**Public holydays in Great Britain**

There are only six public holidays a year in Great Britain, that is days on which people need not go in to work. They are: Christmas Day, Boxing Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Spring Bank Holiday and Late Summer Bank Holiday.

In Scotland, the New Year's Day is also a public holiday. Most of these holidays are of religious origin, though it would be right to say that for the greater part of the population they have long lost their religious significance and simply days on which people relax, eat, drink and make merry.

All the public holidays, except Christmas Day and Boxing Day observed on December 25th and 26th respectively, are movable, that is they do not fall on the same day each year. Good Friday and Easter Monday depend on Easter Sunday which falls on the first Sunday after a full moon on or after March 21st. The Spring Bank Holiday falls on the last Monday of May or on the first Monday of June, while the Late Summer Bank Holiday comes on the last Monday in August or on the first Monday in September, depending on which of the Mondays is nearer to June 1st and September 1st respectively.

Besides public holidays, there are other holidays, anniversaries and simply days, for example Pancake Day and Bonfire Night, on which certain traditions are observed, but unless they fall on a Sunday, they are ordinary working days.

**New Year In England**

In England the New Year is not as widely or as enthusiastically observed as Christmas. Some people ignore it completely and go to bed at the time as usual on New Year's Eve. Many others, however, do celebrate it in one way or another, the type of celebration varying much according to the local custom, family tradition and personal taste.

The most common type of celebration is a New Year party, either a family party or one arranged by a group of young people. This usually begins at about eight o'clock and goes on until the early hours of the morning. There is a lot of drinking, mainly beer, wine, gin and whisky; sometimes the hosts make a big bowl of punch which consists of wine, spirits, fruits juice and water in varying proportions. There is usually a buffet supper of cold meat, pies, sandwiches, savouries (a lovely dish of light food with a pleasant, served at the start or end of a meal), cakes and biscuits. At midnight the wireless is turned on, so that everyone can hear the chimes of Big Ben ( you know, it's the bell in the clock tower of the Houses of Parliament) and on the hour a toast is drunk to the New Year. Then the party goes on...

Another popular way of celebrating the New Year is to go to a New Year's dance. Most hotels and dance halls hold a special dance on New Year's Eve. The hall is decorated, there are several different bands the atmosphere is very gay.

The most famous celebration is in London round the statue of Eros in Piccadilly Circus where crowds gather and sing and welcome New Year. In Trafalgar there is also a big crowd and someone usually falls into the fountain.

January 1st, New Year's Day, is not a public holiday, unfortunately for those who like to celebrate most of the night. Some people send New Year card and give presents but this is not a widespread custom. This is the traditional time for making "New Year resolutions", for example, to give up smoking, or to do morning exercises and etc. However, these are generally more talked about than put into practice.

**The Night Of Hogmanay**

Nowhere else in Britain is the arrival of the New Year celebrated so wholeheartedly as in Scotland.

Throughout Scotland, the preparations for greeting the New Year start with a minor "spring-cleaning". Brass and silver must be glittering and fresh linen must be put on the beds. No routine work may be left unfinished; stockings must be darned, tears mended, clocks wound up, musical instruments turned, and pictures hung straight. In addition, all outstanding bills are paid, overdue letters written and borrowed books returned. At least, that is the idea!

Most important of all, there must be plenty of good things to eat. Innumerable homes "reek of a celestial grocery" - plum puddings and currant buns, spices and cordials, apples and lemons, tangerines and toffee. In mansion and farmhouse, in suburban villa and city tenement, the table is spread with festive fare. Essential to Hogmanay are "cakes and kebbuck" (oatcakes and cheese), shortbread and either black bun or currant loaf. These are flanked with bottles of wine and the "mountain dew" that is the poetic name of whisky.

In the cities and burghs, the New Year receives a communal welcome, the traditional gathering-place being the Mercat Cross, the hub and symbol of the old burgh life. In Edinburgh, however, the crowd has slid a few yards down the hill from the Mercat Cross to the Tron Kirk - being lured thither, no doubt, by the four-faced clock in the tower. As the night advances, Princes Street, the main street in Edinburgh, becomes as thronged as it normally is at noon, and there is growing excitement in the air. Towards midnight, all steps turn to the Tron Kirk, where a lively, swaying crowd awaits "the Chapplin o'the Twal" (the striking of the 12 o'clock). As the hand of the clock in the tower approach the hour, a hush falls on the waiting throng, the atmosphere grows tense, and then suddenly there comes a roar from a myriad throats. The bells peal forth, the sirens scream - the New Year is born!

Many families prefer to bring in the New Year at home, with music or dancing, cards or talk. As the evening advances, the fire is piled high - for the brighter the fire, the bitter the luck. The members of the household seat themselves round the hearth, and when the hands of the clock approach the hour, the head of the house rises, goes to the main door, opens it wide, and holds it thus until the last stroke of midnight has died away. Then he shuts it quietly and returns to the family circle. He has let the Old Year out and the New Year in. Now greetings and small gifts are exchanged, glasses are filled - and already the First-Footers are at the door.

The First-Footer, on crossing the threshold, greets the family with "A Gude New Year to ane and a'!" (Sc. A good New Year to one and all!) or simply "A Happy New Year!", and pours out a glass from the flask he carries. This must be drunk to the dregs by the head of the house, who, in turn, pours out a glass for each of his visitors. The glass handed to the First-Footer himself must also be drunk to the dregs. A popular toast is: "Your good health!"

The First-Footer must take something to eat as well as to drink, and after an exchange of greetings they go off again on their rounds.

**Tar - Barrel Burning**

The custom of men welcoming in the New Year by carrying pans of blazing tar on their heads is still kept up at Allendale, Northumberland, on New Year's Eve. Each of the "carriers", in fancy costume, balances on his head the end of a barrel (or "kit") filled with inflammable material. The procession is timed to reach the unlit bonfire shortly before midnight, then each man in turn tosses his flaming "headgear" on to the bonfire, setting it ablaze. On the stroke of twelve, all join hands and dance around the fire, singing Auld Lang Syne (Sc. The days of long ago). The song by Robert Burns (1759 - 1796), Scotland's national poet.

Auld Lang Syne

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,

And never brought to min'?

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,

And auld lang syne?

Chorus - For auld lang syne, my dear,

For auld lang syne,

We'll talk a cup o'kindness yet

For auld lang syne.

**The Night Before Christmas**

by Clement Clarke Moore

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,

In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,

While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;

And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,

Had just settled down for a long winter's nap,

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,

I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash,

Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow

Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,

When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,

But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,

With a little old driver, so lively and quick,

I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,

And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;

"Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer! Now, Prancer and Vixen!

On, Comet! On Cupid! On, Donder and Blitzen!

To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!

Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,

When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,

So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,

With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too.

And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof

The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

As I drew in my hand, and was turning around,

Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,

And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;

A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,

And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.

His eyes -- how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!

His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!

His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,

And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;

The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,

And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;

He had a broad face and a little round belly,

That shook, when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.

He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,

And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;

A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,

Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,

And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,

And laying his finger aside of his nose,

And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,

And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.

But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,

"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."

flock by night.

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about

them; and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which

shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a

manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace,

good will toward men.

**The Role Of Tradition**

There is no other nation that clings to the past with the tenacity of the British. The Briton has a sense of the continuity of history. He loves to go through his ancient ceremonies as he has always performed them with the consciousness that he is keepнng faith with his ancestors, that he is maintaining the community they created. He does not often change his manner of carrying out official acts, and if ever he does, the new method at once becomes the tradition.

Qu'een Elizabeth the First provided one of these examples of discarding the old and supplanting it with the new. She was knitting when the list of nominees for sheriff was brought to her. Tradition decreed that she should take up her quill and make a check in ink against the name of each person whom it was her pleasure to-appoint. There was no pen handy. So Elizabeth the First, with one of her knitting needles, pricked a little hole in the parchment beside each favoured name. That is the reason why today Queen Elizabeth the Second appoints sheriffs of England by pricking holes in the listing of their names.

Even the casual visitor to London can view without effort many of the brilliant parades and spectacles in which the colour of medieval times has been preserved for ours. And if you wish you can also enter the visitors' gallery of the House of Commons and participate in the ceremony that has ruled the Commons as long as it existed. If a speaker steps across the Hne on the floor that marks the point at which he would be within sworпs length of his adversaries on the opposite side of the Chamber, the session is automatically suspended. If a rebellious member should seize the great mace, the symbol of authority that rests on the table before the Speaker's chair, and make off with it (this happened at least once), no legal business can be transacted until the mace has been restored to its position. You can also go into the House of Lords, where the glitter is more pronounced, the royal scarlet more in evidence, and where your own back will begin to ache sympathetically at the speetacle of the Lord Chancellor, so uncomfortably seated on the edge of the enormous woolsack.

**Traditions.**

Clubs. One of English traditions is clubs. A club is an association of people who like to meet together to relax and discuss things. These people are usually upper-class men or men connected with the govern-ment or other powerful organizations which control public life and support the established order of soci-ety. However, there are clubs of people not connected with the ruling circles, for example cultural clubs, whose members are actors, painters, writers and critics and their friends. In a word, clubs are organizations which join people of the same interests. A club usually owns a building where members can eat, drink, and sometimes sleep. Gardening. Gardening is yery popular with many people in Britain. Most British people love gardens, and this is one reason why so many people prefer to live in houses rather than flats. In suburban areas you can see many small houses, each one with its own little garden of flowers and shrubs. For many people gardening is the foundation of friendly rela-tions with neighbours. Flower-shows and vegetable-shows, with prizes for the best exhibits, are verypopular.

**London's Ceremonial Events**

The London calendar is distinguished by many picturesque events and ceremonies, some of ancient origin. Among the best known are: Trooping the Colour, Opening of Parliament, the Lord Mayor's Show, the annual Opening of the Law Courts, about October 1, with a procession through the main Hall of the Courts, preceded by a special service at Westminster Abbey, and the annual Royal Academy Dinner, held on the Saturday before the opening of the summer exhibition. Less distinguished but extremely picturesque annual events include Van Horse Parade on Easter Monday and the Cart Horse Parade on Whitmonday, both in Regent's Park; the Sheep-Dog Badge, and the University Boat Race between Oxford and Cambridge on the Thames; the Fairs on Easter Monday, Whitmonday and August bank holiday, on Hampstead Heath and Black Year's Eve; the Soho Fair, in July, and the Chelsea Arts ball on New Year's eve. Daily ceremonies include the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, the Mounting of the Guard of the Household Cavalry in Whitehall, and the nightly locking up of the Tower of London, or Ceremony of the Keys by the chief warder of the yeomen warders («Beefeaters»).

**Trooping The Colour**

The ceremony of «Trooping the Colour» takes place annually in London on the Official Birthday of the Sovereign. It is notable for the colourful appearance and precise movements of the Foot Guards who perform it, and for the part taken in it by the Queen herself.

The ceremony derives from two old military ceremonies: Trooping the Colour and Mounting the Queeir s Guard. From earliest times Colours and Standards have been used to indicate the position of the commander in battle and act as rallying point for the soldiers, and were honoured as symbols of the spirit of military units. It was probably in the eighteenth century that it became customary in the British Army, before a battle, to salute the Colours by beat of drum before carrying them along the ranks (this is what the expression «Trooping» means) so that every soldier could see them and be able to recognise them later. It soon became usual to troop the Colour daily at the most important parade or the day: for the Regiment of Foot Guards; who traditionally have the honour of guarding the Sovereign, the most important was obviously the Mounting of the Queen's Guard.

On the Sovereign's Birthday all the Regiments of Foot Guards took part in the Trooping, and, after daily Trooping was discontinued early in Queen Victoria's reign, the full annual parade on the Sovereign's Birthday continued and has done so to this day, except during the two world wars. Only one Colour, however, can be trooped at a time, and the five Regiments (Grenadier Guards, Coldstream, Scots, Irish and Welsh) therefore take their turn year by year in strict rotation.

The ceremony can be divided into the following phases: the arrival of the Queen at the Horse Guards Parade, her inspection of the troops, the actual Trooping, the march past, and the Queen's return to Buckingham Palace.

Before the Queen arrives, the crowds have assembled around the Parade and along the approach routes, and the Queen Mother, the Royal children, and other members of the Royal Family have arrived by horse-drawn carriages and entered the Horse Guards Buildings to watch the ceremony from a balcony. The massed bands of the Guards Division have formed up at one side of the parade ground, and the guardsmen are standing in line in an L-shaped formation on two sides of it. The Queen then leaves the Palace, riding side-saddle. She wears the uniform of whichever Guards' regiment is trooping and a specially-designed tricorn hat. She is followed by her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, also on horseback, and accompanied by the Sovereign's Escort found by the Household Cavalry Regiment (Mounted). She rides down the Mall on to the Horse Guards Parade and as she turns to face her Guards from the saluting base the National Anthem is played.

The Colour is then trooped through the ranks to the sound of the drums beating, while the band plays traditional marches.

After the trooping, each battalion of Foot Guards taking part marches past the Queen to the sound of the band playing the regiment's slow and quick marches, first in slow time (a most taxing manoeuvre requiring a very high standard of training), and then in quick time. As each «guard» passes her the order «Eyes Right» is given, and the Queen returns the salute. Afterwards the mounted division of the Household Cavalry Regiment, their mounted band playing, first walk and then trot past the saluting base.

The Queen then rides back to the Palace, preceded by the Sovereign's Escort and followed by the Foot Guards. On her arrival, the Old Guard is already formed up in the courtyard, and the New Guard enters; the remaining troops once more march past the Queen, who has taken her position in the Palace gateway, before returning to the barracks.

Finally, the Queen enters the forecourt and rides between the Old and the New Guard into her Palace, and the ceremony of Trooping the Colour is over for another year.

**Mounting the Guards.**

Mounting the Guard is an-other colourf ul ceremony. It takes place at the Horse Guards, in Whitehall, at 11 a.m. every weekday and at 10 a.m. on Sundays. It always attracts sight seers. The Guard is a detachment of Cavalry troops and consists of the Royal Horse Guards and the Life Guards. The Royal Horse Guards wear deep-blue tu-nics and ivhite metal helmets with red horsehair plumes, and have black sheep-skin saddles. The Life Guards wear scarlet uniforms and white metal helmets with ivhite horsehair plumes, and have white sheep-skin saddles. Both the Royal Horse Guards and the Life Guards wear steel cuirasses - body armour that reaches down to the waist and consists of a breastplate and a backplate fastened together. The ceremony begins with the trumpeters sounding the call. The new guard arrives and the old guard is relieved. The two officers, also on horseback, salute each other and then stand side by side while the guard is changed. The ceremony lasts fifteen minutes and ends with the old guard returning to its barracks.

**Opening Of Parliament**

If you want to see the spectacle of the third oldest parliament in the world in action (it was preceded by the Althing of Iceland and the Parliament of the Isle of Man), ask your consulate to get you a ticket admitting you to the visitors' galleries. On the opening of Parliament the Sovereign delivers the address from the Throne, a speech worded as though it emanated from the Crown, though actually it is written by the Prime Minister. This is a day when ceremony rules every gesture, and when officials appear to perform their appointed functions, whose exact role is not clear even to most Britons themselves -- like Black Rod, who leads the parliamentarians into the hall to attend their ruler's address. The titles and functions of such officials, mysterious even to the British, and naturally doubly so to foreigners. For example, no one is able to define the precise functions of Lord Privy Seal, for he has none. He is one of several members of the government who give it great flexibility since, having no stated department under their control, they are available for assignment by the Prime Minister to such special and unusual problems as may arise in the course of his term of office.

Although it is unlikely that you will be able to get inside the Houses of Parliament on the day of its opening, you can enjoy some of the spectacle in the street.

The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh ride, in state to Westminster. The famous gilded coach of which you heard so much at the time of the Coronation parades from Buckingham Palace to the Houses of Parliament, escorted by the brilliantly uniformed and superbly mounted Household Cavalry — on a clear day, it is to be hoped, for this ceremony takes place in late October or early November, depending on the exigencies of Parliament. As the Queen enters the Houses of Parliament the air shakes with the booming of heavy guns and all London knows that the processes that have so long protected England from oppression have once again been renewed with all their age-old ceremony.

**The Lord Mayor's Show.**

The local power of the City of London is headed by the Lord Mayor who is elected every year from among the most prominent citizens. The splendid ceremony of election known as the Lord Mayor's Show dates back more than six hundred years. It is always watched by many || thousands of people, who crowd the streets of the City of London on the second Saturday of November to see and admire its interesting procession. The ceremony begins at the Guildhall, the seat of the municipal government in the City of London. Starting from the Guildhall at about 11.30 a.m., the newly-elected Lord Mayor travels in a gilded coach which dates from the mid-eighteenth century. His body-guard is a company of Pikemen and Musketeers. The long, colourful procession, made up of liveried footmen and coachmen, moves along the narrow streets of the City. At about noon the Lord Mayor arrives at the Royal Court of Justice, where he takes the oath before the Lord Chief Justice and Judges of the Queen's Bench to perform his duties faithfully. The bells of the City ring out as the festive procession leaves the Court of Justice after the ceremony and heads for the Mansion House, the official residence of the Lord Mayor. During the evening the traditional Banquet takes place at Guildhall. The Banquet is attended by many of the most prominent people of the country, and is usually televised. The Prime Minister delivers a political speech, and a toast is proposed by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

**Changing of the Guard.**

The royal palace is tradi-tionally guarded by special troops who wear colourf ul uniforms: scarlet tunics, blue trousers and bearskin caps. The history of the Foot Guards goes back to 1656, when King Charles II, during his exile in Holland, ''ecruited a small body-guard. Later this small body-guard grew into a regiment of guards. Changing o f the guard is one of the most popular ceremonies. It takes place at Buckingham Palace every day at 11.30. The ceremony always attracts a lot of spectators -Londoners as well as visitors— to the British capital.

**The Ceremony Of The Keys**

Every night at 9.53 p. m. the Chief Warder of the Yeomen Warders (Beefeaters) of the Tower of London lights a candle lantern and then makes his way towards the Bloody Tower. In the Archway his Escort await his arrival. The Chief Warder, carrying the keys then moves off with his Escort to the West Gate, which he locks, while the Escort «present arms». Then the Middle and Byward Towers are locked.

The party then return to the Bloody Tower Archway and there they are halted by the challenge of the sentry. «Halt!» he commands. «Who goes there?» The Chief Warder answers, «The keys.» The sentry demands, «Whose keys?» «Queen Elizabeth's keys,» replies the Chief Warder. «Advance, Queen Elizabeth's keys; all's well,» commands the sentry.

Having received permission to proceed through the Archway, the party then form up facing the Main Guard of the Tower. The order is given by the officer-in-charge to «Present Arms». The Chief Warder doffs his Tudor-style bonnet and cries, «God preserve Queen Elizabeth. «Amen», answer the Guard and Escort.

At 10 p. m. the bugler sounds the «Last Post». The Chief Warder proceeds to the Queen's House, where the keys are given into the custody of the Resident Governor and Major.

The Ceremony of the Keys dates back 700 years and has taken place every night during that period, even during the blitz of London in the last war. On one particular night, April 16, 1941, bomb blast disrupted the ceremony, knocking out members of the Escort and Yeomen Warders. Despite this, the duty was completed.

Only a limited number of visitors are admitted to the ceremony each night. Application to see it must be made at least forty-eight hours in advance at the Constable's office in the Tower. Visitors with permission are admitted at 9.40 p. m. and leave at 10 p. m.

**Late Summer Bank Holiday**

On Bank Holiday the towns' folk usually flock into the country and to the coast. If the weather is fine many families take a picnic-lunch or tea with them and enjoy their meal in the open. Seaside towns near London, such as Southend, are invaded by thousands of trippers who come in cars and coaches, trains, motor cycles and bicycles. Great amusement parks like Southend Kursaal do a roaring trade with their scenic railways, shooting galleries, water-shoots, Crazy Houses, Hunted Houses and so on.Trippers will wear comic paper hats with slogans such as «Kiss Me Quick» and they will eat and drink the weirdest mixture of stuff you can imagine, seafood like cockles, mussels, whelks, shrimps and fried fish and chips, candy floss, beer, tea, soft drinks, everything you can imagine.

Bank Holiday is also on occasion for big sports meetings at places like the White City Stadium, mainly all kinds of athletics. There are also horse race meetings all over the country, and most traditional of all, there are large fairs, with swings, roundabouts, coconut shies, a Punch and Judy show, hoopla stalls and every kind of side-show including, in recent years, bingo. These fairs are pitched on open spaces of common land, and the most famous of them is the huge one on Hampstead Heath near London. It is at Hampstead Heath you will see the Pearly Kings, those Cockney costers (street traders), who wear suits or frocks with thousands of tiny pearl buttons stitched all over them, also over their caps and hats, in case of their Queens. They hold horse and cart parades in which prizes are given for the smartest turn out. Horses and carts are gaily decorated. Many Londoners will visit Whipsnade Zoo. There is also much boating activity on the Thames, regattas at Henley and on other rivers and the English climate being what it is, it invariably rains.

**Holidays.**

New Year. New Year is not such an important holiday in England as Christmas. Some people don't celebrate it at all.

Many people have New Year parties. A party usually begins at about eight o'clock and goes on until early in the morning. At midnight they listea to the chimes of Big Ben, drink a toast to the New Year and Sing Auld Lang Syne.

In London crowds usually gather round the statue of Eros in Piccadilly Circus and welcome the New Year.

**February 14th**

When all the fun of Christmas and New Year is over, there's a feeling of anti-climax. The rest of January is dreary and cold. But before long the empty shops seem to come to life once again with displays of attractive and brightly coloured «I love you» Valentine cards.

St. Valentine was a priest who lived in Rome and died for his faith in A.D. 170. His feast happens to fall on February 14th -the traditional day for lovers. But this is mere coincidence. He was not noted for helping lovers in distress and was not therefore the true patron saint of lovers.

There was in early times a strong belief that on this day birds choose their mates. To some extent this might explain why lovebirds seem to be such popular motifs on Valentine cards. A fourteenth-century poet wrote: «On Valentine's Day all the birds of the air in couples do join». And Shakespeare carried on the tradition when Theseus says in «A Midsummer Night's Dream»:

St. Valentine is past:

Begin these wood-birds

but to couple now?

But antiquarians maintain that St. Valentine's Day celebrations are a continuation of a Roman festival of Pan and Juno.

There used to be a custom in England (and probably in other countries) on St. Valentine's Day, mentioned by Chaucer, Shakespeare and Pepys: the names of young, unmarried men

and girls were mixed up and drawn out by chance. The person of the opposite sex whose name came out after yours was your chosen «Valentine» for the year.

Just over a century ago it became fashionable to send pretty lace-edged cards. Earlier, ludicrous and sometimes vulgar cartoons were sent to friends and strangers on this day.

In our own time, too, the Valentine tradition has undergone a sort of revival in Britain. There seems to be no limit to the variety of cards on sale for this celebration. They are happy or sad, romantic or humorous, serious or ridiculous. The card manufacturers, realising they're on to a good thing, cater for all tastes — including the vulgar. You can pay anything from 10p to 10 pounds, depending on the depth of your love and the depth of your pocket! If you really want to get rid of some money you can always use the St. Valentine's Day Greetings Telegram — a service put on specially for February 14th by the Post Office, for the really love-sick.

Of all the Valentine cards on the market the humorous variety seem to be the most popular, but some of them are so cruel you would have to be quite heartless to send them, even to your worst enemy. Anonymity is, of course, part of the thrill of sending Valentine cards -- you must not say who you are. The person receiving it must be left to wonder. You can send cards to anyone you like, or, for that matter, even people you don't like. There are cards specially printed to My Wife, My Husband, Mother, Father, Sweetheart, and, would you believe it, Grandmother and Grandfather. At least it is good to know that in this troubled world love is still living and spreading a little happiness, especially in dreary February.

Easter. Easter is a Christian holiday in March or7 April, when Christians remember the death of Christ and his return to life. The holiday is marked by going to church and then having a celebration dinner. Easter is connected in people's minds with spring, with the coming to life of the earth after winter. The most popular emblem of Easter is the Easter egg: a hard-boiled egg painted in different colours. Easter eggs are traditional Easter presents for children. Nowadays Easter eggs are usually made of chocolate. Children get chocolate Easter eggs, and also chocolate Easter rabbits. They are either hollow or have a filling, and are usually covered with brightly coloured silver paper.

Each year, on Easter Sunday, London greets spring with a traditional spectacular Easter Parade in Battersea Park. The Parade is a great procession of many richly decorated floats, that is large moving platforms on wheels, on which actors and amateurs perform shows. The most beautifully decorated float moves at the back of the procession and carries the Easter Princess and her attendants.

May Spring Festival. The May Spring Festival, which is celebrated on the 1st of May, has to some extent retained its old significance -that of a pa gan spring festival. Nowadays it is celebrated by children and young people in many schools in different parts of Britain. It is celebrated with garlands of flowers, dancing and games on the villag green, where they erect a maypole - a tall pole decorated with flowers and ribbons. The girls put on their best summer dresses, put flowers in their hair and round their waists, and wait for the crowning of the May Queen. The most beautiful girl is crowned with a garland of flowers. After this great event there is dancing, and the dancers wear fancy costumes representing characters from the Robin Hood legends. Spring Bank Holiday. Spring Bank Holiday is celebrated on the last Monday in May. It is an official holiday, when all the offices are closed and people don't go to work. Many people go to the country on this day and have picnics.

**Late Summer Bank Holiday**

On Bank Holiday the towns' folk usually flock into the country and to the coast. If the weather is fine many families take a picnic-lunch or tea with them and enjoy their meal in the open. Seaside towns near London, such as Southend, are invaded by thousands of trippers who come in cars and coaches, trains, motor cycles and bicycles. Great amusement parks like Southend Kursaal do a roaring trade with their scenic railways, shooting galleries, water-shoots, Crazy Houses, Hunted Houses and so on.Trippers will wear comic paper hats with slogans such as «Kiss Me Quick» and they will eat and drink the weirdest mixture of stuff you can imagine, seafood like cockles, mussels, whelks, shrimps and fried fish and chips, candy floss, beer, tea, soft drinks, everything you can imagine.

Bank Holiday is also on occasion for big sports meetings at places like the White City Stadium, mainly all kinds of athletics. There are also horse race meetings all over the country, and most traditional of all, there are large fairs, with swings, roundabouts, coconut shies, a Punch and Judy show, hoopla stalls and every kind of side-show including, in recent years, bingo. These fairs are pitched on open spaces of common land, and the most famous of them is the huge one on Hampstead Heath near London. It is at Hampstead Heath you will see the Pearly Kings, those Cockney costers (street traders), who wear suits or frocks with thousands of tiny pearl buttons stitched all over them, also over their caps and hats, in case of their Queens. They hold horse and cart parades in which prizes are given for the smartest turn out. Horses and carts are gaily decorated. Many Londoners will visit Whipsnade Zoo.There is also much boating activity on the Thames, regattas at Henley and on other rivers and the English climate being what it is, it invariably rains.

Guy Fawkes. Night. Guy Fawkes Night is one of the most popular festivals in Britain. It commemorates the discovery of the so-called Gunpowder Plot, and is widely celebrated all over the country.

The story goes that there was a plot to destroy the Houses of Parliament and kill King James I during the ceremony of opening Parliament on November 5, 1605. The plot was organized by a group of Roman Catholics. In 1604 the conspirators rented a house near the House of Lords. From this house they dug a tunnel to a vault below the House of Lords and put into the vault 36 barrels of gunpowder. The plot was discovered because one of the conspirators wrote a letter to his relative, a member of the House of Lords, warning him to stay away from the House of Lords on the 5th of November. On November 4, a search was made of the parliament vaults, and the gunpowder was found, together with Guy Fawkes, who was to set off the explosion. Guy Fawkes was hanged.

The historical meaning of the event is no longer important, but this day is traditionally celebrated with fireworks and a bonfire, on which the figure of a man called Guy is burnt.

November 5 is a day on which children are allowed, under proper supervision, to let off fireworks, to make a bonfire and to burn on it a guy made of old clothes, straw and — if possible — one of father's old hats. On 5 he days before November 5, one may see groups of children going about the streets with their faces blackened and wearing some fancy clothes. Sometimes they have a little cart with a guy in it. They ask the passers-by to give them a penny for the guy. With this money they buy fireworks for the festival.

Christmas. Christmas is the main public holiday in Britain, when people spend time at home with their families, eat special food and drink a lot. Christmas is a Christian festival to remember the birth of Jesus Christ.

Long before Christmas time shops become very busy, because a lot of people buy Christmas presents. A lot of money is spent on the presents, but many people enjoy it. Every day television and newspapers say how many days are left before Christmas. People also buy Christmas cards to send to their friends and relatives. The cards have the words Merry Christmas and pictures of the birth of Christ, Santa Glaus, a Christmas tree, a robin, or scenes of old-fashioned Christmases.

In churches people sing Christmas carols - special religious songs. Sometimes groups of people walk about the streets and sing carols at the doors of houses. One of the well-known carols is "Silent Night".

Houses are usually decorated with lights and branches of needle-leaf trees. Many people have a decorated Christmas tree in their houses.

Young children are told that Santa Claus will bring them presents if they are good. Before going to bed on Christmas Eve the children hang stockings at the back of their beds, for Santa Claus to put the presents in when he comes in the middle of the night through the chimney.

On Christmas Eve (the 24th of December) some people go to a special church service called Midnight Mass which starts at 12 o'clock at night.

Christmas is the day when people stay at home, open their presents and eat and drink together. The most important meal is Christmas dinner. The typical meal consists of turkey with potatoes and other vegetables, followed by a Christmas pudding. Other traditional foods include a special Christmas cake and mince pies — small round cakes filled with a mixture of apples, raisins and spices.

The day after Christmas, the 26th of December, is also a public holiday. It is called Boxing Day. The name goes back to the old tradition: some time before Christmas, boxes were placed in churches for the people to put some money or presents for the poor. On the day after Christmas, the 26th of December, the priest opened the box and gave the contents away to poor people.

**April Fools' Day**

Children throughout the English-speaking countries look forward to April 1st, April Fools' Day. By tradition it is the day on whi jokes are played. The children might decide to wake their parent with the news that the house is on fire, or that some other disaster has occurred. When they see the looks of alarm on victims' faces, they shout, «April Fool!»

At school serious work is practically forgotten as the c try to pin notices on one another's backs. The notices say things like «Kick Me», or «I'm a Fool». Teachers have to be particularly careful or they too might find themselves walking around wit silly sign on their backs.

On this day of national good humour, the television service joins in the fun.

Once they told the story of a building that had been upside down by mistake. They showed an example of mo architecture, which actually did look better when it was ti the other way. Many people must have been fooled, and pe the architect himself was given food for thought.

**Pancake Day**

Pancake Day is the popular name for Shrove Tuesday — the day preceding the first day of Lent.

In medieval times the day was characterised by merrymaking and feasting, a relic of which is the eating of pancakes. Whatever religious significance the day may have possessed in the olden days, it certainly has none now.

The origin of the festival is rather obscure, as is the origin of the custom of pancake eating.

The most consistent form of celebration in the old days was all over town ball game or tug-of-war in which everyone let rip before the traditional feast, tearing here and tearing there, struggling to get the ball or rope into their part of the town. It seems that several dozen towns kept up these ball games until only a few years ago. Today the only custom that is consistently observed throughout Britain is pancake eating, though here and there other customs still seem to survive. Among the latter, Pancake races, the Pancake Greaze custom are best known.

**Remembrance Day (Poppy Day)**

Remembrance Day is observed throughout Britain in commemoration of the million or more British soldiers, sailors and airmen who lost their lives during the two World Wars. On that day special services are held in the churches and wreaths are laid at war memorials throughout the country and at London's Cenotaph, where a great number of people gather to observe the two-minute-silence and to perform the annual Remembrance Day ceremony. The silence begins at the first strike of Big Ben booming 11 o'clock, and is broken only by the Crash of distant artillery and perhaps by the murmur of a pawing jet. When the two-minute silence is over, members of the Royal Faintly or their representatives and political leaders come forward to lay wreaths at the foot of the Cenotaph. Then comes the march past the memorial of ex-servicemen and women, followed by an endless line of ordinary citizens who have come here with their personal wreaths and their sad memories.

On that day artificial poppies a symbol of mourning, are traditionally sold in the streets everywhere, and people wear them in their buttonholes. The money collected in this way later used to help the men who had been crippled during the war and their dependants.