

On Christmas Day in England...

On Friday 25th December, the people of Britain, like those of many other nations, will sit down and eat an enormous **Christmas dinner**. But why is what the British do at Christmas of interest? The answer is that they probably invented modern Christmas.

THE FATHER OF CHRISTMAS



The man responsible for this was the writer Charles Dickens, who published A Christmas Carol in December 1843. This “novella” is about the Christmas spirit, the importance of being kind to other people. But Dickens invented many modern Christmas traditions, like giving presents, having a big dinner with your family and singing carols. Christmas cards also started at this time, although they were the invention of another Victorian gentleman, Henry Cole. Christmas cards also began life in 1843. They say that Dickens was “the man who invented Christmas.”

When he died in 1870, another writer, Theodore Watts-Dunton, was walking in Drury Lane near Covent Garden. He heard a **Cockney girl** say: “Dickens dead? Then will Father Christmas die too? ”

CHRISTMAS EVE

So how do the British celebrate Christmas? Christmas Eve is fun. Many people go to parties or to the pub. At midnight people go to Midnight mass at the local church. In this way they won't see Father Christmas when he comes down the chimney with his presents. The more generous families leave him a glass of sherry and some delicious mince pies.

CHRISTMAS DAY



Some people also go to church on Christmas morning, but most prefer to open their presents. They will start eating their “Christmas dinner” at around 1 o'clock. They will eat roast turkey, with stuffing and cranberry sauce, and then Christmas pudding with brandy butter. They will probably continue eating the turkey the following day, which is called Boxing Day. Turkey at Christmas is a modern tradition. In the past people ate goose. This is evident from the nursery rhyme: “Christmas is coming, **the goose is getting fat.**”

THE ROYAL MESSAGE

At 3 o'clock many families will watch “the Royal Christmas Message” on television. This is when the Queen addresses the nation and the **Commonwealth**. This tradition began with her grandfather, George V, in 1932. He spoke on the radio to the nation and the **Empire**. The man who wrote his speech was another famous writer, Rudyard Kipling. The Queen made her first televised Christmas broadcast in 1957.