

Charles Dickens

A Christmas Carol



Text adaptation, notes and
activities by **Peter Foreman**



Some Christmas Ghosts

In northern countries like Great Britain, Christmas is traditionally a time for ghosts. People sit round a big fire and tell ghost stories.

In the sixteenth century two skulls ¹ appeared every Christmas Day at Calgarth Hall in the English Lake District. Myles Phillipson, a magistrate, built Calgarth Hall on some land – but it wasn't his land. It belonged to a man called Kraster Cook, who lived in a cottage with his wife Dorothy. On Christmas Day Phillipson invited them to a big dinner and gave them a beautiful bowl ² made of gold. Next day, soldiers arrested them. Phillipson was the magistrate at the trial. He said that the Cooks had taken his bowl. He sentenced them to death and they were hanged.³ After Phillipson built Calgarth Hall, two skulls appeared on the stairs on Christmas Day. They returned every year on the same day. When the Phillipson family became poor and sold the Hall, the skulls disappeared.

For many years a ghost has returned to Sandringham in Norfolk, one of the historic homes of the British Royal Family. Every Christmas Eve, in the servants' rooms on the second floor, it throws Christmas cards into the air and pulls sheets from the beds.

There is a restaurant called Popjoy's next to the Theatre Royal in Bath, Avon. Just before Christmas, 1975, a man came in to have dinner. He went upstairs to the bar, bought a drink, looked at the menu and ordered his meal. While he was sitting on a sofa with his

1. **skulls** : craniums.

2. **bowl** : round container used for eating or for storing food.

3. **hanged** : suspended by the neck until dead.



drink a lady in old-fashioned ¹ clothes came and sat next to him. Then she vanished. The man didn't stay for his meal. He ran downstairs, told his story to the waiter, and then ran out.



Sandringham in Norfolk.

- 1** Complete the tables with information from the texts, like the examples. For numbers 2 and 3 say what the ghosts did and try to imagine why the ghosts appeared! (Write your ideas in the 'Reason' section.)

1	Time	
	Place	
	People	
	Ghost	two skulls appeared on the stairs
	Reason	the spirits of Kraster and Dorothy wanted to frighten Phillipson, so that he wouldn't forget what he had done / said at the trial

1. **old-fashioned** : out of date.



2

Time
Place
People
Ghost
Reason

3

Time
Place
Person <i>a customer</i>
Ghost
Reason

2 Answer these questions.

- a. Do you believe in ghosts?
Yes? How do you explain them?
No? Why not?
- b. Would you like to see a ghost?
Why?
Why not?





The Christmas Story

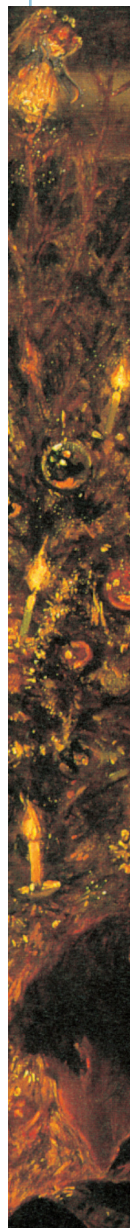
In the pagan world there was a midwinter festival after December 22nd – the shortest day of the year – when the days become longer. The Celts built big fires that symbolised the return of the sun. The Romans had the Saturnalia when people ate, drank and danced. Then, in the fourth century AD, Pope Julius I made December 25th the official date of Christ's birth. So Christmas combines a pagan religious festival and a Christian festival.

Ancient customs became a part of Christmas: for example, decorating houses with mistletoe ¹ or holly. ² From the pagan Yule



Glad Tidings (end of the 19th century) by William M. Spittle.

1. **mistletoe** : plant traditionally associated with Christmas.
2. **holly** : traditional Christmas plant.



festival of the sun in Scandinavia we get Yule logs and Yule candles at Christmas, which symbolise fire and light. Later, Saint Nicholas, the patron of children, became associated with Christmas. He was famous for his generosity, and people said he often left presents for them. The tradition of carol-singing began many centuries ago.

But some traditions are quite modern. The image of a fat, happy Father Christmas in red and white clothes came from America at the end of the 19th century. Christmas crackers ¹ first appeared in the 1870s. In the 1840s Queen Victoria and her husband Albert introduced the custom of decorating a

Christmas tree. They used candles, not lights, and they put children's toys and presents on the tree. They had Christmas stockings ² too. People also started sending Christmas cards in the 1840s. Other traditions go back to earlier centuries. Christmas pudding ³ was first made about 1670. Before the 16th century there was no turkey at Christmas. People ate goose and other birds.

1. **crackers** : paper tube with toys, sweets etc. inside.

2. **stockings** :



3. **Christmas pudding** : traditional dessert.



Christmas, cover of the Saturday Evening Post (1926) by Norman Rockwell.



In Dickens's time, people usually gave presents at the New Year. And Boxing Day (December 26th) was not a holiday. St. Stephen's Day is called Boxing Day in Britain – but not because the British celebrate boxing on that day! Today a 'Christmas box' is any type of present. But years ago it was the custom to give servants a 'Christmas box' – a present of money or clothes – on December 26th. This custom originated with the early Christian Church when the priests broke the money boxes on the day after Christmas and gave the contents to poor people.

**1 Which of the following statements are true (T) or false (F)?
Correct the false ones.**

	T	F
a. There was a pagan midwinter festival before the shortest day of the year.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. The early Church changed the pagan festival into a Christian one.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. When he became associated with Christmas Saint Nicholas was already the patron of children.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. The modern Father Christmas was a European idea.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Christmas trees and Christmas cards began at about the same time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Christmas pudding and turkey appeared about the same time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. In Dickens's time, people had two or three days' holiday at Christmas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Boxing Day has no connection with the sport of boxing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. A modern-day 'Christmas box' is a box containing money.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Boxing Day originated with a religious custom of giving presents to servants.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

