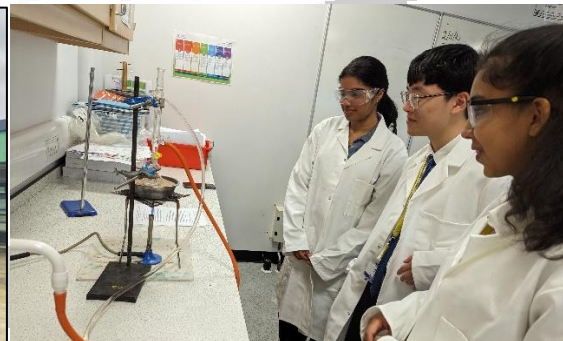


Sixth Form Gazette

Winter Edition 2023

Our first newsletter edition of academic year 2023-2024 compiled by our Sixth Form students, ranging from a variety of topics from Christmas, world news and a Christmas quiz!



The Christmas Truce of 1914: A Beacon of Humanity Amidst the Horror of The Great War

By Joshua Quinn

In the midst of the unprecedented bloodshed and destruction of World War I, the Christmas Truce of 1914 shines brightly as a remarkable and poignant episode. This temporary ceasefire, observed by soldiers on both sides of the conflict, remains a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and a reminder of the universal longing for peace during even the darkest of times.

World War I, which began in 1914, saw Europe embroiled in a devastating conflict. The soldiers who had once been neighbours, friends, and even family members were now pitted against each other in a brutal and seemingly endless war. The initial enthusiasm and patriotic fervour that had led to the outbreak of war were gradually replaced by the grim reality of trench warfare, where troops faced the horrors of the frontlines, including relentless artillery bombardments, poisonous gas attacks, and the daily fear of death.

In this grim context, the Christmas Truce was born out of a complex web of circumstances. Soldiers on both sides were enduring unimaginable hardship. They were stuck in muddy, rat-infested trenches, subjected to constant danger and filth. Many had experienced the loss of comrades and friends. Their experiences created a longing for a brief respite from the relentless violence.

Additionally, the approaching Christmas holiday was a significant factor. The soldiers were reminded of the joy and togetherness that the season typically represented, and they missed their families and loved ones back home, having been convinced to sign up by the propaganda insisting they'd be home for Christmas. As December 25th approached, the desire for a break from the relentless fighting and a sense of normalcy grew stronger among the troops.

The Christmas Truce unfolded spontaneously in various locations along the Western Front, particularly in the areas where British, French, and German soldiers faced each other. The exact sequence of events may vary from place to place, but the overarching sentiment was one of temporary peace and camaraderie.

On Christmas Eve, soldiers began to observe a series of informal truces. It started with the cessation of artillery fire, followed by the exchange of small gifts such as cigarettes, food, and souvenirs. Some soldiers ventured into no-man's land, the area between the opposing trenches, to meet their counterparts. They greeted each other, shook hands, and began to communicate despite the language barrier.



One of the most iconic aspects of the truce was the impromptu football matches that took place in no-man's land. Soldiers from different sides, often wearing makeshift kits or simply playing in their military attire, engaged in friendly matches. These games served as a poignant symbol of the universal appeal of sport and a moment of shared humanity amid the war. Even in war, the universal language of football broke down the language and the barrier put up between them by the powers that be, highlighting the fact that this was not the men fighting who wanted the war, it was the politicians.

Throughout Christmas Day, the truce continued, with the soldiers singing carols, sharing meals, and even assisting each other in burying the dead. It was a surreal spectacle as soldiers who had been fighting each other just days before now coexisted peacefully, if only for a brief moment.

The Christmas Truce, while a beautiful display of humanity, was not without its complexities and consequences. For many soldiers, it was a much-needed respite from the horrors of war. It allowed them to briefly forget the suffering and death that surrounded them. Moreover, it humanized the "enemy," allowing them to see each other as individuals with shared experiences, rather than faceless adversaries.

However, the truce was unofficial and was not endorsed by the high command of either side. As a result, the fraternization between soldiers was met with disapproval from military leadership. They were concerned that such interactions could undermine the soldiers' fighting spirit and disrupt the chain of command. In the days that followed, efforts were made to prevent further truces, and the frontlines gradually returned to a state of hostility. Most notably, Canadian soldiers dismissed the truce and threw grenades disguised as tinned food into the German trenches.

The Christmas Truce did not bring an end to the war, as the conflict would continue for several more years with even greater ferocity. However, it did leave a lasting legacy. It served as a poignant reminder that even in the darkest of times, the shared humanity of individuals can overcome the divisions of nations and conflict. The truce continues to be a symbol of the human desire for peace, unity, and normalcy, even amidst the chaos of war.

In the years following the war, the Christmas Truce of 1914 became a symbol of hope and peace. It has been commemorated in various forms, from art and literature to films and re-enactments. The truce's enduring significance lies in its ability to touch the hearts of people and remind them of the power of humanity to transcend even the direst circumstances.

In conclusion, the Christmas Truce of 1914 stands as a remarkable and poignant episode during World War I. It was a brief moment of humanity, where soldiers on opposing sides came together to celebrate the spirit of Christmas, play football, and temporarily put aside their differences. While it did not bring an end to the war, it serves as a powerful reminder of the universal longing for peace during even the darkest of times. The legacy of the Christmas Truce endures as a symbol of hope, unity, and the enduring spirit of humanity.



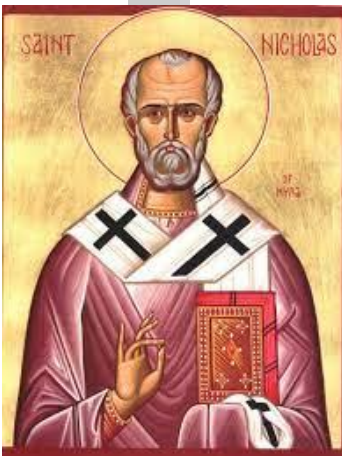
How is Santa Claus different in other European countries?

By Dominic Farrell

Santa Claus has been the face of Christmas for many countries globally, however, all these countries have their own unique version of Saint Nicholas. Before looking at other examples, let's look at what Santa is like in Britain.

Britain

Father Christmas first appeared as a character in the 1616 play Christmas His Masque. Ever since, he has appeared in many books of literature, which describes him wearing different coloured robes, such as blue, brown and purple. Towards the 18th century, Father Christmas wore a green cloak and carried a staff. Although some thought it was due to Coca-Cola advertising, Santa today is actually red due to the 4th century Saint Nicholas who was commonly painted wearing red. Today we have a mix of the old Father Christmas and St Nicholas, who is known as Santa Claus.



Spain

In Spain, children are visited by three men known as Los Reyes Magos, or the three wise men. Spanish Children write to their favourite Mago (Wise men) in the days leading up to El Dia de Reyes, which is the same day as the Epiphany on the 6th of January.



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France

In France, there is Pere Noel, who rather than wearing a red hat, he wears a fur-lined hood. French children also leave carrots and treats for Pere Noel's flying donkey, known as Gui.



Germany

In Germany, there are dozens of regional names for Santa Clause such as Weihnachtsmann, Klaus and Nickle. As well as the 25th of December, Germans also celebrate Niklolaustag (St Nicholas Day) on the 6th of December. Rather than Elves, Santa has frightening companions such as Aschenmann, Bartle, Boozenickel and Hans Trapp to name a few.



Netherlands

In the Netherlands, Sinterklaas, who wears a tall red bishop's hat, rides into town on a horse, knocking on the doors of well-behaved children to deliver gifts.



Sweden

Sweden's version of Santa is traditionally a dwarf like creature. Family members often put on a red robe and a facemask known as the Tomte, before distributing gifts to children.



And finally, a Christmas joke to share:
Why did Santa ban fizzy drinks in his workshop?
Because they were bad for his elf.



The Hidden History of Christmas

By Sarah Moore

As the end of the year draws near, people of all backgrounds from across the world are beginning to prepare to celebrate the most anticipated holiday of the year. Christmas has become incredibly widespread over the last several centuries, with over 2 billion people around the globe of all sorts of religions (and even some of those with none) considering Christmas to be one of the most important holidays in their lives. Even though Christmas has a central theme of Christianity, this has begun to be overpowered by the sentiment of gift giving.

So, with so many people celebrating the holiday, why is it that so few know of the intriguing and complex origins of the festival? Sure, most people know that it was created for the birth of Jesus, but do you know how deep it really goes?

The history of Christmas begins with its main theme, the birth of Christ, in the year 0AD. However, people did not celebrate it as early as when the actual event happened, which is shown by the date that the holiday takes place. For a long time, no one could agree on what day Jesus was actually born, which is why people in the first couple centuries after the event steered away from Christmas and showed preference for other Christian holidays such as Easter, and the events both proceeding and preceding the crucifixion.

It was only in the year 336AD when Emperor Constantine decided to establish December 25th as Christmas Day. He did not pick randomly, however, as Christians had begun to debate the birth of their Saviour around this time and must have slowly come to the consensus that December 25th was the most fitting date for Jesus' birth, as Constantine was known for choosing the most widely attested viewpoint, as this would result in the least possible uproar.

The reasons for the public to choose a date in December vary, but many believe that it was because the winter solstice has long been a time of celebration and worship for people all across the world, even before the times of Christianity.

Even though the date of Christ's birth was decided upon in the 300s, it didn't become a proper festival until way later, in 1870, when it became an official federal holiday. However, it was still celebrated before this date, which allowed Oliver Cromwell in 1645, when he took over England, to cancel Christmas. When Charles II was restored to the throne due to popular demand, Christmas returned alongside him, showing how beloved the celebration has been for centuries.

While Christmas has been loved by many for a long time, it wasn't always as popular as it is today. It had to be aided on its way to becoming the giant that it is in the modern world, and one of the main attendants was pieces of art, poetry and music, specifically a little story called A Christmas Carol. Dickens' 1843 novella on an old man's heart being melted through the Christmas spirit was



a major step forward for the festival, evidenced by the first ever commercial Christmas card being sold the very same year.

A major aspect of Christmas that has yet to be mentioned is the jolly ol' Santa Claus, an impossibly old man with an impossibly fast sleigh, whose nonexistence breaks thousands of children's hearts every year. It's pretty common knowledge that this character is based on the similarly named Saint Nikolas, a man who was known for being charitable and jovial, making a name for himself by giving gifts to others in an act of selflessness.

Because of him, gift giving became an integral part of Christmas. The cartoony version of Nik is based on art by the cartoonist Thomas Nast in 1863. This image was further popularized by the character's appearance in Coca-Cola advertisements since 1931, which are also the reason for his iconic red suit and hat.

Now that we've covered Jesus' birth, gift giving and Santa Claus, the next thing that's likely to come to mind is Christmas trees, the staple of any good living room during the winter months. While many people believe that this tradition began in the Victorian era, with Queen Victoria and her husband loving to decorate a fir tree (as well as participating and popularizing many other well-known modern Christmas traditions), the practice actually dates much further back than that. It originally came from Germany and was then passed on to England in the Georgian period. The king during this time, George III, had a German wife named Charlotte, who is believed to have decorated the tree in her family's home in the 1790s.

Fir trees are traditionally used for this because of their status as evergreen, meaning that they don't lose their leaves during the winter months. Unlike other trees, their leaves stayed bright and green during Christmas, making them a perfect fit. Ever since 1947, Norway have sent London a fir tree every Christmas as a thanks for their help during World War II.

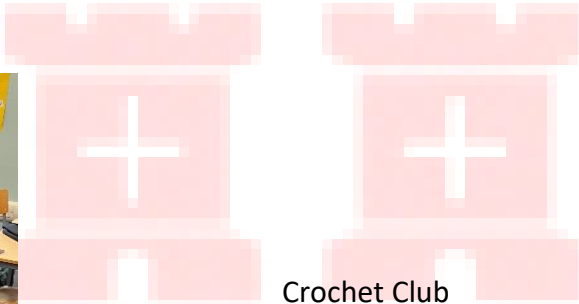
Overall, Christmas is a holiday that has taken the world by storm for centuries, through its jolly men, traditions and Christian origins, it has become a sign of peace and unity for billions. For a celebration which's exact date was up for debate 1,700 years ago, it has the profound ability to hold the whole of humanity in its powerful grip the moment the clock strikes midnight on October 31st.



Student Leadership Scheme

Over the past term, it has been so pleasing to see so many Sixth Form students participate in different areas of school life through the Student Leadership Scheme.

What has been particularly pleasing is those students who are running various clubs and activities around the school. Make sure you are completing your Student Leadership activities each week.



Crochet Club



Mindfulness Club



Engineering Society



World news

By Karandeep Sadhra

Plane forced to return to airport after horse escapes on board

A plane was forced to return to the airport shortly after taking off when a horse got loose on board. Around half an hour after the plane left New York, the plane contacted air traffic control to inform them of the escaped animal. This may seem like a shock to the wider public, but horses are allowed to travel on planes.



Pond mysteriously turns bright pink in Hawaii

Many visitors and tourists have flocked to the pond which has recently turned bright pink. The area is currently experiencing a drought and halobacteria is plaguing the pond, causing the problem. If this continues, there may be further complications which will cause a problem for other species.



Christmas Joke

What's every elf's favourite type of music?

Wrap!



What makes a good Christmas movie?

By Ben Robinson

If you asked any person what their favourite Christmas film is, I am sure they would be able to give you a rundown of the top 5, but what makes a good Christmas movie? There is something special about Christmas movies that warms the heart and comforts the soul, so what gives a film the ability to elicit these feelings?

With Christmas being so heavily embedded in our culture, we all experience some level of nostalgia when the holiday period comes around. Whether it's the colourful decorations, the festive food or the snow that reminds you of your childhood, everyone has a personal connection to the festive season. Christmas movies play on this by helping us reminisce about our earliest memories of the holiday, putting us in the Christmas spirit. The feeling of comfort provided by a film is what makes it a successful Christmas movie.

For example, my favourite Christmas film is Elf, the story of Buddy the elf journeying to find his family in New York. The film hits all the critical Christmas points: a jolly protagonist with an honest and important mission, a diverse cast of loveable sidekicks and a nice happy ending. The heart-warming tale is a classic and is a great example of how a good Christmas film can set the tone for the festive season.

There is no set criteria for what makes a movie a "good" Christmas film. If a film gets you in the festive mood, then that is all that really matters. What is important is your connection to your favourite holiday film and the joy it brings to you throughout the holiday season.



Careers, Employment and University Presentations

Over the past term, we have had a number of employers, professionals and universities come in to speak to students about future careers and opportunities.

There will be more opportunities available in the rest of the school year, make sure you attend to ensure you are well informed about future steps.



University of Sunderland



Clifford Chance



Policing





Christmas Quiz

How much do you know about Christmas-including the more unusual facts about it? Find out in this quiz!

- 1) In what century did the typical Christmas tree tradition begin?
- 2) What is the name of the Christmas dessert consisting of a cake rolled into a log, often with chocolate flavour?
- 3) True or false: the first song believed to have been played using instruments in space was 'Jingle Bells'.
- 4) True or false: this Christmas carol above was not originally meant to be a Christmas song.
- 5) True or false: the world's biggest Christmas cracker was over 83 metres long.
- 6) According to Guinness World Records, how expensive is the most expensive decorated Christmas tree? Choose from:
 - a) \$13,967,460
 - b) \$11,026,900
 - c) \$18,229,100
- 7) How many countries across the world celebrate Christmas as a public holiday, to the nearest ten?
- 8) From which time period did the abbreviation "Xmas" originate?
 - a) 2000s
 - b) 1900s
 - c) 1700s
 - d) 1500s





Quiz Answers

- 1) 16th century
- 2) Yule log
- 3) True! This was done on 16 December 1965, using a harmonica and bells, by astronauts Wally Schirra and Thomas P. Stafford.
- 4) True! It only began to be associated with Christmas decades after it was first believed to be performed in 1857, under the name 'The One Horse Open Sleigh'.
- 5) False, but this is not that far off from reality! The Guinness world record for largest Christmas cracker was given to a 63 metre long cracker and it even contained toys, hats and jokes.
- 6) 'B'. It was displayed in 2010 in a hotel in Abu Dhabi, UAE!
- 7) 161 countries, out of nearly 200-more than 80% of the world's countries.
- 8) 'D'. In the Greek alphabet, the letter X is the Greek letter for 'chi', which is also the first letter of the Greek name for Christ. This was combined with 'mas' (referring to church service) to form Xmas!



Messages from the Sixth Form Team

It has been fantastic to get to know our Year 12 and see them make a real positive start to their time in the Sixth Form. A real highlight of this first term was our Day of Aspiration. The students took the opportunity to bond with their tutor groups while taking part in some competitive activities such as tower building as well as thinking about their aims and goals for the future. It has also been lovely to see students make new friendships as well as continue to build upon those they developed throughout lower school.

I have been really impressed with the way the year group have made the most of all the opportunities that are offered in the Sixth Form. We have students supporting the wider school community in an array of different ways such as running our Sixth Form Cafe, leading Mindfulness Club, running Dance Club and running Crochet Club to name just a few.

In addition, we have a large number of students taking part in the John Paul II Award and 28 students taking on the Extended Project Qualification, which allows them to independently research an area of their interest. It is great to see Year 12 inspiring our younger students and acting as role models in so many different ways.

I hope that all of Year 12 have a restful Christmas break and I look forward to seeing what they achieve in the New Year!

Miss Lamb (Head of Year 12)



With this being their final year of their time here at St Mary's, students in Year 13 have been making the most of the time they have left with us. They have created an ever increasingly popular crochet club, taken the lead with an engineering society, and continued to send off applications to UCAS; all whilst studying hard for their first round of mock examinations in Year 13. This has made for an extremely busy term, but also a rewarding one as we see students successfully gain offers from universities and excel in their studies as their long hours of revision pays dividends.

In addition, Year 13 students are setting amazing examples as role models for the younger students by continuing to take part in the wider life of the school. Whether this be by partaking in this year's school musical; having a vital role in the Remembrance Services; or being a student mentor and lesson assistant. On top of this, Year 13 are also striving to collect the full set of Bronze, Silver and Gold Enrichment badges for their lanyards by attending an array of enrichment opportunities available in the Sixth Form.

These range from listening to external speakers, to attending workshops and to going on visits to local universities.

Thank you to all Year 13 students for their fantastic efforts this term, and I look forward to seeing how we continue to go from strength to strength next term.

Have a well-deserved restful Christmas break!

Mrs Francis (Head of Year 13)



It is a great honour for me to have the closing message in this edition of the Sixth Form Gazette.

I am incredibly proud of all the Sixth Form students. You have worked hard in this first term, and you have all shown a tremendous commitment to your studies. Whether it be Year 12 students starting courses or Year 13 students completing Mock Examinations, UCAS applications and other applications to apprenticeships and employment. The staff and I are inspired by your enthusiasm and resilience, and we are confident that your hard work will be rewarded with success.

I have been incredibly impressed by the copious reports from teachers praising Sixth Form students continued effort and commitment to learning, along with the vast number of Class Chart points and Enrichment Award points you have accrued.

Congratulations to all Sixth Form students for carrying out extra-curricular activities and showing your enthusiasm and dedication. You have all worked hard to achieve your goals and have shown great determination and dedication. Well done! I want to thank you for your enthusiasm and dedication and for being a part of the Sixth Form community. I look forward to seeing your continued success and achievements when we return in 2024.

Sixth Form life is very busy, but I would encourage you to take a moment to pause and reflect on all of the opportunities offered to you in the Sixth Form. We encourage all students to immerse themselves in Sixth Form life to enhance your own academic and personal development, and it is so pleasing to see so many students do this. Opportunities such as the Student Leadership Scheme, Super-Curricular Tasks, being part of our Mentoring and Volunteering Programme, running charity fund-raising activities, attending enrichment workshops, running the Sixth Form Café, hosting the Sixth Form Podcast, and even writing in this newspaper. You will be offered these existing opportunities and new developments in 2024 and I implore you to take advantage of them.

In my role as Head of Sixth Form, I always want students to develop into people who can achieve their goals but also thrive in our modern world. As such, it is so pleasing to me to you act as fantastic role models for others in the school community and develop holistically as well academically.

I would like to say a huge thank you to all students in the Sixth Form for your excellent start to the year, and the enthusiasm, respect, compassion, integrity, and generosity you bring to Sixth Form every day. It is a pleasure to be your Head of Sixth Form and I look forward to returning after what I hope is a restful Christmas break for all.

Mr Turnbull (Head of Sixth Form)



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