

A Christmas dictionary/ encyclopaedia for EFL students and teachers

Advent calendar

A calendar from the 1st of December until Christmas Day that has little cardboard doors that are opened every day to reveal pictures, chocolates etc

Auld Lang Syne

The song that is usually sung at the very beginning of the New Year, often with people linking hands while their arms are crossed in front of them. People only hear and sing this song at New Year and its lyrics are in Scots (a Scottish dialect of English), so people can only usually remember a few words and just hum the rest. In Japan, by contrast, many shops play this song at the end of every day. The title can loosely be translated as “(for) old time’s (sake)”.

Bah humbug

The famously negative attitude of SCROOGE towards Christmas at the beginning of the Charles Dickens story A CHRISTMAS CAROL. It means something like “nonsense”, but nowadays is only used to refer to Christmas as a direct quote from the book.

Baubles (Br. Eng)

Things that hang off the CHRISTMAS TREE to make it more colourful. Especially used to mean shiny balls. In America these would be called ORNAMENTS.

Bethlehem

A small town near Jerusalem where Jesus is supposed to have been born. It is mentioned in many CHRISTMAS CAROLS, e.g. Oh Little Town of Bethlehem.

Big Ben

This is the name of the bell inside the Houses of Parliament near the Thames in London, and is often also used for the famous clock and tower that it is in. In the UK, most New Year parties and TV channels play the chimes of Big Ben to mark the exact start of the New Year.

Boxing Day

The day after Christmas. No one really knows why it is called Boxing Day, but theories include boxes of good being given to servants and the alms boxes in the church being opened to give money to the poor.

Boxing Day Bank Holiday

A bank holiday is a public holiday in Britain, usually on a Monday. If Christmas Day or Boxing



Day are at the weekend when people are usually on holiday anyway, they get an extra day's holiday just after.

Brandy sauce

The traditional sauce for CHRISTMAS PUDDING and sometimes MINCE PIES that is similar to custard and is made from butter, sugar, milk, and brandy. Some people prefer fresh cream, ice cream or just a sprinkling of sugar with their Xmas pudding.

Cake

See CHRISTMAS CAKE

Candy cane

A coloured piece of candy in the shape of a walking stick. It is used as a CHRISTMAS DECORATION and as a Xmas treat, especially in America.

Carol

See CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Carol service

A church service to celebrate Xmas in which CAROLS are sung, often before Xmas and organised by a school.

Carolling

Singing CHRISTMAS CAROLS outside people's houses, nowadays usually to collect money for charity but traditionally to be offered food and drink by the people who live there. Often called CHRISTMAS CAROLLING.

Carve

Cutting the meat in a ROAST, which at Xmas is usually TURKEY. The whole bird is usually put on or near the dining table and someone, usually the father, cuts off pieces of the turkey for people with a special long carving knife and fork. There are also electric carving knives.

Chimney

The part of the house where the smoke from the fires comes from. FATHER CHRISTMAS/ SANTA CLAUS is said to come down the chimney to deliver the presents, which is why the CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS are usually hung on the FIREPLACE.

Chinese New Year



See LUNAR NEW YEAR

Christ child

Another way to say “baby Jesus”, rarely used in speech but part of many CHRISTMAS CAROLS. This is originally what KRIS KRINGLE meant, but that eventually became another name for SANTA.

Christmas cake

In Britain, a Christmas cake is usually a dark, heavy cake made with lots of dried fruit, with MARZIPAN and thick white icing on it. The white icing looks like snow and is often decorated with snowmen etc.

Christmas card

A folded piece of card (= thick paper) that is similar to a birthday card, but with a colourful Xmas scene on the outside (e.g. a NATIVITY SCENE or the THREE WISE MEN) and people’s names and a Christmas greeting (e.g. “MERRY CHRISTMAS and a Happy New Year” or “HAPPY HOLIDAYS”) inside. Unlike letters or emails, you usually write “To (person it is being sent to)” and “(Love) from (the people sending it)” rather than “Dear...” etc. Many families send out hundreds of Xmas cards, including to people who they rarely contact during the rest of the year. They will also sometimes keep a list of people who they have received cards from to make sure that they (and only they) get cards next year. This makes the postal system so busy that cards can take weeks to get to their destination. Nowadays many Xmas cards have non-religious themes such as saying “SEASON’S GREETINGS” inside and having a picture of a ROBIN and snow.

Christmas carols

Traditional and/ or religious songs about Christmas. Although “carols” means the same as “Christmas carols” (similar songs at other times of the year are called “hymns”), it is quite common to still use the full expression. CHRISTMAS SONGS are non-religious songs about the season. “A Christmas Carol” is also the name of the famous story by Charles Dickens about SCROOGE.

Christmas carolling

See CAROLLING

Christmas cracker

A short cardboard tube that is covered with a longer piece of colourful paper which is twisted at both ends to make kinds of handles, making it look a bit like the handlebars of a motorbike. Two different people hold the two ends of the cracker, and when they pull it the things inside are revealed or (often) fall out. The things inside are usually a small plastic toy, a CHRISTMAS JOKE and a PARTY HAT. There is also usually a strip of cardboard with a small amount of gunpowder on it that runs through the cracker, making a pop (a small explosion) as the cracker is pulled. It is fairly easy to make your own crackers, but most people buy them from shops.



Christmas Day

In most countries Christmas Day is on the 25th of December, but it is in January in some countries and churches, often around the 7th of January. It is the most important day of the Christmas holiday in most countries. However, in some countries the CHRISTMAS PRESENTS and/ or CHRISTMAS DINNER are on other days such as CHRISTMAS EVE. On Christmas Day in the UK almost no shops are open and there is no public transport.

Christmas decorations

Things that are put up in houses, shops etc to celebrate Xmas. They include a CHRISTMAS TREE, TINSEL, a WREATH, and BAUBLES

Christmas dinner

The main meal on CHRISTMAS DAY, usually a late lunch and usually a TURKEY ROAST in the UK, USA and some Commonwealth countries.

Christmas Eve

“Eve” means “just before”, so Christmas Eve is the day before Xmas, meaning the 24th of December in most countries. In some countries the main Xmas meal is eaten on the evening of Xmas Eve.

Christmas food

Xmas comes in the middle of the European winter, so Xmas foods are often based around ingredients that were preserved earlier in the year (e.g. MINCEMEAT) and ingredients that last a long time (e.g. dried fruit like FIGS and DATES), and winter vegetables (potatoes, PARSNIPS etc). The dishes are also often things that can be used over the length of the Xmas holiday without going off (turkey, CHRISTMAS PUDDING, CHRISTMAS CAKE, etc)

Christmas joke

A strip of paper in a CHRISTMAS CRACKER with a joke on it. These jokes are famously unfunny and usually make people groan instead of laugh, but it is still traditional to read them out to everyone at the table.

Christmas lights

In British English this is sometimes used to include FAIRY LIGHTS, but more often meaning lights that are hung outside, e.g. on the outside of people’s houses and in shopping streets such as OXFORD STREET. Americans use “Christmas lights” for both meanings. Families sometimes go out in the evening just to see the Xmas lights. Public Xmas lights often have an official switching on ceremony, with the mayor or a celebrity pushing the switch.

Christmas log

A chocolate cake in the shape of a piece of wood, often decorated to look even more like wood. Its origins lie in the traditional YULE LOG.

Christmas party

The most common kind of Xmas party in the UK is an office party actually held in the normal working space, as happens in the TV series *The Office*. It is also traditional for at least one person to get very drunk and kiss someone else, photocopy their bottom and/ or say something really rude to someone such as their boss. As party venues can get very busy during the Xmas period, some office parties that are held outside are celebrated as early as the end of November.

Christmas presents

Gifts given around CHRISTMAS DAY. The two traditions of Xmas presents are to put them in CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS and under the CHRISTMAS TREE. Usually everyone in the family buys presents for everyone else, but it is also possible to do variations on SECRET SANTA.

Christmas pudding

A very dark, rich and heavy steamed pudding made with lots of dried fruit, often eaten hot with BRANDY SAUCE. Traditionally a coin is hidden somewhere in the pudding and finding it in your portion is good luck. Note that a Christmas pudding is not similar to an American “pudding” (which is like a British “crème caramel”), but rather uses the British meaning of the word, being a heavy dessert made from flour and suet that is traditionally steamed in a pressure cooker.

Christmas service

This usually means a church service on CHRISTMAS DAY, e.g. a MIDNIGHT MASS, but could also mean a CAROL SERVICE before Xmas.

Christmas songs

Song such a RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER and Frosty the Snowman. “Christmas songs” usually means ones that are too modern and/or secular to be considered CHRISTMAS CAROLS.

Christmas special

As the weather is usually bad and there are few open shops and no public transport, British families traditionally spend a lot of time in front of the television during Xmas. As well as the QUEEN’S SPEECH and programmes that seem to be on every year (musicals, James Bond, etc), there are often special versions of regular television programmes such as longer versions of soap operas and one-off revivals of old sitcoms.



Christmas stocking

A large sock (so not actually a stocking) which Xmas presents are put into, usually red with Xmas patterns on it but sometimes just a normal sock. Usually hung on the foot of children's beds or on the FIREPLACE.

Christmas story (a/ the)

Using "a" or "the" changes the meaning. The Xmas story is the story in the Bible about the birth of Christ, including the STAR, THREE WISE MEN, MANGER, SHEPHERDS, etc. A Xmas story includes A CHRISTMAS CAROL (the story of SCROOGE) and other stories based around this time of year.

Christmas television

See CHRISTMAS SPECIAL and QUEEN'S SPEECH

Christmas tree

An evergreen tree, often a fir, that is put up inside or outside the house at around Xmas time, and usually covered with CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS with a fairy, STAR or angel right at the top. CHRISTMAS PRESENTS are usually put under it. Christmas trees can be real or made from plastic. Plastic ones, especially smaller ones, are sometimes silver or white rather than dark green.

Coin

See CHRISTMAS PUDDING

Countdown

Counting down from 10 to 1 as midnight on NEW YEAR'S EVE approaches. The second when the New Year starts is usually marked by kissing, hugging, toasts, cheering, PARTY POPPERS, shouting "Happy New Year", listening to the chimes of BIG BEN, and a verse or two of the song AULD LANG SYNE.

Cranberry sauce

A kind of jam made from cranberries that is the usual accompaniment for TURKEY (just as mint sauce is for lamb and apple sauce is for pork)

Dates

The fruit of a date palm, which is about the same size as a thumb and has a long stone inside. Most British people have never seen a fresh date and only eat the dreid ones at Xmas, exactly the same as FIGS.

Decorations



See CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

Ebenezer Scrooge

See SCROOGE

Eggnog

A drink made from milk or cream with sugar, spices and raw eggs, usually with alcohol added. It is popular in the USA, Canada and the UK during the winter, especially around Xmas.

Elf

See ELVES

Elves

The small magical people who make presents that SANTA delivers on Xmas day.

Fairy lights (Br. Eng)

The small, colourful lights that people hang on their Xmas trees and in their windows. Americans would just say CHRISTMAS LIGHTS.

Father Christmas

The traditional British name for the person who is supposed to bring children's presents on Xmas day. The American version SANTA is becoming more popular in the UK nowadays.

Festive season (the)

A way of talking about Christmas that is meant to include HANUKKAH and KWANZAA, or sometimes to avoid the mention of religion at all.

Figs

Fruit that are dark purple on the outside and green on the inside, with lots of seeds inside. Figs do not grow in the UK, and are only popular in their dried form at Xmas.

Fireplace

The place around the fire that children traditionally hang their CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS from, perhaps because SANTA is meant to come down the CHIMNEY.

Fireworks

Rockets that explode in the air, making beautiful coloured lights. Some local governments provide



a firework display to celebrate the New Year, especially during a big celebration such as the new millennium.

Frankincense

An aromatic product of trees which was used to make perfume and incense. One of the presents of the THREE WISE MEN.

Gift

See CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

Hanukkah

The eight-day Jewish Festival of Lights that occurs in November or December. Because Hanukkah and KWANZAA happen at around the time of Christmas, inclusive expressions like HAPPY HOLIDAYS and FESTIVE SEASON are becoming more politically correct than the specific mention of Christmas.

Happy Christmas

This greeting is becoming increasingly common but is considered incorrect by some as it is traditional to say "MERRY CHRISTMAS and a happy New Year"

Happy holidays

A Xmas greeting like "MERRY CHRISTMAS", but one that is supposed to include other holidays at around the same time. Similar to SEASON'S GREETINGS.

Hogmanay

Scottish New Year celebrations, which are much bigger and more important than a Scottish Xmas or New Year in the rest of the UK.

Holly

A bush with sharp, dark green leaves and red berries that is often used as a CHRISTMAS DECORATION and pattern on CHRISTMAS CARDS and WRAPPING PAPER. It is popular because the leaves and berries retain their colour and it is very easy to draw.

Humbug

See BAH HUMBUG

January sales

Traditionally the sales with the biggest discounts of the whole year, and nowadays starting as soon



as the shops reopen in December. It is traditional for people to queue outside the shops, sometimes even overnight, in order to rush in and buy the biggest bargains.

Kris Kringle

Although this expression comes from Christkindl (CHRIST CHILD), which is another tradition for who brings CHRISTMAS PRESENTS, in America it has now become another way to say SANTA.

Lap

The top of your thighs when you sit down that you can rest things on, hence the name of a laptop computer. Children traditionally go to a department store to sit on FATHER CHRISTMAS's lap and say what they want for Christmas, at which point they receive a small gift.

Letter to Santa

Children traditionally write a letter to SANTA telling him what CHRISTMAS PRESENTS they want, and usually reassuring him that they have been good all year. Some postal services provide a special address to write to and actually reply to the children as Santa.

Lunar New Year

Sometimes called Chinese New Year, this is a bigger celebration than the Western version in China and Korea, and is also marked (though not celebrated) in Japan. It is usually in January. The Vietnamese New Year holiday Tet is on the same day.

Magi

Another name for the THREE WISE MEN

Manger

The thing that the baby Jesus is said to have slept in when he first born, most famous because of the CHRISTMAS CAROL "Away in a Manger". It is an old-fashioned word which means a thing that cows and horses eat hay from.

Marzipan

A soft paste made from ground almonds that is used in many CHRISTMAS CAKES, including STOLLEN.

Merry Christmas

The traditional greetings during this season, both in person and in CHRISTMAS CARDS, is "Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year", but "HAPPY CHRISTMAS" is also becoming popular.



Midnight mass

A CHRISTMAS SERVICE that takes place late at night on CHRISTMAS EVE and lasts past midnight and therefore into CHRISTMAS DAY

Mince pies

Confusingly, mince pies are made from MINCEMEAT (which is not a kind of meat) and are not made from mince (which is a kind of meat). The mincemeat is put between pastry above and below, and then usually dusted with a little sugar. Each mince pie is usually the size of a cupcake and so is for one person. It is traditional to leave out a mince pie for SANTA to eat when he delivers the presents

Mince tart

An easier to cook but less popular version of MINCE PIES, with no pastry on top. Unlike the usual way of cooking mince pies, you make one big mince tart and cut it into slices.

Mincemeat

The filling of MINCE PIES. Confusingly, mincemeat is not meat (the kind of meat that is used in spaghetti Bolognese is called “mince” in British English), although it traditionally included it. Instead, it is a very rich mix of dried fruit, distilled spirit and spices, with suet or vegetable shortening (both kinds of solid fat).

Mistletoe

A plant with white berries. A sprig (part of a branch with leaves and berries) is hung in a doorway or on the ceiling, and if someone is standing underneath it they must kiss you if you ask them to.

Mrs Claus

The wife of SANTA CLAUS

Mulled wine

A traditional winter drink that is made from hot wine mixed with spices.

Myrrh

A highly valued fragrance that is said to have been one of the three gifts brought to Jesus by the THREE WISE MEN, along with FRANKINCENSE and gold.

Naughty or nice

SANTA is only supposed to bring presents to children who have been well behaved during the year. This choice is often said to be “naughty or nice”, for example in the song Santa Claus is Coming to Town.



Nativity

Things connected to the birth of Christ, for example NATIVITY PLAY and NATIVITY SCENE. The word is connected in meaning to the English word native (as in native speaker) and the Italian word from Xmas, which is “natale”.

Nativity play

Acting out the Xmas story. Usually the biggest play put on by a school and attended by most of the parents (as in the end of the film Love Actually).

Nativity scene

A small three dimensional model of the scene of baby Jesus lying in the MANGER in the STABLE surrounded by animals, SHEPHERDS and the THREE WISE MEN. Often used as a household CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS. Shops and chrucejs also sometimes have larger versions, sometimes even life size.

New Year's Day

The 1st of January

New Year's Eve

The 31st of December. New Year is usually a time to meet friends rather than family, as Xmas is the family time. For people who are at home, there are always variety shows on TV that count down to the New Year. Other New Year traditions include the chimes of BIG BEN, PARTY POPPERS and AULD LANG SYNE.

Noel

Another name for Xmas

Ornaments (Am. Eng.)

CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

Oxford Street

The main shopping street in London, the most famous place for CHRISTMAS LIGHTS in England

Parsnips

Parsnips are root vegetables that look like a white carrot but taste more like sweet potato. They are usually ROASTed.



Parson's nose

A part near the tail of a ROAST chicken or TURKEY that some people consider to be the best part of the bird

Party hat

Any kind of paper or card hat that is worn during a party. At Xmas, they are usually coloured hats in the shape of a crown that are made from thin paper, usually taken from the inside of a CHRISTMAS CRACKER.

Party poppers

A piece of cardboard with string hanging out of it and streamers (long strips of coloured paper) and a small explosive charge inside. When you pull the string, the gunpowder explodes with a bang and the paper flies out over the room. These are often pulled at midnight on New Year's Eve.

Poinsettia

A plant that is popular as a CHRISTMAS DECORATION due to its festive red and green colours, which are actually the leaves of the plant rather than its flowers

Quality Street

A brand of chocolates that come in a big tin and are most popular at Xmas time.

Queen's speech (the)

At three o'clock in the afternoon on Xmas day the Queen of England gives a televised speech. Traditionally the whole family sits down to watch the speech and the rest of the day is structured around it, for example finishing CHRISTMAS DINNER before it starts and starting to open CHRISTMAS PRESENTS after it finishes.

Reindeer

The animals with big antlers (a kind of horn) who are supposed to pull SANTA's SLEIGH across the sky when he is delivering CHRISTMAS PRESENTS. The names of Santa's reindeer are Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen and RUDOLPH. There are large populations of real reindeer in Norway, Finland, Siberia, Greenland, Alaska and Canada.

ROAST (n)

A meal in which the meat and some of the vegetables are ROASTed, traditionally eaten in Britain every Sunday and on CHRISTMAS DAY. The meat on Xmas day is usually TURKEY.

ROAST (v)



Covering something in fat (oil or solid fat such as lard) and cooking it in the oven. This is different from baking (which is cooking something dry in the oven) and frying (which is cooking with fat in a frying pan on the stove, not in the oven). A traditional Sunday dinner in Britain is usually called a “Sunday roast”, and the meat, potatoes and some other vegetables such as PARSNIPS are all roasted together. CHRISTMAS DINNER is bigger but cooked in the same way. The meat can take a long time to cook this way, so the family traditionally go to church, for a walk or to the pub and then come back home when it is nearly ready.

Roast parsnips

See PARSNIPS

Roast potatoes

Potatoes which are covered in fat and cooked inside the oven, often next to the meat. This makes them brown and crispy on the outside and soft and fluffy on the inside. Some families also have mashed or boiled potatoes as part of their CHRISTMAS DINNER

Roast turkey

See ROAST and TURKEY

Robin

A small, red-breasted bird that is very common on CHRISTMAS CARDS, perhaps because its red breast stands out in the snow or because it is one of the few birds which doesn't migrate away in the winter.

Rudolph (the Red-nosed Reindeer)

In the story and song, Rudolph was a REINDEER who was teased by the other reindeer for having a glowing nose (like a light bulb), until one day SANTA asked him to help light the way of his SLEIGH.

Santa

A common short form of SANTA CLAUS

Santa's elves

See ELVES

Santa Claus

The most common name for the fat man with red and white clothes and a white beard who delivers presents on CHRISTMAS EVE on his SLEIGH pulled by REINDEER, coming down the CHIMNEY to leave them in children's STOCKINGS. The name Santa Claus comes from the Dutch



version of ST NICHOLAS and is often shortened to SANTA. He is also sometimes known as KRIS KRINGLE. The name Santa Claus was originally American English, but has spread all over the world. Although the British FATHER CHRISTMAS was originally a different character, the two myths have merged. He is helped by ELVES and is sometimes said to have a wife, MRS CLAUS.

Scrooge

Ebenezer Scrooge, the miserly (= mean, the opposite of generous) character in the Charles Dickens book CHRISTMAS CAROL. He saw no point in Xmas at the beginning of the story (saying “BAH HUMBUG”) but is shown his life by three ghosts and changes personality completely by the end.

Season's greetings

A greeting, usually in CHRISTMAS CARDS but also sometimes in person. It can be used in place of MERRY CHRISTMAS, either to include other holidays such as New Year or to avoid being specific to one religion. See also HAPPY HOLIDAYS.

Secret Santa

A system by which each person is randomly given a name and only has to buy a present for that one person, which is given anonymously or marked “from SANTA”. A budget is usually set for each present to make sure the system is fair. This is most common in office CHRISTMAS PARTIES, but can also be done between friends or family.

Secularisation

The process by which the original meaning of Christmas (the birth of Jesus) is being lost, often due to the COMMERCIALISATION of Xmas or due to specific policies by educational authorities etc that are meant to save offending people of other or no religion. See also SEASON'S GREETINGS and HAPPY HOLIDAYS.

Shepherd

A person who looks after sheep and takes them from place to place. Shepherds are said to have visited baby Jesus in the STABLE, and so they are usually part of a NATIVITY SCENE and a NATIVITY PLAY. They can be identified by their shabby clothes (unlike the THREE KINGS) and a bent stick called a crook.

Sleigh

A kind of carriage for snowy weather that SANTA sits on to be pulled by his REINDEER, usually shown flying with lots of CHRISTMAS PRESENTS in it.

St Nicholas

The name SANTA CLAUS originally comes from Saint Nicholas, who was a bishop in what is now Turkey in the 4th century. The story that connects him to the modern Santa is that he left

presents for people.

Stable

In the CHRISTMAS STORY, Jesus was born in a place where animals usually slept as there was “no room at the inn”. In modern English the word “stable” is only used to talk about the place where horses sleep, but in a NATIVITY SCENE Jesus is usually shown surrounded by cows etc.

Star

In the original Xmas story the THREE WISE MEN were led to the STABLE where the baby Jesus was born by a moving star. A star is therefore a common Xmas motif, for example at the top of a CHRISTMAS TREE or on CHRISTMAS CARDS.

Stollen

A German dried fruit cake that often includes MARZIPAN. It has some similarities to a British CHRISTMAS CAKE but is smaller, less dark and less rich, and is sprinkled with icing sugar rather than covered with a layer of icing. It is becoming increasingly popular at Xmas outside Germany, e.g. in the UK and Japan.

Stuffing

Before a TURKEY is ROASTed, its insides are taken out and replaced with stuffing. This gives flavour to the meat and absorbs the juices which come off the meat as it is cooking. Stuffing for a bird such as turkey is mainly made from breadcrumbs, along with some flavourings such as onions, herbs and spices. The stuffing is removed from the bird before it is CARVED and eaten as part of the meal. It is also possible to cook the stuffing outside the bird.

Sugared almonds

Almonds (a kind of nut) covered with hard white sugar. It is one of many sweets that is only usually eaten over Christmas.

Three wise men

Three kings from the East who are supposed to have visited the baby Jesus bringing presents of gold, FRANKINCENSE and MYRRH. In Spain, Xmas presents are said to be brought by the Three Wise Men (rather than by Santa). Although there are no names in the Bible, they are commonly called Melchior, Caspar and Balthasar. They are a common part of a NATIVITY SCENE. Also known as the MAGI or the Three Kings (as in the CHRISTMAS CAROL “We Three Kings”).

Tinsel

The small pieces of multicoloured shiny foil that are used as DECORATIONS, especially by putting them over the branches of a CHRISTMAS TREE

Trafalgar Square

The square in front of the National Gallery in London with Nelson's Column in it. It is the venue of the most famous public New Year's party in England.

Turkey

A bird that is much bigger than a chicken and is usually ROASTed whole in the oven along with ROAST POTATOES and other vegetables such as PARSNIPS, and eaten for CHRISTMAS DINNER. As a turkey is so large, it often also has to be eaten in various other forms (e.g. sandwiches, salads, curry) over the following meals and days. It has the same name as Turkey the country because when the bird was discovered in America it reminded people of a similar bird in Anatolia.

Twelve days of Christmas (the)

The holiday season traditionally lasted for twelve days starting on Christmas Day, hence the song about "a partridge in a pear tree" etc. It is still considered unlucky to leave your CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS up past the twelfth day of Christmas,

White Christmas

A CHRISTMAS DAY on which it snows, or maybe just on which there is snow is lying on the ground. It is also a famous CHRISTMAS SONG sung by Bing Crosby.

Wise men

See THREE WISE MEN

Wish bone

A V-shaped bone at the front of a TURKEY or chicken. If two people take the two parts of the V shape and pull (usually only using their little fingers), the person who gets the bigger portion of the bone when it breaks is allowed to make a wish.

Wrapping paper

The coloured paper that is put around Christmas presents so that people can't see what is inside until they are opened. At Christmas the paper usually has a seasonal pattern on it, e.g. HOLLY or REINDEER, so birthday present wrapping paper can't usually be used. It is better to wrap it yourself, however messily, rather than having it wrapped at the shop you buy it at (if such a service is available). It is good manners to tear it off enthusiastically to show how much you are looking forward to the present, although some older people do try to save and reuse wrapping paper .

Wreath

A circular arrangement of leaves and flowers that is usually hung on the front door

Xmas

Many people assume that this short form is a way of avoiding the religious meaning of Christmas, but actually it is common Christian shorthand based on the first letter of the name Christ in Greek. Actually pronouncing the word “ex-mas” is more recent, however, and might well be a sign of the SECULARISATION of the holiday.

Yule

A pagan (= pre-Christian) festival that eventually merged with Xmas, so that “YULETIDE” now means the same as Christmas

Yule log

A piece of wood that was traditionally burnt over the TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS for good luck, now mainly only seen in the shape of a CHRISTMAS LOG. Also known as a Yuletide log.

Yuletide

See YULE