

Syston and District

**u3a**

learn, laugh, live

DEC  
2025

# *Vitality!*

Official newsletter of the Syston and District u3a

CHARITY No 1180152



**FROM OUR CHAIRMAN**

Hi Everyone,

I am really looking forward to our Christmas meeting, and it is also our 10 th Anniversary. We will be using the same format as last year with social/nibbles area and entertainment provided by our brilliant Ukulele and Singing Groups.

It would be especially nice to see people in their Christmas jumper or Santa hat.

Could I wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a Happy & Healthy New

Clive



# WE WANT TO LET YOU KNOW

## Thinking of booking a holiday or traveling abroad?

If so, Syston and District U3A can benefit. Yes really. By making a booking through Riviera Travel, mention you are a member of Syston and District U3A. Doing so will financially benefit our organisation which adds to what it can offer you and other members too! Riviera Travel will donate 10% of the basic cost of your chosen travel package to U3A's Governing Body who then refund 90% back to Syston U3A! How good is that and all by you enjoying yourself. Definitely win win in my opinion. What an opportunity by doing nothing yet actively supporting our 'not for profit' charity. An added bonus to spending time doing things you want to do and helps us offer more for all our members. It could be another provider be best for your needs but it's worth considering Riviera Travel and bear them in mind when choosing your next excursion overseas – just sayin! Enjoy a great time whatever you choose to do with your time.



### What is Friends Extra?

Friends Extra is a new benefits website exclusively for u3a Friends. Friends Extra provides access to a wide range of offers, discounts and additional services. Friends can make savings on well-known brands, shopping, travel, days-out and much more.

### How does a u3a Friend access Friends Extra?

Friends Extra is exclusively available to anyone who signs-up to receive the u3a Friends Newsletter.

When someone signs up to the u3a Friends Newsletter for the first time, they will receive an email with a link to the Friends Extra benefits website.

Find out more [here](#)

## GROUP NEWS

Sadly, after a bumper crop of news last month, we have slipped back to very little this month.

I can't publish information if I don't receive it. Group members can send me items about a group, just check with your group organiser so that duplication is avoided. Can we do a bit better next month please? *Ed*

## NEW GROUP IDEAS

If you have any ideas for a new group, please contact Barbara Sargeant our groups co-ordinator [sadu3agroups@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3agroups@gmail.com) or speak to her at one of our monthly general meetings. Alternatively contact her assistant Angie Baker email [sadu3agroupsasst@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3agroupsasst@gmail.com) Acting as a group organiser doesn't have to be onerous, it doesn't have to be down to just one person, and it doesn't mean you have to organise everything the group does.

Is the group you want to join currently full? How about starting a second group? Barbara and Angie are happy to provide support and guidance on how to get going.

## POSSIBLE GROUP REVIVAL – LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

I'm happy to report that there appear to be enough expressions of interest to explore reviving this group. As many people will be busy with Christmas preparations I plan to have a preliminary meeting in the new year. I will be emailing those who have given me their names once I have a date, time and place.

IF you'd like to be added to the list for that meeting please let me know by emailing: [sadu3aed@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3aed@gmail.com) or calling 0116 2609012 (do note I have call screening, so you'll need to announce who you are when calling).  
Julie Johnson

## NEW TAI CHI GROUP

A new weekly group is beginning the first week in January 2026 subject to members interest. This is a great opportunity to enjoy a gentle form of stylised movement, and no intense physical exertion is required.

Our U3A is hosting this Tai Chi group at Syston Community Centre each Wednesday for ONE hour at 12pm. This is suitable for both sexes so don't be shy lads, come and join the lovely ladies and share an hour of enlightened tuition delivered to a high standard, offering all round benefits as I personally can attest.

Interested? To save your space please email me [sadu3apublicity@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3apublicity@gmail.com) OR register interest with Barbara Sargeant or Angie Baker at our monthly meeting who will forward your name to me. Cost to be advised but expected to be in line with usual U3A overheads.

Please register your interest asap to bring this new initiative to fruition.  
Thank you all for reading this.

Jill Kempton-Hayes

  
**Proposed New Group**




Are you interested in joining a scrabble group?  
 We have a member who is keen to run the group.  
 June would be looking to start in the New Year once we  
 have enough numbers to make it viable. She thinks  
 the maximum at the beginning would be 8 members.  
 June would like it to run it as a relaxing chilled out session.  
 At this stage we will be looking to see if there is any  
 interest before going any further. If you are please email  
 me at the below address and I will pass your details onto  
 June. She will be in touch nearer the time once she has  
 decided the day, time and place etc.  
[sadu3agroups@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3agroups@gmail.com)

## CREATIVE WRITING GROUP

### **Do you enjoy writing?**

Short stories, poems, memoirs, character sketches, or just scribbled thoughts?

### **Would you like to share your work in a friendly, non-judgemental space?**

Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned scribbler, you're warmly welcome.

Following some renewed interest, we're hoping to revive the u3a Creative Writing Group, open to all forms of creative writing. Each meeting offers an optional "trigger" or prompt to spark ideas, but you're free to bring any piece you've written—recent or long ago.

It's an opportunity to share your work, feedback is available if requested. It will be offered with care—supportive, constructive, and focused on encouraging each writer's voice.

### **Meetings will be held at the local library.**

We previously met on the 4th Thursday of each month, 2.00–3.30pm, but this may be adjusted to suit those who wish to take part.

### **Interested?**

Please contact Julie at: [juliedjohnson@yahoo.com](mailto:juliedjohnson@yahoo.com)

Let's create a space where words are shared, voices are heard, and creativity is gently encouraged.



## FAMILY HISTORY GROUP

We held our second meeting at our new venue – Syston Library. Our efforts to use some of the family history sites were affected by an international problem with Cloudflare. However, we did manage to work around the outages, not all sites rely on Cloudflare.

One member was able to see a newspaper article about an ancestor that she never dreamed would have made the press. Such articles can provide insight into our relatives lives that we would never otherwise know about. They can highlight heroes and rogues, along with ordinary details of how they lived and died.

If you would like to find out how to explore your ancestors' lives, you are welcome to join us. We meet from 10.15 – 12.15 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of each month. Please contact me before coming along, as the library kindly reserves computers for us. Email: [juliedjohnson@yahoo.com](mailto:juliedjohnson@yahoo.com)

## WALKING GROUP

This month the Walking group met at the Waterside Inn in Mountsorrel. We did a circular route round the quarry before heading back down and crossed both the old and new A6.

Some little-known paths then had us emerging behind Rowena Garden Centre, and after a short stretch along the A6 in Rothley, we crossed over to join the river.

The footpath here took us firstly by Sileby Marina (where we crossed over the river), and then back to the pub for our preordered lunch.



## CROSS STITCH GROUP

We held our first group meeting on 7th November. Some people had done cross stitch before and some were complete novices, so it made an interesting mix, with everyone helping each other. Our next meeting is Friday 5th December at 10 a.m. in the Jubilee room at Syston Community Centre. There are still some places available.

If anyone is interested, please contact me by email: [gwyndle@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:gwyndle@hotmail.co.uk)  
Gwyn Garner.

## SINGING GROUP



You can hear our singing group in action using the link below  
<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1267081885177338>

If you click on the link and you are not currently a member of our Facebook group you'll be asked to sign up, if you are you may need to sign in.

## EVENTS – PAST, PRESENT & PLANNED

Do you have an idea for an event?

If you can think of an event that our members may like to do, please tell Angie Baker, our new Events Coordinator at [sadu3aevents@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3aevents@gmail.com)

Perhaps you may even be willing to organize it? In which case the Coordinator can help you with everything you need to know.

Once the Coordinator has created the Event on our Computer System (Simple Membership). It will be easy for you to email all those interested, as all the relevant information is already recorded on the system.

Please just give it some thought, and let's make our u3a fun for everyone.

## WHAT'S ON NEXT

### GENERAL MEETINGS

In the Brookside Room at the Community Centre – talks usually start 10.30am  
Tea/coffee and mingling from 10.00am

**December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

**Christmas Social and 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations**



Wednesday 10th December, Christmas Social Meeting at Syston Community Centre - all invited to celebrate our 10th Anniversary of Syston & District u3a. Doors open at 10am

Sandwiches, drinks, mince pies etc, freely available.

Come and listen/sing along to our Ukulele group (10.30-11am) and our Singing Group (11.15-11.45am) and have a look at all the various interest groups that are available and have a chat with fellow members



## NATIONAL U3A ITEMS

### u3a TALKS



#### The Importance of Fungi for the Environment and Humans

Explore fungi, including their evolution, symbiotic relationship with plants, and value as a food and their medicinal uses, with Dr Alan Heyes and the u3a Science Network.

Tuesday 9 December at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom



#### Ways we can be happier

Join Jean Jackson for a whistle-stop review of some of the best science-backed tips out there on being happy. Come curious. Leave happier!

Wednesday 10 December at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom



#### Radiant Celebrations: How Festivals of Light Inspire Society

Catherine Stevenson of Newcastle u3a looks at the Transformative Power of Christmas and Other Festivals of Light.

Friday 19 December at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)



*Left to right: Liz Page, Yvey Bailey, Iain Cassidy and Sharon Parsons*

A huge congratulations to the team behind our membership magazine, u3a matters, for receiving a commendation at the prestigious Memcom Awards.

u3a matters was shortlisted in two highly contested categories and won a Highly Commended award for 'Best Magazine: Circulation more than 20k.'

"To receive a Highly Commended award is truly gratifying given the calibre of entries," said Sharon Parsons, Editor of u3a matters, "I think our smiles say it all!"

Sharon attended the event with Third Age Trust CEO Iain Cassidy - they're pictured above with Liz Page, Chair of the u3a matters committee, and Yvey Bailey, Senior Designer for u3a matters.



## NOT u3a BUT YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED



### DICK WHITTINGTON – A FAMILY PANTOMIME

**18th December – 4th January**

The Little Theatre, Dover Street, Leicester, LE1 6PW

Visit: [The Little Theatre, Leicester](#)



### SYSTON SWING BAND CHRISTMAS SING- ALONG

**12th December**

Queniborough Village Hall, Rearsby Road, Leicester, LE7 3DH

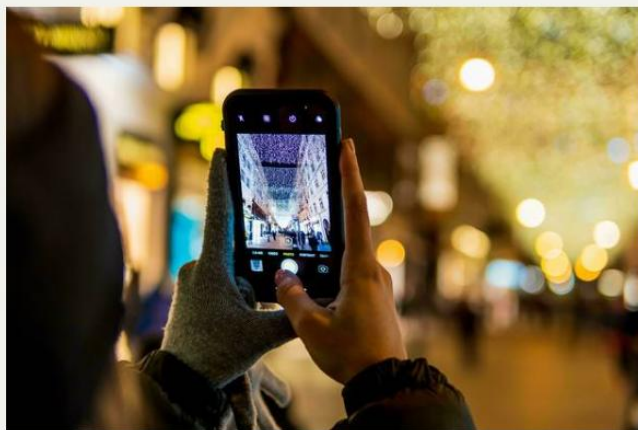
[Booking here](#)

### CHRISTMAS BRASS & VOICES WITH FOSSE SINGERS

**13th December**

St James The Greater Church, 216 London Road, Leicester, LE2 1NE

[Booking here](#)





# SEVENTEEN ACRES CHRISTMAS MARKET

14th December

Mowmacre Sports Ground, Thurcaston Road, Leicester, LE4 2RG

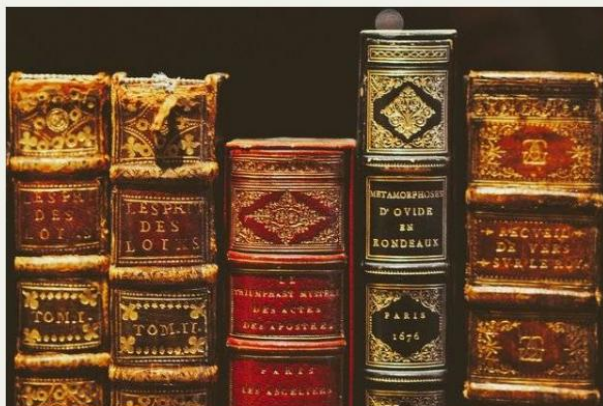


# JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

14th December - 24th December

Peepul Centre, Orchardson Avenue, Belgrave, Leicester, LE4 6DP

[Booking here](#)



# CANDLELIT CHRISTMAS TOURS

17th December

The 1620s House And Garden, Manor Road, Coalville, LE67 2FW

[Website & Booking here](#)

December 13 @ 12:00 pm - December 14 @ 10:00 pm

## Christmas Melton Folk Trail 2025

**Melton Town Centre** Town Centre, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, United Kingdom

The Melton Folk Festival comprises a full weekend of music & dance (from folk to popular) all around the town. It is a free festival and attracts musicians from all over the country. A great weekend for music lovers or for those just wishing to experience the festival atmosphere. Melton Folk Festival performances are spread over a number of venues, mostly pubs and tea-rooms, in Melton Mowbray town centre with a great line up of performances to enjoy over the weekend. See website for venues scheduled to host acts <https://festival.meltonfolk.com/schedules>





# FROM OUR MEMBERS

## 🎭 The Christmas Pantomime: From Ancient Masques to Modern Magic

Every December, theatres across Britain resound with laughter, music, and cries of “*He’s behind you!*”. The pantomime—or “panto”—is now inseparable from Christmas, but its story stretches back centuries, weaving together ancient theatre, European comedy, and Victorian spectacle.

### Ancient & European Roots

The word *pantomime* comes from the Greek *panto* (“all”) and *mimos* (“imitator”). Roman pantomimes were wordless performances using gesture, dance, and music to tell stories from myth. These spectacles were popular across the empire, laying the groundwork for later traditions.

In 16th-century Italy, travelling troupes of *commedia dell’arte* brought improvisation, slapstick, and stock characters:

- **Harlequin**, the nimble trickster in a diamond-patterned costume.
- **Columbine**, his clever sweetheart.
- **Pantaloon**, the miserly old man.
- **Clown**, the bumbling comic foil.

These characters, performed in marketplaces and courts, became the DNA of pantomime.

### Arrival in Britain

#### Masques and Misrule

Tudor and Stuart masques—lavish entertainments of music, dance, and costume—introduced role reversal and festive misrule. The “Feast of Fools,” where commoners played masters, echoes in today’s pantomime cross-dressing roles.

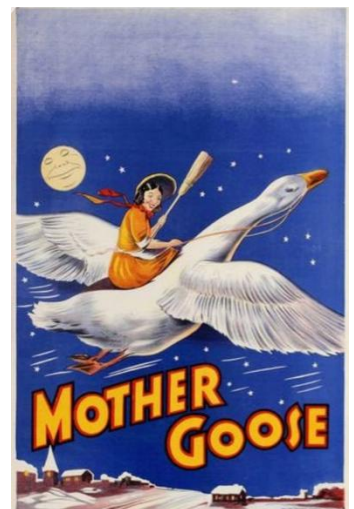
#### John Rich and the Harlequinade

The true architect of English pantomime was **John Rich**, theatre manager and performer. Beginning at **Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre** in 1714, Rich staged comic dance dramas inspired by *commedia dell’arte*. His Harlequin, performed under the stage name “Lun,” became famous for magical transformations and chase scenes.

In 1732, Rich opened the **Theatre Royal, Covent Garden** (today’s Royal Opera House). His pantomimes were so successful they funded the building itself. Audiences flocked to see Harlequin and Columbine outwit Pantaloon and Clown in dazzling spectacles of trick scenery and stage effects.

#### Joseph Grimaldi and the Clown

If Rich created pantomime, **Joseph Grimaldi** gave it its heart. In 1806, Grimaldi starred as the Clown in *Harlequin and Mother Goose* at **Covent Garden Theatre**. Opening on Boxing Day, it ran for 92 nights—an unprecedented success.





Grimaldi transformed the Clown from a supporting role into the star. His painted white face, colourful costume, and physical comedy delighted audiences. He introduced catchphrases, pratfalls, and comic songs, making pantomime a national craze. Even Charles Dickens later edited Grimaldi's memoirs, cementing his place in theatre history.

## The Victorian Extravaganza



By the mid-19th century, pantomime had evolved into the Christmas tradition we recognise today.

- **Fairy tales and folklore:** Stories like *Cinderella*, *Aladdin*, and *Jack and the Beanstalk* became staples.
- **Spectacle:** Gas lighting, trapdoors, and elaborate scenery dazzled audiences.
- **Cross-dressing traditions:** The *Principal Boy* was played by a young woman in breeches, while the *Dame* was a man in outrageous costume. These reversals added humour and reflected the topsy-turvy spirit of Christmas.
- **Music hall influence:** Popular songs, topical jokes, and celebrity performers brought pantomime closer to variety theatre, ensuring mass appeal.

The rivalry between **Covent Garden** and **Drury Lane** theatres pushed productions to ever greater heights. Managers competed with lavish sets, star performers, and topical humour.

## Pantomime in Wartime Britain

- **Professional theatres:** London's West End and regional theatres continued pantomimes, though often scaled down due to shortages of costumes, scenery, and lighting. Audiences craved escapism, and pantos provided laughter and colour amid the gloom.
- **Royal pantomimes at Windsor Castle (1941–1945):**
  - Performed in the **Waterloo Chamber** for audiences of 300–600, including servicemen at discounted tickets.
  - Written and produced by Hubert Tannar, headmaster of the Royal Windsor School.
  - Princess Elizabeth (the future Queen) and Princess Margaret took leading roles — Elizabeth as Prince Florizel in *Cinderella* (1941), Prince Salvador in *Sleeping Beauty* (1942), and *Aladdin* (1943).
  - The productions raised money for the **Royal Household Wool Fund**, supplying wool for knitted comforters for soldiers.
- **Symbol of resilience:** Wartime pantomimes were not just entertainment; they were statements of continuity. Even under threat, Britain kept its festive traditions alive.



*Windsor Castle Performance from World War II*

## Famous Performers

- **Dan Leno:** A music hall star of the late 19th century, Leno became the most celebrated pantomime Dame. His comic timing and absurd costumes made him a household name.
- **George Robey:** Known as “The Prime Minister of Mirth,” Robey carried pantomime into the 20th century.
- **Arthur Askey and Norman Wisdom:** Mid-20th-century comedians who kept pantomime fresh with music hall humour.
- **Christopher Biggins and John Inman:** Modern masters of the Dame, blending tradition with contemporary wit.

## Traditions We Still Love

- **Audience participation:** The ritual exchanges — “*Oh yes it is!*” / “*Oh no it isn’t!*”—make the audience part of the show.
- **Slapstick comedy:** Custard pies, pratfalls, and the pantomime horse remain staples.
- **Topical humour:** Jokes about politicians, celebrities, and local events keep pantomime current.
- **Seasonal timing:** By the Victorian era, pantomime was firmly tied to Christmas, becoming a family ritual.

## Pantomime Today

From the **London Palladium** to local village halls, pantomimes mix fairy tales with pop songs, topical humour, and celebrity cameos. They remain the biggest box-office draw of the year for many theatres, often funding the rest of the season.

Regional theatres like the **Birmingham Hippodrome** stage lavish productions, while amateur groups keep the tradition alive in community halls. The pantomime's blend of tradition and topicality ensures its survival as a festive cornerstone.

## Closing Thought

The pantomime is more than seasonal fun—it's a living tradition rooted in places like Covent Garden and Drury Lane, shaped by performers from John Rich to Joseph Grimaldi, Dan Leno to Christopher Biggins. It blends centuries of theatre with the joy of Christmas, uniting generations in laughter.

## Scrooge or Father Christmas?



### What the Autumn Budget Means for Pensioners and Savers

As the Chancellor delivered her Autumn Budget, many pensioners and savers were left wondering: has she played the role of Scrooge, tightening the purse strings, or Father Christmas, handing out welcome gifts? The truth, as ever, is a mix of both.

#### Father Christmas Moments

- **State Pension uplift:** From April 2026, the *new State Pension* will rise by 4.8%, taking the weekly amount to just over £241. That's worth more than £550 a year for those on the full new pension. The *basic (pre-2016) State Pension* will rise by around £440 a year.
- **Small tax bills removed:** Pensioners whose sole income is the State Pension, and who would otherwise owe only a small amount of tax, will not need to file returns. HMRC will handle this automatically from 2027–28, when we expect the state pension to exceed the tax allowance.
- **ISA protection for over-65s:** While the annual cash ISA limit has been reduced to £12,000, those aged 65 and over can still save up to £20,000 tax-free — a welcome safeguard.

#### Scrooge Moments

- **Frozen thresholds:** The personal allowance remains unchanged and frozen until 2030. This means more pensioners may gradually be drawn into paying tax as pensions and savings income rise.
- **Savings interest taxed:** Rising interest rates, though easing slightly, mean more savers will exceed their personal savings allowance (£1,000 for basic-rate taxpayers, £500 for higher-rate). In those cases, **tax is deducted on the interest earned.**

### How HMRC Handles Savings Tax

Banks, building societies, and other financial institutions report your interest directly to HMRC. You do not need to declare it yourself.

- HMRC calculates any tax due and adjusts your tax code for the following year.
- This means the tax is collected automatically, usually through your pension or other income source.
- For most pensioners, this avoids paperwork and ensures compliance without the need for self-assessment.



## 💡 Tips for Members

- **Check your tax code** each year to ensure it reflects your current circumstances.
- **Review ISA options** to make the most of tax-free savings interest.
- **Keep an eye on interest rates** — rising rates may push savings interest above the allowance.
- **If you are unsure, seek advice** from a trusted source such as Citizens Advice, Age UK, or a qualified financial adviser.

✅ **In summary:** The Chancellor has offered some Father Christmas cheer with pension rises and ISA protection, but Scrooge still lurks in frozen thresholds and tax on savings interest. The best defence remains simple: use ISAs where possible, check your tax code, and don't hesitate to seek advice if you're uncertain.

## DECLUTTER DEN

Are you determined to declutter and get rid of things that you haven't used in an age this year? Look no further than Declutter Den.

Dave Steadman has 2 items looking for a home —

1. Small wall mounted colour TV with remote. Fully working until removed about 5 months ago. If required by anybody they should e-mail me on [dave.steadman@talktalk.net](mailto:dave.steadman@talktalk.net) headed SADU3A-TV.
2. Vax electric carpet cleaner. Last used by me this summer. If required by anybody they should e-mail me on [dave.steadman@talktalk.net](mailto:dave.steadman@talktalk.net) headed SADU3A-Vax

I am pedantic regarding the email heading as I dump all emails unless I'm absolutely sure of their origin and sender.



Maureen Shade also has a couple of items to give away - a Ninja single drawer air fryer and a Breville Sandwich Toaster.

If anyone is interested my contacts details are [shemad72@gmail.com](mailto:shemad72@gmail.com) or 07941711760.



If you have something that you are prepared to give away – **strictly no items for sale!** Let me know and I'll put it in declutter den and hopefully we can help each other free up some space, whilst giving others something they have a use for, even if we don't. Email:

[sadu3aed@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3aed@gmail.com)

## Bargain or Burden?

### Shopping Smart This Christmas

Some of us have already ticked off our Christmas lists, while others are just starting. Wherever you are in the festive rush, it's worth pausing before snapping up those "bargains." A low price can sometimes hide pitfalls—and knowing your rights makes all the difference when buying gifts.

#### The Pitfalls of Bargain Hunting

- **Too good to be true?** Deep discounts may mean end-of-line stock, poor build quality, or limited warranty.
- **Delivery promises:** If you've paid extra for "guaranteed Christmas delivery" and it doesn't arrive on time, you're entitled to a refund of that *extra* charge.
- **Returns confusion:** Shops don't have to refund you if you simply change your mind. Exchanges or credit notes depend on store policy.
- **Gift cards:** Popular but risky—if the retailer goes bust, cards may become worthless. Always check expiry dates.
- **Receipts matter:** Without one, refunds are usually at the *current* (sale) price, not what you paid.
- **Personalised items:** Engraved, customised, or perishable goods are exempt from the usual online cancellation rights.

#### Your Consumer Rights

- **Consumer Rights Act 2015**
  - Goods must be of satisfactory quality, fit for purpose, and as described.
  - Within **30 days:** you can reject faulty goods for a full refund.
  - Up to **6 months:** you're entitled to repair or replacement. If that fails, you can claim a refund.
- **Online purchases (Consumer Contracts Regulations 2013)**
  - 14-day "cooling-off" period after receiving goods.
  - Another 14 days to return them.

- Retailer must refund the **basic (cheapest) delivery cost**—not any premium service you chose.
- Unless the seller's terms say otherwise, **you pay the return postage** if you simply change your mind.
- If goods are faulty or misdescribed, the retailer must cover return costs and refund the full delivery charge you paid.
- **Gift receipts:** These are invaluable when buying presents. They hide the price but prove the purchase, allowing the recipient to return or exchange the item themselves. Without one, they may only get the current sale price back, not what you paid. Always ask for a gift receipt when buying gifts.
- **Proof of purchase:** Bank or card statements count, even if you've lost the receipt.
- **Credit card protection:** Purchases between £100–£30,000 may be covered under Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act.

#### ✨ Quick Reminders for Online Readers

- ☒ Check the **returns policy** before buying gifts.
- ☒ Keep receipts and delivery confirmations safe until after Christmas.
- ☒ Be cautious with gift cards—choose retailers with a solid track record.
- ☒ Factor in **return postage costs** when deciding if a bargain is worth it.
- ☒ Always ask for a **gift receipt**—it makes life easier for the recipient.

#### 🧑‍🦰 Final Thought

Christmas shopping should be joyful, not stressful. By knowing your rights and spotting the traps, you can give gifts with confidence—and avoid turning Boxing Day into a battle over refunds.

## 🎄 Penny Weddings - Boxing Day Marriages in England

Family historians often notice clusters of marriages on **26th December**. Far from coincidence, this date reflected a blend of **religious permissibility, social custom, and economic practicality**. Both rural and urban communities embraced Boxing Day weddings, and the practice reveals much about everyday life in past centuries.

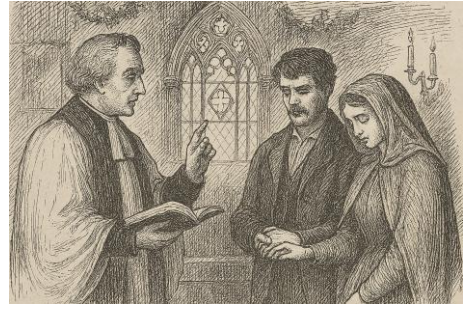
#### ✚ Religious and Liturgical Context

- The Church calendar discouraged weddings during Advent and Lent, but **Christmastide was permitted**.
- St Stephen's Day (26th December) was a feast day, giving marriages a sacred resonance while ensuring a full congregation.



## 🏰 Penny Weddings and Church Fees

- In many English parishes, the **church charged only a nominal fee — often a penny — to conduct the marriage ceremony on Boxing Day.**
- This made the sacrament accessible to poorer couples who might otherwise delay marriage until they could afford the usual charges.
- Boxing Day was a natural fit: couples had just received their “Christmas box” gratuities, and the reduced fee meant they could marry without financial strain.
- However, as this engraving shows working-class couples couldn’t afford special wedding outfits.



## 🎉 Penny Weddings as Community Gatherings

- In Scotland and parts of northern England, the phrase also referred to **low-cost celebrations where guests contributed small sums (often a penny each)** to cover food, drink, and music.
- This communal pooling kept costs down and ensured the couple could celebrate with dignity.
- Holding such weddings on Boxing Day dovetailed with existing feasts and gatherings, so the penny contributions stretched further.

## 🎄 Why Boxing Day Amplified the Tradition

- **Urban workers:** With wages or gratuities in hand, and churches offering reduced fees, Boxing Day was the most affordable day to marry.
- **Rural families:** Already gathered for Christmas, they could fold a penny wedding into the holiday without extra expense.
- **Symbolism:** Marrying on St Stephen’s Day tied the union to a feast of generosity and charity, reinforcing the communal spirit.

## 🏠 Urban Workers and Practical Timing

- In industrial towns, Boxing Day was one of the few guaranteed holidays. Factories, workshops, and shops closed, giving workers a rare day off.
- Apprentices and servants received their **Christmas box** (bonus or gratuity) on 26th December, providing funds for marriage fees or modest celebrations.
- With extended family visiting and leisure time available, urban couples seized the opportunity to marry when support networks were strongest.

## 🌾 Rural Communities

- In farming parishes, Boxing Day fell after the autumn harvest and before the demands of spring sowing. It was a natural pause in the agricultural cycle.
- Families already gathered for Christmas feasts could extend the merriment into a wedding celebration, saving on travel and hospitality costs.

## Evidence in Parish Records

Parish registers across England show spikes in marriages on Boxing Day, alongside other festive dates like New Year's Day and Twelfth Night. These clusters reflect **economic pragmatism and social tradition**, not just romantic choice.

## ✦ Conclusion

Boxing Day weddings in England were shaped by **faith, festivity, and frugality**. Whether through penny weddings in towns or practical timing in villages, couples aligned their unions with the rhythms of the season. For genealogists, these patterns illuminate how ordinary people wove life's milestones into the fabric of community and calendar.

## POETRY CORNER

### Thomas Hardy – *The Oxen*

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.  
"Now they are all on their knees,"  
An elder said as we sat in a flock  
By the embers in hearthside ease.  
We pictured the meek mild creatures where  
They dwelt in their strawy pen,  
Nor did it occur to one of us there  
To doubt they were kneeling then.  
So fair a fancy few would weave  
In these years! Yet, I feel,  
If someone said on Christmas Eve,  
"Come; see the oxen kneel,  
In the lonely barton by yonder coomb  
Our childhood used to know,"  
I should go with him in the gloom,  
Hoping it might be so.

### Alfred, Lord Tennyson – *Ring Out, Wild Bells* (extract)

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the frosty light:  
The year is dying in the night;  
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.  
Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:  
The year is going, let him go;  
Ring out the false, ring in the true.  
Ring out the grief that saps the mind  
For those that here we see no more;  
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,  
Ring in redress to all mankind.

### Christina Rossetti – *Love Came Down at Christmas*

Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, Love Divine;  
Love was born at Christmas,  
Star and Angels gave the sign.  
Worship we the Godhead,  
Love Incarnate, Love Divine;  
Worship we our Jesus:  
But wherewith for sacred sign?  
Love shall be our token,  
Love be yours and love be mine,  
Love to God and all men,  
Love for plea and gift and sign.

### John Betjeman – *Christmas* (extract)

The bells of waiting Advent ring,  
The Tortoise stove is lit again  
And lamp-oil light across the night  
Has caught the streaks of winter rain  
In many a stained-glass window sheen  
From Crimson Lake to Hooker's Green.  
And girls in slacks remember Dad,  
And oafish louts remember Mum,  
And sleepless children's hearts are glad.  
And Christmas-morning bells say "Come!"  
Even to shining ones who dwell  
Safe in the Dorchester Hotel.  
And is it true,  
And is it true,  
This most tremendous tale of all,  
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,  
A Baby in an ox's stall?  
The Maker of the stars and sea  
Become a Child on earth for me?

**Henry Wadsworth Longfellow – *Christmas Bells***

I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old, familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet  
The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along  
The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,  
The world revolved from night to day,  
A voice, a chime,  
A chant sublime,  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth  
The cannon thundered in the South,  
And with the sound  
The carols drowned  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent  
The hearth-stones of a continent,  
And made forlorn  
The households born  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
And in despair I bowed my head;  
"There is no peace on earth," I said;  
"For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;  
The Wrong shall fail,  
The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men."



**Robert Southwell – *The Burning Babe***

As I in hoary winter's night  
Stood shivering in the snow,  
Surprised I was with sudden heat  
Which made my heart to glow;  
And lifting up a fearful eye  
To view what fire was near,  
A pretty babe all burning bright  
Did in the air appear;

Who, scorched with excessive heat,  
Such floods of tears did shed  
As though His floods should quench His  
flames  
Which with His tears were fed:  
Alas! quoth He, but newly born  
In fiery heats I fry,  
Yet none approach to warm their hearts  
Or feel my fire but I!

My faultless breast the furnace is,  
The fuel wounding thorns,  
Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke,  
The ashes, shame and scorns;  
The fuel Justice layeth on,  
And Mercy blows the coals,  
The metal in this furnace wrought  
Are men's defiled souls.

For which, as now on fire I am  
To work them to their good,  
So will I melt into a bath,  
To wash them in my blood.  
With this He vanished out of sight  
And swiftly shrunk away,  
And straight I called unto mind  
That it was Christmas Day.



**And finally.....**

## **The Twelve Gripes of Christmas**

*(To the tune of "The Twelve Days of Christmas")*

**On the first day of Christmas my neighbour gave to me...**

A string of lights that only worked halfway.

**On the second day of Christmas my cat then gave to me...**

Two baubles smashed,  
And a string of lights that only worked halfway.

**On the third day of Christmas my postman gave to me...**

Three "missed you" notes,  
Two baubles smashed,  
And a string of lights that only worked halfway.

**On the fourth day of Christmas my oven gave to me...**

Four burnt mince pies,  
Three "missed you" notes,  
Two baubles smashed,  
And a string of lights that only worked halfway.

**On the fifth day of Christmas my family gave to me...**

FIVE BRUSSEL SPROUTS!  
Four burnt mince pies,  
Three "missed you" notes,  
Two baubles smashed,  
And a string of lights that only worked halfway.

**On the sixth day of Christmas my jumper gave to me...**

Six itchy reindeer...

**On the seventh day of Christmas my fridge then gave to me...**

Seven tubs of butter...

**On the eighth day of Christmas my telly gave to me...**

Eight Snowman showings...

**On the ninth day of Christmas my bank then gave to me...**

Nine overdraft warnings...

**On the tenth day of Christmas my dog then gave to me...**

Ten chewed-up gift tags...

**On the eleventh day of Christmas my Wi-Fi gave to me...**

Eleven buffering carols...

**On the twelfth day of Christmas my family gave to me...**

Twelve hearty chuckles—  
And it made the season bright, despite the gripes!

*Merry Christmas  
& Happy New Year  
to all our members*

