



# Christmas in Samuel Pepys's Time

BY MARJORIE HOWE DIXON  
Of course you know that Samuel Pepys wrote his diary in cipher, and that it was some two hundred years before it was deciphered. Due to the fact that it was written in shorthand, he could write intimately of the happenings of his day, in a way he would not otherwise have dared. Hence the lively interest we feel in his Diary, today.

Let us see how he celebrated Christmas. There was turkey in those days in Merrie England, but we find it was served on the 23rd of December, perhaps because it fell on a Sunday in the year 1660.

"23rd. (Lord's day) In the morning to church, where our pew all covered with rosemary and baize. A stranger made a dull sermon. Home and found my wife and maid with much ado had made shift to spit a great turkey sent me this week from Charles Carter, my old colleague, now minister in Huntinghouse, but not at all roasted, and so I was fain to stay till two o'clock, and after that to church with my wife, and a good sermon there was, and so home."

"25th. (Christmas Day) In the morning to church, where Mr. Mills made a very good sermon. Home to dinner, where my brother Tom (who this morning came to see my wife's new mantle put on, which do please me very well) to a good shoulder of mutton and chicken. After dinner

again, my wife and I, where we had a dull sermon, of a stranger, which made me sleep."

A year later we find that Pepys went to church as usual on Christmas day, but that the following day he and his wife and a group of friends found a merry bowl with singing at an alehouse,—the good old wassail mentioned in Dickens and again in Irving's tale of Bracebridge Hall.

In the year 1662, there was Christmas giving, just as there is now, and the tipping of servants. On December 24th Pepys writes, "This evening Mr. Gauden sent me against Christmas, a great chine of beef (whatever that may be) and three dozen tongues. I did give 5 s. to the man that brought it and a half a crown to the porters."

On Christmas Day Pepys heard a sermon on the text, "Glory to God on high, on earth peace, and good will towards men." Later he says, "I walked home again with great pleasure, and there dined by my wife's bed side with great content having a mess of brave plum-porridge and a roasted pullet for dinner, and I sent for a mince pie abroad, my wife not being well, to make any herself yet." Evidently his wife soon recovered for she was able to join him at a theatre party on the 28th of that month.

Many times Pepys held celebration before Christmas. Thus on the 24th of the month (1665) we find he made this entry:

"24th. (Sunday) To dinner, my landlady and her daughter with me and had mince-pies, and very merry at a mischance her young son had, in tearing of his new coat quite down the outside of his sleeve in the wool cloth. Then to church, and placed myself in the parson's pew under the pulpit, to hear Mrs. Chamberlin in the next pew sing, who is daughter to Sir James Bunce, of whom I have heard much, and indeed she sings very finely."

Mince-pies were certainly Pepys's favorites. His wife seemed to have gone to great measures to provide her husband with his mince pie. In December, 1666, he wrote:

"25th. (Christmas Day) Lay pretty long in bed, and then rose, leaving my wife desirous of sleep, having sat up till four this morning, seeing her maids make mince-pies. I to church, where our parson Mills made a good sermon. Then home, and dined well on some ribs of beef roasted, and mince-pies; only my wife, brother, and Barker, and plenty of good wine of my own, and my heart full of true joy; and thanks to God Almighty for the goodness of my condition at this day."

In 1667 Pepys spent Christmas eve at the Queen's chapel and there witnessed a religious presentation of the advent of our Lord. He mentions his amazement at the mixture of the crowd, there being many footman and beggar, with here and there a fine

lady, the clergy and noble with the Queen and her ladies. Pepys was most concerned about his pockets being picked. The "shew" as he called it lasted until early morning when he finally took a coach after drinking some burnt wine at the Rose Tavern door. He begins his diary for the 26th with his ride home in the moonlight and he stopped and "dropped money at five or six places which he (I) was the willing to do, it being Christmas-day." His wife was asleep when he

arrived but Jane his house maid was making pies and in all probability mince-pies. He retired and rose about nine, and "to church, and there heard a dull sermon of Mr. Mills, but a great many fine people at church, and so home."

Christmas seemed to be celebrated very quietly in England if we are to take Pepys's activities as an example. It is to be remembered that England was at that time going through a period of reconstruction politically with

the restoration of the monarchy under Charles the First. Christmas celebrations were not as highly developed as they were later, when we find the joyous and hearty and even lively affairs which are recorded by Dickens and Irving.

—Twenty-five thousand dollars was paid for a first folio of Shakespeare in London recently. A rare first edition of Gray's "Elegy" brought \$3,000.

—Benjamin Franklin's first Philadelphia home, where the philosopher took up his residence upon his arrival from Boston, is to be torn down to provide for the approach to the new Delaware River bridge. The house is a ramshackle shanty and the street on which it is situated is only an alley. The windows and panels of the old building, all splendid examples of colonial workmanship, will be preserved by the curator of Independence Hall.



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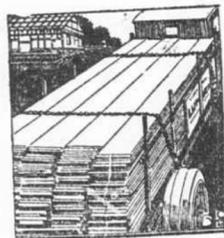
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