

British customs and traditions

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CALENDAR CUSTOMS

January

New Year's Day

In the UK, people celebrate a New year with a lot of joy, music, traditional dances, but also with a lot of care for their guests at the New Year's Eve. Scots, for example, sing the traditional "Auld Lang Syne" while dancing in the hour. For the English, an important moment of the first day of the year is the visit of a guest. Depending on the person who first steps into your house in the New year, you will know if it will bring you luck or, on the contrary, bad luck. It is said that if the guest is a young man with dark hair and presents with gifts for the host, then good luck is guaranteed. The classic gifts that people make at such times consist of homemade bread, salt or charcoal, all being elements that bring you to life. In the UK it is good for the guest not to forget about the head of the family and to bring him a drink in gift. The fire occupies an important place in the traditions of the Scottish New Year. On the streets, especially in the villages, wheels rolled in pitch, rolled. Also, in homes, people burn juniper twigs, the fire being meant to drive diseases out of that place.



Twelfth Night



Twelfth Night (5th January) is when all Christmas Decorations should be removed so as not to bring bad luck upon the home. If decorations are not removed on Twelfth Night, they should stay up all year. Why is it bad luck to leave the decorations up after

Twelfth Night? Long ago it was thought that leaving the decorations up would cause a disaster. People believed that tree-spirits lived in the greenery (holly, ivy etc) they decorated their houses with. The greenery was brought into the house to provide a safe haven for the tree-spirits during the harsh midwinter days. Once this period was over it was necessary to return the greenery back outside to release the tree-spirits into the countryside once again. Failure to do this would mean that vegetation would not be able to start growing again (spring would not return), leading to an agricultural disaster. It was also thought that, if you left the greenery in the house, the tree-spirits would cause mischief in the house until they were released. Today people still feel uneasy about leaving the Christmas decorations up after Twelfth Night. Despite decorations now being made of foil or paper, and even though the tree-spirits are long forgotten, the superstition still survives. The main event for this holiday was to have a cake in the center of a table. Everyone would take a piece of this cake and two pieces had a dried pea and bean. Whoever had this in their slice would be royalty for one day no matter their position.

Plough Monday

The first Monday after Twelfth Night is Plough Monday, a day when ploughmen traditionally blacken their faces and marked the end of the Christmas period for the agricultural communities. As agricultural work was scarce in the winter, farm labourers disguised themselves, by blacking their faces with soot, to get money by dragging a decorated plough around the larger houses in the villages. As they dragged the plough they would shout out "Penny for the ploughboys!". They were



often accompanied by someone acting the Fool. This character would often be dressed in animal skins and a tail, and carried a pig's bladder on the end of a stick.



Molly dancing is most commonly performed on or around **Plough Monday**. In the past, Molly dancers sometimes accompanied the farm labourers to dance and entertain for money. They blackened their faces with soot to disguise themselves so they could not be recognised by their future employers. Molly dancing traditionally only appeared during the depths of winter and is regarded by many people as the East Anglian form of Morris. The dances are still performed today.

February

Candlemas Day

Candlemas is the last festival in the Christian year that is dated by reference to Christmas. It is celebrated on 2nd February. The name, 'Candlemas', refers to the custom of blessing and distributing candles and carrying them in procession before the mass. Nowadays any Christmas decorations not taken down by Twelfth Night (January 5th) should be left up until Candlemas Day and then taken down. Another tradition holds that anyone who hears funeral bells tolling on

Candlemas will soon hear of the death of a close friend or relative, each toll of the bell represents a day that will pass before the unfortunate news is learned.

Valentine's Day

On Valentine's Day, children get used to playing some special songs and are rewarded with candy, fruit or money. In some regions of the United Kingdom the delicious Valentine rolls (with cumin, raisins or plums) are cooked, especially for this occasion. Another popular Valentine's Day tradition is the publication of love sonnets in magazines and tabloids, as the great poets used to do. There are many other traditions and superstitions associated with romance activities on Valentine's day including: the first man an unmarried woman saw on 14th February would be her future husband; if the names of all a girl's suitors were written on paper and wrapped in clay and the clay put into water, the piece that rose to the surface first would contain the name of her husband; if a woman saw a robin flying overhead



on Valentine's Day, it meant she would marry a sailor. If she saw a sparrow, she would marry a poor man and be very happy. If she saw a goldfinch, she would marry a rich person.

Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day

Pancake Day (also known as Shrove Tuesday) is the last day before the period Lent. It is traditional on this day to eat pancakes. A pancake day tradition in the UK is the pancake race. People run in a race with a pancake in a pan. As he runs, he has to throw the pancake (throw the pancake in the air and catch it in the pan) several times. In some pancake races people dress in luxurious costumes. The most popular pancake race takes place in a town called Olney, in the middle of England. People say Olney's been celebrating pancake races since 1445!



March

St. Patrick's Day

Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, though he was not Irish. In the United Kingdom, people go to parades, wear green and clover leaves and even put green paint in the fountains. To be lucky all year, you must wear green clothes, clover

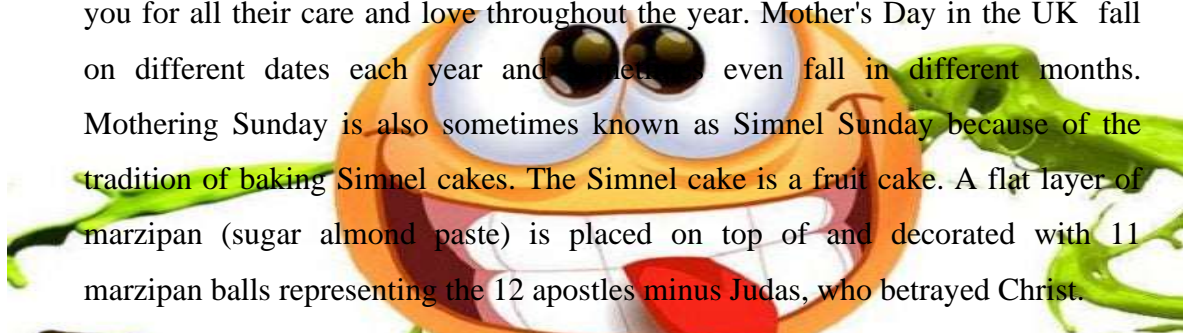


and drink lots of beer. On St. Patrick, the Irish wear a clover to the hat, and at the end of the day, put the plant in the yellow glass. After drinking the last bite of that glass, the clover should be thrown over his left shoulder to be lucky. In

dreams, if it comes up, the four-leaf clover means financial gain, fame, health and the assurance that you will live happily ever after. He is also a kind of vegetable cupid.

Mother's Day or Mothering Sunday

Mothering Sunday is a time when children pay respect to their Mothers. Children often give their Mothers a gift and a card. Many churches give the children in the congregation a little bunch of spring flowers to give to their Mothers as a thank you for all their care and love throughout the year. Mother's Day in the UK fall on different dates each year and sometimes even fall in different months. Mothering Sunday is also sometimes known as Simnel Sunday because of the tradition of baking Simnel cakes. The Simnel cake is a fruit cake. A flat layer of marzipan (sugar almond paste) is placed on top of and decorated with 11 marzipan balls representing the 12 apostles minus Judas, who betrayed Christ.



April Fools' Day!

April Fool Day

Easter Day is marked for two days in England: the trickster is called a 'nobby' and must wear a tail attached to his pants or skirt. In Scotland, it is called "April qowk" or "April cuckoo", because it is the first bird to announce the coming of spring. In Scotland this day bears the name of "Hunt the Gowk Day", in this case "gowk" in the sense of natarau, this day being dedicated to farces aimed exclusively at lazy people. Interestingly, farces are generally allowed only in the first half the day.



April

Easter

Easter is celebrated in the UK in a less exuberant way, through an attitude closer to the Christian faith, usually in the middle of the family, especially in rural areas. The places of worship are mainly decorated with white lilies or "Madonna Lily" (Madonna Lily or Easter Lily), consecrated symbols of purity. Women who go to Psalter's service often wear the traditional "Easter Bonnets", Easter hats adorned with a multitude of flowers. According to an ancient ritual, it is organized for children "hunters" of hidden eggs crafted in the gardens by the Easter Bunny (Easter Bunny). In many parts of England, professional bands



perform Morris's dance every Easter Sunday. Made up of specific choreographic figures, the Morris dance includes accessories such as sticks, swords, handkerchiefs and bells. Often one or two dancers perform consecrated steps around two pipes sitting on the cross. This traditional ritual aims to drive away the spirits of winter. In the UK, Easter Monday is the day when men take their choices and walk a certain distance. On Tuesday, women should do the same with men. All as a representation of the resurrection of Christ or the growth of crops. Also in the UK, Easter takes place the festival called Hocktide: two men are chosen to go through the city and share the orange women in exchange for kisses.

May

May Day

The first day of the month of May is known as May Day. Traditional English May Day celebrations include Morris dancing, crowning a





May Queen and dancing around a Maypole.



Well dressing

Well dressing is the art of decorating (dressing) wells, springs or other water sources with pictures made of growing things. The wells are dressed with large framed panels decorated with elaborate mosaic-like pictures made of flower petals, seeds, grasses, leaves, tree bark, berries and moss. Wooden trays are covered with clay, mixed with water and salt. The design is then filled in with natural materials, predominantly flower petals and mosses, but also beans, seeds and small cones. Well-dressings are beautiful and delicate and take a lot of work to make, and yet they only last for a few days. After the well dressing is erected next to the well it is blessed in a short outdoor service. Eyam, like many of the towns and villages, has several wells and a short procession from well to well is carried out during the blessing of the wells. The well dressing season spans from May through to late September.

June

Trooping the colour

The official birthday of Queen Elizabeth II is marked each year by a military parade and held, known as Trooping the Color. The official name is "Queen's Birthplace". Each June, the Queen and the other Royal Family members attend the Trooping the Color ceremony at Horse Guards Parade, Whitehall in London. The Queen attends the ceremony to greet thousands of guards carrying the Color (the flag of their regiment). The parade route runs from Buckingham Palace along The



Mall to Horse Guards Parade, Whitehall and again. The Royal Family gathers on the balcony of Buckingham Palace to watch a recent RAF flight at 1pm.



July

Swan Upping



Swan upping is a swan ceremony celebrated every July in England, during which the mute swans of the Thames are captured, tagged and then released. Prior to the tenth century, the ownership of swans in any body of water was granted to landowners along the bodies of water. Later, the property of the swans was taken over by the crown. The main practical reason for carrying the swans is for Swan Uppers to count, measure and weigh the swans. Young moviegoers are marked with unique identification numbers to designate the property.



August

Notting Hill Carnival

The Notting Hill Carnival is an annual event that has taken place in London since 1966, every August for two days. The festival is attended by about 2 million people, thus gaining the reputation of the largest street festival in Europe. The annual event is a lively and exciting event that celebrates and exposes the luxury, varied and magnificent past and the multicultural present of London.

September

Harvest Festival

Harvest Festival is a celebration of the food grown on the land. In Britain, people have given thanks for successful harvests since pagan times. They celebrate this day by singing, praying and decorating their churches with baskets of fruit and food. Harvest Festival reminds Christians of all the good things God gives them. This makes them want to share with others who are not so fortunate. In schools and in Churches, people bring food from home to a Harvest Festival Service. After the service, the food that has been put on display is usually made into parcels and given to people in need.

October

Halloween



Halloween is celebrated every year on October 31st. Traditionally, Halloween dishes are made from pumpkin, apples and nuts. The British are accustomed to making huge fires, throwing stones, vegetables and nuts to scare ghosts, and

what happens to the objects was said to predict the future of the one who threw them. If a stone thrown into the fire seemed to disappear until the morning, the one who threw it was destined to die the following year. If the lovers fell in love and they exploded, they would be in a marriage of trouble. Also, the



"Trick-or-treat" habit was at first a Celtic practice of leaving food and water out on the windowsill for ghosts who would have come to the city of Samhain. From Halloween or "Mischief Night" in some parts of the United Kingdom people get used to getting their doors out of hinges. Legend has it that to ward off evil spirits the door would have to be thrown into a pond. There are several games associated with Halloween parties. One of them is called "dunking" or "apple bobbing", and it consists of picking teeth with floating apples in a vessel with water. Halloween costumes are traditionally modeled after supernatural figures, monsters, skeletons, ghosts, witches and devils. Over time, among the costumes used were those of



fictional characters, celebrities of the day and generic archetypes, such as princesses or ninja fighters.

November

Bonfire Night

Bonfire Night is celebrated on November 5th. This day recalls the failure of a plot of 1605, aimed at the burning of Parliament, attributed to a group of Catholics. "Fireworks Day" is also called Guy Fawkes Night and this night huge fireworks are lit and fireworks are launched. In some regions special sweets are prepared for this holiday - fire toffee (Bonfire toffee), pie with black molasses syrup, caramel iced apples, baked potatoes over fire. Guy is a reminder of Guy Fawkes and is made of old clothes stuffed with paper or straw, and then set on fire. Children, in some areas, are blackening their faces as Guy Fawkes might have done when he planned to blow up parliament.



Remembrance Day



Remembrance Day is celebrated on November 11th. It is a special day because the British remember all those men and women who were killed during the two world wars and other conflicts. Special services are organized at war memorials and churches throughout the UK. The Queen lays the first wreath at Cenotaf in Whitehall. The wreaths are placed beside war memorials of companies, clubs and societies. People also leave small wooden crosses in the memory of a family member who died in the war. Remembrance Day is also known as the poppy day, because it is traditional to wear an artificial poppy.

December

Christmas



The habit of decorating houses with evergreen plants, plants that remain green all year long - ivy, mistletoe, laurel, started from the Druidic period, when people adorned their houses with "always green" plants to give the forest spirits a shelter, during the winter. There was an ancient superstition, according to which you were unlucky to throw the perennial Christmas plant decorations before January 5, the "Epiphany" on Christmas Eve. Related to the habit of kissing under the mistletoe, it seems that this plant was endowed with miraculous powers, being considered sacred by the Druids. One of the Christmas traditions is to send friends and acquaintances Christmas greetings or postcards. Every year over a million Christmas postcards are shipped to the UK, many of them being sold for charity. Throughout the English holidays, carolers go from house to house, ringing bells and blessing people with Christmas songs. The hosts treat cakes with cookies, pies filled with walnuts and dried fruits. Christmas Day begins with the gifting of children and attending the church's Christmas service. The traditional Christmas meal consists of turkey baked with chestnuts, goose with raisins or pudding from Yorkshire, next to Brussels sprouts. The Wassail hot drink vessel, consisting of wine mixed with spices, represents the crown of the Christmas table. The quarrels are said to disappear



when the Wassail glasses are savored. After lunch, the family gathers in the living room to listen to the Christmas message of the Queen of England.

Boxing Day

Boxing Day is celebrated on December 26 and was named because, on this day, merchants receive a Christmas Box, with money inside, as a sign of appreciation for the work done during the year. , receiving permission to leave home only on December 26th. Thus, on this day, the nobles allowed their servants to go home and offered them a box of gifts and money, in gratitude for their efforts.

It is a day when people give gifts to loved ones, have dinner with friends or relatives, participate in races and shows, hunting and fishing parties. The name of the holiday has its origins in the days of Queen Victoria, when the churches opened, the day after Christmas, the Box of the Mile. Parents offered children small gifts, such as oranges, handkerchiefs or socks. There was also a habit for boys or girls who were learning trades to collect, in a box, money from customers crossing the threshold of the shop where they worked. Poor people started carving with a box where the rich put money, food or other gifts.