hunter Square where every day during the Christmas holidays they might dine on roast beef, plum pudding, roast turkey, goose and fowls in plates in the coffee room or regular dinners 'served in the best style to parties in private rooms'.<sup>24</sup> In 1845 James Ford of the High Street offered 300 corn-fed Christmas geese, fresh and pickled from 1s 6d to 2s 6d; while in 1862 Jockel and Co. of 62 Queen Street advertised Christmas beef.



Along with eating went dancing. On 15 January 1770 Nelly Spottiswoode at Spottiswoode in the Borders wrote to her friend Jane Innes at Niddrie's Wynd:

*Your humble servant and some of my sisters were invited to a Gentleman's house some few miles distant to spend the Christmas Hollidays where we went and racketed it away for near a fortnight. Dancing, cards, singing, and playing the German flute was the constant entertainment each night.*<sup>25</sup>

## TO PRESERVE YOUR HAIR

Use common sense; don't ruin it by washing it with cold water, or starve it by neglect; all living things require nourishment, and pure grease is undoubtedly the best nourisher of the hair. For more than a century

## ROWLANDS' MACASSAR OIL

has been considered the best preserver of the hair ever used; it prevents it falling off or turning grey, removes scurf and prevents a luxuriant growth; for children it is unsurpassed. Also in a golden colour for hair hair.

Bottles, 3s. 6d., 7s., 10s. 6d. (equal to four small).

Can be sent post free by A. ROWLANDS & SONS, 25, Hatton Garden, on receipt of value in stamps.



<sup>24</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 22 December 1836.

<sup>25</sup> NRS, GD113/5/63.

An advert in the *Caledonian Mercury* of 6 December 1823 used the time of year to publicise Rowland's Macassar Hair Oil by heralding:

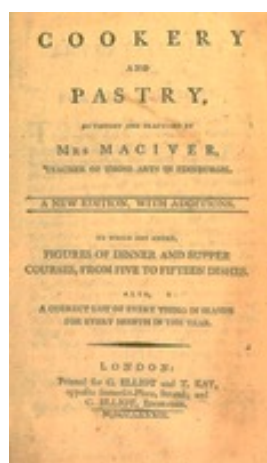
*The near approach of that festive season Christmas when the Youth of both sexes are inclined 'To dance on light fantastic toe' which cause an inducement to improve; and the finest embellishment of the person is a beautiful arrangement of human hair.*

The practice of giving cash at Christmas to apprentices, servants and tradesmen seems to have been prevalent in the seventeenth century and continued into the next though not without adverse comment. The *Caledonian Mercury* commented on 10 January 1791:

*Whatever good intentions there might have been in the first introduction of the custom of giving Christmas Boxes it is an incontrovertible fact that so far from imparting any real benefit it is productive of a numberless variety of evils that might in all probability be otherwise avoided.*<sup>26</sup>

In similar vein, when the town of Leith advertised for a town drummer at an annual salary of 10 pounds with a suit of clothes every two years, it stipulated that 'no Christmas box ' would be allowed.<sup>27</sup>

Giving presents at Christmas to family and friends seems to have been an established custom by the late eighteenth century judging by the trickle of advertisements which appeared in the *Caledonian Mercury*. 'A PROPER CHRISTMAS PRESENT to Young Ladies, Housekeepers, Servants, Maids etc' suggested in 1783 was none other than a new edition priced 2s and 2s 6d of 'COOKERY AND PASTRY as practised by Mrs MacIver, teacher of these arts in Edinburgh'.<sup>28</sup>



<sup>26</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 10 January 1791.

<sup>27</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 4 September 1800.

<sup>28</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 17 December 1783.

In the next decade for the approaching season of Christmas a 'cheap and valuable work by Dr Fleetwood entitled 'The Life of Christ' was recommended as a Christmas present for all Christians and Christian families. This was available in '25 Numbers only' priced 6d each'.<sup>29</sup>

By the early nineteenth century the array of newspaper advertisements for Christmas presents increased steadily. Morton and Milroy of the North Bridge advertised an immense variety of trinkets for Christmas gifts in 1804 as they did in subsequent years. In 1822 Forrest and Sons opposite the Tron Church boasted of an extensive assortment of fancy, ornamental and useful jewellery for Christmas and New Year gifts and added clocks, Indian gongs and silver plate new and second hand to the list in 1828.



Christmas presents for smokers – snuff boxes painted in Germany, cigars and Meerschaum pipes – could be purchased at D. Bruce 46 Head of North Bridge; while the Royal Bazaar at 53 New Buildings North Bridge enticed customers with 'CHEAP CHRISTMAS GIFTS' such as writing desks, leather backgammon boards, musical boxes, soaps, perfumery, fur lined slippers, snow boots and much else.<sup>30</sup>

As Edinburgh was a centre of printing and publishing it is not surprising to find books of various kinds being suggested as suitable Christmas presents. Following the death of Princess Charlotte in November 1817 her biography was advertised in the *Scotsman* as a gift for Christmas or New Year. Christmas presents for 1820 included 'Hundred Wonders of the World' and 'Tubart's Collection of Fairy Tales'. W. Wilson and Co of 44 George Street promoted maps, puzzles, writing and drawing papers in 1822 and 'moral and

<sup>29</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 10 December 1798.

<sup>30</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 20 December 1834.

useful books' in 1823.<sup>31</sup> In 1829 the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* advertised as elegant Christmas presents, cabinet volumes of poems including 'The Seasons' by Thomson and works by Goldsmith and Gray, priced at 5s 6d.



A growing market was aimed at children. In the 1820s Francois Jeaudin 'Seul Importeur de Paniers Francais, 61 Prince's Street' boasted a 'neat select variety of FOREIGN TOYS' suitable for Christmas and New Year gifts.<sup>32</sup> In 1842 Harvey's Royal Bazaar at 25 Prince Street announced that their Toy Department was greatly enlarged for the Christmas season with toys of every description. The 'completely stocked' Doll Department contained a 'splendid collection of Dressed and Undressed dolls' including dolls representing the Prince of Wales and the Princess Royal.<sup>33</sup>



<sup>31</sup> *Scotsman*, 21 December 1822, 13 December 1823.

<sup>32</sup> *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 19 December 1829.

<sup>33</sup> *Scotsman*, 17 December 1842. Princess Victoria and Prince Edward were born in 1840 and 1841 respectively.

The British and Foreign Toy Bazaar in South St Andrew Street had a large assortment of new toys suitable for Christmas presents in 1845; and James Hogg of West Register Street offered 'baby jumpers, rocking horses and a variety of amusing and instructive toys' in 1849.<sup>34</sup>



On 12 December 1855 James Howie Junior asked newspaper readers:

*What would be a most acceptable and tasteful Gift to our Friends this Season. Why! a life-speaking Portrait such as is taken Daily at HOWIE JUNIOR'S AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHIC INSTITUTION 71 and 72 Princes Street*<sup>35</sup>

Prices began at 1s and rose to 3s 6d for a handsome portrait in a Morocco case available during the opening hours of nine till dusk.

Germany is usually credited with devising the post-Reformation Christmas tree rather than the centuries old tradition of decorating homes with greenery at Christmas-tide. Probably Queen Charlotte introduced the Christmas tree to England in the late eighteenth century. The *Scotsman* on 9 January 1862 declared 'We believe we are correct in stating that the first Christmas tree seen in Scotland was in Dalkeith House in 1840'.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the case Christmas trees must have been present in some Edinburgh homes by 1849 when Maclean and Son of 27 Princes Street imported a 'number of beautiful ornaments and presents suited for the appropriate decoration of the domestic "Christmas tree"'.<sup>37</sup> In the following year they:

<sup>34</sup> *Scotsman*, 19 December 1849.

<sup>35</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 12 December 1855; James Howie was Scottish.

<sup>36</sup> *Scotsman*, 9 January 1840.

<sup>37</sup> *Scotsman*, 22 December 1849.



opened up their new supplies of FRENCH and GERMAN ORNAMENTAL GOODS for decorating the Christmas Tree and enriching the Christmas Table.<sup>38</sup>



In 1855 Mrs Carstairs of 106 George Street offered a variety of ornaments for Christmas trees while Knox, Samuel and Dickson in Hanover Street, building on the 'extraordinary success which last season attended the introduction of the MODEL CHRISTMAS TREE' had a supply of Christmas Trees at prices from 5s to 60 guineas.<sup>39</sup> By 1860 the price had fallen to from 6d to £50 with presents from 3d to £10 and toys from 1s to 10s.<sup>40</sup> In 1855 the *Caledonian Mercury* carried a short report on Christmas Trees commenting that 'these pretty baubles which come to maturity during the "merry season" have sprung up this year and in greater profusion than ever'.<sup>41</sup>

In the *Daily Review* of 1 December 1866 the enterprising B. Hyam of 124 High Street advertised the shop's wares in the shape of two Christmas trees. One listed the items of clothing for sale, the other carried the following text:

*the approach of Merry Christmas is always hailed with the liveliest feelings of anticipation by all classes and enumerable are the preparations which are made to give this Monarch of Festivities a royal welcome. The schools are preparing to break up the shops are being decked with their choicest treasures the holly and mistletoe will soon be displayed and thus one and all in every possible and attractive way are preparing for the glorious advent of Christmas.*<sup>42</sup>

In 1611 Michael Maier, a German physician, sent James VI and I and his son Henry Frederick the first known Christmas card. This was found in the Scottish Record Office (now the National Records of Scotland) in 1979. Henry

<sup>38</sup> *Scotsman*, 18 December 1850.

<sup>39</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 27 December 1855.

<sup>40</sup> *Scotsman*, 19 December 1860.

<sup>41</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 29 December 1855.

<sup>42</sup> *Daily Review*, 1 December 1866.

Cole, founding Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, is usually credited with having sent the first commercial Christmas card which was designed for him by artist John Callcott Horsley in 1843.



By 1864 David Foulis of 61 George Street Edinburgh was advertising a variety of Christmas notepaper and cards though the latter may have been calling cards. In 1870, however, in an article on Christmas books the *Scotsman* pronounced the Christmas cards of Messrs Ward and Co. to be 'very ingenious in the variety of their devices' and 'in a very high degree elegant and tasteful'.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the 1870s adverts for Christmas cards proliferated and from 1875 the *Scotsman* began singling out manufacturers for their designs of cards, calendars, diaries and pocket books. In 1878 the newspaper asked:

*What can be said for the Christmas and New Year Cards issued by Messrs De La Rue and Company that has not been said many times before?*

Nevertheless the journalist continued:

*They have been produced from original drawings and would have been thought wonderful even a few years ago...many of the cards are worthy of being kept as things of artistic beauty.*<sup>44</sup>



<sup>43</sup> *Scotsman*, 13 December 1870.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 12 December 1878.

Novelties included scented Christmas cards, cards with flowers from the Holy Land, humorous cards, motto calendars with mottoes for businessmen and commercial desk diaries.

A poem entitled 'Old Christmas' appeared in the *Scotsman* of 23 December 1835. The first verse ran as follows:

*Old Christmas, jolly Christmas, with thy gay and jocund face  
Let holly branch and mistletoe thy ruddy temples grace,  
Come circle round the festive board, while Winter snows do fall  
Thou'rt still a welcome visitor in cottage and in hall  
And when we hail thy coming, joy in every brow we trace,  
Old Christmas, jolly Christmas with thy gay and jolly face.*<sup>45</sup>



Father Christmas then Santa Claus had a centuries-long history of evolution from many traditions to become the figure we know today. Until the nineteenth century he was a symbol of the Christmas season often depicted as a merry old gentleman who presided over entertainments for adults as indicated in the poem quoted above. By 1855 in Edinburgh, however, he had become a dispenser of Christmas gifts to children. At the inauguration of the new Trades' Maiden Hospital on the south side of the Meadows on 28 December 1855 Old Father Christmas stood at the left side of a Christmas tree laden with 300 gifts. Lady Christmas appeared with him in the attitude of 'instructing

---

<sup>45</sup> *Scotsman*, 23 December 1835.

the family in the mysteries of “fairyland” from a huge volume’.<sup>46</sup> Five years later Father Christmas sat in an evergreen bower in Mr Laule’s new Arcade in St Andrew Street. Described as an ‘appropriately rubicund old gentleman’ with white beard and locks encircled with a chaplet of holly he dispensed gifts aided by attendant fairies in blue gauze robes with yellow sashes.<sup>47</sup> The Grand Christmas Fair in the Music Hall of the Assembly Rooms in 1861 contained the grotto of Father Christmas who was crowned with holly and dressed in a crimson robe with golden embroidery. Attendant sprites and a 40 feet high Christmas tree completed the scene.



From the 1860s the number of advertisements for Christmas events and presents, especially toys, proliferated. In 1870 Thomas Stevenson of 76 -77 Princes Street claimed that it would require several columns of an ordinary newspaper to give a correct list of their stock including 4,000 dolls of every size and style from crying and speaking dolls to walking and dancing dolls. Rival store Kennington and Jenner again transformed a large section of their premises ‘into a gaily decorated and brilliantly illuminated bazaar and fancy fair’ containing ‘a multitudinous variety of amazingly cheap pretty toys and clever mechanical combinations’ with ‘thousands of more or less useful fancy articles all at very trifling cost’.<sup>48</sup> Established confectioner A. Ferguson of Melbourne Place advertised their Edinburgh Rock at 1s per pound or in tins from 6d to 2s; as well as crackers at wholesale price for evening parties.

---

<sup>46</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 31 December 1855; *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, vol.28, 1955, pp 30-33.

<sup>47</sup> *Scotsman*, 31 December 1860.

<sup>48</sup> *North Briton*, 24 December 1870.



Two years previously the *Scotsman* in an enthusiastic flurry of Victorian 'journalese' announced that the:

*holiday spirit is again abroad warning us of the close approach of Christmas. Everywhere preparations are in progress for the festive season...the busy caterers are employed having no rest and seeking none...The observance of Christmas is becoming pretty general in Scotland. Each year a wider and heartier recognition of the event is apparent. A general holiday is not yet thought of but the season, nevertheless, is cordially marked and is attended with numerous special appointments. Public entertainments, good, bad and indifferent, cheap and dear, short and long are to be counted by the score...it becomes everybody's duty to go and see pantomimes...The grocers seem to have bought up all the holly and mistletoe that the wide kingdom can supply, and whole ship-loads of currents, raisins and other seasonable fruit are piled in mountain form beneath the showy bowers...*<sup>49</sup>

25 December 1880 proved to be a historic date according to the *Edinburgh Evening News*:

*For the first time for nearly three centuries Christmas was this morning ushered in to the inhabitants of Edinburgh by the peal of Christmas bells. To all appearances the story told by the merry chimes of St Mary's will be realised, for it may be safely said that the present Christmas shows evidence of a stronger hold on the hearts of Scottish people than since the Reformation times.*<sup>50</sup>

Further, at the end of a musical service in the Free High Church no less, Dr W.C. Smith wished the congregation a happy Christmas. In 1882 the *Scotsman* considered that the practice of exchanging Christmas greetings by

<sup>49</sup> *Scotsman*, 24 December 1868.

<sup>50</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 25 December 1880.

cards seemed to be making its way among the population in the poorer localities of the city – though unlikely to have been in the form of the porcelain Christmas cards advertised by John Donald and Co. of Bristo Port and Place.



By 1886 the *Scotsman* opined that Christmas was no longer perceived as belonging especially to the Episcopal and Roman Catholic communities with a Christmas service being held in at least half-a-dozen Presbyterian churches in Edinburgh. By 1892 the newspaper commented that failure to commemorate Christmas in a service either by special music from the choir or by a reference from the pulpit had become rare. Three years earlier Old Greyfriars Church had been decorated with greenery and 'a praiseworthy attempt' had been made to ring Christmas carols on the St Giles' bells.<sup>51</sup>



The *Portobello Advertiser* of 27 December 1889 indicated that the practice of having Christmas Day as a holiday was gaining ground. This remained an annual theme for the press until the end of the century and into the next. Newspapers also monitored the increasing popularity of Christmas by recording the amount of mail being sent. 'Christmas comes but once a year' wrote a *Scotsman* journalist in December 1889:

---

<sup>51</sup> *Scotsman*, 26 December 1889.

*and with it comes, as a thing inevitable, the absolute paralysis of that great public department the Post Office...If people are "early" the chances are that their letters and parcels are delivered before Christmas Day; if people post at a reasonable hour, the chances are that these letters and parcels miss Christmas Day.*<sup>52</sup>

By 1904 the number of parcels delivered by the Post Office had risen to 11,305 but in the following year the total reached 17,567. In 1912 the Post Office needed to employ additional staff numbering 1500 consisting of unemployed men and 300 students to cope with the extra work caused by the Christmas mail; and in 1913 an increase of 6191 parcels had to be dealt with.



Another way of measuring the increasing practice of observing Christmas as a holiday among many of the population was the traffic at the railway stations. In 1908 a special train for the benefit of golfers left the Waverley Station at 9.05 am on Christmas morning bound for Aberlady, Luffness and Gullane; while all the greens about the city were busy. Meanwhile an influx of visitors arrived from London, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle and the Yorkshire towns.

Christmas weather constituted another annual topic. The *Scotsman* commented in 1900 that:

*After the sunless summer and frostless winter experienced this year, it was hardly to be expected that seasonable weather would prevail at Christmas-tide. The seasons seem to have undergone so much change of late that orthodox Christmas weather, with its associations of frost and snow and its exhilarating atmosphere would appear to be almost a thing of the past.*<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Scotsman*, 26 December 1889.

<sup>53</sup> *Scotsman*, 26 December 1900.

In 1906 the Christmas Eve weather proved unpleasant for those who had delayed their Christmas shopping to the eleventh hour. A high, gusty, moist and cold wind swept the city with heavy rain-threatening clouds and an evening frost making depressing conditions for last minute shoppers. On the Christmas morning of 1909, however, the prevailing cold did not deter four of the members of an all-year sea-bathing group from having their dip from the end of Portobello pier.



The Christmas season continued to provide a marketing opportunity for businesses. Messrs Tom Smith and Co. asked:

*What children's party would now be complete that had not Christmas Crackers as part of the evening's entertainment?*<sup>54</sup>



Mr H.E. Moss in his eighth Christmas and New Year Carnival in the Waverley Market exhibited a gigantic Christmas tree containing one thousand toys - all to be given away to the first thousand children entering the Market on 22 December 1892. In 1904 the 'Tale of Two Bad Mice' by B. Potter was

<sup>54</sup> *Scotsman*, 30 November 1889.



advertised as a Christmas present for children but by 1910 Renton's Bazaar on Princes Street advised customers to shop early in the day to avoid the congested afternoon hours. Owing to the large crowds in the afternoon the Punch and Judy Marionette Performance could not be given after 3.00pm.



Meanwhile the British Finance Company 57 York Place advised:

*Christmas comes but once a year. And it's everyone's Delight to keep it up! What's that? Got no Money? Then apply to the British Finance Company and they will advance you as much as you require £10 to £5000.*<sup>55</sup>

1912 proved to be a record Christmas season for shopping with managers confessing that the rush was phenomenal. They thought that money seemed to be more plentiful than in the previous six or seven years; and in spite of an increased price turkey sales rocketed.

In 1881 the wards of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, opened two years previously on Lauriston Place were 'tastefully decorated and the inmates treated as is customary on Christmas Day'.<sup>56</sup> Reporting on Christmas celebration in the Infirmary and the City Hospital remained an annual occurrence into the twentieth century. By 1900 child patients had their stockings well filled before the resident doctors and nursing staff made their early rounds of the wards singing carols. In 1905 the Edinburgh Corporation provided toys for the children in the City Hospital and the Lord Provost, his wife and several councillors visited in the afternoon.

Christmas entertainment continued to be provided by a range of charities. In 1891 in the Corstorphine home of the Scottish National Society for the

---

<sup>55</sup> *Scotsman* 6 December 1910.

<sup>56</sup> *Scotsman*, 27 December 1881.

Prevention of Cruelty to Children as well as a magnificent Christmas tree laden with toys, the festivities included a substantial tea and a magic lantern show. In 1903 the Edinburgh section of the Young Abstiners Union entertained 100 children of the Edinburgh Cripples' Visitation Society in the hall of St John's United Free Church. The children enjoyed tea and a musical programme and each received a toy and a 'useful gift'.<sup>57</sup>

The statement that 'it will all be over by Christmas' did not prove to be correct after the outbreak of war with Germany and Austria in 1914. Cautiously the *Scotsman* of 11 November 1914 urged people to buy British Christmas cards and not German or Austrian. The newspaper reported on 26 December:

*In spite of the peculiar circumstances of the time Christmas was celebrated in Edinburgh in the customary fashion. While most of the shops in the city were closed the streets presented a busy scene and to all appearances there was no falling off in the numbers of people who observed the day...All the public offices were closed, the holiday being pretty general among the professional classes and by many of the merchants of the city.*<sup>58</sup>

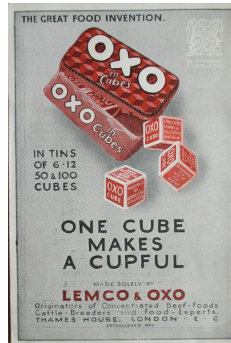
Numbers of soldiers stationed in Edinburgh swelled the crowds undeterred by the restricted lighting. At the Post Office the extra staff recruited to replace employees who had enlisted included 130 women. The Christmas mail incorporated parcels for the troops in the trenches. In the Infirmary each patient received a present and a Christmas card and each ward had a Christmas tree. The children of the Dean Orphan Hospital enjoyed their annual treat but requested that the money spent on the usual gifts should be used to buy presents for the Belgian child refugees.



<sup>57</sup> *Scotsman*, 28 December 1903.

<sup>58</sup> *Scotsman*, 26 December 1914.

In 1915 parcels being sent to the troops at the front contained plum puddings, cakes, dried fruits, sweets, tobacco, stockings, woollen gloves and woollen helmets. Leith Town Council – Leith remained independent from Edinburgh until 1920 – donated shortbread, currant loaf, chocolate and Oxo cubes as Christmas gifts to the Royal Scots at the Dardanelles.



A subdued holiday spirit permeated Christmas Eve but 230 poor children under eight years of age belonging to the Free Breakfast Mission enjoyed a novel Christmas tea party served on low tables provided free of expense by a contractor. Santa Claus paid a visit riding a real donkey.

By 1916 the *Scotsman* noted that ‘Christmas Day celebrations in Edinburgh had a closer association with its sacred significance and less with the spirit of holiday-making and festivity than for many years’.<sup>59</sup> The main feature of this Christmas was the small amount of railway travelling undertaken as people responded to the appeal not to make an unnecessary call on the railways.



*“I just haven't got  
the Transport”*

Battles do not stop for **Christmas**.  
In this fifth winter of the War it is  
more than ever necessary that there  
should be no delay in the transport  
of war equipment for the services.

**SEND FEWER PARCELS  
THIS CHRISTMAS**

and make no unnecessary journeys

**RAILWAY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

<sup>59</sup> *Scotsman*, 26 December 1916.

Christmas fare and musical entertainments by visiting artists were provided for the large number of wounded soldiers lodged in the Infirmary; while the Edinburgh Rotary Club arranged for three afternoon performances to be given at the Empire, the King's and the Leith Gaiety theatres for children of Edinburgh soldiers and sailors.

In the approach to the fourth war Christmas many Edinburgh shops displayed 'sold out' signs with supplies in some places being unequal to demand due to a scarcity of provisions. Those who shopped early benefitted. Retailers reported that there seemed also to be a feeling that it should not be an extravagant Christmas though there appeared to be no lack of money. The popularity of the Christmas card, however, had not diminished and with the entrance of the United States of America into the war, an American flag appeared on some Christmas card designs.



The cooperation of theatre staff, performers and the Edinburgh and Leith Tramway Company enabled a series of matinee performances for the children of soldiers and sailors; the first being 'Humpty Dumpty' given for 2000 children at the Theatre Royal. Regarding religious celebration St Cuthbert's experienced the largest congregation since the restoration of the Christmas service.

With the cessation of hostilities on 11 November 1918, peace brought bigger stocks for Edinburgh shops though very little dried fruit for Christmas puddings; but a feeling prevailed that although Christmas might not be as merry as in days of yore at least it would be brighter than in the immediate past.



Retailer Jenner's assured customers that 'the luxury of present giving can be indulged in with special gladness and generosity this year' but urged the necessity of shopping early.<sup>60</sup> Henry Darling & Co of 124 Princes Street advertised Christmas gifts in 'abounding variety for Ladies and their Daughters' including blouses in Jap silk or crepe-de-chene at 15s to 25s 6d, cosy dressing gowns for youth or old age and 'kimona for the fiancée or bride' at 52s 6d to 18 guineas.<sup>61</sup> Music lovers could enjoy a musical Christmas by purchasing 'His Master's Voice' gramophone records in albums such as 'The Mikado' comprising 11 double sided records of 12 inches for £3 17s 6d; or the British Composers album of orchestral records for £2 8s 6d – available at Patersons Sons & Co. 27 George Street.<sup>62</sup>



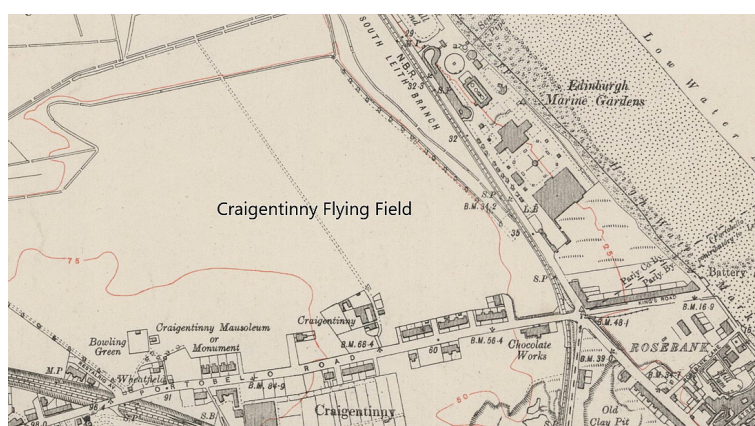
Edinburgh people again organised Christmas meals and entertainments for the active soldiers and sailors present in the city and those recovering in the Infirmary and Craigleith hospitals. The Welcome Club in Cockburn Street played host to American sailors and soldiers on leave swelled the crowds on

<sup>60</sup> *Scotsman*, 10 December 1918.

<sup>61</sup> *Scotsman*, 12 December 1918.

<sup>62</sup> *Scotsman*, 9 December 1918.

Christmas Day afternoon. Every place of entertainment seemed to have queues and in the evening lights once more illuminated the streets. As ever numbers of events funded by charity took place, from the dinner to the Canongate poor and the entertainment for 200 old age pensioners in the Grove Street Mission to the presents of socks, pipe and tobacco to each man in the Scottish Naval and Military Veterans Residence in the Canongate. A novelty of this Christmas proved to be the arrival of Santa Claus by aeroplane at Craigentiny aerodrome. In traditional garb and bearing a sack of toys and gifts provided by Sir Robert Maule he distributed the gifts to children who had been admitted free.



Old Age Pensions were paid earlier in the Christmas week of 1919 but lack of bustle at the railway stations indicated that with high fares the 'stay-at-home' habit adopted during the war years lingered on. Evidence of the industrial depression in 1920 showed at the Post Office where the Christmas work meant temporary employment for 1200 men- but no women- engaged through the Employment Exchange. Increased supplies of imported toys added to the variety now available though less money seemed to be spent as was in the previous year. Christmas Day in 1920, however, marked a historic occasion – no publication of newspapers. The *Scotsman* commented on 27 December:

*To some it seems strange that the papers – which have never before regarded any holyday – should observe Christmas Day instead of New Year and therein they follow the English Custom. But truly Christmas is coming to be everywhere observed in Scotland.*<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Scotsman*, 27 December 1920.

In the following year, however, one Post Office official prophesied that the time would come when the Christmas card would be as obsolete as the Valentine – a conclusion reached because of the shrinkage in the number of cards posted as opposed to the popularity of the calendar and letter packet. Other seasonal activities increased. A large number of Edinburgh residents attended the series of special Christmas dinners with orchestral music arranged by the Caledonian Station Hotel for the festive season; while a ‘new and attractive dancing resort’ named the Balmoral in Princes Street featured a masked ball.<sup>64</sup> A ‘female impersonator’ attended and the Murray Hedges Syncopated Band supplied the music. Meanwhile the Assembly Rooms hosted a Children’s Ball in aid of the Edinburgh Children’s Shelter. The participants mostly in fancy dress included Newhaven fisher wives with children all dressed in ‘their quaint old world costume’.<sup>65</sup>



The annual Christmas entertainment at the Edinburgh Hospital for Women and Children featured ‘a most amusing sketch entitled “Why be Stout” contributed by a party of ladies’.<sup>66</sup>

A football match between Heart of Midlothian and Hibernians in aid of the Lord Provost’s Relief Fund arranged for the Christmas Day of 1922 had to be postponed on account of the gale and drenching rain showers; but Edinburgh had a white Christmas in 1923, the first since 1876. The popularity of

---

<sup>64</sup> *Scotsman*, 24 December 1921.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Scotsman*, 29 December 1921.

Christmas dinner dances and children's dances continued throughout the 1920s with the Charleston being a featured attraction.

## **CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR.**

### **ROYAL BRITISH HOTEL PROGRAMME.**

**DINNER AT HOTEL AND PRIVATE CONVEYANCE AND ADMISSION TO THE PALAIS, INCLUSIVE CHARGE — 10/6 (DECEMBER 31st — 12/6.)**

**WEDNESDAY, 18th December—SPECIAL DINNER and GRAND CARNIVAL.**

**FRIDAY, 20th December—SPECIAL DINNER AND GALA BALL.**

**TUESDAY, 24th December—CHRISTMAS EVE DINNER AND GRAND GALA DANCE.**

**WEDNESDAY, 25th December—CHRISTMAS DINNER AND GRAND CHRISTMAS BALL.**

**THURSDAY, 26th December—SPECIAL DINNER AND GRAND CARNIVAL.**

**FRIDAY, 27th December—SPECIAL DINNER AND GALA BALL.**

**TUESDAY, 31st December—SPECIAL HOGMANAY DINNER AND GRAND NEW YEAR'S EVE BALL.**

**WEDNESDAY, 1st January—SPECIAL NEW YEAR'S DINNER AND CARNIVAL.**

**FRIDAY, 3rd January—SPECIAL DINNER AND GALA BALL.**

**TABLE RESERVATIONS ARE NOW BEING MADE.**

The *Scotsman* reported in 1926 that 'the old custom of sending Christmas cards is rapidly coming back into favour'; and a full course Christmas dinner complete with turkey, plum pudding and all the proper garnishings along with a display of Christmas cakes attracted a good deal of attention at the Edinburgh School of Cookery and Domestic Economy.<sup>67</sup> 'Each student makes her own Christmas cake which she carries home with pride'.<sup>68</sup> By this time the press featured 'female interest' articles written under headings such as 'Woman to Date'. Part of the entry for 28 December 1927 read:

*I chanced to walk down Canongate on Christmas Eve and found the population very much alive. "Aye, but it's cauld", shivered one old body, putting her shawl about her as she leant against the entrance to her close. Her neighbour agreed. She was flourishing in her hand a couple of bananas. The man with the hand-cart had a large supply which he was selling off at two a penny. Who would not join the Eat More Fruit fraternity at such a price? He did not stop to tell his customers that this consignment had been frozen.*<sup>69</sup>

In 1929 the journalist reported a rumour that:

*many modern housewives are reluctant to spend "unnecessary" labour upon Christmas cooking and are therefore buying not only their puddings but the whole of their Christmas*

<sup>67</sup> *Scotsman*, 17 December 1926.

<sup>68</sup> *Scotsman*, 17 December 1927.

<sup>69</sup> *Scotsman*, 28 December 1927.



*dinner at the stores which make such outside catering – let us admit it – thoroughly tempting to the palate if not to the purse.*<sup>70</sup>

By the 1930s the now familiar observation that year by year an increasingly large section of Edinburgh's population observed Christmas Day as a holiday continued to be repeated in the newspapers; and the amount of Christmas mail broke records annually. Reports of charity Christmas dinners included festivities at the Grove Street Mission, the distribution of 1800 toys by the Grassmarket Mission and entertainment for the wives and children of disabled ex servicemen at Lady Haig's Poppy Factory. In 1935 Father Christmas arrived by lift in the Royal Edinburgh Hospital for Sick Children; his horsedrawn sleigh being accompanied by Mickey Mouse and a couple of clowns.



An opportunist festive advertisement told readers that thousands of people who once had cause to regret the Christmas feasting and revelry after it was over 'now take Maclean Brand Stomach Powder and retain only happy memories'.<sup>71</sup>

Ideas for Christmas party table decorations and for making 'your own Christmas presents' and crackers appeared in 1930s' Decembers along with suggestions for recycling natural Christmas trees by planting them outside. In 1935 suggestions for Christmas presents for men in the 2s to 5s price range included a pair of suspenders, an electric torch and a case of half a dozen

<sup>70</sup> *Scotsman*, 16 December 1929.

<sup>71</sup> *Scotsman*, 27 December 1935.

bottles of beer. Over one pound might purchase a boot rack, a dressing gown or a really good razor, perhaps one of the new electric ones.

In 1938 the *Scotsman* announced a 'Christmas Present' for Edinburgh in the form of the distribution of gas masks during the Christmas holidays.



Following the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939, by December the newspaper was advocating a great effort to keep up the Christmas spirit and make merry for the boys on leave – 'we may have to tighten our belts when the year rounds the corner'.<sup>72</sup> Lord Provost Henry Steele and Lady Steele chose a Christmas and New Year card depicting the painting of the Low Battery Edinburgh Castle by James Patterson



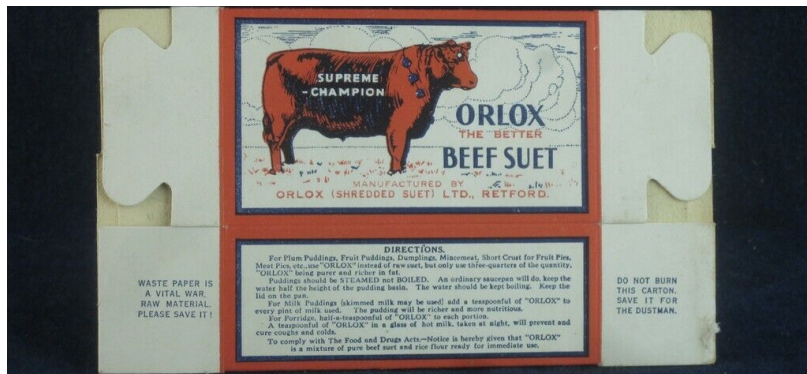
and the Edinburgh Rotary Club had a special Christmas lunch in the North British Hotel at which ladies were present. The King's yearly present to St Giles Cathedral of a Christmas tree from the Balmoral woods had to be displayed inside the Cathedral due to the blackout restrictions. Jenners' department store, calling itself 'a streetful of shops under one roof', announced that 'Soldiers' Comforts will be found all through the shop' in

---

<sup>72</sup> *Scotsman*, 22 December 1939.

addition to 'hundreds and hundreds of lovely presents from the frivolous to the extremely practical'.<sup>73</sup>

A determination to maintain Christmas celebrations in some manner continued throughout the war years. 'There will be no peace on earth this Christmas', announced the *Scotsman* in 1940, 'But the spirit of Christmas is not to be quenched'.<sup>74</sup> In 1941 the newspaper commented that 'Hitler cannot souse the Christmas spirit. Goodness knows he has tried hard enough'.<sup>75</sup> For the week beginning 1 December an extra two ounces of block suet could be claimed in addition to the normal ration although a wartime recipe for Christmas cake included four ounces of margarine as well as four to six ounces of fruit and four ounces of finely grated carrot.



On Christmas Day the Lord Provost and Town Council held a party for a great gathering of service men and women in the Usher Hall. Everyone received a Christmas card, a packet of cigarettes and a copy of Burns' poems.

In 1942 the Government permitted the ringing of church bells on Christmas Day between the hours of 9.00 am and noon; and at Jenners' it was Christmas as usual with Father Christmas to welcome the children in the Toy Bazaar and Captain Oakley to cut silhouette portraits to make charming Christmas cards or gifts. A woman journalist commented in December 1943 that not even four years of war had quenched the Christmas spirit. 'To be sure', she wrote:

*Present-giving is on the wane, coupons and high prices having set a barrier between the generous impulse and its natural fulfilment. But more letters are being written and received*

<sup>73</sup> *Scotsman*, 2 December 1939.

<sup>74</sup> *Scotsman*, 18 December 1940.

<sup>75</sup> *Scotsman*, 24 December 1941.

and who would not rather have a good letter from an old friend than anything any day. The trouble is to find time to write it.<sup>76</sup>

To add to the Christmas spirit the Government allowed two packets of dried eggs per ration book from 12 December to 8 January.



St George's Parish Church devoted the Christmas Eve service of 1944 to the singing of French, Polish, Russian and Czech carols; and on Christmas Day the theatres and cinemas were well patronised. The Lord Provost and his daughter visited Waterloo Place Rest Centre where service men enjoyed a meal of turkey, vegetables, plum pudding and mince pies all for the price of 1s. By Christmas 1945 the war had been over for several months and St Giles held the largest ever seen Christmas Day service. The first baby to be born on Christmas Day in the Simpson Memorial Maternity Pavilion was named Carol. The Canadian Red Cross sent 30 cases each containing 481 pounds of jam for distribution to children in nurseries; and again various venues across the city provided Christmas dinners for servicemen. A *Scotsman* reader found a final request account among his Christmas cards with 'This account is long overdue' written in red ink across it. 'Immediate payment is requested' – then underneath in a 'boisterous hand 'A Merry Christmas'.<sup>77</sup>

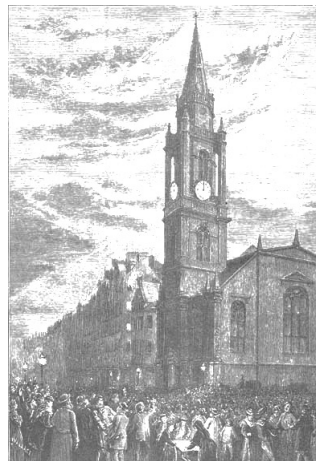
In 1946 Edinburgh enjoyed the happiest Christmas since the outbreak of war with a wider choice of gifts in the shops. Though most factories did not observe a holiday, shops and offices were closed on Christmas Day. A few Germans in prisoner-of-war dress walked the streets under the War Office Dispensation for well-behaved prisoners; and more than 100 German

<sup>76</sup> *Scotsman*, 23 December 1943

<sup>77</sup> *Scotsman*, 21 December 1945

prisoners in a camp at Ratho had invitations to spend Christmas night in the homes of local residents or at functions in churches in the village. The Post Office recorded the heaviest Christmas mail in 1947; and in 1948 St Giles once again welcomed its largest Christmas Day congregation. The Lord Provost and Lady Provost had a busy day presenting gifts to five babies born in the Simpson Maternity Pavilion, followed by greeting 600 children from Challenger Lodge enjoying a Christmas treat in the Capitol cinema; and finally visiting 1250 old age pensioners in the State cinema in Leith. Meanwhile in some parts of Corstorphine residents had to delay the eating of their festive dinner as a result of a local failure in the gas supply.

By 1950 Christmas card mail was on the increase but with the end of war now five years in the past the number of incoming food parcels had diminished. Once again the press noticed the increased observance of Christmas day; and finally in 1958 Christmas Day became a public holiday in Scotland, Boxing Day achieving similar status in 1971. Since then Christmas celebration in Edinburgh has burgeoned and become even more commercialised.



Hogmanay which the kirk also attempted to control in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries accelerated in celebration in Edinburgh throughout the eighteenth century with the Tron Kirk becoming a focus at some point. Perhaps the end of the year now has more than a passing resemblance to the medieval, pre-Reformation twelve days of Christmas.