

personal english

Presents



Merry Britmas!

2017 Edition

by Francesca Possenti, and Mariacristina Natalia Bertoli, PhD

www.personal-english.com

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WARNING!



Levels of difficulty have not been marked on purpose. The *Personal English* method relies on the learner's exposure to authentic language: students of any level are therefore welcome to try their hand at any of the activities in this booklet, and to report their difficulties to the teacher upon resuming classes.

I livelli di difficoltà sono stati omessi intenzionalmente. Il metodo Personal English si basa sull'esposizione dello studente alla lingua reale: tutti gli studenti – qualsiasi sia il loro livello – sono invitati a sperimentare qualsiasi attività contenuta nel presente fascicolo e a comunicare le proprie difficoltà all'insegnante al proprio rientro.

Merry Britmas

*When Did the Winter Solstice Become a Huge Business?
On the Origins of Consumerist Christmas*

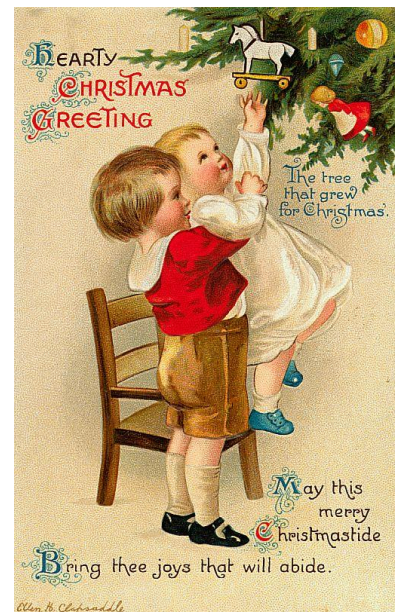


Do you know who invented Christmas as we know it? No, not Coca Cola. The right answer is...Queen Victoria! Yes, Christmas is an invention of the Victorian era. At the beginning of the 19th century, Christmas was hardly celebrated, but things changed quickly during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). When the Queen (herself of German ancestry) married the German-born prince Albert, he introduced to the British court some of the Christmas traditions as we now know them. The first sign was when, in 1848, *London Illustrated News* published an image of the Royal Family around a decorated Christmas tree, also known as Tannenbaum.

The Victorian era was an age of manufacturers, shopkeepers and industrialists: all in all, those were years characterised by a strong business acumen.

Accordingly, Victorians soon realized that these days of events, family and generosity were a great opportunity for making money. So, they popularized Christmas decorations and made shop windows appealing to passers-by in order to promote their usage, thus increasing sales. Also, the overall wealth of the country made it easier for people to 'spoil' children over Christmas time and make it a family celebration.

In 1888 a shop in West Ham inaugurated the first Santa's Grotto, and since then children have queued for hours every December in department stores worldwide to seat on Santa's knee. Thanks to the Victorians, Christmas 'is the season to be jolly' and to shop 'till you drop'.



It's Beginning to Look A Lot Like Christmas is not just an old song, but a feeling you get in the UK starting as early as September. Shortly after the so-called 'British glorious summer', in effect, you will find yourself drunk wearing a Santa hat in absolutely no time.

First, you can start seeing various pubs already accepting bookings for Christmas, but you think it is still too early for Christmas and then just ignore them. Then all those Quality Street tins in Tesco, the shop windows and the lights everywhere, but you think that is just shops eager to sell, and still keep ignoring them.



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Since the 1970s the official beginning of the Christmas shopping season has been marked by the TV commercial fight raging among the most popular British brands. Major British retailers, such as John Lewis, Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's and Boots launch their Christmas commercials on TV from late September to mid-October, and compete to achieve the cheesiest and the most heart-breaking one in order to catch the attention and get remembered somehow. The soundtracks of such ads usually are British popular songs, most of the times revisited and reinterpreted by current pop icons.

Answer the Questions:

1. How and why were Victorian Christmas traditions influenced by German ones?

2. What social phenomenon marked the beginning of the Christmas traditions as we know them nowadays?

3. What market segment was originally targeted by most sellers?

4. What (still extant) promotional strategy was first devised to target this market segment?

5. What marks the official beginning of the Christmas shopping season in the UK?

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Christmas Commercials: Challenge!

What's the Cheesiest Commercial and Why?

Here are four TV commercials by Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer from the past four years: summarize each of the stories they tell and decide what the cheesiest is...



STORY #1: MOG'S CHRISTMAS CALAMITY
by Sainsbury's (2015)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuRn2S7iPNU>



STORY #2: CHRISTMAS TRUCE OF 1914
by Sainsbury's (2014)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KH0VBK2EVE>



STORY #3: PADDINGTON
& THE CHRISTMAS VISITOR
by M&S (2017)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfaSxlkLsIE>



STORY #4: CHRISTMAS WITH LOVE
BY MRS. CLAUS
by M&S (2016)

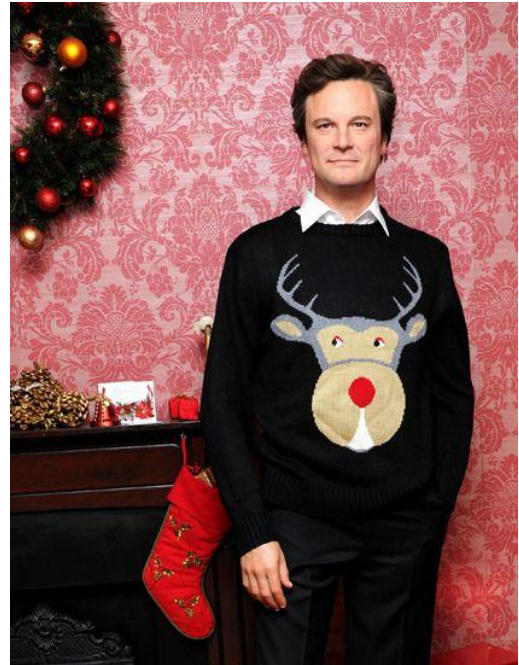
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5QPXhStb5I>

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The second item on your list is the **Christmas Jumper!** Do you remember when in the 2001 film *Bridget Jones's Diary* Bridget (a.k.a. Renée Zellweger) meets Mark Darcy (a.k.a. Colin Firth) who is wearing a reindeer jumper? Ridiculous, huh? Well, imagine everyone is wearing that!

The tradition goes back to the late XIX century in Scandinavia and Iceland, when fishermen needed to wear colourful and warm jumpers, probably to make it easier to identify their bodies if drowned in the sea. Later, the Scandinavian colourful jumper became popular among skiers for pretty much the same reasons.

During the 1960s knitwear became fashionable for everyone and started starring in Christmas time commercials, so by 1970 Christmas jumpers officially became a huge part of British Christmas traditions. The perfect Christmas jumper is warm and cosy, with reindeers, Santa or other Christmassy patterns, and it well represents the British humour, too. Nowadays you can easily find 3D, lightning or singing jumpers and most Brits love showing them off throughout all of December.



VOCABULARY CHALLENGE!

Match Each Jumper with its Theme



coco mama style.com

- A. Polar bear _____
- B. Holly _____
- C. Ribbon _____
- D. Snowflake _____
- E. Snowman _____
- F. Reindeer _____
- G. Tinsel _____
- H. Mr. and Mrs. Claus _____
- I. Santa Claus portrait _____
- J. Geometric pattern _____

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Back to our list now: don't forget to get on your list a present for **Secret Santa**, which is the third item on your Christmas kit list. What is Secret Santa, really? Well, Secret Santa is a British tradition in which members of a large group randomly pick up – usually through a raffle – the name of a person they should buy an anonymous gift to. Once the presents are exchanged and unwrapped, recipients must try to guess who their secret Santa is.

Anonymous gift giving at Christmas is a tradition that traces back to Scandinavia, and is known as *Julklapp* (*Jul* meaning 'Christmas' and *Klapp* meaning 'to knock' in Swedish); in effect, Secret Santa should knock loudly on a door, throw the present in and then run away. This is inspired by the traditional figure of *Knecht Ruprecht* (Servant Rupert) who anonymously delivers presents to help his master, Santa Claus.

Nowadays Secret Santa is played in offices across the UK and is one of the funniest – even though also most feared – moments of the year. In British spirit, in effect, gift giving to co-workers may sometimes be awkward, especially if you get so lucky you have to buy a Secret Santa present to your boss...



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The Christmas Soundtrack



Over Christmas time you might run into **Christmas carollers**, that is, groups of singers that knock door to door to sing typical Christmas songs in exchange for some money to give to charity.

The word 'carol' seems to have derived from the French word *carole*, in turn stemmed from Latin word *carula*, which indicates a circular dance and was used in pagan times to describe musical compositions and dances. What we now know as carols originally were songs sung at the winter solstice with people dancing around stone circles. Soon the use of dancing was abandoned during the early Middle Ages, but thanks to St Francis of Assisi, who started the tradition in 1223, Christmas songs became popular in Europe starting from the late Middle Ages.

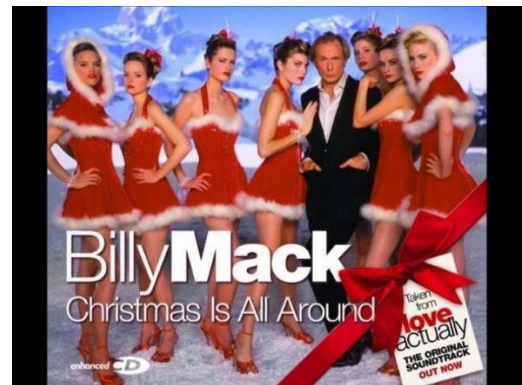
The first English Christmas Carol was written in 1410, but carol singing was banned by Oliver Cromwell during his rule as Lord Protector of England between 1653 and 1658. Victorians brought Christmas Carols back almost two centuries later, and gave them all the magic of Christmas.

Nowadays, along with traditional Christmas Carols, you'll be able to listen to the **Christmas number one hit** to help you get into the right Christmas spirit.

Every year around Christmas time, artists fight in order to secure themselves the number one spot in the UK single chart. Christmas number ones usually are ballads, often Christmas-themed, or sometimes even charity songs. The competition officially started in 1973 when the bands *Slade* and *Wizzard* deliberately released two distinct Christmas songs at the same time, hoping to hit the number one spot on Christmas day.

The Beatles had four singles to win the Christmas number one, so they currently hold the record (among many others); also, the Spice Girls made it to the first spot for three years in a row. 'Do They know it's Christmas?' is the only song to have won the first place three times with all the three generations of Band Aid.

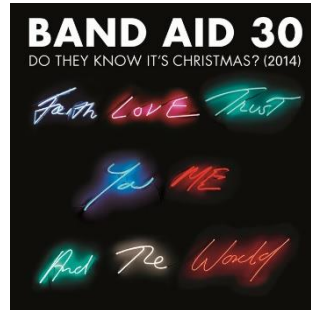
You might remember Billy Mack, the old rock star from *Love Actually* (2003, directed by Richard Curtis), trying his best to make it to the number one spot with 'Christmas is All Around' ... So very British!



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Do They Know It's Christmas?

Band Aid 30, 2014



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-w7jyVHocTk>

Listen to the Song, then Fill in the Blanks with the Missing Words

It's Christmas time and there's no need to be afraid
 At Christmas time we let in light and we banish _____¹
 And in our world of plenty we can spread a smile of joy
 Throw your _____² around the world
 At Christmas time
 But say a prayer, and pray for the other ones
 At Christmas time, it's _____³ but while you're having fun
 There's a world outside your window and it's a world of dread and fear
 Where a kiss of love can kill you and there's death in every _____⁴
 And the Christmas bells that ring there are the clanging chimes of doom
 Well tonight we're _____⁵ and touching you
 Bring peace and joy this Christmas to West Africa
 A song of hope where there's no hope tonight
 Where to _____⁶ is to fear
 Why is touch is to be scared
 How can they know it's Christmas time at all
 Here's to you
 Raise a _____⁷ to everyone
 And here's to them
 And all their years to come
 How can they know it's Christmas time at all
 _____⁸ the world
 Let them know it's Christmas time again
 _____⁹ the world
 Let them know it's Christmas time again
 _____¹⁰ the world
 Let them know it's Christmas time again

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Christmastime Festivities

Circle in the Text the Synonyms of the Words from the Box below

- | | | | | |
|----------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1. Intoxicated | 2. To don | 3. Well-off | 4. To bestow | 5. To spoil |
| 6. Chaos | 7. Laid-back | 8. Confectioner | 9. To rely on | 10. To reprimand |

The very first Christmas celebration in every British calendar is the **Office Christmas Party**. At the beginning of December all companies across the UK organize a Christmas get-together, which generally ends up in a crazy night to forget. On the one hand, the Christmas Party actually is a great opportunity to get together with your co-workers and bosses in a casual setting and, for the company, a perfect way to celebrate company culture and reward the employees for the year of work.



On the other hand, though, the open bar tends to ruin everything, hence the common rule: *whatever happens to the Christmas party, stays in the Christmas party*. An example of someone completely embarrassing themselves at a Christmas Party is Bridget Jones drunk singing at her office karaoke.



Christmas Eve is the day before Christmas, and it's the time when children hang up their stockings on the bed, or on the fireplace, waiting for Santa to come and fill them up with presents. Letters to Santa do not travel via Royal Mail, but are tossed in the fire, so they go up to the chimney and reach Father Christmas. (Does it sound familiar? Yes, that's how Mary Poppins got her job at the Banks'...)

Christmas Day celebrations were banned during Cromwell Puritan dictatorship between 1647 and 1660, but they later became a day for gift giving and celebrations for children during the wealthy Victorian era. The Holy Days and Fasting Day act of 1551, still vigilant, states that all Britons must walk to the church on Christmas day, so to avoid any social difference on the festive day, even though many Britons do break this law.



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A famous brand of cheese, randomly, made a survey to find out the average Christmas day in Britain¹. It turned out that on Christmas Day Britons, generally, wake up before 8am and open the presents first thing in the morning, but they have the first family argument as early as 9:58 am. Christmas day stress is hard to handle, so on average parents tell off children for the first time at 11:07 am and treat themselves to the first sip of alcohol only at 11:49 am. Before the meal, don't forget to pull the **crackers!**

Crackers have played a key role in British Christmas since 1847 (again, Victorian era) when the sweetmaker Tom Smith invented them almost by accident. He tried to replicate French bon-bons and insert a little game or toy in it, but his idea wasn't successful; later on, though, the cricking sound of the fire inspired him to insert a little sound in them, and so crackers were born.

Nowadays crackers are short cardboard tubes wrapped in shiny paper, containing a small present, a paper crown, and a (usually horrible!) joke. Two people, each holding one end, pull the crackers, which open with a small explosive 'pop' sound. Once the jokes are read and crowns are worn, Christmas dinner can start.

Christmas dinner is the main meal but, actually, is usually eaten at lunchtime. Still nowadays the vast majority of Britons (85%) has Turkey 'with all the trimmings', that is to say, parsnip, roasted potatoes, mashed potatoes, gravy or cranberry sauce and England's all-time favourite vegetables: Brussel sprouts. For dessert, forget your *panettone*: British Christmas desserts are Christmas puddings and mince pies.

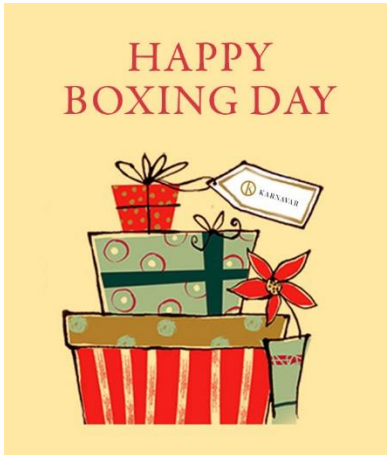


Three o' clock on Christmas date, make sure you are in front of your TV or radio to catch the **Queen's Christmas Message**, formally known as *Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech*. King George V started the tradition by delivering his first Christmas speech on the BBC radio in 1932 and, twenty-five years later (in 1957), Elizabeth gave her first Christmas speech on TV. It was her husband Philip to convince her trust new media and try to speak over the *telly*. Nowadays it is broadcast on all the media by different providers, throughout all Great Britain and the Commonwealth. On this occasion Her Majesty, usually, sums up the main events of the closing year for the Country and celebrates milestones and Christmas feelings.

Shortly after the speech is England's favourite time of the day: teatime! **Christmas tea** is a moment of celebration with the whole family around pigs in a blanket, mince pies, Christmas cake, and, of course, tea!

The survey reveals that, on average, the first person falls asleep at 4:59pm, but for those who manage to stay awake, the afternoon is usually spent playing board games or going to Church.

¹ The Telegraph, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/topics/christmas/6713893/Its-9.58am-on-Christmas-Day-time-for-the-first-festive-row.html>.

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Boxing day is the day after Christmas, when the family stress is finally over. The name dates back to a tradition of the 17th century when the wealthy used to fill in a box with their Christmas feast leftovers and donate it to the servants. More recently, Boxing Day is renowned for less honourable reasons: shopping and football. On the day after Christmas, shops open very early, sometimes even at dawn, to allow people make the most of the Boxing Day sales. The big reduction draws huge crowds, people queuing for hours and even people fighting over the best deal. Just like Black Friday, Boxing Day sales spread to other countries and you can run into these scenes from bedlam in Australian and Canadian malls as well.

This shopping hysteria makes it even easier for men across the UK to just stay home and enjoy some *footy* (as football lovers call it in the UK). The day after Christmas all English teams are back on the pitch and ready to play; Boxing Day match, in effect, is one of the most important matches in the premier league. Traditionally, only local rivals were supposed to play, so that supporters did not have to travel long distances to see their team, and nowadays still Boxing Day fixture is always packed with exciting games to encourage supporters to watch the games at the stadium, at home or at the pub with a few pints.

After all, it's the most wonderful time of the year!