

**The Intimacy of Christmas:  
Festive Celebration in England**

**c. 1750-1914**

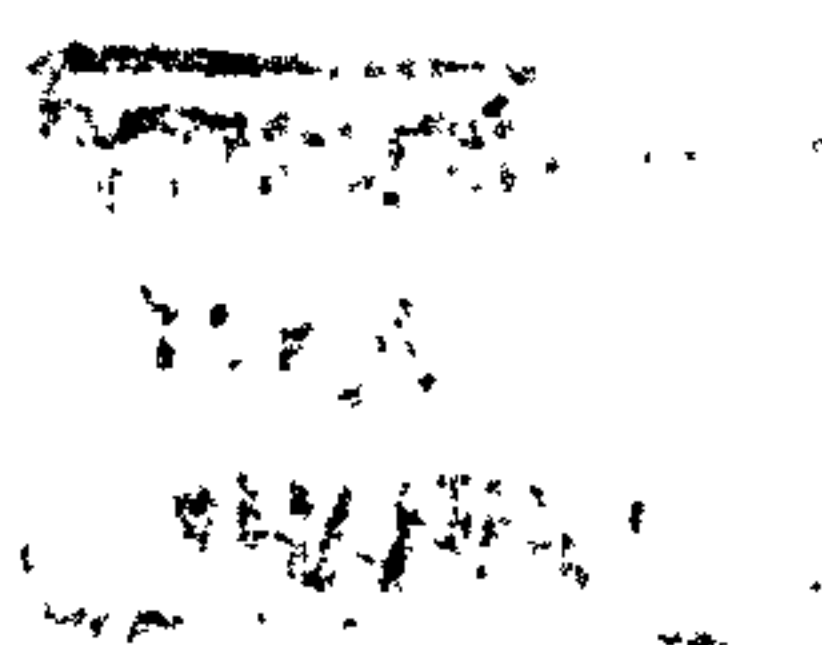
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## **Abstract**

**This thesis examines the development of the Christmas festival in England between the mid eighteenth century and the First World War. It argues that ‘invented tradition’ models of explaining this development, that place a great emphasis on a Victorian construction of a ‘modern’ Christmas, are an inadequate means of conveying the processes of continuity and change at work. It offers instead an alternative paradigm, termed ‘Christmas intimacy’, which describes the heightened emotions, feelings, and sentiments that can be experienced during the festival. Whilst this places emphasis on the role of home and family, intimacy is also employed to examine the Christmas experienced in commercial, civic, educational, philanthropic and religious contexts. The relationship between public and private is considered to be complementary and symbiotic, in which performance plays an important mediating role.**

**The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is concerned with the celebration of Christmas amongst family and friends, in terms of gatherings, sending Christmas wishes, gender roles at Christmas, the experience of children, Christmas presents, decorating and domestic space, and theatricals and music. The chapter concludes by examining the role of servants, and the replication of familial ideals of Christmas within Victorian institutions. Chapter two explores the important religious context, revealing how religion helped shape, but also became obscured by, Christmas intimacy. The third chapter shows how a distinct public culture of Christmas developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, in terms of charity, entertainment, street culture and temperance. Chapter four recognises that leisure time was an important component of Christmas intimacy, and examines the cultures of Christmas that were available in the workplace, schools and associations, as well as highlighting the experiences of shop assistants and postmen, two types of workers who bore much of the physical burden of Christmas intimacy. The final chapter examines the way in which issues of consumption became important to the intimacy of Christmas, with particular emphasis on shopping, advertising and travel.**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

BCA.	Birmingham City Archives.
BI.	Borthwick Institute, University of York.
COS.	Charity Organisation Society.
ECA.	Early Closing Association.
GA.	Georgia.
IWRO.	Isle of Wight Record Office.
MA.	Massachusetts.
NAUSAWC.	National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehouseman and Clerks.
n. d.	No date given.
NER.	North-Eastern Railway Company.
NS.	Nova Scotia.
SA.	Sheffield Archive.
TL.	Templeman Library, University of Kent at Canterbury.
VAMAAD.	Victoria and Albert Museum Archive of Art and Design.
VECA.	Voluntary Early Closing Association.
YCA.	York City Archive.
YML.	York Minster Library.

### **Note regarding definitions**

Where I use the term 'Christmas', I am referring to Christmas as a season, which originally meant the twelve days from Christmas Day to Epiphany, or Twelfth Day. By the late nineteenth century, however, the Christmas season could also mean the build up to the twelve days, and can also mean the same here. Specific days within the Christmas season are referred to by their name.

## Acknowledgements

I must first of all thank the University of York for funding the first three years of this project. It would also have been impossible for me to prosper without the continued financial generosity of my parents, for which I offer them too little in return. Within the history department at York, special thanks must go to my supervisor, Ted Royle, for his expertise, rigour and patience. Liz Buettner, Jim Walvin and Allen Warren all served time on my advisory panel, and provided excellent suggestions and welcome enthusiasm. In the wider world, thanks should also go to all the librarians and archivists who have charmingly and efficiently answered my enquiries, both in person and through correspondence. Far too many colleagues to mention here have listened to my ideas at conferences, provided excellent feedback, and made invaluable suggestions for sources. I wish to thank Jeremy Boulton for giving me the opportunity to teach a Christmas special subject at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, and also my students who endured it. Sean O'Connell kindly commissioned my historiography of Christmas that helped shape this thesis, and has been a source of enthusiasm and support ever since.

The second most rewarding aspect of this thesis has been the company of the postgraduate community at York, with particular thanks to Mike Brown, Melissa Hollander, Ruth Larsen, Matt Roberts, Emma Robertson, Helen Smith, and Louise Wannell. They have provided me with help, ideas, support, and above all, friendship. The most rewarding aspect of this thesis is that I have been able to share the experience with my partner, Catriona Kennedy. She has been the source of endless amounts of enthusiasm and practical help, as well as being a welcome distraction from the thesis. As it stands, this work could not have been achieved without her, though all its faults are mine.

## **Author's Declaration**

Part of the introduction was published as the review essay 'Christmas in Nineteenth-Century Britain and America: A Historiographical Overview', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 118-25.

Part of the 'decorating' section of chapter two was published as the working paper "Gothic Going Mad": Aspects of Christmas Church Decoration in the Nineteenth Century', in K. Sayer and R. Mitchell (eds), *Victorian Gothic* (Leeds, 2003).



## Introduction

For the greater part of the twentieth century, the history of the Christmas festival in Britain was relegated to the preserve of antiquarians and popular historians, who perpetuated a nostalgic and sentimental perspective on the festival.<sup>1</sup> This situation began to change in the late 1970s, with the posthumous publication of J. A. R. Pimlott's *The Englishman's Christmas*. Pimlott described the history of Christmas from pagan origins through to the twentieth century, but devoted five of his thirteen chapters to the Victorian period, putting particular emphasis on the role of trees, cards and carols, the development of Father Christmas, and the emergence of 'the business of Christmas': the Victorian period was identified as being essential to the development of the Christmas recognisable today. For Pimlott, this 'new' Christmas was 'carried forward by an irresistible momentum', establishing the role of children and commerce. Pimlott strongly contrasted the celebration of Christmas in the early nineteenth century with the situation post-1840. He emphasised the reduction in public holidays and the small coverage Christmas received in Regency magazines and periodicals. In explaining the sudden popularity of Christmas in Victoria's reign Pimlott played down the popularly held notion that Charles Dickens and Prince Albert were solely responsible for this trend. Instead Pimlott argued that the popularisation was derived from religious revival (particularly the Oxford movement) and humanitarian and romantic movements that emphasised traditional virtues of 'neighbourliness, charity and goodwill' with particular focus on family and children.<sup>2</sup> Though many of Pimlott's arguments were underdeveloped, he did provide a nuanced perspective of the celebration of Christmas in England, and *The Englishman's Christmas* remains an essential introduction to the subject.

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<sup>1</sup> These works have been framed by sentiment, rather than exploring sentiment. See, for example, T. K. Hervey, *The Book of Christmas* (London, 1835); W. Sandys, *Christmastide; its History, Festivities and Carols* (London, 1852); J. Ashton, *A Righte Merrie Christmase!!! The Story of Christ-tide* (London, 1894); W. F. Dawson, *Christmas: Its Origins and Associations* (London, 1902); T. G. Crippen, *Christmas and Christmas Lore* (London, 1923); and M. Harrison, *The Story of Christmas. Its Growth and Development from the Earliest Times* (London, 1951). The most analytical history of Christmas was C. A. Miles's *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition, Christian and Pagan* (London, 1912).

<sup>2</sup> J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Christmas. A Social History* (Hassocks, 1978), pp. 85, 89.



Despite useful appendices detailing potential avenues for research, *The Englishman's Christmas* was an unreferenced work, an indication that it was still aimed at a popular market. The same can be said of the next two histories of British Christmas to appear: J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue's *The Making of the Modern Christmas*; and Gavin Weightman and Steve Humphries' *Christmas Past*. Both these works reveal the influence of Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* collection, arguing that the Victorian middle classes 'reinvented' Christmas in terms of a nostalgic view of 'Merrie Englands', in order to promote social harmony and alleviate guilt created by material prosperity.<sup>3</sup> Though essentially a tie-in to a London Weekend Television series, *Christmas Past* is an important contribution to the study of Christmas, offering a thematic exploration of the social experience of the festival and containing valuable oral testimonies from the Edwardian period.

Invented tradition was now an established paradigm in the historical study of British Christmas, and it gained further popularity in the 1990s when Geoffrey Rowell published a short article entitled 'Dickens and the Construction of Christmas', highlighting the role Dickens played in the construction of what Rowell considers to be a Christian-social feast.<sup>4</sup> A collection of social-anthropological essays edited by Daniel Miller, *Unwrapping Christmas*, is also underpinned by the idea that the modern Christmas had been invented.<sup>5</sup> This volume showed the value of social-anthropological interpretations of Christmas for historians. James Carrier explores 'The Rituals of Christmas Giving', locating the Christmas present as 'a vehicle of affection that expresses private sentiment within a relationship that is personal and probably familial';<sup>6</sup> whilst Adam Kuper discusses the relationship between family and time in 'The English Christmas and the Family: Time Out and Alternative Realities', presenting a model of Christmas family time based upon a desire for the repetition of childhood

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<sup>3</sup> J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas* (London, 1986); G. Weightman and S. Humphries, *Christmas Past* (London, 1987); E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> G. Rowell, 'Dickens and the Construction of Christmas', *History Today*, 43 (December 1993), 17-24.

<sup>5</sup> D. Miller, 'A Theory of Christmas', in D. Miller (ed.), *Unwrapping Christmas* (Oxford, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> J. G. Carrier, 'The Rituals of Christmas Giving', in Miller, *Unwrapping Christmas*, p. 55.



rituals, existing outside history, and downplaying conflict and hierarchy.<sup>7</sup> In a study of 'Christmas Cards and the Construction of Social Relations in Britain Today', Mary Searle-Chatterjee examines the role Christmas cards played in the maintenance of social networks, both within close intimate circles and looser social connections, and its dependence upon the work of female members of families.<sup>8</sup> Working in a transatlantic context, John Gillis also places considerable emphasis on invented traditions within the Victorian-family Christmas as part of a wider emphasis on new family time in *A World of Their Own Making. Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values*.<sup>9</sup>

There has also been a backlash against the use of invented tradition within the study of Christmas. Ronald Hutton places considerable emphasis on Christmas in his volume on calendar customs, *The Stations of the Sun. A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*. Hutton devotes ten chapters to the study of Christmas customs, marrying a synthesis of the works discussed above under the heading 'The Reinvention of Christmas' to chapters examining the decline of well-documented rural-agricultural customs such as the mummers' play and sword dance, employing an unsentimental tone and situating the decline within the changing economic and social relationships of the British countryside.<sup>10</sup> Hutton is critical of the folklorist tradition of studying custom with its emphasis on pagan survivals (revealing a common pattern of customs emerging in the eighteenth century, reaching a height of popularity in the early nineteenth century before dying out in the early twentieth century), and also of historians such as E. P. Thompson, Robert Malcolmson, Robert Storch and Bob Bushaway for their treatment of the working classes as relatively homogenous in both identity and interest, and for the glossing over of hostility towards traditional customs displayed by religious

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<sup>7</sup> A. Kuper, 'The English Christmas and the Family: Time Out and Alternative Realities', in Miller, *Unwrapping Christmas*, pp. 157-75.

<sup>8</sup> M. Searle-Chatterjee, 'Christmas Cards and the Construction of Social Relations in Britain Today', in Miller, *Unwrapping Christmas*, pp. 176-92.

<sup>9</sup> J. R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual and the Quest for Family Values* (New York, 1996), pp. 98-104. See also 'Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 3, (1989), 213-35; and E. H. Pleck, *Celebrating the Family. Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2000), pp. 43-72.

<sup>10</sup> R. Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun. A History of Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford, 1996), chapters 1-10.

nonconformists and political radicals.<sup>11</sup> Despite this scepticism towards the treatment of custom by the disciplines of folklore and social history, Hutton also argues ‘that the rhythms of the British year are timeless, and impose certain perpetual patterns upon calendar customs’. Here Hutton notes how a modern nine-day Christmas festival had emerged to replace the medieval twelve-day one, commenting that ‘a sense of overpowering familiarity strikes a historian interested in the long-term development of the festival’.<sup>12</sup>

Hostility to invented tradition can also be found in Mark Connelly’s *Christmas. A Social History*. Connelly examines the themes of Englishness, pantomime, the Christmas carol revival, empire, BBC broadcasts, cinema and shopping, stressing continuity over the period 1780 to 1952, and highlighting the role of Christmas as a cultural expression of English national identity. Whilst Connelly’s volume is a welcome addition to the field, being complete with references and bibliography and highlighting an important factor in the representation of Christmas, it is not without problems. Connelly’s rejection of the term ‘invention’ (he preferred ‘inflation’) seems to be a semantic quibble rather than an actual engagement with the theory of invented tradition itself.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Connelly’s conception of ‘Englishness’ seems to be largely based upon Martin Wiener’s heavily criticised *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*,<sup>14</sup> and the over emphasis on this theme leaves the work one dimensional and guilty of reductionism. Ironically, the framework of national identity actually lends support to the legitimacy of invented tradition.

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<sup>11</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, pp. vii-viii, 419-22. See E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York, 1993); R. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1973); R. Storch (ed.), *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1982); and B. Bushaway, *By Rite. Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700-1880* (London, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, pp. 123, 426.

<sup>13</sup> M. Connelly, *Christmas. A Social History* (London and New York, 1999), pp. 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> M. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge, 1981). For a critique of Wiener, see P. Mandler, ‘Against “Englishness”: English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 7 (1997), 155-75.



America has witnessed a similar emergence of Christmas as a valid field of historical study. For many years the standard work was the sociologist James Barnett's *The American Christmas*, which placed emphasis on the fusion of disparate customs and the decline of dissenting opposition on the creation of a national holiday.<sup>15</sup> More recently, Susan Davis's "Making Night Hideous": Christmas Revelry and Public Order in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia',<sup>16</sup> and Stephen Nissenbaum's *The Battle for Christmas*, under the influence of E. P. Thompson, recast the nineteenth-century American Christmas as a contest between proletarian street culture and middle-class respectability. The starting point for Nissenbaum's 'battle' is the puritan 'war' on Christmas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a battle replayed and recast in Clement Clark Moore's 'A Visit from St. Nicholas', the contrast between parlour and street, the conflict between personal and impersonal embodied in the Christmas gift, the relationship between generations in the middle-class home, the renegotiation of charitable giving to the poor, and the relationship between master and slave in the ante-bellum south. Nissenbaum's imaginative, interdisciplinary and sprawling work is based on an understanding of the potential of Christmas to answer broader historical questions, and the importance of the history of holidays not existing in isolation. He also argues that whilst the Christmas he describes represented 'something of an invented tradition', the implication that real traditions existed before invented traditions is questionable. Nissenbaum calls for the authenticity of all traditions, viewing them 'as dynamic forces that are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated'. Invented tradition, then, is 'a very useful historical tool', but 'subject to abuse'.<sup>17</sup>

A similar caution regarding invented tradition can be found in Penne Restad's *Christmas in America*, a general history charting the evolution of the American Christmas from the colonial period to the twentieth century, but placing particular emphasis on the nineteenth century. Restad views invented tradition as a 'useful starting

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<sup>15</sup> J. H. Barnett, *The American Christmas. A Study in National Culture* (New York, 1954).

<sup>16</sup> S. Davis, "Making Night Hideous": Christmas Revelry and Public Order in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia', *American Quarterly*, 34 (1982), 185-99.

<sup>17</sup> S. Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York, 1996), pp. 315-19.



point', but 'too singular and static' to explain the American Christmas. In common with Nissenbaum, Restad seeks to emphasise the 'elastic and ever-changing nature' of the American Christmas, especially through the 'interaction of political, social, economic, and religious realms'. Like Davis and Nissenbaum, Restad also locates the growth of the American Christmas within the emergence of the middle class during the first phase of industrialisation and urbanisation, but is more successful in connecting this with domestic ideology and the liberal Protestantism that underpinned it, showing how Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and above all, gift giving were compatible with the Protestant ethic.<sup>18</sup> This theme of negotiation between market and religion is paramount in Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Consumer Rites. The Buying and Selling of American Holidays*. Placing Christmas within a context of annual holidays that included Easter, Mother's day and Valentine's day, Schmidt reveals the relationship between Christianity and consumer culture to be 'symbiotic and conflictual, complementary and contested'. He emphasises how the market helped to foster a new kind of festivity based upon consumption and spectacle, including the gift-giving rituals of the home, where the anticipatory atmosphere induced by the idea of Santa Claus had a sense of 'religious waiting' inspiring 'spiritual awe' and 'advent mysticism'. For Schmidt, the rituals of shopping and gift giving became 'secular liturgies' competing with Church celebrations and showing the ability of the new Christmas 'to absorb and supplant it'. The Churches for their part willingly participated in the market through the holding of Christmas bazaars. At the same time, Schmidt identifies a growing Christianisation of Christmas, embodied in the recounting of bible stories of the Incarnation, the singing of religious hymns, the viewing of Nativity scenes, the decoration of church interiors and the holding of special services. Concurrently, it was churchmen who were most prominent in publicly criticising various aspects of the developing festival, from the wastefulness and meaninglessness of excessive giving, to the obscuring of religious meaning and the treatment of the poor.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> P. L. Restad, *Christmas in America. A History* (New York, 1995), pp. viii-ix.

<sup>19</sup> L. E. Schmidt, *Consumer Rites. The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton, 1995), chapter 3.

A different perspective on the consumer undercurrents of the American Christmas can be found in William Waits's *The Modern Christmas in America. A Cultural History of Gift Giving*. Waits insists that religion did not play an important role in the emergence of the modern Christmas, offering instead the themes of industrialisation and urbanisation in the late nineteenth century, and efforts to reform the festival in the early twentieth century. Waits is keen to avoid the term 'commercialization' because it blurred similar but distinct trends such as the use of money in connection with Christmas, increased volume of sales, increased promotion of sales at Christmas, the importance of buying and selling within the holiday, and the relationship between Christmas and a wider culture of consumption. Waits provides a nuanced perspective of Christmas consumerism, charting the rise of manufactured gift items; the feminisation of Christmas; and most importantly gift-giving relationships: between friends, married couples, parents and children, from the prosperous to the poor, and from employers to employees.<sup>20</sup> The wider significance of *The Modern Christmas in America* lies in Wait's expert application of an anthropological tradition of gift-giving theory dating back to Marcel Mauss's *The Gift*,<sup>21</sup> and in the positioning of the origins of the modern American Christmas as post-1880, offering an alternative to the consensus formed by Davis, Nissenbaum and Restad. The narrow focus of the study, however, is perhaps an insufficient basis on which to make such a claim, relying heavily on mass-circulation periodicals, that is, on *representations*; like Connelly's *Christmas, The Modern Christmas in America* retains a one-dimensional feel.

Most recently, these histories of the American Christmas have been criticised by Karal Ann Marling in *Merry Christmas! Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday*. Marling argues that Nissenbaum, Restad, Schmidt and Waits ignore the visual and material culture of Christmas in America, and is keen to highlight the role not only of the objects and images of Christmas, but the feelings they inspire. Also important to Marling is the

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<sup>20</sup> W. B. Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America. A Cultural History of Gift Giving* (New York and London, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> M. Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York, 1967). For an overview and critique of this tradition see D. Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (London and New York, 1988).



context of domesticity, and the role played by women in creating this world. This approach has brought some rewards. Marling offers a more complex interpretation of the now familiar 'decontamination theory' of present wrapping, arguing that wrapping may add value to the gift, and warning against the assumption that conflict existed between the home and the expanding nineteenth-century marketplace. Marling also recognises that Christmas trees played an important role away from the domestic interior, becoming important in civic ceremony as an embodiment of public virtue. There is also a consideration of the effect of shop window displays, which 'subordinated merchandise to visual drama', but also represented an impenetrable barrier between affluent and poor. Despite these rewards, much of *Merry Christmas!* represents a familiar replaying of the themes and material of her predecessors in the field. Marling is also unable to resist the kind of cloying sentimentalism that has characterised the popular historical approach to Christmas, captured in her advice that 'this book would make a great Christmas present for your Mom!'<sup>22</sup>

As a collective body of work, the recent American scholarship on the history of Christmas is more successful than its British counterpart in unlocking the potential of the topic, and this is due to the cautionary approach to invented tradition as set out by Nissenbaum and Restad in particular. In Britain, the issue of invented tradition has side-tracked historians and obscured the process of a deeper understanding of Christmases past. There is no doubt that invented tradition holds relevancy to the historical development of Christmas, and some individual cases of invented tradition took place during nineteenth-century Christmases, and I detail specific examples in chapters three and four. Invented tradition does not, however, provide a satisfactory explanation for the overall historical development of Christmas. Whilst I engage with the weaknesses of invented tradition in a context particularly pertinent to it, philanthropy, in chapter three, it is important to highlight at this point that invented tradition does not sufficiently convey the nexus of motivations that contemporaries felt when they engaged, or did not engage, in Christmas festivities and activities, nor does it

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<sup>22</sup> K. A. Marling, *Merry Christmas! Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday* (Cambridge, MA., and London, 2000), pp. xiii, 18-20, 84-87, 161-65, 178-81.

capture the complex processes of continuity and change that were at work. As I was researching this project, I was struck by the prominence of an emotional and sentimental discourse of Christmas that underpinned its development; this discourse was an agent of both continuity and change. Though Marling has begun, importantly, to emphasise the *feeling* of Christmas, I began to recognise that many historians had inherited the narrative of Christmas sentiment, but paid little attention to the construction of it. This was because much of the immediate evidence of Christmas past was based upon customs, rituals and traditions, which had in turn led historians to the invention of tradition. Customs, rituals and traditions are important, and can evoke the feelings and sentiments of Christmas, but they have also obscured the emotions and sentiments that have surrounded the Christmas festival.

Christmas was, and remains, a time of heightened emotions. I have termed this heightening of emotions 'Christmas intimacy', particularly in terms of social interaction and engagement with material culture. The term intimacy has only occasionally been employed by historians, often synonymously with privacy, and often with little theoretical employment. I offer an overview of the potential use for intimacy for historians in chapter one. Christmas intimacy, I will argue, emerged in the early modern period as a discursive construction to describe the feelings of good fellowship that were experienced when the increasing social distance of rank was overcome. By the eighteenth century, these emotions had shifted to centre upon the fluid meanings of household, family, friends, and kin, to express joy at Christmas gatherings. These feelings were framed in domestic space, and enhanced by the material culture of food, decorations, and gifts. Intimacy also had a performative quality, manifested in games, music and theatricals, which played an important role in the centring of children in the Christmas festival. All of these aspects of Christmas became more elaborate as the period progressed. However, it was not a 'privatisation' of Christmas. Particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, a public culture of Christmas developed, and intimacy could also thrive in civic, commercial, educational, entertainment, philanthropic and religious contexts. These contexts shared the decorative and



performative qualities of intimacy with the home, and were also pervaded by the same discursive elements. The relationship between Christmas public and Christmas private was often, though not always, symbiotic and complementary.

The distraction of the invention of tradition has prevented British historians of Christmas from integrating the topic within several important sub-categories of historiography.<sup>23</sup> The history of children and childhood, for example, is very important to the history of Christmas, and I have highlighted various elements of this in all five chapters. Philanthropy is discussed in detail in chapter three, whilst leisure and consumption are prominent in the final three chapters. One important aspect of Christmas that has been gaining increasing recognition is that of gender. Leslie Bella's *The Christmas Imperative*, a part historical, part sociological work that draws mainly from Canadian sources, argues that the Victorian period witnessed the feminisation of Christmas, instilling within women a 'Christmas imperative', an inherent desire to recreate the rituals of childhood, that is reinforced by print representations and consumer society.<sup>24</sup> C. P. Hosgood's recent article "'Doing the Shops" at Christmas: Women, Men and the Department Store in England, c. 1880-1914' is concerned with women's position within the gift-acquiring process, arguing that through shopping women had the opportunity to extend their authority both within their families and the community at large, involving a reclamation of a 'public street presence', and countering popular images of female shoppers acting in an irrational and narcissistic manner by emphasising personal sacrifice for family enjoyment. By charting the representation of Christmas shopping in the popular press, Hosgood found that men's position at the forefront of shopping had given way by the 1890s to narratives of female dominance, where men were represented as subordinate and 'emasculated at Christmas, stripped of their authority - publicly humiliated'. However, by employing older Christmas discourses of inversion and role reversal, Hosgood maintains that these depictions ultimately trivialised women's achievement of extended public authority, since they reinforced the reality of continued subordination after a 'temporary

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<sup>23</sup> I am not suggesting, though, that invented tradition has no relevance to those sub-categories.

<sup>24</sup> L. Bella, *The Christmas Imperative: Leisure, Family, and Women's Work* (Halifax, NS., 1992).



suspension of traditional relationships'. The balance of authority was corrected in the New Year sales, where popular representations of women re-established paternal authority by employing military metaphors to show the 'cunning' and duplicitous' nature of women as 'the sale season saw them scrambling to items to sate their own petty cravings'.<sup>25</sup> I contextualise and build upon the ideas of both Bella and Hosgood in chapters one and five respectively. John Tosh briefly considers the implications of the emergence of the modern Father Christmas/Santa Claus figure for paternal masculinity in *A Man's Place*,<sup>26</sup> and I explore the role of the father in the Christmas household in chapter one; and the representations of Father Christmas/Santa Claus that emerged in Edwardian advertising in chapter five.

This thesis began as a local case study of York. At the time, I felt that such a study would be the best way of enhancing an understanding of nineteenth-century Christmas. As I realised the inadequacies of the existing British historiography and the potential shown by the American historiography, I expanded my horizons as to what I wanted to achieve. After an initial expansion to Yorkshire, I realised that I could only fully achieve my ambitions by using material on a national scale. Once that final expansion had been set in motion, a suspicion that regional variations were not a particularly important facet of my research was confirmed. However, I was able to obtain a significant amount of excellent material from my initial York phase of the thesis, and have used it accordingly; but whilst some parts of the thesis may retain a York flavour, it is not, and has never been, a history of Yorkshire.

A significant proportion of my research has been based upon newspapers and periodicals. They are an excellent source for the history of Christmas, providing reports on Christmas events; opinions on the nature of Christmas or issues pertinent to Christmas; pictorial representations of Christmas; Christmas advertising; occurrences of

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<sup>25</sup> C. P. Hosgood, "Doing the Shops" at Christmas: Women, Men and the Department Store in England, c. 1880-1914', in G. Crossick and S. Jaumain (eds), *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 97-115.

<sup>26</sup> J. Tosh, *A Man's Place. Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London, 1999), pp. 39, 49, 82-83, 88, 147-49.

drunkenness and violence in the police reports; and debates about Christmas in the letters section. I sampled the regional press in Yorkshire, as well as a number of national titles. In the case of *The Times*, I was, of course, guided by *Palmer's Index*. In other cases, I began examining the paper in late November, going through to the beginning of January. I applied a similar method to other types of sources that I used. I made two major surveys of family papers; the Hickleton papers of the Wood family, based near Doncaster; and the papers of the writers Margaret Gatty and Juliana Ewing, resident in Ecclesfield near Sheffield. I supplemented this research with an extensive search of published autobiographies, diaries and memoirs for evidence concerning Christmas, and used the excellent facilities provided by the access to archives website to target additional manuscript sources.<sup>27</sup> I also consulted a number of institutional records, including church records.

Chapter one examines the historiography of the English family, and the potential for intimacy as a historical paradigm. It explores the way in which Christmas intimacy became located within a fluid definition of familial and friendship gatherings in the eighteenth century, and the extent to which this was restricted to family in the nineteenth century. The rise of written Christmas wishes to convey regrets for absences are considered, as are the importance of gendered roles within Christmas. The role of children is highlighted, and partially understood in terms of gift-giving rituals. Christmas presents, decorations, the domestic interior, theatricals and music are all defined as part of Christmas intimacy. The parameters are then extended to include the role of domestic servants in the familial Christmas, and the replication of the familial Christmas in Victorian institutions. A coda reveals how Christmas was initiated and replicated by English people overseas, and how Christmas intimacy could be connected to national identity. This chapter reveals how Christmas intimacy was underpinned by relationships of power and inequality.

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<sup>27</sup> [www.a2a.org.uk](http://www.a2a.org.uk).



In chapter two, I examine the important religious context that influenced the development of Christmas intimacy. The religious celebration of Christmas in the home, services and communion, sermons, church music and Christmas carols, church decorating and social activities are explored, to show how evangelical religion helped shape the eighteenth-century development of Christmas intimacy, and how the shifting emphasis from the Atonement to the Incarnation helped centre children in the Christmas festival. The chapter charts the weakening of Protestant dissenting opposition in the nineteenth century, and how most denominations appropriated the language of Christmas intimacy to support their own celebrations. I also show how, in the Edwardian period, religious leaders reacted to the increasing secularisation of society by constructing a narrative of separation between the religious and secular aspects of the festival.

In the third chapter I discuss the charitable aspects of Christmas in the form of open-house hospitality; begging customs; charitable bequests; the workhouse and the poor law; female philanthropy; the influence of evangelicalism; the nature of the 'philanthropic impulse'; the validity of social control theories, the role of the COS; fears of 'charity mongers'; working-class survival strategies; newspaper appeals; hospitals; children; missions; 'cripple's' charities; and large-scale charitable projects. Noting how the philanthropy of Christmas became increasingly dependent upon entertainment, I proceed to chart the rise of the Christmas entertainment industry, focusing on pantomime; museums; panorama and diorama shows; the Crystal Palace and the Royal Polytechnic Institution; provincial theatres; choral societies; performing children; the variety of entertainment and the limitations of the subject of Christmas within that entertainment; early forms of cinema; the influence of music hall; rural entertainments; balls and juvenile parties; hunting; and football. Following this, I focus on forms of Christmas leisure that are informal, with an emphasis on street culture, including music, particularly the waits; the development of a New Year culture; disturbances associated with youth culture; and the problems of drunkenness and violence. Finally, I turn my attention to the temperance movement that sought to deal with those problems of

drunkenness, and the alternative cultures of Christmas that they tried to create for children and young people. Ultimately, the temperance movement proved to be in cultural opposition to the mainstream celebration of Christmas; however, the main purpose of this chapter is to show that the intimacy of Christmas was not restricted to home and family, and that particularly through performance, the symbiosis between the public and the private Christmas can be made clear.

Chapter four recognises that leisure time was a key component of Christmas intimacy, and maps the attempts that working people made to gain a Christmas holiday, and also the cultures of Christmas that were fostered in the workplace. I survey the development of Christmas holidays in terms of both law and custom, and examine employer paternalism. Particular emphasis is placed upon the role of shop assistants and postmen, who, in common with the domestic servants examined in the first chapter, bore much of the physical burden of Christmas intimacy. Postmen were also a focus for debates that surrounded the Christmas box, a continued process of personal service. The role of self-help and associational organisations at Christmas are considered, in terms of both savings and goose clubs, but also educational institutions. I then expand the theme of education to cover the relationship between Christmas and school, and the culture of Christmas treats, prizes and examinations that emerged in the nineteenth century. I also consider what type of message that was being disseminated to children at Christmas.

The final chapter stresses the importance of food, goods and material culture to the intimacy of Christmas, as well as the interdependence of Christmas intimacy and the consumerist cultures of shopping, advertising and travel. Christmas boxes are again considered, this time in a retail context, followed by the increasing demand for foodstuffs and the development of the decorations and crackers industry. I examine the evolution of the gift, placing emphasis on the role of books, toys and Christmas cards. In the final three parts of this chapter I place particular emphasis on the final years of the period, in terms of the distinct Christmas shopping culture that emerged in the late nineteenth century, the increasingly elaborate use of advertising during Edwardian

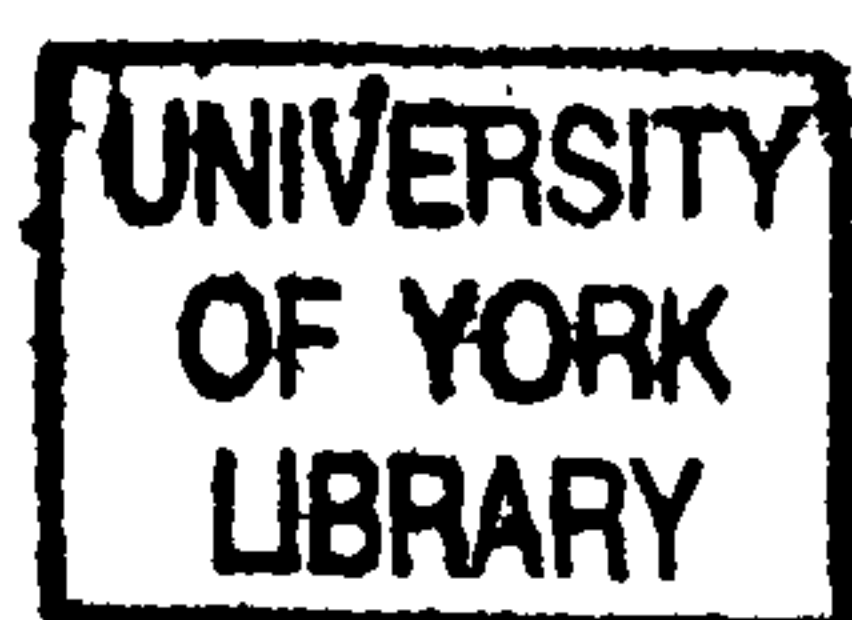
Christmases, and the growth of Christmas travel, manifested in both Mediterranean and winter sports holidays, and also the trend towards visiting London restaurants and hotels, and seaside resorts. A recurrent theme of this chapter will be the interaction between the intimacy of Christmas and the contemporary mindset of modernity.



## **Chapter One:**

### **A Sentimental Journey: Family, Friends, Servants, and Institutions at Christmas**

This 'sentimental journey' begins with the Christmas activities of the Verney family of Buckinghamshire at the turn of the eighteenth century, and ends on a missionary voyage along the Han River in the 1880s. It will examine the development of the intimacy of Christmas amongst gatherings of family and friends, and also consider the role played by servants and institutions. The chapter will begin by examining the existing historiography of the English family, and the potential of intimacy as a historical paradigm. Identifying Christmas intimacy as a discursive formation of shifting household and social relations in the seventeenth century, this chapter will explore how it came to be located within a fluid definition of familial and friendship gatherings in the eighteenth century, a characteristic it has retained ever since, though in the nineteenth century it becomes more closely aligned with the nuclear family. At the same time, intimacy was also conveyed in written Christmas wishes that attempted to overcome inevitable absences during the Christmas season. The importance of feminine and masculine roles within Christmas will be considered, as well as the shift towards a child-centred celebration, which will be understood partly in terms of the structuring of Christmas through present-giving rituals. Presents are highlighted as part of the growing emotional power of Christmas intimacy, and the contributions made by decorations, the domestic interior, theatricals, and music are also examined. An examination of domestic service highlights how servants performed the labour of Christmas intimacy, but were also separated from their own families, and the position of servants within the familial experience of their masters will be explored. The experience of servants at Christmas was similar to that of the employees of institutions, who adopted familial patterns of Christmas celebration in the second half of the nineteenth century. Finally, the narratives of people spending Christmas abroad are explored to highlight how important the emotional aspects of Christmas had become, through reaction to the experience of



Christmas abroad, and dislocation from Christmas at home. The chapter emphasises processes of continuity and change, and highlights the importance of the emotions and sentiments of Christmas and the way they relate to customs.

### **Intimacy and the Family Gathering**

The Victorians invented the modern Christmas, giving it a special association with family it lacked when it had been more community-centered, an extended period of doling, wassailing, mumming, and guising during which households turned themselves inside out to accommodate those who came to its door.<sup>1</sup>

John Gillis's argument, that the pre-Victorian Christmas lacked a family dimension raises immediate problems. When was this golden age of 'community' Christmas? The popularity of this idea seems to derive from the many discourses on the decline of Christmas customs that appeared in the early nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> However, as Felicity Heal and Ronald Hutton show, these discourses of decline were an inheritance from a literary complaint culture that had its origins in the late-Tudor period, which chided the land-owning class for abandoning traditional hospitality customs in favour of spending the Christmas season in London.<sup>3</sup> Gillis is also repeating the traditional 'story', now heavily criticised, of the history of the English family. This was based upon an assumption that industrialisation caused a profound and significant change in the structure of English families. According to this 'story', the pre-industrial family was based upon extended kin networks, who worked and played together in organic and hierarchical communities independent of outside cultural and social influences. Relationships in these families lacked emotional intensity; bonds between parents and children were weaker than today due to high infant mortality rates, and marriages were primarily based upon land and property. After industrialisation, families became nuclear

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<sup>1</sup> J. R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making. Myth, Ritual and the Quest for Family Values* (New York, 1996), p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, the introductions to D. Gilbert, *Some Ancient Christmas Carols* (London, 1822); and W. Sandys, *Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern* (London, 1833).

<sup>3</sup> F. Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 71-77, 148-49, 173, 175, 219, 280-81, 293-94; R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England. The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 177-78.



in form, based upon parents and children, in which stronger emotional ties could develop. Children came to be seen as precious and valuable, whilst the home became a haven from the encroachments of work and urban life. Emphasis was placed upon the middle-classes as the first group to embrace 'ideals of companionate marriage, separate spheres, innocent childhood and small families'.<sup>4</sup>

In criticising the conventional history of the English family, Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden construct a series of tentative positions for this history to move forward. Firstly they argue that 'industrial capitalism and the modern nuclear family did not emerge at a single historical point', nor was the family emerging as a single form. Secondly, the economic contributions of women and children working in the home has been obscured by the 'ideological construction of women's work around the private sphere, untouched by market forces'. Thirdly, little is actually known about how families and/or households defined themselves in the past, though it is clear that 'early modern households did not contain the same kinds of family forms as those of the late nineteenth century'. Finally, the popular idea that 'modern families have developed a unique and important world of affection not available in the past' is 'seriously flawed',

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<sup>4</sup> L. Davidoff and others, *The Family Story. Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (London and New York, 1999), pp. 17-18. Probably the most famous advocate of this approach is L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth, 1977), though similar processes of discontinuity (with differing chronological and thematic emphases) can be found in E. Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London, 1976); R. Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York and London, 1978); and J. R. Gillis, *For Better or Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (New York and Oxford, 1985). A body of scholarship has also emerged, some of it pre-Stone, emphasising continuity of familial structures and sentiments. See P. Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (New York, 1965), and *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations: Essays in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge, 1977); P. Laslett and R. Wall (eds), *Household and Family in Past Time: Comparative Studies in the Size and Structure of the Domestic Group Over the Last Three Centuries in England, France, Serbia, Japan and Colonial North America* (Cambridge, 1972); A. Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: A Seventeenth-Century Clergyman* (Cambridge, 1970); E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1981); K. Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (London, 1982), chapters 2-4; D. Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism* (New York, 1977); L. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900* (Cambridge, 1983); and R. Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (London, 1984). For recent overviews of continuity and change in the historiography of the English family see, Davidoff, *Family Story*, chapter 1; N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England. Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), introduction; and K. Wrightson, 'The Family in Early Modern England: Continuity and Change', in S. Taylor, R. Connors, and C. Jones (eds), *Hanoverian Britain and Empire: Essays in Memory of Philip Lawson* (Woodbridge, 1998).



and that 'crude associations of social, economic and cultural change linked in an unproblematic way with the possible kinds of emotional lives which might be experienced by families have not proved very helpful', though neither has the 'assertion that familial love is a natural and therefore transhistorical experience'. However, Davidoff and colleagues do not mean these ideas to preclude future research into the inner lives of families; rather they believe that curiosity in this field continues to inspire 'great popular and academic interest and continues to provoke new research'.<sup>5</sup>

One paradigm for the study of the English family that has so far largely been ignored by historians is that of intimacy, a term that has increasing currency within the field of sociology in the past decade.<sup>6</sup> Davidoff and others use the word intimacy in the subtitle to *The Family Story*, recognising that intimacy was at the core of family life, encompassing 'the most private physical, sexual and emotional aspects of relationships', which is based upon trust and loyalty but also incorporating elements of power and control.<sup>7</sup> Beyond this recognition, however, the authors of *The Family Story* fail to develop or exploit intimacy as an historical paradigm. Of the sociologists, Lynn Jamieson is the most successful in developing an historical context for her argument. Jamieson is particularly concerned with the development of what she terms 'disclosing intimacy', 'a very specific sort of knowing, loving and "being close to" another person', based upon talking and listening, sharing thoughts, and showing feeling; this is what Jamieson believes to be the modern ideal of intimate relationships, which she defines as an 'intimacy of the self'.<sup>8</sup> However, she also understands that this form of intimacy has

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<sup>5</sup> Davidoff and others, *Family Story*, pp. 25, 31, 39, 45.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Duncombe and D. Marsden, "'Workaholics" and "Whingeing Women": Theorising Intimacy and Emotion Work: the Last Frontier of Gender Inequality?', *Sociological Review*, 43, 1995, 150-69; D. Ehrensaft, 'Dual Parenting and the Duel of Intimacy', in G. Handel (ed.), *The Psychological Interior of the Family* (New York, 1985); A. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge, 1992); L. Jamieson, *Intimacy. Personal Relationships in Modern Societies* (Cambridge, 1998); N. Luhmann, *Love as Passion. The Codification of Intimacy* (Cambridge, 1986); A. Skolnick, *The Intimate Environment: Exploring Marriage and the Family* (5th edn., New York, 1992); and J. Weeks and J. Holland (eds), *Sexual Cultures: Communities, Values and Intimacy* (London, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Davidoff and others, *Family Story*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> Jamieson, *Intimacy*, p. 1. This is distinct from bodily intimacy, though this can combine with the former to gain a greater sense of completeness. Bodily intimacy is only of very marginal interest in my study. A shift towards an intimacy of the self may partly explain increasing amount of memoirs recording childhood Christmases of Edwardian period, that form part of my evidence below.



never existed in some forms of society, and that different forms of intimacy can exist or coexist at any given time, and also that not all the dimensions of intimacy had to be in place at one particular time in order for it to flourish. Jamieson views the conventional history of the English family in terms of constructing intimacy in the present. For example, in the pre-industrial household, the conventional history has assumed that the intimacy of close association within the everyday life of the household did not result in empathy because of the social distance implied in a society stratified on hierarchical terms. In the nineteenth century, the private domain of the nuclear family provided the seed bed in which intimacy could flourish.<sup>9</sup> Jamieson criticises these assumptions in three ways. Firstly, she questions the legitimacy of constructing a binary opposition between community and intimacy; Jamieson states that the two can coexist. Secondly, she suggests that the idealised femininity associated with the nineteenth-century household justified women's dependence and subordination and therefore constrained the 'possibilities of intimacy between men and women'; this does not mean that intimacy between men and women was precluded, rather it was regulated by 'patterns of mastery and dependence'. Finally, Jamieson asserts that the level of child-centredness in families during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been exaggerated, and that in many cases the necessary material circumstances for parent-child intimacy were not available until after the Second World War, and even in middle-class households intimate parent-child relationships might not have been fully realised until the demise of domestic servants. Again, this did not mean that parent-child relationships were unloving, but it does place an emphasis on obedience and respect being key indicators in this relationship.<sup>10</sup>

Jamieson uses the paradigm of intimacy to add nuance and complexity to the history of the English family, yet there is still a danger of replacing one grand narrative with another. What can be taken from this are the fertile results of examining the past from a framework based upon emotions and sentiments. Why should Christmas be examined through the paradigm of intimacy? The primary answer to this question is that

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<sup>9</sup> Jamieson, *Intimacy*, pp. 7-8, 13, 17-18.

<sup>10</sup> Jamieson, *Intimacy*, pp. 22, 27-29, 82-83.



Christmas has been traditionally studied through the paradigm of custom rather than of sentiment. The emphasis on custom, inherited from the antiquarian and folklore fields of study, albeit employed with far greater nuance and complexity by modern historians, has nonetheless blinded historians of Christmas to the complexities of Christmas past, instead taking the arrival of a 'new' set of very recognisable customs to use and reinforce an uncritical version of English family history. This does not mean, however, that Christmas customs were unimportant. They could have the full potential to unlock the intimacy of Christmas, as this thesis will show on many occasions. Nor does it preclude the possibility for historical change in the English family Christmas, including greater emphasis on the family within Christmas in the Victorian period and/or beyond. However, to suggest, as Gillis does, that the modern Christmas, centred upon the family, was an invention of the Victorian middle classes, needs substantial qualification at the very least.

How should a search for and examination of Christmas intimacy begin? If, as Jamieson acknowledges, the historical development of intimacy involves patterns of mastery and dependence, then the origins of Christmas sentiment might be found in the shifting patterns of household hospitality during seventeenth century Christmases. Felicity Heal suggests that this was the period in which changes to the domestic structure of the aristocratic and gentry household began to be organised as so to preclude ease of access for a wide range of guests. At the same time, the development in London and other provincial centres of an elite/gentry culture, combined with the continued expansion of an urban middle class, meant that the cultural divide between respectable and poor was being deepened and consolidated.<sup>11</sup> A language of Christmas sentiment developed during this period to describe the effect of bridging this gap.<sup>12</sup> However, the popularity

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<sup>11</sup> Heal, *Hospitality*, pp. 167-68; D. Underdown, *Revel Riot and Rebellion. Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660* (Oxford, 1987), p. 281.

<sup>12</sup> It was this language that Washington Irving drew upon when he described Christmas in the following terms: 'our thoughts are more concentrated, our friendly sympathies more aroused. We feel more sensibly the charm of each other's society, and are brought more closely together by dependence on each other for enjoyment. Heart calleth unto heart, and we draw our pleasures from the deep wells of living kindness which lie in the quiet recesses of our bosoms, and which, when resorted to, furnish forth the pure element of domestic felicity'. W. Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and other Stories* (New York, 1999), p. 149. In turn, nineteenth-century writers drew upon Irving's repackaging of an older tradition to describe the



of this discourse of Christmas has obscured other facets of hospitality in the elite/gentry household. In the mid sixteenth century, Heal has found evidence that Christmas hospitality was being used to include extended kin networks.<sup>13</sup> The focus upon the absence of the elite from their country seats as a cause of Christmas decline also obscures the possibility that Christmas intimacy was being developed in urban settings. This can be demonstrated by the Verney family. Sir Ralph Verney (1613-96), a Buckinghamshire baronet, had discontinued the custom of hospitality at his country house in favour of residing in London, and this pattern of living was continued by his son John (1640-1717).<sup>14</sup> John, prior to inheriting the family title, had been a Levant company merchant. This meant that he and his wife Elizabeth (1678-1736) had social networks in London with middling-sort families like the Palmers, at whose residence they attended Christmas plum porridge events.<sup>15</sup> The early eighteenth century also saw the regrouping of John and Elizabeth, and John's daughter Elizabeth (1681-1767) from his first marriage, for the Christmas holidays. Susan E. Whyman describes how the coach, which had enabled John and Elizabeth to maintain separate patterns of visiting during the year, also brought the family back together again in London.<sup>16</sup> Here the coach seemed to have parallels with the role played by the railway in bringing families together in the nineteenth century.

It is perhaps a mistake to see the decline of country-house hospitality in consistent linear terms. On Christmas Day 1740, Frances Tynne Seymour (1699-1754), Countess of Hartford, wrote to Henrietta Louisa Jeffreys, Countess of Pomfret, stating that 'It is so unfashionable to pass this season in London, that the streets seem quite depopulated'.<sup>17</sup>

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emotional effects of Christmas.

<sup>13</sup> Heal, *Hospitality*, p. 74.

<sup>14</sup> John subsequently became 1st Viscount Fermanagh.

<sup>15</sup> Part of the argument of this chapter is that friendships played a close and an overlapping role with families in the development of Christmas intimacy. Evidence exists for this kind of activity in the mid seventeenth century. In 1660 Samuel Pepys and his wife were 'entertained by the Strudwicks with a rich cake and the ceremonial choosing of a Twelfth Night king and queen'. Underdown, *Revel Riot and Rebellion*, p. 260.

<sup>16</sup> S. E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England. The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys 1660-1720* (Oxford, 1999), pp. xiv, 1, 22, 57, 69, 90, 101, 286.

<sup>17</sup> W. Bingley (ed.), *Correspondence between Frances, Countess of Hartford (afterwards Duchess of Somerset) and Henrietta Louisa, Countess of Pomfret, between the Years 1738 and 1741* (London, 1805),

Eighty years later, Melesina Trench (1768-1827), wife of the Dean of Westminster, stated that

I am inclined to criticise the habits of keeping in villas and small country houses all festivities for Christmas, *because* the very wealthy, who have immense houses, and whose large parties remain under the same roof during the foggy period, fix on it for their amusements. It is a misfortune when they who are neither wealthy nor great ape the habits of our Croesuses and grandees...<sup>18</sup>

Discourses in the decline of Christmas hospitality did become popular again in the 1780s. These discourses were intertwined with attacks on aristocratic vice. In 1789 *The Times* declared that the hospitable festivities were now 'narrowed to the entertainment of a few gambling friends from London, out of whose pocket the Lord of the Manor expects to be ten-fold paid for the furniture of his Christmas tables'. *The Times* also noted that 'Among the middling and lower class of people some real hospitality yet exists'.<sup>19</sup> Did this mean that Christmas now had a family emphasis amongst the middle classes and below? Was 'hospitality' in this sense synonymous with family gathering? The following year, *The Times* clarified this situation further: 'Among the trading part of the people, beef and pudding, and turkey and chine are almost synonymous with the day. The young people are invited to dine with the old, and a kind of general joy spreads itself around: business is forgot and pleasure takes the chair'.<sup>20</sup> This is commensurable with John Golby's belief about the extent of the Christmas celebration on the eve of Victoria's reign. Drawing upon an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1824 which stated that the 'middle ranks' were the real upholders of the Christmas season, Golby argued that the number of people observing Christmas in the 1830s was numerically small, but that it was 'celebrated enthusiastically by members of the professional, clerical and shopkeeping classes'.<sup>21</sup>

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vol. 2, p. 174.

<sup>18</sup> Melesina Chenevix St. George Trench to Charles Manners St. George, 20 December 1820, in R. C. Trench (ed.), *The Remains of the late Mrs. Richard Trench. Being Selections from her Journals, Letters, and other Papers* (London, 1862), p. 438.

<sup>19</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1789.

<sup>20</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1790.

<sup>21</sup> J. Golby, 'A History of Christmas' in *Popular Culture: Themes and Issues* (Open University Press,



Class is an inevitable paradigm in any discussion of the modern Christmas, since the ability to celebrate is always mediated in some way by economic and material considerations. Because so much emphasis has been placed upon the middle classes as the inventors of the modern Christmas, it is necessary to briefly consider the development of the middle classes and the problems that this emphasis raises. Not the least of these problems is the lack of evidence from real families that survives for the first generation of the Victorian middle classes, which shows in previous studies of Christmas through an over-reliance upon newspaper coverage and literary sources. A further problem lies within the chronological placing of the emergence of the middle classes. Although the term only came into widespread usage in the nineteenth century, early modern historians have located the emergence of an urban middle class in the seventeenth century.<sup>22</sup> If Christmas was fundamentally middle class, why did it not evolve in this initial expansion of the middle class? The answer to this lies partially in the close association between the commercial world that this new middle class was based upon and religious dissent.<sup>23</sup> As Golby and Purdue acknowledge, the middle classes had previously wanted to distance themselves from the popular associations of Christmas: popish and heathen superstition; aristocratic excesses; and rough plebeian culture. For Golby and Purdue, conditions in the mid nineteenth century were now ripe for the middle classes to embrace a version of Christmas reinvented from a selection of Christmases past: insecurity of position; awareness of social dislocation; and fear of attacks on property.<sup>24</sup> It is impossible at this stage to examine this situation in any greater detail without turning to the more specific topics that follow later in this chapter. What can be done, however, is to consider again the role Christmas played amongst the middle classes before the nineteenth century. It should be highlighted again that *The Times* associated Christmas with the middle classes in 1789, and in their study of

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1981), Block 1, Units 1-2, pp. 15-16. See also J. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas* (2nd edn, Stroud, 2000), p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> See P. Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Social and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (University of California Press, 1989); J. Smail, *The Origins of Middle Class Culture: Halifax, Yorkshire, 1660-1780* (Cornell University Press, 1994); and M. Hunt, *The Middling Sort. Commerce, Gender and the Family in England 1680-1780* (University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> Though, as I show in chapter two, there is not a simple binary between Christmas and Protestant nonconformity.

<sup>24</sup> Golby and Purdue, *Making of the Modern Christmas*, p. 48.



Birmingham and East Anglian middle-class families between 1780 and 1850, Davidoff and Hall note that Christmas was increasingly becoming a time for ‘family gathering and pledging of loyalties’, highlighting the example of a Suffolk village family who ran a bakery-cum-haberdashery, who in the 1790s used the parlour for family gatherings; the rest of the year they would spend their time in the kitchen.<sup>25</sup> It would seem at the very least that the chronology provided in previous studies of Christmas, particularly Gillis, have overemphasised the *newness* of family Christmas in the Victorian period, and precisely because the development of a simple form of Christmas intimacy, based upon family reunion and the sentiment that inspired, has been ignored in the search for customs. This also applies to the lower classes, who in terms of Christmas historians have always been keen to deny agency to. As early as 1973, R. W. Malcolmson found that for the lower orders private family time was coexisting with declining communal rituals during the festive periods of the eighteenth century.<sup>26</sup> On Twelfth Day 1802, William Holland, parson of Overstowey in Somerset, noted that one of his servants ‘went off before dinner to her Father’s, being Old Christmas Day when all the family are to meet, I like the plan very much and I find it very much practised among the lower orders in this country’.<sup>27</sup>

Naomi Tadmor has uncovered evidence from the 1750s and 1760s, showing that the shopkeeper Thomas Turner’s Christmas celebrations demonstrated ‘how contractual, instrumental, and occupational household-family relationships were also entwined with networks of patronage and kinship’. In the 1750s a servant, Hannah Marchant, came to live in Turner’s household. In the period 1756 to 1758, Christmas was celebrated with Hannah, her brother, James and a widowed female relative. Elizabeth Mephram, a member of a family lower in the social order to Turner, who occasionally worked for

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<sup>25</sup> L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (2nd edn., London and New York, 2002), pp. 359, 377.

<sup>26</sup> R. W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 27.

<sup>27</sup> J. Ayres (ed.), *Paupers & Pig Killers. The Diary of William Holland, a Somerset Parson, 1799-1818* (Stroud, 2003), p. 64. On 26 December 1807, Holland wrote ‘George has been permitted to go with his father to visit his friends. I charged him to come home in good time but he has not made his appearance and it is past nine. Wm Frost had his son in law, wife and children come and see him this Christmastime and has a son in law wife and child besides in the house so that I cannot conceive where he can put them all yet it is pleasant to see families meet at Christmas’. See p. 162.



him, was present from 1759.<sup>28</sup> As Tadmor highlights, the term family often referred the people who occupied a household, 'including its diverse dependants, such as servants, apprentices, and co-resident relatives'. Whilst Turner's household is best understood in institutional and instrumental terms, Tadmor dismisses the idea that instrumentality can be placed in opposition to sentiments and affection; in Turner's case the former was often enhanced by the latter. Turner's Christmas celebrations demonstrate that 'household-family relationships were both domestic and occupational'.<sup>29</sup> However, this did not mean that blood and marriage relationships were unimportant; many members of the household-family were recruited from kin. Tadmor also shows the variety of ways in which kinship was referred to in the eighteenth century: 'Relation', 'kindred', 'friends' and 'connexions' were all often used. These were not, however, distinct from nuclear family members; instead, the nuclear family was subsumed within a broader context of kinship, and the boundaries between kinship and the nuclear family were blurred.<sup>30</sup>

These flexible and fluid terms for the various personal and occupational relationships that existed in eighteenth-century England are significant for the development of the sentiments of Christmas. This very fluidity created the environment in which the intimacy of Christmas could form, re-form, develop and disseminate amongst family and household groups, and it did not necessarily have to be the nuclear family. The use of the word 'friend' to mean a kin relation is also very interesting here. Tadmor has found that the term 'friend' could also describe 'sentimental relationships, economic

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<sup>28</sup> The widow Marchant was not present at Christmas 1764. James Marchant married Elizabeth Mephram in 1763. See D. Vaisey (ed.), *The Diary of Thomas Turner 1754-1765* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 334-35.

<sup>29</sup> It is important to clarify the nature of Turner's Christmas celebrations, however. On 2 January 1760, Turner wrote in his diary, 'Oh, how pleasant has this Christmas been kept as yet, no revelling nor tumultuous meetings where there too often is little else but light and trifling discourse, no ways calculated for improvement; and it's well if it's not intermixed with some obscene talk and too often with vile and execrable oaths. Not that I am anyways an enemy to innocent mirth, but what I protest against is that which is not so'. See Vaisey, *Diary of Thomas Turner*, p. 197. Turner was able to find a middle way between a coarse celebration of Christmas, and rejections of Christmas on grounds of serious religion or fashionable refinement.

<sup>30</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, pp. 19, 28-30, 132. It is important to stress that Tadmor was arguing for the coexistence of several concepts of the family in eighteenth-century England: the household-family, the lineage-family and the kinship-family.

ties, occupational connections, intellectual and spiritual attachments, sociable networks, and political alliances', and encompassed both familial and non-familial relationships. In common with household relationships, they also combined an occupational, instrumental and sentimental nature; 'they were nearly always both useful and expressive'.<sup>31</sup> This adds further flexibility to the potential environments where Christmas intimacy might flourish. In many cases friends would have been present in Christmas gatherings, and could play a full part in the emotional atmosphere. This recognition of friends within the intimacy of Christmas also allows a different reading of some of the decline narratives of the first half of the nineteenth century. For example, in 1842 William Howitt compared English and German Christmases in *The Rural and Domestic Life of Germany*. Howitt emphasised the family nature of the German Christmas, highlighting the child-centred activities taking place within the domestic interior.

In England it used to be so in the olden times, but it is now a festival of friends... The parents and elder brothers and sisters are going out to dine, or even to parties, or are busy receiving their friends to such at home. The children get mince pies, but make little or no part of the festivities.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious reaction to Howitt's comments would be that there had never been a golden age of the English family Christmas in way Howitt believed. However, we can also infer that rather than being a decline in the celebration, this understanding of Christmas as 'a festival of friends' actually shows a continuity of the development of Christmas intimacy and sentiment aligned to a broader understanding of the interaction of friends and family inherited from the previous century. This does not mean, however, that the meanings of the terms family and friends had continued unaltered, rather that a context within which Christmas intimacy could form had been developing since the eighteenth century.

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<sup>31</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, pp. 167, 212-13.

<sup>32</sup> W. Howitt, *The Rural and Domestic Life of Germany* (London, 1842), pp. 153-54.



A gradual shift towards a more modern understanding of the Christmas family gathering is perhaps detectable in the nineteenth century, however. On New Year's Day 1850, Geraldine Jewsbury wrote to Jane Carlyle telling her of a Christmas tree she had been to see the night before, commenting, 'The guests were chiefly children and family connections; I was nearly the only *alien* [my italics]'.<sup>33</sup> However, the family Christmas was often seen in extended terms, and by the early twentieth century, this concept of the family Christmas had become so strong that it caused tensions between married couples as to whose branch of the family would be visited. In 1901, after recording the details of a pleasant family Christmas Day, Elizabeth Cadbury (b. 1858), noted in her diary 'All my family away and scattered'.<sup>34</sup> In 1903, George Lane Fox had to write a letter of explanation to his father-in-law, Charles Lindley Wood, as to why he and his wife Agnes were absent from the Wood family Christmas at Hickleton: 'My family have never let me be away on Xmas day ... I tried to persuade Agnes to go to you alone, and let me join her tomorrow, but she was so good about it and utterly declined to hear of it. I feel that any cloud that is over her happiness today is partly my making'.<sup>35</sup> It should also be reiterated that family reunions could be fraught occasions, in which careful negotiations of particular topics were needed. Arthur Munby (1828-1910) realised this in 1860. He returned to his parents' home in York for Christmas, and noted in his diary how 'Household unity' had been preserved 'by a careful avoidance of religious topics', and that they had 'realised for once the sacred family life which only Christmas, with snow without and love within, can give'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> A. E. Ireland (ed.), *Selections from the Letters of Geraldine Endors Jewsbury to Jane Welsh Carlyle* (London, 1892), p. 354.

<sup>34</sup> BCA, Papers of the Cadbury Family of Birmingham, MS 466/205/33, extracts from diaries of Elizabeth Cadbury re Christmas, 1901-2.

<sup>35</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A2.125, George D. Lane Fox to Charles Lindley Wood, 25 December 1903.

<sup>36</sup> D. Hudson, *Munby, Man of two Worlds. The Life and Diaries of Arthur J. Munby 1828-1910* (London, 1972), p. 87.

## Christmas Wishes

Reunions of family and friends was one of the settings in which Christmas intimacy could flourish, but it was not always possible. Pimlott has argued that written Christmas and New Year greetings between relatives and friends only became common in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>37</sup> The desire to send Christmas wishes to absent family and friends was perhaps a direct consequence of the rising language of Christmas sentiment in the seventeenth century. In 1736 Alexander Pope commented that ‘About Christmas time there is great plenty of good wishes sent about the kingdom’, and by 1800 Janet Leigh Perrot<sup>38</sup> stated that Christmas was a season when ‘everyone’s good wishes are posting from friend to friend’.<sup>39</sup> By 1800 correspondents had also begun to express regrets concerning their absence at Christmas. In 1783 Anna Barbauld wrote to Hannah More, commenting that it was ‘mortification’ that they could not meet in London the previous Christmas, and hoped that they would be able to do so in Bristol this Christmas.<sup>40</sup> Christmas was also becoming the location for recollections. In 1797 Anna Seward commented in a letter to an unidentified recipient that ‘Often does the Wellsburn circle of Christmas 1792 come back to my recollection; that circle, in which you sat, like the sun, cheering every heart, and illuminating every theme’.<sup>41</sup> By the mid nineteenth century, hearing about another person’s Christmas could provoke a rapturous response, framed in the now established and powerful language of Christmas intimacy. In January 1849 Mary Russell Mitford wrote that

It did my heart good, dearest Mrs. Ouvry, to hear of your happy Christmas meeting. Many and many a year may you enjoy such dear friends! Only increased and gladdened by new and ever dearer ties!

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<sup>37</sup> J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman’s Christmas. A Social History* (Hassocks, 1978), p. 75. Naturally questions of literacy and the efficiency and cost of postal services are relevant here. From the 1860s onwards, Christmas wishes became more commonly sent in Christmas cards, which are discussed in chapter five.

<sup>38</sup> An aunt by marriage of Jane Austen.

<sup>39</sup> Both quotations cited in Pimlott, *Englishman’s Christmas*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>40</sup> G. A. Ellis (ed.), *Memoirs, Letters, and a Selection from the Poetry and Prose Writings of Anna Letitia Barbauld* (Boston, MA, 1874), vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>41</sup> A. Constable (ed.), *Letters of Anna Seward: Written Between the Years 1784 and 1807* (Edinburgh, 1811), vol. 4, p. 147.



Always I have felt that the union of a large and happy family must be about the most gladdening and delightful of human felicities.<sup>42</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Christmas also became a time of regrettable absence when nuclear family members could not be together. In 1860 Mary Wood wrote to her husband Charles, then Baronet of Bowling Hall and Hemsworth, from Nice, complaining 'A merry Xmas it cannot be either for you or to me - separated by near 2000 miles'.<sup>43</sup> Another separation in 1868 caused her to have a 'gloomy' Christmas Day.<sup>44</sup> Their children were also active in writing letters expressing either a desire for parental company at Christmas, or regrets concerning their absence. In 1847 their seven year old daughter Emily pleaded in a letter to her mother that 'I want you to come here on Christmas Day very much and papa too'.<sup>45</sup> During Christmas 1851 the twelve year old Charles Lindley Wood commented in a letter to his mother that 'Papa went away yesterday [and] we were all very sorry for him to go as it is a long time since we have seen him'.<sup>46</sup> These sentiments continued into adulthood. In 1865 Emily, now married and separated from her nuclear family at Christmas, wrote to her mother: 'I too longed more than I counted to be with you on Monday - and the old Christmas hymn in church made my eyes quite full of tears in thinking of you all and the old happy Christmas's we used to have and picturing to myself how you were all together then'.<sup>47</sup> Christmas wishes could also be used to affirm sibling relationships in adulthood. The relationship between Charles Lindley and Emily Wood had been particularly strong in childhood, based upon a compatibility of tastes and temperament.<sup>48</sup> During her marriage to Hugo Meynell-Ingram of Temple Newsam, Charles Lindley wrote to her at Christmas in a language of tender affection:

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<sup>42</sup> H. F. Chorley (ed.), *Letters of Mary Russell Mitford* (London, 1925). 2nd series, vol. 2, p. 98.

<sup>43</sup> BL, Hickleton Papers, A2.43, Mary Wood to Charles Wood, 25 December 1860.

<sup>44</sup> BL, Hickleton Papers, A2.43, Mary Wood to Charles Wood, 25 December 1868. Charles became the 1st Viscount Halifax in 1866.

<sup>45</sup> BL, Hickleton Papers, A2.85, Emily Wood to Mary Wood, 14 December 1847.

<sup>46</sup> BL, Hickleton Papers, A2.87, Charles Lindley Wood to Mary Wood, 26 December 1851.

<sup>47</sup> BL, Hickleton Papers, A2.88, Emily Meynell-Ingram to Mary Wood, 27 December 1865.

<sup>48</sup> J. G. Lockhart, *Charles Lindley, Viscount Halifax. Part One 1839-1885* (London, 1935), p. 58.

A merry Xmas to you and the happiest and most prosperous of new years. I do wish you all the good things possible from the bottom of my heart... What a pleasure to think of you and Hugo together and to reflect how charming he is, and of the happiness you have in one another. It is a thought that makes everything seem cheerful when it occurs to one, and as my thoughts are often with you - I have the reward in having suggestions of happiness and pleasantness bought continually before my mind. It is the greatest pleasure to think of the well-being and happiness of those loved ones, and this is a pleasure which among many others you have procured for your family, and notably for me, who as you know love you so very dearly.<sup>49</sup>

Here the sentiments of Christmas had the ability to unlock the emotional currents of not only a sibling relationship, but also the wider ideal of the family. It should be noted, however, that there was a distinct tendency for letters describing the sentiments of Christmas to be gendered. Both females and males could describe the sentiments of Christmas in their correspondence, but there was a strong tendency for the recipient to be female; masculinity seemed to preclude the notion of men writing to one another in this fashion. This suggests the idea that there was something intrinsically feminine about the nature of Christmas, a factor that now demands further attention.

### The Gendering of Christmas?

The most fully developed theory of a gendered Christmas can be found in Leslie Bella's *The Christmas Imperative*. Bella traces the origins of familist ideology in the key Christmas literary texts of the first half of the nineteenth century, highlighting in particular Irving's description of Christmas in terms of 'domestic felicity'. At the same time, Bella emphasised that the organisation of household Christmas activities in the works of Irving and Dickens lay in the hands of men: the 'squire of Bracebridge Hall, Mr Pickwick, Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's nephew and ultimately Scrooge himself'. Bella identified the accession of Queen Victoria<sup>50</sup> as a turning point, highlighting the way in

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<sup>49</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A2.267, Charles Lindley Wood to Emily Meynell-Ingram, 24 December 1866. Emily's marriage to Hugo was a happy one, though there was a nineteen year age gap, and Emily struggled to adapt to wider Meynell-Ingram family. See Lockhart, *Viscount Halifax*, pp. 105, 217.

<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth Langland suggests that Victoria 'presented herself through a scrim of domestic virtues emphasizing home, hearth, and heart'. See E. Langland, *Nobody's Angels. Middle-Class Women and*



which Victoria was presented in the press as a role model for families on both sides of the Atlantic, an interpretation which placed heavy emphasis on the portrayal of the royal Christmas tree which appeared in the *Illustrated London News* in 1848; Bella interprets this in terms of Victoria supervising Christmas whilst delegating the preparation of the tree to her husband. Bella believes that the discourse of domestic ideology propagated in the press, and connected to Christmas by the portrayal of festivities at Windsor, encouraged women to try and create the perfect family Christmas for the first time. According to Bella, this imperative was then replicated in the next generation of Victorian women, who were inspired to replicate the efforts of their mothers, and were further influenced by children's fiction, particularly for girls, which featured Christmas scenes emphasising female agency.<sup>51</sup> This Christmas imperative was further enforced by external agencies, particularly the media and commerce, and according to Bella are still effective today. Using evidence from Canadian women's diaries, Bella supports her argument by contrasting the amount of references to Christmas pre- and post- 1840, suggesting that many families began to celebrate Christmas in the period between 1840 and 1870.<sup>52</sup>

Bella's argument is at once compelling and problematic. The view that in the past 150 years women have carried out the majority of emotional and sentimental Christmas work, the tasks of maintaining kin and friendship networks, appears sound, and bears comparison with other studies.<sup>53</sup> Combined with the lack of evidence before the mid nineteenth century, this makes Bella's argument appear seductive. Further consideration is needed, however, before this can be accepted. Firstly, if domestic ideology played a part in the familialisation of English Christmas, why does it not feature in any of the

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*Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca and London, 1995), p. 63.

<sup>51</sup> See in particular Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) and Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* (1872). Though both of these are American, they were successful on both sides of the Atlantic.

<sup>52</sup> L. Bella, *The Christmas Imperative. Leisure, Family and Women's Work* (Halifax, NS, 1992), pp. 14, 77, 93-135. William Waits also briefly examines the 'feminisation' of Christmas in America, arguing that after 1880 American women became responsible for virtually all aspects of Christmas preparation, whilst men only provided money. See *The Modern Christmas in America. A Cultural History of Gift Giving* (New York, 1993), chapter 6.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, M. Di Leonardo, 'The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families, and the Work of Kinship', *Signs*, 12 (3), 1987, 440-53.



most popular literary examples of that genre, and why did the process not begin earlier? As Davidoff and Hall show both the middle-class Christmas family gathering and domestic ideology had their roots in the eighteenth century.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, whilst domestic ideology was no doubt influential, there is a danger of relying too much upon prescriptive literature, and this also applies to the literary Christmas texts of the first half of the nineteenth century, as popular as they were.<sup>55</sup> Thirdly, there is danger in treating a lack of evidence regarding Christmas as a fundamental truth of there being *no* Christmas. This partly lies in the way in which the search for Christmas past in the twentieth century has been clouded by Christmas present, including the emphasis on customs noted above, and also in the evolving ways in which literate people represented themselves in diaries, correspondence and autobiography.

What, then, can be said about the historical development of women's role in the family Christmas? In terms of the *discourse* of Christmas, the comments in the late eighteenth century editions of *The Times* reveal some sort of place for women in the pre-Victorian Christmas. Admittedly many of the criticisms can be placed in the category of elite women's failure to play the traditional 'lady bountiful' role, but there is also evidence that places women in a domestic Christmas context. In 1790 *The Times* declared

that the education of the female part of the family being for some years committed to the mistresses of boarding schools or to private governesses, the art of domestic cookery is no longer practised by ladies, the study of the graces having kicked the drudgery of mixing pies, tarts, and puddings out of doors. It is much more fashionable now to possess the art of painting the face and whitening the hands, than to know the mystery of making raised crust or fining calves feet jelly.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, chapter 3; see also C. Hall, 'The Early Formation of Domestic Ideology', in S. Burman (ed.), *Fit Work for Women* (London, 1979). It is also important to highlight, as Dror Wahrman has, that domesticity can be found amongst segments of the landed and working classes. See D. Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class. The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780-1840* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 379-80.

<sup>55</sup> Bella emphasises how it is the male characters who are the leaders of Christmas in *A Christmas Carol*. Whilst this may be true, it is important to highlight that female labour is implied throughout the text. Mrs Cratchit, for example, prepares most of the food for the Christmas dinner, aided by her daughters, with the exception that Peter Cratchit mashes the potatoes. See C. Dickens, *Christmas Books* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 51-55.

<sup>56</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1790. This discourse of attack on politeness and refinement at Christmas can



This reveals an expectation of female labour in preparations for Christmas. Further evidence can be found in the pages of the *Examiner* in 1818. Responding to an article concerning the keeping of Christmas the *Examiner* had published, one female from South Lambeth, describing herself as ‘a Wife, a Mother, and an Englishwoman’, stated that ‘I have, ... been for some days past busily employed in preparing for passing Christmas *worthily*. My beef and mince-meat are ready ..., and my holly and mistletoe gathered’.<sup>57</sup>

The evidence does become more explicit from the mid nineteenth century, however, and if women were more closely aligned with Christmas labour then the inequalities of power within the intimacy of Christmas may have been reinforced. The aristocrat Mary Wood of Hickleton was arranging Christmas trees from at least 1845, and there is evidence from the 1850s of her colluding with her teenage daughter Emily to find out what presents Emily’s siblings would like for Christmas.<sup>58</sup> Amongst the middle classes, the children’s writer and botanist Margaret Gatty of Ecclesfield recorded the arrangement of a Christmas tree for her children in early January 1851.<sup>59</sup> By 1881, her daughter Juliana Ewing expressed her relief at missing the Christmas preparations, describing it as being ‘out of the fierce Ecclesfield stress just now’.<sup>60</sup> The case is harder

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also be found in the writings of antiquarians, and is in itself probably an inheritance from opposition to the ‘reformation of manners’ that included the development of puritan disapproval of secular Christmas customs in the sixteenth century until the official banning of Christmas during the Commonwealth, but also mediated equally by concerns over aristocratic vice, as noted earlier.

<sup>57</sup> *Examiner*, 27 December 1818.

<sup>58</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A7.48, Diary of Mary Wood, 1845; A2.267, Mary Wood to Emily Wood, December 1856. Fanny Kemble (1809-1893) was preparing a Christmas tree as early as 1843, see F. A. Kemble, *Records of Later Life* (London, 1882), vol. 1, p. 369. As discussed below, the Christmas tree became a common indicator of Christmas work, though it does also obscure other ways of determining this feature.

<sup>59</sup> SA, Hunter Archaeological Society Records, HAS 40.7, Diary of Margaret Gatty, 1851. Bella indicates that women in their childbearing years seemed to have little time to write about Christmas. This seems to be true in the case of Margaret Gatty; she gave birth eight times in the 1840s, and the 1850s reveal a marked increase of Christmas references in her diary. See Bella, *Christmas Imperative*, p. 124, and C. Maxwell, *Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing* (London, 1949), p. 104.

<sup>60</sup> SA, Hunter Archaeological Society Records, HAS 61.529, Juliana Horatia Ewing to Alexander Ewing, 8 December 1881. It should be noted however, that for the middle and upper classes the work of preparing for Christmas in the home was often indistinguishable from preparations located in churches and philanthropic contexts; in this letter to her husband, for example, Juliana Ewing mentioned the work of school treats and old women’s teas. This highlights the symbiotic nature of the Christmas experience between conventional notions of public and private.

to prove in working-class families, primarily due to a lack of evidence. However, if the premise that the working classes were celebrating Christmas in some domestic form in the nineteenth century can be accepted, then it is possible to speculate about the context in which Christmas might have existed. Several historians have stressed the centrality of domesticity to working-class identity in the nineteenth century,<sup>61</sup> even if the link between domesticity and Christmas must be questioned, there is still the potential for a certain form of Christmas celebration to develop within working-class households upon gendered lines, especially where aspirations of respectability were paramount. Even within the poorer, so called 'outcast' families, what Christmas celebrations could be achieved largely depended upon the resourcefulness of mothers who also dominated the emotional currents of their families.<sup>62</sup> In both cases, women were not sufficiently removed from domestic labour (in terms of not having employed servants) to escape the work of Christmas.<sup>63</sup> However, it is only in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period when, due to the growth of working-class autobiography and twentieth-century oral history projects, evidence becomes more plentiful. These recollections tended to locate the mother within the kitchen at Christmas. Florence Atherton (b. 1898) of Farnworth in Lancashire remembered that 'Mother always made a big Christmas pudding and nice dinner, turkey and everything else',<sup>64</sup> whilst Walter Southgate (b. 1890) of Cambridge Heath in the East End of London recalled how his mother boiled the Christmas pudding 'in the brick copper outside the yard'.<sup>65</sup> Women's Christmas work could also have a wider scope. John Blake (b.1899) of Poplar, recalled how his mother 'used to gather up little items..., and some sweets and fruit and nuts, and wrap them up in fancy paper' for

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<sup>61</sup> See A. Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches. Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995), part three; S. O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1992); and W. Secombe, 'Patriarchy Stabilized: The Construction of the Male Breadwinner Wage in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Social History*, 11 (1986), 53-76.

<sup>62</sup> See C. Chinn, *They Worked all their Lives* (Manchester, 1988); and E. Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (New York, 1993).

<sup>63</sup> In the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, the lower middle classes might also experience this. Richard Church (b. 1893) recalled his mother on Christmas Day 1901, 'flushed and tired after the hard morning's work in the hot kitchen'. R. Church, *Over the Bridge. An Essay in Autobiography* (London, 1955), p. 107.

<sup>64</sup> T. Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods* (London, 1981), pp. 103, 111.

<sup>65</sup> W. Southgate, *That's the Way it Was. A Working Class Autobiography 1890-1950* (Oxford, 1982), p. 70.



the stockings, and also ‘made up some paper chains, with a festive bell hanging in the middle, and had them stretched across the top of the room from wall to wall’. Blake’s speculation about how his mother might feel at the end of Christmas indicates the extent to which a certain behaviour was now expected: ‘Mum would then probably sit back and feel contented that she had carried out her *duties* to the family for Yuletide’ (my emphasis).<sup>66</sup> Clare Cameron (b. 1896) noted that ‘Mother had to work harder than at any other time, so that everything should be spick and span for the relations who might drop in. There was much extra scurry, much extra cooking, and much greater care to be exercised with the weekly income’.<sup>67</sup>

Any discussion of Christmas and gender cannot be complete without considering the role men played in the domestic Christmas. If Bella’s placement of men as the leaders of the pre-Victorian Christmas was based upon man’s position as patrician and patriarch, John Tosh argues that it was the Victorian period that allowed men a licence to play as fathers; whilst these two embodiments of masculinity are closely related, the way in which men were participating in Christmas in the nineteenth century relied upon an increasingly nuanced understanding of a distinction between father and patriarch. Tosh attempts to show how an ideology of masculinity compatible with domesticity held a brief ascendancy between the 1830s and 1860s, before conflict with ‘two longstanding aspects of masculinity’, namely homosociality and adventure, led to an increasing viewpoint from the 1870s that domesticity was, in Tosh’s words, ‘unglamorous, unfulfilling and ... unmasculine’. In this scheme bourgeois men became disturbed ‘by the identification of the home with the feminine’, and were more sensitive to traditional notions that the appropriate realm of masculinity lay in peer-group activity, a sensitivity manifested in increasing levels of club life and outdoor sports. Tosh is able to convey the sheer variety of bourgeois male experience in the Victorian period, featuring men who were able to live by their ideals of domesticity, and others defeated by its contradictions. Within this context Tosh, drawing upon earlier work by

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<sup>66</sup> J. Blake, *Memories of Old Poplar* (London, 1977), p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> C. Cameron, *Rustle of Spring. An Edwardian Childhood in London’s East End* (London, 1979), p. 51.



John Gillis,<sup>68</sup> suggests that the Victorian family Christmas represented an intensification of a father's licence to play, when 'fathers could abandon the normal restraints and become children for a day'. Tosh also suggests that the establishment in England of what he termed 'the modern materialist figure of Santa Claus' in the 1870s represented a shift in the 'spiritual underpinnings of paternal authority' from the 'judging, watchful father of Evangelical tradition' to the 'source of material largesse' in the form of Christmas presents.<sup>69</sup> Tosh emphasises this change with J. Lionel Taylor's recollection of his Unitarian parents' attitude to Father Christmas: 'both liked the idea of *Father Christmas*, but not because of its fancifulness but on account of the spirit of unselfish hospitality, goodwill and fatherhood which it represented, and because the idea delighted children and they delighted in what delighted them'.<sup>70</sup>

It is clear, however, that it was not just middle-class fathers who delighted in the role of the benevolent, playful Christmas father.<sup>71</sup> An obvious aristocratic example of this can be found in Charles Lindley Wood.<sup>72</sup> Charles has been described as a kind of benevolent autocrat in his relations with servants and his local estate, though his interest lay more in spiritual welfare than the practicalities of estate management. Charles was a loving husband and father, and his relationship with his children was described by his biographer J. G. Lockhart in the following terms: 'their father was the fun and the adventure of life, the person who suddenly broke in on the routine of lessons, who told them the most enchanting stories, and played the most amusing tricks, and took them for

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<sup>68</sup> J. R. Gillis, 'Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 3, (1989), p. 230; see also *World of their own Making*, p. 104. Gillis is suggesting a separation between women who made Christmas and men who performed it. This would perhaps suggest a greater continuity with the past than Gillis would give credit to; in this explanation men continue to act as the patrician-leader of Christmas; women's work in the pre-Victorian Christmas was simply obscured by domestic service.

<sup>69</sup> J. Tosh, *A Man's Place. Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London, 1999), pp. 4-7, 88, 147-49, 195.

<sup>70</sup> J. L. Taylor, *The Story of a Life* (London, 1931), p. 112.

<sup>71</sup> David Roberts comments on the way in which the absent father of the Victorian governing classes could 'appear at Christmas or Easter', and that 'Among the landed families papas were indeed great fun. They dispensed gifts, took their sons hunting, their daughters to ducal balls, and the whole family to the Alps'. See D. Roberts, 'The Paterfamilias of the Victorian Governing Classes', in A. S. Wohl (ed.), *The Victorian Family. Structures and Stresses* (London, 1978), p. 65.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Lindley Wood became the 2nd Viscount Halifax in 1885, and was president of the English Church Union from 1868 to 1919, and from 1931 until his death in 1934.



the most exciting excursions'.<sup>73</sup> Charles made a full contribution to the material culture of Christmas at Hickleton. His diaries are full of references to being busy with decorations, practical aspects of theatricals, wrapping presents and the writing of Christmas cards and letters.<sup>74</sup> There is also evidence of Charles Christmas present shopping whilst in London, though he was under instruction from his wife Agnes.<sup>75</sup> He also played an important role, discussed in more detail below, in entertaining children at Christmas, including reading, the staging of elaborate ruses, trips to the pantomime, and the organisation of furniture to facilitate the children's great romps around the hall.<sup>76</sup> This behaviour was replicated with a new generation of grandchildren, nephews and nieces, and was described by Cosmo Lang, who used to visit Hickleton at Christmas when he was Archbishop of York, as 'the life and soul of the merry party'.<sup>77</sup> Roberts comments that the style of fatherhood within the early Victorian governing classes was characterised by 'remoteness, sovereignty, and benovolence'. Whilst this remoteness was most often caused by the pressures and location of work, it could also be caused by the large size of some families, and a dislike of younger children amongst certain fathers. An extreme example of this was the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould, father of sixteen children, who asked a little girl at a parish Christmas party, 'And whose little girl are you?' After which the girl burst into tears and replied 'I am yours, daddy'.<sup>78</sup>

Charles Lindley Wood forged a prominent and fatherly role for himself in the Christmas celebrations at Hickleton, in a way that was entirely complementary to both his authority and his personality. He fulfilled this role with ease due to a combination of comfort with domesticity and aristocratic status. It is noticeable however, that Charles

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<sup>73</sup> J. G. Lockhart, *Viscount Halifax 1839-85*, p. 162. His wife Agnes, by contrast, was supposed to represent discipline.

<sup>74</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A7.5, Diaries of Charles Lindley Wood.

<sup>75</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A2.124, Agnes Wood to Charles Lindley Wood, December 1875, 10 December 1878, 11 December 1878, 6 December 1879; A2.125 Charles Lindley Wood to Agnes Wood, 11 December 1879. It is also apparent that Agnes consulted Charles on her present-buying decisions.

<sup>76</sup> Earl of Halifax, *Fulness of Days* (London, 1957), p. 32; B. I., Hickleton Papers, A7.5, Diary of Charles Lindley Wood, 1886, 1912.

<sup>77</sup> Lockhart, *Viscount Halifax 1839-85*, pp. 29, 219-20; *Viscount Halifax 1885-1934*, p. 167; M. Meynell, *Sunshine and Shadows over a Long Life* (London, 1933), pp. 139-41.

<sup>78</sup> Roberts, 'Paterfamilias of the Victorian Governing Classes', p. 60.



played a greater role in the family Christmas than his father. The first Viscount's political career meant that the organisation of Christmas was left largely in the hands of Mary Wood, though activities such as the giving of Christmas shillings did provide excitement for his children.<sup>79</sup> A good example of the fathering of Charles Wood's generation was the Bedfordshire squire John Thomas Brooks of Flitwick (1794-1858). In the 1830s and 1840s, the happiness that the Christmas family reunion caused him is apparent in diary entries that record the arrival of children in mid-December, always prefixed by 'dearest'. Brooks's sense of satisfaction in his family was framed by religious seriousness, and reached its apogee on New Year's Day. On the first of January 1843, for example, Brooks recorded in his diary that 'We are all assembled together in our dear happy home, thank God, (Myself, Mary, Mary Ann, Johnnie, George, Willie) and commence the New Year with good resolutions, and increased kindness and affection to each other'. This did not preclude fun during the Christmas period: on Christmas Day 1847 Brooks recorded a 'Christmas Tree and pleasant dance in the evening'; but there were also occasions such as New Year's Eve 1846 when he noted 'Domestic: pressed to go tonight with Dawsons to see a Christmas Tree for the children, escaped'.<sup>80</sup> It is also possible to note fathers who had some reticence or hostility to Christmas. For example, Thomas Wodehouse, the 2nd Lord Newton of Lyme Park in Cheshire, was described by his daughter Phyllis as either pretending to or actually disliking Christmas, and having a particular dislike of the term 'Santa Claus'. The father's importance to the family Christmas is demonstrated by Wodehouse's influence on his elder children, who became a 'little blasé' about Christmas as well. It also arguably diminished Wodehouse's authority, as symbolic functions such as the

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<sup>79</sup> BL, Hickleton Papers, A2.85, Emily Wood to Mary Wood, December 1847; A2.87, Charles Lindley Wood to Mary Wood, 25 December 1851. Other examples exist of Christmas shillings. Fred Benson recalled how his father disguised his Christmas shilling in a cup of milk, instructing him to drink slowly as he progressed towards the bottom of the cup. E. F. Benson, *Our Family Affairs 1867-1896* (London, 1920), p. 17. See also the 'Wilson shilling' at York charity schools in chapter four. Tosh argues that Edward Benson displayed the watchful and hardhearted characteristics of the dutiful rather than indulgent father figure. These kinds of characteristics might be attributed to men of an evangelical mould; Charles Wood was an evangelical Anglican. However, Tosh is also keen to stress that evangelical 'patriarchal was not necessarily incompatible with playfulness', citing the easy informality attributed to both William Wilberforce and Adam Clarke. See Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 88, 98.

<sup>80</sup> R. Morgan (ed.), *The Diary of a Bedfordshire Squire* (Bedford, 1987), pp. 6, 12, 55, 78. Significantly, Brooks also recorded giving his children money at breakfast assembling on New Year's Day.



servants' beef distribution and the opening of the ball were performed by his wife; whilst the decoration of the Christmas tree and the giving of presents to estate employees was performed by the butler.<sup>81</sup>

Problems of evidence reoccur here. A superficial reading of the Gatty family Christmas suggests that the clergyman Alfred Gatty was a shadowy figure in the celebrations, constantly away from home managing the demands of a large rural-industrial parish. However, it is probable that this impression has been skewed by the survival of Margaret and Juliana's personal papers and not of Alfred's; Alfred's refusal to indulge the domestic aspects of his life in his memoir;<sup>82</sup> and biographies of Margaret and Juliana written by female relatives keen to perpetuate a magical idealism of their lives.<sup>83</sup> Again, the problem becomes more acute for the working classes. Even oral history records can be disappointing. For example, none of the working-class interviewees involved in both Paul Thompson's *The Edwardians* and Thea Thompson's *Edwardian Childhoods* revealed any distinct roles in the family Christmas for their fathers.<sup>84</sup> It should also be remembered that some poor children's Christmases were framed entirely in philanthropic contexts,<sup>85</sup> and Jose Harris highlights how, in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, bank holidays became notorious as the 'saturnalia of beaten wives';<sup>86</sup> recalling her Edwardian childhood in the Potteries, Alice Towey noted how the Christmas period was characterised by fighting between her parents.<sup>87</sup> Robert Roberts described how 'Christmas or bank holidays could leave a stigma on a family already registered "decent" for a long time afterwards'.<sup>88</sup> Some stories, however, have

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<sup>81</sup> P. E. Sandeman, *Treasure on Earth. A Country House Christmas* (London, 1995 edition), pp. 13-14, 37, 76, 97.

<sup>82</sup> See A. Gatty, *A Life at One Living* (London, 1884).

<sup>83</sup> See H. K. F. Gatty, *Juliana Horatia Ewing and her Books* (London, 1887); and Maxwell, *Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing*.

<sup>84</sup> Though Clifford Hills (b. 1904), son of an agricultural labourer, did 'always have a Christmas tree'. See Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, pp. 38, 50.

<sup>85</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>86</sup> J. Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (Harmondsworth, 1994), p. 94.

<sup>87</sup> P. Thompson, *The Edwardians. The Remaking of British Society* (2nd edn., London, 1992), pp. 306, 310.

<sup>88</sup> R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (Manchester, 1971), p. 9.

been recovered from the Edwardian period that locate working-class fathers at the heart of the family Christmas. A notable example is Grace Foake's autobiography of an Edwardian childhood in London. She recalled that her father took her and her brother, significantly the two eldest children, to Smithfield Market on Christmas Eve, where he purchased a turkey, oranges, nuts, and sweets. Grace remembered that her father was in regular employment during this period of her life, and always saved for Christmas. In the evening of Christmas Day the family would gather round the fire and Grace's father roasted chestnuts.<sup>89</sup> Whilst this narrative does not recover the thoughts and feelings of Grace's father, it is clear that he had carved out a Christmas role for himself in family life that in some way drew upon the masculine role of provider; Grace's narrative revealed a pride in her father's knowledge of the Christmas markets, and ability to get the best goods he could afford; and whilst the task of preparing the food lay with Grace's mother, her father could indulge in the more playful and seasonal activity of roasting chestnuts.<sup>90</sup>

It is clear that from the 1870s, men of all classes were given a more defined role to play in family Christmases as the modern Father Christmas/Santa Claus figure (discussed below) was popularised. However, as is discussed in chapter five, it is also clear that the varied representations of that figure in advertising, commercial and philanthropic contexts may have complicated and sometimes compromised men's feelings about their masculinity in a time when the context of a tangible modernity demanded a renegotiation of what masculinity actually meant. Tosh has located middle-class men's 'flight from domesticity' in this period,<sup>91</sup> and the domesticity of Christmas may have led men to take refuge in the masculine associational cultures of Christmas intimacy described in chapter four,<sup>92</sup> or the vogue for spending Christmas in

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<sup>89</sup> G. Foakes, *Between High Walls. A London Childhood* (London, 1972), pp. 57-58.

<sup>90</sup> John Blake also attributed this role of Christmas provider to his father, recalling that 'Dad would get a few crates of beer in, which he paid for in a Christmas club, and if possible, a rabbit and chicken to enlarge the Christmas dinner for themselves and seven children'. See Blake, *Memories of Old Poplar*, p. 12.

<sup>91</sup> See Tosh, *A Man's Place*, chapter 8; and 'Imperial Masculinity and the Flight from Domesticity in Britain, 1880-1914', in T. P. Foley and others (eds), *Gender and Colonialism* (Galway, 1995).

<sup>92</sup> Though some of these did become more family orientated.



hotels or on continental trips described in chapter five.<sup>93</sup> The problems that Edwardian men may have had in relating to their children, a problem put into sharp focus by the prolonged exposure at Christmas time, was highlighted by a satirical article that appeared in the *Daily Mail*, under the headline, 'Holiday Problem. "What shall we do with the Children?"' Here three fathers were supposedly overheard in conversation at a London restaurant, being baffled and perplexed by the problem of entertaining their children over the Christmas period, before a passing stranger suggested that they simply consult their child as to their tastes and interests, and then act accordingly, a suggestion that is met with incredulous acknowledgement. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this article is the way in which the stranger advises these fathers to approach this matter: 'you must give a little time and thought to it, just as you would if it were a question that affected your business. After all, it is your business, and a very important part of it. Treat it in a business way'.<sup>94</sup>

The growth of sentimental feelings within Christmas intimacy also lent a mawkish character to the narratives people constructed about the absence of loved ones in memoirs and diaries. It is also important to recognise that this was an inheritance from the evangelical tradition of keeping spiritual records in general and the practice of taking (emotional and spiritual) stock at New Year in particular. However, in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods it also made family Christmas a target for criticism, in line with the kind of reconstruction of the popular perception of Victorianism that eventually found its most famous expression in Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*.<sup>95</sup> An example of this can be found in George and Weedon Grossmith's *The Diary of a Nobody*, when Pooter's son Lupin outlines his reasons for not wanting to attend the family Christmas:

I hate a family gathering at Christmas. What does it mean? Why someone says: "Ah! we miss poor Uncle James, who was here last year," and we

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<sup>93</sup> It is important to recognise, however, that these trends did cross gender boundaries and to a certain extent may have been generational.

<sup>94</sup> *Daily Mail*, 18 December 1908.

<sup>95</sup> See J. Gardiner, *The Victorians. An Age in Retrospect* (London and New York, 2002), chapters 1 and 2.

all begin to snivel. Someone else says: "It's two years since poor Aunt Liz used to sit in that corner." Then we all begin to snivel again. Then another gloomy relation says: "Ah! I wonder whose turn it will be next?"<sup>96</sup>

It is perhaps significant that Grossmith placed these words in the mouth of Lupin, a young adult male as yet unmarried. For it has become apparent that any discussion of men's involvement in family Christmas becomes framed by their role as fathers. To a lesser extent, narratives also exist concerning the role of uncles, but these share the context of interaction and engagement with children. Women are equally framed by the identity as mothers, though it was easier for women to adopt surrogate mother roles; indeed, at times they had little other choice. But this scenario leads to the question of whether Christmas actually alienated the unmarried and childless man, particularly the young adult male. This perhaps tapped into an older discourse of Christmas present in mid nineteenth century journalism and stories that highlighted the misery of the serious-minded young male scholar at Christmas.<sup>97</sup> Thinking also in terms of Jamieson's interpretation of the historical development of intimacy, it seems the framing of Christmas by the roles of father and mother may have obscured the relationship between husband and wife, at least in the way in which the available evidence has been recorded. What is apparent is the way in which children came to dominate forms of Christmas celebration, and any discussion of parenting roles is not complete without a similar analysis of the role of children and childhood within Christmas.

### Children and Childhood

Hugh Cunningham highlights how historians 'need to distinguish between children as human beings and childhood as a shifting set of ideas'.<sup>98</sup> This distinction is particularly relevant to the examination of the role played by children within Christmas in the long

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<sup>96</sup> G. and W. Grossmith, *The Diary of a Nobody* (London, 1999), p. 114.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, 'Christmas in Lodgings', in *Household Words*, 21 December 1850.

<sup>98</sup> H. Cunningham, *Children & Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (Harlow, 1995), p. 1.



nineteenth century, since the vast amount of material on children (particularly from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards) does not relate to specific children, but rather intersects with popular notions of childhood. Even within manuscript sources, children's voices are rarely heard, and instead their presence is mediated through the narratives created by parents, relations and even servants. Eventually the growth of Christmas-related episodes in memoirs and autobiographies, and the oral histories of those growing up in the Edwardian period restructure the narrative to that of a child's point of view, but these discourses are mediated by age, experience and nostalgia.<sup>99</sup>

It is clear that Christmas was not always a child-oriented festival, and whilst the process of Christmas becoming a children's festival is not fully understood, trends in both the history of children and childhood provide a contextual framework within which the transformation becomes more understandable. The privileging of the child within strains of romanticism, which has been highlighted both in poetry and portraiture,<sup>100</sup> emphasised the positive qualities of children's imagination within a context of feeling and sensation associated with nature, and invested children with an innocence that was blessed by God and reconfigured perceptions of the life cycle from ascent into maturity to decline from the perfection of childhood. According to Cunningham, a 'romantic sensibility towards childhood dominated the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century. It was probably at its height between about 1860 and 1930'.<sup>101</sup> Running parallel with these developments was a greater social concern for the plight of

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<sup>99</sup> Commander Studd (b.1889), writing in 1950, recognised this factor when he commented on his own childhood Christmases: 'they had a spirit, a look and a feeling that have gone out of Christmases for ever. I don't mean that Christmas is not what it was, but to a man in middle age there is a nostalgic delight in Christmases past'. R. G. Studd, *The Holiday Story* (London, 1950), p. 20. Robert Roberts also noted this trend: 'During the '30's and 40's I often talked with people who were already mature by 1914. They criticised the then fairly recent past, faculties alert, with what seemed some objectivity. But by the '60's myths had developed, prejudices about the present had set hard; these same critics, in ripe old age, now saw the Edwardian era through a golden haze!' See Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, p. 11.

<sup>100</sup> See A. Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence. The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London, 1998), chapter one; and P. Crown, 'Portraits and Fancy Pictures by Gainsborough and Reynolds: Contrasting Images of Childhood', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 7 (1984), 159-67.

<sup>101</sup> Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 72-74. Much emphasis has been placed upon William Wordsworth's poem *Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, which itself reveals the influence of both Locke and Rousseau.



poor and working children manifested in an increasing amount of protective legislation as well as philanthropic activity as the nineteenth century progressed.<sup>102</sup>

It is more difficult to assess the changes that took place within family and household units from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, and indeed, over an even longer period. Since the publication in English of Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* in 1962, considerable debate has arisen surrounding the position of children within families and the nature of parent-child relationships.<sup>103</sup> Whilst up to the end of the 1970s the general trend in the historiography of childhood was to stress historical progress in the experience of being a child, work in the following decade stressed that the majority of children in the past had been brought up by loving parents in nuclear families, as Cunningham has commented, 'continuity replaced change as the *leitmotif* of the history of childhood'.<sup>104</sup> However, in the particular case of Christmas, change is a concept that cannot be ignored; but equally, the location of change within the Victorian period, and explanations relating to the Victorian invention or refurbishment of Christmas, need to be placed in a longer context and realigned alongside continuities.

Perhaps one of the longest continuities can be attributed to the school holidays. Although Christmas holidays were never guaranteed in the past, a widespread system of holidays at Christmas, Easter and during summer had emerged in the Tudor period.<sup>105</sup> By the eighteenth century, out of a desire to see evidence of the child's educational

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<sup>102</sup> See G. K. Behlmer, *Child Abuse and Moral Reform in England, 1870-1908* (Stanford, 1982); P. Bolin-Hort, *Work, Family and the State: Child Labour and the Organisation of Production in the British Cotton Industry, 1780-1920* (Lund, 1989); R. Cooter (ed.), *In the Name of the Child: Health and Welfare, 1880-1940* (London, 1992); H. Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1991); D. Dwork, *War is Good for Babies and Other Young Children: A History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England 1898-1918* (London, 1987); H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare: England 1872-1989* (London, 1994); L. A. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (London, 2000); and L. Rose, *The Erosion of Childhood: Child Oppression in Britain 1860-1918* (London, 1991).

<sup>103</sup> See P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth, 1962); L. De Mause (ed.), *The History of Childhood* (London, 1976); E. Shorter, *Making of the Modern Family*, Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*; M. Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500-1914* (London, 1980); Pollock, *Forgotten Children*; and A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England 1300-1840* (Oxford, 1987).

<sup>104</sup> Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>105</sup> For the relationship between Christmas and schools see chapter four.



progress had arisen the practice of 'Christmas pieces', which gave the child a chance to demonstrate this. Decorated sheets of paper were sold to schools, where children would complete them with examples of their handwriting, and then take them home at the Christmas holidays. An example of one of these sheets survives from 1779, headed 'Useful and Polite Accomplishments', and completed by the seven year old John Stainton.<sup>106</sup> The link between Christmas and education was further reinforced by the giving of gift books of an improving nature to children in the eighteenth century.<sup>107</sup> What the practice of 'Christmas pieces' did was to place emphasis upon the child in a performative capacity, even if the task was not completed at home during Christmas. By the early nineteenth century, 'Christmas pieces' had become more spontaneous and performative, possibly linked to trends in the performance of theatricals (considered below), and also part of the general enjoyment. In December 1822, Stafford Pryse wrote to his mother noting that his daughters had just informed him that they were ordered to write some verses for Christmas as a matter of amusement.<sup>108</sup>

It is possible then, that by the early nineteenth century some families were coming to realise the role children could play in unlocking the full potential of Christmas intimacy. Jane Austen realised this in 1808, when she wrote to her sister Cassandra noting that 'I am glad you are to have Henry with you again; and with him and the boys you cannot but have a cheerful, and at times even a merry Christmas'.<sup>109</sup> Such attitudes may also explain why writers perpetuating a decline narrative felt the need, like Robert Southey in 1807, to declare that it was an 'Englishman's religion to eat plumcake on this day,

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<sup>106</sup> M. Harrison, *The Story of Christmas. Its Growth and Development from the Earliest Times* (London, 1951), unnumbered plate. This indicates that the relationship between Christmas and the polite culture of the eighteenth century was more complex than the straightforwardly oppositional one suggested by journalists and antiquarians of the time.

<sup>107</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, pp. 74-75. See also chapter five.

<sup>108</sup> Shropshire Archives, Marrington Collection, 631/3/1276, Stafford Pryse to Mrs. Pryse, 19 December 1822. Mary Clare Martin shows how these kinds of performances continued to be an aspect of children's Christmases until at least the 1870s; see M. C. H. Martin, 'Children and Religion in Walthamstow and Leyton c.1740-c.1870' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2000), pp. 387-88. This also influenced the late-Victorian and Edwardian desire to see children perform in public at Christmas, as explored in chapter three.

<sup>109</sup> Jane Austen to Cassandra Elizabeth Austen, 9 December 1808, in S. Chauncey (ed.), *The Letters of Jane Austen: Selected from the Compilation of Her Great Nephew, Lord Bradbourne* (Boston, MA, 1908), p. 125.

and to have pies made at Christmas made of meat and plums. This is the only way in which these festivals are celebrated; and if the children had not an interest in keeping it up, even this would be soon disused'.<sup>110</sup>

By the 1840s, there is evidence to suggest, at least amongst the aristocracy, that children had come to form clear expectations concerning Christmas. Emily Wood, for example, wrote to her mother in December 1847 both requesting her mother's presence and a Christmas tree.<sup>111</sup> A different kind of expectation had been recorded by Robert Sharp of South Cave in the 1820s, when he noted how schoolchildren would call at houses in the village demanding Christmas boxes.<sup>112</sup> Clearly, the difference here was that the expectations of children in South Cave lay outside the home. Whilst the issue of domestic space will be discussed below, it is worth noting that Stephen Nissenbaum's argument for the American context centres upon the concern to domesticate and bring indoors children's games as a means of separating respectable children from the rude children they may be encountering outdoors. Nissenbaum notes how after 1820 it became increasingly common for Christmas literature to contain scenes in which parents arrange indoor Christmas parties and games for their children, and how from the 1830s Christmas books appeared offering games and puzzles for children.<sup>113</sup> This scenario could be rather uneasily translated to the English context. It could be suggested that a longer tradition of giving gift books to children during the Christmas season existed, dating back to the early eighteenth century, as noted above; the same could be said about the children's parties.<sup>114</sup> However, it is probable that both had become more widespread by the 1840s. Equally, there is evidence to suggest real concerns regarding the Christmas proclivities of working-class youth.<sup>115</sup> What does become apparent is that

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<sup>110</sup> R. Southey, *Letters from England*, cited in M. Hubert (ed.), *Jane Austen's Christmas. The Festive Season in Georgian England* (Stroud, 1996), p. 54.

<sup>111</sup> B. I., Hickleton Papers, A2.85, Emily Wood to Mary Wood, 22 December 1847. This also indicated, however, that a union of the nuclear family at Christmas could not be guaranteed amongst the aristocracy.

<sup>112</sup> J. and P. Crowther (eds), *The Diary of Robert Sharp of South Cave: Life in a Yorkshire Village 1812-1837* (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>113</sup> S. Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York, 1996), pp. 119-21.

<sup>114</sup> M. Hubert (ed.), *The Brontës' Christmas* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 37-38.

<sup>115</sup> See chapters two and three.



any discussion of Christmas and children becomes impossible to separate from developments in the structure of gift giving at Christmas.

### Christmas Presents

The longer traditions of gift giving during the Christmas season will be dealt with in some detail in chapters three and five. Chapter five stresses the continuities of giving gift books and parcels of food during the Christmas season, the latter often being an act of remembrance from absent relatives, a process which allotted the acts of giving and food consumption a central place within Christmas intimacy, which also explains why the dinner might be the centrepiece of Christmas Day.<sup>116</sup> The emotive power that gifts of food could convey is demonstrable throughout the nineteenth century. On New Year's Day 1813, Anna Barbauld wrote to the sender of a 'noble turkey', indicating how the turkey had made her 'greatly thankful that I ... have, so accessible and so near me, the friends and relatives that were assembled at Christmas in order to help me to despatch' it.<sup>117</sup> In December 1842, Mary Russell Mitford wrote to Henrietta Harrison noting that 'Your kind and excellent mother, my dear young friend, has had the great goodness to send me a beautiful turkey this Christmas. I cannot tell you how much I feel the kindness - both for the recollection and thing itself'.<sup>118</sup> In 1872, Juliana Ewing, who was resident with her husband in barracks, described the Christmas hamper she received from her sister Horatia as 'delightful', and encouraged Horatia to 'imagine Rex, Stevie and I devour it, wash it down with a bottle of champagne from the mess to all your very good healths!'<sup>119</sup>

With the gift taking on an increasingly emotive power within Christmas intimacy, a more immediate context of giving and receiving was established. Furthermore, given the

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<sup>116</sup> In her memoir of an Edwardian childhood, Clare Cameron stated that 'Christmas meant feeding - a prolonged and shameful orgy of the stomach'. See *Rustle of Spring*, p. 51.

<sup>117</sup> Ellis, *Memoirs of Anna Barbauld*, p. 280.

<sup>118</sup> Chorley, *Letters of Mary Mitford, 2nd Series*, vol. 2, Mary Russell Mitford to Henrietta Harrison, December 29, 1842, p. 300.

<sup>119</sup> SA, Hunter Archaeological Society Records, HAS 62.59, Juliana Horatia Ewing to Horatia Katherine Frances Eden, 19 December 1872.

developing attitudes towards children, and the beliefs surrounding the innocence and perfection of childhood, children increasingly became the mediators and receptacles of a process designed to increase that emotional power still further. By the 1850s, it is clear that the children at Hickleton were being given proper presents, rather than just gifts of small amounts of money.<sup>120</sup> The striking aspect of Christmas giving in the second half of the nineteenth century was the way in which clear structures developed to mediate the gift relationships between parents and children. These structures are aligned with the myths and rituals that surrounded the emergence of the modern Santa Claus/Father Christmas. The introduction and development of these myths and rituals places emphasis on the need to consider the development of Christmas in a transcontinental context, for it relied on an awareness of customs being perpetuated in Europe and North America, as well as a symbiotic transatlantic print culture relationship.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Mary Wood wrote to her daughter Emily in December 1856, indicating that she had arranged a carriage for a particular day in order to undertake all her Christmas shopping, and wanted Emily to find out what her brother Francis would like. Emily recorded in her diary receiving books on astronomy from her mother at Christmas 1854 and Christmas carols in 1855. By this time Emily was in her mid-teens, and moving away from the ages that Victorians considered to be childhood. She did, however, have six younger brothers and sisters. BI, Hickleton Papers, A2.267, Mary Wood to Emily Wood, December 1856; A7.7, Diaries of Emily Wood, 1854, 1855.

<sup>121</sup> An obvious example of this is the transatlantic success of both Washington Irving's *Sketch-Book* and Dickens's *Christmas Carol*. However, perhaps equally important but now largely neglected, was the publication of the American Susan Warner's *Carl Kringen; or, the Christmas Stocking* which was published three times in London in 1854 and 1855, and went into several later editions. Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, pp. 118-19. An edition in my possession was presented to a Sunday scholar in 1883. This introduced all the central tenets of the myth: sleighs, stockings and chimneys. *Carl Kringen; or, the Christmas Stocking* (London, 1882), pp. 5-10. Historians such as Pimlott and Tosh have placed emphasis on Edwin Lees's contribution to *Notes and Queries* in 1879, which highlighted a 'Santiclaus' custom in the west country, as the first evidence of the transmittance of this custom to England; indeed, Pimlott has used this example to show how little the origins of this custom were known at the time. See Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 114; and Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p. 148. However, the emphasis placed upon this source may have obscured a more widespread dissemination of the ritual by this stage. For example, Santa Claus was being mentioned in a *Daily Telegraph* editorial as early as 1873. See the *Daily Telegraph*, 25 December 1873. Germany could also be a source of inspiration. Accounts of German Christmases had achieved a level of cultural currency ever since Samuel Taylor Coleridge's account of Christmas at Ratzeburg was first published in 1809. Nissenbaum, *Battle for Christmas*, pp. 198-200. Pimlott has highlighted how in 1871, the Amberleys, who had previously not observed Christmas, consciously adopted the German customs surrounding Knecht Ruprecht in order to provide some structured indulgence for their children. Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 93. English children's writers were also reconfiguring the popular interpretation of St. Nicholas and the older English version of Father Christmas. In 1876 Esme Stuart published the 'Children of St. Nicholas' in *Aunt Judy's Magazine*, locating St. Nicholas in Paris, which emphasised both the idea of Christmas presents in exchange for selfless behaviour, and the notion that the real St. Nicholas is usually a relative. E. Stuart, 'Children of St.



Oral and autobiographical accounts of childhood Christmases in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods indicates the extent to which these rituals, particularly the use of stockings, had been disseminated, and amongst all social classes. For example, both John Blake and Grace Foakes recollected the use of stockings,<sup>122</sup> whilst Joan Poynder (b. 1897), the daughter of an MP and High Sheriff of Wiltshire, stated that ‘I had a Christmas stocking. I generally opened it about four o’clock in the morning because I never went to sleep. I never slept all night’.<sup>123</sup> The Quaker William Fryer Harvey (b. 1885) captured this feeling of anticipation:

On Christmas Eve we hung up our stockings ..., and tried in vain to sleep. How slowly the hours dragged! There are steps on the landing and voices whispering. The steps retreat. Whoever the steps belong to has decided that it is not safe to enter yet. They are going to give us another half hour. It is hard to go to sleep; it is harder still to keep awake. And then before we realise it the room is no longer black but grey, and hanging on to the bed is a beautifully distorted stocking with a fascinating bulge in the region of the calf ... What time is it? ... Half past six, because somebody is already moving about downstairs, and that means there is still thirty minutes before we can go into father’s and mother’s room to show them the contents of our stockings ... Bertha [the nurse] comes in to light the gas and pandemonium breaks out as we examine at leisure the contents of the stockings.<sup>124</sup>

Clearly Harvey was trying to capture the child’s consciousness of Christmas in this narrative; the extent to which it can be trusted is another matter. His narrative seems to suggest an awareness that the source of benevolence was parental, and yet the presentation of the gifts to the parents implies a willing collective delusion being

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Nicholas’, in H. K. F. Gatty and J. H. Ewing, *Aunt Judy’s Christmas Volume for 1876* (London, 1876), pp. 100-110. In 1873, Juliana Ewing published a story entitled ‘Old Father Christmas’ in *Little Folks* which recast the lord of misrule as a kindly old man. J. H. Ewing, *Snap-Dragons. A Tale of Christmas Eve and Old Father Christmas, An Old-Fashioned Tale of the Young Days of a Grumpy Old Godfather* (London, 1888), pp. 2, 45-68. The process of disseminating ideas of Christmas presents and structures of giving was consolidated by the English publication of Clement Clark Moore’s *A Visit from St. Nicholas (The Night Before Christmas)* in 1891. Pimlott, *Englishman’s Christmas*, p. 115.

<sup>122</sup> Blake, *Memories of Old Poplar*, p. 12; Foakes, *Between High Walls*, p. 57.

<sup>123</sup> Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, pp. 209, 222. Sir John Poynder Dickson-Poynder was MP for Chippenham from 1892-1910, and became the 1st Baron Altrincham in 1945.

<sup>124</sup> W. F. Harvey, *We Were Seven* (London, 1936), pp. 119-20.

performed by both parties.<sup>125</sup> Why did this ritual match a need to obscure the gift relationship between parent and child? Did it comfortably obscure the inequalities of that relationship, in which the final analysis would show that the gift can never be fully reciprocated in this context? Perhaps the answer lies in the reaction of the child. This particular process of gift exchange maximised the spontaneity of sentiment, framed in an idealised form of the child, unlocking the full potential of Christmas intimacy. This was not, however, always the case. Richard Church constructed a very similar narrative to Harvey concerning the anticipation created by the Christmas stocking, and the demonstration of presents in the parents' bed. Yet here the reaction was only 'half-sincere in their occasional displays of interest'. Furthermore, Church's narrative suggests that for this family's children, Christmas had become too structured by the process of receiving presents. Church recollected that

Throughout the morning these gifts and the larger ones given us at breakfast would keep us in a state of delirious ecstasy, an exultation that could only result in a corresponding fall. It came always after tea, and it usually lasted right through Boxing Day, by which time the more fragile of the treasures would be broken, and those left whole would have lost their savour.<sup>126</sup>

For children of the working classes, the gap between the ideal and the reality of Christmas stockings could already be apparent before Christmas. Clare Cameron recalled the bafflement that greeted her desire for a Christmas stocking; her aunt responded by asking her what she would like in her stocking, which prompted the response "I mustn't tell you beforehand! A Christmas stocking is a surprise!" I was nearly weeping. It wasn't very pleasant instructing grown-ups in the art of keeping Christmas'.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> There is some evidence of children internalising this ritual. In 1910 Denys Kennard wrote to his grandfather John Oglander, telling him that 'I had a very happy Christmas. Such a lot of toys and a big stocking from Father Christmas'. IWRO, Oglander collection, OG/CC/2323, Denys Kennard to John H. Oglander, 31 December 1910.

<sup>126</sup> Church, *Over the Bridge*, p. 109.

<sup>127</sup> C. Cameron, *Rustle of Spring*, pp. 51-52.



It is important to consider the gender implications of the emergence of the modern Father Christmas/Santa Claus; a very structured and gender specific role for fathers emerged at a time when masculine unease about the femininity of the home was at its height, though the images of Father Christmas/Santa Claus that were appearing in Edwardian advertisements sent ambiguous signals to contemporaries concerning contemporary perceptions of masculinity.<sup>128</sup> Santa Claus could also be used as a mechanism for overcoming the absence of a father. In December 1909 Auberon Kennard was aboard the S. S. Plassy, and wrote to his son Denys to ‘give you our best love and wishes for a very happy Christmas. I wonder whether Santa Claus will come and put anything in your stocking’.<sup>129</sup> It is also important not to over emphasise the extent to which the Father Christmas/Santa Claus ritual was fully enacted. Contemporary accounts rarely detail the full processes involved in the ritual, and it is likely that in many cases the bulging stocking was a symbolic representation of patriarchal largesse. A further problem centres upon the appearance of Father Christmas/Santa Claus, who actually appears more like an indulgent *grandfather* than a father.<sup>130</sup> There is also evidence that both the enactment and the symbolism of the ritual crossed gender boundaries. Describing his childhood in the 1880s, J. Lionel Taylor remembered that his father ‘enjoyed the “Father Christmas” feeling almost as much as my mother, as they both on tiptoe stole in to fill our stockings’.<sup>131</sup> At Lime Park, the stockings were filled by the female housekeeper, though this also suggests the ritual lost emotional value for being delegated: ‘Her stocking hung at the bed-foot, but it was now little more than a symbol, a traditional rite to be observed, and it was never filled with anything more exciting than nuts, almonds and raisins, sweets and tangerines’.<sup>132</sup>

It is important to highlight that Christmas presents were not only being given from parents to children. Evidence exists from the 1850s showing how horizontal gift relationships were being formed at Christmas. At Hickleton, Emily Wood was receiving

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<sup>128</sup> See chapter five.

<sup>129</sup> IWRO, Oglander collection, OG/CC/22810, Auberon Kennard to Denys Kennard, 13 December 1909.

<sup>130</sup> I am grateful to Ruth Larsen for highlighting this point.

<sup>131</sup> Taylor, *The Story of a Life*, p. 70.

<sup>132</sup> Sandeman, *Treasure on Earth*, p. 99.



gifts from her brothers and sisters,<sup>133</sup> and Horatia Gatty indicated that her sister Juliana Ewing's story 'Madam Liberality', published in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* in December 1873, which emphasised 'Christmas boxes' as 'the chief cares and triumphs of Madam Liberality's childhood', was based upon her nursery days in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>134</sup> Madam Liberality emphasised thriftiness, through 'pinching and plotting, and saving bits of coloured paper and ends of ribbon',<sup>135</sup> and this attitude was also apparent in the Edwardian period. At Lyme Park, Phyllis Sandeman knitted some of the presents she gave, and 'By mutual agreement the cousins never gave each other presents; the state of their finances would not have allowed it'.<sup>136</sup> Despite these elements of thrift and boundary setting, the amount of Christmas gift relationships did increase in the late nineteenth century, in symbiosis with the increased range of goods and shopping opportunities outlined in chapter five. Part of this process was the way in which gift giving habits learnt in childhood became replicated in adulthood, drawing upon and reinforcing the older idea of the gift as an act of remembrance.<sup>137</sup> In 1867, Emily Wood, now married as Emily Meynell-Ingram, gave her mother a prayer book for Christmas. Her mother commented that Emily's personal inscription had made it 'doubly valuable' and that 'every time I use it I shall think of you my darling'.<sup>138</sup> The previous year Henry Wood wanted to invoke the memory of his mother carrying around 'lighted brandy with mince pies' and sent her a small cooking implement.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A7.7, diary of Emily Wood, 1855.

<sup>134</sup> Gatty, *Juliana Horatia Ewing*, pp. 10-11. Horatia Gatty also indicated that Christmas presents could be at the centre of complex family politics in the Gatty household, with a battle of wills between Juliana and an aunt to see who could be the most generous. As Gatty commented, when 'Greek met Greek over Christmas presents, then came the tug of war indeed! The relation's ingenuity in contriving to give away whatever plums were given to her was quite amazing, and she generally managed to baffle the most careful restrictions which were laid upon her; but Julie conquered at last, by yielding - as often happens in this life!' Whilst Horatia Gatty was careful to emphasise that 'Julie had none of the petty tyranny about her which often mars the generosity of otherwise liberal souls', this clearly indicates a contest for moral authority and a rejection of the gift's meaning and capacity to perpetuate intimacy. See pp. 15-16.

<sup>135</sup> Gatty, *Juliana Horatia Ewing*, p. 11.

<sup>136</sup> Sandeman, *Treasure on Earth*, pp. 16, 70.

<sup>137</sup> The fact that middle- and upper- class children in the second half of the nineteenth century were being encouraged to be philanthropic may also be of importance here. See chapter three.

<sup>138</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A2.267, Mary Wood to Emily Meynell-Ingram, 25 December 1867.

<sup>139</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A2.95, Henry John Lindley Wood to Mary Wood, 23 December 1866.



It is not clear whether this generation of Woods were giving Christmas presents to their parents<sup>140</sup> as children, or if they only began to reciprocate as adults on their own terms. There is evidence to suggest that children were reciprocating gifts with their parents, including their fathers, by the 1870s. In Molly Hughes's middle-class London home, the children each gave their father a book for Christmas in 1878. Her father was one example of a middle-class father at ease with domesticity and reciprocity; Molly recalled: 'There he sat, gazing at the pile of five books - too pleased to speak, too pleased to touch them'.<sup>141</sup> Evidence of this is harder to find amongst the working classes, almost certainly due to lack of resources, though the tendency towards make-do strategies should not be overlooked. Clare Cameron recalled bursting into her mother's bedroom with a fancy handkerchief wrapped in tissue paper, uttering a breathless 'Merry Christmas Mamma' before her mother could chide her about catching cold. She also gave to her father, summoning him into her room as he walked past, and hastily presenting him with a 'small brown-paper package' with the comment 'For you, Not much, though!' Clare Cameron noted that she felt 'embarrassed with giving', indicating that the emotions created both reciprocally with her father and the knowledge that she could not fully participate in the kind of Christmas she had learnt about from commercial and discursive contexts. She also noted that the family received a Christmas parcel from an uncle and aunt living in the country, which contained a tie for her father, a lace collar for her mother and work-basket for herself.<sup>142</sup> There is a continuity here with the gifts of food that had been made since the eighteenth century, since these were often aligned in a rural-urban fashion.

The expanding Christmas shopping culture I explore in chapter five clearly shows that by the Edwardian period, Christmas gift relationships had expanded in vertical, horizontal, diagonal, and extra-familial terms. However, a complex social and emotional nexus had arisen around the gift relationship that had to be negotiated. In

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<sup>140</sup> Or more specifically their mother; there is no record of gifts being given to their father. This perhaps reinforces the notion that the father could not ultimately be reciprocated, being the material provider.

<sup>141</sup> Hughes, *London Family*, p. 140.

<sup>142</sup> Cameron, *Rustle of Spring*, p. 60.



1910 E. M. Forster captured this in *Howard's End*, when Mrs Wilcox solicits the help of Margaret Schlegel for a Christmas shopping expedition. When Mrs Wilcox suggests that Margaret's name be placed on top of the list, Forster exposed Margaret's inward thoughts: 'she did not want to receive anything expensive. Their acquaintance was singular rather than intimate, and she divined that the Wilcox clan would resent any expenditure on outsiders; the more compact families do'.<sup>143</sup>

### Decorating and Domestic Space

The rituals surrounding Father Christmas/Santa Claus were not the only element of Christmas to structure the giving of Christmas presents in the second half of the nineteenth century. Recalling her childhood in the 1850s, Horatia Gatty (b. 1846) often referred to 'Christmas-tree gifts' and 'Christmas-tree presents'.<sup>144</sup> The Christmas tree was not technically introduced to England by Prince Albert. Other Germans resident in England before Albert had brought this ritual with them.<sup>145</sup> A Christmas tree was arranged by a German resident in the household of Queen Caroline in 1820, though this is not evidence, as Peter Brown has inferred, to suggest any widespread dissemination of Christmas trees at this time.<sup>146</sup> What can be said is that the Christmas tree had become

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<sup>143</sup> E. M. Forster, *Howard's End* (London, 1995), pp. 106-8. Forster described Mrs Wilcox as 'one of the unsatisfactory people ... who dangle intimacy and then withdraw it'. In this period Barry Pain saw the comic potential of Christmas gift etiquette. The title character of *Eliza's Son* (1913) kept a 'Christmas Present Account' in which he evaluated the cash value of the gifts he received to make sure he is not in debit. One of the ways in which this was manifested was buying his parents a joint rather than an individual present. His parent's discovery of the account leads to Eliza's son being 'treated as a kind of leper'. B. Pain, *The Eliza Stories* (London, 1992), pp. 264-67.

<sup>144</sup> Gatty, *Juliana Horatia Ewing*, p. 11.

<sup>145</sup> Nissenbaum has suggested that Christmas trees were not a widespread custom in Germany before the last third of the eighteenth century. It had developed in Strasbourg by the beginning of the seventeenth century, and remained a largely localised custom until 1750, when it began spreading to other parts of Germany. Nissenbaum partly attributes this to Goethe, who included a Christmas tree scene in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in 1774. For Goethe, and for many Germans, the Christmas tree became associated with a growing awareness of German identity, and was disseminated 'as a fashionable new ritual that was perceived...as an ancient and authentic folk tradition'. It was only adopted by the Berlin elite in the 1810s. See Nissenbaum, *Battle for Christmas*, pp. 196-97.

<sup>146</sup> P. Brown, *The Keeping of Christmas 1760-1840* (York, 1999), p. 15. There is also evidence of a Christmas tree being suggested, but not carried out, in 1789. Charlotte Papendiek, assistant keeper of the wardrobe and reader to Queen Charlotte recalled 'This Christmas Mr. Papendiek proposed an illuminated tree, according to the German fashion, but ... I objected to it. Our eldest girl, Charlotte, being only six the 30th of this November, I thought our children too young to be amused at so much expense and trouble'.



well known amongst the upper echelons of society by the 1840s. In January 1843, the actress Fanny Kemble, who moved in high social circles, recorded that ‘on Wednesday the children are to have a party of their little friends, and I am making a Christmas-tree for them’.<sup>147</sup> At Hickleton, Mary Wood first recorded having a Christmas tree in 1845, and Emily’s desire for one two years later indicates the impact that it had.<sup>148</sup> What Prince Albert did was to consolidate an already growing trend by allowing the *Illustrated London News* to print lithographs of the Christmas tree at Windsor Castle in 1848. Whilst this undoubtedly played an important role in the popularisation of Christmas trees, their dissemination could also take place in a more immediate way. In 1851 Margaret Gatty noted in her diary how she ‘got up a nicish [sic] little Xmas tree’ after having witnessed one at Lord Effingham’s house.<sup>149</sup> This is testament to the emotional and psychological impact that the Christmas tree could have, it placed spectacle at the heart of Christmas intimacy. It is important to remember though, that the Christmas tree could not be a permanent centrepiece of the domestic Christmas as it is today. Until the widespread availability of electricity,<sup>150</sup> Christmas trees were illuminated by candles, a factor which made the provision of Christmas trees a risky undertaking, and there were several occurrences of fires. What this did was to make the lighting of the Christmas tree a temporally fixed event; contemporary diaries would often note that the Christmas tree was ‘lighted up for the children’ at a particular time: this added to the feeling of a special occasion, and allowed parents the opportunity to structure children’s time more effectively. For Nissenbaum, the Christmas tree allowed parents ‘to keep virtually total control of the gift exchange’, and render ‘children completely passive participants in the process’.<sup>151</sup> However, whilst evidence in chapter

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See the ‘Memoir of Charlotte Louise Henrietta Albert Papendiek’ in Mrs. V. Delves Broughton (ed.), *Court and Private Life in the Time of Queen Charlotte: Being the Journals of Mrs. Papendiek, Assistant Keeper of the Wardrobe and Reader to Her Majesty* (London, 1887), vol. 2, p. 158. This could be considered an indicator of the way attitudes to children changed between the 1780s and the 1840s.

<sup>147</sup> Kemble, *Records of Late Life*, vol. 1, p. 369.

<sup>148</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A7.4A, diary of Mary Wood, 1845; A2.85, Emily Wood to Mary Wood, 22 December 1847.

<sup>149</sup> SA, Hunter Archaeological Society Records, HAS 40.7, diary of Margaret Gatty, 1851.

<sup>150</sup> Christmas trees with electric were being advertised in terms of ‘all danger of fire averted’ in 1887. See Pimlott, *Englishman’s Christmas*, p. 131.

<sup>151</sup> Nissenbaum, *Battle for Christmas*, pp. 213-14.

four indicates that Christmas trees could be used as a tool to instil discipline in educational contexts, little evidence exists to support the idea of English parents so consciously using Christmas trees as a form of control in this way. Indeed, it is quite difficult to estimate the extent to which Christmas trees appeared in private households in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Weightman and Humphries suggest that by 'the mid 1850s the Christmas tree had firmly established itself as a middle-class Christmas convention',<sup>152</sup> though it is important to recognise the majority of examples were to be found in civic, educational, philanthropic and religious settings. In upper-class households, the purpose of the Christmas tree would often overlap as a domestic and a dynastic occasion, which could also include a philanthropic element. At Hickleton, children from the local village would be invited to view the tree, and later in the nineteenth century the children of miners of the nearby village of Goldthorpe were accommodated.<sup>153</sup> Historians of Christmas have worked on the assumption that most working-families in this period would not have been able to afford a Christmas tree.<sup>154</sup> There is no doubt a lot of truth in this, though exceptions can be found; Clifford Hills recalled that 'We always had a Christmas tree for Christmas'.<sup>155</sup>

Christmas trees need to be set in the wider context of Christmas decorations. Households had been decorated with natural and evergreen material since at the least the fifteenth century.<sup>156</sup> Between the 1780s and the 1800s, the Reverend James Woodeforde recorded the decorating of his parlour windows and kitchen with hulver-boughs and red berries.<sup>157</sup> The use of such materials continued throughout the nineteenth century, becoming increasingly elaborate, and connected to feminine

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<sup>152</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 107.

<sup>153</sup> BL, Hickleton Papers, A7.4A, diary of Mary Wood, 1845; A2.221, Edward Wood to Agnes Wood, 9th December 1894.

<sup>154</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 133. Weightman and Humphries suggest that it was not until the 1950s that the majority of working-class households could afford a Christmas tree, see *Christmas Past*, p. 121. It is possible, however, that working-class households used synthetic trees that were cheaper and could be recycled second-hand.

<sup>155</sup> Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, p. 50.

<sup>156</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>157</sup> J. Woodeforde, *The Diary of a Country Parson 1758-1802* (Oxford and New York, 1978), pp. 341, 539, 599.



fashions of home decorating, as well as the decoration of civic and religious buildings, particularly church interiors.<sup>158</sup> Artificial materials gradually became interspersed with natural materials, and in the last quarter of the nineteenth century commercially produced paper decorations became available.<sup>159</sup> It is clear that by 1914, even though working-class households may have been financially restricted in their ability to decorate at Christmas, many of them had developed 'make do' strategies to overcome this. In rural areas, evergreens could be gathered from woods and hedgerows,<sup>160</sup> whilst in Edwardian London Clare Cameron recalled that 'I was hurried out to the kitchen, festive with coloured-paper chains that Jack had strung across the ceiling, and my attention drawn to the "Merry Christmas" in frosted cotton-wool that adhered to the mirror'.<sup>161</sup> Another family in Edwardian London, the Harrisons, lighted up their back yard with fairy lights made by placing farthing candles in glass jars, whilst Rose Ashton, growing up in turn of the century Barrow, remembered her father writing Christmas mottoes in chalk around the hearth.<sup>162</sup>

What increasingly elaborate Christmas decorations did was to frame a space in which the intimacy of Christmas could flourish. It reflected a spatial transformation of the domestic interior which created the potential for heightened emotion by presenting space which was simultaneously familiar yet different. These transformations might also be manifested in others ways, such as the removal of furniture to facilitate children's play,<sup>163</sup> or the utilisation of domestic space not normally used.<sup>164</sup> For Charles Lindley Wood's children at Hickleton, Christmas meant access to their father's private chambers where he would read adventure and ghost stories to them, and the Christmas

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<sup>158</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>159</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 120; see also chapter five.

<sup>160</sup> Weightman and Humphries have suggested that this was a continuation of localised customs dating back to pagan times; *Christmas Past*, pp. 112-16.

<sup>161</sup> Cameron, *Rustle of Spring*, p. 63.

<sup>162</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 116.

<sup>163</sup> At Hickleton, Charles Lindley Wood had furniture removed in order to create 'great romps' with the children. BI, Hickleton Papers, A7.5, diary of Charles Lindley Wood, 1911.

<sup>164</sup> Phyllis Sandeman's memoir of a Edwardian childhood Christmas at Lyme Park revealed the excitement caused by the use of such areas, but Christmas could also signal a temporary prohibition on visiting certain areas. Sandeman recalled how she would be forbidden to visit the billiard table, which was the resting place of the Christmas presents before Christmas Day. Sandeman, *Treasure on Earth*, pp. 55, 79-80.

dinner would be a liberation from meals taken in the nursery.<sup>165</sup> The importance of domestic space to Christmas intimacy can best be demonstrated by the way it structured people's nostalgia for their own childhood Christmases. One of Daniel Price's female relatives wrote to him in December 1847, noting how during the Christmas season her thoughts often turned to 'Hendon's hospitable hearth' where as children they would be united for the Christmas holidays.<sup>166</sup> Francis Lindley Wood, who was staying at the Royal Navy college in Portsmouth during Christmas 1860, wrote to his mother musing 'would it not be nice if by some magic we were all conveyed to Hickleton if it was only for that day'.<sup>167</sup> In 1903, Charles Lindley Wood's daughter, Mary Agnes, who married George Lane Fox and had to spend Christmas Day with his family, wrote to her mother: 'You cannot think how I long to be at home with you and papa and to be running down the back stairs to your room to wish you a really happy Christmas'.<sup>168</sup> Whilst Juliana Ewing was resident in Canada in the late 1860s, the emotional effect of her husband playing 'Christians Awake' was, as she wrote to her mother, that she was 'not entirely in Canada'.<sup>169</sup>

It is important to question the extent to which this framing of Christmas intimacy was linked to a growing sense of privacy.<sup>170</sup> An element of this can be allowed. In the late eighteenth century, James Woodeforde had members of the elderly parish poor to dine at his rectory on Christmas Day.<sup>171</sup> By the mid nineteenth century, these sorts of arrangements were no longer being made in this way, and can perhaps be located in the

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<sup>165</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A7.5, diary of Charles Lindley Wood, 1885; Halifax, *Fulness of Days*, p. 30.

<sup>166</sup> Shropshire Archives, Marrington Collection, 631/3/1684, letters written by Daniel Price to family members, 10 December 1847.

<sup>167</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A2.89, Francis Lindley Wood to Mary Wood, 23 December 1860.

<sup>168</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A2.125, Mary Agnes Emily Lane Fox to Agnes Wood, 24 December 1903.

<sup>169</sup> SA, Hunter Archaeological Society Records, HAS 60.179, Juliana Horatia Ewing to Margaret Gatty, 27 December 1868.

<sup>170</sup> For intimacy as an issue of privacy, see Davidoff and others, *Family Story*, pp. 4-5; K. Chase and M. Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy. A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton and Oxford, 2000); P. Gay, *Schnitzler's Century. The Making of Middle-Class Culture 1815-1914* (New York and London, 2002), chapter 9; J. C. Inness, *Privacy, Intimacy, and Isolation* (New York, 1992); and P. Boling, *Privacy and the Politics of Intimate Life* (Cornell, 1996).

<sup>171</sup> Woodeforde, *Diary of a Country Parson*, pp. 28, 70, 128, 193, 218, 240, 429, 450, 478, 515, 539, 599.



wider long-term context of declining hospitality.<sup>172</sup> Where acts of philanthropy provided by a household continued, ways of mediating contact were found. At Hickleton, the Christmas tree, to which the local village children were invited, was often located in a position where it did not impinge too far on the Christmas intimacy of the household. The Hickleton Christmas tree was variously held in the village schoolroom, the carpenter's shed, and the front hall of the country house itself.<sup>173</sup> It is, however, important not to over emphasise the importance of privacy in the nexus of Christmas intimacy. Chapters three and five show how aspects of entertainment and material culture made Christmas intimacy transcend the barriers of public and private in the nineteenth century, and it needs to be remembered that many interiors (as well as exteriors) were decorated away from the domestic sphere. Furthermore, many familial narratives of Christmas experience were set away from the domestic interior itself. In the Hickleton papers, it becomes clear that walking, hunting, shooting and skating were an important part of the family Christmas.<sup>174</sup> At the same time, it is possible that the Christmas intimacy framed within the domestic interior could be conveyed outdoors, and exposed in situations of unmediated class interaction. Whilst the Wood family were staying at Temple Newsam<sup>175</sup> during Christmas 1886, Mary Agnes Wood (b. 1877) reported to her brother Francis that 'Yesterday when I went on the ice I was nearly knocked over by a crowd of rough-looking men and every one of them came from Leeds'.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> The problems caused by customary rights in the first half of the nineteenth century may have also contributed to this. See chapter three.

<sup>173</sup> F. W. Cornish (ed.), *Extracts from the Letters and Journals of William Cory* (Oxford, 1897), pp. 108-109. BI, Hickleton Papers, A7.5, diary of Charles Lindley Wood, 1893; A7.4A, diary of Mary Wood, 1876.

<sup>174</sup> Of this list of activities, women were excluded only from shooting.

<sup>175</sup> Owned at this time by Emily Meynell-Ingram.

<sup>176</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A2.275, Mary Agnes Emily Wood to Francis Hugh Lindley Wood, 28 December 1886.

## Christmas Theatricals and Music

Another way in which domestic space became transformed at Christmas was through the performance of theatricals. Christmas theatricals have a long history. Studying private theatricals across the period 1700 to 1820, Sybil Rosenfeld highlighted the popularity of performances at Christmas house parties, and though she was mainly concerned with the aristocracy and landed gentry who built permanent stages, she did also note the existence of 'the family party performance on an intimate scale, often for children'. Rosenfeld believed that the 'golden age' of private theatricals was between 1770 and 1810,<sup>177</sup> and evidence emerges during the Christmases of this period. In the autumn of 1787, Jane Austen's aunt, Eliza Comtesse de Feuillide, was planning a play at Steventon for Christmas. Her cousin, Philadelphia Walters, reported that 'My Uncle's barn is fitted up quite like a theatre and all the young folks are to take part'.<sup>178</sup> This emphasis on the 'young folk' is very important; theatricals were another process which centred children within the domestic celebration of Christmas, linked to the desire to see children perform noted above. Linked to theatricals were the Twelfth Night parties which included similar elements of dressing up and performance. In 1812, Fanny Knight described one such event at Godmersham Park:

W Morris was King, I was Queen, Papa - Prince Busty Trusty, Mama - Red Riding Hood, Edward - Paddy O'Flaherty, G. - Johnny Bo-peep, H. - Timothy Trip, W. - Moses Abrahams, Eliz. - Mrs O'Flaherty, Ma. - Granny Grump, C [?] - Cupid (by his own desire), Louisa - Princess Busty Trusty, Uncle H. B. - Punch, Aunt H. B. - Poll Mendicant, Jane - Punch's Wife, Mary - Columbine, Uncle John - Jerry the Milkman, Mrs Morris - Sukey Sweetlips, Sophia - Margery Muttonpie.<sup>179</sup>

Although Twelfth Night declined as a popular event, theatricals and dressing up at Christmas remained popular amongst landed society throughout the nineteenth century.

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<sup>177</sup> S. Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis. Some Private Theatres and Theatricals in England and Wales, 1700-1820* (London, 1978), chapter 1.

<sup>178</sup> Hubert, *Jane Austen's Christmas*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>179</sup> Fanny Knight to Dorothy Chapman, February 1812, cited in Hubert, *Jane Austen's Christmas*, p. 82.



A very similar scene is recorded in the diary of Charles Lindley Wood in December 1887:

Busy most of the day with the preparations for waxworks and some tableaux - which turned out a great success.

Little Emily Corry as Red Riding Hood, and Edward and Fra as the Princes in the Tower were quite delightful. Mary looked very pretty as Lady Jane Grey.

Agnes and Henry Corry quite excellent as Mr and Mrs Jarley. Arthur Knox Little very good as the robber with Queen Margaret after the battle of Hexham. Francis and Mary very amusing as Jack Sprat and his wife.<sup>180</sup>

Both these accounts seem to be describing an intimate gathering of family and friends, but by the Edwardian period, theatricals could be used to represent the country house as an institution. At Lyme Park, there would be three performances of the Christmas theatricals, the first a dress rehearsal, the second a charitable occasion to which 'the elite of the county and magnates from the industrial town came with their families', and the final performance for the 'tenants, work-people, and villagers'.<sup>181</sup> These three performances suggest that the family was aiming to foster both their own Christmas intimacy and their symbolic ties to the wider 'community'; it was also simultaneously harking back to the grand tradition described by Rosenfeld, and following a more recent tradition of institutions using Christmas theatricals (see below).

Whilst there was a continuity of Christmas theatricals amongst landed society, their integration amongst the middle classes was more problematic. The theatricals planned at Steventon in 1787 highlight this. Eliza Comtesse de Feuillide met resistance in her attempt to get Philadelphia Walters to participate in the theatricals. Philadelphia wrote to Eliza, complaining that she felt it wrong to 'appear in public with male actors in sexual embraces'.<sup>182</sup> Jane Austen herself set out in *Mansfield Park* certain rules that should be followed for the performance of private theatricals: they were primarily a

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<sup>180</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A7.5, diary of Charles Lindley Wood, 1887.

<sup>181</sup> Sandeman, *Treasure on Earth*, p. 58.

<sup>182</sup> Hubert, *Jane Austen's Christmas*, pp. 9-13. Philadelphia Walters was renowned as being prudish, a trait she apparently inherited from her mother, who refused permission for Philadelphia to spend Christmas at Steventon on several occasions.

form of amusement for children; the material being performed must be deemed suitable; the activity must have the knowledge and blessing of the paterfamilias; and most fundamentally of all, the theatricals must remain private.<sup>183</sup> It is likely, however, that following such conventions would have not made theatricals acceptable for the middle-classes in the early nineteenth century. The evangelical position was set out in 1809 by Hannah More, in her novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*. Concerned by Pheobe Stanley's reference to 'in-door festivities and diversions', Coelebs pondered:

I longed to know what those Christmas diversions, so slightly hinted at, could be; diversions which could reconcile these girls to their absence not only from their green-house, but from London. I could hardly fear indeed to find at Stanley Grove what the newspapers pertly call Private Theatricals. Still I suspected it might be some gay dissipation, not quite suited to their general character, nor congenial to their usual amusements.<sup>184</sup>

As Deborah Vlock comments, 'bourgeois culture was deeply ambivalent about performance, assuming play to be connected more or less directly to the streets'. According to Vlock, 'that connection was embodied in the costermonger, the strolling actor, [and] the prostitutes who staked out theatres and music halls'.<sup>185</sup> Yet, by 1870, the professional theatre had shaken off an 'aura of tabooed disrepute and began to win respectability',<sup>186</sup> a factor which seemed to influence their performance in the middle-class home as well. Christmas theatricals were performed by children in the Gatty household in the 1850s,<sup>187</sup> and from the 1870s in the Benson and Hughes households.<sup>188</sup> The process of disseminating theatricals amongst the middle classes, and

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<sup>183</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London, 1996), chapters 13-19. As Alan Ackerman has commented, 'theatre is posed as a direct threat to a particularised notion of domestic space'. See A. L. Ackerman, 'Theatre and the Private Sphere in the Fiction of Louisa May Alcott', in I. Bryden and J. Floyd (eds), *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior* (Manchester and New York, 1999), p. 164.

<sup>184</sup> H. More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (London, 1809), vol. 2, pp. 111-16. These festivities were in fact philanthropically inclined, earning Coelebs's approval.

<sup>185</sup> D. Vlock, *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 56.

<sup>186</sup> N. Auerbach, *Private Theatricals. The Lives of the Victorians* (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1990), p. 13.

<sup>187</sup> Gatty, *Juliana Horatia Ewing*, p. 27.

<sup>188</sup> Benson, *Our Family Affairs*, pp. 261-62; Hughes, *London Family*, p. 27-28.



particularly middle-class children, was probably aided by the transatlantic success of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, first published in 1868. A number of advice books for amateur actors also appeared in the 1870s and 1880s, including J. Barmby's *Plays for Young People*, published in 1879. In the preface, Barmby noted that his plays had been written 'for the entertainment of the writer's own children and their friends at Christmas', commenting that 'Juvenile theatricals are now in vogue; but one often hears the question asked, "where can we get plays for the purpose, neither stupidly moral, nor in other respects unsuitable for youngsters?"'<sup>189</sup> If Barmby was concerned to tread a fine line between morality and immorality, J. Shirley Hodson's *Private Theatricals*, published in 1881, was still aware of theatricals' 'unenviable notoriety for offending against morality', and Hodson's advice had echoes of Austen's portrayal in *Mansfield Park*.

Nothing can be alleged against the practice of private representations of dramatic works in the home, and before an audience composed of members of the family circle and the friends of the house; supposing, of course, the plays to be judiciously chosen. Here the home virtues stand in no danger of being compromised, but on the contrary, a kindly spirit of painstaking and intelligent emulation is engendered. Indeed, no better or more fascinating means of intellectual training could be suggested for the younger members of a household ...<sup>190</sup>

However, as chapter three shows, children were increasingly being expected to perform publicly at Christmas, and the gap between public and private was perhaps in part breached by publications such as C. H. Fox's *The Art of Making-Up for Public and Private Theatricals*, which was simultaneously an advice book and a catalogue, offering wigs, costumes and make-up,<sup>191</sup> and many other purveyors of this kind of ware were advertising in the anonymously published *Male Character Costumes for Fancy Dress Balls and Private Theatricals*.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> J. Barmby, *Plays for Young People, with Songs and Choruses, Suitable for Private Theatricals* (London and Durham, 1879), p. v.

<sup>190</sup> J. S. Hodson, *Private Theatricals. Being Practical Guide for the Home Stage. By an old Stager* (London, 1881), pp. iii, 14-15.

<sup>191</sup> C. H. Fox, *The Art of Making-Up for Public and Private Theatricals. Advice for Amateurs etc* (London, 1890).

<sup>192</sup> *Male Character Costumes for Fancy Dress Balls and Private Theatricals* (London, 1884).



By the late nineteenth century, private theatricals had gained widespread cultural currency amongst the middle and upper classes of England, and the associations with Christmas and childhood had grown even stronger. Theatricals were another factor in the centring of children within the familial Christmas, and in turn became part of the process of heightening the intimacy of Christmas. Why should this be the case? In part, the bourgeois objection to performance seemed to raise questions concerning sincerity and self-consciousness. In her analysis of nineteenth-century America, Karen Halttunen views the vogue for private theatricals in the 1850s and 1860s as part of the increasing self-consciousness of middle-class social relationships.<sup>193</sup> For Nina Auerbach, private theatricals serve as a metaphor for how individuals could undergo unsettling transformations which were a 'threat to the integrity of sincerity'. Auerbach also highlights how Christmas could be located as a prime occasion for transformations, particularly with its associations with ghosts and pantomime,<sup>194</sup> and decorations could also be added to this list (see above). Given the growing emotional appeal of Christmas in the nineteenth century, it may be that Christmas became the centre of a process in which self-consciousness increased and concerns about sincerity receded. It may also have been the case that as Christmas became a more gendered performance, with its intimacy masking structures of power and inequality, then the processes of actual performance may have thrown the realities of Christmas into sharp relief. However, some doubts may have remained, and these doubts made theatricals more appropriate for children of a certain age. Describing herself in the third person, Phyllis Sandeman described her anxieties concerning theatrical performance during Christmas at Lyme Park in 1906:

Phyllis did not always enjoy her rehearsals. She had no difficulty in memorising her part; what was so difficult was the playing of it. She sometimes wondered why success had seemed to come so easily, almost effortlessly, a year or two ago - no one had yet enlightened her and she was too young to find the answer herself. The answer, of course, was to be found in that all too common failing - that terrible self-consciousness

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<sup>193</sup> K. Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America 1830-1870* (New Haven, 1982), p. 153; Ackerman, 'Theatre and the Private Sphere', p. 162.

<sup>194</sup> Auerbach, *Private Theatricals*, pp. 14-15, 102-3, 114.



growing with the years which must inevitably be destructive of all natural grace. A little older, the player might acquire enough artifice to conceal it - a little younger, there was nothing left to conceal.<sup>195</sup>

Elements of theatricality and performance also pervaded other forms of Christmas activity in the domestic interior. Part of this centred upon the many games that were played. Examples of this included hunt the slipper, which was played at Godmersham Park in 1808,<sup>196</sup> and many card games, including pounce commerce, which was a favourite at Hickleton in the late nineteenth century.<sup>197</sup> Others forms of theatricality may have stemmed from a literary influence on the imagination, particularly considering the importance of book consumption at Christmas.<sup>198</sup> At Hickleton, Edward Wood recalled how his father, Charles Lindley Wood, might bring to life the book that was being read to the children over Christmas: 'But sometimes there would be a sudden and terrifying diversion - my father coming in, hobbling with a stick and dressed up as a witch, and the word passing round that this was indeed Gagool from *King Solomon's Mines*, which was being read aloud to us at the time'. On another occasion, Charles arranged an elaborate ruse, whereby the gardeners pretended to be gypsies out to kidnap a 'fat little boy'.<sup>199</sup>

Another performative element of the familial Christmas was music. The seasonal balls of the aristocracy and gentry would have had musical accompaniments, and in some areas people may have had their early Christmas mornings punctuated by the waits, though this tradition was in decline.<sup>200</sup> But the music that contributed most to the intimacy of Christmas was that made by the protagonists of the Christmas circle itself.

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<sup>195</sup> Sandeman, *Treasure on Earth*, p. 56.

<sup>196</sup> Fanny Knight to Dorothy Chapman, 25 December 1808, cited in Hubert, *Jane Austen's Christmas*, p. 64.

<sup>197</sup> Halifax, *Fulness of Days*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>198</sup> See chapter five. Katherine Chorley (b. 1897) recalled that 'the life I then lived seemed glorious enough to me as I sat in my chair in a corner and browsed through my Christmas books'. K. Chorley, *Manchester Made Them* (London, 1970), p. 31.

<sup>199</sup> Halifax, *Fulness of Days*, p. 32. In her memoir of an Edwardian childhood Christmas, Mary Clive noted that 'we were all frightened of gypsies. We had read books about children who were stolen by gypsies for their clothes, and the Savages' nurse once knew a little girl, I think her own sister, who was stolen by gypsies and found in a quarry with nothing on but her chemise'. See M. Clive, *Christmas with the Savages* (London, 1964), p. 99. I am grateful to Anna Davin for drawing my attention to this source.

<sup>200</sup> See chapter three.

On Christmas Day 1808, Fanny Knight recorded the children singing Christmas carols at Godmersham Park, and on Twelfth Night in 1812 ‘sometimes Mama sometimes myself acting as musicians’.<sup>201</sup> In the Victorian period, the piano played an increasingly important role, and Richard Graves has shown how important the market for Christmas sheet music became.<sup>202</sup> Despite competition from the gramophone, the piano still played an important role in the Edwardian period. Florence Atherton (b. 1898), whose family occupied a complex social position in between the middle and working classes, remembered that ‘Father used to play the piano and play the accordion and we used to be singing quite happy’.<sup>203</sup> Harriet Vincent, whose family was also on the class borderline, recalled that one sister would play the piano at Christmas, though they did also have a ‘battered old gramophone’.<sup>204</sup> It is important to remember, however, that not all the music being performed was of an intrinsic Christmas nature. A large proportion of the Christmas section of Clare Cameron’s memoir featured the family gathered round the piano, but the songs her father sang on Christmas night had been cut out of the *News of the World*, including ‘We Close at Two on Thursday’, ‘Captain Ginger’ and ‘It’s a Different Girl Again’. Forms of music associated with Christmas were not always welcome. Though Cameron remembered humming ‘King Wenceslas’ as she washed tumblers in the scullery, the sound of carol singers in the porch singing ‘While Shepherds Watched’ at ‘breakneck speed’ were less welcome, which her Uncle described as ‘the cats again’, whilst her mother commented that ‘Can’t they give us a rest now? We’ve had ‘em now nearly every evening for a fortnight’.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Fanny Knight to Dorothy Chapman, 25 December 1808, and February 1812, cited in Hubert, *Jane Austen’s Christmas*, pp. 64, 82.

<sup>202</sup> R. Graves (ed.), *A Victorian Christmas Song Book* (London, 1980). See also D. B. Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour* (Aldershot, 2001); and Martin, ‘Children and Religion’, pp. 250-51. Martin indicates that for Evangelical families, Christmas was a time in which sung hymns were first introduced to family life, whereas they had previously only been read.

<sup>203</sup> Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, pp. 103-4, 111.

<sup>204</sup> Thompson, *The Edwardians*, p. 99.

<sup>205</sup> Cameron, *Rustle of Spring*, pp. 56-57, 61.



## Domestic Service

My account of the evolution of the domestic celebration of Christmas has so far largely obscured an importance presence in middle- and upper-class households: that of servants.<sup>206</sup> Servants were important because they carried out much of the physical work of Christmas in the home.<sup>207</sup> The reliance on servants is demonstrated by a letter written by Geraldine Jewsbury to Jane Carlyle, describing Christmas in 1841:

Listen! When, I got home from Leeds I found my servant ill, and I had to find a substitute in an instant! Well, this unlucky substitute left me at a minute's notice on Christmas Day, and there was I, left with a servant ill in bed and eight people to provide a dinner for, [and] nothing but myself to stand between them and starvation!<sup>208</sup>

Like children, servants' voices were rarely recorded, though some records do survive. One of the most vivid accounts of a servant's life in the nineteenth century is the diary

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<sup>206</sup> For the history of domestic service in this period, see L. Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (New York, 1995), chapters 1 and 4; Davidoff and others, *Family Story*, chapter 6; F. Dawes, *Not in Front of the Servants: Domestic Service in England, 1850-1939* (London, 1973); M. Ebery and B. Preston, *Domestic Service in Late Victorian and Edwardian England, 1871-1914* (Reading, 1976); J. Franklin, 'Troops of Servants: Labour and Planning in the Country House 1840-1914', *Victorian Studies*, 19 (1975), 211-39; E. M. Garret, 'The Dawning of a New Era? Women's Work in England and Wales at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 28: 56 (1995), 421-64; J. A. Gerrard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815-1914* (Oxford, 1994); and 'Invisible Servants: the Country House and the Local Community', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 57 (1984), 178-88; E. Higgs, 'Domestic Service and Household Production' in A. V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800-1918* (Oxford, 1986); B. Hill, *Servants: English Domesticity in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1996); and *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1989); P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Dublin and New York, 1975); F. E. Huggett, *Life Below Stairs: Domestic Servants in England from Victorian Times* (London, 1977); T. Lummis and J. Marsh, *The Woman's Domain. Women and the English Country House* (London, 1990); T. M. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: the Modernisation of Household Service in England and France 1820-1920* (London, 1976); T. Meldrum, 'Domestic Service, Privacy and the 18th Century Metropolitan Household', *Urban History*, 26 (1999), 27-39; F. K. Prochaska, 'Female Philanthropy and Domestic Service in Victorian England', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 54 (1981), 79-85; E. Roberts, *Women's Work, 1840-1940* (Basingstoke, 1988); R. Saptari, 'Rethinking Domestic Service', *International Review of Social History*, 44 (1999), 77-85; L. Stanley (ed.), *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian Maidservant* (London, 1984); and C. Steedman, 'Service and Servitude in the World of Labor: Servants in England, 1750-1820', in C. Jones and D. Wahrman (eds), *The Age of Cultural Revolutions: Britain and France, 1750-1820* (Berkeley, 2002).

<sup>207</sup> Servant's tasks were heavily gendered and may have served to reinforce gender distinctions at Christmas.

<sup>208</sup> A. E. Ireland (ed.), *Selections from the Letters of Geraldine Endor Jewsbury to Jane Welsh Carlyle* (London, 1892), p. 46.



kept by Hannah Cullwick (1833-1909). In 1863 Hannah was in service of the family of Mr Foster, a beer merchant in Kilburn. Her preparations for the Foster Christmas began on 23 December. She got up early that morning to light the kitchen fire so that it would be ready to roast a turkey and eight fowls on Christmas Eve when the Fosters were having forty guests for the performance of a play. Rehearsals for the play that evening meant that the 'Missis has order'd a hot supper for 15 people'. Hannah was very busy all day with cleaning, and 'keeping the fire well up & minding the things what was roasting & basting 'em till I was nearly sick wi' the heat & smell'. The supper was served at a quarter to ten, and Hannah was able to witness some of the acting. After having and clearing away her own supper, she was involved in more preparation of the ham and pudding, attended to the fire and went to bed around midnight. At four in the morning on Christmas Eve, she was woken by the waits, and put more coals on the fire. After six the process of cleaning and lighting fires began again. She put the 'beef down to roast' and made the custard and mince pies. Later she witnessed the acting again, and was also able to listen to the four 'singers the Master got in for the night'. Her diary entry for the day ends with her noting the fun the family had with a 'hot mince pie up wi' a ring & sixpence in it', which led Hannah to comment that 'We had no fun downstairs, all was very busy till 4 o'clock & then to bed'. On Christmas Day, Hannah woke at eight, and began another round of fire lighting, food preparation and cleaning. She received some respite later in the day as the Foster family went out, and she was able to go and visit her sister Ellen, 'but I'd such a headache & felt so tired & sleepy [so] I sat in a chair & slept till five'. The following day she commented 'I felt glad the Christmas was over so far for if it kept on long as it's bin the last 3 or 4 days I should be knock'd up I think'.<sup>209</sup> In 1871 Hannah was in service with the Henderson family, and her Christmas Day 'was spent very quiet'. The Henderson family went to church in the morning, and she was instructed by the Mistress of the house to go out in the afternoon, and so was able to visit her sister for tea, but had to leave at half past seven, because the ladies of the

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<sup>209</sup> Stanley, *Diaries of Hannah Cullwick*, pp. 112, 143-45. Whilst it should be noted that these diaries were initially framed by Arthur Munby's desire to be kept in touch with Hannah's daily drudgery, she eventually began to write them for herself for many purposes, and they can be read as an accurate description of her domestic labour and emotional feelings. See Stanley, pp. 8-9. See also Davidoff, *World's Between*, chapter 4; and Hudson, *Munby, Man of two Worlds*.



Henderson household had gone out to dinner and were uncertain about their time of return. Hannah commented 'I felt dull & disappointed on the whole, spending the day neither here nor there'.<sup>210</sup>

In the aristocratic house, Christmas could be a very large-scale operation. At Hickleton, Edward Wood recalled from his late-Victorian childhood how he and his siblings were allowed to go down to the kitchen and watch the maids roast the joints of meat over a huge open fire and ladling gravy over them. For the dinner, gardeners would prepare the table with flowers, and around twenty people would be served six or seven courses off silver plates and hot water containers carried up two flights of stairs from the kitchen. Such was the amount of work this created that people from the village, stables and gardens were drafted in to help with the carrying and washing-up. Wood also noted the amount of work having guests would create. All would require cans of hot and cold water carrying up to their bedrooms, and their bath water emptied with slop pails. Sitting rooms and passages would need to be illuminated by lamps and candlesticks and subsequently put out, and the wicks would need to be trimmed and cleaned for the next morning. Every room in the house was equipped with a steel-grate coal fire, though Wood noted that 'on Christmas Eve members of the family used sometimes to practise self-denial for the benefit of the housemaids by not having a fire'.<sup>211</sup>

With servants undertaking so much physical work during the Christmas period, it is clear that they would not have been able to enjoy the idealised version of the festival and its intimacy. Being resident in their place of employment throughout the Christmas season also meant that they were separated from their own families. Hannah Cullwick was fortunate in being able to visit her sisters on Christmas Day, but this was not the same as going *home* for Christmas. On Christmas Day 1872 Hannah mused upon Arthur Munby's annual trip home for Christmas: 'Massa's with his own relations at home that Christmas Day, as usual, for a good many years I expect, both from school & since he's

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<sup>210</sup> Stanley, *Diaries of Hannah Cullwick*, p. 185.

<sup>211</sup> Halifax, *Fulness of Days*, pp. 29-30.

bin his own master ... I often think what a delightful pleasure that must be, going home for Christmas, but I've never once had it'.<sup>212</sup> Whilst this longing was undoubtedly mediated by her absence from Arthur, it does reveal how powerful an allure the intimate family gathering at Christmas had by this stage. Servants were witnessing in their working lives what they were missing, and had much in common with shop assistants, who, working in a culture that inspired aspirations to gentility, campaigned for greater access to Christmas holidays in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>213</sup>

It is important to consider, however, the extent to which servants could be included in the Christmas intimacy of their household residence. Whilst the case of Thomas Turner indicated how a servant might be included in the Christmas celebrations in the mid eighteenth century, it is clear that the period 1750 to 1914 witnessed a distancing of the nuclear family and their kin in relation to the servants of the household.<sup>214</sup> At Christmas this can perhaps best be seen in the way family interaction with servants at Christmas became more structured in the form of particular events. Events at Godmersham Park show how these had developed by the early nineteenth century. In early January 1806 the servants were invited to see a performance of the seasonal play,<sup>215</sup> and on Christmas Day 1808, the children visited the servants' hall to sing carols to the servants, and later the servants were invited to join the house party to toast the season.<sup>216</sup> By this time the servant's ball had also emerged, and later in the nineteenth century this became a very public occasion in landed society. At Hickleton, Edward Wood described the use of 'corporate' invitations, which included the principal local farmers and their wives, Doncaster tradesmen, and a selection of servants from other local houses, and proceedings would begin by the entrance of the Lord and Lady of the house. Servants clearly enjoyed these occasions; they were allowed to invite a friend, and generally the

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<sup>212</sup> Stanley, *Diaries of Hannah Cullwick*, p. 261.

<sup>213</sup> See chapter four. This emphasis on aspiration to gentility should not, however, obscure the potential for servants and shop assistants to be motivated by pre-existing family traditions, or knowledge inherited from friendship networks of a lower-class nature.

<sup>214</sup> This distancing might also have be structured on class lines.

<sup>215</sup> Fanny Knight to Dorothy Chapman, 12 January 1806, cited in Hubert, *Jane Austen's Christmas*, p. 51.

<sup>216</sup> Fanny Knight to Dorothy Chapman, 25 December 1808, cited in Hubert, *Jane Austen's Christmas*, p. 64.



dancing continued until the early hours of the morning long after the aristocratic family went to bed. They would wear 'dance-clothes', but their status as servants was always reinforced as they were expected to wear their caps.<sup>217</sup> Rituals reinforcing hierarchical structures of authority also pervaded the servants' Christmas. At Lyme Park, the servants received a distribution of beef on Christmas Eve, each servant receiving their piece in strict order of precedence.<sup>218</sup> These formalised interactions between family and servants were less likely to be evident in middle-class households. One such event, in the Munby household in York, was in decline by the mid 1860s. Arthur Munby noted 'my mother complains that servants do not so much care for Christmas matters: the mistletoe in the servants' hall [on Christmas Eve], which we used to have yearly, with its paper of verses written by the footman & addressed to the Master & Mistress, is now a poor & unregarded affair'. However, it was clearly not Christmas that these servants objected to, but the ritual of deference. The servants had another party on Christmas Day, during which Munby overheard pleasant 'female voices ... singing hymns'. On Christmas Day 1874, Munby recorded that the manservant, five maids, and the gardener and his wife were hosts to several guests, whom Munby described as being 'outsiders'.<sup>219</sup> For the middle classes, patterns of deference were becoming harder to maintain, especially for those located in urban environments with an increasing range of leisure and employment opportunities, particularly for young women. This in turn led to a growing middle-class dissatisfaction with the performance of servants. In census returns, employment in domestic service peaked in 1891 as 15.8 percent of the labour force, but was still at 13.9 percent in 1911. Despite these figures, problems with domestic service was one of the contributory factors to the growing popularity of staying in hotels and dining in restaurants at Christmas.<sup>220</sup> Recalling the strain Christmas placed

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<sup>217</sup> Halifax, *Fulness of Days*, pp. 34-35. Distinctions of dress were very important at these occasions. Phyllis Sandeman recalled the consternation at a Lyme Park ball when two guests, thought to be friends of the butler, 'committed a solecism in coming to the ball dressed exactly as the gentry'. Sandeman, *Treasure on Earth*, p. 78. Davidoff and others have indicated that maids' indoor caps had become a 'resented badge of servility' by the twentieth century. See *Family Story*, p. 162.

<sup>218</sup> Sandeman, *Treasure on Earth*, pp. 37-39.

<sup>219</sup> Hudson, *Man of two Worlds*, pp. 234-35, 376.

<sup>220</sup> See chapter five.

upon her mother in the Edwardian period, Katherine Chorley noted that 'we never had many servants nor the kind of servant who could share the responsibility'.<sup>221</sup>

The bonds and intimacies between family and servants were gradually weakening; and yet they played their most important role in the lives of the children of the household, and Christmas was becoming increasingly child centred. As Davidoff and others highlight, servants played a crucial role in forming the child's world view, through formal education or learning about behavioural norms, gender expectations, and patterns of power and authority. Children often spent much of their time in the company of servants, and servants, particularly maids, could be 'a fascinating source of forbidden topics'.<sup>222</sup> Access to the kitchens at Christmas, as noted above, or dancing with the servants during the ball, were important moments of child-servant interaction, since they were a site for learning about the inequalities of authority inherent in nineteenth century intimate relationships. One of Edward Wood's fondest Christmas memories was being 'impelled round the [frozen] pond on a wooden chair from the kitchen'.<sup>223</sup> It is important to differentiate amongst the servant roles in the aristocratic household, as upper servants carried a considerable amount of authority, which was highlighted at Christmas. At Hickleton, the butler acted as master of ceremonies during the servants' ball,<sup>224</sup> and at Lyme Park was responsible for the decoration of the Christmas tree, a significant factor in a household where the father refrained from much participation in the Christmas festivities.<sup>225</sup> Governesses, who occupied a precarious position in between the family and the main body of servants, might play an important role. Such was their closeness, that Fanny Knight kept a long correspondence with her former governess Dorothy Chapman, from 1803 to 1857, including many details concerning Fanny's own intimate Christmas experiences.<sup>226</sup> At Hickleton, the eight year old Emily Wood noted

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<sup>221</sup> Chorley, *Manchester Made Them*, p. 30. Katherine's mother was also sensible to the idea that servants should be given 'just time off'.

<sup>222</sup> Davidoff, *Family Story*, pp. 168-70.

<sup>223</sup> Halifax, *Fulness of Days*, p. 33.

<sup>224</sup> Halifax, *Fulness of Days*, p. 35.

<sup>225</sup> Sandeman, *Treasure on Earth*, p. 14.

<sup>226</sup> Hubert, *Jane Austen's Christmas*, p. 51.



the absence of her governess Miss Campern during the Christmas period.<sup>227</sup> Even a temporary governess might have an memorable effect upon the children. Fred Benson recalled that a temporary governess, Miss Branston, wrote a play in rhymed verse, which the Benson children performed at Christmas.<sup>228</sup>

Some evidence suggests that servants could become very attached to the children of the household, indeed of all the family. At Hickleton, Mrs Pilgrim (d. 1882) was Mary Wood's maid, and subsequently became housekeeper. Due to her own family commitments in Norwich, she had to leave Hickleton in 1870, and wrote to Charles Lindley Wood at Christmas that year with Christmas wishes and the message that 'may you both live to see your dashing son grow up to be a blessing and a comfort to you in future years. I was so sorry time would not permit of my seeing him and giving him a kiss before I left', and subsequent Christmas letters in 1873 and 1874 conveyed the instruction to bestow kisses upon the children on her behalf. Mrs Pilgrim had clearly felt part of the family intimacy at some stage of her life, including Christmas: at Christmas 1875 she wrote to Agnes Wood telling her 'I very much wish I was with you'. Her letters to the Wood family indicate that they sent her Christmas cards in the 1870s, something she began to reciprocate in 1875, telling Agnes, 'I thought the sentiments on the card so expressive of my own feelings only expressed in such a much nicer way'. Eventually, this relationship became unreciprocated, as by 1880 Mrs Pilgrim wrote that 'It is such a long time since I heard from you that I think you must almost have forgotten me'. Yet the power of the Christmas sentiment compelled Mrs Pilgrim to keep writing, as she explained, 'I cannot allow the season to pass without writing'.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, Emily Wood to Mary Wood, 11 December 1848.

<sup>228</sup> Benson, *Our Family Affairs*, p. 37.

<sup>229</sup> BI, Hickleton Papers, A2.126, Mrs Pilgrim to Charles Lindley Wood, 24 December 1870; 24 December 1873; 26 December 1873; 31 December 1874; 24 December 1876; 24 December 1879; 24 December 1880; Mrs Pilgrim to Agnes Wood, 23 December 1875.

## Institutions

The resident attendants of Victorian institutions experienced a similar Christmas to that of domestic servants. In workhouses, asylums, hospitals, penitentiaries and other institutions, attendant staff would most likely be separated from their own families in the service of the institution, and in implementing an increasing array of Christmas activities in the Victorian and Edwardian periods.<sup>230</sup> In 1903, Bedford Pierce, Superintendent of Retreat Asylum in York, acknowledged the problems the Christmas season caused for both patients and attendants alike: 'Christmas is a heavy time for the Insane; the patients cannot think of happier days that are gone, and the staff lament the absence of Christmas holidays'.<sup>231</sup> In the Victorian period, the majority of staff in asylums were poorly-trained attendants, lacking a vocational framework, and often drawn, due to poor pay and conditions, from an undesirable social background. For this type of staff, the tensions of the Christmas period might bring about problems of intemperance. In 1878, the medical superintendent of York County Asylum had to reprimand two attendants for being drunk on Boxing Day. On 28 December he had to dismiss one of the attendants for a further incident of drunkenness.<sup>232</sup> One of the ways in which asylums sought to soften the Christmas experience of attendants was through the staff ball, indicating similarities between the way institutions and country houses operated, but even these might be the site of tensions. The potential for disruption was evident in the record kept by the superintendent of York County Asylum after the staff ball in 1906: 'Staff Ball went off well: no rowdiness'.<sup>233</sup> However, by the end of the nineteenth century, there was some recognition of the Christmas needs of the attendants. At York County Asylum in 1898, the attendants were given a half holiday on Boxing

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<sup>230</sup> By the late-Victorian period, leading civic figures would also interrupt their own Christmas celebrations, to attend functions in institutions. See chapter three.

<sup>231</sup> *Annual Report of the York Retreat* (York, 1903), pp. 12-13. For the York Retreat, see A. Digby, *Madness, Morality and Medicine. A Study of the York Retreat, 1796-1914* (Cambridge, 1985).

<sup>232</sup> BI, Records of Clifton Hospital, CLF 1.6.1.5, medical superintendent's daily diary, 1878. See J. Evans, "Well Conducted, Rational and Industrious". Female Insanity and its Treatment at the North Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum 1865-1893: Care or Custody? (unpublished MA dissertation, University of York, 1996).

<sup>233</sup> BI, Records of Clifton Hospital, CLF 1.6.1.34, medical superintendent's daily diary, 1906.



Day and, perhaps more significantly, *married* attendants were given leave on Christmas Day 1902.<sup>234</sup>

The early nineteenth century witnessed the building of a range of new institutions that replaced earlier buildings characterised by informality and ease of access with 'large walled premises amidst deliberately bleak, surroundings, with inmates segregated according to age and gender'.<sup>235</sup> Within the discursive representation of Christmas in the Victorian press, the workhouse held a central position as the heart of the system of poor relief.<sup>236</sup> The first workhouse was established in Bristol in 1698,<sup>237</sup> and by 1831 there were almost 4,800 workhouses in England. These numbers fell after the new Poor Law of 1834, but workhouses 'became progressively larger and more grandly constructed'.<sup>238</sup> I have outlined in chapter three how the new Poor Law attempted to ban the provision of a special meal for paupers on Christmas Day. These attempts actually highlighted the plight of paupers at Christmas in the national and provincial press, and signalled the continuation of philanthropic customs of Christmas provision to paupers.<sup>239</sup> By the mid nineteenth century official opposition to the provision of Christmas in workhouses had ended, and the celebration of Christmas gradually became more extensive throughout the rest of the century, partly tied to the increasing presence of lady visitors, who began to structure the workhouse in familial terms.<sup>240</sup> Part of this process involved increasing the provision for children. In 1854, Emma Sheppard of Frome, Somerset, provided gifts

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<sup>234</sup> BI, Records of Clifton Hospital, CLF 1.6.1.25, medical superintendent's daily diary, 1898; CLF 1.6.1.29, diary for 1902.

<sup>235</sup> Davidoff and others, *Family Story*, pp. 130-31.

<sup>236</sup> For the history of workhouses, see P. Anderson, 'The Leeds workhouse under the old poor law 1726-1834', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, 56 (1979), 75-113; F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children* (Stroud, 1997); M. Crowther, *The Workhouse System: the History of an English Social Institution* (London, 1981); F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: the Workhouse System 1834-1884* (Cambridge, 1993); J. S. Taylor, 'The Unreformed Workhouse, 1776-1834', in E. W. Martin (ed.), *Comparative Developments in Social Welfare* (London, 1978); and P. Wood, *Poverty and the Workhouse in Victorian Britain* (Stroud, 1991).

<sup>237</sup> N. Longmate, *The Workhouse* (2nd edn, London, 2003), p. 23.

<sup>238</sup> S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England 1700-1850* (Manchester and New York, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>239</sup> Whilst evidence of Christmas customs in workhouses before the 1830s is scarce, it is probable that these customs flourished in the eighteenth century as part of wider practices of giving to the poor in a parochial context at Christmas.

<sup>240</sup> See chapter three.



for the children in the local workhouse,<sup>241</sup> and in the York Workhouse Christmas decorations were first put up in 1857,<sup>242</sup> a Christmas tree was a regular feature from 1871, and entertainments were provided such as magic lanterns and conjuring shows. This period also witnessed the rise of Christmas letter missions, which would send Christmas cards and letters to the inmates of a variety of institutions throughout the country.<sup>243</sup> Many of the strands of familial Christmas intimacy were being positioned within the workhouse, and yet simultaneously this showed how Christmas intimacy could flourish beyond the family. The central tenet of the workhouse Christmas remained the feast, however. Workhouse regimes were keen to maintain their dietary provision at a level lower than the local working classes, but adequate enough to stave off accusations of pauper starving. Consequently, monotony of diet was more important than quantity; substantial amounts of food were provided but elements that might make it more palatable, such as the provision of table salt, were removed. In this context food created considerable interest amongst inmates, making the Christmas meal important.<sup>244</sup> Beef and plum pudding were consistently served throughout the Victorian and Edwardian period, whilst fruit became an additional perquisite from the 1860s.<sup>245</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century, other institutions followed the workhouses' lead. At the York Penitentiary, a 'refuge' for the training of former prostitutes in domestic service, a Christmas tree was first used 1863.<sup>246</sup> It became the focus of the Christmas presents the girls received, and was part of a wider context of treats received for good behaviour, and the choice of gift would usually be of a practical nature, including workboxes and writing-desks in 1868,<sup>247</sup> and a silver thimble in

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<sup>241</sup> Longmate, *The Workhouse*, pp. 226-28.

<sup>242</sup> *York Herald*, 26 December 1857.

<sup>243</sup> The first Christmas Letter Mission was begun in Brighton by the Rev. E. B. Elliott of St. Mark's, Kemp Town, in 1871. See K. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action. An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era* (London, 1962), p. 231. One inmate of a workhouse infirmary stated that one such letter 'seemed a message from heaven'. See Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 56.

<sup>244</sup> Crowther, *Workhouse System*, pp. 193-98, 213-18.

<sup>245</sup> During Christmas 1859, the children at Bedford Workhouse were provided with fruit and nuts, whilst on Boxing Day 1860 a London workhouse served tea and cakes. See Longmate, *The Workhouse*, pp. 222-23. For the controversy over the serving of beer in the workhouse, see chapter three.

<sup>246</sup> *Annual Report of York Penitentiary Society* (York, 1863), p. 9.

<sup>247</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 2 January 1869.



1901,<sup>248</sup> reinforcing the new identity the institution was trying to foster in these girls. This institution was run on explicitly familial lines, stressing the need for ‘family worship’, which was often manifested in the girls as an ‘obsessive anxiety to gain the approval of Matron’, who became ‘a rather authoritarian mother figure’.<sup>249</sup> This was shown during Christmas by the behaviour of former inmates, who drew upon the conventions of Christmas intimacy to express the importance of the relationship. Some former inmates would write to the Matron, enclosing a gift, as one in the service of a clergyman’s family did in 1874.<sup>250</sup> Another wrote to the Assistant Matron from America in 1897 exclaiming ‘I suppose by the time this reaches you it will be Christmas. I must say that I almost wish there was no Christmas: for when it comes round I want to be home so much it makes me miserable’.<sup>251</sup> This notion of the penitentiary as family was reinforced by the fact that some former inmates actually returned to spend Christmas there, as four did in 1910.<sup>252</sup> Christmas could be an enjoyable time for the inmates of the penitentiary, as one lady visitor commented on Boxing Day 1904, ‘the girls in a state of great excitement and delight’.<sup>253</sup> However, it could also be site of tensions, especially as ‘petty jealousies, squabbles, tyrannies and constant bickerings [were] always in evidence’.<sup>254</sup> In 1875 one visitor, referring to the Christmas presents the inmates had received, remarked that one girl ‘did not behave well about hers and very unpleasant to Miss Briddon about it’, and the following year it was recorded that ‘Elizabeth Oates had not behaved well and was not allowed to come down on Xmas day’.<sup>255</sup> The Penitentiary authorities maintained an ambivalence towards the nuclear families of the girls, believing these families had in some way failed them. Yet the inmates were encouraged to maintain links with their actual families through the Christmas gift-giving process. In 1865 the Matron reported that

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<sup>248</sup> *Annual Report of York Penitentiary Society* (York, 1901), p. 9.

<sup>249</sup> F. Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution, a Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 166, 176, 191. See also L. A. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (London and New York, 2000), chapter 7.

<sup>250</sup> *Annual Report of York Penitentiary Society* (York, 1874), p. 10.

<sup>251</sup> *Annual Report of York Penitentiary Society* (York, 1897), p. 7.

<sup>252</sup> *Annual Report of York Penitentiary Society* (York, 1910), pp. 4-6.

<sup>253</sup> YCA, Acc. 212.21 and 212.22, York Penitentiary visiting books.

<sup>254</sup> Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution*, pp. 166, 176, 191.

<sup>255</sup> YCA, Acc. 212.21 and 212.22, York Penitentiary visiting books.

The inmates, by willingly giving up the few luxuries allowed them, saved a little money, and were enabled to send presents to their friends at Christmas. A father was much pleased to receive a silk handkerchief; one mother was surprised by the gift of a parcel of tea on Christmas Eve; the brothers and sisters of another inmate were made happy by a parcel of sweets sent as a token of love from the absent one.<sup>256</sup>

These former prostitutes experienced the intimacy of Christmas through competing concepts of family, yet it was only two of many potential ways for that intimacy to be constructed in the life of an individual.

Davidoff and others comment upon how, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the familial structuring of institutional living contrasted with the 'distinctly masculine atmosphere without feminine warmth or care' to be found in male-only institutions, best illustrated by army barracks. However, this situation changed in the second half of the nineteenth century, as the need for the 'civilizing effects of domesticated feminine attachments' was realised. Whilst a limited extension was made in the number of soldiers who could marry, the major shift was the creation of an ethos of the 'regimental family' where officers 'dispensed fatherly rewards and punishments'.<sup>257</sup> At Christmas (or New Year, if the regiment was of Scottish origin), this could be manifested in the officers providing the Christmas dinner at their own expense, which would receive deferential responses from the troops either in the form of loud cheers or in pre-prepared mottoes. The Christmas decoration of army barracks became a common feature from the 1870s onwards, and was a way of reinforcing the ideals of the regimental family. It drew upon the older notion of the lineage family, and each regiment's history, customs, and traditions were reflected in their Christmas decorations. Items of military paraphernalia were interspersed with materials associated with the decoration of domestic and church interiors. In 1881, the York Cavalry barracks 'Lances, swords, curb chains, horse cloths, and the varied articles which are

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<sup>256</sup> *Annual Report of York Penitentiary Society* (York, 1865), p. 9.

<sup>257</sup> Davidoff and others, *Family Story*, pp. 131-33. See also M. Trustram, *Women of the Regiment. Marriage and the Victorian Army* (Cambridge, 1984); and E. M. Spiers, *The Army and Society 1815-1914* (London, 1980).



included in a soldier's accoutrements are freely employed, ... judiciously used in combination with greenery and floral or tissue devices'.<sup>258</sup> The presence of such decorations, implemented by the soldiers, may help to forge an understanding concerning the ambivalent position of masculinity within a recognisably feminised Christmas. The feminisation of an overtly masculine space and culture suggests that males were not too disconcerted by the process, even if it was not mediated by the presence of children.<sup>259</sup> However, it should also be noted that the processes of decoration were mediated by a sense of competition, which provided a reaffirmation of masculinity.

Within asylums, Christmas became a part of moral therapy, a system of controlled amusements that were supposed to induce some normalcy to personal behaviour within a familial framework.<sup>260</sup> Christmas events at asylums are evident from the 1840s onwards. At York Asylum, the Chaplain recorded attending a concert party for the patients in 1846,<sup>261</sup> and at the County Asylum a Christmas tree event was provided in 1853.<sup>262</sup> Quaker hostility to Christmas meant that the Retreat did not witness such events until later in the century. There is evidence to suggest that the galleries were being decorated as early as 1885, whilst the 1894 annual report noted that 'every patient, as well as every member of staff received a Christmas gift'.<sup>263</sup> By 1903, Father Christmas was distributing presents in the wards, assisted by a fairy and an elf.<sup>264</sup> The familial

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<sup>258</sup> *York Herald*, 26 December 1881.

<sup>259</sup> It should be noted, however, that children were becoming a factor in barracks life, and distinct children's treats started to emerge from the 1870s as well.

<sup>260</sup> Moral therapy was originally a uniquely Quaker philosophy of providing 'a comfortable and varied life' for the mentally-ill within an atmosphere of domesticity. Anne Digby argues that it was based upon common values between patient and healer that 'drew on a Protestant dissenting tradition of religious healing'. Digby detects a growing trend in the nineteenth century for the comfort and amusements within moral therapy to become 'more materialistic, even hedonistic'. See Digby, *Madness, Morality and Medicine*, pp. 34-5, 42.

<sup>261</sup> BI, Records of Bootham Park Asylum, BOO 1.10.1.1, Chaplain's report book. See A. Digby, *From York Lunatic Asylum to Bootham Park Hospital* (York, 1986).

<sup>262</sup> *Annual Report of the North and East Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum* (York, 1857), p. 7.

<sup>263</sup> BI, Records of the York Retreat, K/17/2/27, Fanny Elizabeth S. to Ellis S., 26 December 1885; *Annual Report of the York Retreat* (York, 1894), p. 25. I am grateful to Louise Wannell for providing me with this source.

<sup>264</sup> *Annual Report of the York Retreat* (York, 1903), pp. 12-13.



nature of the celebrations was reaffirmed by the use of theatricals, in which the staff would perform in a similar way to the family in the aristocratic household.<sup>265</sup> Other forms of entertainment were used that reinforced the performative links between public and private.<sup>266</sup> In 1894 the Retreat held a Turkish bazaar,<sup>267</sup> in 1895 a Chinese bazaar,<sup>268</sup> and in 1896 presented Egyptian scenes.<sup>269</sup> In 1909 Bootham (formerly York) Asylum, had a whist drive on Christmas Eve, a social evening and concert on Christmas Day, a museum lecture on Boxing Day, and a concert band on New Year's Eve.<sup>270</sup>

### Coda: Christmas Abroad

The growing emotional resonance of Christmas can also be measured in the way people reacted to the celebration of Christmas while abroad, and the processes of Christmas celebration they tried to recreate. The narratives of Christmas that English people created abroad also act as an indicator of the extent to which the intimacy of Christmas was mediated by notions of national identity. Marianne Bailey (1795-1831), who was resident in Lisbon in the early 1820s, noted that 'Christmas does not appear to be kept with much hilarity in this country'. She attended 'a large Christmas party', where 'the eternal card table effectually prevented any expression of that animated social enjoyment which is peculiar to similar meetings in "Merry England"'.<sup>271</sup> In 1837,

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<sup>265</sup> For example, the cast of the scenes from *Cranford*, performed on 31 December 1901, included the superintendent Bedford Pierce and his wife.

<sup>266</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>267</sup> *Annual Report of the York Retreat* (York, 1894), p. 25.

<sup>268</sup> *Annual Report of the York Retreat* (York, 1895), p. 21.

<sup>269</sup> *Annual Report of the York Retreat* (York, 1896), p. 29.

<sup>270</sup> *Annual Report of Bootham Park Asylum* (York, 1909), p. 16.

<sup>271</sup> Marianne Bailey used this opportunity to replicate the discursive narrative of decline in England by stating that Christmas was being 'checked by the pressure of these "iron times", and chilled by the freezing influence of the sneering demon of ultra-refinement'. M. Bailey, *Lisbon in the Years 1821, 1822 and 1823* (London, 1824), pp. 23-24. Card games feature in the narratives of many accounts of Christmas intimacy, but here the card table becomes the site of tension for a discursively constructed binary opposition between refinement and Christmas merriment. It might be argued that the romanticism of this period encouraged some people to believe that Christmas should be a composite of historical representations of an imagined past. However, Thomas Turner's dislike of artifice in the mid eighteenth century (see above) suggests an older social tension at work.



Emily Eden (1797-1869), sister of George Eden, Governor-general of India, wrote to her sister complaining of the cultural contrasts that experiencing Christmas in India posed:

I am particularly *Indianly* lowly today. There is such a horrid mixture of sights and sounds for Christmas. The servants have hung garlands at the doors of our tents, and (which is very wrong) my soul recoiled when they all assembled, and in their patois wished us, I suppose, a happy Christmas. Somehow a detestation of the Hindustani language sounding all round us, came over me in a very inexplicable manner.<sup>272</sup>

Emily Eden's reaction indicates that her emotional resonance with Christmas was connected with her wider cultural and national identity, only drawn out by sharp comparison.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the highly structured gift rituals made Christmas abroad easier to cope with. The journals of Harriot Blackwood (1843-1936), whose husband was Governor General of Canada from 1872 to 1878, show how the Christmas tree became the centre of a child-orientated Christmas.<sup>273</sup> In 1884, when Frederick Blackwood (1826-1902) had become Viceroy of India, Harriot lamented the absence of the children:

We should have spent a very pleasant Christmas Day indeed but for the absence of the children, who have hitherto always helped to make it 'merry;' and I think that all the little presents they have provided for us, and which, according to their directions, were laid out for us this morning, only served to mark the blank.<sup>274</sup>

However, the arrival of letters on Christmas Day cheered the Blackwoods. As Harriot explained in 1885: 'It is so nice because it makes one feel less far away when the good

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<sup>272</sup> E. Eden, *Up the Country: Letters Written to her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India* (London, 1866), vol. 1, p. 77.

<sup>273</sup> H. G. Rowan-Hamilton Blackwood, *My Canadian Journal, 1872-8* (New York, 1891), pp. 56-57, 135, 228, 237, 326, 399.

<sup>274</sup> H. G. Rowan-Hamilton Blackwood, *Our Viceregal Life in India: Selections from my Journal, 1884-88* (London, 1889), vol. 1, p. 23.

wishes and the remembrances from home come exactly on the right day'.<sup>275</sup> India was undoubtedly harder to recreate Christmas in, though the effort could help bridge the sense of cultural and emotional dislocation. In 1886, Harriot had the Duke and Duchess of Manchester as guests for Christmas, and 'The Duchess at once announced that she could not stand Christmas without a tree. I had thought of having one before, only vaguely, and so decided me, and we at once sent off a steam launch to bring a fir from somewhere'. On Christmas Day, Harriot recorded how the Christmas tree 'was placed in a gilt tub at one end of the ball-room, and was rather a bushy and Oriental sort of pine, but three bands of iron to compress its figures and to hold rows of candles improved it greatly; then we hung on glass balls, and golden chains, and tinsel'.<sup>276</sup>

Perhaps the greatest sense of dislocation came when people were travelling at Christmas. Isabell Arundell, Lady Burton (1831-96), noted how 'It was a strange Christmas night, spent alone, in a small room at an Alexandrian hotel, passed in writing letters home, and in thinking of the merry family parties and festivities - and of my mother'.<sup>277</sup> In 1888, Geraldine Guinness-Taylor, a member of the China Inland Mission and daughter-in-law to J. Hudson Taylor, was on a boat on the Han River on Christmas Eve, and recorded in her diary: 'How strangely unlike all other Christmas Eves one has ever known! It seems scarcely possible that this can really be the time of happy home gatherings and cosy firesides - the Christmas Eve of long-loved memories'. The dark waters of the Han River made her feel 'cut off, in the very heart of this vast land, from all contact with the world outside us; beyond the reach of letters and all Christmas greetings, and many hundreds of miles from any others of our own race or language'. As a missionary, this isolation led her to turn to the spiritual solace of Christmas, recording that 'Christmas has a deeper meaning than the joyous one ... Does it not tell of One, the Christ of Christmas, Who on the first Christmas Eve left home and all the joys of heaven'.<sup>278</sup> That 'deeper meaning', will now be considered in chapter two.

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<sup>275</sup> Blackwood, *Our Viceregal Life*, p. 277.

<sup>276</sup> Blackwood, *Our Viceregal Life*, vol. 2, p. 101.

<sup>277</sup> I. Arundell Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine, and the Holy Land: from my Private Journal* (London, 1875), vol. 2, p. 12.

<sup>278</sup> L. E. Guinness Kumm (ed.), *In the Far East: Letters from Geraldine Guinness from the Mediterranean*



## Conclusion

The origins of Christmas intimacy can be found in the shifting household and social relationships of the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century this came to be located within fluid familial and friendship gatherings. Christmas gatherings were not always possible, and intimacy also came to be conveyed through written Christmas wishes. The nature of these wishes tended to be gendered, however, pointing towards the domestic celebration of Christmas being a gendered experience. Whilst Bella's explanation of the feminisation of Christmas in the Victorian period has no doubt been overstated, particularly in terms of domestic ideology, gender did clearly play a role in the domestic celebration of Christmas, with women taking responsibility for some of the physical labour of Christmas and the work of kinship. Men's participation in the domestic Christmas in the nineteenth century was based upon a shift from host to father, an identity which may have obscured the power relationship between husband and wife. It is also important to stress the variety of experience, and to suggest some ambivalence towards both the domesticity of Christmas and the performance of fatherhood.

As a spatial and temporal site for homecoming from school, Christmas became a time that children could perform their accomplishments in a family context. This, combined with children's playfulness, set in the wider context of beliefs concerning childhood, began the process of making Christmas a child-centred festival. This process led to the domestic Christmas becoming increasingly structured around Christmas-present rituals in the second half of the nineteenth century, though gifts from parents to children were only one of an increasing range of Christmas gift relationships. Part of this structuring was also related to Christmas decorations in the form of Christmas trees, though this was part of a wider decorating tradition grounded in historical continuity. However, Christmas decorations did become more elaborate as the nineteenth century progressed,

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*to the Po-Yang Lake, China, 1888-89* (London, 1889), pp. 119-20.

and contributed to the intimacy of Christmas by framing domestic space as a transformed environment, and contributed to the domestic interior playing a prominent part in Christmas memories. Within this space, theatricals and music were two other performative elements of Christmas intimacy that increased children's importance in the festival.

Whilst it is true that pressures of time and resources may have militated against working-class households celebrating Christmas in the terms outlined above, this chapter has provided consistent evidence that Christmas was celebrated domestically by the lower orders throughout the period, and on their own cultural terms. They did not, however, have the domestic support of servants who carried out much of the physical work of Christmas intimacy for the middle and upper classes. Servants were close to the intimacy of the family and friends they served, and sometimes interacted with and formed a part of it. Yet at the same time they were often separated from their own friends and family. Employees of Victorian institutions also experienced a similar situation in environments that were increasingly using Christmas as part of a familial style of operation.

The emotions and sentiments surrounding family and friends were an integral part of the development of the intimacy of Christmas, a force of both historical continuity and change, yet it was mediated by other factors, not the least being class and gender. What intimacy was not about, however, was privacy. The increasing emphasis on family was not a privatisation of Christmas. Through intimacy, Christmas interacted with and complemented a series of 'public' Christmases. The first of these to be considered is religion.



## Chapter Two: The Religious Context

By the medieval period, Christmas had developed as one of the three great festivals of the English Church. However, this situation was complicated by the Reformations that swept Europe in the sixteenth century. Whilst Christmas survived the pruning of holy days in England, in 1561 the Scottish Kirk abolished Christmas as an unscriptural papist invention, though not without considerable opposition. In the following century, the intervention of Scottish Covenantors in the English Civil War played an important role in achieving a ban on the celebration of Christmas in England between 1647 and 1660. Whilst a minority of radical English Protestants had taken a similar stance on Christmas to the Kirk, the ban on Christmas, though never fully implemented, consolidated the construction of a standard Protestant dissenting attitude (often referred to as 'puritan') to Christmas in the 250 years following the restoration of the crown, that viewed Christmas as both a bastion of heathen superstition and papist idolatry.<sup>1</sup> To a certain extent this attitude was given renewed emphasis in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as the evangelical revival created opposition to both plebeian and polite forms of celebrating the secular elements of Christmas, and was also characterised by a consistent level of anti-Catholicism. That some evangelicals remained within the Established Church also indicates that the Church of England did not retain a unified position on the celebration of Christmas, especially as the repercussions of the Oxford Movement were felt in the nineteenth century.

By examining the religious celebration of Christmas in the home, services and communion, sermons, church music and Christmas carols, church decorating and finally social activities,<sup>2</sup> this chapter will argue that the evangelical religion of the eighteenth century helped shape the intimacy of Christmas. Particular emphasis will be placed on the way the popular theological shift from the Atonement to the Incarnation<sup>3</sup> highlighted

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<sup>1</sup> R. Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun. A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 25-31.

<sup>2</sup> Another important aspect of the religious celebration of Christmas, charity, is examined in the following chapter.

<sup>3</sup> For an introduction to this subject, see B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988).

the role of children and childhood in the Christmas festival. It will also chart the weakening of the Protestant dissenting opposition to Christmas in the nineteenth century, and how most religious denominations came to appropriate the language of Christmas intimacy, especially regarding children, family, and the home, to support their own celebrations in the latter part of the period. However, the Edwardian period also witnessed an attempt by religious leaders to interpret the religious and secular aspects of Christmas as separate and opposing entities, a factor which should be understood in the wider context of increased leisure opportunities for contemporaries.

### The Religious Celebration of Christmas in the Home

W. M. Jacob's work on lay religion in the early eighteenth century suggests that the Church of England laity had a lively engagement with Christianity beyond clerical control, and enjoyed a 'rich personal devotional life'.<sup>4</sup> John Walsh and Stephen Taylor also highlight how the 'piety of the closet, the parlour and the fireside' was more typical in the eighteenth century than historians have previously thought, supported by a large canon of devotional literature.<sup>5</sup> Much of this literature was inspired by the Book of Common Prayer, and included John Tillotson's *Sermons*,<sup>6</sup> Bishop Gibson's *Family*

<sup>4</sup> W. M. Jacobs, *Lay People and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> J. Walsh and S. Taylor, 'Introduction: the Church and Anglicanism in the "Long" Eighteenth Century', in J. Walsh, C. Haydon, and S. Taylor (eds), *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1833* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 25. On the Church of England in the eighteenth century see also V. Barrie, 'The Church of England in the Eighteenth Century', *Historical Research*, 75:1 (2002), 47-72; F. C. Mather, 'Georgian Churchmanship Reconsidered: Some Variations in Anglican Public Worship 1714-1830', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36, (1985), 255-83; N. Sykes, *Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1934), and P. Virgin, *The Church in Age of Negligence* (Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Turner regularly read Tillotson's *Sermons*, and he recorded doing this on Christmas Day 1756 and 1760. See D. Vaisey (ed.), *The Diary of Thomas Turner 1754-1765* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 75, 214. It is possible that Turner read Tillotson's commentaries on how to spend Christmas. Tillotson declared that 'we cannot possibly choose a worse, a more improper season to sin in, than when we are celebrating the birth of the blessed Jesus, who came "to save us from our sins"... Good God! that ever it should pass for a piece of religion among Christians, to run into all manner of excess for twelve days together in honour of our SAVIOUR!' Tillotson also preached a positive message, however: 'And whenever we commemorate the breaking in of this glorious light upon the world, I mean the birth of our blessed SAVIOUR, how should our hearts be filled with joy, and our mouths with praises!.. Thus we should celebrate the memory of this blessed season, and as often as the year returns, with great joy and thankfulness commensurate to the great blessings which this day brought to the world ...' Turner may have also read Tillotson's sermons on the Incarnation, including 'Concerning the Incarnation of Christ'. See J. Tillotson, *Sermons on Several Subjects and Occasions* (London, 1757 edition), vol. 3, pp. 282-302, vol. 5, pp. 216-17; and vol. 12, pp. 103-104.



*Devotion*, Richard Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man*,<sup>7</sup> and Robert Nelson's *Festivals and Fasts*.<sup>8</sup> From the late 1730s onwards there was a growing body of Methodist literature, including George Whitefield's *Christmas Well Kept, and the Twelve Days Well Spent*. Here Whitefield used his journal to construct an evangelical Christmas of unstinting evangelism, prayer, and worship. As Leigh Schmidt highlights, it is important to avoid the assumption that the attitude of Puritans, Presbyterians and evangelicals towards Christmas was 'one of opposition and iconoclastic leveling'.<sup>9</sup> The Lancashire doctor Richard Kay (1716-51), who regularly worshiped at a Presbyterian chapel in Bury, always attended the chapel to hear a sermon on Christmas Day, followed by participation in charitable activity and dining with his neighbouring tenants, an activity he understood in the following terms: 'Lord, as thou hast loved us in sending thine only begotten Son Jesus Christ into the World, that we might live through him; so may we also love one another'.<sup>10</sup>

Oppositional qualities can be found in the evangelical responses to Christmas in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Evangelicals objected to what was perceived as the sinful revelry of much of the plebeian way of celebrating Christmas, but also took

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<sup>7</sup> Neither Gibson's nor Allestree's works contained direct references to the great festivals. See E. Gibson, *Family Devotion; or, an Exhortation to Morning and Evening Prayer in Families* (London, 1771 edition); and R. Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Man, Laid Down in a Plain and Familiar Way for the Use of All* (London, 1754 edition).

<sup>8</sup> Walsh, 'Church and Anglicanism', p. 25. First published in 1704, Nelson's *Festivals and Fasts* was frequently reprinted over the next 150 years, and reached a thirty-sixth edition in 1826. In general terms Nelson aimed to support the festivals of the church with scriptural authority and spiritual meaning. With specific reference to Christmas, Nelson maintained a position that can be taken as the Church of England's general stance on the festival for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, emphasising admiration, thankfulness, and gratitude for the Incarnation, to be manifested in hymns of praise, piety and virtue, praying and meditating, and taking great care not to abuse the festival in vanity and folly, extravagance, sin and sensuality and luxury and intemperance. Nelson's work also revealed the paternalistic narrative contained within the nativity message: since Jesus chose to be born in a state of poverty, we ought to be reconciled to it, and 'the poor ought to bear a low condition with patience and contentedness'. This may have helped foster the relationships of power and inequality within Christmas intimacy. See chapter one, and R. Nelson, *A Companion for the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England* (London, 1704), pp. 58, 64-66.

<sup>9</sup> L. E. Schmidt, 'Time, Celebration, and the Christian Year in Eighteenth-Century Evangelicalism', in M. A. Noll, D. W. Bebbington, and G. Rawlyk (eds), *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles and Beyond, 1700-1990* (New York, 1994), p. 90.

<sup>10</sup> W. Brockbank and F. Kenworthy (eds), *The Diary of Richard Kay, 1716-51 of Baldingstone, near Bury. A Lancashire Doctor* (Manchester, 1968), p. 40.



offence at the 'polite' activities of landed society.<sup>11</sup> However, evangelical attitudes also had a constructive influence on the development of Christmas intimacy. It provided a spiritual emphasis to the emotional feelings generated by the reunions of family and friends at Christmas, emphasising domesticity, reflection and taking stock.<sup>12</sup> It was also a form of religion that encouraged an emotional response,<sup>13</sup> and by the early nineteenth century changing evangelical attitudes towards childhood seemed to be developing concurrently with and were a probable part of the processes that centred children at the heart of the celebration of Christmas.<sup>14</sup> It is important, however, to recognise that the religious dimension of Christmas intimacy was not restricted to the middle classes. By the early nineteenth century many aristocratic families had adopted an evangelical outlook. At Lyme Park, family prayers (including servants) in the hall on Christmas morning were abandoned only in 1905.<sup>15</sup> Nancy Christie's recent work on Victorian working-class domesticity reveals how the working classes could have a Christmas

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<sup>11</sup>Schmidt, 'Time, Celebration and the Christian Year', p. 100. See also Thomas Turner's comments on a Christmas well spent in chapter one.

<sup>12</sup>See L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (2nd edn., London and New York, 2002), part one; and D. M. Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture* (London, 1984), chapter four. Reflection and taking stock remained an important part of the Christmas season, particularly in terms of remembering those who had passed away. Octavia Hill (1838-1912) reflected upon this in a letter written to Mary Harris in 1855: '[Christmas] is now certainly a time for rejoicing. I believe it; but, as one grows and lives, above all as year follows year, and there is removed from one's side whose blessed smile has highlighted our Christmas hearth, as the vacant chair becomes a witness of the lost one; as one is conscious of the "one mute presence watching all," when one has said in one's heart, "Why should we keep Christmas at all; witness as it is of change?" and one has answered, "Would the sense of change forsake you if you had no such time? Do you wish that it should leave you? Or has it taught you to put all trust in One who is unchanging, Who gives to all their work, Who binds all in one?" When one has felt all this, the mirth of Christmas is gone but not its value; witness, as it is, of that inward union of which we vainly strive to hold the outward symbol. We may spend it in the truest sense *with* those who have been called to other lands'. Though Octavia was brought up as a Unitarian, she did operate in evangelical circles. See C. E. Maurice (ed.), *Life of Octavia Hill as Told in Her Letters* (London, 1913), pp. 70-71.

<sup>13</sup>G. M. Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival* (London, 1998), p. 28. Some forms of evangelical worship in the eighteenth century could be defined in terms of 'primary religion'. See John Kent's recent discussion as to why primary religion became important in this period in *Wesley and the Wesleyans. Religion in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2002), chapter one. See also H. Ablove, *The Evangelist of Desire. John Wesley and the Methodists* (Stanford, 1990).

<sup>14</sup>See chapter one, and also A. M. Boylam, 'Sunday Schools and Changing Evangelical Views of Children in the 1820s', *Church History*, 48 (1979), 320-33; M. C. H. Martin, 'Children and religion in Walthamstow and Leyton, c.1740 - c.1870' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2000); and J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London, 1999).

<sup>15</sup>P. E. Sandeman, *Treasure on Earth. A Country House Christmas* (London, 1995 edition), p. 74.



intimacy framed by religion, describing how on Christmas Day in 1867, Fanny Higgins, a servant located just outside London, returned home from church and spent the rest of the day 'reading her Bible aloud to the local shepherd and his wife, which was in turn followed in the evening by her own private devotions'.<sup>16</sup>

Whilst public attendance at churches and chapels was maintained at significant levels throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (discussed below), the religious significance of the domestic celebration of Christmas was gradually obscured by an increase in materially-based rituals in the second half of the nineteenth century. Already difficult to identify and interpret, references to religion, beyond public attendance at church, largely disappear from contemporary accounts of Christmas in the home. However, some continuities can be found. Amongst families with extreme Protestant beliefs, continuing opposition to Christmas can be found.<sup>17</sup> It should also be noted, though, that the Quakers, who had maintained a rigid objection to Christmas past the mid point of the nineteenth century, had relaxed this opposition by the end of the century. The diaries of Elizabeth Cadbury clearly indicate a fully-fledged family celebration of Christmas in the 1890s and 1900s.<sup>18</sup> What is significant though, is that there was is no evidence to suggest that Christmas had been adopted as anything other than a secular festival. This was not, however, always the case amongst Quakers.

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<sup>16</sup> N. Christie, "On the Threshold of Manhood": Working-Class Religion and Domesticity in Victorian Britain and Canada', *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 71 (2003), pp. 145-74. Fanny would have been obliged to attend the Anglican service of her employer, but Christie shows how her religious beliefs were formed independently of the Established Church. Fanny was at the time engaged to marry Frederick Brigden, who she married the following year. Christie has stressed how their 'mutual evangelicalism above all formed the basis of their attraction and became the central idiom by which they articulated their growing emotional intimacy'. Interestingly, Fanny viewed evangelical beliefs as a means of supporting her right to independent expression within marriage as well as good conduct from her husband, whilst Frederick viewed 'religiosity [as] a recipe for female passivity'. This may help to explain the obscured patterns of power and inequality found in the intimacy between husband and wife discussed in chapter one.

<sup>17</sup> Probably the most infamous case can be found in Edmund Gosse's account of his childhood in a Plymouth Brethren household in the late 1850s. Gosse's father continued to object to Christmas on both 'Popish' and 'heathen' grounds, forbidding any aspect of it in the house. Gosse recalled how the servants gave him some of the plum pudding they had secretly made, and his guilt made him confess that 'I have eaten of flesh offered to idols!' His father seized the remains of the pudding, and 'flung the idolatrous confectionery on to the middle of the ashes' of the dust-heap. E. Gosse, *Father and Son. A Study of two Temperaments* (Harmondsworth, 1949 edition), pp. 83-4.

<sup>18</sup> BCA, Papers of the Cadbury Family of Birmingham, MS 466/205/33, extracts from diaries of Elizabeth Cadbury re Christmas.

William Fryer Harvey (1885-1937) recalled that 'Of course we never went to church on Christmas Day and the meeting house on the twenty-fifth of twelve month was closed'; however, breakfast was 'followed by Morning Reading. Mother reads a Christian hymn, or did we on this occasion sing? - and father an appropriate chapter from one of the Gospels'.<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, both religious and secular aspects of Christmas were attended to. Gilbert Thomas (b. 1891), the child of a Methodist Gloucester shopkeeper, recalled that Christmas Day 'began with my father's chapter from *St. Luke* and ended with my mother's reading from *A Christmas Carol* [which] did justice to the Christian festival as well as the pagan feast'.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, some of the autobiographical accounts of Edwardian Christmases reveal a belief that the religion of that generation's parents could be a barrier to the full expression of Christmas intimacy. Recalling that they never had carols at Christmas time, Katherine Chorley mused: 'Was it because mother's religion was so deep and personal and private that she could not bring herself to expose it to the gaiety of a Christmas party?'<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Phyllis Sandeman, commenting on her family's reticence at showing enthusiasm for Christmas, stated: 'They might display anger but not joy - their joy, it seemed, was too intimate a thing to be shown to anyone - only, perhaps, to God'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> W. Fryer Harvey, *We Were Seven* (London, 1936), p. 120.

<sup>20</sup> G. O. Thomas, *Autobiography, 1891-1941* (London, 1946), p. 43. However, it is also important to note, as Paul Davis has, that many of the mid-Victorian generation did interpret *A Christmas Carol* as having spiritual significance, though the number of poor imitations it produced lessened the effect over time. Mrs. Oliphant noted that when the *Carol* first appeared it was 'as if it had been a new gospel' (though she went on to criticise what she perceived to be the self-indulgence and vulgarity of the *Carol's* message). It could also provoke abhorrence. Ruskin commented that Dickens's Christmas was nothing more than 'mistletoe and pudding - neither resurrection from the dead, no rising of new stars, nor teaching of wise men, nor shepherds'. See P. Davis, *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* (New Haven and London, 1990), pp. 59-63; M. Oliphant, 'Charles Dickens', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, June 1871, p. 689; J. Ruskin, *The Works* (London, 1909), vol. 37, p. 7. Geoffrey Rowell interprets the *Carol* as 'first and foremost a story concerned with the Christian gospel of liberation by the grace of God', and as a cultural signifier of a theological shift from the Atonement to the Incarnation, set within the context of the emergence of the Oxford Movement. He presents little evidence, however, to show that contemporaries viewed it in this way. G. Rowell, 'Dickens and the Construction of Christmas', *History Today*, 43 (December 1993), p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> K. Chorley, *Manchester Made Them* (London, 1970), p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Sandeman, *Treasure on Earth*, p. 55.



## Services and Communion

In the eighteenth century, Christmas was one of the three great festivals of the Church of England, an occasion during which communion was prescribed.<sup>23</sup> The calendar context of communion varied between rural and urban locations. In towns, many churches witnessed Holy Communion during Sunday morning service on a monthly basis in addition to Christmas and Easter, whilst most rural areas held communion on a quarterly basis of the great festivals plus Michaelmas.<sup>24</sup> However, as Jacob highlights, for parishes that had a large number of communicants two or three celebrations might be planned around Christmas and Easter.<sup>25</sup> As Sykes has commented, 'a striking feature of the [eighteenth] century generally was the large proportion of adult parishioners who communicated at Easter'.<sup>26</sup> This is important because it suggests that the deepest emotional connection to the religion of the Established Church was framed by the message of the Atonement, rather than the incarnational emphasis of Christmas.<sup>27</sup> In the

<sup>23</sup> The other occasions were Easter and Whitsun, though several Bishops also advocated communion at Michaelmas to bridge the gap between Whitsun and Christmas. See V. Barrie-Curien, 'The Clergy in the Diocese of London in the Eighteenth Century', in J. Walsh, C. Haydon, and S. Taylor (eds), *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1833. From Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 95.

<sup>24</sup> Though as Sykes has highlighted, of the 836 churches in the Returns to Archbishop Herring's Visitation Articles at York in 1743, 208 fell below the quarterly standard. Sykes, *Church and State*, p. 251. The publication of Sykes's work in 1934 was the beginning of a process of the gradual rehabilitation of the historical reputation of the eighteenth-century Church of England, which had previously been characterised by the cliché of the 'sleeping congregation'. Pimlott's (originally writing in the late 1940s) attitude to the religious celebration of Christmas in the eighteenth century may have been informed by that cliché, however. Pimlott argued that Christmas had become indifferently observed in the eighteenth century, even among regular churchgoers and some of the clergy. See J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Christmas. A Social History* (Hassocks, 1978), p. 60.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob, *Lay People and Religion*, p. 57.

<sup>26</sup> Sykes, *Church and State*, p. 251.

<sup>27</sup> It is difficult, however, to compare the popularity of Christmas and Easter communion in the eighteenth century. Visitations tended to ask for communicant statistics relating to Easter. In Archbishop Drummond's 1764 primary visitation of the diocese of York, a small number of parishes volunteered additional statistical information regarding Christmas and Whitsun. In Aberford, Bardsey, Myton on Swale, and Stillingfleet, for example, Easter was the most popular occasion for communion, though not always by significant margins. At St. Mary's, Beverley, there were 200 communicants at Christmas as opposed to 194 at Easter, whilst at Danby 180 communicated at Whitsun, in comparison with 150 at Easter, and 120 at Christmas. It is likely that local factors affected these figures, but what is also significant is the fact that it was extremely rare for any more than half of all communicants in the parish to take communion at any one occasion, suggesting that some communicants were choosing between the great festivals. However, since Easter was a feast of obligation, it is significant that many parishioners did not make their Easter communion, and that many did volunteer to make a Christmas communion, suggesting that Christmas



1750s and 1760s Thomas Turner regularly 'stayed the communion' on Christmas Day, though the emotional and spiritual experience was mediated by redemption. As he recorded in his diary:

Oh, may the God of all mercy pour into our hearts His Holy Spirit to strengthen this our weak endeavours that we may increase in faith and good works and maintain and keep the good intentions that I hope we have this day taken up, through the merits and intercession of our blessed Redeemer Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup>

The religious significance of Christmas in the mid eighteenth century was being mediated by the message of the Atonement.<sup>29</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century there was a widespread increase in the number of services both at Christmas and during the calendar year as a whole, though for practical reasons services were less frequent in rural areas. As Obelkevich notes in his rural study of South Lindsey, second services were widely adopted in the 1850s, as a way of allowing those who were prevented by domestic duties from attending in the morning.<sup>30</sup> The largest expansion of Christmas Day services is perhaps better located in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and was more likely amongst ritualist churches than evangelical churches. In Leeds, St. Simon's still had only one service on Christmas day in 1876, whilst at St. Saviour's in 1882 Holy Eucharist was held at 6, 7 and 8 am, Matins at 10 am, choral Holy Eucharist at 10.45 am, and evensong at 6.30 pm, though these are perhaps extreme examples.<sup>31</sup> The main reason behind this increase in services was the perceived need to increase the desire to partake of Holy

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communion was an important aspect of *some* people's devotional life. See C. Annesley and P. Hoskin (eds), *Archbishop Drummond's Visitation Returns 1764* (York, 1997-2001), vol. 1, pp. 2, 36, 53, 131; vol. 2, p. 149; vol. 3, p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> Vaisey, *Diary of Thomas Turner*, p. 169.

<sup>29</sup> This relates to the name of the festival itself, Christmas, deriving from Christ Mass. The Protestant Holy Communion remained a celebration of the death and not the birth of Christ, and of his redemption of mankind.

<sup>30</sup> J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825-1875* (Oxford, 1976), p. 151. However, a survey of the Archbishop of York's visitation returns for 1865 indicate that two services on Christmas day had only partially been introduced. Borthwick Institute, *Visitation Returns V. 1865*, *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> *St. Simon's Parochial Magazine*, December 1876; *St. Saviour's Monthly Paper*, December 1882.



Communion. Obelkevich has commented on how communion became for the church 'the test and badge of Anglican commitment'.<sup>32</sup> Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Anglican Church moved from a quarterly communion to weekly communion as the norm by 1900.<sup>33</sup> There is evidence of clergymen putting great stress on the importance of Christmas communion, but by the standards they set themselves, the effort to make communion a central feature of the Christmas experience was a failure. As an outward form of incarnational religion, Christmas never replaced Easter as the most popular time of the year to communicate. At York Minster for example, Easter communicants outnumbered Christmas communicants by 52 to 42 in 1837; 174 to 157 in 1872; and by 296 to 212 in 1912.<sup>34</sup> The Archbishop of York's visitation returns conducted between 1912 and 1922 clearly indicate Easter still being the most popular time to receive the sacrament, with Christmas being rivalled in some parishes by Whitsuntide.<sup>35</sup> The taking of Christmas communion should be placed within an annual context of communion participation, but this can only be ascertained from the few *detailed* communicant rolls that survive.<sup>36</sup> In Bolton Percy, in the year from Easter to Easter 1897-98, a total of 143 known people communicated at some point in the year. 89 communicated at Easter and 40 at Christmas. 14 of those who communicated at Christmas had not communicated at Easter, though the structure of the records suggest that 9 of these 14 were new to the parish at some point in the year after Easter. Of these communicants, only one family other than the clergyman's could be described as weekly participators. Approximately another 50 individuals followed some kind of pattern of monthly or more infrequent and occasional taking of the sacrament. The indication appears to be that Christmas was a relatively popular time for Holy

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<sup>32</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 127.

<sup>33</sup> Parsons, 'Reform, Revival and Realignment', pp. 47-48.

<sup>34</sup> YML, Dean & Chapter Archives, Minster Registers of Collections and Communicants 1826-39 [S 3/1/8]; Service Registers 1872-73 [S 4/2 c] and 1901-1910 [S 4/2 e].

<sup>35</sup> BI, V1912-22, *passim*. In the York parish of St. Mary Bishophill Junior, for example, Whitsuntide narrowly outnumbered Christmas in terms of number of communicants between 1912 and 1914 by 168 to 159.

<sup>36</sup> In many parishes they were not even recorded. It would have been impractical for those churches with large congregations to do this, and in those with small congregations the clergyman knew all the parishioners personally and the need to record names was not deemed necessary.

Communion, but always second to Easter and not always guaranteeing the participation of a parish's more committed Anglicans.<sup>37</sup>

The importance of Christmas communion to Anglican clergymen was evident in the parish magazines that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was particularly manifested in the announcing of communicant statistics. These statistics reveal that parish churches were able to attract greater numbers to participate in Christmas communion in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period. Whitkirk, near Leeds, reported increases every year from 1903 to 1907, the figure rising from 180 to 313.<sup>38</sup> At St. Saviour's, the mid - 1890s witnessed a genuine belief 'that the due observance of Christmas day is really gaining ground'.<sup>39</sup> But such successes were also tempered by how the figures fared in comparison to Easter communion. At St. Saviour's, John Wylde declared in 1885 that

It would be a great comfort to me, and a sure sign of increased spiritual life, if we could have as many - or very nearly as many - Communions made at Christmas as at Easter. I cannot understand why this is not so: I cannot imagine what a soul can be like, which, knowing what Holy Communion is, and feeling its necessity at Easter, can put itself out in the darkness of excommunication on the Day of our SAVIOUR'S Birth.<sup>40</sup>

At Whitkirk the Vicar commented that 'Christmas, ... always has many deep disappointments in store for me on account of the absence of so many I hoped to see at the altar'.<sup>41</sup> Parishioners were confronted by exhortations in the parish magazines to prepare properly for the communion. The vicar of St. Olave's, York, asked his parishioners to try and 'feel that in your Communion you are going indeed to meet Jesus' and to 'prepare for it a careful self-examination and confession of your sins. Perform works of mercy and love, meditate and pray. This will prevent your coming to

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<sup>37</sup> BL, Bolton Percy Communicant Rolls, PR BP.57 (1897-1910).

<sup>38</sup> *Whitkirk Parish Magazine*, January 1903; January 1904; January 1905; January 1906; January 1907.

<sup>39</sup> *St. Saviour's Monthly Paper*, January 1895.

<sup>40</sup> *St. Saviour's Monthly Paper*, December 1885.

<sup>41</sup> *Whitkirk Parish Magazine*, January 1903.



Communion hastily, and so injuring your soul instead of doing it good'.<sup>42</sup> However, the appointment in the Edwardian period of Charles Bell to St. Olave's instituted some rare moments of candidness concerning the success of the church on the subject of Christmas communion. In 1907 he commented that the number of Christmas communicants had remained steady for many years, but since there were always 60 to 70 first communicants added every year, it meant that they were experiencing 'leakage'. He also commented that the 'quality of the Communicants and not the quantity which is the thing to be desired', and quoted the Bishop of Birmingham in saying 'we don't so much want more Christians, we want better Christians'.<sup>43</sup> In 1913 Bell reported a combined total of 535 Christmas communicants in his parish, but then set that figure in sombre context:

It is of course far below what there ought to be when you consider that there are 8000 people in the parish. I expect there were about 5000 people in the parish who never went near any kind of religious observance on Christmas Day and that is putting the figure low. It looks pretty awful when we put it down on paper doesn't it. And yet I expect all those people or nearly all thought they were keeping Christmas.<sup>44</sup>

Whereas previously the religious discourse of Christmas had been constructed in opposition to sin, it was now becoming opposed to a vague notion of a modern secular Christmas. This was the direct result of the material aspects of Christmas intimacy obscuring religious influences.

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<sup>42</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, December 1894. The vicar was advocating a sacrificial theory of the Eucharist. C. M. Davies noted in the 1870s that 'The sacrificial theory of the Eucharist - that is, the Romish doctrine of the Mass - is flourishing, in various grades, in the Established Church'. The perceived danger of this was that it led to 'a merely mechanical transaction on their behalf by a priest, instead of trusting to that purity of life and faith which the Church of England requires in the worthy communicant'. C. M. Davies, *Orthodox London: or Phases of Religious Life in the Church of England* (London, 1876), pp. 159-60.

<sup>43</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, January 1907. This perhaps indicates that the paternally inclusive vision of the church, which, particularly in rural areas, could view Holy Communion as 'the religious expression of the whole community', was disintegrating. See Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 137.

<sup>44</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, January 1913.



It would be mistaken, however, to take communicant figures as an accurate guide to overall participation in the Anglican religious experience. Those who took the sacrament were usually only a proportion of the regular congregation, and that proportion was usually a minority.<sup>45</sup> As Obelkevich observes, forms of worship were often perceived in class terms, and a perception did exist that Holy Communion was the preserve of the elite, and that simple attendance at morning or evening prayer was the experience of the common churchgoer.<sup>46</sup> Trying to gauge the level of participation in religious aspects of Christmas is difficult, as Robin Gill implies, as 'it remains an occasional phenomenon. Once a year the British celebrate Christmas in a confusion of sacred and profane activities'.<sup>47</sup> Both Jeffrey Cox and S. J. D. Green highlight that Christmas, along with Easter and Whitsuntide, was a festival that attracted the occasional churchgoer, though it was an attendance that was inseparable from the surrounding customary events, and Cox has been keen to highlight that the greatest attraction to churches on Christmas Day for working-class people were weddings.<sup>48</sup> It is probably safe to presume that churches were fuller during Christmas at the end of the Victorian period than at the beginning. There were more communions made, but there were also more services to attend, and more churches to attend. But there was also a higher population, and just as the Anglican church finally failed to match the growth in population in terms of the percentage attending church, so the percentage of those attending at Christmas must have fallen also. It might also be commented that the Established Church was less successful in staking a greater claim on the celebration of Christmas than it was in the development of the Harvest Festival from 1860 onwards.<sup>49</sup> Attending church on Christmas Day, whilst remaining a potent symbol of respectability within Anglican society, was one of a number of increasing social options for

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<sup>45</sup> This is a general impression gleaned from the Archbishop of York's Visitation Records for 1865 and 1912-22. BI, V1865 and V1912-22, *passim*.

<sup>46</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 143.

<sup>47</sup> R. Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (London, 1993), p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> J. Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society. Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford and New York, 1982), pp. 102-03; S. J. D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline. Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 332.

<sup>49</sup> For an introduction to the development of the Harvest Festival see Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 158-61; and A. Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England: a Social History, 1850-1925* (London, 1991), pp. 70-73.



individuals to choose from, and churches faced competition not only from the family home, but also a growing amount of leisure and entertainment opportunities;<sup>50</sup> and an individual church could also find increasing religious competition not only from dissenting bodies but also from within the Established Church itself. Whilst in some areas the Church struggled to reach the urban poor and expanding suburbs, locations such as York that had a longer tradition of religious activity based upon a dense concentration of churches in combination with a cathedral, found it difficult to sustain the loyalty of churchgoers at times of special services and consequently faced an undermining of the parochial ideal they were trying to uphold. In 1903 the Vicar of St. Olave's was pleased with the attendance at evensong on Christmas Day, despite the 'great attraction at the Minster'<sup>51</sup>, and previously in 1897 the Vicar of St. Philip and St. James had felt it necessary to advise his parishioners: 'As to our services, it is hoped that the parishioners will recognise the special claim of their parish church at this great festival'.<sup>52</sup> Improvements in transport facilities could also lead families to leave the parish for the duration of Christmas, either for a holiday or for visiting relatives, where they could have attended another church. There was an awareness of this factor at St. Olave's in 1901, when 40 candidates made their first communion on the third Sunday in Advent because they were leaving York before Christmas Day.<sup>53</sup> A variety of local factors might affect churchgoing patterns, including the type of employment that the majority of parishioners were involved in. In more remote areas, the weather might also play a role if the access to the church became a problem. Obelkevich found this to be the case in some parts South Lindsey, where the high point of the liturgical year, running from Advent to Trinity Sunday, was the period of lowest church attendance.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>51</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, January 1904.

<sup>52</sup> *St. Philip and St. James Parish Magazine*, December 1897.

<sup>53</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, January 1902.

<sup>54</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 152. However, in some parishes efforts were made to overcome these difficulties. At Whitkirk, having been unable to arrange for a Holy Communion service to take place in the Halton Mission Room, Gerald Sharp provided a 'large covered waggonette' to transport all who could not walk to the parish church. *Whitkirk Parish Magazine*, December 1898.

Within the Anglican Church there was also an increase in services that surrounded Christmas Day. Clergyman encouraged the message that Christmas could not be separated from Advent in the context of the liturgical year. Parishioners were reminded that Advent was the beginning of the church year, invoking a solemn, meditative period in which the individual reflected on the Incarnation of Christ and also his second coming. The Advent sentiment prohibited joyous celebration before Christmas Day, as the vicar of St. Olave's, York, stated in 1894, 'in Advent we should avoid social festivities as much as lies in our power.' He captured the essence of the relationship between Advent and Christmas in the phrase 'a time to mourn, and a time to dance'. At St. Olave's this message was reinforced by Advent sermons on themes such as watchfulness, patience, diligence and sincerity.<sup>55</sup> At St. Philip and St. James in the same city, Friday evening services during Advent had been introduced by 1881, and a midday Litany service on Fridays in 1884.<sup>56</sup> Special groups were also organised to retain parishioners' interest in the Advent message. Advent services for women began at Whitkirk in 1900 and an Advent Convention had become a feature at St. Olave's in the 1900s.<sup>57</sup> A feature of the Advent services was that they were based upon networks of clergymen travelling the country as visiting speakers. However, this in turn provides evidence that the emphasis on Advent was failing. Commenting on the slender congregations that the Thursday evening Advent services had received in 1891, the vicar of St. Philip and St. James noted that it 'does not encourage the inviting of clergy from a distance on week evenings'.<sup>58</sup> The disappointment became more pronounced in the 1900s. Special services were abandoned at Whitkirk in 1907 as there was 'material enough for everybody if they like to use it'.<sup>59</sup> It is feasible to suggest that the strong Advent message being propagated by the Established church in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods simply ran counter to the emotional basis of what Christmas intimacy had become.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, December 1894.

<sup>56</sup> *St. Philip and St. James Parish Magazine*, December 1881; January 1884.

<sup>57</sup> *Whitkirk Parish Magazine*, December 1900; *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, December 1911.

<sup>58</sup> *St. Philip and St. James Parish Magazine*, January 1892.

<sup>59</sup> *Whitkirk Parish Magazine*, December 1907.

<sup>60</sup> Whilst the Advent message was largely absent from Protestant nonconformity, the exception is to be



Services also proliferated on the saints' days that followed Christmas Day, and the most significant one of these was Holy Innocents' Day. It became the perfect setting for the interaction of the church's specific concern for the welfare of children with the wider popular notion of childhood innocence that was becoming increasingly prevalent within society as a whole. The church's increasing emphasis on childhood at Christmas, connected to the birth of Jesus, was one of the outward signs of a shift to an incarnational form of religion in Victorian society, and was one of the processes that positioned children at the centre of the Christmas festival.<sup>61</sup> In the early 1870s the Rev. C. M. Davies commented in one of his vignettes on the religious life of London that 'probably until the present time none ever thought how appropriate it would be to pray and praise as children and have sermons for children, on that day which is so thoroughly their own - Innocents' Day'. Davies was referring to Dean Stanley's introduction of an Innocents' Day service to Westminster Abbey, and saw it as part of a process in which 'we scarcely realize to what an extent children are, at Christmastide, masters of the situation'. For Davies this was 'social progress'. Stanley's address to the children included a historical narrative that also served to celebrate the idea of the child and childhood innocence, through reference to the eight-hundredth anniversary of Edward the Confessor completing Westminster Abbey, a man 'himself an innocent, guileless man - in many respects like a child'.<sup>62</sup> In 1878 *The Times* reported that children's

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found amongst the Unitarians. There were a series of Advent sermons throughout December 1879 at Mill Hill, Leeds, but this was not a feature that happened every year. In other years the December sermons would take a particular theme, as in 1889, when they featured 'nineteenth-century aims and new testament ideals'. *Mill Hill Chapel Monthly Calendar*, December 1879; December 1889.

<sup>61</sup> See chapters one and three. This process was supported by an increasing tendency for images of the Madonna and Child to be associated with Christmas. In 1848 the *Illustrated London News* reproduced Delaroche's 'La Vierge a la Vigne' and in 1849 Rubens' 'Adoration of the Magi'. See *Illustrated London News*, 23 December 1848, Christmas supplement 1849. Madonna and child images were also prevalent in the parish magazine insets that proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth century. See, for example, the *Gospeller*, December 1893. Manger scenes were also used, including the December 1894 edition of *Banner of Faith*. Later editions of John Keble's *Christian Year* were adorned with manger scenes to illustrate the Christmas passages. This can also be seen in late-Victorian Christmas carol collections. The 1901 edition of Joshua Sylvestre's *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern* contained four pictures of the Madonna and child. Not only did these images emphasised the importance of childhood to Christmas, they also emphasised the role of the mother. See J. Keble, *The Christian Year* (London, 1877), p. 18; and J. Sylvestre, *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern* (New York, 1901).

<sup>62</sup> Davies, *Orthodox London*, pp. 183-86.



services on Holy Innocents' Day were 'becoming increasingly common'.<sup>63</sup> In 1870 Whitkirk parish church had made a point of holding the Sunday scholar's Christmas tree on Holy Innocents' Day,<sup>64</sup> whilst in 1895 St. Olave's, York, introduced their annual children's celebration on that day.<sup>65</sup>

Roman Catholics had a generally more static series of Christmas services in the Victorian period. It was based upon a system of three masses, the first taking place at midnight, the second at the break of day, and the third in the forenoon of Christmas day.<sup>66</sup> Developments to this system were actually forced upon the Roman Catholic Church by political events, revealing again how Roman Catholicism was tied in with Irish issues. The public performance of the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve was banned by the Roman Catholic Bishops in 1867 because of disturbances linked to the Fenian activity of 1867-1868. It is possible that the Midnight Mass had become embroiled in a working-class street culture, as in York reference was also made condemning the behaviour of 'garibaldians', a reference to anti-Catholic riots that had taken place in 1862.<sup>67</sup> The ban remained in place in York throughout the 1870s, and the situation was resolved by having three successive masses on Christmas morning.<sup>68</sup> Midnight services on Christmas Eve also took place amongst the ritualist wing of the Anglican church, and can be seen as evidence of Anglicanism's ability to appropriate in order to flourish. The first instance of this took place during the period of controversy at St. Saviour's, Leeds, in the late 1840s.<sup>69</sup> In the early 1870s C. M. Davies described the ritualist midnight mass in its most extreme form at the church of St. Albans, Holborn, under the Rev. A. H. Mackonochie, which had become the most notorious of the

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<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1878.

<sup>64</sup> *Whitkirk Parish Magazine*, January 1871.

<sup>65</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, January 1898.

<sup>66</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1872.

<sup>67</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1867; D. M. MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750-1922* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 140, 175. There had been rioting in nearby Leeds.

<sup>68</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1872; 27 December 1875. Writing in the 1890s, John Ashton stated that the ban remained in force in the Diocese of Westminster, but that midnight mass was celebrated in conventual establishments. J. Ashton, *A Righte Merrie Christmässe!!! The Story of Christ-tide* (London, 1894), p. 90.

<sup>69</sup> J. H. Pollen, *Narrative of Five Years at St. Saviour's, Leeds* (Oxford, 1851), p. 103.



ritualist churches in the late 1860s.<sup>70</sup> For Davies, the proceedings, whilst aesthetically pleasing, were meaningless, and he commented ‘I did not know what was going on until they nearly got to the end of it’. Even the sermon made no sense to him: ‘But, I repeat, we had not come “to hear sermons.” We were there to attend a gorgeous sacrifice’. Davies felt it was a triumph of style over content, and made a pointed comparison with the opera house: ‘such a ceremony no more embodied my own religious life than *Traviata* does the ordinary life of thousands who are thrilled by it at the opera’. Davies’s reaction was tempered, however, by comparison with the drunken street culture he encountered when leaving the church, concluding that ‘such a contrast makes one very “broad” indeed’.<sup>71</sup> There is evidence that Midnight Mass within the Anglican Church became less popular in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1878 *The Times* reported that the ‘habit of midnight communion on Christmas-eve does not seem on the increase’, with the exception of churches located in the poorer neighbourhoods.<sup>72</sup> At Whitkirk a Christmas Eve service was held in 1869, but they do not appear to have held them later in the century.<sup>73</sup> There were also no Christmas Eve services at St. Saviour’s later in the nineteenth century. From the point of view of the Church, the problem may have been related to the strong Advent message they were trying to send out. At St. Saviour’s, John Wylde berated his parishioners, ‘it would be a great thing gained if at least all Church people would make a point of going to bed in good time on Christmas Eve’.<sup>74</sup> At St. Olave’s, York, a Christmas Eve service was not attempted until 1909, and here the vicar told his parishioners that ‘we *must* arrange to spend the hours of Christmas Eve from 6pm very quietly’.<sup>75</sup>

Given the desire to reclaim Christmas that could be found within the various brands of Methodism in the eighteenth century, it is safe to assume a continuity of some form of

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<sup>70</sup> O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church. Part 2: 1860-1901* (London, 1987), p. 321.

<sup>71</sup> Davies, *Orthodox London*, pp. 155-56.

<sup>72</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1878. See Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, pp. 311-13 on the attraction of elaborate ritual to the town labourer.

<sup>73</sup> *Whitkirk Parish Magazine*, December 1869.

<sup>74</sup> *St. Saviour’s Monthly Paper*, December 1892.

<sup>75</sup> *St. Olave’s Parish Magazine*, December 1909.

Christmas service through to the First World War and beyond, though evidence is often hard to come by. The form these services took, however, may have varied considerably over time. During the period of great revival in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there is evidence that Christmas Day was used as an occasion for the lovefeast, such as in Hull in 1793 and Harriseahead, Staffordshire in 1804.<sup>76</sup> By the 1810s, however, individual Methodist chapels were beginning to publish hymn sheets for use on Christmas Day, suggesting the beginning of a more formal period of Christmas worship.<sup>77</sup> By the beginning of the Victorian period, a Christmas Day service could not be guaranteed within the other Protestant nonconformist bodies unless it fell on a Sunday. The Unitarians at Mill Hill, Leeds, appear to have begun regular Christmas Day services in the late 1850s, and introduced additional services in the 1880s.<sup>78</sup> In York, a special Christmas service took place at Salem Congregational chapel in 1872.<sup>79</sup> I have not been able to uncover any formal Christmas services at Baptist chapels until the Edwardian age. At South Parade Baptist Church in Leeds, which reopened on a new site in 1909, it was notable that no Christmas Day services took place during their first four Christmases. This was however rectified in 1913, when the minister declared: 'We want to make this a great service of praise for all that His coming has meant to us, and we need your help'. However, he also added 'It will not be a long service'.<sup>80</sup> Nor have I found evidence of special Christmas services being held by the English Presbyterian Church, though *The Times* did carry a report on the Christmas day service at St. Columba's Church of Scotland in Pont Street, London in 1910.<sup>81</sup>

The emotional appeal of Christmas intimacy gradually weakened the Protestant dissenting opposition to Christmas, especially as that intimacy had such a strong

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<sup>76</sup> D. C. Dews, 'Methodism in Leeds from 1791 to 1861', (unpublished MPhil thesis, University of Bradford, 1984), 2 vols, pp. 313, 352.

<sup>77</sup> For example, see *A Selection of Hymns, for Christmas Day, 1814, to be Sung at the Methodist New Chapel, Waltham-Street, Hull* (Hull, 1814); and *A Selection of Hymns, for Christmas Day: to be Sung at the Methodist Chapels in Carver Street, Norfolk Street, and Bridgehouses* (Sheffield, 1817).

<sup>78</sup> *Mill Hill Chapel Record*, January 1858; *Mill Hill Chapel Monthly Calendar*, December 1881.

<sup>79</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1872.

<sup>80</sup> *South Parade Baptist Church Magazine*, December 1913.

<sup>81</sup> *The Times*, 26 December 1910.



grounding in family and home and growing connections with childhood. There may have also been an element of responding to demand. As Pimlott has argued, 'Some chapels started services on Christmas Day because they found that their members were going to the parish church'.<sup>82</sup> Nonconformist buildings may have also played a role. As both Green and A. D. Gilbert argue, the acquisition of permanent large spaces of worship that characterised nonconformist organisations in the second half of the nineteenth century were a significant step in the transformation of what Gilbert refers to as the transition from sect to denomination, and what for Green was the 'civilising principle'. Building ownership, and the implication of debt that was associated with it, may have encouraged an attitude of reverence for public space and an inherently middle-class ethos preoccupied with respectability.<sup>83</sup> This and the increasing popularity of Gothic architecture, may have induced a greater willingness to accept conventional modes of worship, particularly at key moments of the church year. Green has, however, found evidence that the 'degree of liturgical accumulation and adaptation' in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was heartfelt. At a presentation to the pastor at Northgate End Unitarian Chapel, Halifax in 1901, reference was made to the impression that 'the services of Easter and Christmas have gathered new associations around them which will be cherished in many hearts'.<sup>84</sup>

It should, however, be noted, that in Protestant nonconformist circles, Christmas was not one of the major attractions for the occasional chapelgoer. Protestant nonconformist organisations constructed an alternative liturgical year to distance themselves from the perceived corruption of both the Established and Roman Catholic churches. The highlights of this alternative liturgical year were the chapel and school anniversaries as well as the watch nights and, as Cox argues, these were the attraction to the occasional chapelgoer.<sup>85</sup> Sometimes the anniversaries could be located around the Christmas

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<sup>82</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 92.

<sup>83</sup> A. D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel, and Social Change, 1740-1914* (London, 1976), pp. 139, 160-62; Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 300.

<sup>84</sup> R. E. Nicholson, 'Presentation to F. E. Millson', March 1901, Minute Book of the Presentation, cited in Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 294. Northgate End Chapel was rebuilt in the Gothic style in 1872.

<sup>85</sup> Cox, *English Churches in a Secular Society*, p. 102.



period. At Mill Hill the celebration of the chapel anniversary began only in 1902, and was located on 28 December. By 1908 the celebration of Christmas and the chapel anniversary had almost merged into one, with Mendelssohn's *Hymn of Praise* being performed to celebrate the anniversary, followed by a service of Christmas carols.<sup>86</sup> Anniversaries could also be popular within the evangelical wing of the Anglican Church. At St. Simon's, Leeds, much more emphasis was placed upon the anniversary festival than Christmas throughout the 1870s, and by 1883 they were being talked about in much the same way, as 'coming but once a year and bringing good cheer'.<sup>87</sup>

In the context of the Christmas period the most important of the alternative festivals were the New Year watch nights. Moravian in origin, watch nights first appeared in England near Bristol in the 1740s, and were quickly endorsed by John Wesley for widespread use amongst Methodists. Although they were first used throughout the year, New Year's Eve emerged as the pre-eminent time to observe the watch night. Schmidt comments on the 'potential for pious practice' that the watch nights presented for evangelicals. Watch nights provided an expressive vehicle through special 'hymns, exhortations, prayers and testimonials' and the timing of the end of the secular year added urgency to the call to repent, whilst the vigilance of the late hour placed evangelicals 'in the eschatological framework of being ready for Christ's second coming', implying a kind of 'Advent piety'. Schmidt interprets the watch night as an opposition both to the rowdy street culture and also the 'mannered fashions of the genteel'.<sup>88</sup> Later in the period, evidence from South London suggests that the watch

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<sup>86</sup> *Mill Hill Chapel Record*, January 1903; December 1908. They were celebrating both the establishment of the original chapel in 1672 and the current chapel in 1848.

<sup>87</sup> *St. Simon's Parochial Magazine*, December 1883.

<sup>88</sup> L. E. Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: the Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton, 1995), pp. 119-21. See also 'Time, Celebration, and the Christian Year', pp. 97-101. Henry Rack describes the watch nights as 'a spiritualized counter-attraction to that pagan folk-festival'. See H. D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London, 1989), p. 412. The emphasis on reflection in the watch night was important in framing the emotional connections of family and friends within the intimacy of Christmas. See chapter one. In 1823 the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* spelt out the evangelical attitude to the New Year: 'The expiration of the old year, and the commencement of the new one, are too generally seasons of mere dissipation and festivity. Let us pause, and dedicate a little time to serious meditation. It is wise to reflect on the past, and to contemplate the future. Behind us, we survey an unbroken train of mercies, reaching out from our birth to the present moment; and before us, a succession of blessings, secured by the promises of GOD, and stretched into eternity ...' See *Wesleyan Methodist*



night had become entwined with the culture of the street. In Southwark, Sarah Williams found that watch-night services could be ‘filled to overflowing with those who had left a nearby pub’,<sup>89</sup> whilst in Lambeth, Cox discovered that bands of youths connected to Christian Endeavour Societies went round the pubs in order to steer the drunken crowds towards the chapel instead of church.<sup>90</sup> Both Cox and Williams highlight the connection between the attendance of watch-night services and popular beliefs concerning luck. The desire to be inside a place of worship at the start of the year indicates what Williams terms ‘spiritual cleansing’ and the idea of ‘starting the year right’, and is closely associated with domestic cleaning rituals and New Year resolutions.<sup>91</sup> However, disagreement has arisen on how to interpret this. Williams sees this as a sign of how ‘church-based culture’ can govern the wider elements of everyday life,<sup>92</sup> and Green is in sympathy with this view, arguing that such services reminded people of their connections to places of worship.<sup>93</sup> Cox, conversely, believes the religious institutions were fighting a war ‘with the popular religion of “luck”’.<sup>94</sup> There is evidence from rural areas to suggest that watch nights merged with older traditions of village life. In 1888 the choir of the Wesleyan chapel at Stockton-on-the-Forest near York spent the night ‘serenading their neighbours’.<sup>95</sup> This kind of activity contrasts with the evidence highlighted by A. B. Bartlett’s study of Bermondsey. Bartlett found that the watch night was aggressively used by ministers to highlight temperance themes and solemn subjects. Bartlett also discovered the irony of widespread agreement amongst ministers that watch-night preaching had little long-term effect on congregations, and tended to confirm stereotypes in the minds of those attending.<sup>96</sup> Such issues raise the question

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*Magazine*, January 1823.

<sup>89</sup> S. Williams, ‘Urban Popular Religion and the Rites of Passage’ in H. McLeod (ed.), *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities 1830-1930* (London and New York, 1995), p. 223. Much of this article has been reproduced in chapter 4 of S. C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark c. 1880-1939* (Oxford and New York, 1999). See chapter three for Christmas street culture.

<sup>90</sup> Cox, *English Churches in a Secular Society*, p. 103.

<sup>91</sup> Williams, ‘Urban Popular Religion’, pp. 223-24.

<sup>92</sup> Williams, ‘Urban Popular Religion’, p. 225.

<sup>93</sup> Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 340.

<sup>94</sup> Cox, *English Churches in a Secular Society*, p. 103.

<sup>95</sup> *York Methodist Magazine*, January 1889.

<sup>96</sup> A. B. Bartlett, ‘The Churches in Bermondsey 1880-1939’, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1987), p. 203.

concerning the respectability of the congregation, especially if large sections of it were drunk. Williams has discovered evidence from 1913 where the address was illustrated by slides, and 'it was common for a large number of the congregation to stand and testify to a dramatic conversion experience'.<sup>97</sup> The atmosphere of religion, street culture, and popular superstition recreated a scene where echoes of Methodist revival of a hundred years previous could be heard.

The expansion of the watch-night phenomenon is testament to the continuing appeal of the sentiment of the Atonement. As a truly popular phenomenon, this expansion can be located in the Victorian period. It would be mistaken to presume the existence of a long-established tradition of watch nights within Methodism stretching back into the eighteenth century throughout the country as a whole. Green, for example, found no evidence of watch-night activity in the area of Halifax, Keighley and Denholme before 1875.<sup>98</sup> From the mid nineteenth century onwards watch nights penetrated the culture of other Christian denominations. In York the Baptists observed a watch-night for the start of 1866.<sup>99</sup> Congregational watch nights welcomed in 1872 at Lendal Chapel in York and 1885 at Harrison Road Chapel in Halifax. The Unitarians in Halifax initiated a watch night in 1908.<sup>100</sup> The most important appropriation of watch nights was by the Anglican Church. The first instance of this took place at Leeds Parish Church at the start of 1849, and in York a watch-night service was held at All Saint's Pavement to welcome 1858. In the same city, watch-night services were being held at Holy Trinity Micklegate, St. Mary's Castlegate, St. Michael-le-Belfrey, and St. Thomas in the Groves by 1874,<sup>101</sup> and services were introduced to St. Philip and St. James in 1881.<sup>102</sup> In Leeds, watch-night services had been introduced to St. Simon's by 1876 and to St. Saviour's in 1883.<sup>103</sup> This latter introduction shows how the watch-night service was able to breach the

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<sup>97</sup> Williams, 'Urban Popular Religion', p. 225.

<sup>98</sup> Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 339.

<sup>99</sup> *York Herald*, 6 January 1866.

<sup>100</sup> *York Herald*, 6 January 1872; Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, pp. 339-40.

<sup>101</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 January 1849; *York Herald*, 2 January 1858; 1 January 1874.

<sup>102</sup> *St. Philip and St. James Parish Magazine*, December 1880.

<sup>103</sup> *St. Simon's Parochial Magazine*, January 1876; *St. Saviour's Monthly Paper*, December 1882.



divides of Anglicanism. C. M. Davies described in the early 1870s how the watch night was introduced at St. Alban's, Holborn, implying a good deal of pragmatism: 'Even now, whilst adopting the idea, the Ritualist protests against it as un-Catholic; but wisely adapts himself to circumstances since he cannot adapt circumstances to himself'. This pragmatism was apparent in the way the service was conducted:

There was not a symptom of Ritualism to be seen. The beautiful chancel was not used. The hymns were special ones culled from the Wesleyan manuals. There was no choir. Father Stanton was the sole 'minister', and he wore no vestments; not even the possibly obnoxious surplice.<sup>104</sup>

On the subject of the New Year, Davies acknowledged that 'it has such significance, and the Church of England lately, in common with other religious bodies, has recognised the fact, and celebrated Watch-Night, or the Vigil of New Year's Day, with solemn services and suitable addresses'. Davies highlighted that there were varying customs. 'Homely addresses' were common in the chapels, whilst Anglican churches would more frequently offer a sermon, and high churches Holy Communion. Davies viewed the watch night in a positive light, a sign of the 'moving of the dry bones on all sides. Another was the gradual removal of old landmarks in the shape of narrow and exclusive lines of thought and practice'. To highlight this point Davies described the revelation of a Baptist minister who had been allowed to hold a service at a Quaker chapel.<sup>105</sup>

### Sermons

Sermons were a common feature of Christmas services throughout the period. In the eighteenth century, three main characteristics of Christmas sermons can be identified. Firstly, they replicated, and may even have been a source of, the discursive opposition to the plebeian and polite forms of Christmas. In a sermon preached at St. Dunstan's in the West, London, on Christmas Day 1757, William Romaine (1714-1795) stated that:

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<sup>104</sup> Davies, *Orthodox London*, pp. 176-78.

<sup>105</sup> Davies, *Orthodox London*, pp. 171-75.

What is minded among us but Pleasure, and getting money to enjoy Pleasure with, in frequenting Balls, Masquerades, Assemblies, Card-Tables, Operas, Plays, Dancing, Singing, and many other fashionable Diversions; and are these proper at this holy Season? ... That a Man should go to the Devil's House to celebrate the Birth of CHRIST! Now *the politer Sort of People spend their Time in this Manner*. Look around the City, and see how the lower class of People will be spending their Time by all kind of rioting and Excess; it will be very difficult to walk the streets To-morrow; they will be behaving just in the same Manner as if they were celebrating the Birth-Day of the drunken God *Bacchus!* ...<sup>106</sup>

Secondly, sermons reaffirmed the fact that Christmas was being mediated by the message of redemption and the Atonement. On Christmas Day 1755, Thomas Turner recorded hearing a sermon preached on the theme of Hebrews 9:26, 'But now once in the end of the world he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself'.<sup>107</sup> Thirdly, sermons encouraged an emotional response to the religious demands placed upon the individual. John Disney's (1746-1816) 'Sermon for Christmas Day' stated:

Let the effusions of our hearts pay the grateful tribute - the pleasing sacrifice. - Let us receive the tender and warm impressions, which, so great love for man, must make upon us, and for a few moments give loose to those emotions which, as Christians, should be our happiness and our glory.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> W. Romaine, *The Necessity of Receiving Christ in our Hearts, set forth in a Sermon Preached at St. Dunstan's in the West, London, on Christmas-Day... 1757* (London, 1758), pp. 12-13. Though remaining in the Church of England, Romaine was initially drawn to the Methodism of Wesley, but from 1755 he supported the Calvinistic Methodism of Whitefield. The published version of this sermon contains a censorious address to the preacher, complaining of his deviation from the liturgy and articles of the Established Church.

<sup>107</sup> Vaisey, *Diary of Thomas Turner*, p. 19. At the dissenting chapel Richard Kay attended, the Christmas Day sermon in 1742 was based upon Matthew 1:21, 'And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins'. Brockbank and Kenworthy, *Diary of Richard Kay*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>108</sup> J. Disney, *The Birth, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, and the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, Considered in Four Sermons, Preached on Christmas-Day, Good-Friday, and Easter and Whit-Sundays* (London, 1771). Disney was vicar of Swinderby in Lincolnshire, before becoming a Unitarian minister in 1782.



These messages in the eighteenth-century Christmas sermon helped people define the sentimental terms in which Christmas could be understood and helped infuse the discourse of Christmas with an emotional language.

By the second half of the nineteenth century Christmas sermons were beginning to change, though there is also evidence of some continuities, and here evidence can be drawn both from reports of sermons and the exhortations of the clergy in parish magazine inserts and newspapers. The oppositional tone continued throughout the nineteenth century. In 1876 the vicar of Whitkirk warned about Christmas being ‘a time of danger and temptation’,<sup>109</sup> and in 1881 John Wylde at St. Saviour’s warned of excess, sin and self-indulgence with particular reference to drunkenness and gluttony. But there was a softening of tone. What Wylde was seeking was an ordering of priorities, with Holy Communion and ‘the joy in the Holy Child of Bethlehem’ at the top, followed by ‘the family gatherings, the worldly festivities, [and] the moderate feasting’ as the lower priorities.<sup>110</sup> Wylde’s reference to the ‘family gatherings’ was significant. Clergymen increasingly made frequent references to home and the family. It was representative both of the increasing popularity of incarnational religion and of clergymen’s attempts to appropriate one of the central experiences of Christmas as having religious meaning. In 1867 Canon Hey, addressing the York Church Institute declared ‘that the quiet cheerfulness of the domestic hearth, and the re-union of scattered members of families was a ... fitting celebration of Him’.<sup>111</sup> At the same time Unitarians were making similar connections between Christmas, chapel and home in discussing the importance of keeping up the ‘*true sentiment* of Christmas in connexion with the House of God, as well as with our own homes’.<sup>112</sup> However there was also an awareness that religious bodies faced competition from the domestic interior, when Charles Hargrove declared in reference to Christmas services that ‘we must try and make them as suitable to the occasion as possible, so that none may repent of having left fireside and family’.<sup>113</sup> By

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<sup>109</sup> *Whitkirk Parish Magazine*, December 1876.

<sup>110</sup> *St. Saviour’s Monthly Paper*, December 1881.

<sup>111</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1867.

<sup>112</sup> *Mill Hill Chapel Record*, January 1867.

<sup>113</sup> *Mill Hill Chapel Monthly Calendar*, December 1893.

1913, Canon Austen of York Minster was making the link between the Incarnation and the home explicit:

The incarnation shows us that the Lord is with us in the changing scenes associated with the home. It is mostly the place of our chief joys and sorrows, pleasures and pain. There we breathed the breath of life; there happened the events which stand out in childhood. Thence we go forth into the world; thither we used to return to a haven of rest. There we discuss; thence begin sons and daughters their marriage life; there we watch by the bedside of those upon whom God has laid his hand. God aims to bless all life, and certainly to bless home life. Apart from Him there can be no lasting joy, and only those homes where He is recognised and honoured can really be home ...<sup>114</sup>

Incarnational thought relating to Christmas also centred on childhood. Naturally some sermons might dwell upon the events of Christ's birth, but in the late-Victorian age this message started to merge with the wider notions of the ideal of childhood that were prevalent in society. This was evident in Dean Church's address to St. Paul's Cathedral in 1880, when he captured the prevalent psychological approach to Christmas in the phrase 'At Christmas we rejoiced as children rejoiced'.<sup>115</sup> In 1900 Charles Hargrove revealed his innate belief in childhood innocence, when in reference to keeping a sombre demeanour at Christmas because of the Boer War, he declared 'I have not exchanged the ordinary greetings at all, except to wish joy to the little children, who have, thank God, little share in our troubles and no responsibility for our sins'.<sup>116</sup> This attitude to childhood reached its clearest state through Canon Alexander's sermon at St. Paul's Cathedral in 1910. Alexander declared that 'The triumph of Christianity was to be, in many senses, the triumph of childhood' and went on to discuss the inherent qualities being projected on to children and the desirability of remaining in a childlike state:

The story of the incarnate Christ ... seems to carry with it all that is most closely associated with what we care for in childhood - with gladness,

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<sup>114</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 26 December 1913.

<sup>115</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1880.

<sup>116</sup> *Mill Hill Chapel Record*, January 1900. This contrasts with the old evangelical doctrine of original sin.



faith, hope, innocence, trustfulness, simplicity, large-eyed wonder, strength made perfect in weakness, contentment with little things. A very childlike child Jesus must have been: dowered with that kind of happiness which you only find in people who are grave and gentle: eager to ask questions that could not easily be answered, eager to give answers that were no less unexpected and surprising; with the tranquil, steadfast look of one who, as in Raphael's great picture, seems to have a secret of his own and to know far more than he chooses to tell us - and a child in heart, we may believe, He remained to the end ... The message of Christmas meant the recovery of the world's childhood ...<sup>117</sup>

Hilton suggests that another manifestation of incarnational thought was through 'a dynamic sense of time past and future', as the evangelical sense of time as 'static-cum-cyclical' was transformed by historical enquiry and advances in geology and biology.<sup>118</sup> Canon Hanson's Christmas sermon at St. Margaret's, Westminster, in 1910 made this link between the Incarnation and time, declaring that 'God is present in history from the first, and history will finally end in God'; that the 'Incarnation was the climax of an historic process' and that the 'complete content of the Gospel of the Incarnation will not be known until the last chapter of human history has been written and the Book of Time has been finally closed'.<sup>119</sup> Earlier in 1880, Dean Church used historical parallels between the Roman Empire and the contemporary British imperial experience to highlight misgivings about the state of the national character.<sup>120</sup>

By the Edwardian period, there developed amongst churchmen of all varieties a desire to try and separate the religious and secular aspects of Christmas. In 1910 the Congregational minister of Salem Chapel, York, addressed the men's open meeting on the afternoon of Christmas Day, implicitly dividing the festival along the lines of 'Yuletide or Christmas', and urged his congregation to observe the latter, meaning the religious festival.<sup>121</sup> In 1914, Canon Tupper-Carey, addressing a men's service at St.

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<sup>117</sup> *The Times*, 26 December 1910.

<sup>118</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 33-34 and chapter 8, *passim*.

<sup>119</sup> *The Times*, 26 December 1910.

<sup>120</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1880.

<sup>121</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 26 December 1910. This paralleled the contemporary thinking on Christmas in scholarly circles, when in 1912 Clement Miles divided his *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition* into distinct Christian and pagan sections.



Barnabas Church, York, caused a minor local commotion by suggesting that Christmas be abandoned for a short time, because the excessive drunkenness associated with it caused fear and dread to 'hundreds of thousands of mothers and wives'. The issue was taken up by the local press, who pursued other local clergymen for their opinions, who in turn felt the need to clarify that Tupper-Carey meant that the secular Christmas should be abandoned. The vicar of St. Olave's reiterated the idea of separation of the religious and secular, and also revealed the impact of another aspect of modernity. Charles Bell declared that 'We have to divide between Christian and heathen'. Antiquarian writers of the eighteenth century made frequent references to 'heathen' origins in their discussions of Christmas,<sup>122</sup> but after the imperial experience of the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the word 'heathen' came to take on a new meaning. It took on the association of 'savage', and there was a certain savagery implied by Bell in his statement that the 'heathen take advantage of the Christmas holiday and behave as heathen.' Other clergymen were more realistic in what the church was able to achieve. P. J. Shaw believed that 'outsiders will do differently, that is all. You can't make people religious. It must be a voluntary act on their part. The Church must provide them with opportunities for being religious'.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> See, for example, H. Bourne, *Antiquitates Vulgares; or the Antiquities of the Common People* (Newcastle, 1725).

<sup>123</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 6 January 1914. Shaw was an extreme Anglo-Catholic. This episode reflected a wider trend of clergyman constructing a public discourse of a religious Christmas in the Edwardian press. In 1908, for example, the *Daily Mail* featured a page of 'Christmas Messages. Brief and Practical Sermons by Leaders of Religious Thought', including the Dean of Manchester, the Canon of Westminster, the Superintendent of the West London Mission, the founder and Honorary Chief Secretary of the Church Army, and the Rev. W. L. Watkinson, ex-president of the Wesleyan Conference. See *Daily Mail*, 25 December 1908. These messages provoked a reaction from radical secularists. In 1911 the *Freethinker*, which had been using Christmas as a method to attack organised religion since the 1880s, published an article by J. T. Lloyd, which itself was an attack on an article published in the *Methodist Times* by the Rev. J. E. Rattenbury. Rattenbury had emphasised the secular rather than the theological character of Christmas, but Lloyd felt that 'like all divines, he makes the mistake of treating the secular elements as if they were the direct results of a Divine incarnation, ignoring the fact that mankind had been familiar with them for countless ages before that alleged event took place'. Rattenbury was arguing that the spiritual and material worlds were not divorced, that all common things were made sublime by Jesus, and whoever did not realise this was blind. Lloyd found this talk insulting, dismissing Rattenbury as a 'twentieth century popular preacher' and questioning what was sublime about the experience of the 'submerged masses who inhabit the slums'. See the *Freethinker*, 24 December 1911.



Amongst some clergymen, a process of accepting the secular aspects of Christmas had long been underway. In 1887 the vicar of St. Simon's, Leeds, declared that

Once more we have come to the closing month of another year, and Father Christmas, crowned with holly and crusted all over with snowflakes and icicles, will be peeping at us with his jolly, rosy face. Well, we are always glad to see him. The world has so many sad and painful sights, that even a merry face in itself is a pleasant variation to look upon.<sup>124</sup>

The popular imagery was often irresistible. This was demonstrated by the minister of South Parade Baptist Church. When, in 1912, he decided to comment on the nature of Christmas, the only way he could find to articulate his feelings was through reference to the secular scripture of *A Christmas Carol*, quoting extensively from it, and concluding that 'may we so enter into its spirit with hearts prepared for a large hospitality to Jesus Christ that we shall determine with Ebenezer Scrooge, after his vision, "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year"'.<sup>125</sup>

### Church Music and Christmas Carols

Music might also play a significant part in Christmas services. For the first two centuries following the Reformation, the Calvinistic suspicion of texts not directly derived from Scripture meant that sung worship within the Anglican Church largely consisted of metrical psalms. There was, however, a gradual relaxing of this Calvinist orthodoxy from the seventeenth century onwards, though as John Wolffe stresses, innovations were never universally uncontested.<sup>126</sup> However, the general impression of Anglican Church music in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was that metrical psalms were the norm, and only in the nineteenth century were they superseded

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<sup>124</sup> *St. Simon's Parochial Magazine*, December 1887.

<sup>125</sup> *South Parade Baptist Church Magazine*, December 1912. See my comments above concerning the contemporary interpretation of the *Carol*.

<sup>126</sup> J. Wolffe, "'Praise to the Holiest in the Height": Hymns and Church Music', in J. Wolffe (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain. Volume V: Culture and Empire* (Manchester, 1997), pp. 61-62. See also N. Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge, 1979), vol. 1.



by hymns.<sup>127</sup> Within this context, a large emphasis has been placed upon the development of hymn singing in Methodist circles. John and Charles Wesley's *Hymns and Sacred Poems* was published in 1739, and included the 'Hymn for Christmass-Day' 'Hark how all the Welkin rings'.<sup>128</sup> Schmidt argues that this hymn 'combined traditional recognition of Christmas as the holy day of the Incarnation with evangelical themes of new birth', as well as leaving 'an enduring imprint on evangelical piety'; whilst Bernard Manning has suggested that this type of hymn has come to form a functional alternative for evangelical Protestants at the great festivals.<sup>129</sup> *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord* followed in 1744.<sup>130</sup> In 1780 John Wesley published a compilation entitled *Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists*, which became a basic source of reference.<sup>131</sup> This included a section on Christ's incarnation, which itself included the inevitable 'Hark the herald'. The popularity of Methodist hymn singing at Christmas can be shown in the way it was taken up by culturally distinctive communities. In the early nineteenth century, for example, Methodists in the colliery villages of Durham established the custom of singing Methodist hymns through the villages, starting at three o'clock on Christmas morning, describing them as 'Methodist Christmas carols'.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> V. Gammon, "Babylonian Performances": the Rise and Suppression of Popular Church Music, 1660-1870', in E. and S. Yeo (eds), *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590-1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure* (Sussex, 1981), pp. 62-63. Evidence that hymns were being used in Christmas services emerges towards the end of the eighteenth century. Hymns were sung at St. John's, Liverpool on Christmas Day 1786; at Sutton Coldfield church in 1789, and at Rotherham in 1810. See *Hymn to be Sung at St. John's, on Christmas Day, and the Sunday Following* (Liverpool, 1786); *Hymns for Christmas-Day; as Sung at Sutton-Coldfield Church, 1789* (Birmingham, 1789); and *A Selection of Hymns to be Sung at the Parish Church, Rotherham, on Christmas Day* (Rotherham, 1810).

<sup>128</sup> This was amended to 'Hark, the herald angels sing' by George Whitefield for his *Collection of Hymns for Social Worship* published in 1753. See Schmidt, 'Time, Celebration, and the Christian Year', p. 98; J. and C. Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London, 1739), p. 206; and J. Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology, Setting Forth the Origin and History of Christian Hymns of All Ages and Nations* (New York, 1892), pp. 486-88.

<sup>129</sup> Schmidt, 'Time, Celebration, and the Christian Year', p. 98; B. L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts: Five Informal Papers* (London, 1942), p. 135.

<sup>130</sup> Schmidt, 'Time, Celebration, and the Christian Year', p. 99.

<sup>131</sup> Wolffe, 'Praise to the Holiest in the Height', p. 63.

<sup>132</sup> Writing in the Edwardian period, George Parkinson (b. 1828) stated that his own participation in this custom kept 'up the custom which the early Methodists established in the colliery villages of Durham over a hundred years ago'. See G. Parkinson, *True Stories of Durham Pitlife* (London, 1912), p. 128. I am grateful to Helen Rogers for bringing this source to my attention.



Hymn singing was another factor in the process of raising the emotional intensity of Christmas, and the musical legacy of Methodism has been credited with the encouraging, through the introduction of hymns, of congregational singing in the Anglican church.<sup>133</sup> In the nineteenth century, this was often manifested at Christmas in the performance of hymns drawn from Handel's *Messiah*. Handel's *Messiah* was first performed in Dublin in 1742 and London in 1743, and was received with enthusiasm in Lancashire and Yorkshire in the 1760s. Whilst Methodists did much to encourage performances (usually of selections), and some of the earliest crucial performances were held at Anglican institutions, it was actually secular choral and philharmonic societies who perpetuated *Messiah's* popularity, and this popularity permeated religious institutions in the second half of the nineteenth century, by which point it had become firmly associated with Christmas.<sup>134</sup> Only a relatively small portion of Handel's *Messiah* deals with the nativity, so it is not entirely clear why this exclusive connection with Christmas was increasingly made in the nineteenth century.<sup>135</sup> It is possible that contemporaries made an emotional connection, mediated by Christmas intimacy, with the increasingly entertainment-based performative elements that surrounded *Messiah*, a connection that placed it in a context of activity that included music and theatricals in both the home and in public.<sup>136</sup> At York Minster, where selections from *Messiah* were regularly performed from the 1850s, the choir was augmented with members of the town's choral society, as well as several local schools.<sup>137</sup> The popularity of *Messiah* reached down to parish level,<sup>138</sup> and was also popular amongst Methodists and Unitarians. The Wesleyan Methodists at New Street Chapel in York performed selections from *Messiah* on Christmas Day 1886<sup>139</sup>, as did the Unitarians at Mill Hill in Leeds in 1892.<sup>140</sup> Another related form of music that crossed these religious divides was

<sup>133</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 110; Obelkovich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 147.

<sup>134</sup> D. Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914* (2nd edn, Manchester, 1997), pp. 192-93, 263.

<sup>135</sup> Though part one looks forward to the coming of the Messiah and so is appropriate to Advent.

<sup>136</sup> This is not to suggest that the idea of religious services as an entertainment was a new one. For example see Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 189-90 on Methodist preaching as performance.

<sup>137</sup> *York Herald*, 3 December 1859.

<sup>138</sup> For example, selections from the *Messiah* were performed at St. Simon's Church in Leeds at Christmas 1897. *St. Simon's Parochial Magazine*, January 1897.

<sup>139</sup> *York Herald*, 1 January 1887. This attracted a large congregation.

<sup>140</sup> *Mill Hill Chapel Monthly Calendar*, December 1892.



a fashion for performing cantatas in the build up to Christmas.<sup>141</sup> York Baptists performed a nativity cantata in 1879; the same piece had been performed five years previously by York's Primitive Methodist body.<sup>142</sup> Anglican churches keen on stressing the importance of Advent also made use of cantatas. At St. Olave's in the same city Clement Locknane's *The Birth of Christ* was performed in 1893 and Garrett's *The Two Advents* in 1894 and 1896, though it was stressed on such occasions that such activities were acts of worship and preparation, and the element of performance and by association entertainment was played down.<sup>143</sup> This ambivalence regarding entertainment was also apparent amongst the Unitarians at Mill Hill, Leeds. On Christmas Day 1898 Mendelssohn's *Hymn of Praise* was performed in chapel, involving the employment of a 28-strong professional orchestra, and the augmentation of their choir<sup>144</sup> by members of the Leeds Choral Union. The minister Charles Hargrove rhapsodised about the event, noting how much more appropriate the chapel setting was in comparison to the concert hall:

I realised as I had never done before how inappropriate such music is to the conditions under which it is generally heard, ... which cannot but degrade it from the sublime purpose it should serve as an act of worship. A place of amusement, and evening dress, and a fashionable audience in reserved seats, and vigorous applause, how ill they suit with the song of thanksgiving, the assertion of faith, the cry of prayer!<sup>145</sup>

Hargrove's sentiments are a precursor to religious leaders' explicit discursive construction of an opposition between a religious and a secular Christmas in the Edwardian press. Negative opinions were, however, being sounded regarding the quality

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<sup>141</sup> As Wolffe highlights, many clergymen were suspicious of the use of oratorios and sacred cantatas precisely because 'it was seen as devaluing Christianity by turning it into entertainment, but its appeal was unquestionable'. Wolffe, 'Praise to the Holiest in the Height', p. 94.

<sup>142</sup> *York Herald*, 24 December 1874; 24 December 1879.

<sup>143</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, December 1893; December 1894; January 1897.

<sup>144</sup> Choral music had been a feature of Christmas services at Mill Hill chapel since 1863, the year a vesper choir was formed, though care was 'taken that the music shall be strictly subordinate to the devotional aims of the service'. By 1867 the chapel magazine was boasting 'one of the largest choirs we have seen on any occasion of the kind', making the Christmas morning service 'one of the pleasantest in the year'. *Mill Hill Chapel Record*, January 1864; January 1868.

<sup>145</sup> *Mill Hill Chapel Record*, December 1898; January 1899.



of the religious Christmas experience. In 1910 *The Times* was lamenting the reliance of Anglican Church musicians on *Messiah*, as well as Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*. Instead *The Times* was appreciative of the Roman Catholic efforts at Westminster Cathedral to revive older English church music, performing as they did all of Byrd's Christmas motets, though Westminster Abbey was also praised for performing Purcell's 'Behold I Bring You Good Tidings' and Sweelinck's 'Hodie Christus natus est'.<sup>146</sup> Other evidence suggests that the rediscovery of old music within Roman Catholic circles was a relatively new phenomenon. The Roman Catholic churches in mid-Victorian York drew upon a rich tradition of continental mass settings by Mozart, Haydn and Gounod. Continuing use was also made of the 'Adeste Fideles'.<sup>147</sup> The performance of the original version of this piece was also found at ritualistically inclined Anglican churches. Pollen recorded its use at St. Saviour's, Leeds, in the late 1840s,<sup>148</sup> and it was still in use at St. Olave's, York, in 1898 as the commencement of the choral Eucharist.<sup>149</sup> However, there is no evidence that ritualists sought to imitate aspects of contemporary Roman Catholic practice in terms of Christmas music, though some use of continental settings can be found. At St. Paul's Cathedral in 1894, the high service included music by Gounod and Schubert; the same year Gounod's 'Ave Verum' was performed at St. Olave's, York.<sup>150</sup>

In 1910 *The Times* also attacked the Established Church for its appropriation of carol singing,<sup>151</sup> declaring that carol singing

<sup>146</sup> *The Times*, 24 December 1910. The performance of the latter indicates that such an interest cannot merely be dismissed as further evidence of the refashioning of English identity, as Connelly does, through the rediscovery of old music, since *The Times* believed 'there is still much Christmas music among the work of the early Northern and Italian schools ... waiting to be brought back to life in our churches'. See Connelly, *Christmas. A Social History* (London and New York, 1999), chapter three.

<sup>147</sup> *York Herald*, 26 December 1874. 'Adeste Fideles' was composed in the early 1740s by John Wade, a fervent Jacobite, at the English Catholic college at Douai in France. It was translated by Frederick Oakeley in 1841, becoming the now familiar 'O Come all ye Faithful'. I. Bradley, 'Sing Choir of Angels', *History Today*, 48 (December 1998), p. 45; Rowell, 'Dickens and the Construction of Christmas', p. 21.

<sup>148</sup> Pollen, *Narrative of Five Years*, p. 104.

<sup>149</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, January 1899.

<sup>150</sup> *The Times*, 26 December 1894; *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, January 1895.

<sup>151</sup> There is an extensive literature on the history and development of the Christmas carol. See Connelly, *Christmas*, chapter 3; E. Routley, *The English Carol* (New York, 1959); H. Keyte and A. Parrott, *The New Oxford Book of Carols* (Oxford, 1992); Bradley, 'Sing Choirs of Angels'; R. Greene, *The Early English Carols* (London, 1935); D. Brice, *The Folk-Carol of England* (London, 1967).



is now so widely accepted in churches of every kind that we seem in danger of regarding the carol as an wholly ecclesiastical work of art, whereas its genesis and its history is secular in the best and broadest sense of the word. Both the words and the music of the old carols kept their freshness and vitality because they were entirely untrammelled by ecclesiastical associations.<sup>152</sup>

This article went on to comment that a good carol, instead of bearing ‘the stamp of the theologian’, should be a ‘frank expression of some personal feeling, ranging freely over every part of the Christmas festival, from the wassail-bowl to the thought of the Babe lying in the Manger’.<sup>153</sup> Christmas carols were a key area where religion, folk culture, and antiquarianism intersected. The carol, not necessarily religious, or associated with Christmas, emerged in the medieval period. By the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a large number of carols were being printed in cheap broadsheet form, including *Three New Christmas Carols*, published in 1760.<sup>154</sup> By the early nineteenth century, however, antiquarians, particularly Davies Gilbert and William Sandys, had taken a great interest in Christmas carols, believing that they were relics of a dying folk culture, and began to publish collections of them.<sup>155</sup> Whilst the later nineteenth century witnessed a number of successors to the publications of Gilbert and Sandys,<sup>156</sup> a more significant development took place after 1850 with the publication of carol books by clergymen designed for use within the church. These developments must be understood within the context of the Oxford Movement. In 1853 the tractarians J. M. Neale and T. Helmore published *Carols for Christmas-tide*, which was followed by Edmund

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<sup>152</sup> *The Times*, 24 December 1910.

<sup>153</sup> *The Times*, 24 December 1910.

<sup>154</sup> *Three New Christmas Carols* (London, 1760). This included ‘God rest on merry, gentlemen’, ‘The moon shines bright’, and ‘The first good joy our Mary had’. See also Connelly, *Christmas*, p. 66.

<sup>155</sup> D. Gilbert, *Some Ancient Christmas Carols, with the Tunes to which they were Formerly Sung in the West of England* (London, 1823); and W. Sandys, *Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern* (London, 1833). See also Connelly, *Christmas*, p. 62-66.

<sup>156</sup> For example, M. M. Butt, *The Christmas Carol* (London, 1839); E. F. Rimbault, *A Little Book of Christmas Carols* (London, 1846); J. Sylvester, *A Garland of Christmas Carols* (London, 1861). There were also many cheap anonymously published collections including: *A Book of Christmas Carols* (London, 1840); *100 Christmas Carols for Christmas Day* (London, 1860); *Christmas Carols* (London, 1877); *A Garland of Christmas Carols* (Newcastle, 1880); *Christmas Bells* (London, 1882); *Christmas Carols* (London, 1886). As Connelly has stated, ‘the market was now awash with them’. Connelly, *Christmas*, p. 69.



Sedding's *A Collection of Ancient Christmas Carols* in 1860, H. R. Bramley and John Stainer's *Christmas Carols Old and New* in 1869, and R. R. Chope's *Carols for Use in Church* in 1871.<sup>157</sup> . However, it should also be stated that the desire to reform Anglican worship in the 1830s and 1840s cut across evangelical and tractarian divides, and the tractarian hymnody that was manifested in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, first published in 1860, never gained more than a limited acceptance with Anglican congregations. A distinct Anglican hymnody did develop in the early- and mid-Victorian period, though, and a new body of carols can be seen emerging from this.<sup>158</sup> Schmidt has interpreted this activity as a clear signal of 'heightened religious espousal',<sup>159</sup> whilst Chadwick has seen it as one of the visible forms of theological movement from the Atonement to the Incarnation, highlighting the fact that all the significant Victorian Easter hymns had been composed by 1862.<sup>160</sup>

It is difficult to assess the direct extent to which Christmas carols found a place in the Anglican liturgy. The rhetoric of contemporary writers seems to indicate battling success in the late nineteenth century. Pimlott has suggested that initial attempts by the clergy in the 1850s and 1860s to interest their parishioners in a carol revival were too sporadic to be successful, and that it was the publication of Bramley and Stainer's volume that made the breakthrough.<sup>161</sup> By 1885 A. H. Bullen claimed that 'for some time past it has been a growing practice to sing carols in church instead of in the open air',<sup>162</sup> whilst in 1892 R. R. Chope commented on the 'arduous, prolonged and costly work to restore the use of Carols in Divine Service, and thus make into an act of worship what was well-nigh considered only as a recreation at a social gathering'.<sup>163</sup> But

<sup>157</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, pp. 108-10; Connelly, *Christmas*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>158</sup> Wolffe, 'Praise to the Holiest in the Height', p. 80. Temperley, *Music of the English Parish Church*, p. 273. Between the 1840s and the 1880s carols that emerged included: 'Once in Royal David's City' (1848); 'It Came upon the Midnight Clear' (1849); 'We Three Kings' (1857); 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' (1868); 'In the Bleak Midwinter' (1872); and 'Away in a Manger' (1887); there were also new arrangements or translations of 'O Come All Ye Faithful' (1841); 'Joy to the World' (1848); and 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel' (1854). See Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*, pp. 181-82.

<sup>159</sup> Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*, p. 181.

<sup>160</sup> Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, p. 469.

<sup>161</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 109.

<sup>162</sup> A. H. Bullen, *A Christmas Garland* (1885), cited in Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 110.

<sup>163</sup> R. R. Chope, *Carols for Use in Church* (London, 1892), introduction.

from what evidence does survive it appears that the church reintroduced carols firstly through the means of such social gatherings. J. H. Pollen, reflecting on the events at St. Saviour's, Leeds, in the late 1840s, noted how the choir sang carols whilst marching round the children's Christmas tree in the schoolroom.<sup>164</sup> This kind of entertainment persisted throughout the period in question, and the late nineteenth century saw the introduction of carol concerts, as happened in St. Simon's mission room, Leeds in 1879.<sup>165</sup> The tradition of singing carols outdoors also persisted, and it was a phenomenon that caused tensions for the church. In 1894 the vicar of St. Olave's in York expressed indignation that a group of carol singers had used the parish church's name without his authorisation.<sup>166</sup> Part of the problem was the timing. The traditionally popular time for carolling coincided and indeed merged with the waits tradition of being out late on Christmas Eve and the early hours of Christmas morning, a feature which clashed with the Church's teaching on both the nature of Advent and the importance of Christmas morning communion. In 1892 the vicar of St. Saviour's complained that the 'rough and noisy activities ... are none the better for being joined to carols sung in no devotional spirit'.<sup>167</sup> Even when carol singing was sanctioned, clergymen were careful to try and retain control of their parishioners' patronage, as the vicar of St. Philip and St. James, York, remarked in 1887: 'the old custom of singing carols on Christmas Eve was revived this year by members of our own village community, connected with the Institute. It would be well, perhaps, to confine our patronage to our own people, who undertake this work'.<sup>168</sup>

There is evidence from the last quarter of the nineteenth century that carol singing penetrated the boundaries of actual church services. *The Times* reported in 1878 that carol singing in churches was taking place frequently on the afternoon of Christmas Day

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<sup>164</sup> Pollen, *Narrative of Five Years at St. Saviour's*, p. 123. During this period St. Saviour's was an extreme example of high church ritualism.

<sup>165</sup> *St. Simon's Parochial Magazine*, January 1880.

<sup>166</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, December 1894.

<sup>167</sup> *St. Saviour's Monthly Paper*, December 1892. Concerns about the weather and the participation of children could also lead to outdoor carol singing being curtailed in favour of indoor activities. See *St. Philip and St. James Parish Magazine*, December 1890.

<sup>168</sup> *St. Philip and St. James Parish Magazine*, December 1887.



and on the evenings of St. Stephen's Day, St. John the Evangelist's Day and Holy Innocents' Day.<sup>169</sup> The evidence from churches in Yorkshire indicates that the most popular time for incorporating carols was during or immediately following the evening service on Christmas Day. St. Saviour's, Leeds, advertised evensong and carols in 1882, as did St. Olave's, York, in 1893; evensong and a sermon were followed by carols at Whitkirk in 1898 (and also at its Mission Room at Halton), and at St. Philip and St. James, York, four carols were sung during the evening service in 1891.<sup>170</sup> Cathedrals appear to have been more reticent in introducing carols into their services. Rowell has stressed the importance of the introduction of E. W. Benson's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at Truro in 1880, but its impact was minimal before the First World War, despite being published three times.<sup>171</sup> There were no carol services at York Minster in this period<sup>172</sup>, though by 1910 the singing of a single carol after evensong during Christmas week had been adopted at St. Paul's Cathedral.<sup>173</sup>

Pimlott has asserted that by the beginning of the twentieth century, carol singing had become widely popular amongst nonconformists as well as Anglicans.<sup>174</sup> This assertion may however be oversimplified. Pimlott may have been inferring the practice had become universally popular amongst the followers of various dissenting bodies, without actually having been incorporated into formal services. Such a phenomenon is impossible to quantify. But within formal nonconformist services, evidence to support Pimlott's assertions is scarce. Despite some facets of the carol revival being located in a revived interest in the medieval catholic church, nineteenth century Roman Catholics seem to have remained aloof from the official performances of carols, at least until the Edwardian period when carols were introduced into the afternoon service at

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<sup>169</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1878.

<sup>170</sup> *St. Saviour's Monthly Paper*, December 1892; *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, December 1893; *Whitkirk Parish Magazine*, December 1898; *St. Philip and St. James Parish Magazine*, January 1892.

<sup>171</sup> Rowell, 'Dickens and the Construction of Christmas', p. 22. The British Library Public Catalogue records editions of the work from 1880, 1884, and 1912.

<sup>172</sup> 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing' was used as a processional at York Minster from 1868, but was perceived as a Christmas *hymn*. *York Herald*, 2 January 1869.

<sup>173</sup> *The Times*, 24 December 1910.

<sup>174</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 110.



Westminster Cathedral.<sup>175</sup> This reticence may have been due to the desire to retain a distinct cultural identity,<sup>176</sup> as well as a desire to distinguish themselves from the Anglo-Catholics within the Church of England who were introducing carols. Within the older Protestant dissenting traditions, I have found no direct evidence of formal carol singing activities amongst Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Quakers.<sup>177</sup> Cultural identity may well have played a part here as well, combined with continuing anti-Catholicism and lingering biblical literalism. There may also have been reaction against artistic forms that were perceived to be an outward form of incarnational thought, as David Bebbington has argued that Hilton's theories of transition from atonement to incarnation did not apply to Protestant nonconformity.<sup>178</sup> The exception within older Protestant dissent were the Unitarians. This can be seen at Mill Hill, Leeds, where carols were sung during evening service on Christmas Day 1881.<sup>179</sup> The theological position of Unitarianism contained elements that in theory could lead to either an acceptance or rejection of Christmas as a religious festival. As Nissenbaum highlights, ministers in early nineteenth-century America who doubted the trinity of the Godhead and by implication, the divinity of Christ, called for the public observance of Christmas without biblical sanction 'not because God had ordered them to do so but

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<sup>175</sup> *The Times*, 24 December 1910.

<sup>176</sup> A. D. Gilbert argues that Victorian Catholicism had a tendency towards 'subcultural orientation'. See A. D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England. Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (London and New York, 1976), pp. 172-74. Often, due to large scale immigration, this was tied up with an Irish cultural identity. See D. M. MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750-1922* (Basingstoke and London, 1999), chapter 3.

<sup>177</sup> Though in the late nineteenth century the older dissenting bodies introduced denominational hymn books which did provide dissenting congregations with Christmas-orientated material. The *Baptist Hymnary* was first published in 1879, and by 1900 the *Baptist Church Hymnal* contained 'It came upon a midnight clear', as well as the older Christmas hymns 'Hark the herald' and Nahum Tate's 'While shepherds watched'. The *Congregational Church Hymnal*, first published in 1887, included a Christmas section, though these were hymns based upon Scripture, including 'There were shepherds' (Luke, 2:8-11, 13-14). In 1898 *The Church Hymnary* was published on behalf of the Scottish and Irish Presbyterian Churches (the English Presbyterian Church was formally involved in the 1928 edition) which also included 'It came upon a midnight clear', as well as 'O come all ye faithful' and 'O little town of Bethlehem'. See the *Baptist Church Hymnal* (London, 1900), pp. 63-81; G. S. Barrett and J. Booth (eds), *Congregational Church Hymnal* (London, 1890), pp. 121-40; J. Stainer (ed.), *The Church Hymnary* (Edinburgh, 1898), pp. 34-47; and Wolffe, 'Praise to the Holiest in the Height', p. 65.

<sup>178</sup> D. Bebbington, 'Gospel and Culture in Victorian Nonconformity' in J. Shaw and A. Kreider (eds.), *Culture and the Nonconformist Tradition* (Cardiff, 1999), 43-62, p. 46.

<sup>179</sup> *Mill Hill Chapel Monthly Calendar*, December 1881.



because they themselves wished to'.<sup>180</sup> Hilton also draws attention to the Unitarian celebration of a kind of incarnational belief not centred exclusively on Christ but universally on man and everlastingly on God. Despite Hilton's assertion that the gradual decline in the importance placed upon the Atonement after the mid-nineteenth century left Unitarian doctrine in a less powerful position as an independent stance, perhaps the intellectual context had become more welcoming for a greater embrace of Christmas for Unitarians.<sup>181</sup>

### Decorating

As Hutton shows, the Christmas decoration of churches had been taking place since at least the late Middle Ages, when parish accounts become available showing that most urban churches purchased holly and ivy for Christmas.<sup>182</sup> In the sixteenth century, whilst the custom did not receive formal censure from Protestant reformers, Hutton notes the disappearance of greenery purchases in the parish accounts in the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I. The custom was revived in the early seventeenth century, when mistletoe also became popular, and despite a hiatus during the period 1647-1660, when the festival itself was illegal, there was a strong continuity of practice through to the mid nineteenth century.<sup>183</sup> By this stage the Christmas decoration of Anglican churches became embroiled in the ritualistic controversies of that period. In 1839 the Cambridge Camden Society (the Ecclesiological Society from 1845) was formed in order to guide what Chadwick has termed 'the flowering of Victorian Gothic'. It was a movement

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<sup>180</sup> S. Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York, 1997), p. 45. Occasionally the Unitarian response to Christmas in the early nineteenth century might be deliberately provocative. In 1808 the Unitarian minister David Davies preached a Christmas Day sermon entitled 'Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph'. D. Davies, *Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph. A Sermon... Christmas Day, 1808* (Belper, 1809).

<sup>181</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 301-02.

<sup>182</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 34. These purchases were absent from rural accounts, but as Hutton states, this 'is almost certainly due to the fact that they were to be found in the parish'. It is also probable that churches were being decorated with greenery at Christmas long before the direct evidence becomes available. In the seventh century, Pope Gregory the Great actively encouraged the practice in what was to become England.

<sup>183</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, pp. 35-37. Hutton has found evidence that churches in Bristol, Gloucester and London all purchased Christmas greenery in the 1650s, even though they did not hold services. See R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 214, 342.

grounded in antiquarianism and architectural aesthetics that, following the influence of Pugin, idealised the medieval church as the true form of Christian architecture. However, the authorities for decorative innovations proved ambiguous in interpretation, leading to controversy, which was further heightened by the ‘papal aggression’ and the Irish immigration that led many to fear the imminent revival of Romanism as the dominant religion.<sup>184</sup> This controversy merged with Christmas in 1858 when an anonymous ‘Churchman’ complained to the *York Herald* about the decorations at the church of All Saints, Pavement, in that city:

I was extremely surprised, on Sunday, to find it had been decorated after the most approved Puseyite fashion. A dove, wreathed in holly, was represented as descending upon the altar, and above the altar, also encircled in holly, were the words, “Unto us a child is born.” Immense festoons of evergreens were suspended between each of the arches which separate the aisles, whilst the arches themselves were pricked out with red and blue colouring. ... I would respectfully venture ... to direct the attention of the Archdeacon of York to the present state ... and to ask him if such profuse decorations ... is in accordance with his views of what is correct in a Protestant church?<sup>185</sup>

This letter provoked a response from the churchwarden of All Saints, who declared that ‘anything in the shape of crosses or symbols, considered as peculiarly belonging to the Tractarian party, were most scrupulously avoided’, and highlighted the fact that ‘evergreens are always used in churches at Christmas time’. The churchwarden attacked the ‘Churchman’ with the accusation of puritanism with a frame of reference that went beyond the merely religious:

the whole tenor of his letter shows his to be of the Puritan school- harsh, cold, and uncharitable. The season of the year, instead of creating in him the glow of hope, and mellowing his heart to kinder and more genial feelings, has shrivelled it into hard, dry, selfish illiberalism - a very Scrooge among hearts ... Holly and yew, ivy and laurel, are an abomination to him; and he squirts out his venom and gall to defile and despoil them of their beauty ... Our friend, ... is almost beside himself

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<sup>184</sup> O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church. Part One 1829-1859* (London, 1971), pp. 212-21, 271-309.

<sup>185</sup> *York Herald*, 1 January 1859.



when he beholds the arches picked out and the capitals of the pillars with a bright red streak. He cannot get the glaring colour out of his eye; it is perfectly maddening ...<sup>186</sup>

The controversy at All Saints recurred again a year later. A 'Protestant Churchman' wrote to the *York Herald* to warn against 'the indecency of the over-decoration' of churches during Christmas, putting particular emphasis on the context of events that had taken place at St. George's in the East in London, where 'hooligans and ritual innovation collided with a clang that sounded through the land'.<sup>187</sup> This writer tried to avoid attacking Christmas, but felt it necessary to highlight the danger: 'I should be sorry to interfere with Christmas happiness, or with *usual* Christmas decoration. But in these dangerous times, I humbly and earnestly request the good and respectable churchwardens of our churches to allow no excess'. He underpinned his plea with the authority of the homily 'against peril of idolatry, and superfluous decking of churches', drawing upon the judgements of St. Augustine and St. Jerome.<sup>188</sup> This letter again drew an angry response, on this occasion from two parishioners of All Saints'. The counterattack existed within the same frame of reference as the previous year, with one commenting that 'this is the old puritan spirit' and the other that 'I think there is a greater danger in his running about with itching ears, from place to place, seeking to spread dissent (which, by the by, I think is nearer his creed than that of the Church of England)'.<sup>189</sup> This indicates that a distinctive Protestant dissenting opposition to Christmas still had considerable cultural currency at this point. In the case of All Saints, Pavement, it would appear that the clergy, churchwarden and parishioners were fairly united on the subject of Christmas decorations. That was not the case during an incident at the Manchester parish of St. John Baptist, Hulme, in 1870. Here an ultra-Protestant churchwarden had been elected in opposition to the ritualist incumbent. At Christmas the churchwarden ordered workmen to remove the decorations that the minister had

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<sup>186</sup> *York Herald*, 8 January 1859.

<sup>187</sup> For a summary of the events at St. George's in the East in 1859 see Chadwick, *Victorian Church. Part Two*, pp. 495-501; and R. Sharp, 'The Riots at St. George's in the East', *Local Historian*, 33, 1 (2003), 4-11.

<sup>188</sup> *York Herald*, 10 December 1859. The incumbent clergyman, George Trevor, was of a moderately High Church persuasion, though High Churchmanship was not usual in mid nineteenth century York.

<sup>189</sup> *York Herald*, 17 December 1859.



arranged to be put up; a consistory court subsequently ruled that the churchwarden had exceeded his authority.<sup>190</sup>

Within the atmosphere of controversy, the Rev. E. L. Cutts published *An Essay on the Christmas Decoration of Churches* in 1862, partly to act as a guide to negotiate areas of controversy.<sup>191</sup> Cutts divided the decoration of churches into two distinct types, naturalist and architectural, advocating the latter over the former. ‘The principles of the naturalistic style are sufficiently simple’ wrote Cutts,

its professors are the Sextons and the Pew-openers of England; ... The highest ideal at which this school can aim is probably that which is pleasantly pictured by a correspondent of the *Spectator*, who says that, in going into his Church on Christmas morning, he found “the central alley converted into a shady avenue and each pew into a separate bower”.<sup>192</sup>

What Cutts was advocating was to have ‘the satisfaction of knowing we are decorating our Church on the most correct artistic principles, and in the very way which the architect of the building would himself have approved’. This was a promotion of a cultural aesthetic of interplay with the architecture of the interior. Of particular importance to Cutts were the architectural lines of the building, which he believed should be adorned with ‘straight and curved lines of evergreen’, ‘to the pillars and arches which separate the nave and chancel from their aisles, and the nave from the chancel; to the arches of the windows and doors; and to the horizontal wall plates and string courses of the walls’. Cutts freely admitted this to be a gothic vision. ‘In all the preceding remarks, we have had a Gothic building in our mind’s eye as the subject of our decoration’, and the essay was extremely thorough in the ground it covered,

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<sup>190</sup> N. Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910* (Oxford, 1999), p. 170.

<sup>191</sup> It was also a product of the antiquarian spirit amongst clergymen that had existed since the seventeenth century. Cutts himself was secretary to the Essex Archaeological Society, and the opening chapter of the book represented a collection of historical evidences provided to establish authority.

<sup>192</sup> E. L. Cutts, *An Essay on the Christmas Decoration of Churches* (London, 1862), p. 13. Cutts may have been referencing a description from *The Spectator* published in 1712, which mocked the surfeit of greenery which had become popular: ‘The middle isle is a very pretty shady walk, and the pews look like so many arbours on either side of it. The pulpit has such clusters of ivy, holly and rosemary about it that a light fellow in our pew took occasion to say that the congregation heard the Word out of a bush, like Moses’. *Spectator*, 23 January 1712. See also Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, pp. 36-37; and T. G. Crippen, *Christmas and Christmas Lore* (London, 1923), p. 26.



enclosing separate illustrated chapters on pillars, capitals, arches, wall devices, banners, texts, the pulpit and desk, the font, standards and coronas, screens, the reredos and the entrance. But the advice was not entirely architectural. His advice that the font and Communion-table receive extra care and 'richer material' derived from a interpretation of the Canons that ordered the Communion-table and font to remain in place when not in use as representing symbols of the sacrament. Consequently during great festivals they should receive decoration in proportion to their importance, and the birth of Christ placed particular emphasis on the font. A similar reasoning applied to the reredos chapter, since the chancel represented "the Lord's Banqueting House"; where, for His faithful people, His own body and blood are spread forth for the Lord's Birthday Feast'. Justification was also made in reference to children in a wider sense. Here Cutt's drew a comparison with the schoolroom, arguing that a special effort would be made to prepare for a 'Christmas School Feast', and therefore 'we surely need not fear that we "are going too far" when we do only as much, or not so much, to decorate the chancel of the Church for the Christmas Communion as we should do to the School-room for a children's holiday'.<sup>193</sup>

Cutts was not afraid to engage with the controversy that had come to surround the decoration of churches. He highlighted 'the horror of the introduction of flowers'<sup>194</sup> because it was a novelty, and pleaded 'have a tender respect, dear Decorators, for this suspicion of novelties'. Cutts captured the spirit of the age when he noted 'in these days of change, they are afraid of every novelty; they fear lest too much regard be had to these things, in themselves innocent; they fear the gradual and insidious return of superstitious practices; they fear a serpent lying hid among your flowers'. Whilst Cutts retained a slightly mocking tone towards such people, especially with the implication of irrationality in his statement that 'you must not expect people to give good reasons for their likes and dislikes, their prejudices and suspicions', he was keen to describe a way

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<sup>193</sup> Cutts, *Christmas Decoration of Churches*, *passim.*, and pp. 19, 48, 54-55, 61. Cutt's also realised that Christmas could be the driving force for a wider revival, and the essay also contained an appendix with chapters concerning Easter, the school feast, harvest thanksgiving, confirmation, marriage, and baptism.

<sup>194</sup> In 1868 separate works were published on the use of flowers in church: W. J. Audsley's *The Floral Decoration of Churches at Christmas* and W. A. Barratt's *Flowers and Festivals*.

of decorating that was 'lawful and innocent' and avoided 'strife and division'. The attempt to achieve this was grounded in a meticulous attention to detail. For example, Cutts did sanction the use of flowers, but advocated the particular use of certain flowers in certain places, such as Christmas roses and camellias being placed in the font and about the altar.<sup>195</sup> Overall, a distinct impression was created of trying to neutralise debate by moving the agenda from a matter of theology to a matter of taste. The essay was an act of demystification, but coinciding with a time when the mystery of the Incarnation was beginning to be preached.

An important factor of Cutts' essay was the social vision he had for the act of church decoration. As a starting point he viewed the making of decorations as an event that could encapsulate the whole family, with daughters making devices; brothers tying laths and hoops and bending wire; mothers stitching and tying; and 'fathers will at least have looked on, over the newspaper'.<sup>196</sup> This naturally set the making of decorations within the prominent setting of Christmas, the home. But Cutts then took his ideal further:

it will serve a useful moral purpose to associate as many as possible in the work. One of the evils of our day is surely the isolation of class from class - the want of friendly intercourse even among good people of different classes. On the common ground of the Parsonage dining-room or the National School-room, you may bring together different ranks of your parishioners and the pleasant bustle and confusion of the work will shake them together, and make them more really intimate in a couple of days than in a century of uncomfortable "parties".<sup>197</sup>

It is significant that Cutts was drawing upon the language of intimacy to describe the social potential of decorating churches at Christmas, indicating that the intimacy of Christmas had permeated institutions beyond the domestic interior.

Cutts' publication quickly went to a second edition, and reached a third edition in 1868. It also influenced the appearance of a successor, Edward Young Cox's *The Art of*

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<sup>195</sup> Cutts, *Christmas Decoration of Churches*, pp. 11-17.

<sup>196</sup> Cutts, *Christmas Decoration of Churches*, p. 63.

<sup>197</sup> Cutts, *Christmas Decoration of Churches*, p. 63.



*Garnishing Churches at Christmas and Other Festivals*, which also appeared in 1868. Cox followed an ostensibly similar structure to Cutts, but with subtle differences that stemmed from the purpose of publication. Cox was not a clergyman but the owner of an 'ecclesiastical warehouse'. This represented the entry of the commercial into the world of Christmas church decoration. The most obvious impact was in the style of the book. The display of the text was much clearer, and the book was far more visual, containing a section of thirty illustrated plates, designed to stimulate business, as they were linked to eleven pages of prices. Available to purchase were monograms, crosses, letters, devices, crowns, texts and banners in perforated zinc, cardboard, everlasting flowers and prepared cloth. The firm of Cox and Sons also supplied the basic raw materials for church decorators to make their own decorations, which fitted the main purpose of the actual text.<sup>198</sup>

Cox's publication reached a third edition in 1871.<sup>199</sup> Both Cutts and Cox contributed to a craze for the elaborate decoration of churches at Christmas time, which is demonstrated by extensive press coverage in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>200</sup> In Leeds during this period, the vicar of Whitkirk made the connection between church decoration and the size of the congregation: 'it is a fact that wherever a church is well decorated on any account, there is always a good congregation'.<sup>201</sup> P. F. Anson has argued that it was the very fear of Romanism and ritualism that drove the popularity of temporary decorations, since their potential desecration was much cheaper to endure.<sup>202</sup> But the Christmas decoration of churches seemed to have achieved a degree of universality within Anglicanism in the 1870s. This was captured by C. M. Davies in an article entitled 'Doing Decorations'. He described a number of fictitious churches, all inspired by actual churches he had visited, one broad, one ritualistic, one evangelical and one an

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<sup>198</sup> E. Y. Cox, *The Art of Garnishing Churches at Christmas and other Festivals* (London, 1869).

<sup>199</sup> Revised editions continued to be published by the Rev. Ernest Geldart until 1884.

<sup>200</sup> For example, in 1872 and 1873 the *York Herald* carried detailed reports on the Christmas decorations of six city and suburban churches. In 1874 the coverage rose to twenty-two churches, with nineteen being featured in 1875. After this year the reports very quickly died out. *York Herald*, 28 December 1872; 27 December 1873; 26 December 1874; 27 December 1875.

<sup>201</sup> *Whitkirk Parish Magazine*, December 1873.

<sup>202</sup> P. F. Anson, *Fashions in Church Furnishings 1840-1940* (London, 1960), p. 206.

Episcopal chapel. Davies's descriptions were characterised by a uniformity of activity, with the exception that the ritualist church actually confined their decorations to the chancel. For Davies the 'time has gone by for railing at every little adornment which goes to make the church the poor man's home, sniffing incipient Popery in every new gaslight, or Ritualism in each simple decoration'.<sup>203</sup> There was also a convergence with the decorative practices of the home.<sup>204</sup> Anson has linked the phenomenon of church decorations to wider fashions in interior decorations.<sup>205</sup> This was a major point which connected the Christmas intimacy of the home with that of the church, and the prominent position women played in decorating both interiors contributed to the belief that both Christmas and religion as a whole had been feminised in this period.<sup>206</sup>

The Christmas decoration of churches continued throughout the period and beyond, but there was a sharp decline in the discursive representation of church decorating after 1880. Anson estimated that the particularly elaborate style of decoration lasted until around 1890,<sup>207</sup> whilst the gothic style itself ceased to be fashionable in the Edwardian age. Churches were also beginning to struggle to find the necessary lay help to complete the task. In the 1870s, Davies indicated that church decoration was still very much a feminine pass-time; 'we may smile at our enthusiastic ladies, young, and old, at Christmas, but they are unconsciously exercising a softening influence upon society'.<sup>208</sup> Reports on Christmas church decorations in local newspapers overwhelmingly confirmed that the participants were female. References to Christmas church decorations could also be found within the pages of parish magazines, albeit

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<sup>203</sup> Davies, *Orthodox London*, pp. 160-65.

<sup>204</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>205</sup> Anson, *Fashions in Church Furnishings*, p. 202. For Anson, the elaborate church decorating of the 1870s paralleled housewives cluttering their homes with 'sofas, stools, chairs, little tables and what-nots. She had a passion for tassels, fringes, bobbins, peacock's feathers, and lacquered bullrushes. All her table-cloths touched the floor, and table-legs were regarded as slightly indecent, just as were columns in churches, at least on the great festivals.' What Anson was referring to was the desire to cover every single part of the church; 'there are so many banners, bannerettes, illuminated texts, and devices worked in everlasting flowers, that no wall spaces or columns are left bare'.

<sup>206</sup> It was very common for the illustrated press to feature images of ladies decorating church interiors at Christmas. See for example, the *Illustrated London News*, 22 December 1860.

<sup>207</sup> Anson, *Fashions in Church Furnishings*, p. 202.

<sup>208</sup> Davies, *Orthodox London*, p. 165.



increasingly sporadically, and were tied in with appeals for help. The vicar of Whitkirk felt the need for a broad appeal when he declared 'I shall feel much obliged if all, of *any rank, sex, or age*, will meet me in the schoolroom', for the purpose of Christmas decorations.<sup>209</sup> Such appeals were, however, rarely upheld. An exception to this rule could be found at St. Philip and St. James, York, where they frequently had help from a band of 'zealous young men'.<sup>210</sup> Occasional instances of controversy still persisted in the late-Victorian age. In 1894, several of the parishioners of St. Olave's purchased a processional cross, which was used during Christmas Day. The vicar was evidently responding to criticism when he stated in the parish magazine 'we find it very hard to understand how any persons can find ground for objection to the use of this simple, beautiful and suitable choir ornament. It emphasises no controverted doctrine and is not surely a badge of any party'.<sup>211</sup> But in the late-Victorian and Edwardian ages, parish churches were having increasing trouble getting help with the decorations at all. It was reported at St. Philip and St. James that the 'church had to be decorated under great difficulties in procuring either sufficient materials or a sufficient number of workers' during Christmas 1891,<sup>212</sup> and similar problems were reported at St. Olave's in 1905.<sup>213</sup>

Roman Catholic churches were also elaborately decorated in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>214</sup> Another decorative aspect of Roman Catholic church decoration at Christmas was the appearance of cribs, particularly as they were a visible form of incarnational religion that strengthened the importance of childhood within Christmas.<sup>215</sup> By the early 1870s,

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<sup>209</sup> *Whitkirk Parish Magazine*, December 1873.

<sup>210</sup> *St. Philip and St. James Parish Magazine*, January 1893.

<sup>211</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, January 1895.

<sup>212</sup> *St. Philip and St. James Parish Magazine*, January 1892.

<sup>213</sup> *St. Olave's Parish Magazine*, January 1906.

<sup>214</sup> *York Herald*, 27 December 1873. During Christmas 1873, St. Wilfrid's in York abounded with evergreens, festoons, monograms, designs and everlasting flowers. In Roman Catholic churches the decoration was the preserve of the sacristan, and the standard reference work was J. D. H. Hale's *The Sacristan's Manual*. Yet this book offered scant information concerning Christmas, noting only that the 'Altars and other parts of the Church should be adorned in a simple manner'. Altars could 'be adorned in a partially festive manner with flowers, images of the Saints, or Relics, placed between the candlesticks'. See J. D. H. Hale, *The Sacristan's Manual* (London, n. d.), p. 59.

<sup>215</sup> For Davies, however, Christmas crib scenes were part of a context of 'pictorial religion' that intended to implement desperate means of employing 'gospel truths'. Davies thought they were a failure because 'the making objective, and suggesting from outside to the worshipper what can only be subjective', was a

Davies stated that cribs had not been introduced to High Anglican churches, though evidence from the diary of the Anglo-Catholic Lord Halifax indicates that a crib was in use at the parish church in Hickleton by 1894.<sup>216</sup> Within Protestant nonconformity, only the Unitarians succumbed to the fashion for Christmas church decoration. The Christmas decoration of Mill Hill Chapel appears to have begun in 1866 when the minister declared:

we believe we express the general feeling when we say that our beautiful Chapel looked even more beautiful than usual in its Christmas dress. The decorations were, by common consent, admirably managed - simple, but thoroughly effective, and in harmony with the building ... We trust that we have not only realised a good result for this year, but established a precedent for years to come ... and we are quite enough of ritualists to be willing to decorate both the one and the other in honour of the Prince of Peace.<sup>217</sup>

In the latter part of the period, the Unitarians managed to overcome the problem of lay help experienced by some Anglican parishes in relation to Christmas decorations, by formalising the activity as women's work. In 1911 it was stated that since 'the Women's League is in full working order ... they will undertake it not for this year only, but as a yearly obligation recognised as falling within their proper sphere of work'.<sup>218</sup> Other nonconformist bodies restricted their Christmas decorations to schoolrooms and mission-rooms. In York this was being undertaken by Baptists by 1869, Congregationalists by 1872, and Methodists by 1877.<sup>219</sup> This was a means by which nonconformists could incorporate Christmas without compromising their cultural and theological identities.

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'hopeless task'. See C. M. Davies, *Unorthodox London: or Phases of Religious Life in the Metropolis* (London, 1873), pp. 428-33.

<sup>216</sup> BL, Hickleton Papers, A7.5, diary of 2nd Viscount Halifax, 1894. Writing in 1912, Clement Miles stated that 'In England the Christmas crib is to be found nowadays in most Roman, and a few Anglican, churches. In the latter it is of course an imitation, not a survival'. See Miles, *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition*, p. 118.

<sup>217</sup> *Mill Hill Chapel Record*, January 1867.

<sup>218</sup> *Mill Hill Chapel Record*, December 1911.

<sup>219</sup> *York Herald*, 24 December 1869; 6 January 1872; 2 January 1877.



## Social Events

The decoration of schoolrooms that were attached to chapels related to the growing amount of social activities that nonconformist bodies were organising around the Christmas period. In his study of Oldham and Saddleworth, Mark Smith comments on how the mid-1850s ushered in a period when tea meetings became surrounded with entertainments that the whole congregation could attend,<sup>220</sup> and Green has commented upon how informal many Christmas celebrations were.<sup>221</sup> It was a way of enjoying Christmas without deferring cultural authority to the Anglican church. Conversely, it may have also set in process a softening of opposition to more mainstream Christmas services. Inevitably, many events centred on children,<sup>222</sup> the central discourse of childhood within Christmas was too powerful to ignore. Other events revealed the existence of a pragmatic streak within nonconformist bodies, as they capitalised on the popularity of Christmas by holding Christmas bazaars to help pay off chapel debts. These would centre around a sale of work, and feature a Christmas tree as a spectacle, at a time when the appearance of trees within the domestic interior was still a relatively rare phenomenon. In Leeds during Christmas 1870, bazaars took place at the Methodist New Connexion Schoolroom, Hunslet Road; the Mount Pigsah Schoolroom, New Wortley; St. Jude's Church, Hunslet; Oxford Place Chapel; and Marshall Street Chapel.<sup>223</sup> In York, the Baptists held a bazaar in 1869, and even the Presbyterians engaged in this activity in 1887.<sup>224</sup> The preparations for these social events could also create theatres of intimacy. In his memoir *Grey Pastures*, William Haslam Mills recalled how the preparations for the Christmas tea party at Albion Chapel, Ashton under Lyne, made the schoolroom 'intimate, exclusive, esoteric'. But it was an intimacy linked to the imposition of social hierarchies. The "cutting up" of the loaves and the teacakes 'had got rather into the hands of a clique'. These women, the 'priestesses' of

<sup>220</sup> M. Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society. Oldham and Saddleworth 1740-1865* (Oxford, 1994), p. 145.

<sup>221</sup> Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 339.

<sup>222</sup> An example being the children's missionary meeting held by the Wesleyan Sunday School on Christmas Day, 1845, where heathen curiosities were exhibited and explained. *York Herald*, 20 December 1845. The role of Sunday schools will be explored in chapter four.

<sup>223</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 28 December 1870.

<sup>224</sup> *York Herald*, 24 December 1869; 16 December 1887.

Christmas day, addressed each with the use of Christian names, revelling in the fact that 'to be "asked to go and cut up" was to have an acknowledgement of some standing in the congregation'.<sup>225</sup>

Social events were also a prominent feature within the Anglican church, as parish churches tried to uphold the parochial ideal. The range of events taking place was ably demonstrated by St. Simon's Church in Leeds. A bazaar with Christmas tree was held in 1879; a concert and fruit banquet in 1880 in relation to the temperance committee; a conversazione in 1882; a magic lantern exhibition for the Band of Hope Christmas party in 1884; tableaux vivants in 1887; and a waxwork exhibition in 1890.<sup>226</sup> It is no coincidence that many religious denominations began to offer a series of social activities surrounding formal worship in the Victorian period. As I establish in the following chapter, an increasing range of leisure activities became available to contemporaries during the Victorian and Edwardian Christmas, and religious bodies felt the need to draw upon the entertainment and performative aspects of Christmas intimacy that were connecting the private and public Christmases together.

## Conclusion

In the eighteenth century, Christmas was one of the three great festivals of the Church of England, a popular, but generally not the most popular, time for Holy Communion. At the same time, a dissenting minority, following the attitude to Christmas established by the Scottish Kirk in the sixteenth century, largely rejected Christmas on the grounds that it was scripturally unsupported, and objected to what was perceived as papist idolatry and heathen superstition. These attitudes partially fed into the evangelical revival, whereby evangelicals both within and without the Established Church objected to both the plebeian and polite forms of celebrating Christmas. This did not, however, necessarily mean that evangelicals rejected Christmas outright. The evangelical

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<sup>225</sup> W. H. Mills, *Grey Pastures* (London, 1924), chapter 9 'The Annual Tea-Party'.

<sup>226</sup> *St. Simon's Parochial Magazine*, December 1879; January 1881; February 1883; February 1885; January 1888; January 1891; February 1891.



emphasis on family and domesticity, as well as its basis as an emotional form of religion, helped shape the early formation of Christmas intimacy, particularly as it emphasised reflection and inspired family reunion. The religious message of Christmas was mediated by the Atonement, highlighting the redemption offered by Christ's arrival. This message was particularly inspirational to the burgeoning Methodist movement, from which emerged a rich tradition of Christmas hymnody and the social, spiritual and theological stance of the watch night, both of which would prove to be influential in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both hymn singing and watch nights were part of a process by which the nature and extent of public worship at Christmas varied and expanded in the nineteenth century. Christmas carols were also drawn into a religious context, partially influenced by developments in the Established Church deriving from the Oxford Movement. The Church of England, was not, however, a homogeneous entity, and the development of ritualism caused considerable controversy in the mid nineteenth century, particularly on the subject of the Christmas decoration of churches. By the mid-Victorian period, though, the process of decoration had become a craze, and was one of the ways in which the religious celebration of Christmas had become connected to the intimacy of the home. Another connection can be seen in the Christmas sermons that were being preached in the second half of the nineteenth century, which emphasised both the importance of the home celebration, but also the central role of childhood; indeed, religion played a prominent role in centring the position of children and childhood within the intimacy of Christmas (though at the same time, the religious dimension of Christmas began to be obscured in the home). Though nonconformists were keen to defend a cultural distinctiveness that separated them from the Church of England, the emphasis on family and children was one of the key factors in the gradual diluting of their opposition to Christmas, leading to Christmas services at most dissenting places of worship by the outbreak of the First World War. It was also the signal of a shift towards a more incarnation-based form of religious message, though this never translated into Christmas rivalling Easter as a time for Holy Communion, despite the efforts of many Church of England clergy. By 1914, there were more Christmas services than ever before, and more people than ever before attended them, as

well as partaking of Holy Communion. Nevertheless, all religious denominations failed to increase the percentage of the population who attended a place of worship during Christmas, a factor which led to religious leaders becoming publicly vocal about the lack of religious observance of Christmas, and to the discursive construction of a religious-secular binary of Christmas within the Edwardian press. What had happened was that churches and chapels were increasingly having to compete with a range of leisure opportunities, as a rich public culture of Christmas developed in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is to that culture that I will now turn.



## **Chapter Three: The Limits of Intimacy? Charity,<sup>1</sup> Entertainment, Street Culture and Temperance**

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a contrast to the developing sense of Christmas intimacy centred within home and family with prominent features of Christmas that developed in the nineteenth-century public sphere. By considering Christmas charity, entertainment, street culture, the role of alcohol and the temperance response to it, the chapter will argue that a new urban public culture of Christmas can be detected in the second half of the nineteenth century, though some continuities will be observed. Beginning with charity, this chapter will consider the traditions of open-house hospitality; begging customs; charitable bequests; the workhouse and poor law; the role of women; the impact of evangelicalism; the nature of the 'philanthropic impulse'; the validity of social control theories; informal and indiscriminate giving; the impact of the COS; fears of 'charity mongers'; working-class survival strategies; newspaper appeals; hospitals; children; missions; the elderly; cripples' charities; large-scale projects; invented tradition; and the increase in provision of entertainment. The focus will then switch to the growth of a Christmas entertainment industry, looking at pantomime; museums; panorama and diorama shows; the Crystal Palace and the Royal Polytechnic Institution; provincial theatres; choral societies; performing children; the variety of entertainment and the limitations of the subject of Christmas within that entertainment; early forms of cinema; connections with entertainment in the home; the influence of music hall; rural entertainments; balls and juvenile parties; hunting; and football. The informal nature of much Christmas leisure will then be stressed, with an emphasis on street culture. This discussion will focus upon music, and in particular the waits; the development of a distinct New Year culture; disturbances associated with youth culture;

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Prochaska asserts that the terms charity and philanthropy were interchangeable in the nineteenth century, and this chapter will do likewise. It should also be stated, however, that in this context the discussion of philanthropy will be largely confined to the charitable gift, and that another prominent feature of nineteenth-century philanthropy, self-help, will be examined in the following chapter. Temperance is discussed at the end of this chapter, but mainly in terms of a response to the connections between alcohol and the Christmas season. See F. K. Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950. Vol. 3: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 360.

and the problems of drunkenness and violence. Finally, the chapter will consider the response of the temperance movement to the problem of drunkenness at Christmas, with particular emphasis being placed upon the provision of alternative Christmas activities for children and young people.

### Charity

The act of charitable giving can be traced back to the very first civilised societies,<sup>2</sup> and Christmas charity in England can be found as far back as at least the medieval period. Christmas was a natural time to support the poor, a slack period in the farming cycle when earnings from harvest were exhausted and work was scarce.<sup>3</sup> In the thirteenth century, charitable giving at Christmas was intrinsically linked to the gift, organised at a very localised level based upon open-house hospitality in which manorial lords would provide a feast for their villeins. However, as Felicity Heal and Ronald Hutton show, the manorial feast had ceased to be an expected custom in the late medieval and Tudor periods. Landowners had, in general terms, reduced their activities to entertaining friends, relations and occasionally tenants. Examples of feeding the poor and keeping open house could be found, but were exceptional cases. Heal suggests that the levels of generosity had declined even further by the early Stuart period.<sup>4</sup> The early Stuart period subsequently saw a flowering of a literary complaint tradition bemoaning the decline of Christmas hospitality at gentry seats, typified by John Taylor's *Complaint of Christmas* which accused landowners of preferring to stay in London during the twelve days of Christmas in order to save money.<sup>5</sup>

Hutton argues that this pattern of declining hospitality continued throughout the Hanoverian period, as observations of the decline continued to be reproduced. This can

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<sup>2</sup> A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> B. Bushaway, *By Rite. Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700-1880* (London, 1982), p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> F. Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 148-9, 151, 168, 297; R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England. The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 241-2.

<sup>5</sup> Hutton, *Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 177.



certainly be seen in early editions of *The Times* published in the late 1780s. In 1786 *The Times* reported that a correspondent asked the question ‘are the halls open for the tenants? - is the table spread for the poor? - Does *Charity* in the form of an *elegant Woman*, walk round the village, to see that the naked are clothed, the hungry fed, and the aged protected against the rigours of the season ...’<sup>6</sup> In 1788 *The Times* implicitly suggested that the cultures of politeness and sensibility were to blame for a lack of charitable activity, particularly amongst women: ‘It would hurt the feelings of a modern Lady to be employed in such *low occupations* as administering comfort and relief to those distressed objects ...’<sup>7</sup> The following year *The Times* also sounded a note of caution regarding open-house hospitality, noting the ‘exquisite knavery’ of robbers and pickpockets, ‘whose outward dress and address denote the gentleman’. The breakdown of traditional social relations was inherent in the statement that ‘the face is no longer the *index of the mind*’.<sup>8</sup>

These concerns about safety of person and property can be placed in a wider context of a developing sense of intimacy grounded in domestic interiors. Concern was also developing to protect this environment from being overrun by the poor. In 1820 Washington Irving captured this feeling in his fictional account of Bracebridge Hall. The squire attempted to create an old-fashioned Christmas only for the manor to be ‘overrun by all the vagrants of the county’, and subsequently restricted his invitations to ‘the decent part of the neighbouring peasantry’ on Christmas day.<sup>9</sup> Some locations witnessed the rural peasantry claiming hospitality as a right. Bob Bushaway has uncovered evidence from early nineteenth-century Buckinghamshire, revealing how the Charity Commissioners ordered the suppression of hospitality customs, termed ‘folk charities’ by Bushaway, because they had no recognisable existence in law.<sup>10</sup> Until 1813 a custom existed at Princes Risborough whereby a bull, a boar, and sacks of wheat and

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<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1786.

<sup>7</sup> *The Times*, 11 January 1788.

<sup>8</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1789.

<sup>9</sup> W. Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and other Stories* (New York, 1988), p. 178; Hutton, *Merry England*, p. 243; Bushaway, *By Rite*, 128-30, 240-1.

<sup>10</sup> Bushaway, *By Rite*, pp. 23-4, 253-4.

malt were given away by the Lord of the Manor at six o'clock on Christmas morning. This practice was subsequently discontinued, and replaced for five or six years by a distribution of beef and mutton to the poor. The process was reported to be accompanied by 'much intoxication and riot', involving the poor parading the town the night before the distribution, and then marching in the morning to the lord's house, in a party that contained many strangers as well as parishioners, who then rushed into the house, 'inflicting wounds on one another with their knives'.<sup>11</sup> The parish of Drayton Beauchamp witnessed a custom in which the inhabitants of the parish would go to the rectory on St. Stephen's day to eat bread and cheese and drink ale at the expense of the rector. The occasion was reported to cause so much rioting that the custom was discontinued, and replaced by an annual distribution of money. By 1827 the increase in population had made this practice untenable, and the rector began to withhold payments. Parishioners continued to visit the rectory to demand money but were always refused.<sup>12</sup> As Hutton argues, the expectation that landowners would offer some form of hospitality to tenants and guests remained in place until the late nineteenth century, when the 'decline of British agriculture and increasing rural depopulation put paid to the old social and economic relationships of the countryside'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *26th Report of the Charity Commissioners*, British Sessional Papers, 1833, Vol. XIX, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> *27th Report of the Charity Commissioners*, British Sessional Papers, 1834, Vol. XXI, pp. 83-84. These reports became the basis on which some Christmas charitable customs were organised for the remainder of the nineteenth century. In 1894 John Oglander received a letter from his solicitor stating 'In order that you may consider this matter I enclosed an extract from the Blue Book of the Report of the Commissioners appointed at the beginning of the Century, for enquiring into Charities, upon whose report the present charitable trusts are founded. So long as I can remember ... £20 has been spent every year at Christmas in beef and about £3 in bread, both being given away at Nunwell House on Christmas Eve. So far as I can see there does not appear to be a legal obligation to do this, although as you will see there is some obligation in the matter. All Lady Oglander did with reference to this charity was to do what Sir Henry did in his lifetime and which his father, Sir William, also did'. Two years later the same solicitor was advising Oglander on the list of names for the distribution of bread and meat. Here *obligation* seems very important, with the intimate potential of the gift negated by the legality of the proceedings. IWRO, Oglander Collection, OG/CC/1842, letter from John Wilson Fardell to John H. G. Oglander, 23 November 1894; OG/CC/1917, F. C. & John Fardell to John H. G. Oglander, 22 December 1896.

<sup>13</sup> R. Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun. A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford, 1996), p. 54. See chapter one for how the Wood family continued to facilitate philanthropic activities in relation to their local tenantry but in a mediated context that withdrew the theatre of operation away from intimate locations of the domestic interior.



The most prominent day for what Hutton terms 'begging customs' was St. Thomas's Day, falling on 21 December. It was most commonly associated with helping the elderly and indigent female population, by providing them with money or provisions. Hutton stresses that such customs reached a peak in the early nineteenth century before declining and vanishing completely in the inter-war period of the twentieth century. Hutton locates the disappearance of such customs in the context of a growing realisation of the inefficiency of such charity, the rise in the standard of living, and finally the provision of old age pensions in the late Edwardian period. The striking aspect of Hutton's research is the complete absence of references to begging customs before 1700, a factor that led him to postulate a theory that the growth of such customs were a response to the decline in traditional genteel charity and hospitality. Of older origin were the mumming and wassailing groups, who sought hospitality from wealthy houses and offered entertainment in return. These also reached a peak in the early nineteenth century, declining afterwards as supply and demand atrophied.<sup>14</sup> Bushaway highlights how many of the St. Thomas Day doleing customs operated within the context of the 'folk', emphasising community through support during times of hardship, and 'reinforcing the labourer's normative view of the social structure', based upon reciprocity between the labouring classes and the rural elite. Dolders did not regard themselves as 'beggars' since they were not permanently dependent on charity but merely claiming a customary entitlement.<sup>15</sup>

Bushaway stresses that folk charities should be distinguished from the distribution of institutionalised charities and bequests, since they did not permit discrimination between the deserving and undeserving poor.<sup>16</sup> But much Christmas charitable activity in this period fell into these categories, and those established by bequest were able to survive much longer than the folk customs due to their grounding in law. In York, for example, one charity founded upon a legacy from Leonard Thompson in 1698 distributed money annually to the poor in December in the parishes of St. Martin and St.

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<sup>14</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, pp. 58-64.

<sup>15</sup> Bushaway, *By Rite*, pp. 188-90.

<sup>16</sup> Bushaway, *By Rite*, pp. 188-90.

Helen; and the parish of St. Martin also benefited from a December coal distribution by Dr. Beckwith's Coal Charity, founded in 1770. Both were still operating in the Edwardian period.<sup>17</sup> These forms of charity continued to be established throughout the nineteenth century. In 1883, the parish magazine of St. Philip and St. James, York, advertised tickets for flour and coals relating to the will of John Roper, which stipulated that the bequest benefit 'persons of good moral character, whose position in life renders such a gift welcome, and who with some kind of regularity attend the church'. The magazine lamented that the vicar and churchwardens 'might prefer not to be so restricted in their choice'.<sup>18</sup> However, the perceived inefficiency of this form of charity led to pressure for reform in the second half of the nineteenth century. The result of this can be seen in Batley, where a Christmas Dole was established in 1874 following the amalgamation of seven different charities.<sup>19</sup> However, some benefactors remained stubbornly attached to their chosen form of bequest. A charity was founded in 1889 at Great Yarmouth by the will of Cornelius Harley Christmas, providing a distribution of bread, coals and money to the poor in the week before Christmas Day. The bequest contained an attached instruction to the trustees to convert the whole bequest into cash for immediate distribution should the public authorities try to interfere with the gift.<sup>20</sup> Whilst the recent historiography of philanthropy has sought to resist whiggish assumptions of the inadequacy of private philanthropy being rescued by the onset of state-provided welfare,<sup>21</sup> it is perhaps true to say that the continued existence of Christmas dole related bequests was not adequate to meet the needs of a rising urban population. An example of this can be seen in 1860s London where two

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<sup>17</sup> York City Archives, Acc. 13.

<sup>18</sup> *St. Philip and St. James Parish Magazine*, December 1883. This church was established in 1867, and the parish in 1871. John Roper's will was proved in 1875 to provide bread and coal for the poor people of the congregation. See P. M. Tillott, 'The Parish Churches'; and R. B. Rose, 'Charities', in P. M. Tillott (ed.), *A History of Yorkshire. The City of York* (London, 1961), pp. 396, 429.

<sup>19</sup> M. Sheard, *Records of the Parish of Batley* (Worksop, 1894), pp. 412-15. I am grateful to Elizabeth Briggs of the West Yorkshire Archive Service, Kirklees, for this information.

<sup>20</sup> David Owen speculated that Cornelius Harley Christmas's motivation in this instance was a sentimental attachment to the nature of his surname. See D. Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660-1960* (Cambridge, MA., 1964), p. 324.

<sup>21</sup> H. Cunningham, 'Introduction', in H. Cunningham and J. Innes (eds), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform from the 1690s to 1850* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 1; M. Daunton, 'Introduction', in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London, 1996), p. 1.



eighteenth-century bequests which provided Christmas provisions for the debtors of Horsemonger-Lane Gaol yielded only twelve shillings and thirteen shillings and four pence a year respectively and had to be supplemented by the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, this kind of inadequacy was rendered insignificant when considering the many new urban environments which had no basis of ancient bequests and endowments to fall back upon at all.<sup>23</sup>

When considering the rise of institutional charity in relation to Christmas, an awareness of the inadequacies of the reformed poor law of 1834 does seem to shed light on how the poor, particularly the institutionalised workhouse poor, were spending Christmas. In the 1830s, *The Times* began to report the Christmas treats given to the paupers in London workhouses, but only provided a vague sense of how well established such treats were, noting only the 'usual custom attendant upon Christmas'.<sup>24</sup> The reporting of treats for imprisoned debtors also became common at this time, which *The Times* proclaimed to be a 'good old custom, handed down from time immemorial through our ancestors'. In 1834 the debtors of the Fleet and Whitecross-Street prisons were provided with dinner and beer by the Lord Mayor and sheriffs, and received a supply of Christmas beef through bequests and private and corporate donations.<sup>25</sup> These reports created a sense of a well established tradition of treating the institutionalised at Christmas through private charity.<sup>26</sup> But in specific relation to workhouses, the reformed poor law did highlight the need for the authorities to clarify the limits of permissibility in terms of what could be provided by the rates and what was clearly the responsibility

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<sup>22</sup> *The Times*, 26 December 1862.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, N. Evans, 'Urbanisation, Elite Attitudes and Philanthropy: Cardiff, 1850-1914', *International Review of Social History*, 27, (1982), 290-323.

<sup>24</sup> *The Times*, 26 December 1838. In 1828, for example, the inmates of St. Martin's-in-the-Field poor-house were supplied with roast beef, plum pudding and a pint of porter on Christmas Day. See N. Longmate, *The Workhouse* (2nd edn, London, 2003), p. 221.

<sup>25</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1834. The existence of eighteenth-century bequests for debtors indicates that the custom can be traced back at least to that century. Debtors remained in receipt of Christmas philanthropy until the laws relating to imprisonment for debt were amended in the late 1860s. As a general rule, criminal prisoners did not receive liberality to such an extent, and discrimination against them increased as the nineteenth century progressed.

<sup>26</sup> In 1836 the *Dorset Country Chronicle* reported that the Bridgwater union were discontinuing the Christmas dinner, and noted that this was 'the first time in the memory of the oldest inhabitant' that it had happened. Cited in Longmate, *The Workhouse*, p. 221.

of private charity. That this was necessary clearly points to a situation highlighted by Hugh Cunningham, who states that that the poor law, funded through taxation, was sometimes referred to by contemporaries as 'legal charity', and as such was 'distinguished from, but not sharply counterposed to, other forms of charity originated by religious and voluntary bodies'.<sup>27</sup> The poor law authorities clarified the situation in 1840 by forbidding the supply of extra dinners on Christmas day, unless they were supplied by private individuals. However, by 1847 this stipulation had been relaxed, and local poor law guardians were given the discretion to provide extra Christmas food at the expense of the poor rate.<sup>28</sup> Essentially though, the earlier ruling of the poor law authorities was perhaps the more significant in the history of Christmas charity in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, securing, as it did, a tradition of raising the means for the provision of Christmas to the poor by private, but in a broader sense public, subscription, a form that would come to be adopted by a whole range of institutions aiming to provide some form of Christmas experience for the disadvantaged from the latter part of the nineteenth century onwards. This did cause problems in the short term. The *Leeds Intelligencer* attempted to score political points when reviewing the Christmas events at Wakefield Workhouse in 1843: 'Several *Liberal* individuals refused to subscribe on the ground that the inmates of the Poorhouse should not be allowed to have a dinner which was to be paid for by charitable contributors'.<sup>29</sup> Other Poor Law Unions, such as York, showed firm support for the subscription principle from this period onwards.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it was consistent with that city's attitude to poor relief that in 1877 the York Guardians announced a public

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<sup>27</sup> Cunningham, 'Introduction', p. 2. Cunningham also asserts that eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century contemporaries might also distinguish charity, being religiously inspired, from philanthropy, which had a greater secular orientation. See also N. McCord, 'The Poor Law and Philanthropy' in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1976).

<sup>28</sup> J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Christmas. A Social History* (Hassocks, 1978), pp. 81, 90.

<sup>29</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 December 1843. Evidence also exists of Christmas charity being used in a sectarian manner. In 1881 a complaint was made by the Cardiff Liberal Association that the second Marquess of Bute had given Christmas dinners to all the poor children of Cardiff, which had a small Liberal majority, but only treated Church of England children in Aberdare, a liberal stronghold. See, Evans, 'Urbanisation', pp. 322-23.

<sup>30</sup> In 1845 the *York Herald* reported that 'It was stated that Mr. Bell had obtained leave to collect subscriptions from the guardians and other gentlemen who have generally been in the habit of contributing to a fund for supplying a treat to the inmates of the workhouse on Christmas day'. *York Herald*, 20 December 1845.



subscription in order to provide a Christmas treat to the outdoor poor. This provoked a flurry of correspondence to the *York Herald* both debating the best means to implement the plan and offering practical assistance on behalf of individuals.<sup>31</sup> Other Unions, such as Leeds, provided a supplementary grant in Christmas week of 1 shilling to those over the age of 60. Such action was forbidden by the poor law authorities following a 'stringent rule' of 1878. This prompted an ex-Guardian, Samuel Ashworth, to organise a public subscription to continue the tradition in Leeds.<sup>32</sup>

Another philanthropic feature of the workhouse Christmas experience was the appearance of lady visitors from the 1850s onwards. Lady visitors were recorded operating in the Leeds workhouse at 1863, where they provided Christmas trees, fruit, presents and arranged for a drum-and-fife band to perform for the inmates.<sup>33</sup> The involvement of lady visitors in Christmas philanthropic projects at an institutional level is consistent with Frank Prochaska's conclusions concerning the role of women in nineteenth-century philanthropic work in general.<sup>34</sup> There can also be little doubt that middle-class women's involvement with institutions at this stage promoted the transformation of institutional interiors in terms of Christmas decoration in order to recreate arenas of intimacy replicating the ideals of the family life, and contributing to

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<sup>31</sup> *York Herald*, 4 December 1877; 6 December 1877; 7 December 1877; 8 December 1877; 10 December 1877. For a general overview of the treatment of poor relief in nineteenth-century York, see A. Digby, 'The Relief of Poverty in Victorian York: Attitudes and Policies' in C. H. Feinstein (ed.), *York 1831-1981. 150 Years of Scientific Endeavour and Social Change* (York, 1981).

<sup>32</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 15 December 1880. The most famous reaction to the perceived hypocrisy of the poor law authorities in providing the civic spectacle of the workhouse Christmas, but denying outdoor relief, was George R. Sims *In the Workhouse: Christmas Day*, first published in 1877. See Longmate, *The Workhouse*, pp. 223-25.

<sup>33</sup> F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1980), p. 179. It is possible that women became involved with workhouses because of their inadequate provision for children in the early Victorian period. In 1837, the chairman of the Petworth guardians told a parliamentary committee that he would not be allowed to permit any 'charitable lady' to provide a dinner on Christmas Day. One of the first women to provide for workhouse children at Christmas was Emma Sheppard of Frome, who published an account of her activities in the Bristol press, which was subsequently published as a pamphlet entitled *Sunshine in a Shady Place*, one of a number of discursive constructions of female Christmas philanthropy that appeared from the 1850s onwards that inspired wider participation. See Longmate, *The Workhouse*, pp. 226-28.

<sup>34</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 222-30. The role played by middle-class women in Christmas charity is also emphasised by Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 117, and G. Weightman and S. Humphries, *Christmas Past* (London, 1987), p. 57.



the contemporary perception that Christmas was becoming feminised.<sup>35</sup> But the involvement of middle-class women also raises interesting questions concerning the motivations for charitable activity. Prochaska highlights the prime role of evangelical religion as a motivating factor for women's involvement in philanthropy in the nineteenth century,<sup>36</sup> and the general rise in philanthropic activity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has been linked to the increase of evangelical sentiment<sup>37</sup> and the importance of the doctrine of the Atonement.<sup>38</sup> As I have shown in the previous two chapters, evangelicalism played an important role in the early formation of Christmas intimacy, before the religious aspects of Christmas within the home tended to become obscured by material culture in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is possible then, that the evangelical spirit was translated into philanthropic activities during the Christmases of the second half of the nineteenth century. Though not strictly an evangelical, Octavia Hill (1838-1912) provides a suitable example of this. In 1855 she was working at the Ladies' Guild,<sup>39</sup> helping ragged school children to make toys. Her attitude to Christmas becomes very apparent in her letters at this time. Her priorities were asserted in a letter to her mother on 19 December:

Mr. Maurice<sup>40</sup> tells me that he will preach at Lincoln's Inn on Tuesday morning. Of course I *cannot* miss *that*; but I will, if necessary, as a great sacrifice, on one condition, that it is not made a precedent for expecting it again ... I very much wish to spend some part of Christmas with you, and to see you again; but I very much wish you would be contented, if I spent Christmas Eve with you, as I would much value to do so.<sup>41</sup>

Writing to her friend Mary Harris on Christmas Eve, Octavia went further: 'I care very little for what is called a merry Christmas... I have renounced parties, above all I have

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<sup>35</sup> See L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (2nd edn, London, 2002), chapter 3; L. Bella, *The Christmas Imperative. Leisure, Family and Women's Work* (Halifax, NS, 1992); and chapters one and two.

<sup>36</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 8-17.

<sup>37</sup> Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', pp. 378-79.

<sup>38</sup> Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor*, p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> A co-operative association promoted by the Christian Socialists.

<sup>40</sup> The Christian Socialist and educationalist F. D. Maurice (1805-72).

<sup>41</sup> C. E. Maurice (ed.), *Life of Octavia Hill as Told in Her Letters* (London, 1913), p. 68.



renounced Christmas parties.’<sup>42</sup> Yet at the same she recognised the value of Christmas to the children in care:

I must bring home to them some of the gladness which they see around them; their only Christmas trees must not be those in confectioners’ windows, at which they gaze with longing eyes. There is time enough for Christmas to become solemn, when it has become joyful and dear.<sup>43</sup>

It is probable, however, that many women were able to enjoy the social festivities of Christmas, and engage in its philanthropic pursuits. Indeed, many years later Octavia had a warmer attitude towards the Christmas circle of family and friends. In 1891 she informed Mary Harris that ‘We have just parted from our Christmas party of dear ones’.<sup>44</sup>

The most advanced analysis of charitable motivation in the nineteenth century has been provided by Alan Kidd.<sup>45</sup> Kidd argues that Brian Harrison<sup>46</sup> and Frank Prochaska<sup>47</sup> both identify the ‘philanthropic impulse’ as intrinsically altruistic, and that particularly on Prochaska’s part this is a reaction against the ‘social control’ theories that emerged in the 1970s.<sup>48</sup> Kidd is essentially arguing that one-dimensional theories such as social control or simplistic arguments that emphasise either altruism or egotism at the expense of the other should be rejected in favour of an explanation that highlights the complexity of emotions and thoughts that philanthropic activity engendered, and that the question of reciprocity should be part of that complex.<sup>49</sup> If, as Stephen Nissenbaum suggests, we were witnessing in the nineteenth century the separation of Christmas giving into the

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<sup>42</sup> Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, pp. 69-71.

<sup>43</sup> Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, p. 71.

<sup>44</sup> Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, p. 519.

<sup>45</sup> A. J. Kidd, ‘Philanthropy and the “Social History Paradigm”’, *Social History*, 21. (1996), 180-192. One of the earliest modern studies of philanthropy was E. Lascelles, ‘Charity’, in G. M. Young (ed.), *Early Victorian England 1830-1865* (London, 1934), vol. 2.

<sup>46</sup> B. Harrison, ‘Philanthropy and the Victorians’, *Victorian Studies*, IX (1966), 353-74 and *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1982), chapter 5.

<sup>47</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*; ‘Philanthropy’; and *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (London, 1988).

<sup>48</sup> Notably A. P. Donajrodzki (ed.), *Social Control in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1977).

<sup>49</sup> Kidd, ‘Philanthropy’, *passim*.

separate categories of presents for friends and family, and charity for the poor,<sup>50</sup> this does not preclude the possibility that the emotive element had been removed from the latter. Kidd suggests that the continuing centrality of ‘conditionality’ upon philanthropy was an attempt to overcome the imbalance between donor and recipient; the act of conforming to social and moral norms ‘functioned as a mediated “return” for the charitable gift’.<sup>51</sup> This recognition of complexity releases the historian from narrow reductionist conclusions regarding philanthropic behaviour. This can be seen in the publication of names in subscription lists that appeared in newspapers and the annual reports of charitable societies, a common feature of Christmas and other charity from the mid nineteenth century onwards. In Kidd’s model this becomes not merely an act of status building on behalf of the individual, but also an act of community spirit, since the publication of charitable activity seems to speak symbolically to the community as a whole rather than the recipient specifically. The reputation of the individual for charity may translate into political influence or social prestige, and may even have been actively sought, but cannot be indisputably proved nor realistically separated from the complex of impulses. Furthermore, Kidd proposes that the culture of philanthropy may have possessed ‘its own particular logic and its own language’. Thus subscription lists and annual reports become a generic form ‘with their own conventions and traditions’.<sup>52</sup> This may explain why the subscription list remained a dominant cultural form throughout our period, though in the late-Victorian period a new desire for anonymity could be detected. In making a public appeal for her charity to provide Christmas dinners to the poor in their own homes, Edith Milner declared in 1898: ‘We never publish a list of names. Our donors do not wish for publicity’.<sup>53</sup>

Much charitable activity at Christmas and in general was informal, and by definition, difficult to quantify. This existed in many different forms. It included donations made to church offertories, or the vast amount of donations of materials, food, clothes,

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<sup>50</sup> S. Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York, 1996), p. 227.

<sup>51</sup> Kidd, ‘Philanthropy’, pp. 186-87.

<sup>52</sup> Kidd, ‘Philanthropy’, pp. 188-91.

<sup>53</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 5 December 1898.



decorations, etc., which institutions of all forms relied on to provide Christmas treats.<sup>54</sup> Much of the informal giving at Christmas can be characterised by direct personal transactions between the donor and recipient, which could have conveyed on the donor a temporary sense of emotional and moral satisfaction, a construction of a false intimacy. This type of giving can be placed in the category of Christmas boxes, though the term was applied so loosely in the nineteenth century that they also have relevance to debates in the fields of shopping culture, work practices, and temperance. Complaints about Christmas boxes had been common since the eighteenth century, but they do seem to have reached a new height in the 1860s when they combined with a powerful discourse challenging indiscriminate giving. Writing in an American context, Nissenbaum has argued that the large amount of press condemnation concerning indiscriminate giving was based on a need to reinforce the separation of gifts and presents that had become marked earlier in the century; mediation of contact through charitable organisations was now both necessary and desirable.<sup>55</sup> The English context of the 1860s, particularly the East End of London, has been described by Gareth Stedman Jones. In *Outcast London*, Stedman Jones reveals how contemporaries perceived the virtual breakdown of the machinery of poor relief in the East End of London, and the social and political ramifications that followed from it, in terms of the 'deformation of the gift'.<sup>56</sup> The deserving poor were becoming demoralised by the ease in which the undeserving poor could take advantage of the mass of charity that was becoming available. Much of this charity was being channelled through organisations, but organisations motivated by sentiment, lacking coherent methodology, and overlapping

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<sup>54</sup> Donations of materials were also made public through newspapers, annual reports and parish magazines. In some quarters, however, a preference did exist for the cash gift. In 1910 the Vicar of St. Saviour's, Leeds, noted in their parish magazine, that it was '*money we want, not goods*', for the children's Christmas treat. *St. Saviour's Monthly Paper*, December 1910. Two examples of the many donations of materials are the packets of tea given to Brunswick Chapel, Leeds, by Messrs W. B. Mason and J. H. Lawton in 1900 for their Christmas dinner for the aged, and the packets of cough lozenges provided by Councillor Ratcliffe for the Christmas treat to Leeds sandwich men the same year. *Leeds Mercury*, 26 December 1900; 28 December 1900.

<sup>55</sup> Nissenbaum, *Battle for Christmas*, pp. 227-29.

<sup>56</sup> As Kidd has highlighted, Stedman Jones's theory was based upon a misreading of M. Mauss's *The Gift. Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York and London, 1967). See 'Philanthropy', p. 187.

with each other.<sup>57</sup> The ‘evils’ of indiscriminate giving thus became the intellectual context in which Christmas boxes were discussed.

Stedman Jones clearly influenced the way in which Weightman and Humphries perceive the development of Christmas charity in the nineteenth century, who argue that by the mid-Victorian period the big cities were acting as magnets at Christmas for ‘casual labourers, the unemployed, tramps, and travelling criminals’, and thus creating the perception that ‘respectable working-class folk would be demoralised by the midwinter wealth and Christmas revelling of the casual poor’.<sup>58</sup> Certainly the winter positioning of the Christmas festival would make it a likely time for migration by the indigent poor, but whilst Weightman and Humphries suggest that the rationalisation of charity that took place under the auspices of the COS<sup>59</sup> greatly reduced this seasonal migration,<sup>60</sup> Peter Mandler has uncovered evidence from Manchester and London to suggest that it was still prevalent in the Edwardian period.<sup>61</sup> Ellen Ross draws attention to the suspicion of ‘charity mongers’ as ‘both stock literary figures and the *bête noire* of the whole charity world’. She draws upon evidence discovered by Charles Booth of a Mrs. Parks, wife of a drunken invalided soldier, who was able to get two or three dinners for her children during the Christmas season.<sup>62</sup> In York the Salvation Army gave a new suit to the most deserving boy at their Christmas children’s treat. However, in 1909 the Commanding Officer recorded in the Corps History Book: ‘Don’t give

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<sup>57</sup> G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford, 1971), Chapter 13.

<sup>58</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, pp. 64-66.

<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that the COS was not the originator of rational scientific charity, nor was it a coherent national body. As Kidd argues, ‘although the provincial societies professed commitment to the principles of the London COS, in reality, they displayed a wide variety of practices’. See Kidd, *State, Society, and the Poor*, pp. 97-102. See also J. Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work in Britain: The Charity Organisation Society/Family Welfare Association since 1869* (Aldershot, 1995); C. L. Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society, 1869-1913* (London, 1961); and A. W. Vincent, ‘The Poor Law Reports of 1909 and the Social Theory of the Charity Organisation Society’, *Victorian Studies*, 27 (1984), 343-63.

<sup>60</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 66.

<sup>61</sup> P. Mandler, ‘Poverty and Charity in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis: An Introduction’, in P. Mandler (ed.), *The Uses of Charity. The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis* (Philadelphia, 1990), pp. 18-19.

<sup>62</sup> E. Ross, ‘Hungry Children: Housewives and London Charity, 1870-1918’, in P. Mandler (ed.), *The Uses of Charity. The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis* (Philadelphia, 1990), p. 173; C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London. First Series: Poverty* (London, 1902), vol. 2, p. 54.



Hepworth suit at children's tea, as some children dress poor to secure it. Give it when visiting'.<sup>63</sup> Such a systematic 'working' of the charity system takes this debate into the field of working-class survival strategies. For some sections of society patterns of income remained temporary and seasonal, and Christmas charities must have played a considerable role in getting by. Another factor, as highlighted by Prochaska, is the great amount of charity of poor to poor, which had a 'familial and immediate character',<sup>64</sup> which is very hard to substantiate, but must have been a factor at Christmas.

Weightman and Humphries argue that reform of Christmas charity that arose under the influence of the COS was manifested in a greater means testing that strengthened the established categories of deserving and undeserving poor.<sup>65</sup> The evidence for means-testing Christmas beneficiaries is strong in the late-Victorian period. In York, Edith Milner's charity, which aimed to give Christmas meals to the poor in their own homes, operating from the late 1880s through to the Edwardian period, was organised in collaboration with the local COS officer, who sought out the deserving cases.<sup>66</sup> In Leeds, members of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes 'went into the slums and alleys of the towns, and sought out the little ones thought fit' to be recipients of a Waifs and Strays Christmas dinner.<sup>67</sup> But this does create a problem. The idea of Christmas charity, if separated from the harsh natural conditions of December, seems to exist primarily as a sentimental discourse, which at first glance seemed oppositional to the rational, scientific principles of the COS, though as Kidd argues, the COS contained a diversity of ideas, and a softer stance was perceivable in the late-Edwardian period.<sup>68</sup> But the Bethnal Green COS was making a Christmas charity appeal as early as 1872,<sup>69</sup> and

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<sup>63</sup> Reprinted in *York Salvation Army 1881-1981* (York, 1981), p. 32.

<sup>64</sup> Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', pp. 362-66; see also M. Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1971); Mandler, 'Poverty and Charity'; S. Meacham, *A Life Apart: The English Working Class 1890-1914* (London, 1977), chapter 2; Ross, 'Hungry Children', and 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London before World War 1', *History Workshop Journal*, 15 (1983), 4-27.

<sup>65</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> *York Herald*, 11 December 1888; *Yorkshire Herald*, 31 December 1891.

<sup>67</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 2 January 1891.

<sup>68</sup> Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor*, pp. 101-2.

<sup>69</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1872.

contrary to the Weightman and Humphries assertion about charitable reform in the late-Victorian period, many of the specifically Christmas orientated charities came into existence only during this period.<sup>70</sup>

All of this suggests that Christmas had been gaining an emotive power that cut across ethical, moral, social, political and religious divides. The full impact of the sentiment of Christmas on the charitable arena can be seen after 1870 and is best demonstrated by the appearance of Christmas charitable appeals in *The Times* (see Appendices 1-3). In 1872 a total of 131 organisations made a Christmas appeal in *The Times*, with the figure falling to 106 in 1892, and 85 in 1912. Whilst at first glance this suggests that the heyday of Christmas philanthropy can be found in the mid- to late-Victorian period, the gradual decline could be partially explained by factors such as an increased range of print outlets in which to court such publicity, and more generally in the rise in living standards. At the very least it suggests that Christmas philanthropy continued to be a significant force up to the First World War. The lists of charities show the sheer diversity of causes in action, and they included not just organisations wishing to provide either a Christmas experience for the poor, or just the basics for survival, but organisations which were exploiting the sentiment of Christmas in order to raise general funds for everyday expenses. A good example of this can be found in Leeds, where Laura Braithwaite, secretary of the Leeds Unmarried Women's Benevolent Institution, an organisation founded in 1860 to provide pensions for genteel ladies who had been employed as governesses, ladies' companions, seamstresses or schoolmistresses, wrote a Christmas-orientated appeal for funds to the *Yorkshire Post* for a charity whose aim was to support its beneficiaries year round.<sup>71</sup> This type of exploitation of the Christmas sentiment can be particularly applied to hospitals, which featured prominently in *The Times* lists. Of the 131 institutions appealing in 1872, 32 were hospitals, with 28 hospitals appealing in 1892, and 22 hospitals appealing in 1912. Roy Porter has

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<sup>70</sup> It is also a mistake to assume that all charitable activity after 1870 was motivated by and adhered to COS principles. As Kidd notes, 'The COS managed to alienate many within the charitable community'. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor*, p. 99.

<sup>71</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 27 December 1900; *Annual Report of Leeds Unmarried Women's Benevolent Institute* (Leeds, 1962).



highlighted how philanthropy had been an essential part of hospital finance since the eighteenth century,<sup>72</sup> though Keir Waddington argues that hospitals were extending their financial base away from philanthropy in the 1880s and that charity was not the main source of hospital finance even in the 1850s, despite a widespread belief that ‘hospitals were an essential part of the philanthropic welfare system and could be legitimately funded only through voluntary action’.<sup>73</sup> However, the continuing importance of philanthropy to hospital finance in relation to Christmas can be seen in the way many hospitals in the Edwardian period used staged images of wards featuring Christmas decorations in their annual reports to present a positive image of the institution to its subscribers.<sup>74</sup> Waddington notes how hospitals also diversified their charitable activity with measures that ‘mixed “seriousness” with “entertainment”’, including annual dinners or balls that would be the ‘social and financial highlight of the hospital’s year’.<sup>75</sup> Lord Halifax attended balls at Doncaster Infirmary early in the New Year, and reinforced philanthropic links with Doncaster tradesmen concerned with the Infirmary by inviting them to his own servant’s balls.<sup>76</sup> Porter has noted how the philanthropic undercurrent of the foundation of provincial hospitals in the eighteenth century served to heal the divisions of ‘Hanoverian *versus* Jacobite, Whig *versus* Tory, established church *versus* dissenter, ministerialist *versus* the backwoods squirearchy, town *versus* country, [and] landed *versus* moneyed wealth and trade’ at a civic and county level.<sup>77</sup> The hospital could also act as a civic bond at Christmas, albeit in a more limited sense, in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period. York County Hospital was in receipt of the Christmas day offertories of churches and chapels. In 1884 26 Anglican, Baptist,

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<sup>72</sup> R. Porter, ‘The Gift Relation: Philanthropy and Provincial Hospitals in Eighteenth-Century England’, in L. Granshaw and R. Porter (eds), *The Hospital in History* (London, 1989), 149-78.

<sup>73</sup> K. Waddington, ‘“Grasping Gratitude”: Charity and Hospital Finance in Late-Victorian London’, in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London, 1996), pp. 181-82, 187.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, *Annual Report of York County Hospital*, (York, 1905-1906).

<sup>75</sup> Waddington, ‘Grasping Gratitude’, p. 186.

<sup>76</sup> Earl of Halifax, *Fulness of Days* (London, 1957), pp. 34-36. See also chapter one. Prochaska notes how some middle-class charity, particularly the kind which promoted self-reliance amongst the poor, represented an attack on aristocratic power. Yet by the late-Victorian period, aristocrats were keen to heighten symbolic ties with urban centres as their formal hold on authority began to decline. At the same time, tension often existed between middle-class and upper-class contributors in charities. See Prochaska, ‘Philanthropy’, p. 369. See also Evans, ‘Urbanisation’; and D. Cannadine, ‘Introduction’, in D. Cannadine (ed.), *Patricians, Power and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Towns* (Leicester and New York, 1982).

<sup>77</sup> Porter, ‘Gift Relation’, p. 153.



Methodist, and Presbyterian churches and chapels from York and its surrounding hinterland contributed over £135 from their respective Christmas day collections.<sup>78</sup> However, this feature went into sharp decline in subsequent years, and by 1914 only six religious institutions contributed a total of £18, 1s. 0d., and offertory collections had largely been replaced by collections made by carol-singing groups.<sup>79</sup> By 1870 York County Hospital had joined the institutional trend for providing a Christmas for its inmates, especially children.<sup>80</sup> In order to facilitate these events the hospital received donations of money, clothing, toys and books, evergreens, and crackers and dessert fruits, and the donors were subsequently listed in the annual reports. The lists reveal the participation of local religious, civic, political, military and commercial elites, as well as aristocratic figures and a collection of York's leading retailers.<sup>81</sup> Christmas charity had come to operate to a great extent within a civic context, and it became common for the beneficiaries of such charity to be addressed by Lord Mayors, MPs, and in the Edwardian period, their wives.<sup>82</sup> Lady Mayoresses would come to perform a very public role in the civic Christmas, as demonstrated in York when in 1904 Lady Vernon-Wragge distributed packets of tea to the elderly poor of nineteen institutions, and gave boxes of oranges to children of a further five institutions.<sup>83</sup> The civic principle could also be important for a charity society's appeal for funds. In 1912, the subscription form produced by the York Aged and Poor People's Christmas Dinner Fund featured views of York Minster, the Ouse from Lendal Bridge, and the Ruins of St. Mary's Abbey.<sup>84</sup> In London Sir William Treloar's Crippled Children's Christmas

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<sup>78</sup> *Annual Report of York County Hospital* (York, 1884), p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> *Annual Report of York County Hospital* (York, 1914), p. 25.

<sup>80</sup> The best example of this trend was the activities of the Santa Claus Society, whose object was to provide presents for children and adults in hospital. In 1891 they established the Santa Claus Children's Home in Highgate, 'chiefly for cases of Hip and Spinal Disease, and for those children who, though otherwise well enough to go to a Convalescent Home still required surgical nursing. Delicate children under three years of age [were] also admitted'. *Annual Report of Santa Claus Children's Home*, 1902. I am grateful to Bridget Howlett of London Metropolitan Archives for this reference.

<sup>81</sup> Contributors included the Archbishop of York, the Lord Mayor, Sir Frederick Milner, M. P., Colonel Yorke, Joshua Tetley, and the firm of Leak and Thorpe.

<sup>82</sup> For example, on New Year's day 1909 the recipients of the York Aged and Poor People's Christmas Dinner Fund were addressed by the Lord Mayor. On New Year's eve 1913, Arnold Rowntree, M. P., performed a similar function at the same occasion. *Yorkshire Herald*, 2 January 1909; 1 January 1914.

<sup>83</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 24 December 1904.

<sup>84</sup> *York Aged and Poor People's Christmas Dinner Fund* (York, 1912).



Hamper Fund of 1913 published a whole-page advertisement in *The Times* which centred the portrait of George V amongst those of the Lord and Lady Mayoress of London and the 21 mayors of metropolitan boroughs, in order to provide readers of *The Times* with an esteemed example to follow, and contrasted the spectacle of 'fairy Christmas London' with a sentimental description of the experiences of poor crippled children.<sup>85</sup>

Both the York Aged and Poor People's Christmas Dinner Fund, and Sir William Treloar's Crippled Children's Christmas Hamper Fund were examples of a specific type of charity that emerged in late-Victorian England: the charity organisation specifically designed to provide a Christmas experience for the poor. The rise can again be traced through the lists of charities advertising in *The Times*. No such charities appeared in the 1872 list, but the 1892 list featured Mrs. Power Lalor's Christmas Fund, East-End Christmas Dinners, and Christmas Cheer for the Homeless and Destitute, whilst in 1912 appeals were made for the Poor Children's Yule-Tide Association, Christmas Clothing and Hampers for Little Cripples, The Santa Claus Society Doll Show and Sale, and Christmas Dinners. Another feature of this period was the intersection of Christmas charity with the discourses of the sentimentalisation of childhood that were becoming central to Christmas rhetoric. In the context of Christmas, it became common to refer to poor children as 'poor robins',<sup>86</sup> associating children with one of the central emblems of Christmas by investing children with the qualities of innocence and nature. In 1880 the parish magazine of St. Simon's, Leeds, noted the church's intention of 'providing a Christmas dinner for the little robins of the parish',<sup>87</sup> and in 1908 *The Times* reported on

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<sup>85</sup> *The Times*, 23 December 1913. Sir William Purdie Treloar, Bt. (1843-1923), manufacturer, philanthropist and Lord Mayor of London in 1906, founded the 'Little Cripples Fund' in 1908 because of his concern for the effects of non-pulmonary tuberculosis on the children of London. The appeal also appeared in the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph*.

<sup>86</sup> Robins immediately became a popular image when the Christmas card became commercially successful during the 1860s. At first comic, the depictions began to become sentimental in the 1870s, and in the 1880s there was a fashion of cards depicting dead robins accompanied by morbid and sentimental texts. See G. Buday, *The History of the Christmas Card* (2nd edn, London, 1964), pp. 100-109. Kathleen Heasman has attributed the term 'robins' dinners' to the Rev. Charles Bullock, editor of *Home Words* who inserted an appeal in his paper one Christmas 'for all the hungry human "robins"'. See *Evangelicals in Action. An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era* (London, 1962), p. 76.

<sup>87</sup> *St. Simon's Parochial Magazine*, December 1880.

the activities of the Derby Robin Christmas Dinner Society, regarding it as ‘a long established charity’.<sup>88</sup>

The most fully developed example of the entwining of the discourses of charitable giving and childhood can be seen in a *Yorkshire Evening Post* newspaper campaign, first run in 1909. The idea of a Christmas charity newspaper appeal was not unprecedented. At a local level, the *Leytonstone Express and Independent* was raising money to provide poor people with Christmas dinners in 1902,<sup>89</sup> whilst as early as 1879 readers of the *Truth* were subscribing to an annual exhibition of toys to be distributed amongst children in London hospitals, workhouses, workhouse schools and infirmaries.<sup>90</sup> Charitable institutions might also produce their own publications for such purposes. The Santa Claus Distribution Fund was formed in Stoke Newington in 1894 for the purpose of providing presents and clothing for poor children, and by 1896 were producing the *Santa Claus Gazette* to appeal for funds.<sup>91</sup> The *Yorkshire Evening Post* appeal began when Albert Knight, Vicar of Christ Church, Leeds, wrote a letter to the paper asking for help in providing toys for the poor children of his parish. The previous year the *Yorkshire Evening Post* had helped Knight to procure over 1,600 items for the children. The appeal was grounded in the question one young girl had asked the clergyman: ‘Please, sir, are we havin’ any toys at Christmas?’ The question evoked an emotional resonance revealing the extent to which children were now believed to have innate rights and how *all* children had come to form expectations of receipt at Christmas. The *Yorkshire Evening Post* took up the appeal, but applied it to the whole of Leeds, estimating that there were 10,000 children who ‘never receive a visit from Santa Claus’. The paper asked for 10,000 toys, principally dolls, to be sent, appropriated

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<sup>88</sup> *The Times*, 31 December 1908.

<sup>89</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1902.

<sup>90</sup> *The Times*, 16 December 1891.

<sup>91</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, pp. 143–45. The Distribution Fund also had a Santa Claus Workers’ League who visited poor families on Christmas Eve distributing parcels. This work, as might be expected, was carried out by middle-class women, and Weightman and Humphries have placed emphasis on women dressing up as Santa Claus. However, a detailed survey of the *Santa Claus Gazette* reveals only one incidence of this, when Miss Waggett of Whitechapel recorded ‘Dec. 24th found us trying to assume the garb of Mrs. Santa Claus, by decking ourselves in large light wool shawls as an outer covering’. *Santa Claus Gazette*, 3 (1897), p. 9.



from the 'corner of some well-stocked nursery', and further appealed to an 'army' of ladies to dress the dolls.<sup>92</sup> An exhibition of the dressed dolls followed, for which an entrance fee was charged with proceeds going to the Leeds Summer Holiday Camp Fund,<sup>93</sup> and the toys were subsequently distributed to children in various schools throughout Leeds, in collaboration with the Local Education Authority.<sup>94</sup> Civic pride also played a part, as reference to established doll-dressing schemes for poor children in Birmingham and Manchester were made.<sup>95</sup> Almost every day the readers of the *Yorkshire Evening Post* were provided with a running total of the number of toys received, which by 17 December had reached 29,753. There were also daily anecdotes concerning interesting donations, and letters from both donors and potential recipients indicative of an interactive process. The most interesting feature to appear was a fictive letter from Santa Claus thanking the donors for their help. This letter located Santa Claus in fairyland, and established a binary opposition between the 'bitter winds of poverty and neglect' and fairyland, a place that could be evoked through the gift-giving process, when the 'happy child-look' could be brought back to 'little people'.<sup>96</sup> Evoking Santa Claus was a useful tool for negotiating the disrupted relationship between donor and recipient. This had been shown in 1898 when an anonymous donor to the robins' dinner in the Leeds parish of St. Simon's was referred to as Santa Claus.<sup>97</sup> The issue was raised by some *Yorkshire Evening Post* readers, who felt that someone should dress up as Santa Claus when the gifts were being distributed, in order to perpetuate the 'colour and romance of Christmas time'; though the logistics of the event meant that 'Santa Claus' was only able to be present in the motor car that conveyed the presents to the various schools.<sup>98</sup> Another important factor about this charity was that it encouraged the middle-class child to become a donor. This was a culmination of a process that had been developing for a century. Prochaska reveals how the British and Foreign Bible Society

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<sup>92</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 19 November 1909.

<sup>93</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 29 November 1909.

<sup>94</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 9 December 1909.

<sup>95</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 19 November 1909.

<sup>96</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 17 December 1909.

<sup>97</sup> *St. Simon's Parochial Magazine*, January 1898.

<sup>98</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 13 December 1909.

encouraged children's participation in the charitable process in the early nineteenth century, and in 1841 the Methodist Missionary Society began a children's Christmas appeal, the success of which guaranteed it as an annual event.<sup>99</sup> In the later nineteenth century, children, particularly girls, may also have been influenced by the Christmas examples of selflessness they encountered in popular fiction such as Louisa Alcott's *Little Women* and Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did*.<sup>100</sup> The *Yorkshire Evening Post* was keen to testify to the willingness of the children to give up their own possessions, by printing the notes of goodwill the newspaper received with the toys. Nine year old Dorothy E. wrote 'Mother told me about the poor little girls and boys who were sure Santa Claus was not coming to their houses. I have sent you all my fairy tale books. Please give them to the little children'.<sup>101</sup> Such acts of selflessness contributed to the ideal picture of middle-class childhood at Christmas, tempering concerns about material desire and acting in ways that suggest an independent 'little person'. Problems were caused by the *Yorkshire Evening Post's* appeal however. Some unscrupulous individuals did pose as workers for the appeal, and went house calling in Leeds in order to solicit goods.<sup>102</sup> Concern was also raised by the nature of the gift itself. Some readers of the paper felt that the 'fund should be devoted to feeding the poor children'. The *Yorkshire Evening Post* was adamant, however, that 'for once the poor children should have what every child in better circumstances regards as a natural right - a luxury - a present from Santa Claus for Christmas'.<sup>103</sup>

However, much of the Christmas charitable activities were concerned primarily with providing children with basics such as food and clothing. From 1885 Brunswick Chapel in Leeds provided children with a Christmas morning breakfast in the schoolroom,<sup>104</sup> and a similar endeavour was provided by the Oxford Place Mission in that city from

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<sup>99</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 76, 82.

<sup>100</sup> L. M. Alcott, *Little Women* (London, 1994), pp. 15-16; S. Coolidge, *What Katy Did* (Ware, 1994), pp. 118-26.

<sup>101</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 19 November 1909.

<sup>102</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 13 December 1909.

<sup>103</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 3 December 1909.

<sup>104</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 28 December 1900.



1906.<sup>105</sup> In York the Central Mission organised a children's tea on Christmas day from 1893,<sup>106</sup> whilst the Wesleyans had pioneered the idea of Christmas dinners for 'street arabs'<sup>107</sup> in York in 1872.<sup>108</sup> In London, one of the many examples of such activity involved a renegotiation of colonial relationships when the Children's Sunbeam Mission of South Australia began to provide an annual Christmas dinner for children in 1894.<sup>109</sup> It should be stated, however, that these desires to feed needy children had a wider context. Ellen Ross has explored the way in which the provision of meals to poor children in London grew from the efforts of ragged schools and missions in the early nineteenth century, to the existence, after 1870, of organisations such as the Referee Fund and the London School Dinners Association,<sup>110</sup> and the two concerns merged in 1892 when the Educational Food Fund and Halfpenny Dinners for Schoolchildren made a Christmas appeal in *The Times*.<sup>111</sup>

Such emphasis on children within the nexus of Christmas charity partly reflected and partly motivated the growing associations between Christmas and childhood, and has led Nissenbaum to declare that impoverished children became the single-issue group within Christmas charity in the United States after 1850.<sup>112</sup> This assertion does not, however, reveal the full story. There was also a considerable emphasis placed upon the aged poor. York's Aged and Poor People's Christmas Dinner Fund was established in 1898,<sup>113</sup> and in addition to the children's breakfast at Brunswick Chapel a dinner to the aged poor was provided in the afternoon.<sup>114</sup> As I noted earlier, concern for the aged poor was an important part of older forms of Christmas charity, only eroded in the twentieth

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<sup>105</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 26 December 1910.

<sup>106</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 26 December 1893.

<sup>107</sup> On the development of the street child as 'arab' see H. Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor. Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1991), chapters 5 and 6. Cunningham also examines the portrayal of children as waifs and strays, another image that was exploited in Christmas charity.

<sup>108</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1872.

<sup>109</sup> *The Times*, 29 December 1898.

<sup>110</sup> Ross, 'Hungry Children', 175-86.

<sup>111</sup> *The Times*, 19 December 1892.

<sup>112</sup> Nissenbaum, *Battle for Christmas*, p. 232.

<sup>113</sup> *York Aged and Poor People's Christmas Dinner Fund* (York, 1912).

<sup>114</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 28 December 1900.

century by the widescale introduction of pensions. The issue of pensions arose at the Aged Poor's Christmas Dinner in York, held on New Year's day 1909. The Old Age Pension's Act had come into force the previous day, and whilst addressing the audience Alderman McKay took the opportunity to ask how many of those present were receiving pensions, and after fewer than he expected responded, declared that he was 'very glad ..., because ... it was an indication that a great many of them did not require pensions'.<sup>115</sup>

The introduction of pensions began to have an affect on the funding of such activities. After 1909 many of the most generous subscribers to the York Aged and Poor People's Christmas Dinner Fund had passed away, and had still not been replaced by 1913. That year's Christmas dinner was the third in a row for which the subscriptions had not met the costs. An attempt was made to cover the losses by making house to house collections, but had to be abandoned after complaints from householders.<sup>116</sup>

The emphasis on children and the aged poor within the discourse of Christmas charity in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods can to a certain extent reveal the continuation of a concern for the most vulnerable members of society. This can certainly be seen in the popularity of cripples' charities at Christmas. Sir William Treloar's charity was well established by 1913,<sup>117</sup> and the Leeds Invalid Children's Aid Society, which in 1909 decided that 'so much had been done for the children during the summer that it was ... considered unnecessary to have the usual Christmas treat', were so overwhelmed with offers of help that the treat went ahead as usual.<sup>118</sup> The consideration of Christmas charity for crippled children is a suitable place to consider the influence of Dickens on the charitable discourse. It is probable that the immediate and sustained success of *A Christmas Carol* did make its readers (and listening and viewing audiences), pause and reflect on the explicit message of the book, and the setting of events at Christmas might also have reconnected the sentiment with the season in people's minds.<sup>119</sup> By the Edwardian period there is more tangible evidence of

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<sup>115</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 2 January 1909.

<sup>116</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 1 January 1914.

<sup>117</sup> *The Times*, 23 December 1913.

<sup>118</sup> *Annual Report of Leeds Invalid Children's Aid Society* (Leeds, 1909-1910).

<sup>119</sup> *Punch*, however, had revealed through the character of Mr. Chokepear how easy it was to neglect the



the influence of *A Christmas Carol*. In 1903 the Leeds Dickens Fellowship 'hit upon a very happy and appropriate opening for their surplus energy as well as for the practical expression of their sympathy with the poor and weak which Dickens must infuse into every follower', by providing a tea and entertainment for poor children.<sup>120</sup> In 1905 new heights of sentimentalism were achieved when the York Dickens Fellowship provided a similar reception for 'real Tiny-Tims'.<sup>121</sup>

Many of the late-Victorian and Edwardian Christmas charity events were obsessed with providing for large numbers of people. Four-figure gatherings were often recorded, such as the 1,500 poor children given Christmas dinner in Southwark by the Ragged School Union and the Shaftesbury Society in 1902,<sup>122</sup> or the 4,000 poor children given Christmas dinner by the Derby Robins' Christmas Dinner Society in 1908.<sup>123</sup> These figures were however, dwarfed by those found by Nissenbaum in New York, where in 1902 20,000 poor people were fed by the Salvation Army. Nissenbaum is struck by the public nature of these events, with large numbers of wealthy New Yorkers paying to watch them eat. This has led Nissenbaum to develop a theory of 'charity as spectator sport', where the 'jaded rich', lacking an emotional reciprocity from the gift-giving process they engage in with their own children, turn outwards to the poor for emotionally sustaining gratitude.<sup>124</sup> The theory does not translate well to an English context. Part of the explanation of the rising numbers being provided for can perhaps be explained in terms of rising population, and in England no distinct public discourse of grasping, selfish children had developed at this stage. Another factor is that alongside the large gatherings, considerable efforts were being made to allow the poor a Christmas experience in their own homes, provided through distributions of materials. There is an abundance of evidence for this. In York, Edith Milner's charity operated from 1887,<sup>125</sup>

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charitable element of Christmas. *Punch*, 25 December 1842.

<sup>120</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 30 December 1903.

<sup>121</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 26 December 1904.

<sup>122</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1902.

<sup>123</sup> *The Times*, 31 December 1908.

<sup>124</sup> Nissenbaum, *Battle for Christmas*, pp. 245-53.

<sup>125</sup> *York Herald*, 11 December 1888.

and in London *The Times* recorded in 1902 that on Christmas Eve the St. Giles Christian Mission provided materials for 550 families, the Ham-Yard Soup Kitchen for 1,000 families, the Vicar of Plaistow for 500 families, and the *Leytonstone Express and Independent* for 4,000 families.<sup>126</sup> Such activity fits the pattern of greater means testing noted earlier, with its home visiting and ticket systems, but it also reveals the undercurrent of the strong ideal of Christmas intimacy rooted in the home.

The Vicar of Plaistow's activity is a reminder that the parish unit and the clergy remained an important part of the administration of Christmas charity. This in turn raises the question of continuities and 'invented traditions'. Much of the low-scale, parish-based Christmas philanthropy that existed in the mid eighteenth century remained intact in 1914. At the same time new institutions evolved to reproduce elements of the intimate domestic experience for the mass of society. A complex mass of reasons lay behind these developments, but how can it be interpreted in reference to the past? Was it, as Weightman and Humphries suggest, 'a re-working of an age-old aristocratic custom of giving alms to the poor'?<sup>127</sup> Whilst there was an element of nostalgia for 'merrie Englande' in the charitable discourse of Victorian society, there is very little direct connection between an idealised version of a medieval social fabric and the activities of generations of philanthropists. At the same time, charity organisations were displaying ritualistic behaviour in making each new charitable occasion an annual event, and the civic aspect within many of those occasions is a key area identified by Eric Hobsbawm for the flourishing of invented tradition, as is the centring of most of the developments in the 1870-1914 period, as the limitations of a 'rigorous individualistic rationalism' as a social ideal came to be realised.<sup>128</sup> Hobsbawm's theories of invented tradition are primarily concerned with 'new methods of ruling or establishing bonds of loyalty',<sup>129</sup> and ultimately this seems a too simplistic explanation

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<sup>126</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1902.

<sup>127</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 60.

<sup>128</sup> E. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 9, 11-12, and 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914', p. 263.

<sup>129</sup> Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914', p. 263.



for the charitable impulse. In this context 'invented tradition' has undercurrents of social control. Kidd criticises social-control models on the basis that they have undercurrents of 'rational-actor syndrome'. According to Kidd, 'social behaviour is not always intelligible as the consequence of reasoned choices, whether self-interested or altruistic'.<sup>130</sup> Equally, Prochaska rejects social control in reference to philanthropy as being 'rather murky and reductionist'. He argued that the desire for social conformity was located in a much wider set of social relations; that working-class families had many ways of receiving charitable relief without imbibing cultural values; that fear of social unrest and domestic revolution did not adequately explain persistent trends in charitable giving; that charitable institutions were chaotic and often at cross-purposes, and therefore were an inefficient means of subduing disaffection; and that philanthropists were often reacting primarily to a social need.<sup>131</sup> The Christmas charity of late-Victorian England contained both continuities and much that was new. The latter tended to be based upon either currents that had been developing since the eighteenth century, relating to childhood and the outward reflection of the Christmas intimacy of family and friends, or from a more practical exploitation of those sentiments. Christmas charity fitted the context of invented tradition only in the sense that it was underlined by a tendency towards ritualism that can in any case be partly explained by the existence of Christmas outside normative linear time. The model thus collapses in on itself, and for this reason 'invented tradition', though a useful category of exploratory analysis, must come to be seen as an inadequate model of explanation. It should also be asked whether Christmas charity was entirely linked to the general trends of philanthropy in the period. The increase of Christmas charity in the late nineteenth century is commensurate with the measurable rise in charitable activity as a whole,<sup>132</sup> and strong social themes emerge that have a much wider context than Christmas. Much of the evidence that I have produced above suggests that the late nineteenth century was an important period when earlier charitable customs were gathered together and consolidated, and new ones

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<sup>130</sup> Kidd, 'Philanthropy', p. 192.

<sup>131</sup> Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', pp. 370-71.

<sup>132</sup> Kidd suggests that 'charitable giving was at least the equal of state welfare provision in the nineteenth century'. See Kidd, *State, Society, and the Poor*, p. 67.



fostered. To a certain extent this reflected the way in which poverty had been placed back on the national agenda of the chattering classes following the publication of Andrew Mearns's *Bitter Cry of Outcast London* in 1883. The amount of charitable activity for children in the mid to late nineteenth century also coincided with the gradual shift from reformatory-based institutions to organisations that aimed to provide children with a surrogate family experience, as well as increasing state intervention.<sup>133</sup> As Cunningham highlights, the philanthropic discourse contained shock at the distance between the reality and the ideals of childhood, as the middle and upper classes perceived 'children without childhood'.<sup>134</sup> However, Christmas had become one the key elements that children should experience and expect.

### Entertainment

Another factor in late-Victorian and Edwardian Christmas charity is performance. Provisions of food became tied to entertainments. Sarah Lloyd has recently shown how charity and entertainment were linked in the eighteenth century,<sup>135</sup> but whereas in the eighteenth century it was charitable events raising income by providing entertainments for the wealthy, by the late nineteenth century it was the poor who were being entertained. The poor could expect to be regaled with concerts and magic lantern shows.<sup>136</sup> In this regard charities were increasingly forced to mirror a public culture of Christmas that was becoming linked to various forms of entertainment that existed as an outlet of leisure choice.<sup>137</sup> The Christmas leisure industry had a similar level of growth

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<sup>133</sup> For example, Dr Barnardo's Homes were founded in 1867; the Wesleyan National Children's Home and Orphanage in 1871; the Waif and Strays Society in 1881; and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in 1884. The Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act was passed in 1889.

<sup>134</sup> Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society*, pp. 134-37.

<sup>135</sup> S. Lloyd, 'Pleasing Spectacles and Elegant Dinners: Conviviality, Benevolence, and Charity Anniversaries in Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (January 2002), 23-57.

<sup>136</sup> For example, on Boxing Day 1907, the York Salvation Army provided a limelight exhibition for poor children that was interspersed with music from an industrial school band. Another lantern entertainment followed in the evening for adults. *Yorkshire Herald*, 27 December 1907.

<sup>137</sup> For the history of changing patterns in leisure and the development in a leisure industry see P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (London, 1978); H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c. 1780-c.1880* (London, 1980); J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd. Popular Culture in England 1750-1900* (2nd edn, Stroud, 1999); and R. W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1973).



to that of Christmas charity, reaching nation-wide prominence in the second half the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century such a culture barely existed. The origins of this Christmas entertainment culture can be found in the development of English pantomime during the eighteenth century.<sup>138</sup> Pantomime in England had evolved in the eighteenth century under the influence of Italian *commedia dell'arte*, associated with the Harlequinade<sup>139</sup> and was based at the patent theatres of Covent Garden and Drury Lane.<sup>140</sup> Harlequinades were originally performed throughout the year, but gradually became more closely tied to holiday periods and eventually achieved a strong association with Christmas in the nineteenth century.<sup>141</sup> The pantomime season opened on Boxing Day, and this contributed to the development of a distinct leisure culture in London on that day. By 1842 pantomimes could be seen at Drury Lane, Covent Garden, the Haymarket, the Adelphi, the Princess, the Surrey, the Olympic, Sadler's Wells and the Victoria.<sup>142</sup> The Statute for the Regulation of Theatres which was passed the following year, ending the restriction on licences to the patent theatres, increased the availability of pantomime in the following decades.<sup>143</sup>

The leisure options available in London at this time also began to include those which operated in a more rational context. The British Museum began opening to the public in 1837, and by 1841 was attracting 15,000 visitors on Boxing Day, with twice as many visiting the following year.<sup>144</sup> In 1852 *The Times* listed the British Museum amongst the

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<sup>138</sup> Much work has been written on the subject of pantomime and it is not my intention to repeat a general history of its development here. See M. R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910* (London, 1981), chapter 3; R. J. Broadbent, *A History of Pantomime* (New York, 1964); V. C. Clinton-Baddeley, *Some Pantomime Pedigrees* (London, 1963); M. Connelly, *Christmas. A Social History* (London and New York, 1999), chapter 2; R. Mander and J. Mitchenson, *Pantomime. A Story in Pictures* (London, 1973); D. Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element. The English Pantomime, 1806-1836* (Cambridge, MA, 1969); and A. E. Wilson, *Christmas Pantomime. The Story of an English Institution* (London, 1934).

<sup>139</sup> The Harlequinade was centred around the characters of Pantaloon, an old man; Columbine, his beautiful daughter; Harlequin, Columbine's lover; and Harlequin's servant, Clown. Harlequin was at odds with Pantaloon, and usually invisible to him. Clown would play tricks on his master and other members of the cast. Over the course of the eighteenth century Clown gradually became more important, playing off Pantaloon against Harlequin and carrying out a greater number of tricks. See Connelly, *Christmas*, p. 45.

<sup>140</sup> Wilson, *Christmas Pantomime*, chapter 4.

<sup>141</sup> Connelly, *Christmas*, p. 45.

<sup>142</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1842.

<sup>143</sup> Wilson, *Christmas Pantomime*, p. 142.

<sup>144</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1842. Large attendances were also recorded on other holidays. The first



following non-theatrical attractions that might tempt the 'country cousin' or blasé Londoner on Boxing Day: the Tower of London; St. Paul's Cathedral; Burford's Panorama; the Colosseum; Madame Tussaud's; the Egyptian Hall; the Cosmorama; the Royal Polytechnic Institution; the Zoological Gardens; and the Great Globe.<sup>145</sup> Burford's Panorama, as well as the Colosseum, Egyptian Hall and the Cosmorama, all contained forms of visual spectacle, based on the panorama and diorama, that had been developing since the late eighteenth century.<sup>146</sup> Richard Altick has argued that by the 1860s such shows ceased to be 'a major genre of popular art',<sup>147</sup> though they did not entirely disappear in London until the Edwardian period. The British Museum continued to be a leisure option on Boxing Day, though only one option amongst an increasing range of museums and galleries. By 1912 it was evident that museum and gallery visiting had become only a small minority pursuit on Boxing Day. That year the British Museum was attended by 3,013 visitors on Boxing Day, the Victoria and Albert Museum by 2,789 visitors, the Natural History museum by 2,360 visitors, the Science Museum by 1,510 visitors, and the National Gallery by 1,498 visitors.<sup>148</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Boxing Day entertainment in London became dominated by the relocated Crystal Palace at Sydenham. As Altick has argued, the 'shadow of Sydenham fell across the entire London show business'. Its success was based on an ability to create 'a gigantic variety entertainment'.<sup>149</sup> On Boxing Day 1862 its entertainments included gymnasts, champion vaulters, stump orators, negro minstrels, clowns, character songs and dances, as well as a pantomime, all situated in an environment of 'fancy-fair stalls, evergreens, banners, illuminations, pictures, and Christmas trees'. The illumination of the lamps at dusk added to the spectacle, as did

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Easter Monday under the new policy drew an attendance of 23,000, and in the early 1840s 32,000 attended on Whit Monday. See R. D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1978), p. 445; and Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 105.

<sup>145</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1852. Altick has argued that seeing the London sights had been a ritual since Elizabethan times. Altick, *Shows of London*, p. 221.

<sup>146</sup> See Altick, *Shows of London*; and Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, pp. 5-7.

<sup>147</sup> Altick, *Shows of London*, p. 482.

<sup>148</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1912.

<sup>149</sup> Altick, *Shows of London*, p. 485.



the appearance of a 65 foot Christmas tree, described by *The Times* as the most extensive ever seen.<sup>150</sup> The Crystal Palace did have competition at this time from the Royal Polytechnic institution, which combined its mechanical and scientific exhibits with a

special Christmas programme, its giant Christmas tree, the ornaments and toys from which are given away gratuitously; and there are cosmeranic pictures, dissolving views, magic, curious experiments with Greek fire and submarine explosions, ventriloquism, a perfect Christmas pantomime, and, above, there is what is called “a strange lecture”, by Professor Pepper. This last entertainment, which consists of a series of the most wonderful optical delusions ever placed before the public, is intended to illustrate Charles Dickens’s idea of the haunted man...<sup>151</sup>

The Crystal Palace was clearly the winner of this commercial battle, however, with Boxing Day attendances of around 40,000, rising to over 50,000 in the early 1870s.<sup>152</sup> The Polytechnic, by contrast, was achieving Boxing Day attendances of only around 5,000 in the late 1850s, and struggled financially before eventually becoming a purely educational institution.<sup>153</sup> By 1902 the Crystal Palace was still attracting over 20,000 visitors on Boxing Day, and in 1912 the policy of spectacular variety was still in operation. Visitors that year could have witnessed a pantomime of Jack and the Beanstalk, cinematograph displays, variety shows, an ice hockey match, a football match on skates, organ recitals, and performances by the Crystal Palace band. The toy-laden Christmas tree had now reached a height of between 80 and 90 feet.<sup>154</sup>

The Boxing Day entertainment culture was slower to develop in the provinces, particularly in terms of the theatre. By the end of the eighteenth century a two-tier system of theatre in the provinces had evolved, based first upon the Theatres Royal in Edinburgh, Bath, Norwich, York, Hull, Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, Newcastle, Brighton and Dublin. Many of these acted as the headquarters for the second tier, the

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<sup>150</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1862.

<sup>151</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1862.

<sup>152</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1862; 27 December 1872.

<sup>153</sup> Altick, *Shows of London*, pp. 388, 504-5.

<sup>154</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1902; 27 December 1912.

loose collection of towns that formed circuits for travelling companies.<sup>155</sup> In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, these theatres did not provide entertainment during the Christmas season, as the upper-class society they were catering for ‘developed a recreational calendar that ran roughshod over the traditional one’.<sup>156</sup> By the late 1820s the way in which the provincial-theatre season had been developing can be demonstrated by Birmingham’s Theatre Royal. On the 19 December 1828 there was a performance of *Il Barbiere di Seviglia* and *The Young Widow*; the theatre then appears to have closed for a short period before *La Cenerentola* and *Othello* were performed on New Year’s Eve. A similar situation occurred at Hull’s Theatre Royal over a decade later, where non-pantomime performances were given on 23 December 1841, with the following performance not taking place until 7 January 1842.<sup>157</sup> In looking for the origins of the momentum for laying the basis for a Christmas entertainment industry in the provinces, emphasis must be placed upon the development of choral societies from the 1820s onwards, particularly in cathedral cities and areas with a strong Methodist contingent.<sup>158</sup> Handel’s *Messiah* became recognised as appropriate material to perform around the Christmas season. The York Choral Society, formed in 1833,<sup>159</sup> was planning a late December concert including material from *Messiah* by at least 1837.<sup>160</sup> The *York Herald* made the connection that such a performance was a special occasion when in early January 1841 it declared: ‘Wednesday night this society gave, what we may term a Christmas Concert’.<sup>161</sup> By the mid nineteenth century *Messiah* had been firmly established as Christmas music, and as Dave Russell highlights, most northern choirs performed it virtually every Christmas.<sup>162</sup> Even if choirs grew tired of the repetition, it

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<sup>155</sup> Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, p. 16. Many other provincial theatres opened throughout the nineteenth century.

<sup>156</sup> P. Borsay, ‘“All the Town’s a Stage”: Urban Ritual and Ceremony 1660-1800’, in P. Clark (ed.), *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns 1600-1800* (London, 1984), p. 250.

<sup>157</sup> TL, Playbill Collections, UKC/POS/BRM R: 0594454; 0594455; UKC/POS/HUL R: 0594514; 0594515.

<sup>158</sup> D. Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914* (2nd edn, Manchester and New York, 1997), pp. 192-96.

<sup>159</sup> Russell, *Popular Music*, p. 196.

<sup>160</sup> YCA, York Choral Society Records, Acc. 31/1, minute book 1837-40.

<sup>161</sup> *York Herald*, 9 January 1841.

<sup>162</sup> Though the Huddersfield Choral Society began singing *Messiah* regularly only from 1872, though it had been sung occasionally since 1838.



became financially advantageous to continue performing the work.<sup>163</sup> Different expectations became apparent surrounding the performance of *Messiah* as the century progressed. In 1869 a correspondent of the *York Herald* complained about the behaviour of the audience during the performance of *Messiah* that year, notably the stamping of feet to the time of the music, talking loudly during the performance, and the disturbance caused by ‘a large portion of the audience vulgarly disturbing the other portion by leaving their seats before the performance is over’. This correspondent also believed that a ‘heathenish insult’ had been made to the Archbishop of York by such behaviour.<sup>164</sup> If it showed concert going to be a matter of religious and social sensibility pertaining to public space, then a further complaint concerning the York Choral Society’s *Messiah* concert in 1875 also cast it into the arena of civic pride and commercial responsibility. The complaint centred upon the narrow entrance to York’s Festival Concert Room, where the ‘crushing, squeezing, and struggling of both sexes for entrance were equally discreditable to the city and those who let the hall for such entertainments. The time has evidently arrived when the city authorities should seriously take the question of providing a suitable building’.<sup>165</sup> By the Edwardian period the provincial choral societies had begun a long process of decline as potential participants and audiences were provided with an ever-increasing range of leisure opportunities.<sup>166</sup> However, despite rarely performing on Boxing Day itself, they had stimulated an environment whereby provincial audiences came to expect formal entertainments connected with the Christmas season. Music concerts remained a strong part of this, demonstrated in Leeds, where Dr. Spark’s organ recitals at the Town Hall in the 1870s and 1880s became a noted part of that town’s Boxing Day culture.<sup>167</sup>

The development of a Christmas entertainment industry relied in part on the growth of population, income and leisure time.<sup>168</sup> The development of the railway also played a

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<sup>163</sup> Russell, *Popular Music*, p. 263.

<sup>164</sup> *York Herald*, 24 December 1869.

<sup>165</sup> *York Herald*, 20 December 1875.

<sup>166</sup> Russell, *Popular Music*, pp. 292-98.

<sup>167</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 27 December 1870; 27 December 1880.

<sup>168</sup> Though the commercialisation of leisure in the English provinces had been developing since the

considerable role in this, allowing London-based entertainers to transport themselves to new audiences in the provinces, and thus extending the life span of the product. This can be seen with reference to panorama and diorama shows. They were transferred to large provincial centres such as Leeds and Sheffield for short runs over the Christmas period relatively quickly after showing in London. Banvard's Panorama of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio rivers was exhibited at the Stock Exchange Hall, Leeds, for one week during the Christmas season, 1850.<sup>169</sup> Touring exhibitors and performers did not become attracted to smaller venues such as York until slightly later in the century. York did receive brief visits from performers such as Mr. Barnardo Eagle, performer of magic and clairvoyancy, in 1855,<sup>170</sup> and Monseour Hertz, 'the bare-armed wizard', in 1863,<sup>171</sup> but it was not until the 1880s that York regularly received visits from companies such as Hamilton's Excursions, Poole's Popular Panorama and New Century Animated Pictures purveying visual spectacle. The taste for such spectacle in smaller provincial locations meant that panoramas and dioramas continued to have a cultural caché long after their popularity had waned in London. By this stage the terms panorama and diorama had come to mean 'a slapdash mixture of wide-screen or moving paintings, dissolving views, music and talk'.<sup>172</sup> This confusion of form was intensified by innovations stemming from the introduction of the cinematograph in 1896.

Eventually, the provincial theatres began providing entertainment during the Christmas period. *Harlequin Koh-i-Noir, the Mountain of Light; or the Princess and the Pearl* was performed at the Princess Theatre in Leeds during Christmas 1853;<sup>173</sup> *King Busterbubble and Grummo the Giant* was advertised as a 'gorgeous comic Christmas

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eighteenth century. See Borsay, 'All the Town's a Stage', p. 251; and *The English Urban Renaissance. Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 212-22; N. Mckendrick, J. Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society. The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, 1982); J. H. Plumb, *The Commercialisation of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century England* (Reading, 1973); and R. Porter, 'Material Pleasure in the Consumer Society', in R. Porter and M. Mulvey Roberts (eds), *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke and London, 1996), pp. 19-35.

<sup>169</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 21 December 1850.

<sup>170</sup> *York Herald*, 22 December 1855.

<sup>171</sup> *York Herald*, 19 December 1863.

<sup>172</sup> Altick, *Shows of London*, p. 506.

<sup>173</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 31 December 1853.



pantomime' at Brighton Theatre Royal in 1858;<sup>174</sup> *The Dragon of Wantley; or Harlequin Moore, or Moore Hall, and his Fayre Margery* was performed at the Theatre Royal in Sheffield during Christmas 1861;<sup>175</sup> and *Harlequin the House that Jack Built for Little Goody Shoes* was performed at Bristol Theatre Royal during Christmas 1863.<sup>176</sup> Pantomime came to feature prominently during Christmas at the provincial theatres. Looking back on a lifetime's pantomime attendance in 1934, A. E. Wilson particularly commended the achievements of the Royal at Manchester, the Alexandra at Liverpool, the Royal and Princes at Bristol, the Grand and Alexandra at Birmingham, and the Grand Theatre, Leeds.<sup>177</sup> Pantomime had undergone further evolution since the mid nineteenth century. The Harlequinade became marginalised, the subject matter became increasingly drawn from a small pool of fairy tales, casts expanded and greater expense was lavished on scenery. The 1860s saw the appearance of music-hall<sup>178</sup> performers, which in turn led pantomimes to become gigantic variety shows.<sup>179</sup> The prevalence of fairy tales had led to the impression that pantomime was relegated to an increasingly moralised children's entertainment, especially in the context of the theatre's growing respectability amongst the middle-classes after 1870.<sup>180</sup> A complex relationship between children and pantomime had already been in existence for some time, however. As early

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<sup>174</sup> TL, Playbill Collections, UKC/POS/BTN R: 0592745.

<sup>175</sup> Brotherton Library Special Collections, Yorkshire Pamphlets H-She-7.6 HAZ.

<sup>176</sup> TL, Playbill Collections, UKC/POS/BRS ROY: 0594038.

<sup>177</sup> Wilson, *Christmas Pantomime*, p. 237.

<sup>178</sup> An extensive historiography of music hall has developed over the past thirty years. A group of studies that emerged in the mid 1970s found music hall to be a culturally and politically conservative force. See M. Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London, 1974), pp. 238-79; G. Stedman Jones, 'Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London 1870-1900: Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class', *Journal of Social History*, 7, (1974), 460-508, reprinted in *Languages of Class* (Cambridge, 1983); and L. Senelick, 'Politics as Entertainment: Victorian Music-Hall Songs', *Victorian Studies*, 19, (1975), 149-80. This position has been challenged by subsequent historians, who have argued in favour of a more active involvement by the working-classes in the making of their own culture, as well as a greater stress on the potential for subversion. See H. Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism', *History Workshop Journal*, 12, (1981), 8-33; B. Waites, 'The Music Hall', *Popular Culture, Block 2. The Historical Development of Music Hall*, Open University U203 (Milton Keynes, 1981); J. S. Bratton (ed.), *Music Hall: Performance and Style* (Milton Keynes, 1986); P. Bailey (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes, 1986); D. Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall. Culture, Class and Conflict* (Cambridge, 1996); P. Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge, 1998). For the current state of the discipline, see Russell, *Popular Music*, pp. 113-18.

<sup>179</sup> Connelly, *Christmas*, p. 46.

<sup>180</sup> N. Auerbach, *Private Theatricals. The Lives of the Victorians* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1990), pp. 13-15.

as 1846 *The Times* was lamenting the absence of children's participation in the pantomime audience:

The screams of honest laughter, the shouts of exquisite delight, the beating of hands and stamping of feet that accompany all our early recollections of the pantomime - where are they now? The long rows of boys and girls that were wont to deck the first and second circles of boxes, dressed in their holyday attire, and throwing more light upon the scene by the smiles and broad grins that played upon their chubby faces, and the tears of pleasure that glistened from their innocent eyes - where are they now? Instead of groups of pretty children, open mouthed with eager astonishment, and with arms outstretched as if they would like to hug the merry clown ... we see the places occupied by grown-up people, criticising seriously what should be laughed at indiscriminately, or sitting moped up in the embraces of *ennui* - seeing the pantomime, in short, in order that they may be able to say they have seen it the next morning, and most likely persuade their friends not to go and do so likewise ...<sup>181</sup>

However, the reports of the rowdiness of pantomime audiences in the first half of the nineteenth century made them seem unsuitable venues for the presence of children. Pantomimes in this period began around 10 p.m., and were preceded by a serious drama. But as Wilson has stated

nobody listened to the opening piece. Tumult reigned in the gallery. There were shouts and whistlings and sing-song choruses. There were battles with orange-peel and bottles and free fights took place ... It was a recognised thing to keep the riot going until the curtain went up on the pantomime.<sup>182</sup>

There was, however, evidence of children attending the pantomime in this period. Sir F. C. Burnand recalled his first pantomime on Boxing Day 1842, noting the presence of little girls and boys in evening dress making their 'fingers sticky with sweetmeats'.<sup>183</sup> By the Edwardian period, there were also many complaints that the often topical content of pantomimes was unsuitable for children. In 1903 the *Lady's Pictorial*

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<sup>181</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1846.

<sup>182</sup> Wilson, *Christmas Pantomime*, p. 136.

<sup>183</sup> F. C. Burnand, *Records and Reminiscences*, cited in Wilson, *Christmas Pantomime*, p. 140.



hoped that a mild protest will be raised against the introduction of political matters into our pantomimes or other forms of light entertainment. Children, for whom pantomimes are primarily designed, can scarcely be expected to understand constant allusions to “Joe” and preferential tariffs and fiscal policy ... Furthermore, it is neither recreative nor agreeable to have rival parties booing and hooting at political allusions made from the stage.<sup>184</sup>

Brian Crozier challenges the idea that pantomime fitted the context of the middle-class return to the theatre after 1870, arguing that pantomime audiences remained largely restricted to the upper-working and lower-middle classes. This argument was based partly on upper-middle-class revulsion towards the vulgarity of music-hall elements within pantomime,<sup>185</sup> and partly on the ‘lack of interest among pantomime audiences in the development of fairyland as a metaphor for childhood’. For Crozier, the very presence of music-hall stars and the magnificence of the staging were evidence that the material was being addressed primarily to an adult audience.<sup>186</sup> Crozier does provide some qualifications to his position, however. He notes evidence that children were being taken to the pantomime in greater numbers than ever before; and that some theatre managers were responding to the needs of child audiences, through the offer of half-price seats for children.<sup>187</sup> He also notes that there was ‘evidence of a degree of

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<sup>184</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 19 December 1903.

<sup>185</sup> In 1882 the theatre-critic W. Davenport Adams complained that ‘it is nevertheless to the music-hall element that we owe the main portion of that propriety of word, gesture, and “business” which makes so much of our pantomimes unsuited to youthful ear and eye and not only unsuited to the youthful ear and eye, but unpleasant to all people of whatever age who possess good taste and feeling’. Cited in Wilson, *Christmas Pantomime*, p. 172.

<sup>186</sup> The question of who pantomimes were for was played out in the pages of the *Daily Mail* during Christmas 1904. The *Mail's* attack on the suitability of Drury Lane's *The White Cat* for children prompted a flood of supportive letters condemning its vulgarity, which prompted the management of Drury Lane to issue notices stating ‘in consequence of the attack made upon the Drury Lane pantomime in a daily newspaper, Mr Arthur Collins will be greatly obliged if parents and guardians will favour him with their views as to whether the “White Cat” is a proper entertainment for children’. *Daily Mail*, 29 December 1904.

<sup>187</sup> There was also a problem with the length of many pantomimes. In 1902 *The Times* noted ‘the problem of devising a Christmas pantomime which, without any sacrifice of essentials, shall occupy not more than two hours in representation’ in order to create a situation where ‘instead of drooping heads and over-tired faces, a bright and unexhausted interest and a still undimmed delight’ were apparent in the child. This situation was apparently achieved by the London Hippodrome's production of *Dick Whittington* that year. Pantomimes of over five-hours length were not uncommon, *The Times*, 27 December 1902.



identification between children and fairy roles in the appearance of child stars as major figures within the fairy tale which was part, but only part, of the pantomime as a whole'.<sup>188</sup> There is also evidence of whole pantomimes being performed by children. At London's Avenue Theatre, a company of around 80 children, with ages ranging from 8 to 15, performed *Dick Whittington* on Christmas Eve, 1882.<sup>189</sup> To compensate for their revulsion towards music-hall inspired pantomime, Crozier argues that upper-middle-class audiences turned towards a new form of child-oriented theatrical entertainment, instigated by the first production of *Alice in Wonderland* in 1886, and reaching its apogee with the appearance of *Peter Pan* in 1904.<sup>190</sup> For Crozier, such productions embodied 'an intensified interest in alternative worlds and fantasy of all kinds, [and] an association between these and childhood'. From 1899 he noted a 'marked increase in the numbers of non-pantomime Christmas productions for both child and adult audiences'.<sup>191</sup> During Christmas 1912 *Peter Pan* embarked upon its ninth revival at the Duke of York's theatre, and *The Times* celebrated the performance of the child-actress Ivy Sawyer as Betty, declaring that the 'child actress is becoming a vogue at Christmas', and that 'there is a capriciously lurking poetry about her acting which assures us that at bottom she understands all about fairies, just as the author said she did'.<sup>192</sup>

Crozier recognises a trend, also represented in music recitals and children's balls, of a desire to see children perform publicly.<sup>193</sup> As Christmas was becoming centred as the children's festival, it was perhaps natural that this desire reached its height at Christmas.

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<sup>188</sup> B. Crozier, 'Notions of Childhood in London Theatre, 1880-1905', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1981, pp. 204-10. Examples of these child stars were Addie Blanche as *Mother Goose* at Drury Lane, 1880; Laura Lawson as Fairy Florizel in *Robin Hood* at the Alexandra Theatre in Liverpool, 1880; Mabel Love as Sunbeam in *Jack and the Beanstalk* in 1887; and Minnie Terry in *Cinderella* at the Lyceum in 1893. There were, however, child stars much earlier than this.

<sup>189</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1882. Addie Blanche took the lead role.

<sup>190</sup> As Wearing states, '*Peter Pan* very rapidly became a permanent feature of the Christmas scene and developed audiences which attended each revival with almost cultish fanaticism'. See J. P. Wearing, 'Edwardian London West End Christmas Entertainments 1900-1914', in J. L. Fisher and S. Watt (eds), *When they weren't doing Shakespeare* (Athens, GA, 1989), p. 236.

<sup>191</sup> Crozier, 'Notions of Childhood', pp. 213, 228-34.

<sup>192</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1912.

<sup>193</sup> Crozier, pp. 3, 157-58.



But it also had its limitations, particularly when it was felt that children were being exploited and sexualised, particularly in reference to pantomime. Michael Booth has commented upon

the vast preponderance of young women in the cast and the mass transvestism of processions and large groups gathered for any purpose. The female physique, and the feminine domination of fairyland were linked in a sexual, pictorial, and spectacular combination of ideal purity and handsome flesh.<sup>194</sup>

The exploitation and sexualisation of children was brought to public attention by Ellen Barlee's book *Pantomime Waifs, or a Plea for our City Children*, published in 1884 with an introduction by the Earl of Shaftesbury. Barlee drew attention to the fact that there was a large demand for children between the ages of 3 and 15 to play various roles in the pantomime:

The services of these children being only required during a portion of the year, they are generally drawn from a very low class, and selected more for beauty and agility than intellectual powers, no great talent being necessary to represent Angels, Cherubs, Sprites, and Demons, and even animal life.<sup>195</sup>

Barlee's text was full of references to the potential corruption of the theatre, particularly for young girls, who in the process of training were forced to undergo the 'testing [of] their straightness of limb, and here the necessary critical examination they have to undergo would rob any respectable girl of her modesty'. There were also complaints concerning the 'clothing of children [which] was of the scantiest kind, and many were in flesh-coloured tights'. Barlee noted the case of

One girl of fifteen, when ordered to doff her clothing and habit herself in "tights", said she crouched down in a corner of the room with shamefacedness, and dared not rise till laughed out of her shyness. The

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<sup>194</sup> Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, p. 79.

<sup>195</sup> E. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs, or a Plea for our City Children* (London, 1884), pp. 30-31.

same girl now sits unblushingly to photographers to be taken in all kinds of attitudes, all feminine modesty having been long since departed.<sup>196</sup>

Barlee also had particular concern for female acrobats,<sup>197</sup> where the ‘degradation of such feminine exposure of life and limb’ became an ‘outrage ... to morality and decency’. Barlee believed that the ‘daily contact with sin’ hardened them to it, and left young girls vulnerable to men buying them beer and spirits, and engendered ‘a dissatisfied and discontented mind in matters of every-day life’ and provoked ‘much competitive jealousy amongst themselves’. In Barlee’s final analysis, this left girls ‘totally unfitted for any domestic calling’, the culmination of the ‘shipwreck of their Innocence and Purity’. Barlee had gained firsthand knowledge of the situation through observance of the pantomime company at the Crystal Palace in the early 1870s. Her personal response to the situation was to invite the pantomime children to a tea party, involving carol singing and the telling of a story in which a child ballet dancer met with a fatal accident falling from the trapeze, but had gained salvation from the acceptance of Christ. This story apparently led to many questions of reassurance from the children whereupon Barlee told them ‘that the same Jesus would be their Friend and Saviour, if they would only seek Him, and pray to Him to send them His Holy Spirit to keep them pure and good’. Three years later, in 1876, the Theatrical Letter Mission was established, which by 1884 involved 700 ladies writing monthly letters to 2,500 professional actresses and children. By 1883 the Mission was sending out 2,000 Christmas and New Year ‘lithographed letters’, promoting the same essential message to that at the first Crystal Palace tea party. One such letter stated ‘There is such a beautiful Christmas promise in connection with...the 91st psalm: “He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust”’.<sup>198</sup>

The growing association between Christmas and fairyland in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period had created problems when children were performing the fairy role

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<sup>196</sup> Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 52-54.

<sup>197</sup> On acrobats see C. Steedman, *Strange Dislocations. Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930* (London, 1995).

<sup>198</sup> Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, pp. 3, 14-15, 58, 72, 77-78, 113, 151-53, 161-62.



on stage. The fairy image reinforced the connection with the purity of childhood imagination and yet revealed too much of children as physical beings. Yet the broader picture within the Christmas entertainment industry showed a lack of connection to the subject of Christmas itself. There were limitations to which the popular imagery and rhetoric of Christmas passed over into the subject matter of the performances.<sup>199</sup> Instead, people used these new leisure opportunities to indulge in the consumption of the prevailing tastes of the times. Hence attendance at circuses<sup>200</sup> or minstrelsy shows<sup>201</sup> became very popular on Boxing Day. The sheer range of subject matter that people were viewing can be demonstrated by the Edwardian panorama shows. Audiences were being tempted by a variety of the exotic, foreign, comic, banal and curious. In 1904, the New Century Animated Picture Company's Boxing Day show in York featured scenes of cowboy and Indian life; Canadian, Norwegian and Swiss winter sports; the saving of a shipwrecked crew by lifeboat; battleships scenes from the Russo-Japanese war; an illustrative tour of Italy; and a comic series of scenes concerning a family holiday, amongst many others.<sup>202</sup> A similarly eclectic mix could be found in the early cinematic theatres than had reached towns the size of York by 1911. On Boxing Day, 1911, the audience at York's Electric Theatre witnessed a drama entitled 'The Maiden of the Pie-Faced Indians'; a set of pictures illustrated the New York water supply system; and various scenes of football. At the rival venue of the Victoria Hall, boasting the new invention of 'Kinemacolor', audiences watched scenes of the Niagara Falls, humorous films entitled 'The Typist's Revenge' and the 'Magnetic Umbrella', and dramas such as 'Love's Victory' (including an exciting railway chase), 'David and Goliath', and 'Told

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<sup>199</sup> Wearing has emphasised the eclectic range of theatrical performances that were available in London's West End during Edwardian Christmases: 'The menu included the broad category of children's/fairy/fantasy plays and farcical comedies, melodramas, romances, serious plays and Shakespeare'. Wearing, 'Edwardian Christmas Entertainments', pp. 231, 239.

<sup>200</sup> For example, the Holborn Grand Cirque and Hengler's Circus, which were open for business in London on Boxing Day 1872; and Tannaker's Troupe in Leeds, Boxing Day, 1880. *The Times*, 27 December 1872; *Leeds Mercury*, 27 December 1880. Circus was an invention of the eighteenth century, owing much to the activities of Philip Astley in the late 1760s. Astley's Amphitheatre was a feature of Boxing Day in London from the 1840s until the 1870s. Cunningham, *Leisure*, p. 33.

<sup>201</sup> Examples being the Moore and Burgess Minstrels, who performed in London every Christmas (as well as other times during the year) from the mid 1860s until the 1890s, and the Kemble and Birchmoor Christy Minstrels, who began a holiday season at the Festival Concert Rooms in York on Boxing Day 1900. *The Times*, 27 December 1882; 27 December 1892; *Yorkshire Herald*, 27 December 1900.

<sup>202</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 27 December 1904.



in Colorado'.<sup>203</sup> Relatively few films appeared on the subject of Christmas between the appearance of the cinematograph in 1896 and the outbreak of the First World War. George Albert Smith's *The Vision of Santa Claus* appeared in 1898, depicting Santa Claus on a snowy housetop, before disappearing out of view as he descends down the chimney, and then reappearing in a children's bedroom to fill their stockings. This film lasted for approximately only one minute, and was probably not seen much beyond the producer's pleasure garden in Hove.<sup>204</sup> Mark Connelly has uncovered the existence of more Christmas films from this period including *A Christmas Card* (1906); *The Old Folks' Christmas* (1913); and *The Christmas Strike* (1913).<sup>205</sup> Certainly attempts to bring religiously-oriented material to the screen at Christmas during this period were unsuccessful. On Christmas Eve, 1912, a film depicting the life of Christ entitled *From Manger to Cross* was shown at the Albert Hall, but attracted only a small audience.<sup>206</sup>

Along with the great philanthropic efforts witnessed above, the great variety of entertainment available over the Christmas period in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods contributed to a considerable public culture of Christmas, but there was also a symbiotic relationship between entertainments within the home and those witnessed in the public sphere. A long tradition of private theatricals existed in connection with Christmas, a connection that was reinforced through a growing popularity in the Victorian age.<sup>207</sup> Magic lanterns had also been existence since the seventeenth century, and 'came to be an integral part of home entertainment, brought out of its case and set up on birthdays, for treats, and above all at Christmas'.<sup>208</sup> William Hone recalled an

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<sup>203</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 27 December 1911.

<sup>204</sup> F. Gray, 'George Albert Smith's Visions and Transformations. The Films of 1898', in S. Pople and V. Toulmin (eds), *Visual Delights: Essays on the Popular and Projected Image in the Nineteenth Century* (Trowbridge, 2000), pp. 171, 177.

<sup>205</sup> For Connelly, these films reinforced Victorian sentiments of Christmas through the paternalist representation of class harmony. For the purposes of this study, what is striking is how Connelly's evidence has been reconstructed from specialist publications such as *The Official Lantern and Kinematograph Journal*, the *Kinematograph Monthly Film Record*, and *Bioscope*, suggesting a limited popular diffusion. See Connelly, *Christmas*, pp. 159-62.

<sup>206</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1912.

<sup>207</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>208</sup> D. Francis, 'Pictures on the Christmas Wall. 250 Years of the Magic Lantern', *Country Life*, 142 (1967), 1454-58.



instance on Twelfth Night, 1818, when Joshua Leverage called at his house crying 'Gallantee Show', and proceeded to show his children images of the prodigal son, Noah's Ark, and the judgement on a baker who 'sold short of weight, and was carried to hell in his own basket'.<sup>209</sup> Harriet Martineau recalled from her childhood how a magic lantern would be exhibited on Christmas day and one or two other occasions in the year, the terror of which actually caused a bowel-complaint.<sup>210</sup> Minstrelsy was also a form of entertainment that could be brought into the home. Michael Pickering argues that minstrelsy had a flexibility of form that allowed it to be extended 'by the amateur performance of blackface songs, acts and routines in community and domestic milieux'.<sup>211</sup> John Coker Egerton, rector of Burwash in Sussex, recorded in his diary of 1880 that a 'nigger' band (consisting of local parishioners) had performed at his house on Christmas Eve. Egerton commented that the performance 'represented some intellectual effort during 3 weeks'.<sup>212</sup>

In many cases the Christmas entertainments taking place in the home involved performances by members of the household themselves. This in turn creates a problem. At first glance it suggests that by attending performances provided by the Christmas leisure industry, people have been turned into passive consumers of commodity culture. Cunningham, however, warns against such an interpretation in the context of the working classes, arguing that this social group played a more active role in the making of leisure, and that leisure was diffused up as well as down the social scale.<sup>213</sup> This can certainly be seen in the influence music hall had on other popular cultural forms, and the very symbiotic nature of the relationship between the home and the arena of entertainment underlined a more active psychological process in which the mental boundaries between performers and audiences were blurred; and in the great variety of entertainments available in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods this meant that

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<sup>209</sup> W. Hone, *Ancient Mysteries Described* (London, 1823), pp. 230-31.

<sup>210</sup> H. Martineau, *Autobiography* (London, 1877), vol. 1, pp. 15,20.

<sup>211</sup> M. Pickering, 'White Skin, Black Masks: "Nigger" Minstrelsy in Victorian England', in J. S. Bratton (ed.), *Music Hall: Performance and Style* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1986), p. 78.

<sup>212</sup> R. Wells (ed.), *Victorian Village. The Diaries of the Reverend John Croker Egerton, Curate and Rector of Burwash, East Sussex 1857-1888* (Stroud, 1992), p. 257.

<sup>213</sup> Cunningham, *Leisure*, p. 186.



class differentiation, in the manner of received entertainment, was beginning to collapse for a large section of the population, though, as we have noted before, the experience of Christmas was always connected to available resources, and higher up the social scale elites began to find new forms of cultural and social distancing.<sup>214</sup> Earlier in the nineteenth century, class was a more important paradigm for determining choices in the pursuit of entertainment. In pubs, the informal amateur sing-song culture of the ‘free and easy’ was developed in the 1830s into a more formalised and licensed form of concert entertainment,<sup>215</sup> and during the same period penny gaffs arose featuring a mixture of melodrama, singing and dancing, but might also perform pantomime-style material at Christmas.<sup>216</sup> Both these forums of entertainment were forerunners of the music hall, all of which were presumably frequented during the Christmas season. This does, however, become harder to prove, since the inherent lack of respectability of such venues prohibited coverage in the national and provincial press. However, signs of its influence did become discernible from the 1860s. The comic singer Harry Liston performed regularly during the Christmas season in York and Leeds from the 1860s to the 1890s, drawing appreciative comments from the *York Herald*.<sup>217</sup> The greatest indication that music hall was gaining respectability was the appearance of venues such as the London Pavilion in the Boxing Day reviews section of *The Times* from the 1890s onwards.<sup>218</sup> A note of caution is needed here, however. Some forms of entertainment did remain class specific, particularly in terms of the pub. In Leeds, concern existed that the music and dancing activities in the pubs was encroaching on Christmas Day itself. In early January 1901 that city’s Watch Committee witnessed a debate in which some councillors tried to restrict the issuing of music and dancing licenses to pubs and halls on Christmas Day, arguing that other cities and large towns did not allow it, and because Christmas Day ‘should be regarded in a better fashion’. It would seem that the licences had previously been issued without reference to Christmas Day, but that a tacit agreement had existed between the police and the licence holders that premises would

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<sup>214</sup> See chapter five.

<sup>215</sup> Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, p. 29.

<sup>216</sup> Cunningham, *Leisure*, pp. 166-67.

<sup>217</sup> *York Herald*, 2 January 1869; 27 December 1884. *Leeds Mercury*, 26 December 1890.

<sup>218</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1892.



not open on that day; in the previous few years, however, the growing commercial spirit had led some licence holders to open. In the end, the amendment was defeated. No actual complaints had been received concerning the conduct of houses licensed on Christmas Day, and no connection could be proved in connection to recent disturbances on Woodhouse Moor; indeed, it was believed that 'Hunslet roughs' had been kept away from the moor by the entertainments available to them more locally in licensed premises. In the final analysis, it was thought too hard to draw a distinction between the kind of music being offered in these venues, and the more spontaneous singing associated with Christmas.<sup>219</sup>

I have been primarily dealing with the urban context, but there was an older performative culture of Christmas existing mainly in a rural context associated with the lower orders, the mummers' play and sword dance. As Ronald Hutton shows, whilst the existence of Christmas mummers and some versions of sword dancing do predate the eighteenth century, a particular form of play and dance, revolving around combat death and resurrection, evolved in England between 1700 and 1750, 'spreading rapidly thereafter and reaching a peak of popularity in the early nineteenth century'. They existed mainly within the context of the economic relationships of the English countryside, allowing working men, or even boys, to earn money or hospitality during the winter months.<sup>220</sup> Ben Turner recollected performing the mummer's play 'St. George and the Dragon' between the ages of 9 and 13 in the 1870s. He and a group of friends performed in the village pub, and also inside 30 houses in the neighbourhood, including the kitchens of 'two well-to-do folks' houses'. He recalled one season earning 1s. 4d., as well as being regaled with oranges, cheese and cakes.<sup>221</sup> The plays and dances became divorced from the economic context as British agriculture declined and rural depopulation proceeded apace, but they have survived to this day, increasingly appropriated and perpetuated by middle-class folklorists eager to cite them as evidence

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<sup>219</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 3 January 1901.

<sup>220</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, chapter 7.

<sup>221</sup> B. Turner, *About Myself 1863-1930* (London, 1930), pp. 24-26.

of pagan survivals.<sup>222</sup> An early example of this process appeared in the *Antiquary* in 1895, when the antiquarian T. M. Fallow produced photographs of a sword-dance team from the neighbourhood of Leeds.<sup>223</sup>

At the elite end of society, there was a continuity throughout the nineteenth century of entertainments such as Christmas and New Year balls. But the social context of such balls was changing. Originally existing within the context of private houses (and in some cases continuing to do so), they increasingly took on a public function, as suggested by the appearance of notices for New Year, fancy dress and hunt balls in the Derby Assembly Rooms, the York Assembly Rooms, the Angel Hotel, Abergavenny, and the Great Western Hotel in Modbury, that appeared in *The Times* in 1913.<sup>224</sup> Balls, however, existed in a slightly different context to the Christmas entertainment industry, in that they remained socially exclusive, relying on an invitation system. The precarious position between private and public that balls existed in was recognised by the *York Herald* in 1845. On announcing the New Year ball to take place the following January, this newspaper commented: 'The invitations are very numerous. The ball will, in every respect be conducted as a *private assembly*, and we have no doubt that the attendance will not only be large, but highly respectable'.<sup>225</sup> Balls could be adapted to new contexts. The servant's ball at Hickleton and the Infirmary ball in Doncaster allowed the aristocratic Wood family a means to reaffirm and honour their commitments with and relations to the wider community. Another use of the New Year ball existed in a civic context: the fashion for the large-scale 'juvenile party' from the 1870s onwards. One such example took place in York in early January 1873. The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of York received a party of around 200 children at the Mansion House, where they received a magic-lantern entertainment and a quadrille band.<sup>226</sup> By the Edwardian period, these were occasions where Christmas, childhood and civic pride intersected. In

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<sup>222</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 54 and chapter 7; see also G. Boyes, *The Imagined Village. Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester and New York, 1993), chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>223</sup> Reproduced in W. F. Dawson, *Christmas: Its Origins and Associations* (London, 1902), pp. 282-84.

<sup>224</sup> *The Times*, 1 January 1913.

<sup>225</sup> *York Herald*, 27 December 1845.

<sup>226</sup> *York Herald*, 4 January 1873.



1902, after an evening of dancing, Noel Terry emerged on to a patch of moonlight, dressed as Father Christmas, and bearing in his hand a small Christmas tree. Behind him an attendant rolled a huge snowball. Terry then summoned to him four fairies in 'light gauzy silvery robes, to which tinkling silver bells had been attached, [and] they tripped into the light and began a skirt dance round the central figure'. Then the light switched to the snowball, which was revealed to contain a present for all the guests.<sup>227</sup> In 1907 the Lord Mayor of York took on the role of Santa Claus entertaining an audience of over 500 children, emerging from a 'wide, old-fashioned fire place' at the Guildhall, wearing a 'civic, crimson gown, which served to identify the wearer with the state and circumstance of the ancient city [which] harmonised thoroughly with the traditional garb of St. Nicholas'. The Guildhall was being promoted to the children as the 'Castle of Santa Claus', with banners declaring that fact, a tree covered in cotton wool to indicate snow, and a Yule log in and stockings surrounding the fire place. The Lord Mayor was accompanied by the Sword and Mace Bearers, and informed the children that they were gathered in the 'York House of Parliament', and asked them to write a short essay on the civic insignia of the city. After an interval and the Mayor's withdrawal, the back of the chimney gave way, and Santa Claus appeared, followed by the Snow Queen (the Mayor's daughter) on a pony-drawn sleigh, and finally two 'polar bears'.<sup>228</sup>

Another activity that merged from elite culture that took on associations with the Christmas season was the development of the Boxing Day hunt. By the end of the eighteenth century, fox hunting had become a central part of life for the leisured rural class, and its development owed much to enclosure, reflecting the 'post-enclosure balance of power'.<sup>229</sup> The Boxing Day hunt probably developed during the same period, though the earliest occurrence I have found was a meeting of the Earl of Harewood's hounds at Harewood Bridge in 1823.<sup>230</sup> As Cunningham comments, by the 1820s fox

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<sup>227</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 4 January 1902.

<sup>228</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 5 January 1907.

<sup>229</sup> Cunningham, *Leisure*, p. 18.

<sup>230</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 25 December 1823.

hunting had become associated with the idea that it linked classes together, but this was true only to the extent that it allowed tenant farmers and professional men to participate, but only in a subordinate role.<sup>231</sup> By the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods the Boxing Day hunt had gained a prominent role within the outdoors culture of the day, with provincial newspapers noting it as one of a number of outdoor leisure opportunities.<sup>232</sup> The idea of hunting as a class unifier continued to be propagated. When the hounds of the York and Ainsty hunt did not meet in the vicinity of York on Boxing Day 1909, a correspondent wrote a letter of complaint to the *Yorkshire Herald* arguing that ‘in these democratic days actions that please the masses generally benefit the moneyed classes in the long run and help check the growth of opposition to the “privilege of the few”’, and went on to declare: ‘Let the crowds know they are not forgotten, make them realise that the hunting field is a place for good comradeship, ... and then the countryside will continue to echo that nerve-bracing word of “Tally-ho” and the music of the hounds, which cheers the heart of so many’.<sup>233</sup>

## Street Culture

Many other outdoor leisure pursuits had developed by this stage. When conditions permitted, skating continued to be a feature of the season that all classes participated in, though as I noted in chapter one, the mixing of social classes was not always welcome.<sup>234</sup> A culture of day-tripping also emerged, including trips both to the countryside and to urban centres.<sup>235</sup> Developments in the organisation of association football meant that matches on both Christmas Day and Boxing Day became increasingly well frequented, even between lesser known teams. On Boxing Day 1887 a crowd of 3,500 watched York play Salterhebble, the biggest indication, according to the

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<sup>231</sup> Cunningham, *Leisure*, p. 18.

<sup>232</sup> For example, the *Yorkshire Herald* commented on the Boxing-day York and Ainsty hunt from 1887.

<sup>233</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 28 December 1909.

<sup>234</sup> See chapter one. In the late-Edwardian period skating became commercially available on Boxing Day. By 1910 York’s Palace Skating Rink had opened, and provided a ‘carnival’ to entice the crowds, which was apparently ‘exceptionally well patronised’. See the *Yorkshire Herald*, 27 December 1910.

<sup>235</sup> This was tied to a large extent to developments in transport, and will be explored further in chapter five.



*York Herald*, that the ‘citizens were on pleasure bent’.<sup>236</sup> By 1913, home and away fixtures were being organised between teams over the two days.<sup>237</sup> But a great deal of outdoor Christmas leisure was simply spent in the street,<sup>238</sup> and in particular, was associated with music. In the form of the waits, a tradition of Christmas music dated back until at least the fourteenth century. Existing in many towns throughout England and Scotland,<sup>239</sup> the waits were small bands of professional musicians who were employed by corporations to play music for civic ceremonies.<sup>240</sup> At Christmas, the waits became particularly associated with perambulating the streets in the early hours of Christmas morning. The formal connection to the civic authorities was severed however, by the Municipal Corporations Reform Act of 1835, which had the effect of removing several traditional forms of employment,<sup>241</sup> though in some places, such as Westminster, warrants were issued for authorised waits until at least 1871.<sup>242</sup> In other places, such as York, groups of musicians managed to maintain continuity and tradition until, in the case of the York waits, they were finally disbanded in 1902.<sup>243</sup> There was, however, no shortage of groups of musicians, of various and often dubious quality, parading the streets in the early hours of Christmas morning, which led to the development of a popular narrative of complaint in both the national and provincial press in the nineteenth century. James Merryweather has uncovered evidence in *Punch* from the 1840s through to the 1930s attacking the appropriateness of the waits and their claims for cultural authenticity,<sup>244</sup> an attack that was reiterated by antiquarians such as William Sandys and Robert Chambers. Sandys claimed that instead of performing traditional music, their repertoire generally consisted of ‘a polka or galope, with some

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<sup>236</sup> *York Herald*, 27 December 1887.

<sup>237</sup> For example, York City and Halifax Town, played their Midland league fixtures against each other on Christmas Day and Boxing Day 1913. *Yorkshire Herald*, 27 December 1913.

<sup>238</sup> In the late-Victorian period it could be argued that the Christmas culture of the streets was synonymous with the visual culture of the shops, a subject that will be explored in chapter five.

<sup>239</sup> A list of the towns where the existence of waits has been recorded can be found in J. Merryweather, *York Music. The Story of a City's Music from 1304-1896* (York, 1988), pp. 174-75.

<sup>240</sup> Merryweather, *York Music*, p. 13.

<sup>241</sup> Merryweather, *York Music*, p. 7.

<sup>242</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 142.

<sup>243</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 8 December 1909.

<sup>244</sup> Merryweather, *York Music*, pp. 9-10, 131, 175.



of the latest opera airs'.<sup>245</sup> There can be little doubt that the nineteenth-century waits did offend urban sensibilities, particularly in the timing of their appearance. It is striking how quickly nostalgia could set in once a custom had ceased to operate. In 1895 the *Yorkshire Herald* was complaining about the 'discordant' way the bands greeted the arrival of Christmas, but by 1909 it greeted the publication of local antiquarian T. P. Cooper's *The Christmas Waits and Minstrels of Bygone York* with an article asking the question 'is the popularity of Christmas declining?'<sup>246</sup> It could also be argued that the cultural position of the waits within the Christmas experience had been superseded by the growing bands of carol singers we noted in the previous chapter, who usually went abroad at a more respectable hour. Other forms of street music also developed. By the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods Salvation Army bands had become a central feature of the urban Christmas experience,<sup>247</sup> though the timing of performances could be crucial. In York the Commanding Officer noted in the Corps History Book that the Band doesn't go out early enough on Christmas eve, and that the 'Songsters usually go out Christmas Eve - useless - no money - persuade them to out 6.30-11.30'.<sup>248</sup> There may also have been tension between Salvation Army bands and other parading musicians, as Dave Russell highlights how the Salvation Army bands did not operate within orthodox band traditions.<sup>249</sup>

Another development in the Christmas street culture in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods was the arrival of a distinct culture for celebrating New Year, though an informal culture of the streets mirroring that of Christmas Eve had probably existed for many years.<sup>250</sup> Around 1898 or 1899 crowds started gathering around St. Paul's

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<sup>245</sup> Cited in Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 142.

<sup>246</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 26 December 1895; 10 December 1909.

<sup>247</sup> In 1887, *War Cry* boasted of the Marylebone corps Boxing Day activities: 'The route, as usual, was thronged with hundreds of eager spectators who pressed closely to the sides of the column, making it every now and then, rather difficult to get along', cited in P. J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down. The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, 2001), p. 199.

<sup>248</sup> Reprinted in *York Salvation Army 1881-1981* (York, 1981), p. 32. The first Salvation Army band was formed in Salisbury in 1878, a music department was created in 1883, and two Salvation Army music journals were being produced by 1886. See Russell, *Popular Music*, p. 212.

<sup>249</sup> Russell, *Popular Music*, p. 212.

<sup>250</sup> In 1869 the *York Herald* reported the presence of people and bands of singers in the streets for an hour or two past midnight. As we witnessed in the previous chapter, the culture of Methodist watch nights was



Cathedral in London to welcome in the New Year. *The Times* attributed the custom to the presence of Scots in the capital, and noted the strains of bagpipe music that could be heard. By 1903 this custom was well established, attracting a number of itinerant street vendors but also a large police presence.<sup>251</sup> By 1913 the language of 'Hogmanay' had been attributed to such events, including the singing of 'Auld Lang Syne', amidst 'the ringing of church bells, the blowing of the sirens of the steamers in the Thames, [and] the sounding of hooters'.<sup>252</sup> In other urban centres, youth culture was contributing to the way in which New Year was celebrated in the streets. In York crowds of young people amassed in the chief thoroughfares, singing the popular songs of the year just passed, the *Yorkshire Herald* recording how "you made me love you" rose from the throats of various youths on the left pavement, and their fellows on the right responded "I didn't want to do it".<sup>253</sup>

But there had long been connections between the Christmas culture of the streets and the behaviour of youths, particularly male youths, a connection that for many had disturbing overtones.<sup>254</sup> In 1857 a York resident complained about the 'disgraceful acts

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probably in part a reaction to the culture of the streets during New Year's eve and the early hours of New Year's day. *York Herald*, 2 January 1869.

<sup>251</sup> *The Times*, 1 January 1903.

<sup>252</sup> *The Times*, 1 January 1913.

<sup>253</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 1 January 1914.

<sup>254</sup> Susan Davis shows how the violence of Christmas street culture in nineteenth-century Philadelphia was attributed exclusively to young males. S. G. Davis, "Making Night Hideous": Christmas Revelry and Public Order in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia', *American Quarterly*, 34 (1982), 185-99; For concern over youth culture in a British context see J. H. Gillis, 'The Evolution of Juvenile Delinquency in England 1890-1914', *Past and Present*, 67 (1975), 96-126; H. Hendrick, *Images of Youth. Age, Class and the Male Youth Problem, 1880-1920* (Oxford, 1990); S. Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939* (Oxford, 1981); and M. May, 'Innocence and Experience: the Evolution of the Concept of Juvenile Delinquency in the mid-Nineteenth Century', *Victorian Studies*, 17, (1973), 7-29. Recent historiography has shifted the emphasis of study to the early nineteenth century. See P. King, 'The Rise of Juvenile Delinquency in England 1780-1840. Changing Patterns of Perception and Prosecution', *Past and Present*, 160 (1998), 116-66; P. King and J. Noel, 'The Origins of "the Problem of Juvenile Delinquency": the Growth of Juvenile Prosecutions in London in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries', *Criminal Justice History*, 14, (1993), 17-41; H. Shore, *Artful Dodgers: Youth and Crime in early Nineteenth Century London* (London, 1999); and 'The Trouble with Boys: Gender and the "Invention" of the Juvenile Offender in early Nineteenth-Century Britain', in M. L. Arnot and C. Osborne (eds), *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe* (London, 1999). Recent scholarship has also challenged the notion that this was a male problem. See A. Davies, "'These Viragoes are no less Cruel than the Lads": Young Women, Gangs, and Violence in late-Victorian Manchester and Salford', *British Journal of Criminology*, 39 (1999), 72-89. For a longer perspective see J. Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics. Penny Gaffs to Gansta Rap 1830-1996* (Basingstoke, 1999).



which are invariably committed on Christmas morning by a set of young lads', in particular the damage to property,<sup>255</sup> and in 1865 the *York Herald* noted that on Christmas Eve 'between eleven and twelve o'clock roistering parties of "fast" young men disturbed the ordinary quiet of the citizens'.<sup>256</sup> The following year there was another complaint about Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve: 'few would choose that the streets should be given up to the undisturbed possession of a lot of rude boys, who, during the whole of the night, amuse themselves by hallooing, beating the doors with sticks, or ringing every door bell they came to'.<sup>257</sup> For these complainants, the answer was a greater police presence, but even in this was no guarantee of orderly behaviour. *The Times* noted how there had been some 'ugly rushes' outside St. Paul's Cathedral on New Year's Eve, where 'some women who unwisely formed part of the crowd were severely hustled, and had an unpleasant experience'.<sup>258</sup>

### Temperance

The Christmas street culture also operated within a context of alcohol and drunkenness, a context that surrounded the pubs and music halls. Indeed, in some ways the streets were simply a continuation of the pub culture after closing time.<sup>259</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, the Christmas season saw the regular appearance of drunk and disorderly cases in the police courts. These could cut across gender divides. On New Year's Eve 1863, five charges were made in York that concerned female on female assault.<sup>260</sup> This behaviour could also be ascribed in terms of ethnicity. When reporting alcohol-fuelled violence between inhabitants of York's Irish community, the *York Herald* attributed it to national characteristics, calling one article 'Christmas amusements of the Irish', and commented in another that 'they, no doubt, in the true Irish fashion, thinking it was the most "illegant" way of diverting themselves during the

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<sup>255</sup> *York Herald*, 26 December 1857.

<sup>256</sup> *York Herald*, 30 December 1865.

<sup>257</sup> *York Herald*, 15 December 1866.

<sup>258</sup> *The Times*, 1 January 1903.

<sup>259</sup> Though this was only formally introduced by the Intoxicating Liquor (Licensing) Act of 1872.

<sup>260</sup> *York Herald*, 2 January 1864.



general holiday'.<sup>261</sup> Several characteristics of the urban street culture, the noise, disturbance, violence and drunkenness, combined to form an oppositional culture to the sense of Christmas intimacy grounded in the home, and yet there was a sense that it might have been exaggerated. The number of arrests was always relatively small, and even the 22 cases brought before magistrates in Leeds Town Hall on Boxing Day 1873, described by the *Yorkshire Post* as one of the 'dark spots on the festivities', was very small in comparison to the population.<sup>262</sup> Conversely, Brian Harrison has issued a warning against trying to make direct correlations between the number of arrests and the prevalence of drunkenness, arguing that arrest statistics actually reveal more about the method and efficiency of policing.<sup>263</sup> Another indicator of the level of Christmas drunkenness could be seen in the number of appeals made in the provincial press to stop the practice of giving alcoholic Christmas boxes that appeared between the 1870s and 1900s, indicating a widespread activity. Whilst reflecting wider beliefs in the moral laxity of the working man, the condemnation was phrased in terms of the threat to home life and the authority of the father figure. One such appeal of 1881 wanted the potential benefactor to

consider that to be in any degree the means of causing a usually sober man to return to his family in a state of drunkenness is not only bringing feelings of shame and self-reproach on the man, but also inflicting unhappiness on his family, who may hitherto have regarded (the head of their cottage home) with respect and admiration.<sup>264</sup>

Such concerns were part a wider relationship between a historic continuity of alcoholic excess during holidays and the strength of temperance sentiment during the nineteenth century. This relationship was made more problematic by the fact that even for many respectable people, alcohol, in the form of the 'Christmas glass', was not an instrument of drunken excess but an integral accompaniment to the celebration of the festival

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<sup>261</sup> *York Herald*, 31 December 1853; 3 January 1856.

<sup>262</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 27 December 1873.

<sup>263</sup> B. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians. The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (London, 1971), pp. 314-16.

<sup>264</sup> *York Herald*, 27 December 1881.

within the home, as some of the images appearing within the *Illustrated London News* at mid century testify.<sup>265</sup> The strongest and most successful example of the temperance sentiment in relation to nineteenth-century Christmas can be found in regard to the workhouse. In 1884 the Workhouse Drink Reform League managed to have beer banned from the workhouse Christmas dinner,<sup>266</sup> exploiting the popular belief that alcoholism was the cause of the bulk of pauperism in the country. In some areas the ban was imposed earlier than this date. In 1863, John Hunter Rutherford published a lecture he had given defending the guardians of the Newcastle Union who had imposed a ban on Christmas beer.<sup>267</sup> The regime in Leeds was so stringent that, when in 1880 the retail firm Rene, Felix et Cie sent a hamper of rum to add to the plum-pudding sauce, it was returned by the Master on the instructions that no alcohol was allowed to enter the premises.<sup>268</sup> When, in the late 1890s, individual regimes began relaxing the ban on alcohol, controversy could be stirred within the local press. In 1898 the York Board of Guardians voted to accept a present by the Sheriff of York of a pint of beer for each adult inmate with their Christmas meal. Several correspondents complained to the *Yorkshire Herald* about this, reiterating the connection between alcoholism and pauperism, though one correspondent did challenge this view by pointing to a lifetime of low wages and the need for pensions.<sup>269</sup> The issue was still a point of debate for the York Guardians by 1906. That year they voted to allow beer with the Christmas meal by a majority of 13 to 7, with at least two guardians keen to offer an alternative of aerated waters and ginger beer. By this time the temperance sentiment within workhouse policy was in decline, where a realisation prevailed that 'there were a certain number of

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<sup>265</sup> See, for example, the *Illustrated London News*, 26 December, 1846.

<sup>266</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 67.

<sup>267</sup> J. H. Rutherford, *Beer or no Beer: A Lecture, Delivered in Bath Lane Church, on Sunday Afternoon, December 28, 1862, in Defence of the Seven Guardians of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Union who Voted Against Giving Beer to the Inmates of the Workhouse on Christmas Day* (London, 1863), p. 4. Rutherford tried to imply that Christmas intimacy could not be replicated in the workhouse: 'it is the workhouse, and not home. Where is their own fireside, with its yule-log, and its circle of happy faces? Better a dinner of herbs where freedom is, than a stalled ox, with a sense that you are not your own master'. This latter comment implies that patriarchal authority was deemed one of the elements of intimacy in the nineteenth century, see chapter one.

<sup>268</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 24 December 1880.

<sup>269</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 24 December 1898; 27 December 1898; 28 December 1898; 29 December 1898; 30 December 1898; 31 December 1898.



inmates who had been hard working all their lives and it would be a great pity to deprive them of the privilege simply because other people did not deserve it'.<sup>270</sup>

Workhouse agitation was not the only means through which the temperance movement challenged the connection between Christmas and alcohol. But before considering this it is important to recognise that the temperance movement was not a united or coherent concern. It remained divided in organisational, geographic, religious and class terms. Arising in the early 1830s, it witnessed various ebbs and flows in support over the course of the century.<sup>271</sup> Nor could the temperance movement ever claim the support of the majority of the population. By 1841, organisations such as the Leeds Total Abstinence Charter Association and the York Teetotal Society were organising festivals on New Year's Day, a clear recognition that they had to provide an alternative to the traditional pursuits of the Christmas season. Such festivals included the provision of tea followed by speeches by reformed characters on the evils of drink.<sup>272</sup> By 1845 a Leeds Temperance Festival was being held on Christmas Day,<sup>273</sup> and in 1847 temperance workers in York were sending out 5,000 copies of essays to 'ministers, masters, poor-law guardians, local preachers, deacons, &c., and addresses to all the ministers in York, drawing their serious attention to the drinking customs, more especially at the Christmas season'.<sup>274</sup> That year also saw the formation of the Band of Hope in Leeds. The Band of Hope was the means through which temperance reformers would try and instil the abstention habit from an early age. In York the Band of Hope provided a Christmas day 'fruit soiree' between 1848 and 1850, and again in 1858 and 1859. It is not quite clear why such an event failed to be maintained. In 1858 the committee 'felt that something was wanted to give a sort of finish to the operations of the year that has just passed away; and they therefore determined to hold a fruit soiree, as was customary in years gone by, when the society was formed', and that they trusted it would become

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<sup>270</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 17 December 1906.

<sup>271</sup> L. L. Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England* (New York, 1988), p. 4, and *passim*.

<sup>272</sup> Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink*, p. 32. *York Herald*, 2 January 1841.

<sup>273</sup> *York Herald*, 3 January 1846.

<sup>274</sup> W. Pickwell, *The Temperance Movement in the City of York: Its Origin, Basis and Progress. Being the Jubilee of the York Temperance Society* (York, 1886), p. 38.

an 'annual soiree'. The attendance was 'considerable' despite appalling weather, and again the following year's event was also noted as having 'a good attendance'. Yet by 1863 there was no mention of such an event.<sup>275</sup> This inability to establish an annual custom can perhaps partly be explained in the ebbing and flowing in levels of support that temperance societies experienced. It was also a period when emphasis was being placed on legislative action, and according to Lilian Shiman moral suasion was 'dormant'. Shiman also identifies a phase in the temperance movement called 'gospel temperance', where an apparent increase in cases of intemperance led religious institutions to take a more effective stand on the issue, reviving moral suasion in an argument linking personal abstention with religion.<sup>276</sup> In the previous chapter I highlighted the way in which local religious leaders used the medium of the parish magazine to draw attention to the issue of temperance, and from the 1860s the momentum for bringing a temperance message to children at Christmas does appear to switch to the temperance societies connected to religious schools. By 1864 Salem Mission School in York held its third annual Band of Hope Festival,<sup>277</sup> and in 1874 the Groves Wesleyan Band of Hope had a Christmas entertainment.<sup>278</sup> By the late 1870s young members of temperance societies were becoming performers themselves. In York, young members of the Church of England Temperance Society performed songs in 1879,<sup>279</sup> and in 1880 the Band of Hope children connected with St. Simon's Church, Leeds, conducted an evening's entertainment of songs, glees, dialogues and speeches.<sup>280</sup> Increasingly, these temperance entertainments became almost inseparable from other Christmas philanthropic activities. Instead of creating an alternative temperance world, such events were reinforcing a world of Christmas trees and the popular cultural tastes of the day. In the crowded market of Christmas leisure opportunity, temperance was

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<sup>275</sup> *York Herald*, 30 December 1848; 28 December 1850; 1 January 1859; *Annual Report of the York Temperance Band of Hope or Sunday School and Youth's Temperance Union* (York, 1858), p. 12; (York, 1859), p. 13.

<sup>276</sup> Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink*, p. 4.

<sup>277</sup> *York Herald*, 31 December 1864.

<sup>278</sup> *York Herald*, 5 January 1874.

<sup>279</sup> *York Herald*, 30 December 1879.

<sup>280</sup> *St. Simon's Parochial Magazine*, January 1881.



forced to adapt in order to maintain a position within the mainstream of Christmas culture.

Ultimately, temperance failed to hold this position. Despite the continuing, though declining, controversy that still surrounded the issue of beer in the workhouse, temperance received little attention within the Edwardian Christmas. This was because the temperance movement, having been rejected by both the electorate and the churches after 1895, turned inwards, creating teetotal communities far removed from mainstream culture.<sup>281</sup> In the years immediately prior to the outbreak of the First World War, temperance organisations such as the York and District Band of Hope Union had rejected Christmas as an outlet for entertaining children, opting instead for activities such as a May Carnival.<sup>282</sup>

## Conclusion

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of a distinct urban public culture of Christmas that remained in place through the rest of the period. A new wave of Christmas charity arose, either providing the poor with survival essentials or attempting to give them a Christmas experience, and other charities, particularly hospitals, exploited the popular Christmas charitable sentiment in order to raise general funds. Children, and particularly crippled children, were a central concern of this Christmas charity, as were the aged poor. Paralleling and influencing Christmas charity was a new Christmas entertainment industry centred upon Boxing Day, involving pantomime, music concerts, panoramas and dioramas, minstrelsy shows, circuses and by the Edwardian period, early forms of cinema. Both operated in a civic context. There were also continuities however. Within the field of Christmas charity, bequests and the parish unit continued to play an important role throughout the period; whilst pantomime was an example of Christmas entertainment that had its origins in the eighteenth century, though it was mostly confined to London at this time. In a rural

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<sup>281</sup> Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink*, p. 5.

<sup>282</sup> *Annual Reports of York and District Band of Hope Union*, 1911-13.

context, there continued to be rituals of hospitality and mumming and sword dances, even though they were in slow decline as the older economic structures of the English countryside were gradually eroded.

In many ways this public culture complemented the developing sense of intimacy that was centred in the home. Much of the charitable effort reinforced the idea of Christmas in the home, either through providing the poor with the materials to celebrate Christmas (or at least to be able to survive) at home or through the attempted recreation of Christmas intimacy in institutions and other settings. The concern for and the desire to see children performing at Christmas were both derived from the realisation of children's potential to unlock the full intimacy of Christmas in familial settings. The relationship between the home and the public culture of Christmas was also reinforced through the symbiotic experience of certain types of entertainment being witnessed in both spheres, particularly in terms of theatricals, minstrelsy and visual spectacle. So whilst the Christmas experience of the home was very important at this time, it is too early to talk in terms of a complete 'privatisation' of Christmas before 1914. However, certain forms of Christmas leisure, in particular the Christmas street culture, did provide an oppositional culture to Christmas intimacy, based as it was on a combination of intrusive music, noise, disturbance, violence and drunkenness that was underpinned by contemporary concerns about youth culture and alcohol. The latter feature forced the splintered temperance movement to challenge the continuing connections between alcohol and the Christmas season, but this concern was not sufficiently deep enough for temperance agitators to command widespread and long-term support in the severing of this connection, and their success was limited to a relatively brief ban on alcohol from the workhouse Christmas experience. Ultimately, the temperance movement's relationship to the dominant culture of Christmas was just as oppositional as the street culture was to the home, and by the First World War the temperance movement had rejected Christmas.



## **Chapter Four: Obtaining Christmas Intimacy: Work, Self-help, and Education**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the experience of working people in terms of the amount of Christmas holiday they received, the means by which they attempted to obtain Christmas holiday, and the cultures of Christmas that were created in the workplace. The wider significance of this lies in the concept of leisure as being a crucial component in the fostering of Christmas intimacy, but it also lies in the recognition that not all Christmas intimacies were located in and informed by the twin spheres of home and family, though these did remain prominent. The first section of this chapter offers a survey of the historical development of Christmas holidays in terms of both law and custom, and offers examples of the variety of practice and attitude that affected the issue of holidays throughout the nineteenth century. It will then examine the rise of employer paternalism as manifested at Christmas. The second section will then focus upon shop assistants and their attempts to gain a longer Christmas holiday. Shop assistants came to play a key role in the development of Christmas in the second half of the nineteenth century, being, as they were, at the forefront of the material component of Christmas intimacy. The campaigns reveal a contested terrain between the middle-class aspirations of shop assistants and the needs of both retailers and the public. The third section will emphasise the continuity of the Christmas-box system in a service environment, as well as its unpopularity. In examining the arguments that surrounded Christmas boxes, it emerges that some forms of personal service were deemed worthy of a Christmas box, and in particular the role that postmen played, partly in recognition of the postman as a foot soldier of intimacy, physically carrying the tokens of kin and friendship networks, and partly a recognition of the poor pay and conditions of the postman, which were in turn exacerbated by the commercial success of the Christmas card from the 1860s. The final two sections of the chapter then extend the world of work into arenas that complement and surround it. The fourth section examines the Christmas experience in organisations that broadly fall into categories of self-help and associationalism, focusing firstly on savings and goose clubs, and then secondly on

institutions that provided education. The theme of education is expanded in the final section, which examines the relationship between Christmas and school, showing how a distinct culture of Christmas treats, examinations and prizes evolved in the mid nineteenth century, operating within a philanthropic context. This section also considers the type of message about Christmas that was being disseminated to children, and offers an alternative perspective in the form of Methodist schools. It will also be argued that by 1914, the culture of Christmas in school had begun to evolve beyond the cultural forms laid down by philanthropy, as a new civic culture developed, driven by the Edwardian desire to see children perform.

### Christmas and Work:<sup>1</sup> Holidays and Employer Paternalism

In official terms, the twelve-day Christmas holiday of the medieval period had already begun to decline by the sixteenth century, as the trend of rising real wages in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was reversed and workmen were forced to bear the economic burden of holidays. Further decline in the number of holidays took place in the seventeenth century due to puritan legislation, and whilst the main holidays, including Christmas, were revived after the Restoration, no major reversal in the decline of official holidays took place in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> However, in many working environments, leisure time was maintained by customs that not only affected holidays, but also led to irregular working patterns, set hours, and drinking and 'larking' at work.<sup>3</sup>

It was such customs that came under attack by employers looking to impose efficiency and 'clock time' upon their workforce.<sup>4</sup> Between 1790 and 1840, the pruning of the holidays surrounding Christmas was led by government. Taking the Custom and Excise

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to the experience of work in this period, see P. Joyce, 'Work', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950. Volume 2: People and their Environment* (Cambridge, 1990); D. M. MacRaild and D. E. Martin, *Labour in British Society, 1830-1914* (Basingstoke, 2000); and A. J. McIvor, *A History of Work in Britain 1880-1950* (Basingstoke, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> M. A. Bienefeld, *Working Hours in British Industry: An Economic History* (London, 1972), pp. 18-19, 38-39.

<sup>3</sup> H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c. 1780-c. 1880* (London, 1980), p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> See Cunningham, *Leisure*, chapter 2; D. Reid, 'The Decline of Saint Monday, 1766-1876', *Past and Present*, 71 (1976), 76-101; and E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), 56-97; reprinted in *Customs in Common* (New York, 1993).



Office as an example, in 1797 it closed between the 21 December and 6 January on all seven dates specified by the sixteenth-century Edwardian and Elizabethan Protestant calendars. By 1838 it was open on all these days except Christmas Day.<sup>5</sup> Legislation in the nineteenth century, however, by turns simplified and complicated the pursuit of holidays. In 1833, the Factory Act stipulated that Christmas Day and Good Friday were the only days (except Sundays) upon which workers had a statutory right to be absent from work.<sup>6</sup> In 1871 the Bank Holiday Act recognised the observance of Boxing Day, and the Holidays Extension Act of 1875 extended this to cover certain government offices.<sup>7</sup> The Factory Act of 1901 guaranteed that women and young persons were entitled to have all bank holidays or equivalent in lieu.<sup>8</sup>

J. A. R. Pimlott has commented on how the Bank Holiday Act and the Holiday Extension Act set a general principle of holiday observation within commerce and industry,<sup>9</sup> but the lack of a binding legal code led to a great degree of variance in practice throughout the nineteenth century, and it is therefore difficult to assert any kind of universal pattern of behaviour. Sometimes the difference lay in the emphasis on a particular day. New Year continued to be the most important day in Scotland, but also had a strong resonance in the northern counties of England; whilst in the west of England Twelfth tide had importance.<sup>10</sup> In some industries older patterns of work prevailed; the cutlery factories of Sheffield experienced between four and eight days of Christmas holiday; lace-making industries in Devon and Somerset experienced a week, which was also common in the brass trades; and some of the larger factories in Birmingham closed for a week or a fortnight for stock taking.<sup>11</sup> John Benson found that nineteenth-century coal miners were notorious for insisting on celebrating a series of

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<sup>5</sup> R. Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun. A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford, 1996), p. 112; J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Christmas. A Social History* (Hassocks, 1978), pp. 77-78.

<sup>6</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> The Act also recognised three other Mondays at Easter, Whitsun, and during August. In Scotland, New Year's Day was recognised.

<sup>8</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>9</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 95.

<sup>10</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 113.

<sup>11</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, pp. 78, 95.

local feasts in addition to the major celebrations at Christmas, New Year, Easter and Whitsun.<sup>12</sup> It is important to recognise, however, that workers did not always welcome an extended, or sometimes any, Christmas holiday. This is due to the fact that in many areas of work payment of wages for holidays remained the preserve of the lucky few. For those relying on outdoor employment, the bad weather often associated with the Christmas period could cause an unfortunate extended lay-off. In other instances, advantage was taken of loop holes in the law. The 1833 Factory Act allowed Dissenters to employ children and young persons on Good Friday and Christmas Day with their own consent, but the Select Committee on Factories was told in 1840 that some manufacturers belonging to the Established Church were actually becoming dissenters in order to take advantage of this.<sup>13</sup> On other occasions, workers simply rejected parliamentary regulations in favour of custom. At Henry Ashworth's mill at Turton, no one was compelled to work on Christmas Day, but many workers preferred to, because the local custom was to take a holiday on New Year's Day instead.<sup>14</sup>

As Hugh Cunningham highlights, the defence of custom, which did not have to have deep historical roots, became 'a key bargaining factor' for workers faced with threatening change. He has perceived similarities in tone between workers' defence of custom and the writings of Tory paternalists such as Lord John Manners in *A Plea for National Holy-Days* (1843), and a similar paternalistic undercurrent in the works of radicals such as William Hone.<sup>15</sup> If there was a paternalistic element to the desire to regulate holidays by custom, it could also apply to the relationship between employer and employee at Christmas. Increasingly in the nineteenth century, employers saw the value of paternalistic gestures towards their employees at Christmas and other key times of the year. As Cunningham notes, when middle-class antiquarians commented on custom, they were separating out the 'more colourful leisure traditions of the past' as

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<sup>12</sup> J. Benson, *British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History* (Dublin, 1980), p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> Cunningham, *Leisure*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>15</sup> Cunningham, *Leisure*, p. 72. See William Hone's *Every-Day Book* (1825-7); *Table Book* (1827); and *Year Book* (1832).



distinct from work habits; but for working people there was no clear distinction.<sup>16</sup> Whilst the role of custom declined in the workplace, some form of ritual was still required to mediate the 'intimacy and intricacy' of the employer/worker relationship. Such an assertion causes problems. The conventional historiography of leisure<sup>17</sup> underlines the development of a more regular and separate sphere of work. However, such a fractured view of society is too simplistic. We have witnessed in the previous chapter the existence of a symbiotic relationship between the realms of home, philanthropy and popular entertainment, mediated by the intimacy and performative nature of Christmas, and it is reductive to assume that the workplace can exist independently of this, particularly at Christmas when the power of intimacy had the potential to raise emotional resonance and expectation. Christmas in the workplace may have been a time for forging new social intimacies which either reflected emotional language learnt in the home, or provided a welcome antithesis to it; it is important here not to preclude the possibility of Christmas intimacies being forged and grounded in those working environments that were predominantly male, and forming an intimate Christmas experience that was distinctly masculine.<sup>18</sup> The workplace could then, in turn, be the breeding ground for the continuance of more 'colourful' Christmas customs.<sup>19</sup>

Employer paternalism at Christmas could manifest itself in different forms. In some instances this took the form of simple philanthropy, as at Colman's mustard manufacturing plant in Norfolk, where the Colmans gave each workman a piece of pork

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<sup>16</sup> Cunningham, *Leisure*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>17</sup> P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (London, 1978); Bienefeld, *Working Hours*; Cunningham, *Leisure*; 'Leisure' in J. Benson (ed.), *The Working Class in England 1875-1914* (London, 1985); and 'Leisure and Culture' in F. M. L. Thompson, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950. Volume 2: People and their Environment* (Cambridge, 1990); J. K. Walton and J. Walvin (eds), *Leisure in Britain, 1780-1939* (Manchester, 1983); and J. Walvin, *Leisure and Society 1830-1950* (London, 1978). For a theoretical perspective, see J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 152-54.

<sup>18</sup> Keith McClelland explores the way in which male identity was partially constructed in the workplace. See 'Masculinity and the "Representative Artisan" in Britain, 1850-80', in M. Roper and J. Tosh (eds), *Manful Assertions. Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London and New York, 1991), pp. 74-91.

<sup>19</sup> Cynthia Sughrue's study of sword-dancing teams in south Yorkshire shows that one team, operating in Woodhouse in the 1880s and subsequently transferring to Handsworth, was primarily recruited and maintained through friendships fostered in the collieries. See C. M. Sughrue, 'Continuity, Conflict and Change: A Contextual Study of Three South Yorkshire Longsword Dance Teams', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 138-44.

at Christmas. The weight of the pork depended on the size of the family, a situation in which Caroline Colman displayed her 'useful knowledge', an expertise grounded in domesticity that allowed her to perform a public role.<sup>20</sup> She also distributed Christmas hampers and works' almanacs.<sup>21</sup> Acts of philanthropy could also be combined with employers preaching on their favourite subjects. Between the 1870s and the 1890s, the manager of York Gas Works, Mr. Sellers, gave an annual Christmas address to the workmen. In 1879 he stressed to the workmen 'the wisdom of enjoying Christmas in a sensible and manly way', urging industriousness and temperance, and the importance of taking 'your main enjoyment over your own firesides', and to 'put the education of your children in the highest place'. To complement this, children's books were provided for those men with children under the age of 11.<sup>22</sup> In 1882 he concerned himself with 'lying as a vice', and reiterated the message that 'if you wish to be prosperous keep sober, if you wish to be respected keep sober, and if you wish to do your duty to your wives, to your children, or to your sweethearts, keep sober'.<sup>23</sup> In 1884, however, there was an acknowledgement that the social reality of such addresses was not all harmony when Sellers declared 'It is possible that some of you may think that sermonising in this fashion in a Christmas address is somewhat akin to a wet blanket'.<sup>24</sup> For smaller scale employers, their act of Christmas benevolence was likely to be manifested in the provision of a Christmas dinner. In 1848, a York plumber, Mr. Varvill, gave an 'excellent supper' to his servants and workmen, 'according to annual custom'.<sup>25</sup> Often, these gatherings took place in public houses. In 1859, a York cabinet maker, Mr. Groves, entertained his workmen to a supper in the Waggon and Horses, Gillygate.<sup>26</sup> They could also be the occasion for novelty. In 1881 the employees of Hunt's brewery, York, dined together in a large mashing tub, which had been decorated with holly and

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<sup>20</sup> L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (2nd edn, London and New York, 2002), p. 432.

<sup>21</sup> F. K. Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950. Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 372.

<sup>22</sup> *York Herald*, 22 December 1879.

<sup>23</sup> *York Herald*, 26 December 1882.

<sup>24</sup> *York Herald*, 22 December 1884.

<sup>25</sup> *York Herald*, 8 January 1848.

<sup>26</sup> *York Herald*, 31 December 1859.



evergreens.<sup>27</sup> As well as providing employers the opportunity to perform the role of gracious host, these situations could have provided the opportunity for fostering masculine social intimacies. They seem to have become prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century, and coincided with various firms or divisions of firms holding annual dinners around the Christmas period. This was particularly true of the departments of the NER, with annual dinners of the carriage and boiler-making departments being well established by 1863.<sup>28</sup> However, the NER was also responsible for a symbolic act of paternalism well known in York from the 1860s and still active in 1914.<sup>29</sup> Each employee was granted a piece of wood described as a 'yule log' to take home and burn on the family hearth. Such an act connected the company to the ideal vision of the family, as well as to ideas concerning the ancient pagan origins of the Christmas festival.<sup>30</sup> Whilst in the previous chapter I have acknowledged the limitations of invented tradition as a plausible explanation, this is one incidence where invented tradition is a valid interpretation; an aspect of the past has been reinterpreted for a new use in the industrial age. By 1913 this custom was operating as a potent local spectacle, captured in a photograph by the *Yorkshire Herald* as the workmen streamed out the carriage and wagon works with their logs.<sup>31</sup> It should also be noted, however, that within the rail industry, Christmas work cultures were not always imposed from above. In Leeds, for example, an annual tea and entertainment was established amongst rail employees in 1868, in order to raise funds for orphans of employees killed in the performance of their duties.<sup>32</sup>

For employers, Christmas could also play a part in the forging of a distinct company culture. Charles Dellheim argues that at Cadbury's a company ethos was embedded by

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<sup>27</sup> *York Herald*, 24 December 1881.

<sup>28</sup> *York Herald*, 3 January 1863.

<sup>29</sup> *York Herald*, 2 January 1869.

<sup>30</sup> The earliest recorded occurrence of the yule log in Britain was by Robert Herrick in the 1620s or 1630s, though reference to its existence in Germany can be traced back to 1184. Sir James Frazer popularised the notion that the yule log was a pagan fire ritual from ancient Europe, though considerable doubt has been raised concerning this belief. See Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, pp. 38-40.

<sup>31</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 26 December 1913.

<sup>32</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 27 December 1880.

‘ritual, myth and symbol’, including social occasions at Christmas, New Year and summer, rituals that unified the Cadbury family with their employees, part of a wider trend in the late nineteenth century, identified by Patrick Joyce, of creating the ‘culture of the employer family’.<sup>33</sup> The annual gathering of Cadbury Brothers’ employees, as it was referred to, had been established by 1884, being held that year in Birmingham Town Hall on 31 December. It consisted of a tea, hymns, organ solos, speeches and comic sketches. The following year the gathering was moved to the Bournville works site. The format remained essentially similar throughout the Edwardian period, though it is significant in the charting of Quaker sensibilities that it was renamed the Bournville Christmas gathering in 1904, and the Bournville Christmas party in 1905.<sup>34</sup> Another Quaker chocolate producer, Rowntrees of York, had also instituted a Christmas party by 1905, though at Rowntrees the party was aimed at the children of the employees, complete with Christmas tree, gifts, and magic lantern scenes.<sup>35</sup> From 1907 a children’s treat was established in the factory’s fire station, with Father Christmas distributing the gifts.<sup>36</sup> Such a culture partially reflected a form of employment that had become secure. In 1907 Joseph Rowntree reflected that in the early years of his business the company would have to ‘reduce the size of the staff and to part with many workers’ once the Christmas rush was over. In recent years, however, Rowntrees had been able ‘to maintain full work throughout the year’.<sup>37</sup>

### Shop Assistants and the Campaign for a Longer Christmas Holiday

Paternalism was also prevalent in the way shopkeepers treated their assistants, but as Christopher Hosgood argues, shopkeepers ‘spoke the language of paternalism but failed to invest in the cultural, political, and religious paraphernalia of factory paternalism’.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> C. Dellheim, ‘The Creation of a Company Culture: Cadbury’s, 1861-1931’, *American Historical Review*, 92 (1987), pp. 29-30; P. Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (Brighton, 1980), p. 181.

<sup>34</sup> BCA, Papers of the Cadbury Family of Birmingham; MS 466/33, miscellaneous programmes 1884-1931.

<sup>35</sup> *Cocoa Works Magazine*, January 1905.

<sup>36</sup> *Cocoa Works Magazine*, January 1908.

<sup>37</sup> *Cocoa Works Magazine*, December 1907.

<sup>38</sup> C. P. Hosgood, “‘Mercantile Monasteries’: Shops, Shop Assistants, and Shop Life in Late-Victorian and



A series of parliamentary investigations<sup>39</sup> painted a picture of shop life as monotonous and occasionally dangerous, though some witnesses were liable to exaggerate their conditions, and many complaints could not be substantiated. The workforce changed from being overwhelmingly male in the mid nineteenth century, to fifty percent female by 1914, a factor which in turn increased the interest of social reformers in the working conditions within the shops. Of particular concern were the long hours of work, including standing, low wages, unpaid overtime, and poor lighting, sanitary conditions and ventilation.<sup>40</sup> Of course, it is not possible to talk in terms of a unified shop-assistant experience; it varied between different trades, owners, locations and sizes of shop. Geographic difference, for example, applied to the living-in system, which appears to have been general in the south of England, common in the midlands, but less prevalent in the north.<sup>41</sup> The living-in system involved the assistants living either above the shop, or in dormitories adjacent to it, and had evolved from the 'old apprenticeship system where the apprentice was one of the master's family'. Once the number of assistants had grown beyond family limits an institutional form of living became necessary, and often a series of petty regulations were introduced.<sup>42</sup> Hosgood argues that such regulations enabled shopkeepers 'to maintain control of their staff throughout the day and night', and that the lifestyle rendered shop assistants emotionally and politically 'impotent'. The long working hours meant that they were unable to develop independent social or familial lives; nor were they able to construct 'an independent life as citizens'. Individuality was hampered by a lack of privacy; it was common for at least eight to share a room. Contemporary accounts of these living conditions ranged from spartan to

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Edwardian Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (July 1999), p. 352; see also L. Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work. Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales 1850-1914* (Newton Abbot, 1973), chapter 5; W. Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (Leicester, 1995), pp. 125-58; and W. B. Whitaker, *Victorian and Edwardian Shopworkers. The Struggle to Obtain Better Conditions and a Half-Holiday* (Newton Abbot, 1973). For an American comparative, see W. B. Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America. A Cultural History of Gift Giving* (New York and London, 1993), chapter 11.

<sup>39</sup> For example, the 1886 Select Committee on Shop Hours, the 1895 Select Committee on Shops, and the 1908 Truck Committee.

<sup>40</sup> Hosgood, 'Mercantile Monasteries', pp. 326-29.

<sup>41</sup> Hosgood, 'Mercantile Monasteries', p. 332. See also C. Booth, *Life and Labour in London*, 2d ser., vol. 3, *Industry (1902-1904)* (New York, 1970), p. 84; Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies*, p. 112; Lancaster, *Department Store*, p. 128.

<sup>42</sup> Hosgood, 'Mercantile Monasteries', p. 332; Whitaker, *Victorian and Edwardian Shopworkers*, p. 8.

unhealthy. Strict time limits were imposed on the eating of meals, which were often badly prepared or insufficient in quantity. A systems of fines existed to enforce the rules, which were supported by control over permission to leave the premises; decisions over sickness and doctors; and the assignment of individual employees to particular bedrooms, 'regardless of whether the assistants liked their new roommates'. For Hosgood, this meant that shop assistants were being kept in a permanent state of adolescence, through being denied the rights and responsibilities of adulthood. This was manifested in the way shop life affected the sexual identity of shop assistants. Relationships and marriage were actively discouraged, stripping assistants of their manhood and womanhood. Women who may have entered the job with expectations of independence found that they had replaced the patriarchy of the home with a patriarchy at work, but in an environment which undermined health, acted against the ideology of domesticity and left them vulnerable to harassment by employers, male assistants and customers. For male assistants in turn, the growing number of female assistants led to the feminisation of shop work in the public imagination, increasing the sense of emasculation in their own eyes as well as the public's. Politically too, the living-in system meant that male shop assistants had not been able to take advantage of the widening male franchise, particularly the lodger franchise.<sup>43</sup>

Shop assistants were notoriously hard to unionise. Membership of NAUSAWC stood at 1,294 in 1893, and had risen to 21,426 in 1910, representing an estimated 2 percent of all shop assistants at that time. Furthermore, this modest growth was obtained only 'by moderating the combative tone of union rhetoric and activity'.<sup>44</sup> If they could be motivated to seek reform at all, many shop assistants preferred to combine with employers in self-regulatory early-closing associations. Hosgood partially ascribes this situation to the perpetual adolescence of shop assistants, but also places a large emphasis on their genteel middle-class aspirations. Both the dress and demeanour of the shop assistant at work acted as a mask shielding the public from the social reality of

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<sup>43</sup> Hosgood, 'Mercantile Monasteries', pp. 328-40. In 1907 the NAUSAWC claimed that 95 percent of male shop assistants were disfranchised.

<sup>44</sup> Hosgood, 'Mercantile Monasteries', p. 347



their existence; 'they had the bearing and look of gentlemen and gentlewomen', a situation that was especially reinforced in arenas like the department store. Aspirations to gentility led to a perception equating trade unionism with socialism. Another factor was that many assistants maintained the personal goal of one day owning their own shop.<sup>45</sup>

Within this context, Christmas played an important role, though one that has been neglected by historians. As Christmas consumerism developed in the nineteenth century, becoming entwined with the heightened sense of intimacy manifesting itself in gift exchange and material abundance, shop keepers and assistants came under increasing stress to supply public demand. At the same time, since the self-perception of shop assistants was grounded in aspirations to gentility, then expectations of familial Christmas experience existed which the reality of shop life at Christmas could not match. But it should be noted that this was primarily a Victorian development. The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the breaking down of older systems of retailing, a process that was still far from complete by 1850.<sup>46</sup> Under this system there was not a large body of shop assistants in England; retailing was dominated by small-scale traders with a handful of helpers, mostly drawn from family. Retailers dealt in a specialised line of goods of which they had an intimate and skilled knowledge. The system was aided by apprenticeship, in which youths paid premiums of thirty to fifty pounds and bound themselves to serve for three to seven years, and lived as part of the master's family. It was characterised by an atmosphere of non-competitiveness that frowned upon advertising and display, instead relying on a regular clientele built up by a reputation for quality, skill and personal attention. Nostalgic accounts of the standard of life for the small number of shop assistants who experienced this system paint a picture of camaraderie, hard but fair work, social respectability, vigour, health and independence. However, Lee Holcombe has cast doubt on this picture in the first half of the nineteenth

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<sup>45</sup> Hosgood, 'Mercantile Monasteries', pp. 324-26, 330, 341, 348. By the Edwardian period, however, young shop assistants of both sexes, and their behaviour beyond the realm of work, was beginning to be seen as a social problem. There may have been a difference between the work identities of shop assistants and how they saw themselves beyond work.

<sup>46</sup> Retailing systems will be examined in more detail in chapter five.

century. She highlighted accounts from the 1820s of shop assistants joining to petition their masters for earlier closing and shorter working hours, and also *The Linen Draper's Magna Charta*, published in 1839, which called for a law compelling shops to shut at a reasonable hour.<sup>47</sup> There is no evidence at this stage, however, that Christmas was a motivation for this early action.

What made Christmas become an issue for shop assistants and many other workers was the day that it fell upon. If, as in the early nineteenth century, the number of holidays were being eroded, customary or otherwise, then theoretically if Christmas Day fell on a Sunday shop assistants would lose a day's holiday, because they were entitled to Sunday off anyway. In practice, a moral holiday was often declared on the Monday to compensate for this, as happened in London in 1842, which consequently created a two-day holiday.<sup>48</sup> Such a holiday would operate in a local civic context, often by a combination of a declaration from the Lord Mayor and informal agreements amongst tradesmen. Such a system was not, however, legally binding, and shop assistants could still fall victim to uncharitable employers and local indifference. By the 1850s, shop assistants had become vocal about their concerns about losing a Christmas holiday when Christmas Day fell upon a Sunday. When this happened in 1853, two shop assistants in York wrote to the *York Herald*, anxious to secure a holiday on the Monday, and showing a keen awareness that action had been taken in other towns that they had not yet witnessed in York.<sup>49</sup> A petition was also organised in York and presented to the Lord Mayor, who subsequently issued hand bills declaring Monday to be a holiday.<sup>50</sup> In London, a group of five pawnbrokers' assistants appealed to the public for a general holiday observance on the Monday as the only way they could protect one of the two holidays they received each year.<sup>51</sup> Such letters continued to feature, particularly in the provincial newspaper press, throughout the rest of this period. References to the need for rest and relaxation after long hours of work were often made, as were remarks about

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<sup>47</sup> Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies*, pp. 104, 108.

<sup>48</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1842.

<sup>49</sup> *York Herald*, 10 December 1853.

<sup>50</sup> *York Herald*, 17 December 1853; 24 December 1853.

<sup>51</sup> *The Times*, 16 December 1853.



home, family and friends that were inflected by the language of Christmas intimacy. In 1859, a sympathetic tradesman called upon those who opposed the granting of holiday to read *A Christmas Carol*,<sup>52</sup> whilst in 1877 a former shop assistant recalled the happiness of ‘spending old Christmas at the dearest place on earth, “home, sweet, home”. Christmas brings with it many hallowed associations, who can forget a mother’s kiss and tears of joy, and a father’s loving smile and tender sympathy, on such happy reunions’.<sup>53</sup>

A sense of momentum concerning the Christmas holiday of the shop assistant can be detected in the 1850s. New combinations of holiday, depending on which day of the week Christmas Day fell, were considered. When Christmas Day fell upon a Tuesday in 1855, *The Times* reported that many provincial newspapers were carrying the news that a general holiday would be observed on Christmas Eve, thereby creating a three-day holiday (including Sunday).<sup>54</sup> In York, a large group of drapers’ assistants were very active in campaigning for this holiday,<sup>55</sup> and nearly 200 tradesmen in York closed on Christmas Eve 1855.<sup>56</sup> In 1857, when Christmas Day fell upon a Friday, tradesmen in the large towns of Essex closed on Saturday in addition to Christmas Day, again creating a three-day holiday;<sup>57</sup> whilst in 1858 a similar situation was achieved in Derby and Lincoln when tradesmen closed on Monday 27 December.<sup>58</sup> This year *The Times* saw fit to reprint an article that originally appeared in the *Doncaster Chronicle*,<sup>59</sup> which made reference to ‘the bye-gone days of merry England’, when ‘the Yule-log was not consumed in a single night’. Comment was made that ‘society is not a machine, as our Malthusian philosophers would have us believe’; and in calling for a three-day holiday, the writer argued that it would give the ‘ensuing Christmas of 1858 somewhat of the

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<sup>52</sup> *York Herald*, 10 December 1859. Ironically, Dickens assumed that food shops would be open on Christmas Day. Scrooge was able to have a prize turkey sent to the Cratchit family. See C. Dickens, *Christmas Books* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 85-6.

<sup>53</sup> *York Herald*, 18 December 1877.

<sup>54</sup> *The Times*, 19 December 1855.

<sup>55</sup> *York Herald*, 8 December 1855.

<sup>56</sup> *York Herald*, 22 December 1855.

<sup>57</sup> *The Times*, 12 December 1857.

<sup>58</sup> *The Times*, 4 December 1858.

<sup>59</sup> The article was originally incorrectly attributed to the *Banbury Guardian*, but subsequently corrected.

proportions of the Christmas 100 years ago?’<sup>60</sup> This nostalgic reference to an imagined past makes it tempting to view this new zeal for the observance of holidays within the context of invented tradition. However, I have found no other examples of such rhetoric, and it should be concluded that the sentiment was far outweighed by the many examples of a desire to see family and friends that have been identified. Yet this should not stop us asking why the 1850s were the locus for new demands of holiday observance. It should be noted that many shop assistants lived a great distance from their relatives, and with cheap rail travel now available the possibilities of reunion were becoming obvious. As early as 1846 a correspondent to *The Times* was calling upon the directors of railway companies to extend the validity of day tickets for several days over Christmas in order to allow clerks, warehousemen and shop assistants to travel home ‘without trenching too much on their limited means’.<sup>61</sup> In a wider context, it could also be argued that the economic prosperity of the early 1850s created a greater demand for leisure. In his study of British industrial working hours, M. A. Bienefeld found ‘a renewed enthusiasm for the traditional holidays’, citing the large scale observance of Whitsun in Lancashire, Leeds, Leicester and Nottingham as evidence.<sup>62</sup>

For shop assistants, the momentum of the 1850s did not gain them any firm guarantees in the attempt to secure Christmas holidays. When Christmas Day again fell on a Sunday in 1859, more anxious letters appeared in provincial newspapers to secure a holiday on the Monday; and a two-day holiday was the limit of expectations when the cycle repeated itself in 1864.<sup>63</sup> However, the campaigns for a longer holiday did become more ambitious as the nineteenth century progressed, and were no doubt given a greater impetus by the expectations created by the Bank Holiday Act of 1871 and the Holiday Extension Act of 1875, and campaigns for four-day holidays (including Sunday) were not uncommon. Such holidays were never, of course, universally achieved. In many cases compromise measures were put in place. When Christmas Day fell on a

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<sup>60</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1858.

<sup>61</sup> *The Times*, 1 December 1846.

<sup>62</sup> Bienefeld, *Working Hours*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>63</sup> *York Herald*, 17 December 1864.



Wednesday in 1872, the London firm of Messrs Peek, Brother and Co. gave half their staff holiday on the Monday and Tuesday in addition to being closed on Christmas Day and Boxing Day, whilst the remaining staff received holiday on the following Friday and Saturday: a system that ensured all employees gained five consecutive days holiday.<sup>64</sup> It is important to recognise though, that the campaign for Christmas holidays existed in a contested terrain. The civic decision on the declaration of holiday observance could effectively be left to market committees, since in many towns patterns of shopping continued to be dominated by market day. In 1884, an attempt to alter the York market day in Christmas week from Saturday to Wednesday was rejected on the grounds that it would inconvenience the general public.<sup>65</sup> This was also one of the standard arguments used by tradesmen hostile to an increase in Christmas holidays. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this hostility could also be manifested in public attacks on the character of shop assistants. In 1888, when Christmas Day fell upon a Tuesday, and a holiday on Christmas Eve and Boxing Day was campaigned for, one tradesman declared that the

selfishness of employees is growing worse every year; they get their fortnight's holiday in summer, with wages paid; they have bank holidays, which ought never to have been adopted by traders; and are blest with about four hours a day less work than we old hands used to put in some years ago... I don't intend to give a third day's wage for a third day's no work to about a score of employees, half of whom will not turn up on Thursday ...<sup>66</sup>

Employers could also imperil the agreements forged between trading rivals in relation to closing. In 1896 the secretary of the ECA, James Stacey, complained that the Christmas holiday of a 'large proportion of the assistants of East London are threatened ... by the attitude of a wealthy proprietor of a well known Commercial Road drapery house'; whilst in the West End, an agreement previously arranged between three large clothing firms was now being broken by two of them. Stacey found it 'provoking' that the customers of these firms were 'mostly mechanics working trade union hours', and 'that

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<sup>64</sup> *York Herald*, 9 December 1872.

<sup>65</sup> *York Herald*, 16 December 1884.

<sup>66</sup> *York Herald*, 13 December 1888.

in the efforts to obtain shorter hours for shop assistants no assistance can be expected from the “British workman”<sup>67</sup>.

The role the ECA played in the campaigns for a longer Christmas holiday reveals differences in approach between London and the provinces. Discussing the activities of the ECA in the 1850s, Wilfred Whitaker noted how difficult it was to trace a direct connection between the ECA in London, and attempts to obtain shorter working hours in other parts of the country.<sup>68</sup> With regard to Christmas, however, a pattern is detectable. In York, which had no direct links with the ECA, a large number of letters from shop assistants appeared in the local press on the subject of Christmas holidays. This is not discernible in London, probably due to the fact that the ECA published letters concerning Christmas on their behalf, beginning in 1864. The ECA’s approach to Christmas was a combination of obtaining agreements from employers and appeals to the public to modify their shopping patterns, as in 1881, when the public was urged to make their Christmas purchases before Christmas Eve (a Saturday), in order to allow as many shop assistants as possible to go home early.<sup>69</sup> They also supplied shops with window bills detailing opening times. The efforts of the ECA sometimes provoked a hostile reaction. In 1901 one ‘Working Man’ described the ECA’s efforts as the ‘mischievous interference of a private and irresponsible society’, and highlighted the contradiction of a Bank Holiday where shops were closed, but ‘theatres, picture galleries, and public conveyances are crammed, “all the world and his wife” crowding the streets, and all places of public amusement are thronged’.<sup>70</sup> A ‘housewife’ complained that the ECA were making ‘a very large proportion of the population of our large towns’ exist for several days on stale food, and accused them of inflicting hardship on invalids and children.<sup>71</sup> The ECA were also rivalled in London by the VECA, whose

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<sup>67</sup> *The Times*, 15 December 1896. Hosgood highlights how working men treated the emasculated male shop assistant with undisguised contempt, and we can see these events as part of that pattern. See ‘Mercantile Monasteries’, p. 336.

<sup>68</sup> Whitaker, *Victorian and Edwardian Shopworkers*, p. 58.

<sup>69</sup> *The Times*, 12 December 1881.

<sup>70</sup> *The Times*, 29 November 1901.

<sup>71</sup> *The Times*, 20 December 1901.



main effort at Christmas was to secure cheap rail travel for its members; an example is the special VECA express excursion to Scotland it organised in 1899.<sup>72</sup>

In York, no official organisation intervened on behalf of shop assistants at Christmas until 1906, when the secretary of the York Branch of the National Union of Shop Assistants, Frank Marsh, entered into public debate in the *Yorkshire Herald*. He was responding to the criticism of one ‘proprietor’ that the union had not made its presence felt in the current debate concerning the Christmas holidays. It is indicative of their weak position that Marsh complained that the majority of his members were too tired from working long hours to canvass employers, and that the only way to resolve the problem was for a ‘properly constituted Tradesmen’s Chamber of Trade to be organised’.<sup>73</sup> Marsh did, however, correctly capture the situation that plagued the lives of late-Victorian and Edwardian shop assistants, when he stated that ‘It is absurd that every Christmas, and frequently on other public holidays, we have a repetition of the same thing, that no definitely understood arrangement is arrived at regarding the nature and duration of the holidays’.<sup>74</sup> This was combined with the increasing pressure that Christmas consumerism was placing upon shop assistants. In 1896 *The Lancet* recognised this pressure, commenting:

A week or fortnight before Christmas life in the shop becomes one continuous round of toil. Some of the employees who have homes in the country are forced by the exigencies of the occasion to leave town on Christmas Eve by midnight trains, which they are barely allowed time to catch, and thus with mental and bodily powers exhausted they reach their homes to take part in festivities which under the circumstances further exhaust vitality.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *The Times*, 14 December 1899.

<sup>73</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 20 December 1906; 21 December 1906. In 1907 the York Grocers’ Association advised its members to close early on Friday December 27, contradicting the suggestion of the Lord Mayor that shops close for three days. The York Traders’ Association was formed in 1911 but failed to overcome confusion in the remaining years of this study. *Yorkshire Herald*, 16 December 1907; 12 December 1911.

<sup>74</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 21 December 1906.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in *The Times*, 15 December 1896. *The Lancet* overlooked the fact that railway staff would also still be working in order to operate these trains.

The impact on the growing number of females in this workforce was also acknowledged when James Stacey commented upon the ‘employees, many of them girls and women, who ordinarily work excessive hours, work unusually late in December, and continue their exhaustive labour down to the last moments of Christmas Eve. Truly to them Christmas should have some compensation!’<sup>76</sup> One York ‘counter jumper’ also complained of the unfriendly treatment they received from the public:

There is no kindly greeting for a counterman; he has to do all the bowing and scraping and fascinate the customers, if it be 8 o’clock in the morning or 10 o’clock at night, and not only that, he is snubbed by the customer for not “looking sharp”...; ... people must not forget that they are human beings in the shops ...<sup>77</sup>

Another assistant complained that the ‘public cannot believe how hard it is for a shop assistant (this time of the year) to work like a machine till 10, 11, and 12 almost every night’.<sup>78</sup> Overtime was mostly unpaid, and by the 1890s the pressures of Christmas trade meant that many shop assistants were being deprived of their Wednesday half-holiday in the two weeks prior to Christmas.<sup>79</sup>

A weekly half holiday had been achieved voluntarily in many retail sectors since the mid nineteenth century, but the 1911 Shops Act, which came into force on 1 May 1912, was an attempt to enshrine that holiday in law, but actually caused greater confusion at Christmas since it stated that the holiday should not be enforced in the week before a bank holiday.<sup>80</sup> In December 1912, ‘perplexed’ complained to the *Yorkshire Herald* that the practice of announcing that shops would remain open on the Wednesday prior to Christmas Day as the York Traders’ Association were doing, was not sufficient to cover the legal requirements of the act.<sup>81</sup> Christmas fell on a Wednesday that year, and one shop assistant highlighted the fact that he was in danger of losing a day’s holiday, since

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<sup>76</sup> *The Times*, 23 December 1901.

<sup>77</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 20 December 1906.

<sup>78</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 16 December 1907.

<sup>79</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1895.

<sup>80</sup> Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies*, pp. 123-31; Whitaker, *Victorian and Edwardian Shopworkers*, pp. 159-63.

<sup>81</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 6 December 1912.



his half holiday on the 18 December was being taken from him, and if Christmas Day had been an ordinary day, he would have been entitled to a half day on that occasion as well.<sup>82</sup> Different interpretations abounded. The Home Secretary attempted to clarify the act by stating that if tradesmen had remained open on the Wednesday before Christmas then they were obliged to shut an extra half day in Christmas week,<sup>83</sup> whilst in York the Lord Mayor advised traders to grant an extra holiday on the Friday.<sup>84</sup> This conflict of opinion was put into practice, and the *Yorkshire Herald* commented that

The shops' muddle was accentuated again. Although most of the principal business establishments had granted their staffs the three days' holiday, as requested by the Lord Mayor, there were still a large number which resumed business, but many of them only remained open until midday ...<sup>85</sup>

The involvement of the Lord Mayor and the sentiment of a shop assistant who commented that 'Christmas time is a time for the reunion of the family, and the assistant who, as large numbers do, works a distance from home, has very few chances of joining the family circle, and ... is kept at work until very late on Christmas Eve'<sup>86</sup> has a familiar feel, and it is tempting to conclude that little had changed since the 1850s. What can be concluded is that by 1914 the terrain between the desires of shop assistants, retailers and the public was still contested; the public consequences of Christmas intimacy were still being negotiated. Furthermore, strong parallels can be drawn between the position of shop workers and that of domestic and institutional servants.<sup>87</sup> All these workers carried the physical burden of Christmas intimacy, and often found themselves frustratingly on the periphery of fully intimate Christmas experiences. Yet at the same time, many would have forged intimacies through strategies learned not from above, but rather from their own social and familial backgrounds; and whilst they found themselves at the

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<sup>82</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 10 December 1912.

<sup>83</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 17 December 1912.

<sup>84</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 19 December 1912.

<sup>85</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 28 December 1912.

<sup>86</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 19 December 1912.

<sup>87</sup> See chapter one.

lower end of hierarchical power structures, it needs to be remembered that all intimacies in this period were based upon this kind of inequality.

### Christmas Boxes and Postmen

A system of money being given to people in service had existed in England since at least the early seventeenth century. The practice of dropping money into an earthenware box kept by an apprentice was first recorded in 1621, and had been widened to include servants in general by the 1640s. By the 1660s the term 'Christmas boxes' had taken on the connotation of a cash gift paid to tradespeople who had offered services to customers throughout the previous year. Complaints about this system began to emerge in the eighteenth century. In 1710 Jonathan Swift complained that he was being 'undone' by Christmas boxes,<sup>88</sup> whilst in 1756 the Bow Street magistrate Sir John Fielding commented that it was

Burdensome to private families, for, if in the course of the year, you should send for a carpenter to drive a nail or two, or an upholder to take down a bed, a blacksmith to mend your poker, or a bricklayer to repair a hole in a wall, you will certainly see all their apprentices at Christmas and add to these your baker, brewer, butcher, grocer, poulterer, fishmonger, tallow-chandler, glazier, corn-chandler, dustman, chimney-sweeper, watchman, beadles, lamplighters, not to forget the person who sells brick-dust to your footman to clean his knives, and you will have some idea of the Christmas boxes of a private family.<sup>89</sup>

This system, and the complaints that surrounded it, persisted into the twentieth century, only disappearing when certain means of obtaining goods and services had practically disappeared also.<sup>90</sup> In 1851 one York tradesman complained that he had been

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<sup>88</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 23.

<sup>89</sup> Cited in Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 73. The related practice of tradesmen presenting the servants of their customers with Christmas boxes in exchange for their continued patronage will be considered in chapter five as part of the context of developing retail systems.

<sup>90</sup> Margot C. Finn has recently highlighted how Christmas boxes formed an integral part of a gift economy that eventually gave way to market relations and became restricted to familial relations. See *The Character of Credit. Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 84-88.



visited in Christmas week by the rullymen and goods partners of the York and North Midland Railway Company, who in collecting Christmas boxes informed him that they had been and always will be especially careful with his goods. For this tradesman, such action not only contradicted the ruling by the railway company that porters in the passenger department should not be permitted to receive any fee, for he believed that such a ruling should naturally apply to all departments, but it also implied a threat of poor service in the future if a Christmas box was not paid.<sup>91</sup> For some people this was nothing more than begging. One commentator recalled his Boxing Day of 1877:

Within a few minutes my door is assailed by three well-dressed young men asking to give them a Christmas box, on the plea that I have paid their master a good round sum for work executed by them - the beggars - during 1877. I have barely recovered from this shock when I am again interrupted in my work by a banditti of three very respectable looking "apprentices" on a like errand. Then, we have also to expect a swarm of errand boys demanding black mail, and my dear knocker will have no rest for the day.<sup>92</sup>

Such experiences led commentators to make sweeping generalisations about the working classes. One 'householder' was scandalised by the practice of allowing children to collect Christmas boxes:

I am prepared to maintain that to permit children to go about at this season as mendicants is a step in the direction of pauperising their minds and destroying their self-respect. When I see some children begging from door to door for Christmas boxes, I feel inclined to ask - where is the independent British Workman now? Does he exist, and can it be possible that he will allow his sons and daughters to degrade themselves in this way? On the morning of Christmas Day I met in my street a well-dressed boy of about 10, son of the foreman of one of our largest manufactories; his father draws a wage of between £3 and £4 pounds a week. He asked me for a Christmas box, and told me that he had collected eighteen-pence in copper, after a door to door canvass of two or three streets. Now, is not this a disgraceful thing, that parents in such a position should permit their children to demean themselves? No wonder, when adversity comes, that

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<sup>91</sup> *York Herald*, 3 January 1852.

<sup>92</sup> *York Herald*, 27 December 1877.

the British workman collapses, and becomes a cringing beggar, when these are the associations of his early boyhood.<sup>93</sup>

In 1898 *The Times* captured the contemporary motivations for giving Christmas boxes:

We give Christmas boxes for the most part, not because we will, but because we must - because it is customary to give them, because our neighbours give them, because we shall be thought mean if we withhold them, or because in the same case those who expect them will be sulky and disobliging.<sup>94</sup>

*The Times* contextualised the Christmas box within the universal world of the tip, but concluded that ‘as soon as the “tip” becomes compulsory it loses all its grace and justification’.<sup>95</sup>

Many attempts were made to abolish or at least regulate the Christmas box system. In 1850 the custom of Christmas boxes being given to persons connected to the police courts was suppressed by the Home Office,<sup>96</sup> and that decade the Bank of England belatedly enforced a 1695 regulation preventing clerks from accepting Christmas boxes.<sup>97</sup> The introduction of such regulations could cause problems, however. In 1876 one London rail commuter complained about the contradictory notices at Egham railway station in Surrey. A standard sign stating that employees are prohibited from receiving gratuities was accompanied by a special Christmas notice stating that all Christmas gratuities must be entered on a list and signed for; the station master would then distribute the payments equally. Despite the contradiction, this commuter did not object to granting the railway employees a Christmas box, but did object to having the process made public, and being made to enter a generosity competition with his fellow commuters which might become ‘a subject of comment among the passengers and

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<sup>93</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1877.

<sup>94</sup> *The Times*, 10 December 1898.

<sup>95</sup> *The Times*, 10 December 1898.

<sup>96</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1850.

<sup>97</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 143.



porters' alike, and which in turn might lead to bad service.<sup>98</sup> Different sections of the workforce could also use any excuse to try and protect what they perceived as their customary rights. On hearing of a new scheme being discussed to abolish Christmas boxes in 1848, a London special constable argued that the police should be exempt from any abolition, on the grounds of the great effort they had made in combating Chartism that year.<sup>99</sup> Working people were also vigilant in protecting their Christmas boxes from fraudsters. In 1827 the dustmen of St. Martin in the Fields produced a distinctive medal by which real dustmen could be distinguished from impostors.<sup>100</sup>

Despite the hostility to the Christmas-box system, many people were still able to make distinctions concerning the types of service they were and were not prepared to reward. The 'householder' whose opinions I noted earlier commented that he liked to give a present to

my principal cab driver, who lifts many a heavy box without a grumble, and the lamp lighter, who gives my youngsters at the nursery window a cheerful nod every evening as he goes "twinkle twinkle" down the street. ...but why should I be expected or asked to give to a parcel of boys and men to whom I owe no service at all? If I buy ... a hat box, and have it sent up to my house, it is surely unreasonable that the errand boy should ask me to make him a present on the ensuing Christmas. I suppose his master paid him for bringing the article, and he did me no service in bringing it.<sup>101</sup>

The distinction centred upon personalised service and implied some form of intimacy, however artificial, between giver and receiver. According to 'householder', the most deserving case for a Christmas box was the postman.<sup>102</sup> Performing a useful service throughout the year, postmen received a lot of public sympathy for their well-publicised

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<sup>98</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1876; 28 December 1876.

<sup>99</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1848.

<sup>100</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1827. Such schemes might not necessarily work. In 1899 and 1900, two men fraudulently called upon householders in York for Christmas boxes, claiming to be corporation scavengers, and produced a brass medallion with "York Corporation" stamped on it. *Yorkshire Herald*, 20 December 1900.

<sup>101</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1877.

<sup>102</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1877.

low wages, and Christmas boxes were seen as a necessary way of supplementing them. Like shop assistants, postmen were ultimately not helped by parliamentary interventions. Whilst Christmas boxes were explicitly excepted from a general ban on Post Office employees receiving gratuities in 1880,<sup>103</sup> Lord Tweedmouth's committee, appointed in 1895 and reporting two years later, did nothing to address the postmen's wish for Christmas boxes to be converted into additional wages, save for warning them not to ask for them directly, and not to let the non receipt of a Christmas box affect the level of service they provided.<sup>104</sup> Postmen suffered further when the 1907 Prevention of Corruption Act created the widespread public misapprehension that Christmas boxes had now been made illegal; and for the rest of the period regular notices were placed in the newspaper press by the postal authorities assuring the public that postmen were not covered by the Act.

The plight of postmen at Christmas was also exacerbated by the commercial success of the Christmas card from the 1860s onwards, and a corresponding increase in the parcel post. The great strain this placed upon the Post Office workforce can perhaps be measured in terms of the numbers of casual staff that were taken on in London in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods: 3,000 extra men were employed in 1889,<sup>105</sup> rising to 5,000 in 1894,<sup>106</sup> 8,000 in 1908,<sup>107</sup> and 10,500 in 1913.<sup>108</sup> The year-on-year increase in the amount of mail could be considerable. It was estimated that 100,000 cards passed through York's sorting office during a two-day period at Christmas 1881, an increase of 10,000 on the previous year.<sup>109</sup> Such volumes of post led to intense working conditions. In 1903, workers on the 'South Mail', the travelling post office serving Bristol, Shrewsbury and York, were obliged to work for over twenty-four hours with breaks only

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<sup>103</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 143.

<sup>104</sup> H. Robinson, *Britain's Post Office. A History of Development from the Beginnings to the Present Day* (London, 1953), pp. 231-32.

<sup>105</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1889.

<sup>106</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1894.

<sup>107</sup> *The Times*, 5 November 1908.

<sup>108</sup> *The Times*, 12 December 1913.

<sup>109</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1881.



for meals and refreshments.<sup>110</sup> Public sympathy, however, remained highest with those Post Office employees with the highest public presence, the postmen themselves. During Christmas 1906, one correspondent of the *Yorkshire Herald* called upon York to copy London's example of cancelling a Sunday delivery in order to give the postmen a day's rest as a Christmas box, describing them as 'veritable beasts of burden, groaning under the heavy loads of good wishes, which they carry from door to door, cheerfully smiling (seemingly) under it all, because it is a season of "goodwill towards all men".<sup>111</sup> This is important, for by the Edwardian age, the public had come to recognise postmen as the foot soldiers of Christmas intimacy, completing the task of sending Christmas wishes and material goods that maintained networks when people could not be together; as one commentator noted in 1902, the postman 'is the outward and visible sign of a link between ourselves and our friends in all parts of the world'.<sup>112</sup>

### Self-Help and Associationalism<sup>113</sup>

Some nineteenth-century commentators saw the reform of Christmas boxes as an opportunity to promote education and saving. In 1867 a correspondent of the *York Herald* called upon the public to follow the example of the York Gas Company, which gave its apprentices a Christmas box of a ticket for classes at the York Institute.<sup>114</sup> In 1880, A. G. Legard of Headingley recommended giving a Christmas box in the form of stamps attached to Savings Bank sheets,<sup>115</sup> whilst in 1908 Hugh Richardson argued that Boxing Day was an ideal opportunity to question errand boys about their future prospects, whether they were attending night classes, and to highlight the lack of prospects in their present situation.<sup>116</sup> All these schemes fit a perspective of the ideology

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<sup>110</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 26 December 1903.

<sup>111</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 18 December 1906.

<sup>112</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 24 December 1902.

<sup>113</sup> For an introduction to this subject see E. Hopkins, *Working-Class Self-Help in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1995); MacRaild and Brown, *Labour in British Society*, chapter 5; and R. J. Morris, 'Clubs, Societies and Associations', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain . Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge, 1990).

<sup>114</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1867.

<sup>115</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 27 December 1880.

<sup>116</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 21 December 1908.

of self-help being imposed from above by the middle classes, but as Donald MacRaild and David Martin highlight, the relationship between the ideology of self-help and the practice was often more complex. Whilst it is true to say that working-class people often enthusiastically embraced middle-class notions of respectability, they were often combined with an already existing working-class culture. This is particularly true when considering the forms that self-help actually took. Self-help was closely tied to the economic doctrine of *laissez faire*, emphasising a negative view of state intervention as harmful to the entrepreneurial capacity of the individual. When this ethos was later articulated by Samuel Smiles in *Self-Help* (1859) and subsequent works, it glorified the potential of the individual through a life of hard work, temperance and thrift. Yet, in reality, when self-help was put into practice it was usually through associationalism not individualism.<sup>117</sup>

In the context of Christmas, the combining of meagre economic resources often resulted in Christmas savings or goose clubs. Like other forms of voluntary society and self-help organisation, their origins can be traced back to the eighteenth century,<sup>118</sup> though their exemption from registration at Quarter Sessions in Rose's Act of 1793<sup>119</sup> means that very little is known about them, at least until the late-Victorian period. They allowed for expensive items to be purchased through the payment of regular weekly sums, and were often run through pub-based networks,<sup>120</sup> though the association with pubs led to condemnation from temperance circles, and in some circumstances payment allowed only entry into a raffle.<sup>121</sup> By the late-Victorian period, however, Christmas savings clubs had attained respectability, and were sometimes being run by institutions connected with Protestant nonconformist organisations. Evidence exists of eleven men of the 'A' class of the Quaker York Adult School contributing towards a Christmas

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<sup>117</sup> MacRaild and Martin, *Labour in British Society*, pp. 114-18. MacRaild and Martin do stress, however, that the idea of individual improvement was still very potent in the pursuit of knowledge.

<sup>118</sup> MacRaild and Martin, *Labour in British Society*, p. 125.

<sup>119</sup> Hopkins, *Working-Class Self-Help*, p. 14.

<sup>120</sup> MacRaild and Martin, *Labour in British Society*, pp. 133-34.

<sup>121</sup> G. Weightman and S. Humphries, *Christmas Past* (London, 1987), p. 129.



savings club in 1893.<sup>122</sup> After the York police suppressed pub-run goose clubs in 1896,<sup>123</sup> the Wesleyan Skeldergate Mission<sup>124</sup> established a goose club with 35 members. By 1906 their membership had risen to 431.<sup>125</sup> What could be achieved by such organisations was demonstrated by the Christ Church Christmas Club in Leicester in 1885, when 360 members paid in nine shillings and each received 'a goose, 2 lbs. cake, ½ lb. tea, 2 lbs. sugar, 1 lb. currants, 1 lb. raisins, peel, etc., and 4 oranges'. They were able to do this by dealing directly with wholesalers, though this did cause tension with local shopkeepers.<sup>126</sup> Tension could also exist between shopkeepers and less respectable organisations such as working men's clubs.<sup>127</sup> In 1908 W. D. Barker complained about a club in the Bootham district of York who were buying barrels of beer at Christmas direct from the brewer at 25 per cent discount. Barker believed that such activity was unfair, since most of the club members were railway workers, 'and the traders of the city to a great extent provide them with their labour, and they in turn should patronise them'.<sup>128</sup> Evidence obtained by Seebohm Rowntree in 1899 suggests that Christmas had come to play a prominent role within working men's clubs by the turn of the century. At one particular club, the second highest income for the year was listed as 'Bar Committee Christmas Orders', totalling £116. 2s. 7 ½d.; whilst, £15. 13s. 6d. was spent on 'Christmas Goods', £4. 9s. 7d. on Christmas cake and cheese, and £1 was offered as the prize for the Christmas pigeon sweep.<sup>129</sup>

Christmas could also serve a purpose for organisations offering a primarily educational role. Kathleen Farrar has studied the most famous incidence of this: the Christmas party

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<sup>122</sup> YCA, York Adult and Hope Street Sabbath Schools, Acc. 118.21, 'A' Class Christmas Savings Club.

<sup>123</sup> B. S. Rowntree, *Poverty. A Study of Town Life* (London, 1901), p. 312.

<sup>124</sup> Located in North Street until 1900.

<sup>125</sup> *Wesley Mission, Skeldergate, York. Report, 1907* (York, 1907), pp. 11-12.

<sup>126</sup> C. P. Hosgood, 'The "Pigmies of Commerce" and the Working-Class Community: Small Shopkeepers in England, 1870-1914', *Journal of Social History*, 22, (1989), p. 446.

<sup>127</sup> On working men's clubs see R. N. Price, 'The Working Men's Club Movement and Victorian Social Reform Ideology', *Victorian Studies*, 15 (1971), 117-47; and G. Tremlett, *Clubmen: History of the Working Men's Club and Institute Union* (London, 1987).

<sup>128</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 22 December 1908.

<sup>129</sup> Rowntree, *Poverty*, pp. 328-29.



of the Manchester Mechanics' Institution.<sup>130</sup> Part of a drive for rational amusement, the parties began in the early 1830s as a gathering of fifty members following a lecture. By 1840 there were 600 guests, and from 1847 the party was held in the Free Trade Hall. The late 1840s saw thousands attending, including the elite of Manchester, and by 1850 the Institution had come to rely upon the party financially. The event was, however, relatively short lived. Profits rapidly decreased, and the final party took place in early January 1853. An attempt to revive the Christmas party in 1860-61 led to substantial losses for the directors. The Manchester Mechanics' Christmas party was another legitimate example of invented tradition. The early parties were accompanied by lectures on old Christmas customs, the library owned a copy of Thomas K. Hervey's *The Book of Christmas* (1835), and the party books contained frequent references to the novels and poems of Walter Scott, particularly *Marmion*. This antiquarian interest in Christmas was translated into the recreation of old Christmas customs. The 1833-34 party featured the boar's head and wassail bowl; in 1838-39 'St George and the Dragon' was performed by the lords of misrule; in 1848-49 the Free Trade Hall was decorated to represent 'an old Baronial hall of England'; and in 1851 old country sports and pastimes were represented in scenes of village life. Customs and rituals were being selected from the past in order to perpetuate a vision of a bond between the classes, though the emphasis did gradually change by offering a contrast between the unworthy amusements of the past and the progress of the present.<sup>131</sup> It is also important to consider the role Mechanics' Institutes and similar organisations played in disseminating ideas about Christmas. The lectures, books and performances at Manchester must all have shaped the ideas the members had about Christmas. Similarly, the members of the Leeds Mechanics' Institution had access to the leading nineteenth-century Christmas texts.

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<sup>130</sup> For Mechanics' Institutes, see A. D. Garner and E. W. Jenkins, 'The English Mechanics' Institutes: the Case of Leeds, 1824-42', *History of Education*, 13 (1984), 139-52; I. Inkster, 'The Social Context of an Educational Movement: a Revisionist Approach to English Mechanics' Institutes, 1820-1850', *Oxford Review of Education*, 2 (1976), 277-307; and E. Royle, 'Mechanics' Institutes and the Working Classes, 1840-1860', *Historical Journal*, 14 (1971), 305-21. For a recent perspective, see J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London, 2001), chapter 2.

<sup>131</sup> K. R. Farrar, 'The Mechanics' Saturnalia', in D. S. L. Cardwell (ed.), *Artisan to Graduate* (Manchester, 1974), pp. 99-118. See also Cunningham, *Leisure*, pp. 101-2. The extent to which Manchester was representative of the nation as a whole is, however, debatable.



Their library acquired *A Christmas Carol* in 1843,<sup>132</sup> Washington Irving's *Sketch Book* in 1850,<sup>133</sup> and had two copies of Dickens's 'Christmas Books' and two copies of 'Christmas Stories from *Household Words*' in 1870.<sup>134</sup> Such information could also be transmitted orally. At the York Working Men's Reading Room on New Year's Eve 1856, the members heard the Rev. J. H. Palmer read *A Christmas Carol*.<sup>135</sup>

Finally, some consideration should be made of the Christmas intimacies that these worlds of self-help and associationalism forged. In many cases, it is legitimate to imagine masculine intimacies being forged and perpetuated, similar to and sometimes entwined with the work cultures I noted above. Nancy Christie notes how Frederick Bridgen, a working-class Londoner who attended workingmen's associations in the 1860s, believed that they 'recovered some of the older intimacy between master and workman which had been lost in the modern workplace'.<sup>136</sup> However, this was not always the case. Farrar, for example, noted the importance of the introduction of girls to the Manchester Institution, who became part of both the audience and the performance at the Christmas parties; but their most important role for many was as dancing partners. Also, it was in the young ladies' day classes that smaller Christmas gatherings continued to be held.<sup>137</sup> By the Edwardian period, it had become *de rigueur* for organisations to reflect the popular notion of Christmas as the child's Christmas, by holding parties for children of the members. In York, such parties took place at the Hope Street Adult School in 1907;<sup>138</sup> the Burton Lane Adult School in 1908;<sup>139</sup> and the Acomb Adult School in 1910.<sup>140</sup> This was also reflected in wider associational culture. Charles Booth found that the United Radical Club in the east end of London had recently adopted a

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<sup>132</sup> *Annual Report of the Leeds Mechanics' Institution and Literary Society* (Leeds, 1844).

<sup>133</sup> *Annual Report of the Leeds Mechanics' Institution and Literary Society* (Leeds, 1851).

<sup>134</sup> *Annual Report of the Leeds Mechanics' Institution and Literary Society* (Leeds, 1871).

<sup>135</sup> *York Herald*, 3 January 1857.

<sup>136</sup> N. Christie, "'On the Threshold of Manhood": Working-Class Religion and Domesticity in Victorian Britain and Canada', *Histoire Sociale / Social History*, 71 (2003), p. 157.

<sup>137</sup> Farrar, 'Mechanics' Saturnalia', pp. 101, 116.

<sup>138</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 27 December 1907.

<sup>139</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 4 January 1908.

<sup>140</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 6 January 1910.

children's Christmas party,<sup>141</sup> whilst in 1914 a children's party was provided by the Leeds and County Conservative Club.<sup>142</sup> Clearly a shift from masculine intimacies to familial intimacies within the associational culture of Edwardian Christmases was taking place.

### School

With children becoming so important to perceptions of Christmas in the nineteenth century, associations between Christmas and schools becomes a tempting but testing subject for historians: testing because of the scant nature of the evidence of what actually went on in schools, and also because of the basic nature of much of the teaching of the time. What is most important to keep in mind in such a study is the great variety of experience between the many different types of school, and also the fact that the provision of schooling in the Victorian and Edwardian periods was constantly expanding and developing.<sup>143</sup> Before 1800, one of the most famous Christmas customs associated with schools was 'barring out'. First recorded at Witton School in Cheshire in 1558 (but referred to as an old custom in other schools), it emerged within the context of the expansion of school education in the Tudor period and was a reaction to the absolute authority of the school master. When Christmas drew near, boys gathered provisions and weapons in order to seize the school one morning, and if they were able to hold out for a set period (usually three days), then they were granted an addition to the usual Christmas holiday and a relaxation in the normal amount of flogging. If they were unsuccessful, however, they could expect to be severely beaten. Barring out gradually became obsolete as school charters increasingly spelt out pupils' rights, though it did continue as a form of seasonal fun in schools such as Bromfield and

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<sup>141</sup> C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London. First Series: Poverty. 1: East, Central and South London* (London, 1902), p. 102.

<sup>142</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 1 January 1914.

<sup>143</sup> It is not my intention to replicate the history of school-based education here, or to attempt an exhaustive historiography of the subject. For a useful introduction, however, see W. B. Stephens, *Education in Britain 1750-1914* (Basingstoke, 1998); and G. Sutherland, 'Education', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950. Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge, 1990).



Scotby in Cumberland. There is no definite evidence of it existing after 1800. Ronald Hutton has also cast doubt over whether it existed beyond a collection of northern grammar schools.<sup>144</sup> What remained potent, however, was the lack of certainty that surrounded the obtaining of school holidays. It was not unknown for children to receive no Christmas holiday. School founders could be suspicious of holidays. The late-seventeenth-century benefactor of a number of Gloucestershire schools, George Townsend, forbade holidays for children, so that they would not cause 'offence at home or elsewhere', and in the eighteenth century they were not permitted at Wesley's school in Kingswood.<sup>145</sup> Quaker schools resisted the introduction of a Christmas holiday for much of the nineteenth century. At the Mount School in York, the first winter vacation was granted in 1849, but its timing was regulated by the Quarterly meeting rather than Christmas.<sup>146</sup> At Bootham school in the same city, the system of 'halves' was instituted in 1823, combining a long holiday in summer with a two-week winter vacation that began after Christmas.<sup>147</sup> After 1850, even in schools that did grant a Christmas holiday, the experience could fluctuate from year to year. At Raskelf Church of England School in Yorkshire, the children received a fortnight's holiday at Christmas 1864; a week's holiday in 1879; no Christmas holiday in 1880 (because they had received extra holiday in earlier in the year when the school was being whitewashed); two weeks in 1881; and a week in 1883.<sup>148</sup> In 1902, the York School Board decreed that the Christmas holiday should be 'about a fortnight, to be settled each year'.<sup>149</sup> For many poor children who resided at their school, the nineteenth century was a period of gradually increasing freedom. At the Grey Coat Girl's School in York, strict rules regarding holidays were operating in 1789. On Christmas Eve no business was to be done. The girls were to go

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<sup>144</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 104.

<sup>145</sup> K. Thomas, *Rule and Misrule in the Schools of Early Modern England* (Reading, 1976), p. 17. See also *A Short Account of the School in Kingswood* (Bristol, 1749), pp. 4-5; and A. Platts and G. H. Hainton, *Education in Gloucestershire. A Short History* (Gloucester, 1954), p. 24.

<sup>146</sup> I am grateful to Barbara Wilson, archivist of the Mount School, York, for this information.

<sup>147</sup> Terms gradually replaced halves in the 1860s. I am indebted to Margaret Ainscough, archivist of Bootham School, York, for this information. Pimlott highlighted how the headmaster of Bootham commented in 1849 that he would rather there be no holidays at all than they be called Christmas holidays. See Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 91.

<sup>148</sup> BI, Parish Records, PR RAS 35; Raskelf School log book, 1863-85.

<sup>149</sup> YCA, Acc. 158.4.3.1.1; Bilton Street School (Boys) Log Book 1863-1903.



to church, but were not allowed to go home. Holiday was granted on St. Stephen's Day, St. John's Day and Holy Innocent's Day after church, and one full day after that. A list was kept of those girls who were allowed to go home and see their parents.<sup>150</sup> This system was still in place in 1815. By 1870, however, they were allowed to leave for a week following Christmas Day,<sup>151</sup> and in 1889-90 their holiday lasted from December 21 to January 3.<sup>152</sup> However, because of the background of some of the girls at this institution, an element of discretion still had to be maintained, and in 1898 the Ladies' Committee noted that 'Miss James was asked to use her discretion as to girls who have unsuitable homes, remaining in the school'.<sup>153</sup>

Weightman and Humphries identify a recurrent theme in nineteenth-century Christmas literature: the homecoming of the public schoolboy. It was sentimentalised in Washington Irving's *Sketch-Book*<sup>154</sup> and Hervey's *Book of Christmas*.<sup>155</sup> Weightman and Humphries tie this theme to the growth of the public school system in the nineteenth century as the 'one last impetus for the development of the middle-class Christmas homecoming'. As public schools became a major national institution, the sentimental significance of family reunion 'both reflected and reinforced the growing trend towards Christmas becoming a children's festival'.<sup>156</sup> Such an argument is persuasive in terms of positioning children in the wider Christmas culture, but problems are created in the consideration of schools. Both public and grammar schools tended to break up a considerable time before Christmas<sup>157</sup> lessening the tendency for the end of term to be connected to Christmas in any meaningful way. By 1870 the more prestigious schools

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<sup>150</sup> BI, York Charity Schools; YCT/GCS/1/1; Ladies' Committee Book, 1789-1814.

<sup>151</sup> *York Herald*, 31 December 1870.

<sup>152</sup> BI, York Charity Schools; YCT/GCS/1/4; Ladies' Committee Book, 1886-98.

<sup>153</sup> BI, York Charity Schools; YCT/GCS/1/5; Ladies' Committee Book, 1886-98.

<sup>154</sup> W. Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and other Stories* (New York, 1999), p. 153.

<sup>155</sup> T. K. Hervey, *The Book of Christmas* (Ware, 2000), pp. 102-6.

<sup>156</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>157</sup> For example, St. Peter's School in York 'broke up' on 14 December in 1864. *York Herald*, 17 December 1864.



like St. Peter's in York were giving elaborate choral concerts in the week before Christmas which were attended by the local elite.<sup>158</sup>

It is in schools for poorer children that the connections between Christmas and school are the strongest, because schools operated partially in a philanthropic context. In institutions where the children were resident, there is evidence from the late eighteenth century that children were in receipt of a Christmas dinner of roast beef and plum pudding, as the children of the York charity schools did in the 1790s.<sup>159</sup> However, it is only from the 1850s that a series of distinct Christmas treats began to emerge. By 1850 the children of the York Industrial and Ragged Schools were being treated with roast beef and plum pudding, and by 1854 this was being combined with an entertainment organised by the Lady Mayoress.<sup>160</sup> It is not surprising that the early impetus for such treats rested with institutions that were spiritually and organisationally similar to workhouses, which were in many ways the instigators of the Victorian institutional Christmas. In 1853 the children of the Roman Catholic charity schools in York were also in receipt of a Christmas dinner, and were also provided with presents suspended from a large Christmas tree.<sup>161</sup>

In the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, these combinations of Christmas dinner, entertainment, and presents from a tree remained a common feature at schools catering for poor children. However, Christmas also became recognised as a useful tool for maintaining discipline in school, and the treats became increasingly linked to examinations, prize giving and conduct. Mary Clare Martin's study of children and religion in Walthamstow and Leyton reveals Christmas examinations being held at Walthamstow National School in 1840, and examinations were conducted and prizes awarded at Leyton National School from 1863, at Wood Street British School in 1869 and Higham Hill in 1870. Martin argues that this reflected a tendency in local elite

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<sup>158</sup> *York Herald*, 24 December 1870.

<sup>159</sup> They were also provided with this on Easter Sunday and Whitsunday. See Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>160</sup> *York Herald* 28 December 1850; 30 December 1854.

<sup>161</sup> *York Herald*, 31 December 1853.

households for children being expected to perform 'Christmas pieces'.<sup>162</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that the idea of Christmas examinations dated back until at least the eighteenth century, as the children of Methodist Sunday School in Nottingham had a Christmas examination in 1795.<sup>163</sup> Discipline at Christmas can also be found in this period. At the Grey Coat School in 1804, one girl who was caught stealing was denied Christmas dinner and had her holiday privileges curtailed.<sup>164</sup> Like the Christmas treats, however, the majority of Christmas examinations and prize giving seem to have been introduced after 1850. Prizes for attendance had been introduced to the York Ragged and Industrial school by 1859,<sup>165</sup> whilst the Grey Coat Girls were being examined in geography, arithmetic, writing and scripture knowledge by 1870.<sup>166</sup> If the Christmas treat was connected to conduct and attendance, it could be held as a threat the whole year round. At St. Saviour's Sunday School in Leeds in 1883, the scholars were warned at the beginning of the year that bad conduct and attendance would result in the loss of the Christmas treat, a threat that was repeated throughout the year.<sup>167</sup> By 1896, this Sunday School was also linking the catechism to the Christmas treat.<sup>168</sup> In 1901 the Scholars were warned that only the 'regular' catechism classes would be allowed to attend the Christmas treat,<sup>169</sup> whilst the following year this threat was made in July.<sup>170</sup> Perhaps the harshest use of Christmas to instil discipline took place at the York's Blue Coat Boys' School in 1886:

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<sup>162</sup> M. C. H. Martin, 'Children and Religion in Walthamstow and Leyton, c.1740-c.1870', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2000), pp. 387-88. See chapter one for the role this played in making children's role in Christmas a performative one. The role of children performing tasks also fitted into the context of gift reciprocation. During Christmas 1870, John Lister treated the children of Shibden School to a Christmas treat, and between 28 December 1870 and 17 January 1871 nine of the children displayed their writing skills in letters of thanks. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Calderdale, Lister of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, SH:7/JN/599, nine letters from Shibden School children to John Lister.

<sup>163</sup> *The Order of the Examination of the Children Belonging to the Methodist Sunday School, Nottingham, Christmas 1795* (Nottingham, 1795).

<sup>164</sup> BL, York Charity Schools; YCT/GCS/1/1; Ladies' Committee Book, 1789-1814.

<sup>165</sup> *York Herald*, 29 December 1859.

<sup>166</sup> *York Herald*, 31 December 1870.

<sup>167</sup> *St. Saviour's Monthly Paper*, December 1883.

<sup>168</sup> *St. Saviour's Monthly Paper*, December 1896.

<sup>169</sup> *St. Saviour's Monthly Paper*, December 1901.

<sup>170</sup> *St. Saviour's Monthly Paper*, December 1902.



On a table at the end of the room the articles, consisting of toys, spring guns, dominoes, draughts, boats, pocket knives, boxes of paints, and other articles which boys desire, were all displayed, and each youth was allowed to choose the article he preferred, the boys being called to receive their present according to their conduct during the past year, the best behaved boy being allowed first choice.<sup>171</sup>

What is interesting here is that an attempt to make the boys think about the consequences of their actions was probably being overridden by the fostering of material desires.

What kind of idea about Christmas was being disseminated to these children? Were they learning that it was simply about the spectacle of Christmas trees, an opportunity to be fed more than usual, and that reciprocal duties are inherent in the gift relationship? Pimlott has suggested, at least in Church and Sunday schools, that the experience went further, in that children 'had at least some instruction in the Gospel story and meaning of the Nativity', resulting in a 'wider and deeper awareness of the religious significance of Christmas than ever probably before'.<sup>172</sup> The nineteenth century certainly saw an increase in the amount of printed material available about Christmas to Sunday Schools. The only Christmas material included in *A Collection of Hymns for Sunday Schools*, published by the Leeds Sunday School Union in 1824, was 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing'.<sup>173</sup> Half a century later, W. W. How's *The Children's Hymnbook*, which was used in St. Margaret's Sunday School in York, contained 13 Christmas hymns and carols.<sup>174</sup> In 1883, the Rev. John Watson's *Church Teachings for the Church Year* contained advice on how to construct the nativity story from the New Testament Gospels.<sup>175</sup> Actual evidence from schools is harder to obtain. At Acomb Church of England Day School in 1868, the children had collective lessons on the preparation for Christ's

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<sup>171</sup> *York Herald*, 7 January 1886.

<sup>172</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 108.

<sup>173</sup> *A Collection of Hymns for Sunday Schools* (Leeds, 1824).

<sup>174</sup> W. W. How, *The Children's Hymnbook* (London, 187-).

<sup>175</sup> J. Watson, *Church Teachings for the Church Year: A Series of Lessons for the Sundays and Holy Days of the Ecclesiastical Year, for Sunday School Use* (London, 1883), pp. 12-14.

second coming, and the following week on Christmas.<sup>176</sup> The noting of such information was, however, extremely rare. It was more common to find the children singing songs that were associated with Christmas, though again the details are scarce. Songs to be sung in the forthcoming year and subsequently inspected were set out in April, and at Coxwold School in Yorkshire, a song entitled 'A Merry, Merry Christmas' was listed in 1875, whilst 'Christmas Bells' was listed in 1877 and 'Christmas Day' in 1883.<sup>177</sup> New songs could, however, be introduced near to Christmas. In 1882 the teacher at Burythorpe School noted teaching a 'Christmas carol', and in 1883 a song called 'Christmas'. In 1884 the children were taught the words to 'Welcome, little Robin', one of a number of songs that appeared emphasising romantic notions of winter.<sup>178</sup> Christmas carols were taught to the girls at Micklegate School in York the same year.<sup>179</sup> Children could also be involved in decorating the church to which their school was attached. At Acomb the girls were preparing decorations for the church on Christmas Eve 1867, though by 1869 they had fallen victim to the fashion of church decorating, and this task was carried out by local ladies.<sup>180</sup> Decorations made at school could even find their way to the children's homes. At the Bilton Street School in York, the teacher reported in 1872 that 'several of the boys took home some neatly executed illuminated texts and mottoes'.<sup>181</sup> There is also evidence from school log books that children were not the most receptive to learning in the build up to Christmas. Children had a clear expectation of the Christmas holiday that was reflected in frequent comments about their fidgeting, restlessness and inattention. The time of year also led to increased absences, something which teachers seemed to note with an air of resignation. Sometimes, particularly in rural areas, this was simply due to bad weather, but many took time off school to help their mothers prepare for Christmas, as one teacher at Burythorpe School noted in 1881.<sup>182</sup> At Coxwold School the following year, the teacher

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<sup>176</sup> BI, Parish Records; PR AC 23; Acomb Church of England Day School Log Book 1863-79.

<sup>177</sup> BI, Parish Records; PR COX 56; Coxwold School Log Book 1863-86.

<sup>178</sup> BI, Parish Records, PR BUR 15; Burythorpe School Log Book 1874-88.

<sup>179</sup> YCA, Acc. 158.4.17.1.4; Micklegate Schools (Girls) Log Book 1863-94.

<sup>180</sup> BI, Parish Records; PR AC 23; Acomb Church of England Day School Log Book, 1863-79. See chapter two.

<sup>181</sup> YCA, Acc. 158.4.3.1.1; Bilton Street School (Boys) Log Book, 1863-1903.

<sup>182</sup> BI, Parish Records; PR BUR 15; Burythorpe School Log Book 1874-88.



attributed the absences to Christmas 'begging',<sup>183</sup> in common with some of the complaints about Christmas boxes noted earlier.

If some tentative suggestions regarding schools run by the Church of England can be made, can any definitive statement be made about those run by Protestant nonconformists (other than Quakers)? In York, both Congregational and Unitarian schools were having Christmas treats by 1865.<sup>184</sup> However, it is Methodist schools that provide the most interest in this context. As noted in the discussion of examinations above, evidence of some form of use of Christmas in Methodist schools can be traced back to the 1790s. There is also evidence from Stockport, where in 1800 the local Sunday school committee provided the children with a sermon entitled *A Christmas Gift to the Children*. The purpose of this 'gift' was, however, to carry a message of honour and obedience to parents, resistance to 'temptation and wickedness', and to reject the 'wicked sports and pastimes' associated with Christmas.<sup>185</sup> Evidence exists of Christmas treats being provided at Wesleyan Sunday schools in 1840. At the Lofthouse Wesleyan Sabbath School the children were provided with tea and cake, and the schoolroom was decorated with evergreens.<sup>186</sup> The Wesleyan Day Schools in York resolved to have Christmas examinations in 1846.<sup>187</sup> Precise details of what was taught about Christmas in Methodist schools is harder to come by. It seems that the canon of Methodist hymns was largely adhered to. At Wesley Chapel Sunday School, 'Christmas Hymns' 74 and 75 were sung in 1863;<sup>188</sup> whilst at the New Street Sunday School hymns 73, 118 and 288 were sung in the morning of Christmas Eve 1882, and 55, 81, 149 and 476 were sung in the afternoon,<sup>189</sup> none of which were selected from the run of 'Christmas songs' (hymns

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<sup>183</sup> BI, Parish Records; PR COX 56; Coxwold School Log Book 1863-86.

<sup>184</sup> *York Herald*, 30 December 1865.

<sup>185</sup> *A Christmas Gift to the Children who attend the Methodist Sunday School, Stockport* (Stockport, 1800), pp. 2-3. This is consistent with the Methodist attitude to Christmas outlined in chapter two.

<sup>186</sup> *York Herald*, 2 January 1841.

<sup>187</sup> BI, Methodist Circuit Records; MRC 1/6/1; York Wesleyan Day School's Minute Book 1844-80.

<sup>188</sup> BI, Methodist Society Records; MR.Y/WC/61; Wesley Chapel Sunday School Superintendent's Minute Book 1863-66.

<sup>189</sup> BI, Methodist Society Records; MR.Y/NS/22; New Street Sunday School Teacher's Meeting Minute Book 1882-84.

119-37) that were listed in the 1876 edition of *Wesley's Hymns*.<sup>190</sup> There also seems to have been some interest in promoting the idea of the infant Jesus. On Christmas Day 1881 it was noted in the minutes of Wesley Chapel Sunday School: 'How suggestive is this occurrence. Songs of praise to the saviour, who was the "infant Jesus"',<sup>191</sup> whilst in 1884 the New Street Sunday School resolved that the service of song entitled "Infant Saviour" be given on December 21.<sup>192</sup> These Wesleyan Sunday schools also experienced problems with absences. On Christmas Day 1877 it was noted at Wesley Chapel Sunday School that 'attractions elsewhere' had influenced moderate attendance,<sup>193</sup> whilst on Christmas Eve 1882 it was recorded that several of the scholars had taken advantage of the holiday to visit friends.<sup>194</sup>

By the end of the period, the desire to see children perform in public, explored in the previous chapter, had influenced the Christmas celebrations in some schools. In York, Christmas 1913 witnessed the performance of children in the operettas 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'Santa Claus' at Castlegate Council School; a production of *A Christmas Carol* at Haughton School; and a production of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* at St. Peter's School. All these productions were prominent civic events, and pictures of the respective casts appeared in the *Yorkshire Herald*.<sup>195</sup> This is not to suggest that the experience of all these children was the same. The advanced material being presented at St. Peter's School is evocative of that institution's social superiority. Yet this development indicates the beginning of a period in which Christmas became established in schools beyond the cultural forms of philanthropy; and was also indicative of the connection between childhood and Christmas in the public imagination.

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<sup>190</sup> J. Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns for the use of People Called Methodists* (London, 1876).

<sup>191</sup> BI, Methodist Society Records; MR. Y/WC/62; Wesley Chapel Sunday School Superintendent's Minute Book 1873-82.

<sup>192</sup> BI, Methodist Society Records; MR. Y/NS/23; New Street Sunday School Teacher's Meeting Minute Book 1889-93.

<sup>193</sup> BI, Methodist Society Records; MR. Y/WC/62; Wesley Chapel Sunday School Superintendent's Minute Book 1873-82.

<sup>194</sup> BI, Methodist Society Records; MR. Y/WC/63; Wesley Chapel Sunday School Superintendent's Minute Book 1882-92.

<sup>195</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 18 December 1913.



## Conclusion

Against a background of shrinking, and then subsequently expanding legal holidays, I have shown how varied the customary attitude to Christmas holidays remained throughout the nineteenth century. Within this same context, employers came to see the value of paternalistic gestures at Christmas, creating new Christmas intimacies that could either complement or offer relief from the intimacy of the home, particularly when they could be defined in terms of masculinity. The lack of a normal home life, however, was part of the nexus of motivations that drove shop assistants to campaign strongly for a longer Christmas holiday from the 1850s. Their aspirations to middle-class gentility clashed with the reality of a working existence made worse by growing Christmas consumerism, manifesting itself in the ideal of Christmas family reunion. The position of shop assistants was not resolved in this period; there was instead a process of continuing renegotiation between the needs of the shop assistants, retailers and the public. The plight of postmen was not resolved either, as their Christmas working experience was intensified by the transference of intimacy into presents and cards. They did receive public acknowledgement and sympathy, however, in the form of Christmas boxes. Because they were perceived to be giving a valued personal service, they were exempted from a general dislike of Christmas boxes that persisted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which likened the collection of Christmas boxes to begging.

Contemporaries also saw Christmas boxes as an opportunity to spread the gospel of saving and education, two factors that broadly fall into a category of self-help that were normally achieved through associationalism. In the context of Christmas, saving was normally achieved through Christmas savings and goose clubs; institutions which allowed for large purchases to be made through gradual payments over several months. These clubs were in existence throughout the period in question, and gradually became more respectable as they ceased to be run through pub-based networks, though the practice of buying provisions directly from wholesalers did cause tension with retailers;

a situation that was also experienced by working men's clubs. In educational settings Christmas could also have a purpose, as demonstrated by the use of the past at the Manchester Mechanics' Institution. Also important here was the access to Christmas texts provided to the libraries attached to these institutions. In schools, particularly in regard to poor children, a distinct culture of Christmas treats, examinations and prizes emerged in the mid nineteenth century, merging the philanthropic impulse with opportunities to instil discipline. By 1914, the Edwardian desire to see children perform was beginning to supersede the cultural forms laid down by philanthropy sixty years earlier. It is difficult to make any strong claims about the type of message children were being sent about Christmas. An inclination towards learning the nature of the gift relationship is tempered by evidence of nativity stories from published books for Sunday schools, and stress on the Incarnation was apparent in some Methodist schools from the 1880s. However, evidence from Church of England schools, particularly through songs, suggests that the associations with the nativity were probably mixed with customary and pagan imagery.



## Chapter Five: Consuming Christmas Intimacy? Shopping, Advertising, and Travel

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the importance of food, goods and material culture to Christmas intimacy, and to stress the interdependence of the relationships between Christmas intimacy and consumerist experiences of Christmas manifested in shopping cultures, advertising and travel. The first section stresses continuities through debates surrounding Christmas boxes. The second section considers the expansion in demand for foodstuffs, whilst the third section is concerned with Christmas crackers and decorations. The fourth section concentrates on the evolution of the gift, placing particular emphasis on books, toys and Christmas cards. The fifth section analyses the Christmas shopping culture that developed in the late nineteenth century, placing particular emphasis on the department store and the gender implications of shopping. Gender is also one of a number of considerations in the analysis of the development of Christmas advertising that follows. The final section examines trends in Christmas travel, focussing upon the role played by London and seaside hotels, as well as the vogue for Mediterranean and winter sports holidays. A recurrent theme will be the interaction between Christmas intimacy and the contemporary mindset of modernity.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction: Christmas Boxes and Retail Trade

At the beginning of the nineteenth century no consumer culture of Christmas existed. The main relationship between Christmas and the retail trade lay in the use of the Christmas box to secure a regular clientele; in particular this was given to the customer's servants who dealt with the process of gaining household provisions.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> For further reading on this mindset see M. Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, 1983); M. Daunton and B. Rieger (eds), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (Oxford and New York, 2001); and J. Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (London, 1994), pp. 32-36.

<sup>2</sup> This, however, was not the only instance in which Christmas boxes were given. Recalling his working-class upbringing in Poplar, John Blake (b. 1899) stated that the 'shopkeepers and landlords of the locals used to give a gift to all the regular customers who had dealt with them all year round'. See *Memories of Old Poplar* (London, 1977), p. 12. In the Edwardian period, controversy was also caused by

common with the Christmas boxes detailed in the previous two chapters, this system had already become unpopular in the eighteenth century. A frequent complaint centred upon servants who connived with cheating tradesmen, and some shopkeepers found it an unprofitable system. It was typical for shopkeepers in a particular locality to co-operate in order to end the practice of giving Christmas boxes. In 1795 the butchers in the parish of Hackney announced this in a notice in *The Times*,<sup>3</sup> whilst in 1825 the tradesmen of Trowbridge agreed to levy a fine of five pounds on anyone breaking a similar prohibition.<sup>4</sup> In 1833 the York grocer Joseph Rowntree discontinued the custom of giving Christmas boxes to his customers, an action which caused a temporary downturn in trade.<sup>5</sup>

As was indicated in the previous chapter, the giving of Christmas boxes was representative of a personal-service relationship, and this kind of relationship characterised the link between retailer and customer in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, in order to understand the nexus of continuity and change that characterised the development of Christmas in the nineteenth century, it should be recognised that this form of retailing coexisted with the new forms of retailing that developed after 1850. Notices detailing the abandonment of giving Christmas boxes continued to appear, as the grocers of Bridport advertised in 1880,<sup>6</sup> and the issue continued to cause considerable controversy. In 1898 a leading article in *The Times* repeated the familiar suspicions of the system in declaring

The whole theory of this particular of Christmas boxes is that the tradesman and the domestic servant are to combine in a conspiracy to defraud their common employer ... These so-called presents are given for no other motive than to induce the servant, either by omission or commission, to be unfaithful to his master's interests.<sup>7</sup>

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Christmas boxes presented to retailers from manufacturers and wholesalers.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, 9 December 1795; cited in D. Davis, *A History of Shopping* (London, 1966), p. 209.

<sup>4</sup> B. Bushaway, *By Rite. Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700-1880* (London, 1982), p. 258.

<sup>5</sup> A. Vernon, *A Quaker Business Man. The Life of Joseph Rowntree 1836-1925* (York, 1987), p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> Bushaway, *By Rite*, p. 258.

<sup>7</sup> *The Times*, 10 December 1898.



Not everyone agreed with *The Times*, however. One 'householder' from Hampstead argued that, there was nothing "clandestine" in this matter as far as I am concerned. I know my cook has a Christmas box, and I know that my tradesmen - respectable men - give it ... In this matter householders are greatly to blame; they should make a point of paying the tradesmen themselves'.<sup>8</sup> Different interpretations abounded in the confusion caused by the Prevention of Corruption Act in 1907. In December that year a meeting of tradespeople was held in London in order to make 'the public ... clearly understand that Christmas boxes given openly and without corrupt intentions were a legitimate form of interchange of human sentiment between any class of people and another'.<sup>9</sup> In 1909, Sir Edward Fry, president of the Secret Commissions and Bribery Prevention League (SCBPL) reiterated his belief that there was 'no doubt that most Christmas boxes given by a tradesmen to servants are given as an inducement to show favour to the tradesman'.<sup>10</sup> The SCBPL were particularly concerned with the measures some tradesmen were taking to avoid being prosecuted under the Prevention of Corruption Act. In 1907 'a mistress of five servants' complained that her grocer sent out a circular on Boxing Day, 'when so many head of households are out of town', stating that he will continue to provide a Christmas box unless he receives contrary instructions.<sup>11</sup> For the SCBPL this was applying the letter of the law, but not the spirit.<sup>12</sup>

The issue was not resolved by the end of the period. In 1910 the *Grocers' Journal* was lamenting the fact that the 'question has been thrashed out year after year, and as each period of rejoicing comes round we find more and more adherents to up-to-date methods; but still the system survives'; and reported that Bradford Grocers' Association had been 'at loggerheads over the matter'. For the *Grocers' Journal* the reason behind this lay in the inability of grocers' associations to attract 'the large body of traders who remain without their ranks' who were not co-operating with attempts to abolish the

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<sup>8</sup> *The Times*, 24 December 1898.

<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, 6 December 1907.

<sup>10</sup> *The Times*, 1 December 1909.

<sup>11</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1907.

<sup>12</sup> *The Times*, 24 December 1909.

system.<sup>13</sup> Despite these concerns, the older form of retailing that perpetuated the Christmas box system was in decline; and the expanding consumerist Christmas at the turn of century highlighted this. In 1900, the *Grocers' Journal* had urged its readers 'that an absolutely cash trade be the order of the day; selling goods to the masses for cash, and not the classes on credit, is the sure and easy way to a good turnover'.<sup>14</sup>

### Christmas Fare

The association of Christmas with eating is as old as the festival itself. Pimlott has argued that food retained the highest position in the volume of Christmas trade, and highlighted how a trade in turkeys for the London market was already highly organised in the eighteenth century;<sup>15</sup> in 1788 *The Times* noted that 30,000 turkeys had been 'martyred' that season.<sup>16</sup> The turkey had first been introduced to England in the mid sixteenth century, gradually replacing the swan as a feasting food. By the late eighteenth century it had become the fashionable Christmas bird of choice in London, which was supplied by turkey farms in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk and sent to London by stage coach.<sup>17</sup> It had also long been customary for country people to send parcels of turkeys and other produce to friends and relatives in the cities. This custom persisted for much of the nineteenth century. At Christmas 1824 *The Times* reprinted an article from the *Worcester Herald* stating that 'our coaches to London for the last three or four days have been almost exclusively laden with those solid and acceptable remembrances to our metropolitan friends, a profusion of game, the luscious chine, and the choicest cullings of the poultry-yard';<sup>18</sup> whilst on Christmas Day 1825, Robert Sharp of South Cave wrote to his son William in London informing him that 'we are preparing a Box with Christmas cheer for you'.<sup>19</sup> Such remembrances illustrate the importance of food to

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<sup>13</sup> *Grocers' Journal*, 17 December 1910.

<sup>14</sup> *Grocers' Journal*, 8 December 1900.

<sup>15</sup> J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Christmas. A Social History* (Hassocks, 1978), pp. 127, 130.

<sup>16</sup> *The Times*, 26 December 1788.

<sup>17</sup> G. Weightman and S. Humphries, *Christmas Past* (London, 1987), pp. 124-25.

<sup>18</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1824.

<sup>19</sup> J. E. Crowther and P. A. Crowther (eds), *The Diary of Robert Sharp of South Cave. Life in a Yorkshire Village 1812-1837* (Oxford, 1997), p. 29.



the construction of Christmas intimacy. The consumption of special foodstuffs formed a centrepiece of family reunions and gathering of friends during the formative periods of Christmas intimacy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is not surprising that during these periods food was used to illustrate these social bonds when family and friends were absent.

In the Victorian period, press coverage of the traffic of Christmas fare indicated the growth in demand and the sophistication of organisation. In 1840 the *Bury Post* noted that seventy tons of meat and poultry had been sent to London from Bury St. Edmunds in a six day period.<sup>20</sup> The following year turkeys were being conveyed to London from Suffolk by steamer.<sup>21</sup> Increasingly traders were having to look farther afield for supplies. In 1843 turkeys were being supplied from Belgium, France and the Netherlands,<sup>22</sup> and by the 1880s the Christmas supply of meat was being supplemented by suppliers such as the Australian Frozen Meat Company.<sup>23</sup> By 1896 turkeys were being imported from Germany, Italy and Canada, in sufficient quantity to lower their price by up to fifty percent, making them affordable to a much wider range of people.<sup>24</sup> Pimlott has highlighted how England drew upon 'most of the world' for its Christmas supplies, which places emphasis on the need not to exaggerate the links between Christmas and English national identity.<sup>25</sup> This was particularly the case in the supply of Christmas fruits and nuts. Fruit and nuts were strongly associated with Christmas in the nineteenth century, on account of their being luxury items, though, as Michael Winstanley argues, evidence points to the development of a substantial market for fresh produce having developed by the Edwardian period.<sup>26</sup> In 1852 *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* described the apples, pears, hothouse grapes, pineapples, pomegranates, soft medlars, Kent cob-nuts, filberts and foreign nuts available at Covent Garden market on the Saturday

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<sup>20</sup> Reprinted in *The Times*, 25 December 1840.

<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1841.

<sup>22</sup> *The Times*, 16 December 1843; 20 December 1843.

<sup>23</sup> *The Times*, 23 December 1881.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 December 1896.

<sup>25</sup> See M. Connelly, *Christmas. A Social History* (London, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> M. J. Winstanley, *The Shopkeeper's World 1830-1914* (Manchester, 1983), pp. 152-53.

before Christmas Day.<sup>27</sup> By 1898 *The Times's* description of the fruit markets referred to nuts from Turkey; grapes from Belgium, Spain and France; pineapples from the Azores; pears from Canada; tomatoes from France, Italy, Spain and Belgium; chestnuts from Italy, France, and Spain; apples from California and Canada; and bananas from the Canary Islands and Madeira.<sup>28</sup> The English Christmas had become dependent on the consumption of foodstuffs acquired by global trade.<sup>29</sup>

Christmas markets were also a place where poultry and other foodstuffs could be obtained, and it is important to recognise that this form of Christmas shopping coexisted with the developments affecting shops in this period.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, shops did play a crucial role in the supply of Christmas provisions, and the descriptions of the poulterers', fruiterers' and grocers' shops in *A Christmas Carol* indicate how far the process of 'vying' with each other for Christmas trade had developed by the 1840s.<sup>31</sup> Such shops continued to be of importance throughout the period, and another one that can be added to this list is butchers'. Whilst turkeys remained the reserve of the higher echelons of society for most of the period, Weightman and Humphries indicate that the cheaper alternatives, beef and goose, were delineated on geographical lines, with beef being predominant in the north of England and goose in the south.<sup>32</sup> Whilst there is a fair degree of truth in this assertion it does require some qualifying. Beef was the main choice of charity to the poor throughout the country, whilst in a city like York, for example, a full range of meat and poultry could be obtained by the late 1860s.<sup>33</sup> There is

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<sup>27</sup> *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 18, 1852, p. 410.

<sup>28</sup> *The Times*, 22 December 1898.

<sup>29</sup> There were, however, some continuities in the importation of Christmas foodstuffs. Pimlott has commented that 'Oranges, "plums", spices, figs and other imported commodities had long been especially associated with the season, and in the middle of the sixteenth century shippers of wines are recorded as anxious lest through Biscay storm or Channel piracy they should lose the precious loads they were expecting from Spain for the Christmas market'. These imports were mainly for London consumption as home produce was mostly consumed locally. See *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Phillips highlights how studies of retailing have tended to view the transformation of retailing in terms of competition between markets and shops. See 'The Evolution of Markets and Shops in Britain' in J. Benson and G. Shaw (eds), *The Evolution of Retail Systems c1800-1914* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 53-75.

<sup>31</sup> C. Dickens, *Christmas Books* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 48-49.

<sup>32</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 129.

<sup>33</sup> *York Herald*, 28 December 1867.



no doubt, though, that northern towns did place great emphasis on displays of beef. In the 1850s the butchers of York indulged in another of those incidents of invented tradition, by subscribing for a gas banner inscribing 'Hurrah! for the roast beef of old England', which was suspended across the Shambles.<sup>34</sup> The displays of beef were intimately connected with the Christmas Meat Show which took place in York on the Friday before Christmas Day, an important indicator that the Christmas season was beginning in the mid-Victorian period. Butchers would display next to the carcass the honours which the animal had won at the show.<sup>35</sup>

The Christmas retail trade was not only concerned with fresh and natural foodstuffs. Along with supplies of dried fruits, an increasingly important part of the grocers' Christmas trade was based upon sales of confectionery.<sup>36</sup> In 1843 Dickens described the way in which the 'French plums blushed in modest tartness from their highly-decorated boxes',<sup>37</sup> and in 1852 *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* described the 'boxes of foreign confections, adorned with admirable specimens of the lithographic art'.<sup>38</sup> By the 1870s, there is evidence that production was shifting to branded domestic products, though, with the help of the *Grocer*. In 1870 this trade publication declared that Cadbury's 'have shown that we can compete with Continental makers in the production of boxes if we try', and highlighted their 'Mexican' chocolate, as at 'Christmas time the demand is always larger than usual for such articles, and this will be a good opportunity for our readers to "push" the Mexican chocolate'.<sup>39</sup> The sending of samples to a trade magazine, which in turn recommended it to their readers, was an important indicator that the Christmas trade was becoming more organised and commercial, and it remained a prominent feature of the trade press in the weeks before Christmas for the rest of the period. In 1900 the *Grocers' Journal* recommended the 'very pretty fancy boxes of

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<sup>34</sup> *York Herald*, 22 December 1855.

<sup>35</sup> *York Herald*, 19 December 1863; 24 December 1864. See R. Perren, *The Meat Trade in Britain 1840-1914* (London, 1978).

<sup>36</sup> Confectionery also became closely associated with crackers, which are discussed below.

<sup>37</sup> Dickens, *Christmas Books*, p. 49.

<sup>38</sup> *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 18, 1852, p. 410.

<sup>39</sup> *The Grocer*, 3 December 1870.

chocolates' manufactured by Fry's, and urged readers to obtain one of Fry's illustrated catalogues,<sup>40</sup> whilst in 1910 it noted that 'there is nothing more readily saleable at Christmas time than a good half-a-crown's worth [of chocolates], and Messrs. Rowntree offer a number of attractive novelties at this price'. The level of commercialism being attained can be demonstrated by the complexity of material culture that such boxes provided, including as they did gift items such as 'a jewel casket, in red leatherette, with tray; a photo frame in imitation beaten copper; glove and handkerchief boxes in leatherette with panels of imitation Limoges enamel; [and] lacquer work boxes'. But Rowntree's were also producing cheaper lines at a shilling, and as the *Grocers' Journal* commented, 'every class of trade is catered for'.<sup>41</sup>

### Christmas Crackers and Decorations

In considering the history of the Christmas cracker, attention has been naturally drawn to the firm of Tom Smith and Co.<sup>42</sup> Tom Smith was a London confectioner, who established his own company in Clerkenwell producing wedding cakes and sweets around 1840. During a trip to Paris in the 1830s he had conceived the idea of manufacturing bonbons with lucky mottoes, and he initially experimented with putting love notes in the wrapping. According to company legend, Smith was inspired by the cracking sound made by his fire at Christmas, and this was incorporated into the design, and in 1847 the cracker was patented, though it was not until 1860 that the 'crack' was perfected with the addition of the saltpetre strip.<sup>43</sup> The conventional wisdom of the development of the Christmas cracker has it that the sweet was replaced by a small gift, but whilst small gifts were introduced confectionery crackers continued to coexist with more elaborate crackers. Christmas crackers were a great commercial success, and Tom

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<sup>40</sup> *The Grocers' Journal*, 24 November 1900.

<sup>41</sup> *The Grocers' Journal*, 19 November 1910.

<sup>42</sup> See Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 130; Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 41-46; R. Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun. A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford, 1997), p. 119. For a nineteenth-century perspective on Tom Smith and Co., see the *Strand Magazine*, December 1891, pp. 616-22.

<sup>43</sup> VAMAAD, records of Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3; Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 130; Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 43; C. Lalumia, 'Scrooge and Albert. Christmas in the 1840s', *History Today*, December 2001, p. 28.



Smith and Co. experienced an increasing amount of competition as the nineteenth century progressed. In 1880, for example, the *Grocer* carried an advertisement for over ten different designs produced by Batger and Co.;<sup>44</sup> whilst in the 1890s Tom Smith and Co. sent the following warning to the trade: 'it is deemed important to caution the trade against the incalculable injury that is being done by small manufacturers in putting forth monster boxes of gaudy and vulgar crackers lacking appreciable contents'.<sup>45</sup> By the Edwardian period, large department stores such as Gamage's were also producing their own lines of crackers.<sup>46</sup>

Whilst the evidence for the rapid popularisation of the Christmas cracker is undeniable, discerning the cultural and social consequences of this is more problematic. Weightman and Humphries argue that the cracker was an invented tradition, in the sense that the spark from the cracker evoked 'ancient communal fire festivals', but in such a sanitised way as to fit Victorian middle-class sensibilities.<sup>47</sup> There is no real evidence, however, to suggest that the Victorians viewed crackers in this way. Weightman and Humphries locate the pulling of crackers at the dinner table, and whilst this was probably the case in some instances, it is contradictory to the way in which crackers were marketed for most of the nineteenth century, which was as an accessory to the juvenile party. It was not until 1897, for example, that Tom Smith and Co. advertised crackers for table decoration in their Christmas catalogue.<sup>48</sup>

One aspect of Victorian and Edwardian Christmas crackers that has been neglected is the thematic qualities that they embodied, particularly from the late-Victorian period onwards. The amount of choice being offered by Tom Smith and Co. alone seems bewildering to the historian. Some of these crackers represented Christmas themes, such

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<sup>44</sup> *Grocer*, 27 November 1880.

<sup>45</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/16, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1895-96.

<sup>46</sup> *Gamage's Christmas Bazaar 1913*, facsimile reprint with introduction by Alison Adburgham (Newton Abbot, 1974), pp. 158-61.

<sup>47</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 46.

<sup>48</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/17, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1897-98. This corresponds with the *Edwardian* illustration of Christmas crackers being pulled across the dinner table that Weightman and Humphries use to support their argument. See *Christmas Past*, p. 42.

as the 'Father Christmas Box of Fun' produced in 1881, and some of these, such as the 'Twelfth Night Cosaques', were designed with nostalgic images of Christmases past on the box.<sup>49</sup> But these were only a small strand in a much wider picture. Many crackers represented contemporary interest in foreign cultures and racial stereotyping. 'Nigger's delight' crackers were common,<sup>50</sup> and in 1881 it was possible to buy South African crackers, Russian 'Cossack' crackers, crackers from Japan, and India cosaques. These crackers came in extremely elaborate packaging, and in another product of 1881, 'Parnell's Portmanteau', the crackers were 'ornamented with Irish characters, containing grotesque Irish costumes and head dresses, such as Paddy's hat, peasant shawls and aprons trimmed with shamrock leaves ... packed in trunk-shaped boxes with a label of Mr Stewart Parnell on his way from Cork to Westminster'. Whilst the catalogue stated that such a product had 'no political significance whatever',<sup>51</sup> many of the crackers represented current affairs or prominent cultural themes, such as the Darwinian crackers, containing miniature monkeys, of 1890;<sup>52</sup> the Chino-Japanese war crackers of 1895;<sup>53</sup> the suffragette crackers of 1908 (which featured an illustration of a suffragette holding a banner saying 'vote for Tom Smith');<sup>54</sup> and the general election crackers of 1910.<sup>55</sup> Other crackers captured the excitement of modernity, such as the cinematograph crackers, motor car crackers, and the 'marvels of the x rays' crackers produced in 1898.<sup>56</sup> There were also crackers that represented the growing currents of militarism, including the gatling gun repeating crackers of 1895,<sup>57</sup> and 'regulars and volunteers' in 1908.<sup>58</sup> In 1913 Gamage's range of crackers included dreadnought crackers, which came in a box the shape of a battle ship.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/6, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1881-82.

<sup>50</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/16, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1895-96.

<sup>51</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/6, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1881-82.

<sup>52</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/14, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1890-91.

<sup>53</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/16, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1895-96.

<sup>54</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/22, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1908-09.

<sup>55</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/24, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1909-10.

<sup>56</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/18, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1898-99.

<sup>57</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/16, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1895-96.

<sup>58</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/22, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1908-09.

<sup>59</sup> *Gamage's Christmas Bazaar 1913*, p. 160.



How does the historian interpret this range of Christmas crackers?<sup>60</sup> It should be noted that the crackers described above were top of the range, and for reasons of price were not available to everybody, but by 1897 Tom Smith and Co. were offering many boxes at a retail price of 6d. and 9d., so they were supplying the mass market.<sup>61</sup> Two suggestions seem to derive from these products. Firstly, that the intimacy of Christmas became increasingly dependent upon the physical paraphernalia of material culture, particularly as the complexity of these crackers indicates their playing an important role in home celebrations. Secondly, any notions that the late Victorians and Edwardians were passive consumers, or that they existed in an ‘illusion of intensified privacy’, where private life was governed by consumption, are false.<sup>62</sup> The range of themes represented in the crackers suggests an active, conscious relationship between gatherings in the home and social, cultural and political currents prevalent in wider society, once again highlighting the symbiotic nature of the relationship between private and public in this period.

The material culture of Christmas crackers was related to the wider material culture of Christmas decorations. As noted in chapter one, Christmas decorations had a long tradition, and came to play an important role in the development of Christmas intimacy in terms of the special atmosphere created by transformed interiors.<sup>63</sup> Christmas decorations had long been based upon the use of natural evergreen materials, and from the mid nineteenth century onwards received renewed vigour from women’s magazines pushing an aesthetic partly connected to the interest in decorating church interiors.<sup>64</sup> The supply of evergreen materials, and from the mid nineteenth century, Christmas trees<sup>65</sup>, was another major feature of the Christmas markets. In 1862, *Once a Week* reported that

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<sup>60</sup> As Christine Lalumia has indicated, one London shop in 1906 was able to offer sixty-five different designs. See ‘Scrooge and Albert’, p. 28.

<sup>61</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/17, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1897-98.

<sup>62</sup> See J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 156-57.

<sup>63</sup> Though it was not restricted to interiors.

<sup>64</sup> See chapters one and two, and N. Armstrong, “‘Gothic Going Mad’: Aspects of Christmas Church Decoration in the Nineteenth Century”, in K. Sayer and R. Mitchell (eds), *Victorian Gothic* (Leeds, 2003), pp. 3-11.

<sup>65</sup> This in turn created a market for Christmas tree ornaments.

bundles of holly and mistletoe were being sold at Covent Garden, Farringdon and other vegetable markets in London, a process carried out by regular traders and irregular costermongers. At the beginning of December, between six and seven hundred men and boys, mainly from the St. Giles and Seven Dials areas of London, gathered evergreens from the countryside surrounding London, though some were gathered illegally from suburban gardens.<sup>66</sup> In 1896 the *Daily Mail* reported that just one Covent Garden wholesale firm alone distributed £12,000's worth of holly and mistletoe to its customers.<sup>67</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century, an increasing amount of artificial decorations became available. The material-culture link between crackers and decorations meant that it was natural for firms like Tom Smith and Co. to develop their own lines of Christmas decoration. In 1875 they were offering gelatine wreaths, coloured sprays, coloured festoons, and banners and flags containing mottoes such as 'compliments of the season'.<sup>68</sup> These decorations were designed to be interspersed with natural materials, and can be seen as a logical extension of the products offered by the 'ecclesiastical warehouses'.<sup>69</sup> By 1909 Tom Smith and Co. were offering tissue paper decorations, including bells and garlands.<sup>70</sup> The prohibitive cost of decorations in some instances does not necessarily mean that poorer households did not experience this material culture of Christmas through decorations. As Weightman and Humphries show, the rural poor might be able to collect evergreen materials locally, whilst in urban areas home-made paper chains, stuck together with flour paste were common in working-class homes from the 1850s onwards.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Reprinted in *The Times*, 27 December 1862.

<sup>67</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 December 1896.

<sup>68</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/1, Descriptive Catalogue 1875.

<sup>69</sup> Armstrong, 'Gothic Going Mad', pp. 7-8.

<sup>70</sup> VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/24, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1909-10. Hutton has asserted that commercially produced papers hangings had become commercially available in the 1880s in urban areas, and being convenient and reusable, spread to country areas, and down the social scale. See *Stations of the Sun*, p. 120. Of the Edwardian period, John Blake recalled that 'Mum made up some paper chains, with a festive bell hanging in the middle, and had them stretched across the top of the room from wall to wall'. See *Memories of Old Poplar*, p. 12.

<sup>71</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, pp. 112-16.



## From New Year Gifts to Christmas Presents

Before the nineteenth century, a culture of New Year gifts had become well established by the Tudor period. As Hutton argues, in the Tudor and Stuart period the New Year gift 'remained a vital symbol of relationships at the heart of the body politic'.<sup>72</sup> In the seventeenth century evidence has been found to suggest that these gift relationships existed throughout society,<sup>73</sup> whilst advertising evidence from the eighteenth century indicates that New Year gifts were being given to children, though primarily for educational purposes.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, Pimlott has commented that in the eighteenth century New Year gifts 'probably usually took the form of produce and home-made articles'.<sup>75</sup>

It is clear that by the eighteenth century, New Year gifts based upon an official relationship were dying out,<sup>76</sup> a factor which led early-nineteenth-century antiquarians to declare that the New Year gift was obsolete.<sup>77</sup> T. K. Hervey, writing in the 1830s, made the distinction between New Year gifts, which were based upon mutual exchange, and Christmas boxes, which were passed from rich to poor and were not reciprocal.<sup>78</sup> As discussed in chapter three, this form of Christmas giving held a considerable level of continuity, but in the nineteenth century a separation occurred between philanthropy and giving towards family members, especially children.<sup>79</sup> Pimlott has described this

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<sup>72</sup> For example, Queen Elizabeth 'gave gold or silver plate in fixed quantity, from the 136 ounces due to a reigning favourite such as Robert Dudley to the 2 ounces received by the court dwarf. In return she accepted rich clothing, money, jewels, and individual presents in kind down to the marzipan sent by her cook'. Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> In 1616 Ben Johnson noted that an orange, rosemary, brooches, gingerbread, marzipan, and wine were examples of the kind of gifts being made. In the 1660s the aldermen of Cambridge sent fowl or rabbits to the mayor, who provided a feast in return, whilst in the same decade Samuel Pepys exchanged gifts with friends. In the 1720s Henry Bourne commented that presents were common amongst the populace. Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>74</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 23; Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 74.

<sup>75</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 73.

<sup>76</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 71.

<sup>77</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 120; Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 23. Hutton has described this in terms of 'reasons which neither they nor anybody since has managed to discern'.

<sup>78</sup> T. K. Hervey, *The Book of Christmas* (Ware, 2000), p. 188; Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 120.

<sup>79</sup> S. Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York, 1996), p. 227.

apparent shift from New Year to Christmas as a 'transference', locating it in the second half of the nineteenth century, and highlighting it as 'essential to the establishment of present-giving on its modern scale'.<sup>80</sup> How legitimate is this idea of 'transference'? It seems sensible to ascribe the decline of the political gift to changes in the level of sophistication of political relationships. In terms of representations of mutual affection, it would seem natural that this came to be gradually reconstituted around the intimacy of Christmas, based upon its emotive power that was first expressed through the items of foodstuffs that were exchanged as remembrances of the gatherings of family and friends. At the same time, it is also important to highlight continuities. Considerable emphasis must be placed on the role played by gift books. As far back as the sixteenth century, Edwin Haviland Miller has identified gift books presented from authors to patrons on New Year's Day,<sup>81</sup> and the practice of giving highly personalised and decorated books, blank inside, continued for a considerable time after this. By the eighteenth century, however, books were becoming more commercially available, and special children's books were being offered for sale during the Christmas and New Year period, as well as 'pocket books, pocket ledgers, diaries and almanacks'.<sup>82</sup> However, it was advances in printing technology in the nineteenth century which allowed an increasingly literate population to obtain a much wider range of books at an affordable price, and these came to be heavily marketed at the Christmas season,<sup>83</sup> particularly by London and Edinburgh publishing firms who advertised in the national and provincial press. Books remained an important part of the Christmas trade throughout the period, and reviews of Christmas books were a prominent feature in the pages of national and provincial newspapers throughout December. An important part of this trade was the Christmas annual, aimed at children. Though publications aimed at children for the festive season had existed since the eighteenth century, emphasis has been placed upon the importance of *The Christmas Box; an Annual Present for Children*, published in

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<sup>80</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 122.

<sup>81</sup> E. H. Miller, 'New Year's Day Gift Books in the Sixteenth Century', *Studies in Bibliography*, XV (1962), 233-41.

<sup>82</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>83</sup> M. Harrison, *The Story of Christmas. Its Growth and Development from the Earliest Times* (London, 1951), p. 181.



1828, as heralding the beginning of the nineteenth-century Christmas annual. Edited by Thomas Crofton Croker, the *Christmas Box* contained items of history and poetry, including contributions from Sir Walter Scott and Maria Edgeworth.<sup>84</sup> Following this, hundreds of Christmas annual titles appeared throughout the nineteenth century, including *Ainsley's Christmas Annual*, which ran from 1875 to 1890; and *Pear's Christmas Annual*, running from 1891 to 1903. Added to the contents of the *Christmas Box*, were stories, indoor games and puzzles. The Christmas annuals were also an important influence on another nineteenth-century publishing phenomenon, the magazine and newspaper Christmas number. Pimlott has highlighted the role *Punch* played in producing a special Christmas number,<sup>85</sup> and writing in the 1890s, Arthur Pask believed that the form of the Christmas number had been perfected in 1855 when the *Illustrated London News* published its Christmas number with coloured pictures. Although not intended as Christmas presents, the Christmas number became part of the material culture of Christmas in the home, adding to the heightened emotional atmosphere. Though much of the content followed the form of the Christmas annuals, it did not have to be Christmas related. For the illustrated newspapers, stories and colour prints were the main selling points. In 1895 the editor of the *Graphic* mused that 'perhaps the *Graphic* was the first to depart from the usual line of roast beef and plum pudding when we had in our Christmas number a complete story, by Anthony Trollope, of Australian bush life, illustrated by Luke Fildes'. The importance of the Christmas number can be illustrated by the fact that the *Graphic* was paying over £1000 for a single story, and a similar amount for a picture. Similarly, the editor of the *Lady's Pictorial* noted that by 1887 he 'thought the public had had enough of Santa Claus, children and dogs ... and ours being a woman's paper, I determined to experiment with a picture of a pretty woman'. The first product of this experiment was 'Sweet Seventeen' by Corcos, which resulted in sales of 80,000 copies.<sup>86</sup> This allowed the national

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<sup>84</sup> T. C. Croker (ed.), *The Christmas Box and Annual Present for Children* (London, 1828). In 1829 it was published as *The Christmas Box and Annual Present for Young Persons*, and continued as *Marshall's Christmas* in 1831 and 1832. See S. A. Egoff, *Children's Periodicals of the Nineteenth Century: A Survey and Bibliography* (Library Association, Pamphlet 8, 1951); G. Watson (ed.), *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (Cambridge, 1969), vol. 3; Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 129.

<sup>85</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 129.

<sup>86</sup> A. T. Pask, 'The Evolution of Christmas Annuals', *Windsor Magazine*, 2 (1895), pp. 679-709.

illustrated papers to distinguish themselves from the standard Christmas material being presented by the provincial newspapers. In 1892, for example, the *Yorkshire Herald's* Christmas number contained a 'thrilling Christmas story' entitled 'That Terrible Christmas Eve' by Lucy Hardy; legends and anecdotes of Christmas; Christmas riddles; a 'Christmas column for the young'; Christmas poems; and 'Yuletide lore'.<sup>87</sup>

One of the most distinct trends in the growth of Christmas presents in the nineteenth century was the increase in present-giving to children. Weightman and Humphries suggest some of the reasons behind this trend: closer relations between parents and children; a growing desire to protect children from the 'harshness' of the real world; the growth of the middle classes and increased wealth in general; a growing awareness of older customs and in particular a pre-Cromwellian tradition of giving sweets and small presents to children on Christmas Day; and new ritualist mechanisms that promoted the process of giving to children, such as the Christmas tree and the rituals surrounding Santa Claus. But Weightman and Humphries also argue that an uncritical acceptance of these reasons leads to a nostalgic view of past Christmases, and also looked towards social-anthropological explanations of gift giving to suggest that Christmas presents also represented a mechanism to alleviate the tensions caused by the often physical distance in middle-class parent-child relations, a more competitive, exam-oriented society, and the imposition of evangelical modes of discipline.<sup>88</sup> As I discussed in chapter three, these kinds of arguments need to be treated with some scepticism, since they imply a 'rational actor syndrome' in the gift relationship that may have simply not existed. At the same time, these factors can be taken as individual strands in the nexuses of giving and attitudes to children that existed in the nineteenth century, but an important factor to add is the realisation that within the experience of Christmas, children could play an important role in unlocking the full potential of Christmas intimacy.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 17 December 1892.

<sup>88</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, pp. 157-59.

<sup>89</sup> See chapter one.



A key part of Weightman and Humphries argument is the role the home nursery played in Victorian and Edwardian middle-class life, which in turn places emphasis on the need for toys.<sup>90</sup> Following books, toys were the next important product in cementing the giving of Christmas presents. Kenneth Brown argues that toy distributors were quick to recognise the commercial potential of Christmas, highlighting the prominent role that Germans played in the trade, and the German origin of customs surrounding the giving of Christmas presents, particularly the Christmas tree, and in 'London German traders were instrumental in organising Christmas trade fairs and their influence was equally apparent in the arcades and bazaars'.<sup>91</sup> Advertisements for toys as Christmas presents first appeared in the 1850s,<sup>92</sup> and in 1856 Nathaniel Hawthorne noted that the London toy shops were amongst those showing 'some tokens of approaching Christmas'.<sup>93</sup> From the 1870s toys became strongly associated with Christmas, and in particular with the new department stores. Lewis's Bon Marché in Liverpool introduced its first Christmas 'fairyland' in the 1870s, and when in 1887 Whiteley's was gutted by fire, it reopened with a toy section in 1888, making sales worth £12,000. The connection between Christmas and toys at this time is well illustrated by Cockaynes of Sheffield, who after a successful Christmas season selling toys in 1901 tried to sell toys all year round, but quickly abandoned the experiment.<sup>94</sup> However, demand was soon to create the giant toy emporium, notably Hamley's (then located in Oxford Street), and Gamage's of Holborn.<sup>95</sup>

A vast array of toys were available at Christmas by the Edwardian period, adding to the complexity of the festival's material culture. Amongst the toys being offered by Gamage's at Christmas 1913 were toy trains and accessories; electrical novelties; wireless stations; chemistry sets; model boats, aeroplanes and cars; kites; mechanical toys; cowboy and indian outfits; 'harmless guns, pistols, swords, bows and arrows';

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<sup>90</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, pp. 159-60.

<sup>91</sup> K. D. Brown, *The British Toy Business. A History Since 1700* (London, 1996), pp. 20-21, 38.

<sup>92</sup> A. Fraser, *A History of Toys* (London, 1972) p. 211.

<sup>93</sup> Cited in Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 121.

<sup>94</sup> Brown, *British Toy Business*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>95</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 160.

drums and other toy musical instruments; garden games; balls; board games; bricks and cubes; constructional toys; stuffed toys; dolls, dolls' houses, prams and tea sets; and jokes.<sup>96</sup> Trends were, however, discernible. One of these was the popularity of toy soldiers and martial themes in the Edwardian period, signalling the trend towards militarism in society.<sup>97</sup> Mark Connelly shows how this patriotism was also manifested in desire for the toy to be home-made, with *The Times* commenting in 1911 that British-made toys 'are to be preferred to German and American importations'.<sup>98</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that boys caught some of this patriotic fervour. In his autobiography Cyril Beaumont recorded that 'of all the various kinds of presents that I received during the birthdays and Christmases of my childhood I can recall none that afforded me greater delight than a box of toy soldiers, especially of Britain's make'.<sup>99</sup>

Weightman and Humphries comment on the 'craze toys' that were being marketed from the 1880s,<sup>100</sup> and in 1911 *The Times* commented that it was 'a pity that cat-faced dolls and missing links, and other more objectionable monstrosities are now appearing in the big toy bazaars'.<sup>101</sup> In 1913 the *Lady's Pictorial* went further:

Baby ... does not choose for himself. Mothers, fathers, aunties, and god-parents make choice for him, and these are all influenced consciously or unconsciously, by Futurists, Cubists, artists with pencils that run wild and imaginations that are still wilder. They are the humour of pantomime phenomena, of beasts that suggest nightmares and creatures which out-rival in grotesqueness the gargoyles to be seen upon cathedral fronts, on ancient church towers and choir stalls. It is to satisfy their own sense of humour and their own modern craze for the eccentric that grown-ups buy these "hideosities" for little folks ...<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Gamage's Christmas Bazaar 1913*, pp. 1-177.

<sup>97</sup> See chapter one for the ways in which military barracks celebrated Christmas in the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

<sup>98</sup> *The Times*, 23 December 1911; Connelly, *Christmas*, pp. 202-03. See also Fraser, *History of Toys*, pp. 178-95.

<sup>99</sup> C. W. Beaumont, *Flash-Back. Stories of my Youth* (London, 1931), p. 101. See also Brown, *British Toy Business*, p. 58.

<sup>100</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 164.

<sup>101</sup> *The Times*, 23 December 1911.

<sup>102</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 13 December 1913.



Superficially, this reaction to the 'modern' suggests a tension between the cultural manifestations of modernity and the haven of the home that Christmas symbolised and idealised. But on further reflection the existence of such products implies that many more people were actively engaged with modernity, an engagement grounded in this instance in the intimacy of Christmas, dissolving boundaries of private and public. As R. G. Studd (b. 1889) commented: 'Our Christmas holidays were unorthodox. In the early years of the century they were the most up-to-date of Christmases, as modern as the miraculous animated pictures which were a feature of them'.<sup>103</sup>

The large amount of toys available to the children of the middle and upper classes can be partially seen in the amount that were given away to Christmas charities.<sup>104</sup> But charity was the not the only means for working-class children to obtain toys. Children's presents were available from penny bazaars and street traders who congregated in urban centres in the week before Christmas.<sup>105</sup> In 1911 *The Times* declared that 'it is astonishing what a penny will buy in some of the toy shops in the poorer districts', describing, for example, 'a muslin "Christmas stocking"<sup>106</sup> which contained a cracker, a small but soul-stirring trumpet, a tin oystershell, a wooden whistle..., a wooden beat, a paper cap, an assortment of sweets, and a match-box<sup>107</sup> out of which a small mouse popped when it was opened'. *The Times* also noted that in the 'mean streets' reasonably elaborate toys could be purchased for a halfpenny or a farthing. These items were not directly profitable to small shopkeepers, but instead provided an incentive to the

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<sup>103</sup> R. G. Studd, *The Holiday Story* (London, 1950), p. 21.

<sup>104</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>105</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, pp. 164-65.

<sup>106</sup> The existence of manufactured Christmas stockings emphasise how deeply the rituals surrounding Santa Claus had penetrated society. They were being produced as early as 1895, when Tom Smith & Co. produced 'Santa Claus surprise stockings', which were made 'in transparent net of various colours, through which the contents can easily be seen', contents which included 'toys of every description, jewels, curios, picture books, fans, umbrellas, dolls, humming tops, cornets, clarionets, purses, Christmas crackers, [and] confectionery'. VAMAAD, Tom Smith Group Ltd, AAD/1998/3/16, Catalogue of Christmas Novelties 1895-96. That these items, at least in a cheaper form, had penetrated the lower levels of society by the Edwardian period is demonstrated by the autobiography of John Bennett (b. 1902), who in recalling his childhood in Walworth noted receiving 'a cheap shop-purchased Christmas stocking'. H. J. Bennett, *I Was a Walworth Boy* (London, 1980), p. 6.

<sup>107</sup> This matchbox was apparently made in Japan, which re-emphasises the point made earlier concerning the global nature of the business of Christmas.



'ordinary business'. But the displays of cheap toys still attracted the attention of poor children gazing longingly but who could afford nothing.<sup>108</sup> Not all working-class children were so unfortunate. Kenneth Brown shows how many working-class families in the period 1850-1914 made a special effort to obtain toys for their children at Christmas.<sup>109</sup> Recalling her Edwardian childhood in London, Grace Foakes noted that her father obtained dolls for her and her sister on Petticoat Lane for the cost of 1s.11d.<sup>110</sup>

In 1887 the *Drapers' Record* declared that the stocking of toys was the first stage of a 'novel fashion' in which 'fancy articles, foreign to the regular ones kept in stock by drapers ... are sold under the name of "Christmas goods"'. Here the *Drapers' Record* showed how retailers were recognising the powerful intimacy of Christmas as a means to overcome 'a dull season of the year when the regular trade is flat'. Display practices included removing regular items from the shop windows and replacing them with fancy goods, and also displaying those goods on tables in the middle of the shop. Such displays would 'cause considerable attraction to the passers-by, and purchasers of the nic-nacs when once in a shop are ... often induced to buy other things'. These retail practices were not uniformly adopted, however, and could cause tension with other shopkeepers who felt that tradesmen 'ought to confine themselves to their own line'. The *Drapers' Record* also noted regional differences in this practice, noting that it was 'not a new feature with many of the large concerns in the North of England, Scotland and Ireland'. Following on from toys, the *Drapers' Record* stated that 'pretty articles' such as accessories of the 'toilet table' and fancy boxes of haberdashery were being presented in this way, as well as 'art-pottery and Wedgwood' and 'articles of ladies' dress in the form of ties, neckerchiefs, handkerchiefs, and scarves'. The latter of these gift items received particular praise from the *Drapers' Record* for their usefulness, which revealed an awareness of the importance of the gift within the intimacy of Christmas when they argued that such items 'remain in some instances as lasting souvenirs of the good will that has prompted the donors, and on which account ought to

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<sup>108</sup> *The Times*, 23 December 1911.

<sup>109</sup> Brown, *British Toy Business*, p. 60.

<sup>110</sup> G. Foakes, *Between High Walls. A London Childhood* (London, 1972), p. 57.



claim precedence over those “good things” that are provided for the table at this annual festival’.<sup>111</sup> This last statement perhaps signals a shift in the emotional centre of Christmas intimacy from foodstuffs to gift objects.

There is evidence from the following decade that particular types of retailer were benefiting from the increase in Christmas consumerism. In 1896 the *Daily Mail* reported that furniture dealers were complaining of ‘an almost utter stagnation of trade’, and similar complaints were heard from tailors and dressmakers, though the latter did receive an increase in orders for evening dresses.<sup>112</sup> A decade later this situation was being remedied by the ready-to-wear lines.<sup>113</sup> As part of the trend ‘in many departments other than those chiefly concerned to get something “Christmassy” to show and talk about’, the *Drapers’ Record* reported that ready-to-wear items were being exhibited for Christmas around the beginning of December, a practice that ‘was quite new two or three years ago’.<sup>114</sup>

There was a definite sense at the beginning of the twentieth century of Christmas presents being firmly established, but also that almost anything could be given as a Christmas present. The press certainly played an important role in this, as elaborate guides to shops and goods became the norm in December issues of national and provincial newspapers. In 1893, for example, the *Lady’s Pictorial* featured a thirty-seven page guide to potential Christmas presents available in London’s West-End;<sup>115</sup> whilst an eight-page ‘Christmas Presents Supplement’ covered similar territory in the *Daily Mail* in 1904, which showed the level of collaboration between retail firms and newspapers, being, as they were, interspersed with formal advertisements.<sup>116</sup> Very quickly provincial newspapers borrowed this cultural form to

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<sup>111</sup> *Drapers’ Record*, 17 December 1887.

<sup>112</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 December 1896.

<sup>113</sup> For the origin of ready-to-wear see A. Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping 1800-1914* (London, 1964), pp. 123-36.

<sup>114</sup> *Drapers’ Record*, 23 November 1907.

<sup>115</sup> *Lady’s Pictorial*, 2 December 1893.

<sup>116</sup> *Daily Mail*, 6 December 1904.

review the shops in their own localities. In 1900 the *Yorkshire Herald* introduced a Christmas review of the shops in York, featuring the chief attractions of thirty-nine retail outlets. A wide range of goods was covered including furniture, drapery and hosiery, millinery, toys, books, musical instruments, wines and spirits, and chemist products. Modern phenomena such as the gramophone were contrasted with more traditional products of the grocery and 'fancy goods' genres.<sup>117</sup> The *Leeds Mercury* had adopted such a guide by 1910, but instead of the comprehensive coverage aimed at by the *Yorkshire Herald*, the *Leeds Mercury* focused on large stores such as Marshall and Snelgrove and Montieth, Hamilton and Montieth's Grand Pygmalion.<sup>118</sup> This cultural form also affected the presentation of information within the trade, as in 1907 when the *Drapers' Record* featured a twelve-page buyers' guide for Christmas presents.<sup>119</sup>

From the increase in the range and volume of Christmas presents being purchased by the beginning of the twentieth century, it can perhaps be inferred that present giving had gone beyond children to represent a number of relationships, both vertical, diagonal, and horizontal, between family, kin and friends. An important factor in widening the scope of Christmas presents was the popularity of the Christmas card after 1870.<sup>120</sup> As is well documented, nineteenth-century Christmas cards included a wide range of subject matter that went well beyond what is now considered typical Christmas imagery. For example, pictures of animals, women and children were common, as were comic and political cards. As George Buday has commented, 'Christmas cards represent in a condensed, microscopic panorama the macrocosm of the endless variations, contrasts and divergencies so characteristic of the latter half of the "glorious century"'.<sup>121</sup> This

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<sup>117</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 18 December 1900.

<sup>118</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 15 December 1910; 16 December 1910.

<sup>119</sup> *Drapers' Record*, 9 November 1907.

<sup>120</sup> A considerable, though largely antiquarian, literature exists on the history of the Christmas card, and it is not my intention to reprise that history here. See G. Buday, *The History of the Christmas Card* (London, 1964); L. D. Ettlinger and R. G. Holloway, *Compliments of the Season* (London, 1947); M. Higgs, *Christmas Cards from the 1840s to the 1940s* (Princes Risborough, 1999); A. Blair, *Christmas Cards for the Collector* (London, 1986); L. Seddon, *A Gallery of Greetings* (Manchester, 1992); and Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, pp. 101-07. For a social-anthropological analysis see M. Searle-Chatterjee, 'Christmas Card and the Construction of Social Relations in Britain Today', in D. Miller (ed.), *Unwrapping Christmas* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 176-92.

<sup>121</sup> Buday, *History of the Christmas Card*, p. 87.



variety again added to the material culture of Christmas intimacy, in a similar fashion to the Christmas crackers noted above. Perhaps more importantly, the Christmas card simplified the process of sending written Christmas greetings that had become common in the eighteenth century,<sup>122</sup> and meant that a wider circle of people could be contacted with a minimum of effort. Pimlott has argued that the Christmas card 'provided a release for emotions which were normally inhibited. It also served as a vehicle for often unconscious self-expression'.<sup>123</sup> In 1883 *The Times* declared that the Christmas card 'fulfils a high end' in the process of conveying Christmas wishes, which was 'a happy means of ending strifes, cementing broken friendships and strengthening family and neighbourly ties'.<sup>124</sup> Not everyone, however, agreed. The *Sussex Daily News*, for example, reported in 1910 that exception was being taken towards the comic Christmas card, because it was 'out of keeping with the spirit of Christmas'.<sup>125</sup> Earlier in 1877, one resident of Bristol complained that in the sending of Christmas cards, people were bringing 'up from the depths of their inner consciousness the names of people they know little, and for whom they care less ... in order to swell out the total number they may despatch as forming a ground of boasting'; whilst the number received were being 'recounted with a zest and pride'. This Bristol resident finally concluded that when 'Mary Ann the maid can boast of as many Christmas cards as her mistress or the young ladies, it will soon go out of favour'.<sup>126</sup> Whilst the Christmas card did not, of course, go out of fashion, a belief that it would persisted for the rest of the period. The Bristol residents' comments revealed that snobbishness could be a factor in the consumption of Christmas cards, and Pimlott has highlighted how they became less popular in high society in 1880s and 1890s as production shifted to the needs of the mass market.<sup>127</sup> Christmas cards became available in a much wider range of shops. In 1881 the *York Herald* reported that

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<sup>122</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 75.

<sup>123</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 106.

<sup>124</sup> *The Times*, 25 December 1883.

<sup>125</sup> Reprinted in the *Grocers' Journal*, 24 December 1910.

<sup>126</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1877.

<sup>127</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 106.

Never before was there such an abundance of Christmas cards exhibited in the shop windows. Formerly those presents were only to be had of the booksellers, but so prevalent has the custom become of purchasing these artistic productions that nearly every draper and dealer in ornamental and fancy goods has a large and conspicuous display of them.<sup>128</sup>

New ways to exploit the Christmas card commercially were also being found. In 1882, Chapman's Christmas Bazaar in York was offering free Christmas cards with purchases above 6d.,<sup>129</sup> whilst in 1884 Walter Henry Bacon's Kensington Fine Art Distribution used a coupon in his advertisements with which customers could obtain free cards.<sup>130</sup> Given the context in which the popularisation of Christmas cards was taking place, it is not surprising that there were constant misgivings about them. This is due to their relationship with the intimacy of Christmas. Whilst they could have a positive affect, it is also true that the sending of a Christmas card could also be construed as a reduction in the amount of emotional labour that had been previously invested in the Christmas letter.<sup>131</sup> The behaviour described by the Bristol resident above also has problems for the intimacy of Christmas, because it seems to imply the debasement of that very intimacy and the construction of a series of false intimacies. In reality, a combination of intimacy and pragmatism probably underlay the sending of Christmas cards. In 1910 the *Sussex Daily News* highlighted three reasons for sending Christmas cards. Firstly, because it was customary; secondly because it imposed a timely reason to keep in touch with friends; and thirdly because 'we like at Christmas time to give people pleasure, whether by means of cards, of entertainments, of presents, or of gratuities'. In this third point the writer is implying the power of Christmas intimacy, and went on to suggest that people had learnt to encode this feeling in the formal greetings of the season: 'they know what we mean by the salutation, and it is all very right'.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *York Herald*, 24 December 1881.

<sup>129</sup> *York Herald*, 2 December 1882.

<sup>130</sup> *York Herald*, 6 December 1884.

<sup>131</sup> Though the coexistence of both forms should not be discounted.

<sup>132</sup> Reprinted in the *Grocers' Journal*, 24 December 1910.



The sending of Christmas cards in the post might also have had an influence on the amount of Christmas presents being sent by post, a means which became easier and cheaper with the introduction of the parcel post in 1883, and the subsequent reduction of the parcel rate from 1s. for seven pounds to 11d. for eleven pounds in 1900.<sup>133</sup> Another part of the realm of Christmas shopping and consumption that was affected by mail services was the growth of mail order. Alison Adburgham has shown how important mail order was to stores such as Marshall and Snelgrove by the 1880s, though telephones were not exploited until the 1890s.<sup>134</sup> By the Edwardian period most of the large West End stores in London were producing extensive Christmas catalogues that were sent out as early as October.<sup>135</sup> These catalogues featured the whole range of items available in store, and in 1913 Gamage's Christmas catalogue was 470 pages long.<sup>136</sup> These catalogues undoubtedly contributed to the lengthening of the Christmas shopping season, and also created longing for material goods in the minds of children. John Scupham of Market Rasen in Lincolnshire, who grew up in the 1900s, recalled poring over the Gamage's catalogue and conjuring up 'romantic visions of huge model yachts, train sets that would fill our biggest room, and resplendent regiments equipped with canon which could fire rubber shells', adding also that 'I generally got what I wanted for Christmas; I had about two or three pounds to spend on things in the catalogue, and the order would go in around late November'.<sup>137</sup> This narrative signals a shift to a position where a tension appears between the forces of consumerism and the intimacy of Christmas, a relationship that for the most part had been complementary. The shift

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<sup>133</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 124. Previously parcels had been handled by private agencies. In 1815 one correspondent of *The Times* referred to the delivery charges made on parcels in stating that 'when the affection and liberality of absent friends will be evinced by their presents [presumably referring to foodstuffs], a part of your paper cannot be better employed than in preventing an abundant harvest of frauds'. *The Times*, 25 December 1815.

<sup>134</sup> Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping*, p. 233-34.

<sup>135</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 160. Mail-order shopping at Christmas may have also received a boost from the weather conditions in Edwardian London. In the week before Christmas in 1904, an 'unprecedented fog' deterred many people from making a pre-Christmas shopping trip to London leading to what the *Daily Mail* called a 'disastrous effect on trade'. A by-product of this situation was a large increase in the mail order business. Whiteley's were receiving nearly 1,000 orders a day by telephone, for which purpose eight full-time staff were engaged, whilst 11,000 letters were received a day, where forty staff were employed to open them. *Daily Mail*, 23 December 1904.

<sup>136</sup> *Gamage's Christmas Bazaar 1913*.

<sup>137</sup> Cited in Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 164.

comes about in the transformation of the gift relationship, so that the child demands what are believed to be natural rights to material objects within the diluted state of Christmas intimacy promoted by an extended shopping season.

### The Growth of a Christmas Shopping Culture

The descriptions of shops during the Christmas season that exist from the 1840s and 1850s imply, particularly in the case of purveyors of foodstuffs, that retailers were already aware of the need to create spectacle through special Christmas displays. Often this involved the replication of the home by the use of evergreens, as the butchers of York were doing in the 1850s.<sup>138</sup> Light also played a key part in this creation of spectacle; in 1882 the *York Herald* declared: 'Last night in a blaze of light, the shop windows of the butchers, poultry dealers, grocers, confectioners, drapers, and booksellers in this city were brilliant in their displays of those commodities which combine to make "merry" the Christmas festival'.<sup>139</sup> In 1900 the *Grocers' Journal* spelt out the reasons behind this: 'The shops themselves should be kept brilliantly lighted; this is particularly necessary when gloom and fog outside have so depressing an effect. To get people outside the shop is halfway to success'.<sup>140</sup> By the end of the period there is evidence that display was being placed upon a more commercial and professional footing. In 1910, for example, J. Watson Ltd were offering a free working model aeroplane to grocers in return for them stocking a range of Indian and Ceylon teas: 'Bringing Tea direct from the PLANTATION will make your Xmas Display the TALK of the TOWN and greatly increase your XMAS TAKINGS'.<sup>141</sup> In 1913 the firm of Dudley & Co. were advertising in the *Drapers' Record*, offering retailers 'over 100 of the most novel and attractive "Xmas Present" window tickets and window posters ever produced', and also 'everything necessary for the embellishment of your Xmas window and make it redolent of the festive season'.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *York Herald*, 24 December 1852.

<sup>139</sup> *York Herald*, 23 December 1882.

<sup>140</sup> *Grocers' Journal*, 8 December 1900.

<sup>141</sup> *Grocers' Journal*, 19 November 1910.

<sup>142</sup> *Drapers' Record*, 15 November 1913.



The growth of a Christmas shopping culture also depended upon making shops a comfortable environment to be in, and here historians have rightly highlighted the role played by the department stores that developed in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>143</sup> The consensus of this literature is that by the 1870s and 1880s shopping in the West End of London had become a safe and pleasurable experience for women, and also a means for them to gain access to public territory.<sup>144</sup> It is important to stress, as Claire Walsh does, that shopping was not a new experience for women in the late nineteenth century, and that eighteenth-century retailers had gone to considerable trouble and expense to create a comfortable shopping experience.<sup>145</sup> There was no real connection, however, between the developments of the eighteenth century and Christmas, whilst in the late nineteenth century Christmas played an important role in the expanding shopping culture, a factor which only Connolly and Hosgood have really acknowledged. One important feature of the debates surrounding late-Victorian shopping has been the focus on the moral authority of the female shopper.<sup>146</sup> Hosgood has revealed how female shoppers were portrayed in the press as cunning and duplicitous, particularly during the January sales period that developed as a response to the problems of remainder stock after the Christmas period.<sup>147</sup> During the Christmas shopping season, however, Hosgood found that female shoppers were being portrayed as

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<sup>143</sup> See B. Lancaster, *The Department Store. A Social History* (London and New York, 1995); E. D. Rappaport, "'The Halls of Temptation': Gender, Politics, and the Construction of the Department Store in late Victorian London", *Journal of British Studies*, 35 (1996), 58-83; and *Shopping for Pleasure. Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, 2000); C. P. Hosgood, "'Doing the Shops" at Christmas: Women, Men and the Department Store in England, c. 1880-1914, in G. Crossick and S. Jaumain (eds), *Cathedrals of Consumption. The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 97-115; J. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992); C. Beward, *The Culture of Fashion: a New History of Fashionable Dress* (Manchester, 1995); Connolly, *Christmas*, pp. 189-204; and R. Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (New York, 1985).

<sup>144</sup> For a review of this literature see Hosgood, 'Doing the Shops', pp. 98-99.

<sup>145</sup> C. Walsh, 'Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of Design History*, 8 (1995), 157-76; Hosgood, 'Doing the Shops', p.99.

<sup>146</sup> Rachel Bowlby, for example, focuses on the seduction of female shoppers by the male-dominated industries of advertising, fashion, and retailing, in a way that reinforced their narcissism. See *Just Looking*, pp. 20-32; Hosgood, 'Doing the Shops', pp. 98-99.

<sup>147</sup> Hosgood, 'Doing the Shops', pp. 107-13; 'Mrs Pooter's Purchase: Lower-Middle Class Consumerism and the Sales, 1870-1914', in A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (eds), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism. Middle-Class Identity in Britain 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 146-63.

selflessly promoting the happiness of their families.<sup>148</sup> This phenomenon is ably demonstrated by an article that appeared in the *Daily Mail* in 1904. It attempted to construe the motivations behind the 'women of every age and of every degree staring at the glittering windows'. Normally, according to the *Mail*, these women were thinking

of themselves alone; others perhaps of the youths on whom they have set their hearts; others, very surely of the husbands whose waning admiration they would pitifully strive to keep by the frail tie of frill and ribbon. The lonely woman is there, the gentle old soul is there, the soft-eyed girl is there, the managing mother is there, and each heart brings a different hunger to the gay windows.<sup>149</sup>

At Christmas, by contrast, 'there is greater unanimity of expression, ... and Christmas shopping makes the whole world of women kin. Everybody today seems to be buying things for somebody else; the expression of the bargain hunter is swept away, and an unselfish joy sits in the eyes of the shoppers'.<sup>150</sup>

Hosgood's research has important implications for the gendering of Christmas.<sup>151</sup> Concurrent with these press representations of the female shopper at Christmas was the removal and ridicule of the male Christmas shopper.<sup>152</sup> In 1880, for example, the Christmas number of the *Penny Illustrated Newspaper* featured a present-laden father, entering his home, welcomed by wife and children.<sup>153</sup> By 1907 the *Sphere* had placed the mother in this central position.<sup>154</sup> Those men who did go Christmas shopping were portrayed as bungling incompetents. In 1888 the *Lady's Pictorial* featured a cartoon in which a man purchases a walking stick for his wife, has a series of mishaps on the way home, and is greeted by an indignant wife who complains that the item is out of fashion

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<sup>148</sup> Hosgood, 'Doing the Shops', p. 103.

<sup>149</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 December 1904.

<sup>150</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 December 1904.

<sup>151</sup> For other gendered readings of Christmas, see L. Bella, *The Christmas Imperative. Leisure, Family, and Women's Work* (Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1992); and J. Tosh, *A Man's Place. Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, 1999), pp. 39, 49, 82-83, 88, 147-49.

<sup>152</sup> Hosgood, 'Doing the Shops', pp. 104-06.

<sup>153</sup> *Penny Illustrated Newspaper*, 11 December 1880.

<sup>154</sup> *Sphere*, 23 November 1908.



and comments on man's 'stupidity'.<sup>155</sup> This attitude was still apparent in 1912 when the *Lady's Pictorial* declared that men 'sally forth out in the hope that they will find something, with the result that they rarely buy satisfactorily'.<sup>156</sup> With the home and Christmas being perceived as feminine worlds, shopping was clearly being perceived as an extension of the domestic Christmas, and this attitude to male participation within it clearly reflects the masculine ambiguity towards domesticity reflected in what John Tosh has termed the 'flight from domesticity', which could in some cases leave male participation in the intimacy of Christmas in a position of uncertainty.<sup>157</sup> Hosgood uses the spirit of inversion associated with Christmas and forms of carnival to explain these representations of male and female Christmas shoppers in late-Victorian and Edwardian England. In this system of explanation, Christmas shopping represents a temporary release from the norms of patriarchal authority, shifting that authority to the wife and mother, before she is symbolically stripped of this authority when the January sales arrive.<sup>158</sup> Whilst the spirit of inversion is undoubtedly an important strand in the culture of Christmas, its importance has been exaggerated, particularly in terms of overstating the cultural currency of pantomime.<sup>159</sup> Conversely, in chapter one I indicated that the power relationships between husband and wife within the intimacy of Christmas were being obscured by the relationship between parents and children, so this may have been an important arena for these kinds of issues to be played out.<sup>160</sup>

One aspect of the Christmas shopping culture that has been underestimated is that of the child shopper. Bill Lancaster attributes the first Santa's Grotto to J. R. Robert's store in Stratford, London, in December 1888, when it was reported that 17,000 children

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<sup>155</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 29 December 1888; Hosgood, 'Doing the Shops', p. 106.

<sup>156</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 21 December 1912; Hosgood, 'Doing the Shops', p. 105. The wider context of this article was a concern for the plight of shop workers in the final days before Christmas, which translated into the belief that Christmas shopping should be carried in an earlier and more leisurely fashion, and that late purchasing equated to bad purchasing, a feature that affected both men and women, when 'folk ... plunge from Christmas cakes to lace handkerchiefs and thence to photograph frames and blouses without any plans of purchase in their heads'. For the condition of shop workers at Christmas, see chapter four.

<sup>157</sup> Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 170-94; see also chapter one.

<sup>158</sup> Hosgood, 'Doing the Shops', pp. 107-13. See also 'Mrs Pooter's Purchase'.

<sup>159</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>160</sup> Though it is also important to remember that these are *representations*.

visited Santa Claus.<sup>161</sup> The creation of shopping arenas for children at Christmas spread rapidly in the 1890s and 1900s, aiding the quick assimilation of Father Christmas/Santa Claus rituals into society. They comprised elaborately designed in-store displays, often called 'Christmas Bazaars', though this term had much wider connotations.<sup>162</sup> At one Leeds department store in 1905, a scene featured a snow-covered old English village at Christmas, suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Father Christmas in a motor car.<sup>163</sup> At Gamage's in 1908, a miniature railway ran

through tunnels and cuttings, over bridges and embankment, past villages, each with its station, past a cattle-yard and a sheep-yard, past a football field with leaden footballers in attitudes of extreme activity, a Salvation Army band on a boulevard, a military band in a kiosk; and everywhere are passengers and porters and railwaymen, telegraph lines, electric standards, goods sheds, signals, [and] switches.<sup>164</sup>

At Peter Robinson's, Oxford Street, in 1913, in what the *Lady's Pictorial* termed the 'children's dreamland realised', the spectacle began with a miniature recreation of Hendon Aerodrome, where airships deliver presents. This was followed by the 'children's dream train' which children boarded for the cost of 6d. per ticket or 1s. first class, that took them 'off on a tour through an enchanted land, and round a great golden Spanish galleon laden with treasures. A stop is eventually made at a castle door, which opening, discloses none other than Father Christmas himself'.<sup>165</sup> By this stage these kind of Christmas Bazaars had become so associated with children that the *Lady's Pictorial* reported that 'objection was recently taken to grown-ups frequenting the Christmas Bazaars'.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Lancaster, *Department Store*, pp. 23-24; Connelly, *Christmas*, p. 192.

<sup>162</sup> Michael Moss and Alison Turton attribute Walter Wilson's Colosseum in Glasgow as pioneering the first department-store style Christmas bazaar in the mid 1880s. See M. Moss and A. Turton, *A Legend of Retailing. House of Fraser* (London, 1989), p. 72.

<sup>163</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 11 December 1905.

<sup>164</sup> *Daily Mail*, 16 December 1908.

<sup>165</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 22 November 1913.

<sup>166</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 20 December 1913.



These displays drew children into a shopping culture. Reporting on the ‘crowds of enraptured children’ at the Christmas shops, the *Daily Mail* noted that ‘children are beginning to flock to the great centres, with their mothers and aunts and governesses and nurses, with money in their purses and joy in their hearts’. The *Daily Mail* also commented that ‘they are mostly the smaller children who go shopping now; their elder brothers and sisters will come later, when examinations and breaking-ups are over’.<sup>167</sup> In 1903 the breaking up of school prompted the *Daily Telegraph* to report that Monday 22 December had been the ‘children’s day’ at the shops where whole ‘windows that last week were given up to furs, dressing-cases, costly items in silver, and so forth were now filled with pretty, inexpensive wares that would appeal to more juvenile tastes and purses’.<sup>168</sup> Despite receiving gifts themselves from store-employed Santa Clauses, the implication is that middle- and upper-class children were buying for other people, and further represents the expansion of gift relationships existing under the banner of Christmas presents.

The culture of Christmas perpetuated by the shops in late-Victorian and Edwardian England inevitably spilled over into the streets. Weightman and Humphries emphasise how the lavish displays of the Christmas shops highlighted the gap between rich and poor and caused resentment amongst poorer children.<sup>169</sup> There is evidence to show how children were drawn to these displays of spectacle and consumption. In 1906 one York resident complained about the appearance of a store Santa Claus: ‘Almost before school closing, the pavement is made impassable by a small army of children, struggling to obtain a favourable position against the appearance of “Santa”, and totally oblivious to the appeals of a burly but good-natured policeman’.<sup>170</sup> There was also a more general concern by the crowds generated by Christmas shopping, and in 1909 the police were

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<sup>167</sup> *Daily Mail*, 16 December 1908.

<sup>168</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 23 December 1903.

<sup>169</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 165.

<sup>170</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 20 December 1906. This correspondent made clear that this Santa Claus was handing out goods for free, and made the point that ‘barely one word of thanks or gratitude was accorded to the donor’. This was attributed to free school board education, which the York resident blamed for a decline in good conduct and respect for authority. See chapter three for fears surrounding juvenile delinquency at Christmas.

called to Swan and Edgar in London because the crowds at the corner of Great Marlborough Street and Regent Street had entirely blocked the roads and brought traffic to a standstill.<sup>171</sup> In 1913 *The Times* complained that 'every year at this season the streets of London grow more tumultuously crowded, and the mere physical difficulty of making one's way through the throng to do one's Christmas shopping becomes greater', a situation which threatened the feelings of Christmas intimacy:

even the mortality caused by motor-omnibuses is ultimately as socially destructive as the moral degradation of our chaotic pavements, with the loss of self-respect, the fraying of the temper, and, above all, the dislike of one's fellow-beings which they engender. Even at the season of peace and goodwill he must be a democrat indeed who can feel any real affection for his fellow-citizens in the mass after an hour amid the hurly-burly of the streets.<sup>172</sup>

Images of crowds were one of the defining features of the perception of modernity in late-Victorian and Edwardian England. It is important, however, not to over emphasise the ways in which modernity created tensions at Christmas. Running parallel with these complaints was an excitement about the crowds of Christmas shoppers. In 1908 the *Daily Mail* described the 'Christmas crowd' as 'the crowd that enjoys itself';<sup>173</sup> whilst in 1910 the *Lady's Pictorial* commented on how women were 'not likely to abate one jot or tittle of the exquisite delight of Christmas shopping', where 'there will be just the same exciting and excited crowds in the shops'.<sup>174</sup> After noting in 1913 how travelling will become more difficult because of the Christmas crowds, the *Lady's Pictorial* noted that 'the fun has begun'.<sup>175</sup>

The West End of London was the capital of the Christmas shopping culture that developed in the late nineteenth century, but it is important to emphasise that it was replicated on a smaller scale throughout England. In a more immediate location,

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<sup>171</sup> Connelly, *Christmas*, pp. 194-95.

<sup>172</sup> *The Times*, 23 December 1913.

<sup>173</sup> *Daily Mail*, 18 December 1908.

<sup>174</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 26 November 1910.

<sup>175</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 6 December 1913. See Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.



however, it placed considerable pressure on the retailers in the districts of outer London, who were losing customers to the West End, particularly as transport links improved in the form of trams and buses. This compelled local retailers to go to greater efforts to attract customers. In 1903 a committee was formed in East Ham 'to arrange for an elaborate scheme of decoration and illumination, to enhance the High Street', a scheme which was apparently a great success.<sup>176</sup> Such a scheme borrowed the transformative qualities of decoration from the intimacy of the home and applied it to suburban centres. By 1913 similar schemes had been introduced in Brixton, Clapham, Lewisham and Willesden.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 23 December 1903.

<sup>177</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 19 December 1913; 20 December 1913.

## Press Advertising<sup>178</sup>

As Pimlott has shown, advertisements for gifts for the Christmas and New Year season were appearing in the eighteenth century. In 1728 an advertisement for the 'Famous Anodyne Necklaces', appeared in the *Country Journal*; an item aimed at children described as 'very proper for a present at Christmas or for a New Year's gift'. Pimlott has commented on the 'bias towards the improvement rather than the entertainment of the young' in these items, a factor also apparent in the advertisements for children's books, such as the edition of *Aesop's Fables* published in 1739 described as 'a very proper New-Year's Gift to the Youth of both sexes'.<sup>179</sup> These type of advertisements remained sporadic and limited to a small range of products well into the nineteenth century. This can partially be attributed to the way in which advertising was perceived in the first half of the nineteenth century, which in the minds of middle-class readers was associated with fraudulent and false claims, particularly in the case of patent medicines.<sup>180</sup> However, it was patent medicines, and other associated items such as

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<sup>178</sup> I have chosen to focus on press advertising because of the abundance of material available. However, it is important to recognise that there were others forms of advertising available beyond the world of newspapers, magazines, and other publications. Stores could use circulars and billboard posters, and the large illustrated catalogues of the Edwardian age were also a form of advertising. By the end of the period Christmas posters and circulars were being produced professionally. In 1913 W. Staveley & Co. of Birmingham urged readers of the *Drapers' Record* not to 'send out the ordinary type of stereotyped bazaar circular this year' and to join their 'Christmas advertising scheme' instead. The same year Dudley & Co. offered 'Xmas circulars' 'worded with forceful, convincing selling arguments'. There were restrictions on these services, however, as the need to maintain the exclusivity of the products meant that it was restricted to one draper per district. See the *Drapers' Record*, 15 November 1913.

On the history of advertising see R. Church, 'Advertising Consumer Good in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Reinterpretations', *Economic History Review*, LIII, 4 (2000), 621-45; B. B. Elliot, *A History of English Advertising* (London, 1962); R. Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and the Marketing Revolution, 1862-1969* (Cambridge, 1995); W. H. Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850-1914* (London, 1981), pp. 134-46; D. and G. Hindley, *Advertising in Victorian England, 1837-1901* (London, 1972); L. A. Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (Oxford, 1994); J. J. Looney, 'Advertising and Society in England, 1720-1820: a Statistical Analysis of Yorkshire Newspaper Advertisements', (unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University 1983); N. McKendrick, 'George Packwood and the Commercialisation of Shaving: the Art of Eighteenth-Century Advertising', in N. McKendrick, J. Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (eds), *The Birth of a Consumer Society: the Commercialisation of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, 1982), pp. 146-94; T. R. Nevitt, *Advertising in Britain: a History* (London, 1982); and 'American Influences on British Advertising before 1920', in T. Nevett and R. A. Fullerton (eds), *Historical Perspectives in Marketing: Essays in Honor of Stanley G. Hollander* (Lexington, 1988), pp. 223-40; T. Richards, *The Commodity Culture in Victorian England, 1851-1914* (London, 1991); and E. S. Turner, *The Shocking History of Advertising* (London, 1965).

<sup>179</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 74.

<sup>180</sup> Church, 'Advertising Consumer Goods', p. 633.



beauty products, that proved to be the most innovative in advertising terms. In 1825 Rowland's macassar oil was marketed in the following terms: 'The congratulations at this festive season are- a merry Christmas, and a happy New Year; and every auxiliary is eagerly sought after for the embellishment of the person'.<sup>181</sup> If this advertisement was edging towards employing the intimacy of Christmas as a marketing tool, then it became more prominent in the 1840s. In 1840 the same manufacturer offered a range of toilet articles as a 'CHRISTMAS SOUVENIR. At a period when the social sympathies are most prominent, and the genial influence of "HOME" is felt in the highest degree- ...the most appropriate present becomes the first subject of consideration';<sup>182</sup> and in 1846 Rowlands declared that the 'present season is hallowed by one of the most delightful offices of Friendship and Affection; the interchange of Gifts as remembrances of the donors, and tokens of their esteem for the receivers'.<sup>183</sup>

The language of Christmas intimacy also came to be adopted by purveyors of patent medicines themselves. In 1857 Mr. Page Woodcock of Lincoln advertised wind pills as a Christmas gift associated with 'the memories which each returning Christmas festival awakens within us, are dear to each of our hearts, and indelibly engraved there';<sup>184</sup> though a more pragmatic advert appeared on Boxing Day offering the product as a cure for the 'Christmas Ghost', indigestion, for those who 'indulge too freely in the good things so bountifully spread forth'.<sup>185</sup> Patent medicines also seized upon the imagery of Christmas when illustrated Christmas advertisements became common in the Edwardian period. In 1904 a Beecham's pills advertisement featured Father Christmas with a Christmas pudding, turkey and goose, advising a 'healthy Christmas' with the verse 'Old Christmas comes, and in his train/Come turkey, pudding, goose - and pain!/Which last folks dodge, e'er it can reach 'em/By turning in good time to

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<sup>181</sup> *The Times*, 24 December 1825.

<sup>182</sup> *York Herald*, 26 December 1840.

<sup>183</sup> *York Herald*, 12 December 1846.

<sup>184</sup> *York Herald*, 3 December 1857.

<sup>185</sup> *York Herald*, 26 December 1857.

Beecham'.<sup>186</sup> In 1906 Coleman's used an image of Santa Claus for their Wincarnis product for relief from influenza.<sup>187</sup>

In the 1830s advertisements began to appear that emphasised the range of goods of a particular retailer. In 1833 Charles Cox of Leeds, a wholesale and retail wine and spirit merchant, placed an advertisement informing his friends, and the inhabitants of Leeds and the surrounding villages of the stock of foreign wines and spirits that he had selected for the Christmas season;<sup>188</sup> and in 1835, 'The Lounge', with branches in Leeds and York, advertised an 'immense variety of ornamented and fancy articles' suitable for Christmas presents.<sup>189</sup> Following the 1830s, there was a steady growth in the number of Christmas advertisements appearing in the press. A wider range of items came to be advertised: fancy goods, food and drink, books, toys, clothes, stationery, sheet music, and Christmas cards and decorations. This advertising became more focused on the build-up to Christmas Day, instead of appearing in a somewhat random fashion throughout the twelve days of Christmas. Christmas advertising also began to appear earlier, a point which Pimlott has emphasised. He found that in 1887 the first advertisement for Christmas presents in *The Times* appeared on 12 December; by 1898 it appeared on 30 November.<sup>190</sup> This was also one of several factors indicating the lengthening of the Christmas shopping season, though it is difficult to ascertain when such a season would actually begin. As the *Lady's Pictorial* commented in 1913: 'Each year we find earlier and earlier signs of it, yet there is never any actual beginning to it'.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> *Daily Mail*, 24 December 1904.

<sup>187</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 31 December 1906.

<sup>188</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 21 December 1833.

<sup>189</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 December 1835.

<sup>190</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 124. Isolated examples of November advertising of Christmas presents can be found earlier than this. In 1865 Burdekin's Branch Shop, York, advertised Christmas presents on the 18 November. There was, however, no general trend towards November advertising in the period. See *York Herald*, 18 November 1865.

<sup>191</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 6 December 1913.



It is important to remember that the development of Christmas advertising was restricted by the limits of the genre. For much of the nineteenth century Christmas advertisements, particularly in text-based newspapers, were presented as a block of text, with perhaps a bold header. Despite examples of advertisers who appealed to the sentiment of Christmas intimacy,<sup>192</sup> many Christmas advertisements relied on informing rather than persuading the public, referring to utility, quantity and price.<sup>193</sup> Phrases such as 'suitable for presents' or 'acceptable presents' were common. In the second half of the nineteenth century the spacing of the text in some advertisements improved, with bold phrases highlighting the key part of the argument. It also became common for advertisements, particularly from the 1890s, to repeat words in bold on successive lines to make their advertisement stand out, such as the advertisement for the York provision merchant Banks' which appeared in 1901 (figure 1).<sup>194</sup> Also around the turn of the century, illustrated Christmas advertisements became increasingly common. It is important, however, to stress that these different forms of advertisement were not supplanting each other in succession. They were, in fact, coexisting, so that by the Edwardian period an increasing number of layers of advertisement could be seen, often in the same publication.

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<sup>192</sup> Other examples of this include Farrars, a wine and spirits merchant in York, who advertised using the theme of the 'pledging cup' being passed around the Christmas family reunion, whilst Humphrey's City Provision Warehouse in the same city placed their products within recipes for the Christmas fare of a similar context. There are also several examples of verse being used to advertise at Christmas, particularly by tailors such as E. Moses and Son of Bradford, and Smith's Outfitting and Tailoring Mart of York. See the *York Herald*, 2 December 1865; 8 December 1877; 10 December 1877; *Leeds Mercury*, 21 December 1850.

<sup>193</sup> Church, 'Advertising Consumer Goods', pp. 639-42. Church stresses, however, that it is an oversimplification to assume that advertising before 1880 was directed towards a rational consumer, whilst advertising at the end of the century was aimed at non-rational impulses. Church argues that the 'need to persuade as well as to inform was acknowledged long before', and also that persuasion was not a substitute for information.

<sup>194</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 21 December 1901.



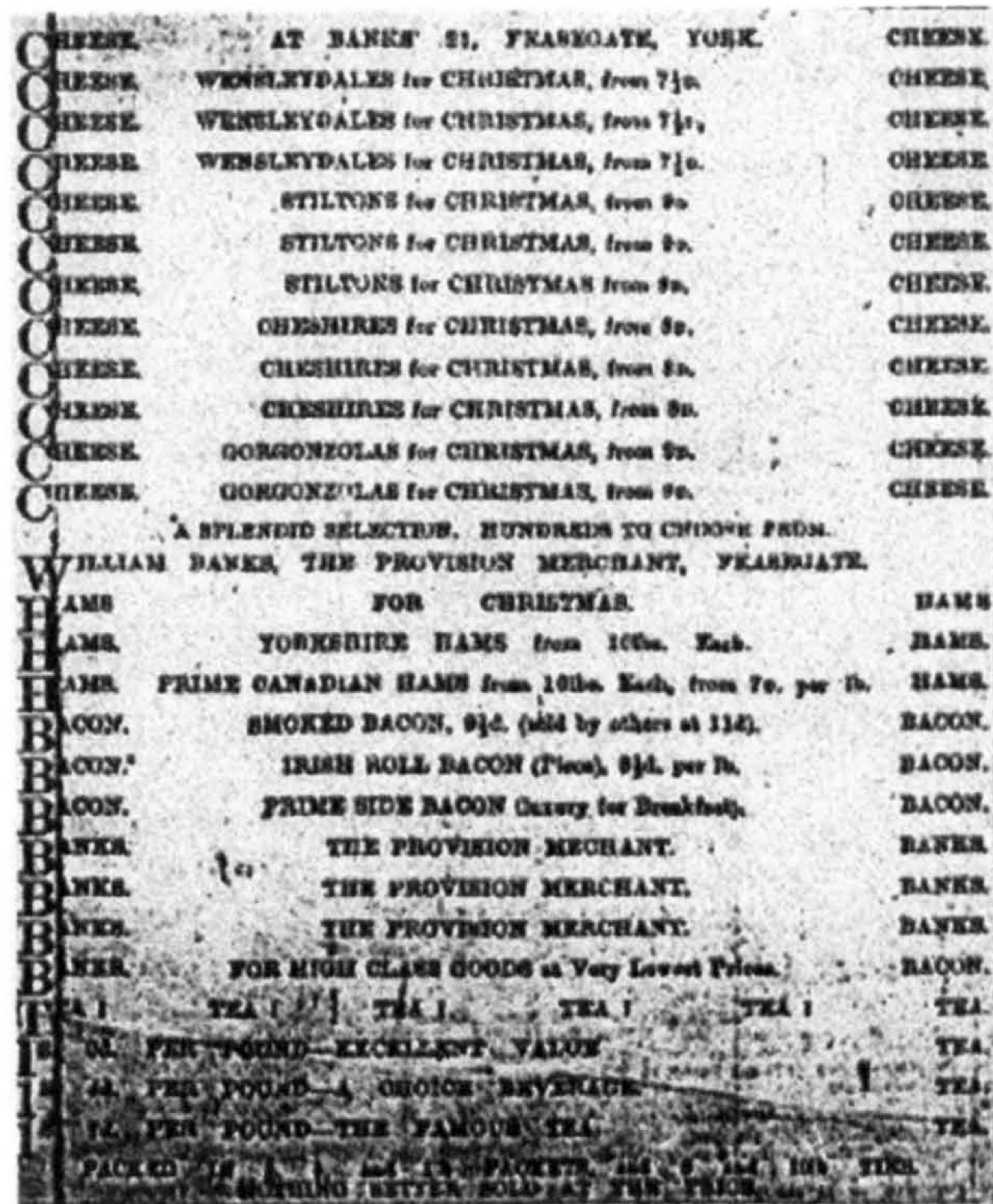


Figure 1: Banks' Provision Merchants advertisement.  
 Source: *Yorkshire Herald*. 21 December 1901.

Illustrated newspapers aimed at the middle-classes had been in existence since the 1840s, and soon incorporated illustrated advertisements.<sup>195</sup> However, it was only late in the nineteenth century that illustrated Christmas advertisements began to appear, and even then they tended to be generic illustrations of luxury items with the phrase

<sup>195</sup> Thomas Richards argues that the 'icons of Victorian commodity culture all originated in middle-class periodicals. Until the very end of the nineteenth century advertising consisted almost entirely of the bourgeoisie talking to itself'. See Richards, *Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, p. 7. This view is challenged by Church, who emphasises the 'growing volume of commercial advertising covering an increasing range of products [which] was directed towards working- and lower middle-class readers rather than those of the upper middle class'. See Church, 'Advertising Consumer Goods', pp. 630-31.



'Christmas presents' added, like the Mappin & Webb's advertisement that appeared in the *Graphic* in 1893 (figure 2).<sup>196</sup> This again demonstrates how relatively late in the nineteenth century the expansion of gift giving to include expensive items took place. In the Edwardian period these kind of advertisements dominated the *Lady's Pictorial*,<sup>197</sup> and this suggests that the cultural form of such advertisements was strong enough to resist the growing pull of the Christmas imagery that was increasingly being employed elsewhere, and also indicates that fashionable women's shopping and consumption were gravitating towards the arena of Christmas, a factor also manifested in the many fur coat advertisements that appeared at Christmas in the Victorian period.<sup>198</sup>



Figure 2: Mappin & Webb's advertisement.  
Source: *Graphic*, 16 December 1893.

<sup>196</sup> *Graphic*, 16 December 1893.

<sup>197</sup> See, for example, the Liberty and Maple & Co. advertisements in the *Lady's Pictorial*, 5 December 1903.

<sup>198</sup> For example, the International Fur Store of Regent Street, London, advertised 'Lovely Furs for Christmas Presents and New Year's Gifts' in 1903. *Lady's Pictorial*, 5 December 1903.



In the mass-circulation daily newspapers, illustrated Christmas advertisements could be supported by the imagery now becoming strongly associated with Christmas; indeed, advertisements probably played an important role in cementing that imagery. In 1913, for example, Selfridge's showed small illustrations of a variety of fancy goods, handkerchiefs, toys, jewellery, cutlery, silver and clocks, that were headed by an drawing of Santa Claus in a present-laden sleigh, being pulled through a snowbound landscape by two reindeer.<sup>199</sup> If this image of Santa Claus seems disconcertingly modern and recognisable, it is not true to say that one firm vision of Santa Claus had been established in the Edwardian period. He was increasingly appropriated to sell a number of different goods, and in ways which invite a multiplicity of meanings. John Gillis has argued the modern Santa Claus that emerged in the late nineteenth century was a 'good deal more feminised than both his rather sterner predecessors, Father Christmas and Saint Nicholas'.<sup>200</sup> Some advertisers, particularly chocolate manufacturers like Cadbury's and Suchard, were keen to play on the association with children and the home (figure 3).<sup>201</sup> Conversely, some advertisers selling a more firmly masculine product were also appropriating the image of Santa Claus, such as Cope's 'Bond of Union' tobacco (figure 4),<sup>202</sup> Marston's Burton ale (figure 5),<sup>203</sup> and Williams' shaving soap (figure 6).<sup>204</sup> The latter advertisement features Santa Claus engaging with modernity by shaving off his beard, because he 'found the men so modern/He felt behind the times'. Another advertisement that places Santa Claus in the context of modernity is the Hopkin's Toy Bazaar advertisement that appeared in 1907, which features Santa Claus driving and smoking (figure 7).<sup>205</sup> In this advertisement Santa

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<sup>199</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 1 December 1913.

<sup>200</sup> J. R. Gillis, 'Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 3 (1989), p. 230.

<sup>201</sup> *The Times*, 2 December 1908; 23 December 1912. Cadbury's had been heavy advertisers since the 1860s, when they were trying to break into a trade hitherto dominated by Fry's who had been advertising since the 1830s. Church, 'Advertising Consumer Goods', p. 635. It was not until the Edwardian period, however, that the strong connections between chocolate and Christmas began to be forged.

<sup>202</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 23 December 1902. This image does owe something to the older image of Father Christmas.

<sup>203</sup> *Daily Mail*, 4 December 1908.

<sup>204</sup> *Illustrated London News*, Christmas number 1901.

<sup>205</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 17 December 1907. The Union Flag emphasised that this was a British Santa, despite Hopkin's having the 'New American Electric Sign'.



Claus seems to traverse both kinds of approach featured above; the driving and smoking are (in this period) masculine traits, and yet there is still the strong connection with children. The ambiguity of these images again reflect the uncertain position of the father in the Christmas of the home noted in chapter one. Yet at the same time it is perhaps wise to reflect that such an interpretation may be too static a vision of gender in general, and masculinity in particular. To some extent, what we are being presented with here is a range of masculine visions, reflecting the diversity of men's role in society at that time. Santa Claus expresses a comfortable paternity, and is also a provider; yet at the same time this poses problems in terms of the gift relationship between the child and its real father.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> These images also reinforce the idea suggested in chapter one that Father Christmas was actually a playful and benevolent grandfather. This may have partially resolved the problem of the gift relationship between father and child. See chapter one.



Santa Claus has no gift that will delight the children more than Cadbury's Chocolates — and you can take home no present more welcome. These pure, dainty, wholesome and exquisitely flavoured confections include a great many varieties, chief among which are:—

**Cadbury's Milk Chocolate**  
**Bournville Chocolate**

"King Edward" Chocolates. "Countess" Assortment.  
"Tudor" Assortment. "Bonbons" Assortment.

Also Fruit and other Fancy Chocolates packed in dainty boxes.

Be sure to order

**Cadbury's**  
**CHOCOLATES**  
in time for Christmas.

Figure 3: Cadbury's Chocolates advertisement.  
Source: *The Times*. 2 December 1908.



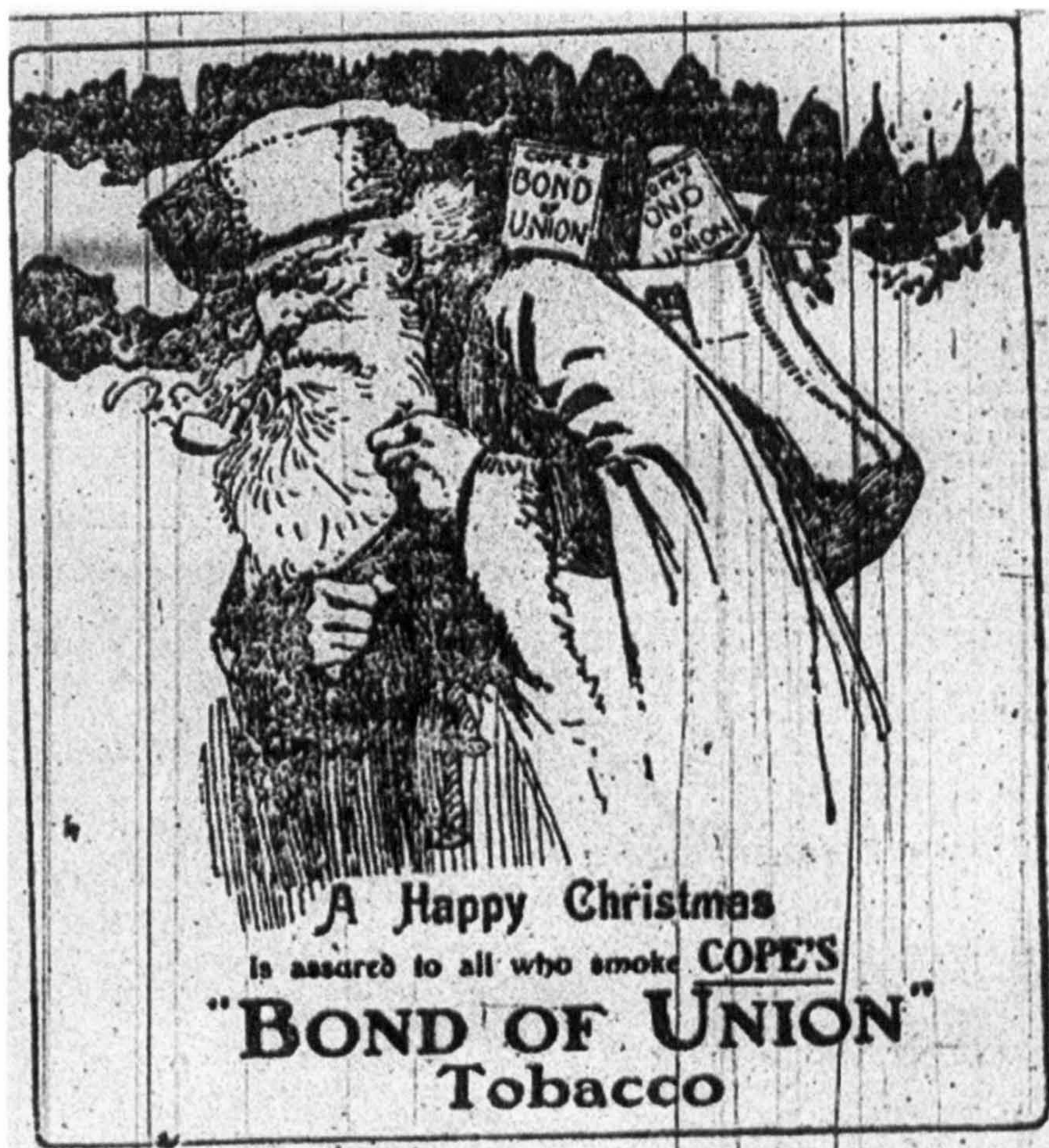


Figure 4: Cope's Tobacco advertisement.  
Source: *Leeds Mercury*, 23 December 1902.





**Xmas Cheer.**

If your guests appreciate a good drink—a pure drink—they will like Marston's Burton Ale. Ale is the good old Christmas beverage. Marston's Burton Ale is the best Ale brewed. It is a real digestive—good at all times—best on Xmas Day. It is pure, yet costs no more than ordinary beer. Marston's Burton Ale is the drink of hospitality—the beverage for generous fare.

**Our Xmas Offer**

A small cask of Marston's Burton Ale makes a welcome present. We will send carriage paid to any home in the Kingdom a sample 9 gallon cask of Bitter Ale 10/6, Pale Ale 14/6, or Strong Ale 15/-, to anyone enclosing Postal Order for amount. There could be no better or novel gift to a friend. When delivered as a gift sender's visiting card or Christmas card will be sent with advice note and will be sent in time for Christmas Day. We will also forward to both recipient and donor the name of our nearest agent. We know that if you once drink Marston's Burton Ale you will drink it always.

**MARSTON'S  
BURTON ALE**

*(As Supplied to the House of Lords)*

MARSTON, THOMPSON & EVERSHED, Ltd., BURTON-ON-TRENT.  
London Agents: 71-85, Pall Mall Road, N.W.

Figure 5: Marston's Burton Ale advertisement.  
Source: *Daily Mail*, 4 December 1908.



Old Santa Claus was grumpy —  
 Hed come with Christmas chimes  
 But found the men so modern  
 He felt behind the times .

How did he get in fashion ?  
 He didn't moan and mope  
 But quickly shaved his whiskers  
 With —

**WILLIAMS' SHAVING SOAP**

Have you a friend discouraged,  
 And would you give him hope?  
 Put in his Christmas stocking,  
 Some Williams' Shaving Soap .

Williams' Shaving Soaps  
 have for sixty years been the only recognized standard  
 for shaving, and in the form of Shaving Sticks,  
 Shaving Tablets, Shaving Cream, etc., are sold by druggists  
 and perfumers all over the world.

THE J.B.WILLIAMS CO., Glastonbury, Conn.  
 LONDON PARIS DRESDEN SYDNEY

Figure 6: Williams' Shaving Soap advertisement.  
 Source: *Illustrated London News*. Christmas number 1901.



Each Child Visiting the Shop has a Chance of Winning an Attractive Present, Scores of Articles being Distributed Each Week.

**Hurrah! Hurrah!!**

**WE'RE OFF to HOPKIN'S  
TOY BAZAAR.**



SEE WINDOWS FOR PRESENTS AT POPULAR PRICES.

**GRAND XMAS SHOW & TOYLAND**

You cannot miss this Shop, it is the only Drapery Stores  
in Leeds with the New American Electric Sign.

**HOPKIN'S Cash Drapery Stores,  
DUNCAN STREET, LEEDS.**

P.S. - THE BAZAAR WILL BE HELD ON MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY AND FRIDAY.

Figure 7: Hopkin's Toy Bazaar advertisement.  
Source: *Leeds Mercury*, 17 December 1907.



The appearance of Santa Claus in advertisements also leads to the question of who were these advertisements speaking to, and in particular, were they speaking to children? For most of the Victorian period, the Christmas advertising of goods for children was aimed at mothers. In 1857 the York County Outfitting Depot advertised 'Christmas presents for Juveniles' through an appeal to the 'Ladies of the City and County';<sup>207</sup> whilst in 1879 T. and H. Chapman of York declared that 'Ladies are invited to buy their children's toys at the wholesale toy shop'.<sup>208</sup> Whilst Edwardian advertisements did encourage more participation on the part of children, Gamage's repeatedly used the phrase 'come yourselves and bring the children', suggesting that it was still the adult being addressed.<sup>209</sup> There were exceptions to this, however. A 1904 advertisement for a 'grand free & spectacular bazaar' at C. S. Broadbent Ltd., Leeds, contained the following caveat:

NOW, A WORD TO THE CHILDREN.

Mickey, the Funny Clown, has brought his Performing Donkey "Jerusalem," and his Watch, which, by the way, is the Smallest in the World; and Dear Old Father Christmas has also brought his

LARGE PILLAR BOX,

for he whispered to the General Manager that he is anxious to send One Hundred Presents away, to arrive at their destination Christmas Eve, to all Good Little Boys and Girls not over eight years of age, who write him the nicest letters. They must tell him where they live, their age, the school they attend, and their teacher's name; and if they don't go to school tell him whom they love best. Then put it in an envelope and address it to Santa Claus. You must then PERSONALLY bring it and put it into his Pillar Box ...<sup>210</sup>

If age was an issue, what of gender? Many Christmas advertisements were placed on behalf of stores, which emphasised variety and an ability to cater for a range of different people and tastes. These kinds of advertisement might delineate on grounds of gender, tapping into preconceived notions of the gender of consumer goods, though not aggressively so. The most pronounced example of this delineation was executed in *The*

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<sup>207</sup> *York Herald*, 12 December 1857.

<sup>208</sup> *York Herald*, 20 December 1879.

<sup>209</sup> *Daily Mail*, 24 November 1904; *The Times*, 13 December 1906.

<sup>210</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 1 December 1904.

*Times*, which in 1908 produced collections of advertisements under the headings of ‘Suggestions for Xmas Gifts for Men’ and ‘Suggestions for Xmas Gifts for Women’. The men’s section comprised Chambers’s Encyclopaedia; Greenlees’ Claymore Whisky; Dixon’s Double Diamond Port; Hennessy Brandy; A. E. Gutmann’s “Thermos” Table Jug; an edition of *The Letters of Queen Victoria*; and invitations to visit the Hanfstaengl Exhibition of colour reproductions, casts and sculpture, and to hire an Electromobile Company Town Carriage for Christmas shopping.<sup>211</sup> The women’s section featured advertisements for jewellery at John Barker & Co. and The Treasure House; Christmas Presents at Frederick Gorrings Ltd. and Maple & Co.; the Onoto Pen; the “Beau Brummel” Fur Tie at Dickins & Jones; gramophones from The Gramophone Company; and James Lyle and Co.’s real China Tea.<sup>212</sup> The only advertisement common to both sections was The Goldsmiths & Silversmiths Company Ltd., and significantly whilst in the men’s section it merely announced that the company ‘beg to announce that their illustrated price list of Christmas presents is now ready’, the corresponding advertisement featured illustrations of diamond buckles and brooches. As Lori Loeb shows, it was advertisements placed by manufacturers that had the greatest potential for gendered meanings, particularly in terms of an idealised reflective image of the female consumer.<sup>213</sup> Loeb argues that advertising played upon commercial interpretations of domestic ideology, in categories that she defined as the ‘walled garden’; the ‘paraphernalia of gentility’; the ‘angel in the house’; and ‘a life of leisure’.<sup>214</sup> All these strands were apparent in the advertisement for the Apollo Piano-Player which asked the question ‘What were Christmas without an Apollo?’<sup>215</sup> This was one of a series of advertisements featuring new technologies to enhance another of the features of the Christmas intimacy of the home, music.<sup>216</sup> The Apollo was not a self-playing piano, but a device attached to a piano to aid playing. In advertising a similar device, the combination autopiano, Kastner & Co. declared that at ‘Christmas time, social

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<sup>211</sup> *The Times*, 15 December 1908.

<sup>212</sup> *The Times*, 7 December 1908.

<sup>213</sup> Loeb, *Consuming Angels*, p. 180.

<sup>214</sup> Loeb, *Consuming Angels*, pp. 16–45.

<sup>215</sup> *Graphic*, 26 December 1903.

<sup>216</sup> See chapter one.



gatherings would be incomplete and dull if harmony and music did not produce the right joyful spirit, but how much more can you enhance your own pleasure and that of your family and friends by becoming master of the world of music'.<sup>217</sup> These manufacturers faced stiff competition from the gramophone, and many advertisements for gramophones and records appeared at Christmas during the Edwardian period. In 1911 J. G. Graves Ltd. of Sheffield declared that the 'Graves Gramophone brings the best of everything right into the midst of the family circle';<sup>218</sup> whilst in 1912 a Christmas advertisement for HMV records recommended 'that personal selection is very important'.<sup>219</sup> The mass market was well attuned to the dynamics of gift relationships.

The association between Christmas and the home was also exploited by furnishing companies. Waring & Gillow Ltd., for example, recreated rooms originally shown at the Ideal Home Exhibition, but placed in each room a suggestion for a Christmas present, the idea being that 'further warmth and intimacy has been given them by adding those dainty, personal etceteras with which we so love to surround ourselves at home'.<sup>220</sup> In 1907 the same company stressed this link by declaring that 'Waring's is pre-eminently the place for Christmas Gifts, because Waring's is pre-eminently the place for everything for the complete furnishing of the Home'. Their message, however, cut across gendered lines of consumption: 'The most beautiful Gift that a husband can give to his wife, or that a wife can give to her husband, is something for the Home'.<sup>221</sup> Other advertisers played upon the feminine need to respond to masculine desire. It was noted above how Williams' shaving soap used the imagery of Christmas to reaffirm a modern masculine identity, and by 1910 Gillette were telling women that 'He wants a Gillette safety razor', and to 'Buy "Him" one this Xmas'.<sup>222</sup> The power of suggestion was now becoming important in the motivation behind gift relationships, something that commentators recognised. In 1913 the *Lady's Pictorial* noted that

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<sup>217</sup> *The Times*, 16 December 1909.

<sup>218</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 16 December 1911.

<sup>219</sup> *Daily Mail*, 10 December 1912.

<sup>220</sup> *Graphic*, 6 December 1913.

<sup>221</sup> *The Times*, 18 December 1907.

<sup>222</sup> *The Times*, 16 December 1910.

in the trading as well as in the medical world it is becoming more and more recognised that a great deal can be effected by the power of suggestion. The mind largely controls the body, the patient can be persuaded out of pain and ills which are very often due to the imagination. So can the Christmas shopper be persuaded to make choice.<sup>223</sup>

The power of suggestion was undoubtedly aided by the illustrated Christmas advertisements of the Edwardian period, but also by the increasing trend towards whole-page advertisements, and here a significant contribution was made by both the *Daily Mail* and Boots the Chemists.<sup>224</sup> In 1904 Boots began advertising in the national press, and to boost the Christmas-shopping trade took whole front-page advertisements in the *Daily Mail* for ten consecutive days. This was followed by eight full-page advertisements in *The Times*, and similar insertions in the provincial dailies of Nottingham, Sheffield, Birmingham and other cities.<sup>225</sup> Jesse Boot realised the power of Christmas intimacy, and on 23 December 1904 placed another front-page advertisement in the *Daily Mail*, thanking customers for their response, and wishing them a 'merry Christmas and a prosperous new year'.<sup>226</sup> This method was repeated on Christmas Eve 1908, and captured the flag-waving imperial character of the *Daily Mail* by calling this advertisement 'a message to the world' with the verse 'Where'er the British Flag flies in the breeze/There, presents from OUR STORES have found their way/Sent from kind friends, whose sole wish is to please/And cheer their absent friends on Christmas Day'.<sup>227</sup> From 1904 Boots was the heaviest Christmas advertiser in both the national and provincial press. At Christmas 1907 they boasted on the front page of the *Daily Mail* that 'We have branches in all the principal towns, and are the largest gift sellers in the

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<sup>223</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 6 December 1913.

<sup>224</sup> Originally based in Nottingham, Jesse Boot expanded the sales of his herbalist and grocer's shop in 1874 to include proprietary medicines. National expansion followed his conversion to a limited liability company in 1883, and by 1914 he had 560 branches. See Fraser, *Coming of the Mass Market*, pp. 119-20; and S. Chapman, *Jesse Boot of Boots the Chemist. A Study in Business History* (London, 1974), pp. 31-81.

<sup>225</sup> Chapman, *Jesse Boot*, p. 85.

<sup>226</sup> *Daily Mail*, 23 December 1904.

<sup>227</sup> *Daily Mail*, 24 December 1908.



country’;<sup>228</sup> and in 1913 declared themselves on the front page of the *Leeds Mercury* to be ‘The Largest Christmas Present Emporium in the World!’<sup>229</sup> Boots used the common feature of illustrating gift items, but provided innovative frameworks within which to situate them. In 1907, two Boot’s advertisements appeared in the *Leeds Mercury* featuring Santa Claus, the first of which sees Santa Claus piloting a hot air balloon on which the gift items are illustrated (figure 8);<sup>230</sup> in the second he sits on top of a large present-laden Christmas tree (figure 9).<sup>231</sup> Another innovation was a campaign in *The Times* in 1913, where a series of small advertisements asked the question ‘How many days till Christmas?’ and revealed the answer, encouraging a distinct culture of Christmas shopping in the run-up to the festival proper.<sup>232</sup>

The dominant presence of Boots within the nexus of Edwardian Christmas advertising reflects the growing significance of the multiple-shop firms. The Edwardian period also saw Christmas advertisements on behalf of chains such as Lipton’s,<sup>233</sup> Stead and Simpson,<sup>234</sup> and W. H. Smith.<sup>235</sup> Earlier than this, the Singer Sewing Machine Company, which had nearly 400 branches by 1900,<sup>236</sup> was targeting female recipients in Christmas advertisements in the 1860s.<sup>237</sup> Hamish Fraser argues that what these multiple firms had in common were a willingness to adopt new selling techniques, and ‘vigorous and frequently spectacular advertising’ that placed an emphasis on the cheapness of goods. They were rewarded by significant increases in market share which Fraser has interpreted as a ‘rebellion by consumers against the high costs of traditional shopping’.<sup>238</sup> In the Edwardian period this form of retailing was centring upon the Christmas season, powered by the advertising of Boots.

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<sup>228</sup> Chapman, *Jesse Boot*, p. 85.

<sup>229</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 December 1913.

<sup>230</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 13 December 1907.

<sup>231</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 17 December 1907.

<sup>232</sup> *The Times*, 13 December 1913.

<sup>233</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 December 1907.

<sup>234</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 18 December 1909.

<sup>235</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 12 December 1912.

<sup>236</sup> Fraser, *Coming of the Mass Market*, p. 118.

<sup>237</sup> *York Herald*, 3 January 1863; 11 December 1869.

<sup>238</sup> Fraser, *Coming of the Mass Market*, p. 121.



THE LEEDS MERCURY, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1907.

# STILL RISING IN PUBLIC ESTEEM

XMAS GIFTS

**LOCAL ADDRESSES:**

**LEEDS.**  
7 & 8, Bond Street, Bridge to and King Edward Street.

**BRADFORD.**  
60 & 61, Kickgate.

**HARROGATE.**  
5, Parliament Street.

**SCARBOROUGH.**  
1, St. Nicholas Street, and 1B, Newborough.

Ask for one of our **New Illustrated Catalogues.**

**LOCAL ADDRESSES:**

**HULL.**  
10 and 12, King Edward Street.

**HALIFAX.**  
18, Old Market.

**BUXTON.**  
46, 48-50, Spring Gardens.

**BLACKPOOL.**  
14, Market Street.

**GLASGOW.**  
101-105, Spittalhall Street.


We invite you to visit our Leeds and other shops. We have branches in all the principal towns, and are the largest GIFT sellers in the country. Our new Illustrated Catalogue is ready to-day, and will be posted free of application to either Leeds, Harrogate, or Blackpool. Available every day until January 1st. Below this advertisement, even to be included in our postage.

HEAD OFFICES, NOTTINGHAMJERSE BOOT, Managing Director.


Figure 8: Boot's advertisement.  
Source: *Leeds Mercury*, 13 December 1907.



THE LEEDS MERCURY, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1907.



**EVERY BRANCH LADEN WITH XMAS GIFTS**



Ask for one of our New Illustrated Catalogues. *(See page 12)*

You are sure to find something interesting.

Over 300 Branches. Over 300 Branches.




LEEDS	7-9, Beane Street, Briggate and King Edward Street
BRADFORD	80-82, Kipling Street
SHEFFIELD	5, Parkhill Street
SCARBOROUGH	1, St. Nicholas Street and 13, Northburgh

HILL	10 and 12, King Edward Street
HALIFAX	18, Old Market
SUXTON	48-50, Spring Gardens
BLACKPOOL	14, Market Street
GLASGOW	10-105, Sproughton Street

**LOCAL ADDRESSES:**

*Boots* GILBERT'S

Figure 9: Boot's advertisement.  
Source: *Leeds Mercury*, 17 December 1907.



## Travel

Another example of Christmas consumerism lies in travel. In terms of mass participation Christmas travel was intrinsically tied to the railway. In many cases it was driven by the power of Christmas intimacy, as the opportunity to travel home to family reunions was taken. This was made possible by railway excursions, special trips at reduced prices. Evidence has been found of railway excursions as early as 1831, though as Douglas Reid argues, it was the 1840s that saw the railway excursion become a phenomenon.<sup>239</sup> Christmas family reunion was not the original or the primary reason behind railway excursions. They were devised to make use of leisure time, and could involve seaside trips, race meetings, temperance events, and particular emphasis has been placed upon the thousands who used excursion trains to visit the Great Exhibition.<sup>240</sup> It is not entirely clear when Christmas excursions actually began, and for what purpose they were actually intended. The enormous freight of Christmas parcels and foodstuffs became a feature of the railways in the 1840s,<sup>241</sup> and this may have proved an incentive for passenger travel. In 1853, the Great Northern Railway was advertising cheap excursions to London, Brighton, the Crystal Palace and Hampton Court Palace under the heading 'Christmas festivities', though this does seem to be primarily for entertainment purposes.<sup>242</sup> By the end of the 1850s a culture of Christmas excursions seems to have become well established. In a complaint letter to the *York Herald*, one 'unfortunate Christmas-Eve excursionist' made reference to the 'usual' practice of the North-Eastern Railway Company to 'convey passengers on their line for a fare and a sixth'.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> D. A. Reid, 'The "Iron Roads" and "the Happiness of the Working Classes": The Early Development and Social Significance of the Railway Excursion', *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser., 17 (1996), p. 58. See this article for an extensive bibliography of railway history.

<sup>240</sup> Reid, 'Iron Roads', p. 57.

<sup>241</sup> See Duncan's 'Arrival of Christmas Train, Eastern Counties Railway', *Illustrated London News*, 21 December 1850.

<sup>242</sup> *York Herald*, 10 December 1853.

<sup>243</sup> *York Herald*, 1 January 1859. The train in question was three hours late, which caused the 'excursionist' to comment that the North-Eastern 'pocket all the extra money they can catch, and avoid being at any expense'.



What is clear about Christmas rail traffic is the enormous expansion between the 1860s and the First World War. In 1912 Harold MacFarlane estimated that Christmas passenger traffic had increased by over 500 per cent on the Midland and Caledonian lines in comparison to 1861, with rises of over 400 per cent being estimated for the Great Northern, Great Western, North Eastern, London and South Western, Great Central, and Great Eastern lines.<sup>244</sup> The context of these increases was an expanding rail network, cheaper fares,<sup>245</sup> quicker journey times, and, in general terms, increases in income and leisure time.<sup>246</sup> There is also evidence from this period to suggest that the intimacy of Christmas had spread to the interior of the trains. In 1907 the North Eastern and Great Northern companies permitted the decoration of the first- and third-class dining carriages, and the following year this was supplemented by gramophone music and the serving of turkey, plum pudding and mince pies.<sup>247</sup> It is also important to highlight, though, that Christmas itself was not the only inspiration for excursion travel during the festive season. By the Edwardian period a considerable number of Scottish people were returning home to celebrate New Year, and in 1907 it was estimated that 30,000 would be returning from London alone.<sup>248</sup>

The call of family reunion remained an important reason behind Christmas travel throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the Edwardian period. It should be noted, however, that the advertising of Christmas excursions was largely information-based for most of this period, and the only railway advertisement that I have identified that draws upon the language of family reunion appeared in the *Graphic* in 1913, with the G. W. R. declaring that 'Christmas, more than any other season of the year, is a time for visiting. There are the folks at home to see, old friends to call upon, or

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<sup>244</sup> H. MacFarlane, 'What the Railways Owe to Charles Dickens', *Railway Magazine*, 1912, p. 140.

<sup>245</sup> Cheap fares were not always guaranteed, however. From 1905 to 1907 complaints frequently appeared in the pages of the *Yorkshire Herald* concerning the lack of Christmas excursion bookings available from York to London, suggesting that the public had come to see the Christmas excursion as a right. *Yorkshire Herald*, 14 December 1905; 13 December 1906; 3 December 1907.

<sup>246</sup> Weightman and Humphries, *Christmas Past*, p. 85.

<sup>247</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 26 December 1908.

<sup>248</sup> *Yorkshire Herald*, 31 December 1907.

the scene of a pleasing experience to visit again. Yuletide demands a re-union'.<sup>249</sup> This appeal to the intimacy of Christmas probably occurred because of the level of competition for Christmas travel, since the railway also presented opportunities for people to leave the home at Christmas. It increasingly became popular to visit seaside and health resorts. The therapeutic qualities of mineral waters had begun to be rediscovered in England in the sixteenth century, and by the eighteenth century spa towns had become fashionable places supported by a sophisticated social and cultural life. During this latter period the medical value of sea bathing was also being propagated and similar developments affected the growth of coastal resorts. The coastal resorts continued to expand throughout the nineteenth century, and were no longer only the preserve of the aristocracy and gentry. One of the effects of an increasingly plebeian presence in the summer months, was that winter and spring seasons were developing on a significant scale by 1818. By the 1830s, the seaside resorts were competing with more traditional spas as places of winter retreat and regular residence for wealthy invalids in search of a mild winter climate to aid the lung diseases engendered by the polluted atmospheres of large urban centres.<sup>250</sup> Pimlott has found evidence of Christmas seaside visiting in the 1830s, when one of James Smith's comic verses made reference to spending Christmas at Brighton for reasons of gentility: 'To Brighton we duly go scampering down/ For nobody now spends his Christmas in Town'.<sup>251</sup> The aristocratic Wood family spent their 1851 Christmas at Scarborough.<sup>252</sup>

Increasingly the development of the seaside resorts was based upon the pursuit of amusement, and the developing Christmas season was no exception to this.<sup>253</sup> By the early twentieth century, a distinct culture of visiting seaside hotels at Christmas had developed. In December 1903 the *Daily Telegraph* featured a column entitled

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<sup>249</sup> *Graphic*, 13 December 1913.

<sup>250</sup> J. K. Walton, *The English Seaside Resort. A Social History 1750-1914* (Leicester, 1983), pp. 18-20; J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Holiday* (London, 1947); R. S. Porter (ed.), *The Medical History of Waters and Spas* (London, 1990); and J. Walvin, *Beside the Seaside: A Social History of the Popular Seaside Holiday* (London, 1978).

<sup>251</sup> Quoted in Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 131.

<sup>252</sup> B. I., Hickleton Papers; A2.87, Charles Lindley Wood to Mary Wood, 25 December 1851.

<sup>253</sup> Walton, *English Seaside Resort*, p. 109.



'Christmas by the Sea', which featured reports on Brighton, Bexhill, Blackpool, Bournemouth, Clacton, Deal, Eastbourne, Folkstone, Hythe, Ilfracombe, Margate, Ramsgate, Sandgate, Sandown, Southend, Torquay, and Westcliff-on-Sea. Emphasis was placed upon the entertainments provided by the hotels, including dinners, pantomimes, concerts and dances.<sup>254</sup> Towards the end of this period whole pages of small advertisements for hotels, under the heading of 'Christmas from Home', were appearing in the *Daily Mail*.<sup>255</sup> A restaurant and hotel Christmas culture had also developed in London by this period. In 1910 *The Times* ran a large feature on 'Christmas at the hotels', reporting on the activities at the Savoy, the Carlton, the Waldorf, the Hotel Cecil, the Piccadilly Hotel, the Trocadero, and the Hotel Dieudonné. Like their seaside counterparts, the London hotels arranged a series of entertainments for their guests during the festive season. One of the striking features of the 1910 reports was the amount of entertainments aimed at children. On Christmas Eve, the Savoy held a Punch and Judy show, followed by a distribution of toys; whilst the Carlton had a thirty-two foot Christmas tree. This hotel culture, however, was also about the popularisation of fashionable forms of celebrating New Year, and *The Times* noted that the Savoy, Carlton, Waldorf, Piccadilly and Cecil hotels 'are booked months ahead. The custom of ushering in the New Year with a blare of trumpets and lowered lights has become popular'.<sup>256</sup> New Year's Eve had become an event of social performance, an opportunity to be part of a spectacle, and an environment affected by fashions and crazes. In 1913 the craze was for Tango dancing. As *The Times* commented: 'few will be unaffected by the craze for the Tango. In fact, the Tango is likely to form the staple amusement'.<sup>257</sup> To reinforce this point, the aspirational magazine *Home Chat* showed its readers how to dance the Tango in preparation for Christmas parties.<sup>258</sup>

Such attitudes towards Christmas caused concern amongst contemporary commentators. Both *The Times* and the *Lady's Pictorial* saw it as evidence of the

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<sup>254</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 8 December 1903.

<sup>255</sup> *Daily Mail*, 30 November 1912.

<sup>256</sup> *The Times*, 23 December 1910.

<sup>257</sup> *The Times*, 13 December 1913.

<sup>258</sup> *Home Chat*, 29 December 1913.

decline of the family Christmas. Excuses were offered, however, that suggested that the intimacy of Christmas as it had developed in the Victorian period, had now become incompatible with modern living. *The Times* highlighted problems with expense, the worry of organisation, and the desire of ‘reliefs from the cares of housekeeping’ caused by the ‘stress of life in cities’.<sup>259</sup> The *Lady’s Pictorial* took this point further: ‘Vast numbers of people live in flats, wherein it is impossible to entertain save on a very limited scale, [and] domestic service has ceased to be what it was’. The *Lady’s Pictorial* also asked why the ‘spirit’ of Christmas could not be recreated in a restaurant setting, suggesting that the quality of intimacy may actually be improved because ‘nobody has time or opportunity nor the inclination amid such thoroughly cheerful surroundings to feel disagreeable or rake up family squabbles’.<sup>260</sup> It would have also had the effect of neutralising the issues of gendered labour and the inequalities of power between husband and wife within Christmas intimacy.<sup>261</sup> The following year the *Lady’s Pictorial* argued that the restaurant and hotels were performing an additional service because they ‘prevent the middle-aged and old folk, those who have no special ties, the flotsam and jetsam of social life, the lonely strangers within our gates, and those who find the domestic circle dull at such a time, from regarding Christmas as a time of sad memories and depression’.<sup>262</sup>

Christmas travel was not, however, restricted to the shores of Britain. There was a long tradition of the social elite visiting the Mediterranean for purposes of the Grand Tour. After travel to the continent resumed following the cessation of hostilities with France in 1815, the nature of this travel began to take on a different character. Whilst the Grand Tourists of the eighteenth century had been, in John Pemble’s words, ‘strangers on a unique excursion’, the Victorian and Edwardian social elites became regular visitors to what became regarded as a home from home. As the nineteenth century progressed, the minority of Britons who travelled for leisure grew steadily as rising incomes and

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<sup>259</sup> *The Times*, 23 December 1910.

<sup>260</sup> *Lady’s Pictorial*, 21 December 1912.

<sup>261</sup> Though to a certain extent, like domestic service, it was a means of transferring these issues rather than supplanting them.

<sup>262</sup> *Lady’s Pictorial*, 20 December 1913.



decreases in the cost of travel made foreign holidays accessible to most of the middle classes, and by the Edwardian period organisations such as the Toynbee Workmen's Travelling Club and the Polytechnic Touring Association were organising foreign tours for the higher echelons of the working classes.<sup>263</sup>

Great emphasis has been placed on the role of Thomas Cook and Sons in facilitating foreign travel in the nineteenth century.<sup>264</sup> It is possible to chart the rise of Christmas travel through the company's publications, *Cook's Excursionist* and subsequently *Cook's Traveller's Gazette*. In 1869 the last edition of *Cook's Excursionist* to be published that year appeared on 21 October; the following year it was the 25 November.<sup>265</sup> By 1880, it was being published until 16 December, and was now mentioning Christmas, offering Christmas and New Year in the south of France.<sup>266</sup> The French trip appeared in the *Excursionist* merely as a block of text, providing basic details of the travel arrangements. By 1902, *Cook's Traveller's Gazette* featured a three-page illustrated guide to Christmas Eve in Bethlehem, Christmas in Rome, and Christmas in Seville, and significantly it appeared in November, signalling that Christmas had now become part of a highly organised tourist industry. These trips were being sold as cultural and religious experiences, highlighting the Christmas Eve service in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem,<sup>267</sup> Rome's 'elaborate and impressive celebrations of Christmastide', and the midnight Mass of the Cockrow on Christmas Eve in Seville.<sup>268</sup> The offer of such trips may have tempted the religiously inclined, and placed further pressure on the declining church attendance in this period.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> J. Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion. Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (Oxford, 1987), p. 2. Pimlott, *Englishman's Holiday*, p. 170; *The Times*, 16 December 1911.

<sup>264</sup> See Pemble, *Mediterranean Passion*, p. 3; Pimlott, *Englishman's Holiday*, pp. 168-69, 191-94; P. Brendon, *Thomas Cook: 150 Years of Popular Tourism* (London, 1991); R. Ingle, *Thomas Cook of Leicester* (Bangor, 1991); and J. Simmons, 'Thomas Cook of Leicester', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 49 (1975 for 1973-4), 18-32.

<sup>265</sup> *Cook's Excursionist and Home and Foreign Tourist Advertiser*, 21 October 1869; 25 November 1870.

<sup>266</sup> *Cook's Excursionist and Tourist Advertiser*, 16 December 1880. By this stage Thomas Cook and Sons had also begun to act as agents for domestic rail excursions at Christmas.

<sup>267</sup> T. Larsen, 'Thomas Cook, Holy Land Pilgrims, and the Dawn of the Modern Tourist Industry', *Studies in Church History*, 36 (2000), 329-42.

<sup>268</sup> *Cook's Traveller's Gazette*, November 1902. Rome provides a good example of the improvement in transport links with the continent. In 1835 it took twenty-five days to reach Rome from London; by 1871 it



By 1912 the range of Christmas excursions in *Cook's Traveller's Gazette* had extended to include 'Xmas in the High Alps'.<sup>270</sup> This was the culmination of a process that had begun in the mid-Victorian period. A hotel industry was already established in Switzerland by 1850, but at that time was restricted to a summer season. Gradually, from the 1860s onwards, pioneering groups of English travellers began to visit during the winter, and preconceived notions concerning winter Alpine conditions were broken down. A lot of the appeal of the Alps in winter centred on sports, at first skating and sledding, and then from the 1890s skiing, which had been gradually introduced to Switzerland from Norway in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>271</sup> Christmas gradually came to be a part of this picture. In 1890 over forty visitors spent Christmas at Grindelwald,<sup>272</sup> and on Christmas Eve 1896 over 2,000 visitors of all nationalities had arrived at Davos, with more expected on Christmas Day.<sup>273</sup> The dominance of English guests can be demonstrated by statistics from St. Moritz. Of the 531 guests staying in St. Moritz hotels on Christmas Day 1901, 328 were English.<sup>274</sup> In the Edwardian period the winter sports phenomenon was a prominent feature in the press. In December 1903 the *Daily Telegraph* reported on the 'record bookings' of the 'rush to Switzerland', with features on Grindelwald, Engelberg, Lucerne, Rigi-Kaltbad, Andermatt, and Klosters.<sup>275</sup> Although this sports-orientated form of holiday could originally be placed in a context of masculine homosociability,<sup>276</sup> the Edwardian press coverage suggested an activity that had become highly fashionable, and had crossed gender boundaries. In December

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was possible to make the same journey in fifty-five hours, and from 1875 it was possible to send luggage in advance. See K. T. Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 368-69.

<sup>269</sup> See chapter two. Much of the religious culture offered by these trips would have been Catholic in nature, and may have proved attractive to those who were ritualistically inclined. They also, however, proved an attraction to British Protestants. Hoppen notes for the mid-Victorian period that 'Year after year British Protestants flocked to the Easter and Christmas ceremonies' in Rome, the appeal being a combination of enticement and repulsion. Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 369.

<sup>270</sup> *Cook's Traveller's Gazette*, 2 December 1912.

<sup>271</sup> P. B. Bernard, *Rush to the Alps: The Evolution of Vacationing in Switzerland* (Boulder, 1978), pp. 99, 117-22.

<sup>272</sup> Pimlott, *Englishman's Christmas*, p. 132.

<sup>273</sup> *Daily Mail*, 25 December 1896.

<sup>274</sup> Bernard, *Rush to the Alps*, p. 151.

<sup>275</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 23 December 1903.

<sup>276</sup> See J. Lowerson, *Sport and the English Middle Classes 1870-1914* (Manchester, 1993).



1912 the *Daily Mail* featured a guide to 'The Sportswoman's Luggage',<sup>277</sup> and in 1913 the *Lady's Pictorial* was offering 'travel hints' for 'Christmas in the High Alps'.<sup>278</sup>

Along with the hotel culture, the fashion for vacationing caused concern in the late-Edwardian years. National and provincial newspapers ran articles commenting on the changes that the celebration of Christmas had undergone. In 1911 *The Times* commented that 'Christmas is losing its family character', with particular concern that 'children must remain in the nest while their parents are flying towards the south and the sun'.<sup>279</sup> Part of this reaction must be located within the strength of sentimental feeling felt for children in the Edwardian period, which as we witnessed in chapter three, had particular consequences for the celebration of Christmas. It was also located within contemporary attitudes to modernity and the burgeoning reaction against the Victorian age and what was perceived as Victorianism. *The Times* talked of the 'many' who felt 'that family gatherings at Christmas are humdrum, banal, *bourgeois*, even mid-Victorian, than which we take it there are no more crushing epithets in the vocabulary of our modern smart folk'.<sup>280</sup> Tosh's 'flight from domesticity' may have had some impact in this context.<sup>281</sup> It is likely of course, that the extent of Christmas vacationing was exaggerated by the press, but it is apparent that there was also a flight from Christmas intimacy as well, for, as *The Times* commented, it was 'the great thing ... to get away from home'.<sup>282</sup> Whilst the reasons behind this flight could be grounded in problems of gender identity, it was not a flight that was restricted on grounds of gender, since women were clearly part of the exodus as well. What we have is a myriad of reasons stemming from different reactions to the intimacy of Christmas. For some the pressure for perfection was too great, whilst for others it engendered a feeling of ennui

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<sup>277</sup> *Daily Mail*, 19 December 1912.

<sup>278</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 22 November 1913.

<sup>279</sup> Arrangements could be made, however, to bring families together in these circumstances. In 1896 the South-Eastern Railway Company made arrangements with the Paris, Lyons and Mediterranean rail companies to run special trains on 23 December in order for school children to join their parents for Christmas in the south of France. *The Times*, 23 November 1896.

<sup>280</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1911.

<sup>281</sup> Toss, *A Man's Place*, pp. 170-94.

<sup>282</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1911.

compared to the excitements offered by modernity. There were still others who were able to reconcile modernity with the intimacy of Christmas. Equally, it should also be recognised that some people travelled for no other reason than that they were able to. Furthermore, it is important to remember that these holidays were the actions of a minority social elite, whose exploits received press coverage disproportionate to their numbers.

In the vogue for winter sports, it is easy to see why it was perceived to be a threat to Christmas intimacy. In the large amount of press coverage it received in the Edwardian period at Christmas time, the language of intimacy was almost entirely absent. Conversely, when closer attention is paid to the activities of people during Christmas vacations, it would appear that the intimacy of Christmas was not so threatened after all. *The Times* recognised this:

Yet how many of us there are who insist on taking our world with us wherever we go or else on making it where we go if we cannot take it with us. We go to the Alps in troops for “winter sports” of our own importation. We go to the Riviera for golf, tennis, pigeon-shooting, gambling ... and the charms of the society we find there, which, after all, is largely a replica of that which we enjoy at home.<sup>283</sup>

This can be witnessed in the Swiss resorts in the 1890s and 1900s. At St. Moritz in 1892, the Hotel Kulm provided a Christmas tree and distribution of presents on Christmas Eve, followed by a shadow pantomime and carol singing. A Christmas ball was held on Christmas Day; whilst in Davos the Hotel Belvedere also had a Christmas tree featuring the appearance of Father Christmas.<sup>284</sup> Extensive celebrations were also arranged for the New Year. The *Alpine Post*, an English-language newspaper established in 1886, partly as an advertisement for the resorts,<sup>285</sup> began producing illustrated Christmas numbers in the 1890s. The 1897 edition was introduced by the following message:

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<sup>283</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1911.

<sup>284</sup> *Alpine Post*, 31 December 1892.

<sup>285</sup> Bernard, *Rush to the Alps*, p. 147.



Frost, Ice and Snow are the traditional concomitants of Christmas, and here in St. Moritz we have these in perfection. We are a small colony of people, mostly of one nationality and who for various reasons intend spending some time in each other's company. We have then a glorious opportunity for making this Christmas-tide, this sojourn together a pleasure to look back upon for the rest of our lives, and above all we can each do our best that the "little ones", long after we are gone, may keep up a happy recollection of a Christmas spent in the High Alps.<sup>286</sup>

This kind of atmosphere seems to have been maintained amongst the greater number of visitors in the Edwardian period. Describing the events of Christmas Day at the Kulm Hotel in 1908, the *Alpine Post* declared that it was 'a carnival of colour, a feast of beauty, a mine of mirth. Everyone felt happy and looked so; everywhere good-fellowship prevailed; and everything contributed in some way or another to the festival of merry-making'.<sup>287</sup> At the end of the period, these kinds of sentiments were beginning to be reported in the press in Britain. In 1913 the *Lady's Pictorial* commented on how the Christmas dinner 'serves to unite guests into a huge family party', which in turn added another layer of dynamic to the intimacy of Christmas: 'Parties are rapidly made up for visits to other hotels, and the joys of a return visit are eagerly anticipated'.<sup>288</sup>

## Conclusion

The existence of arguments concerning Christmas boxes and retail trade in the Edwardian period emphasises the continuity of older forms of retail practice. It is clear however, that retail practices in relation to Christmas developed in response to demand for Christmas fare and decorations. The intimacy of Christmas came to be dependent upon a growing array of foodstuffs that reflected global patterns of trade and the increasing complexity of material culture, indicating an active and symbiotic relationship between private and public. Continuities can also be seen in regard to gifts

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<sup>286</sup> *Alpine Post*, 18 December 1897.

<sup>287</sup> *Alpine Post & Engadin Express*, 29 December 1908.

<sup>288</sup> *Lady's Pictorial*, 22 November 1913.

and presents, though the market undoubtedly became more complex as the nineteenth century progressed, as the range of presents extended outwards from books and toys to embrace most of the goods the retail sector had to offer, reflecting the arrival of the mass market and the extension of Christmas intimacy through the expansion of gift-giving relationships inspired partly by the success of Christmas cards.

The expansion of gift giving inspired the growth of a Christmas shopping culture, as retailers realised the importance of lighting, spectacle, display and the creation of comfortable shopping environments. Department stores played a key role in this process, a factor which highlighted the part played by the female shopper, as the intimacy of Christmas allowed women to obtain a public moral authority. The widespread adoption of Christmas bazaars and Santa's grottos also promoted the role of the child shopper, again signifying the expansion of gift-giving relationships. This new shopping culture did lead to some concerns over the crowds it created, but more often the crowds of Christmas shoppers featured as one of the excitements of modernity.

Running parallel to the development of this shopping culture was an increase in the amount and sophistication of Christmas advertising. Despite some notable exceptions, for much of the nineteenth century Christmas advertising reflected the limitations of the genre. Small, text-only advertisements stated information and emphasised utility, quality, and price. This kind of advertising continued in the Edwardian period, but was supplemented by illustrated advertisements. The imagery of Christmas came to be increasingly appropriated, particularly the image of Santa Claus, whilst others drew upon the power of Christmas intimacy to reinforce connections with the home. Particular emphasis can be placed upon the *Daily Mail* and Boots the Chemist, who jointly pioneered the use of full front-page Christmas advertisements.

The growth of Christmas consumerism can also be located in the increase in travel opportunities at Christmas. Whilst a large part of this was connected to Christmas intimacy through family reunions, by the Edwardian period a culture of visiting hotels in



London and the coastal resorts in England, or going on Mediterranean or winter sports holidays had arisen for an elite minority. These developments worried contemporaries who perceived a conflict between Christmas intimacy and the practicalities of living in what was considered to be a modern age, fearing that the family Christmas was in decline. These fears were undoubtedly exaggerated, and closer inspection of the activities that people engaged in whilst in their hotels suggests that the intimacy of Christmas was merely being replicated and reinterpreted in a different environment.

## Conclusion

The history of the English Christmas in the long nineteenth century has gradually gained acceptance as a subject worthy of academic attention. Yet that attention has been hampered by debates surrounding the validity of applying the theory of invented tradition to the historical development of Christmas. Whilst there were clear examples of invented tradition taking place within the nineteenth century Christmas experience, from the activities of the Manchester Mechanics' Institution to the presentation of Yule logs to the employees of the NER, the focus on the invention of tradition has prevented the analysis of the historical development of Christmas being further integrated into the wider cultural and social interpretation of the period in question. The invention of tradition lacks finesse in uncovering the nexus of contemporary motivations directing the Christmas activities of contemporaries. It is not surprising, though, that the invention of tradition has thus far received privileged attention as an explanatory model from historians who both support and reject it, as it places a premium on the role of custom. Customs are, of course, important, and have featured prominently in this thesis. However, there is also a sense in which they are easy. Customs are generally recorded and commented upon by contemporaries, and become the mainstay of historical evidence. What is harder, though as I have shown, not impossible, is to reconstruct the emotions and sentiments that surround Christmas customs. Once these historical narratives have been uncovered, an alternative framework for understanding the historical development of Christmas can be put forward: the paradigm of intimacy.

I chose intimacy to describe the slightly intangible gamut of emotions, feelings and sentiments that Christmas can inspire, because I felt it best expressed the way in which these feelings became heightened through social interaction and engagement with material culture. At the same time, I have disagreed with one of the central assumptions of much of the theoretical literature on intimacy. Though intimacy can impose psychological boundaries, I did not feel that intimacy automatically meant privacy; intimacy has the capacity to flourish in all manner of social settings, both public and



private. The origins of Christmas intimacy lay in an arena that predated modern assumptions of public and private. Changes to the structure of households in the seventeenth century that militated against wide-ranging access meant that a language of good fellowship developed to describe the occasions in which social distances were overcome, of which Christmas was a prominent time. By the eighteenth century, these emotional expressions had begun to shift towards the fluid meanings of household, family, friendship and kin, to confirm the joy that was felt at the gatherings that took place at Christmas time. Gatherings were not, however, always possible, and the sentiments of intimacy were also expressed in written form, and in the second half of the nineteenth century, in the Christmas card, though not without controversy. These Christmas wishes were also a stimulus to increasingly complex gift relationships at Christmas that heightened intimacy further. Food had long played an important role in both the celebration of Christmas and its gift relationships, part of the way in which material culture was a stimulus to the intimacy of Christmas. These material culture elements of Christmas made the domestic interior an important site for the fostering of intimacy, as increasingly elaborate decorations transformed spaces to create an environment that was familiar yet different. Within this environment, performance became an important feature of Christmas intimacy, through games, music, and theatricals. Performance was also a key means of centring children within the Christmas festival, firstly through the display of their educational achievements, and then increasingly for the sake of seeing children perform, and children's power to unlock the full potential of Christmas intimacy became understood, allied to the shifting understanding of the nature of childhood in the nineteenth century.

Whilst home and family became increasingly important aspects of the intimacy of Christmas, it would be mistaken to understand this in terms of a 'privatisation' of Christmas in the nineteenth century. Christmas decorating was increasingly undertaken in civic, educational, philanthropic, religious, and working contexts, creating environments where Christmas intimacy could flourish away from the family home. The language of intimacy also began to permeate the way in which Christmas was being

discussed in these public contexts, particularly the discourses constructed by religious leaders. In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was also a prominent public culture of Christmas that operated not only in the contexts noted above, but also through the growing Christmas entertainment industry, which, in turn, replicated the performative elements of Christmas intimacy. The material culture of Christmas also became increasingly sophisticated, providing connections to the cultural, social, and political currents that were surrounding contemporaries. The relationship between Christmas private and Christmas public was symbiotic and often complementary.

The material culture of Christmas was supplied by an increasingly sophisticated retailing system that by the late nineteenth century had spawned a distinct Christmas shopping culture. Shops, however, could be a site of tension, as shop assistants were part of a group of workers, including domestic servants, institutional attendants, and postmen, who carried out much of the physical burden, whilst witnessing many of the elements of Christmas intimacy that they could not quite experience themselves. The act of Christmas shopping was an area in which issues of gender came to the fore. Within the press, a discourse that criticised women shoppers for selfishness and vanity was suspended at Christmas, when women shoppers were championed as selfless servants of their families. This was important because the relationship between husband and wife, like all nineteenth century intimacies, was founded upon an inequality of power, which was manifested at Christmas with a far greater amount of labour being both implicitly and explicitly regarded as female in nature (and this gender division was replicated in domestic service). Yet the husband-wife relationship became obscured by men's and women's identities as parents at Christmas, only to become partly visible through the shopping issue. Whilst to a certain extent the labour of Christmas had always been a predominantly female occupation, the Victorian period did feature a rise in the perception that Christmas was a predominantly feminine experience. Whilst many fathers were able to forge a role of conformable domesticity at Christmas, it did cause in some men an ambivalence towards Christmas, a fact that was played out in the different interpretations of Father Christmas/Santa Claus that appeared in Edwardian Christmas



advertising. For some men, there was the opportunity to forge masculine Christmas intimacies in associational and working contexts.

Ambivalence towards the celebration of Christmas in the home could also be manifested in continental travel or the frequenting of London and seaside hotels and restaurants. However, here the issue moved away from being one of gender to being one of modernity. It was the beginning of a process of breaking down the inequalities of power within Christmas intimacy, removing much of the burden of responsibility from women (though significantly it still shifted the problem further down the social scale).<sup>1</sup> In an age of very self-conscious modernity, some Edwardians were already locating what was perceived as a traditional Christmas as part of a fusty, old fashioned, and overly sentimental Victorian age. The domestic celebration of Christmas that had emerged in the nineteenth century was beginning to be seen as incompatible with modern living, connected to changes in living arrangements and the beginning of the breakdown in the reliability of domestic service; it was also a period in which Christmas began to be associated with fashions, fads and crazes. Yet it is important not to over emphasise these trends. The amount of negative cultural commentary that Christmas travel received in the Edwardian press indicates that Christmas intimacy had taken on an unbreakable emotional hold. An analysis of contemporaries' activities in the hotels and resorts indicates that they were largely recreating the forms of Christmas they would have experienced at home.

The Edwardian period also witnessed an increasingly vocal religious leadership decry what was perceived as an almost completely secular festival. The religious aspects of Christmas, in tandem with the secular, had always caused tensions with and oppositions to Christmas since the puritan attempts to ban the celebration of Christmas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A residual Protestant nonconformist opposition to Christmas was still in place in the nineteenth century, though it had largely disappeared by the Edwardian period. An oppositional quality to Christmas was also apparent in the

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<sup>1</sup> The continuation of this process in the twentieth century needs to be the focus of a future study.

evangelical revival, particularly towards the polite and plebeian forms of Christmas celebration. Yet it also contributed towards the early formation of Christmas intimacy, with its emphasis on family and domesticity, emotional religion, and reflection and taking stock. This is important because recognition is needed that the modern Christmas did not emerge from within one single strand of society; rather it was the gradual pulling together of disparate elements of the serious and the jovial; the rough and the respectable. The alternative forms of worship advanced by evangelicals, particularly Methodists, also contributed to the religious culture of many contemporaries, including the watch nights and developments in hymnody. The theological message being propagated gradually shifted from the Atonement to the Incarnation in the nineteenth century, and this both reflected and helped the shift towards a child-centred festival, as it emphasised Jesus as baby and child. However, whilst religion played an important part in the framing of Christmas intimacy, the religious message was becoming obscured by the end of the nineteenth century, and formal worship at Christmas had to face strong competition from an increasing range of leisure choices.

By viewing the historical development of Christmas in terms of intimacy, it becomes apparent that a more complex process of continuity and change had taken place than the invention of tradition would allow. I have demonstrated a continuity of emotions in the sentimental development of the festival over a 175 year period and longer, and clear continuities can also be perceived, for example, in areas such as philanthropy and the multiple meanings of Christmas boxes. It is also important to recognise the coexistence of the old and new processes of Christmas in certain contexts; for example, continuing practices of obtaining goods via personal service alongside the developing shopping culture. At the same time, it must be recognised that many important developments in the history of Christmas did take place in the Victorian period; but this is not the same as stating that the modern Christmas was a Victorian invention: further qualification is required. Much of the evidence I have presented, for example, suggests a concentration of events in the late-Victorian period. This is because Christmas cannot be separated from wider social and cultural currents. The late nineteenth century was a time in which



public concern about poverty was particularly acute, ideas concerning the innocence and perfectibility of childhood had reached their apogee, retailing systems had developed new levels of sophistication; and technological developments in transport and communications had risen to new heights. The history of Christmas depends upon the histories of these developments, just as it depends upon the histories of education, gender, the family, religion and work. In turn, I hope my history of Christmas has enriched these histories.

A final qualification should be made. Not everybody was able to experience the intimacy of Christmas to its fullest extent. The intimacy of Christmas increasingly became dependent upon resources: food to consume; gifts to exchange; adequate domestic space, and decorations to transform it; and distances to travel. Thus class is an issue in the historical development of Christmas. But it is a matter of resources rather than of ideology. I have shown Christmas being celebrated amongst all classes. Desire for various elements of Christmas intimacy, from material culture to family reunion may have been propagated, but these were not the conscious actions of a homogeneous Victorian middle class imposing a cultural form upon the rest of the population. There were occasions when, particularly in a philanthropic context, middle-class contemporaries tried to do so, but many of the working classes would have had existing frames of reference to draw upon when constructing their own Christmases; or, if not, the adoption of certain Christmas practices did not necessarily translate into the adoption of prescribed values. The emotional nexus of Christmas intimacy, rather than social control, and, by extension, invented tradition, was the primary motivation of all Christmas activities.

**Appendix One: List of Organisations Making a Christmas  
appeal in *The Times* between 18 December and 31 December**

**1872**

*In order of appearance.*

Newport Market Industrial School.  
London Female Preventative and Reformatory Institution.  
Orphans Home.  
Poplar Invalids' and Children's Dinner-Table.  
Association for the Sale of Work by Ladies of Limited Means.  
Homerton Ragged Schools.  
Latymer Road Soup Kitchen.  
City of London Hospital for Diseases of the Chest.  
Lamb and Flag Ragged Schools.  
Christ Church Ragged School.  
The Kent Penitentiary.  
Bell-Alley Ragged School and Mission.  
Sunday Home.  
St. Mary's Church, Tothill-Fields, Westminster.  
Union Crescent Mission Hall.  
All Saints' Convalescent Hospital.  
Seaside Convalescent Hospital.  
Deptford Industrial Home and Refuge for Destitute Boys.  
Wanstead Home for Young Girls.  
Chequer-Alley Hope Mission.  
Marine Society's Training Ship Warspite for Poor and Destitute Boys.  
Needy Nook Ragged School.  
Society for the Protection for Women and Children.  
St. Andrew's Church, Bethnal Green.  
St. John's Church, Walworth.  
St. Mark's Church, Walworth.  
Alexandra Orphanage for Infants.  
All Saints' Church, Walworth.  
Regent's Park Road Boy's Home.  
Christian Blind Relief Society.  
Great Northern Hospital.  
Guild House, Holborn.  
Institution for the Employment and Benefit of Needlewomen.  
Leicester Square Soup Kitchen and Refuge.  
London Infirmary for Diseases of the Legs, Ulcers, Varicose Veins, &c.  
Haverstock Hill Orphan Working School.  
Plough Court Ragged School.  
Regent Street Refuge for Fallen Women.



Royal Infirmary for Diseases of Children and Women.  
Sisters in St. Chad, Hackney Road.  
Schools of St. Philip the Evangelist, Old Kent Road.  
South London Refuge, Ragged Schools, Servant's Home, &c.  
St. Saviour's Hospital and Refuge.  
Dudley Stuart Home.  
Wandsworth Common Friendless Boy's Home.  
Gentlewomen's Self-Help Institute.  
Portland Place Girl's Home.  
Industrial Home for Girls, and Home for Incurable and Infirm Women.  
Infirmary for Epilepsy and Paralysis.  
London Female Penitentiary.  
London Hospital.  
Metropolitan Infirmary for Diseases of the Ear and Throat.  
Model Soup Kitchen.  
National Hospital.  
North-Eastern Hospital for Children.  
Poor of Bethnal-Green and Spitalfields.  
Royal Albert Orphans Asylum.  
Royal National Hospital for Consumption of Diseases of the Chest.  
St. John the Evangelist, Holborn.  
Victoria Press Fund.  
St. James Church, Norland.  
British Hospital for Diseases of the Skin.  
Christ Church Ragged Schools, Old Kent Road.  
Distressed French in London.  
Gifford Hall Mission.  
Hospital for Diseases of the Throat.  
Royal Hospital for Diseases of the Chest.  
St. Mark's Hospital for Fistula.  
St. Pancras Industrial School and Refuge.  
Surgical Aid Society.  
United Kingdom Railway Officers' and Servants' Association.  
Royal Free Hospital.  
Refuge for Homeless and Destitute Children.  
The Great Northern Hospital.  
Sydenham Park Home for Sick Children.  
House of Charity for Distressed Persons in London.  
National Industrial Home for Crippled Boys.  
North London Consumption Hospital.  
Victoria Hospital for Sick Children.  
Westminster General Dispensary.  
Metropolitan Visiting and Relief Association.  
Seaman's Hospital.  
St. Augustine's Church, Haggerston.

The Westminster Poor.  
 Brighton Boy's Brigade.  
 The Day Nursery at Brompton.  
 Sailors' Orphan Girls' School and Home.  
 Seven Miles Mission District.  
 St. Barnabas Church, Lambeth.  
 Shetland Fishermen Disaster Fund.  
 Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb.  
 British Lying-In Hospital.  
 Bethnal Green Charity Organisation Society.  
 The Chelsea Hospital for Women.  
 Derbyshire Nursing and Sanitary Association.  
 The Society for Granting Annuities to the Adult Blind.  
 Gray's Yard Ragged Church.  
 Southwark City Mission, Temperance and Band of Hope.  
 Hospital for Diseases of the Skin.  
 The Hospital for Women.  
 The Indigent Blind Visiting Society.  
 King's College Hospital.  
 National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic.  
 National Orthopaedic Hospital.  
 The Poor near Regent Street.  
 The Provident Medical Institution and Lying-In Charity.  
 Dalston Refuge for the Destitute.  
 St. John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin.  
 Surplus Babies (Cavendish Square).  
 The Universal Beneficent Society.  
 Cripples Home and Female Refuge.  
 East London Hospital for Children and Dispensary for Women.  
 Kilburn Park Orphanage.  
 Homes for the Aged Poor.  
 The Training Hospital .  
 Girl's Orphan Home.  
 Charitable and Provident Society for the Aged and Infirm Deaf and Dumb.  
 Miss Stride's Home.  
 Royal Orthopaedic Hospital.  
 British Beneficent Institution.  
 Christ Church Ragged School.  
 Tunbridge Wells Convalescent Home for Children.  
 Golden Lane Mission to Costermongers.  
 Paris British Free Library.  
 The Western Ophthalmic Hospital.  
 St. Giles Mission Hall.  
 Clock and Watch-Makers Asylum.  
 Home for Destitute and Friendless Girls.



**Poplar Hospital for Accidents.  
St. Paul's Church, Walworth.  
The Cabdriver's Benevolent Institution.**

**Appendix Two: List of Organisations Making a Christmas  
Appeal in *The Times* between 14 December and 26 December**

**1892**

*In order of appearance.*

Royal Normal College for the Blind.  
Tower Hamlets Mission.  
Christ Church, St. George's-in-the-East.  
Association for the Welfare of the Blind.  
Fox-Court Ragged School and Mission.  
Marine Society Warspite Training Ship.  
London Homeopathic Hospital.  
Home for Aged Christian Blind Men and Women.  
Metropolitan Convalescent Institution.  
Ham-Yard Soup Kitchen and Hospice.  
Homes for the Aged Poor.  
Society for the Relief of Distress.  
Clergy Ladies' Homes.  
Soho and St. Giles Missions.  
Homes for Waifs and Strays.  
Friendly Help Society.  
The Southwark Girl's Rescue Society.  
British Home for Incurables.  
Midnight Meeting Movement.  
The Meath Home of Comfort for Epileptics.  
The London Female Guardian Society.  
Girl's Friendly Society.  
St. Albans, Holborn, Parochial Mission Fund.  
Sisters of Bethany.  
All Saint's Church, Walworth.  
Hope Mission.  
Royal Naval Benevolent Society.  
Ragged School Union.  
The West London Hospital.  
The Guild of the Holy Redeemer.  
Mrs Power Lalor's Christmas Fund.  
Educational Food Fund and Halfpenny Dinners for School Children.  
British Asylum for Deaf and Dumb Females.  
The Society for the Relief of Distressed Widows.  
Christ Church (late Surrey Chapel).  
Grove Mission.  
London Medical Mission.  
East London Poor.



St. Andrews Waterside Mission.  
 London Orphan Asylum.  
 Spitalfield Weaver's Union.  
 London Fever Hospital.  
 The Pheonix Temperance Hospital.  
 Royal Maternity Hospital.  
 Grovesnor Hospital for Women and Children.  
 The Royal Ear Hospital.  
 The Royal National Hospital for Consumption.  
 The Robin Society.  
 Factory Helpers' Union.  
 St. Mary's Church, Soho.  
 Gifford Hall Mission.  
 Sermon Lane Mission.  
 The Royal Albert Orphan Asylum.  
 St. Alphege Mission.  
 Metropolitan Hospital.  
 South London Association for Assisting the Blind.  
 Royal Westminster Ophthalmic Hospital.  
 North-West London Hospital.  
 Sailors' Orphan Girls' School and Home.  
 St. Giles Christian Mission.  
 The Cancer Hospital.  
 Cheyne Hospital for Sick and Incurable Children.  
 Working Lads' Institute and Home.  
 East-End Christmas Dinners.  
 Lady Constance Howard.  
 The Orphan Working School.  
 The London Diocesan Council for Preventive Rescue and Penitentiary Work.  
 Hospital for Epilepsy and Paralysis.  
 East London Hospital for Children.  
 Friendly Female Society.  
 Field Lane Refuges and Ragged Schools.  
 The Children's Aid Society.  
 The Female Mission to the Fallen.  
 Royal School for Naval and Marine Officer's Daughters.  
 The Church of England Book Society.  
 Shaftesbury Memorial Hall.  
 City Orthopaedic Hospital.  
 The Samaritan Free Hospital for Women and Children.  
 St. Basil's Home (Oxford).  
 King's College Hospital.  
 Home for Working Girls in London.  
 Radnor Street Mission.  
 Royal Blind Pension Society.

Princess Louise Home and National Society for the Protection of Young Girls.  
Boys' and Girls' Industrial Homes.  
The Royal Hospital for Children and Women.  
Royal Orthopaedic Hospital.  
British and American Mission Homes in Paris.  
London Throat Hospital.  
Seamen's Hospital Society.  
Paddington-Green Children's Hospital.  
St. John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin.  
The Mary Wardell Convalescent Home for Scarlet Fever.  
Golden Lane and Hoxton Costers' Mission.  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul.  
The House of Charity.  
The After-Care Association for Poor Female Convalescents on Leaving Asylums for the Insane.  
Christmas Cheer for the Homeless and Destitute.  
Poplar and Bromley Tabernacle.  
St. Bartholomew's Church, Bethnal Green.  
The London Female Preventative and Reformatory Institution.  
North London University College Hospital.  
Home Teaching Society for the Blind.  
Burdett Road Church, Stepney.  
The Royal Hospital for Incurables.  
Homes of Hope.



**Appendix Three: List of Organisations making Christmas  
Appeals in *The Times* between 20 November and 26 December  
1912**

*In order of appearance.*

Alton Cripples Hospital (Hants).  
Chelsea Hospital for Women.  
Queen Charlotte's Lying-In Hospital.  
Poor Children's Yule Tide Association.  
Christmas Clothing and Hampers for Little Cripples.  
National Orphan Home for Girls.  
National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic.  
The Robin Society.  
The Hospital of St. Luke.  
Great Northern Central Hospital.  
Fox Court Ragged Schools and Mission.  
The Queen's Hospital for Children.  
The Model Soup Kitchen.  
The Ragged School Union.  
St. Luke's House.  
Homes for the Aged Poor.  
Tower Hamlets Mission.  
The Cancer Hospital.  
The Evans Hurndall Mission.  
University College Hospital.  
Sunday Clothes.  
The Church Army.  
St. Giles Christian Mission.  
John Groom's Crippleage.  
The Thomas Cranfield Children's Mission.  
The Mission to Seamen.  
Slum Mission in Birmingham.  
The Santa Claus Society Doll Show and Sale.  
South London Association for Assisting the Blind.  
Entertainments for the Poor.  
Mary Wardell Convalescent Home.  
The Liberator Belief Fund.  
Sunday School Union Homes.  
Wesleyan East-End Mission.  
London Female-Guardian Society.  
Queen Victoria Clergy Fund.  
National Hospital for Consumption.  
Evelina Hospital for Sick Children.

Workshops for the Blind of London.  
St. Mary's Hospital, Plaistow.  
Dr. Barnado's Homes.  
The Lighthouse Literature Mission.  
Catherine Gladstone Free Convalescent Home.  
Home of St. Barnabas.  
Salmon Lane Mission.  
London Orphan Asylum, Watford.  
Brompton Hospital for Consumption.  
Hoxton Coster's Mission.  
Female Aid Society.  
British Orphan Asylum, Slough.  
London Homeopathic Hospital.  
Christmas Dinners.  
The Marine Society.  
Children's Aid Society.  
Church Building Society.  
Richmond Street Mission, Walworth.  
Brixton Orphanage.  
South London Church Fund.  
The Royal Albert Orphanage, Bagshot.  
The After Care Association.  
Dinners for Homeless Seamen.  
The National Society for Epileptics.  
The Homes of Hope.  
Royal Naval Fund.  
Work Among Friendless Girls.  
Royal Alfred Aged Merchant Seaman's Institution.  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul.  
Central London Ophthalmic Hospital.  
London Skin Hospital.  
The Poor in Bermondsey.  
St. John's Hospital, Lewisham.  
St. Mark's Parish, Victoria Docks.  
Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital.  
Cheyne Hospital for Sick and Incurable Children.  
Church of England Waifs and Strays Society.  
Alexandra Hospital for Children with Hip Disease.  
Field Lane Institution.  
National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen.  
Southwark Diocesan Association for Rescue Work.  
Fox and Knot and Hatfield Street Schools and Mission.  
The League of Mercy.  
Camberwell Mission and Ragged Schools.  
Royal Westminster Ophthalmic Hospital.



Islington Christmas Dinners.  
Belgrave Hospital for Children.

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PR AC 23, Acomb Church of England Day School Log Book, 1863-79. .

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PR BUR 15, Burythorpe School Log Book, 1874-88.

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