

Bygone Sileby



Special Christmas Issue

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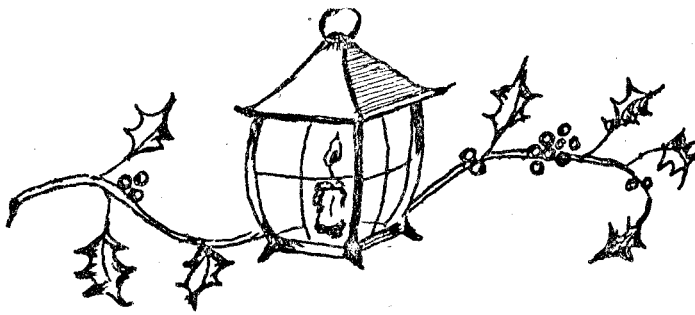


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SILEBY



A Happy Christmas To You All!

Old Sibley Customs

PLUM PORRIDGE

The Christmas festival has seen many changes over the years. Many things we regard as traditional, were unknown to our great-grandparents. Since the early 1800's, the newcomers to the Sibley Christmas scene are - mince pies, crackers, Christmas puddings, Christmas trees, Christmas cards, turkeys and even Santa Claus.



The modern Christmas pudding is quite fruity, whereas in olden times, the Plum Porridge contained a great quantity of meat. The porridge gradually became known as "pudding," and Samuel Pepys recorded in his famous diary one Christmas, that he had dined with "great content on a dish of plum pudding." The pudding was always prepared on Christmas Eve, and according to custom, was boiled before the dawn of Christmas Day.

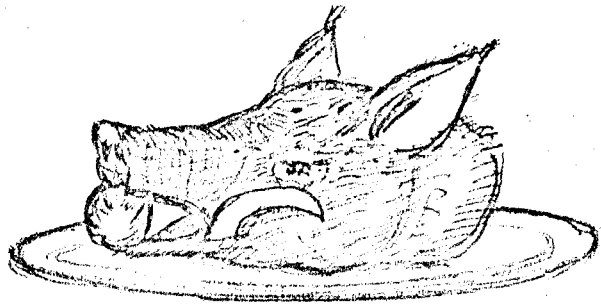
Old ways die slowly, particularly in rural areas, and in the 1700's, the people of Sibley were still making the ancient porridge. Below is a recipe copied from an old book in Sibley which was in use in 1790.

"PLUMB PORRIDGE FOR CHRISTMAS"

"Put a leg and shin of beef into 8 gallons of water, and boil them until they be very tender. When the broth be strong, strain it out. Then wipe the pot, and put in the broth again. Slice 6 penny loaves thin, out off the tops and bottoms, put some of the liquor to them, and cover them up, and let them stand for a quarter of an hour; then boil and strain it, and put into your pot. Let it boil a quarter of an hour, then put in 5 pounds of currants clean washed and picked. Let them boil a little, then put in 5 pounds of stoned raisins of the sun, and 2 pounds of prunes. Let these boil till they swell, and then put in $\frac{3}{4}$ of an ounce of mace, $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce of cloves and 2 nutmegs, all beat fine. Before you put these into the pot, mix with them a little cold liquor and do not put them in but a little while before you take off the pot. When you take off the pot, put in 3 pounds of sugar, a little salt, a quart of sack, a quart of claret and the juice of 2 or 3 lemons. Thicken with sago. Pour the porridge into earthen pans and keep."

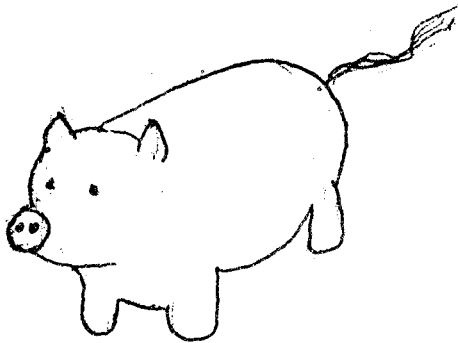
Sugar Pigs

In those times when the lords of the Manor of Sileby were the warlike Barons de Segrave, who lived at Seagrave Castle, one of the important items of their Christmas fare was the Boar's Head. During the festivities, it was carried into the great Hall with much ceremony to the sound of music. The head, roasted to a rich brown, had an orange in its mouth.



In Victorian Sileby, it was the custom for butchers to place the whole carcase of pigs in their shop windows, facing the street, and each pig had an orange in its mouth. This was perhaps, a reminder of the ancient Boar's Head. One of the sure signs that Christmas was approaching, was to see pigs with oranges in their mouths. Although the practice was discontinued in the village some years ago, it continued in Leicester, until recent times.

The bygone Christmas was never complete without the sugar pigs. These were made of hard white sugar, with eyes painted on the face, and a tail made of red or blue wool, which was inseted when the sugar was in the mould.



It was essential to keep the sugar pigs in a dry atmosphere, because they readily absorbed moisture, became soft, and they soon had red or blue rumps where the dye from the tail ran into the sugar. In Sileby, they said that a damp sugar pig, looked "allo'er red or all o'er blue."

Besides sugar pigs, there were also sugar mice, another Christmas favourite of the children. The tails of the mice were made of red twine. These sugar animals were made in a mould which

distributed the sugar, leaving the middle hollow. They were placed in Christmas stockings, or used as ornaments.

Old Sayings

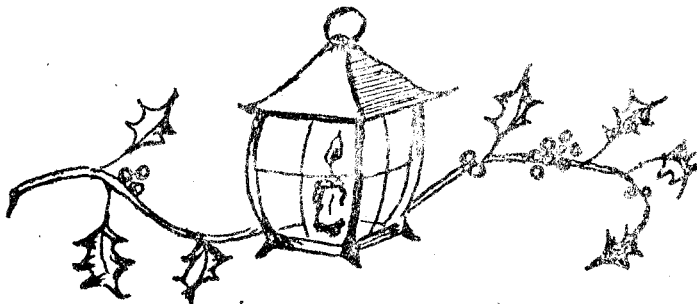
On Christmas Eve, the bees hum the hundredth Psalm.

If the sun shines through the branches of an apple tree on Christmas Day, there will be a good crop the following year.

At midnight on Christmas Eve, all the cattle kneel down.

If ropes made from straw are tied round the trunks of fruit trees on Christmas Eve, it brings more fruit the next year.

The more a cock crows on Christmas morning, the dearer corn will be.



Fireside Games



The children always had their share of the homely fun during Christmas, and were called upon to entertain the family and friends in their own way. If we imagine that their games were "too childish" to be used today, we should try some of the following games.

Tongue Twisters

To be repeated correctly, at speed:

"Red leather, yellow leather."

"Are you aluminiuming um? No, I'm copper-bottoming um Mum."

The River Puzzle

A man who was taking home a fox, a hen and a bowl of corn, came to a river, where there was a tiny boat, which could take across only himself, and one of his three possessions. If he left the fox and the hen together, the fox would eat the hen; if he left the hen and corn together, the hen would eat the corn. How did the man manage to take all three across the river, and get them home safely?

Book and Author Game

Everone was asked to think of a book title, and provide a suitable name for the author. The children, who had memorised a stock of these, usually won the game with ease. Examples -

"The Broken Window," by Eva Brick.

"The Penniless Gambler," by Watt A. Mugg.

"Our Cruel Landlord," by Art O. Stone.

"Baby's Dummy," by Justin K.C. Howells.

"The Empty Cup," by T. Mashing.

"Detection," by Ivor Clue.

The Race Puzzle

Once upon a time, two princes travelled to a distant land to win the hand of a fair princess. The King could not choose which should marry his daughter, so he arranged that they should race on their horses round the walls of the city. However, the King ruled that the LAST across the winning line should become his son-in-law. The princes could not think how they could compete in such a race, and went to a wise man for advice. The race was run, and one prince won the fair princess. What advice did the wise man give the princes?

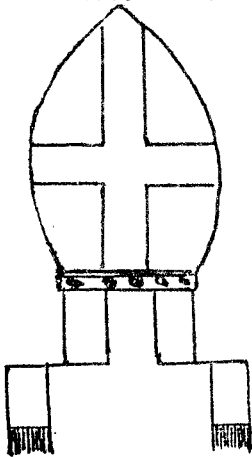
Some Conundrums

These were always favoured by the children. They loved to see the baffled expression on adult faces, and to hear the words of surrender, "We give in."

1. Why do soldiers have a rest on April Fool's Day?
2. If the devil lost his tail, where would he go to get another?
3. What two creatures in Noah's Ark had the least luggage?
4. If a man carrying three lamps dropped one, what would his job be?
5. What has four faces, one arm and one leg?



Santa Claus and Christmas Stockings



The name Santa Claus is derived from Saint Nicholas, who was the Bishop of Myra, in the 3rd. Century. The Church remembers him each year, on 6th December. He is one of the most popular of all the Saints, being the Patron of children, sailors, spinsters, pawnbrokers and even the Russians. St. Nicholas is associated with the Christmas stocking in the following way -

One day, when the kind Bishop was passing a house, he heard the sound of weeping, and making inquiries, he discovered that the three daughters of a poor merchant were broken hearted because their father could not provide money for their dowries, so they could not marry. That night, when they were asleep, St. Nicholas climbed on the low roof of the house, and dropped

three bags containing gold coins down the chimney. It so happened that the young ladies had hung their stockings in front of the fire, and the bags of gold fell into them. When they took down their stockings in the morning, they found gifts which changed their lives.

In bygone Sileby, stockings were hanging from the mantlepiece when the children went to bed on Christmas Eve. For several nights, they had been shouting messages up the chimney to Santa. On Christmas dawning, they were awake and off to look in their stockings, but there was

never much in them. Several old Sileby people were asked what their stockings usually held,

and they replied, "A russet apple, a bull's eye, a fig and some nuts;"

"An orange, a fig, a couple of dates, a ha'penny turnover and four

aniseed balls;" "There were nuts at the bottom of the stocking, then an

orange, a mince pie, some peppermints, and a penny,

wrapped in a mass of paper to make it look a lot;"

"Sometimes the boys got a whistle and the girls, a

purse." Parents went to buy things for the stockings

from Bosworth's shop in High Street, "where you could

get no end of nuts and things for a few coppers."

Toys and trinkets could be bought at Cohen's Bazaar,

in Humberstone Gate, Leicester, known as the "Penny

Bazaar," as all their goods cost only one penny. The

variety of articles on display at that price was astonishing.

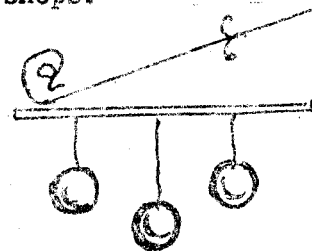
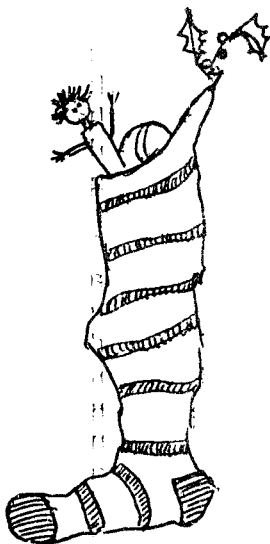
In medieval times, bankers used the three bags

of gold in the legend of St. Nicholas, as their

trading symbol. In later times, the pawnbrokers who

lent money on goods, changed the bags to three gold

balls for the sign over their shops.



Some Christmas Fireside Tales — Tall and Short

At Christmas time, the family and visitors had to amuse themselves. There was no ready-made entertainment as we have today. As families were large and cottages small, there was no space for games which called for movement, so much of the entertainment was vocal. Everyone was expected to make a contribution, from the youngest to the oldest. The adults would tell a story, or sing a song; the children had many "talking games," which included conundrums and tongue twisters.

On Christmas night, as the family and their guests sat round the fire, with the bright flickering flames from the logs casting dancing shadows on the walls, it was time to tell a tale.

Here are a few old tales which might bring a smile this Christmas.

* * * * *

It was a dark and stormy night, and we all sat around the fire, when somebody said, "tell us a tale." And this is what he said
"It was a dark and stormy night, and we all sat round the fire..."

A Thought in Passing

It is said that one Christmas, a Vicar slipped on the ice, and twisted his ankle. A kindly cottager gave the top-hatted cleric an efficient, but undignified ride home on his wheelbarrow. Somebody who saw this strange sight in the High Street, said, "Ah niver thowt ad iver see Passun as drunk as that !"

The Dog Watch

A stranger who came to the village one Boxing Day, entered a public house with an unusual dog. The locals eyed the animal in amazement, and asked, "Worrizit ?" "This," replied the proud owner, "Is a bloodhound." After staring at the sad looking creature for ten minutes, one of the spectators called out, "Ayup, whens yer dug gooin ter blayd ?"

Said with Feline

A Sibley family, "trapesin round Leicester Mooseum on the Satdi afnoon afor Chrismus," stopped to look at a life-like snarling Bengal tiger, which had been shot by the Prince of Wales. When one of the children began to finger the enormous fangs, the frightened mother cried out, "Yo kip away from it - in case it eent stuffed proper !"

Christmas Cheers

A passer-by, to a man pushing a handcart along King Street, one Christmas Eve, "Yowve got a good load o' Chrismus foirwood theer!" "Wotjer mane foirwood ?" was the indignant reply, "thase ar ar things, weer shiftin.."



Somewhere a voice is calling

A man who made a living selling his wares with a horse and cart, made an extra effort up and down the streets just before Christmas. The cold snowy weather brought on a severe attack of laryngitis, and the well-known voice was stilled. When the Vicar called to express his sympathy to the muffled and silent parishioner, the man's wife said, "Yis, way thowt yowd bi sorry, cuz yo an im both gets yer livin ollerin."

Unexpected Bonus

A young lady took her new gentleman friend home for the first time on Christmas Day, to have tea with the family. Her father, anxious to make a good impression on the youth, began loud praises of his daughter, and concluded with, "the bloke wot weds ar Sarah will get a prize." "Oh ar," said the swain, "worrisit?"

Royal Hair Force

A couple of knitters were discussing Christmas presents. "Ah gen the missis a brush jus loike the Queen ez," said one, "Ooz shay brushes 'er 'air fifty toimes a noit." "Gerrout," said the other, "shay must ev foin 'air." "No shay eent," was the reply, "but shays got big muscles."

Skin Deep

A stockinger went to Leicester to buy his wife a silk scarf for Christmas. The lady shopkeeper, getting no clear answers to questions about style and colour, asked, "Is your wife pretty?" "Well," replied the stockinger, "shays not pritty an shays not ugly, shays sumweer betwayn - pritty ugly."

The Sole Solution

A family and some hungry friends were gathered round the table one Christmas Day. As father began to carve a lean and aged fowl, the knife skidded down its rib bones and it fell under the table. "Ay up," screamed mother, "the dug's after it!" "Sorl roit," cried father, "doon't yo worry about the berd, av got mi foot on it."

To Him Who Waits

On a snowy night just before Christmas, Fred, who had promised to join the Town Waits, forgot the arrangement, and went to bed. He woke up about midnight, when snowballs thumped against his bedroom window, and a voice below shouted, "Ayer cumin wi uz?" Fred dressed so hurriedly in the dark, that he put his trousers on the wrong way round. As he rushed from the house, he clipped on the icy pavement and fell on the road. One of the Waits rushed up, shining a bull's eye lantern. "Ayer ut yersel?" he asked. Fred examined himself in the yellow lamp light, and said, "Ah eent bruk nowt, but av gen misen a terribul twist! "

A Pick in Time

A family, which had saved hard to get a good Christmas dinner, was just about to put it on the table, when the wife shouted to her husband, "Ay up, theers somebody cumin down ar entry. Mek out wiv ad ar dinner - put some gravy on yer chin, an goo an stond at the door wi a toothpick!"

A Nagging Doubt

A man eager to get home for his Christmas dinner, "borrowed" a horse, but on the way, he was stopped by the Constable, who demanded to know if he had the owner's permission to ride without a saddle. He explained it like this:

"Well, Constable, it wor loike this. Ah wor walkin across the fayld, an this oss wor lyin on the pad. Ah wor too frit t'goo in front on it, in case it bit mi, an ah wor too frit t'goo at the back on it, in case it kicked mi. Ah wor jus strymin uver it, when it gorrup an run off wi mi."

Milk Made

"Owd Billy," a bygone village humourist, once stopped at a shop window in High Street, which displayed a large sign, "FOR YOUR CHRISTMAS SHOPPING, WE CAN SUPPLY ANYTHING." Old Billy went into the shop, "Con yo supply OWT?" he inquired. The shopkeeper said he could. "Then gi uz a yard o' milk," joked the comic. The shopkeeper, equal to the situation, brought a milk jug, and trickled a line of milk along the counter. "There yar!" he shouted in triumph. Owd Billy simply looked down, and replied, "Orl roit, roll it up, an al tek it wi mi."

A General Introduction

A villager who applied for a temporary Christmas job at a firm in Leicester, was asked to supply a name and address for a reference. At the interview, the manager said, "I see from your letter, we can obtain a testimonial from General Sir John Moore. Do we apply to his A.D.C., or to his secretary?" "Nayther," replied the villager, "yo jus wroite t'the landlord."

Handicap

Visitor leaving a house on Christmas night:
"Av lost mi cap!"
"It's on yer ed."
"Oo ar. Well, ah wor just a gooin um wi out it!"

The Night Before

Children who had been sent to bed early one Christmas Eve, to enable their mother to get on with the preparation of the house, could not sleep, and stood "roaring," at the top of the stairs, when one of them cried out, "Mam, Mam, eent yo cumin up ter say wots up wi us?"

Getting Ahead

A hard up villager stopped the Vicar in Brook Street, and poured out a tale of woe about the prospect of a poor Christmas. "Come to the Vicarage tommorrow," said the Vicar, "and we will consider the matter. Two heads are better than one, you know." "Ar," replied the hard up villager, "speshully yorn Vicar!"

SILEBY GHOSTS

Christmas night was always regarded as the time to tell a good ghost story. Candle light, and the glowing embers of the fire seemed to make tales of the supernatural even more eerie. Shivers ran down spines, hair stood on end, and some with a nervous disposition became almost "too frit t'goo t'bed." Sileby had its ghosts, and here are some stories from the bygone



A Strange Habit

There was a time, when on quiet starlit nights in winter, the apparition of a monk was seen in the village. The ghostly figure wearing the robes and hood of some monastic order, could be seen walking slowly with head bent, from the brook, along Back Lane. Two generations have past since he was last reported to be on the prowl.

A Night Mare

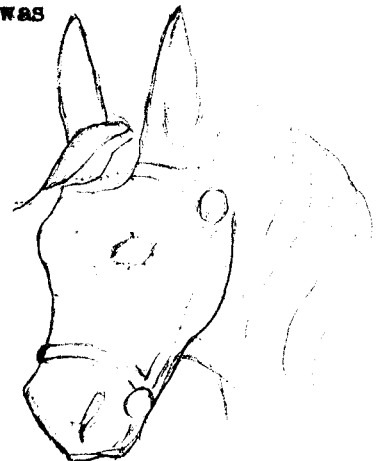
Some years ago, many people in the village were disturbed by uncanny things happening at the Blue Bridge, on Barrow Road. The bridge, which had been constructed to carry the railway line between Leicester and Loughborough, became a favourite hideaway for courting couples, until one night, when two young lovers fled in panic, and told an incredible story in the village.

When they entered the tunnel under the bridge, the sun was setting, but there was light enough to see that it was empty. A few minutes later, they heard the sound of a horse moving about, and felt it passing them, but they could see nothing, and there was not a soul about.

One night, a waggoner took his load under the bridge for protection, and tethered his horses some distance away. On his return, he climbed on the waggon and settled down to sleep. He woke suddenly when he heard a horse moving up and down by the side of the waggon, and occasionally snorting. Thinking that one of his own team had broken free, he lit a lantern to take the horse back to the others, but although he could hear the horse only a yard or two from him, he could see nothing. He dropped the lantern and bolted!

One evening, as two other persons were about to walk under the bridge, they jumped aside quickly, as they heard a horse trotting towards them. Although they could see nothing, they felt the horse pass by, and heard harness jingling and leather creaking. The phantom animal trotted on to the Barrow Road, and they heard the clatter of its hoofs gradually die away as it made its way into the village.

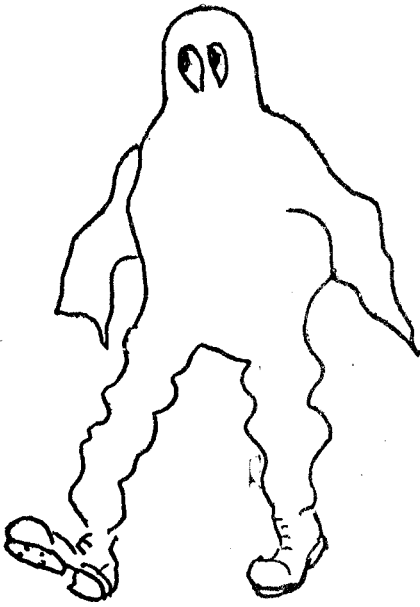
Not only human beings were aware of some unearthly presence near the bridge. Sometimes, horses drawing brakes carrying work people returning to Sileby from Barrow-on-Soar, would rear on their hind legs when they approached the bridge. There were horses that would not pass the place, unless the driver held them by the head.



More Ghosts

Things that go Bump in the Night

One bright moonlit night many years ago, two Sibley men were walking home from Mountsorrel. They had passed the Slash turn, and were making their way along the Long lane, when they heard footsteps behind them. Although they were walking at a good pace, the footsteps came nearer and nearer, and someone pushed between them with such violence, they were both knocked aside. Although the footsteps passed between them, and they could hear them marching on, there was not a living person to be seen on that empty moonlit lane. They were both very scared and shaken, but they dared not to run towards Sibley, because whatever had passed between them was somewhere in front of them. They walked on slowly, until they reached the corner opposite the Cricket Field, then tore up the Lane to Barrow Road, in less time than it takes to tell!



The Running Wraith

A cowman making his way home along Brook Street one dark night, suddenly discovered that he was not alone, a ghostly figure was moving along just behind him. The cowman began to walk faster and faster, but the apparition wafted along at the same pace. He began to trot, then run, until he was flying along the brook-side. Finally, as he reached Dudley's Bridge, he sank to the ground exhausted. The apparition hovered in front of him, and moaned, "We have had a good run..." "Ar," gasped the cowman, "an wayl ev anuther as soon as ev got mi breath back!"



In League with the Ghosts

A local football enthusiast has to stay over night at an inn, There were too many dishes at supper, and he had a dream that the house was haunted, and his room was full of ghosts.

"Wot a yo lot dooin ere?" demanded the enthusiast. He was told that they were football team playing nearby, and were staying there that night. "Who a yo?" he asked a ghost with a badge on his robe. "I am the Football Inn Spectre," was the reply. The enthusiast turned to another ghost, and asked suspiciously, "Wot pusishun do play?" "I", replied the ghost, " am the Ghoul- Keeper.."

A Sileby Christmas Carol

Music and Words by Fig Smith

Little Child of Bethlehem, Born of Mary mild,
In a manger for a bed, Sleepy Holy Child.
Star shone over stable where Baby did lay,
Little Child of Bethlehem 'sleep on the hay.
Lowly Birth for King of Earth, Jesu Lord, we love,
Watch o'er us for evermore from Thy Heaven above.

Little Child of Bethlehem soon was little Boy,
Worried Mary many time, Sometimes gave her joy
Jesus Son of Nazareth be w th us each day,
Watch o'er us and be with us, Jesue we pray.
Every day we alway say, Thy will be done
Bethlehem Child now King of earth Blessed Mary's Son.

Little Boy grew tall and strong, Man of Galilee,
Telling words of love to all, even you and me.
Bad men came and kill him on Calvary's Hill.
Easter morn he rose from dead, Jesus lives still.
Little child of Bethlehem Died for those he love,
Make us worthy Mary's Son, Worthy of Thy Love.

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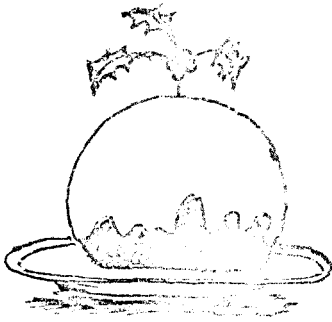
Handwritten musical notation for the first system. The top staff uses a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The bottom staff uses a bass clef. The notation includes a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes and a bass line with chords and single notes.

Handwritten musical notation for the second system. The notation continues with similar notation and a key signature of one sharp. The bass line features more complex chordal structures.

Handwritten musical notation for the third system. The notation shows further development of the melody and bass line with various note values and rests.

Handwritten musical notation for the fourth system. The notation concludes the piece with a final melodic phrase and a bass line ending on a sustained note.

Christmas Pudding



Preparation for making the Christmas pudding began on the Sunday nearest St. Andrew's Day, 30th November, which was always known as "Stir-up Sunday," from the Collect or prayer used in Church on that day, which opens with the words, "Stir up we beseech Thee, O Lord, the wills of Thy faithful people.."

After the morning service, children went home chanting an old rhyme:

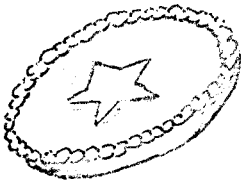
"Stir up we beseech thee, the pudding in the pot,
And when we get home, we'll eat the lot."

The pudding was mixed in a large earthenware bowl known locally as a pansion, and had a red or yellow glazed interior. It began with mother up to her elbows in the pansion thoroughly blending the many ingredients. After the liquids were added, there was much work to be done with a large wooden spoon. Every member of the family took a turn at stirring the pudding, and before handing over to the next in line, tasted the mixture, and made a wish.

Silver coins were then hidden in the pudding, to be discovered on Christmas Day by some lucky member of the household, or a guest. In addition to the usual sixpence and three penny bit, there were also two other silver coins then in circulation, the three halfpenny piece and the four penny piece. In the wealthier houses, a gold half sovereign was slipped into the bowl. A ring and a thimble were also added, - the ring to foretell a marriage, and the thimble to suggest spinsterhood. These items were always good fun raisers, for if the wrong persons found them, everyone laughed, and if the right persons got them, then there was good natured comment, and blushes from the girls.

It was the custom to add brandy to the pudding, but in Sibley, many used ale. The old cookery rule was, the more ale, the less eggs were used.

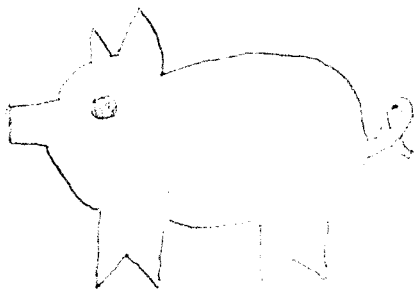
The mixture with its treasures was poured into a cloth, which when tied, gave the pudding a circular appearance. After boiling, it was often suspended from a hook in the kitchen ceiling, until Christmas. The old fashioned circular pudding disappeared when basins came into use. Charles Dickens in his book "A Christmas Carol", described a Christmas pudding as looking like "a speckled cannon ball."



Mince Pie

In olden times, the mince pie was made of minced mutton, to which spices were added, as a reminder of the gifts of the Wise Men, to the infant Jesus. The mutton pie was oval in shape, to symbolise the Manger at Bethlehem. The pie was always eaten in silence, while the thought of the first Christmas filled the mind of the eater. It is supposed that the old custom of making a silent wish when eating the first mince pie, is a survival of the older tradition. For the same reason, it was regarded as unlucky to cut a mince pie with a knife.

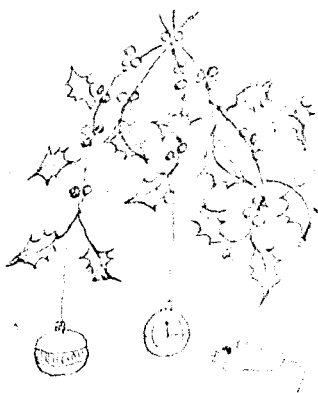
Mince Pigs



Christmas in Victorian and Edwardian Sibleby was not complete without the mince pigs. The contents were the same as the present day mince pie, but the pastry was rolled out, then cut into the outline shapes of a pig. Mincemeat was spread on one shape, another shape was then laid over it, and the edges sealed. A currant was used for the eye, and a twist of pastry for the tail.

Mince pigs were intended for those members of the family who were away from home, but were due to return for the Christmas festivities. In poorer homes, a large mince sow surrounded by many piglets was the central attraction in the front room. When children visited the house anticipating a Christmas gift, they were sent into the front room to select one of the piglets as a present. That was all some of the villagers could afford to give.

The Holly Bush



Christmas trees were introduced into England during the middle of the 19th Century. They became popular after Queen Victoria had one illuminated at Windsor. The Christmas tree was rarely seen in Sibleby until modern times. In the village of bygone days, it was the custom to have a holly bush, usually made from a number of sprigs tied together, and suspended from the ceiling of the living room. It was often decorated with sugar mice, candy watches and various colourful trinkets.

FIRESIDE GAMES - ANSWERS

The River Puzzle

First, he took the hen across. Then he rowed the fox over, and brought the hen back. Next, he took the bowl of corn over, and went back for the hen.

The Race Puzzle

The wise man told the princess to change horses.

Conundrums

1. Because they have just had a March of 31 days.
2. To a shop where they retail spirits.
3. The fox and the cock, because they only had a brush and comb between them.
4. A lamplighter.
5. A gas lamp in the street.

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