

Midwinter on the Isle of Wight

“Winter on the island is a mix of dark and light. It is pitch black, cold, wet and windy for much of the winter. Towns such as Newport are in bad repair and are very gloomy. However, in December, this suddenly changes. The shops have lights, there is carol singing, mummer’s plays, the Christmas Ceildhs and plenty of parties. The spread of food on Christmas day is something to behold. The pubs are always a joy to visit.” 1970s. A different place now I hear!

Here are some bits and pieces to do with winter, Christmas and the New Year.

Mummer’s Play

The Isle of Wight Christmas Play is to be found in Long’s book who takes it from earlier manuscripts. Version about 1840. As in all Mummer’s plays the names of the characters were often changed to reflect the changing times.

It starts “Here comes I - Great Head and Blunder” etc.

Mummer’s plays differ from area to area but are found throughout England, Wales and Ireland and date back as far as the 14th century.

Mummer’s Carol. If the vicar was present during a performance more religious versions were used -“When righteous Joseph wedded was”. All performed to the well known Mummers tune. Other songs included “Good tidings we bring.” “First day of Christmas”.

Mummer’s Carol

Bless the mistress of this house
With gold chain round her breast;
Where e’er her body sleeps or wakes,
Lord, send her soul to rest.

Bless the master of this house
With happiness beside;
Where e’er his body rides or walks
Lord Jesus be his guide.

Bless your house, your children too,
Your cattle and your store;
The Lord increase you day by day,
And send you more and more.

Then bring us some of your Christmas ale,
And likewise your Christmas beer;
For when another Christmas comes
We may not all be here.

With one stone at your head, oh man,
And another stone at your feet.

Your good deeds and your evil
Will all together meet.

Island Christmas Carol

Holly Red and Mistletoe (A Christmas Carol from the Isle of Wight)

Bring the yule log garlanded,
Evergreen with berry,
Draw it homeward, music led,
Men and maidens merry.

Refrain:

Foot it gaily through the snow
Hobbinol and Dolly.
Holly red and mistletoe
Mistletoe and holly.

Balance it across the dogs,
Draw the settler nigher,
Kindle faggots, pile the logs,
Gather round the fire;

Refrain:

Snug within its welcome glow
Let's be warm and jolly,
Holly red and mistletoe
Mistletoe and holly.

For this day was born,
In a stable lowly,
A Saviour-King to us forlorn,
Jesu, name most holy.

Refrain:

Let the joyful music flow,
Flouting melancholy,
Holly red and mistletoe,
Mistletoe and holly.

Heralding the wondrous birth
Hark! The angels singing,
"Goodwill to men and Peace on earth"
Christmas bells are ringing.

Refrain:

Forward pipe and tabor go
Voicing harmless folly
Holly red and mistletoe
Mistletoe and holly.

Crown the board with holly!

Collected / Transcribed P Stone 1890s We have put it on Youtube

Carolling

The original meaning was to dance with a song. Carols were performed for money.

Groups of singers from various organisations sang around the island towns. Carols included The Boar's Head Carol, While Shepherds Watched, O Come All Ye Faithful, Holly and the Ivy and we also tried Gaudete. We enjoyed the Salvation Army Band playing I think in Ryde and Newport.

Wassailing

There are two types of wassailing; one when you go door to door around a town and the other is when you go to an orchard to wassail for a good crop of apples, pears or plums. 'waes hael', which means 'good health'.

Wassailing Song (Shrove Song) Newchurch, Brighstone etc Cake and Ale which is associated with Shrove time changed to "Wassail and wassail" around Christmas! Both had same tune.)

"We would wander the town annoying some and pleasing the many, particularly ourselves." "The hot punch was powerful and the food mighty fine." We used to do this before Christmas and sing carols as well.

Island Wassail

Wassail, wassail in our town
The cup is white and the ale is brown;
The cup is made from the ashen tree
And the ale is brewed from the good barley.

Chorus:

*Wassail and wassail
A piece of cake and a cup of ale
We'll sing merrily one and all
For a piece of cake and a jolly wassail.*

Little maid, little maid, troll the pin,
Open the door and well all fall in;
Give us some cake and ale that's brown
And we don't give a fig for the wassail in the town.

Chorus

Then John he arose and to the door goes
And he tirded and he tirded at the pin;
The lass she took the hint and to the door went
And she let, oh she let her true love in.

Chorus

(There were more verses)

Now for the apple tree wassail. Plenty of information about this. A fun rowdy night on 5/6th January or the 17th.

Apple Tree Wassail

Old apple tree we'll wassail thee
And hoping thou wilt bear.
The Lord does know where we shall be
To be merry another year.

Chorus:

*To blow well and to bear well and so merry let us be
Let every man drink up his cup and health to the old apple tree.*

Here's to thee, old apple tree
Mayest thou well bud
Give us a crop of good apples ripe
Red well-rounded, the good juicy type. Ch.

Here is our cider now drink of it well
And give us good apples that we can tell
Let every man take off his hat
And shout to the old apple tree. Ch.

Stand fast root, bear well top
Give us a youling sop
Every twig, apples big
Every bough, apple enough. Ch,

Shout Outs:

Hats full, caps full, half a bushel bag full
God bless every poor man who's got an apple tree.

Hats full, caps full, half a bushel bag full
Barn's floor full and a little heap under the stairs!

Hats full, caps full, half a bushel bag full
What you please to give us happy we shall be.
Hip, hip, hooroo! x3
Huzza, Huzza,.....

Children's Christmas Bands (such as Newchurch, Sandown, Northwood...)

This involved every child. Those that could play led the sound but others played single notes in harmony. Others kept time on percussion following a master percussionist. Some were actual percussion instruments but there were also home made drums, kettles, forge made triangles and so on. They would walk around the village and end up in the church for a carol service followed by a splendid tea.

Island Winter Songs

Winter Song (in Stone's book) listen to the cassette.

Winter

The sluggard wakes with many a yawn,
Frost stars the window pane a.
Sure gettin' up in winter dawn
Is a sleepy sluggards bane a.
While Kezzie 'way to cowhouse trips,
With ankles trim and neat a,
So tight jack Frost her fingers grips
She scarce can draw the teat a. (2)

The wagon horses seep along
The roads all white with rime a,
While Jem the carter cracks his thong
And hames bells ring a chime a.
Will Shepherd whistles up his dogs
And seeks the lambing ewes a;
His master way to market jogs
To learn the latest news a. (x2)

The jolly huntsman mounts his hors
And leaves his home and wife a.
Sly Reynard breaks for furzy gorse:
Yo-oi, we'll have his life a
The sportsman reaches for his gun:
'Let's try the marsh for duck a,
And chance some snipes afore we have done -
If we have any luck a.' (x2)

When daylight sinks along the West
'Tis time no more to roam a.
Give over, we have done our best -
So, hey, my boys, for home a.
Ay, there it is, at end of lane,
The home we dearly love a.
See, fire-light bivers thro' the pane
And chimney smokes above a. (x2)

Fling on a log. Draw to a cheer.
Come, let's be snug and warm a.
Fill up the glass, away with care,
Shut out the cold and storm a.
So let our voices merry sound
With song and tale and jest a.
Then, filling up a final round,

Toss off - and so to rest a. (x2)

Christmas Party (in Stone's book) listen to the cassette.

Christmas Party (One of my favourites!)

'Morning, you! 'Tis fine today'
Sure wind has blown the rain away.
Oi we've done well this lambing time,
And hay be up and roots be prime -
I've come to ask all of ye
To take your vittles along with we.
There's rabbit pie and roasted teal,
And figgy pudding thick with peel,
And just about a breast of veal
In oven now a baking!
And missus' made a topping brew
- Sure I've a tub of whiskey too
Will last us most the winter through -
To cheer our merry making.'

We settled down. Old George said grace,
And then we did pitch in a pace.
I reckon we made proper play
With all the spread that Christmas Day.
Soon 'Missus' farmer Chick did cry
'Here's the bottom of your rabbit pie.'
Then followed on the breast of veal,
The ribs of beef, the roasted teal,
The figgy pudding, thick with peel,
All fairly round divided.
We finished off with cheese and bread,
White celery and beetroot red.
Begob! It was a topping spread
That Farmer Chick provided.

All done, we pushed the chairs away
And started in for fun and play.
Then Missus brought her famous brew
As Farmer said she was allowed to do,
And tongues got loose and eyes got bright,
As ought to be on Christmas night.
Granfer caught old Missus Loe
And kissed her under mistletoe,
He did and wouldn't let her go
Lord! Didn't it surprise her.
Then kiss within the ring began,
The boys did catch, the girls did run -
The smartest couple at the fun
Were Sam and Serle's Eliza.

Then the Christmas boys came tumbling in
With dance and talk and merry din.
'Girt Head and Blunder,' starts the show
And after him 'King George' you know;
Next 'Father Christmas' and his wife,
With broom and cudgel fair at strife.
Then 'Noble Captain,' 'Turkish Knight'
That most do give the maids a fright
When he with brave 'King George' does fight -
Each after the other coming'.
Next 'Valiant Soldier,' 'Poor and Mean,'
Then 'Doctor' with his physics seen,
Lastly 'Johnny Jack' so starved and lean
'Twas proper Christmas mumming.

Then the farmer from his whiskey keg
Gave all of them a middling peg;
'Twill keep the dust down,' so he said,
And never hurts your legs nor head.
'Twas then the song and tale went round,
The best of both, you may be bound.
Last, Farmer set a dancing bout
'Twixt Nat and Jan, the dancers stout;
I reckon neither would give out,
But keep their legs a shaking.
Have done! We cried, the match be drawn,
Else you might dance away till dawn.
- Begob! I'll mind so long as I'm born
Chick's Christmas merry making.

Boxing Day was a big day for Morris Dancing. It was hard to get going even though it started at midday. I remember people were always waiting to see us. We sang all the old favourites afterwards. Joan's Ale, Old Dung Cow, Good luck to the pint pot, Five Jovial Fellows, Sportsmen Arouse etc etc

Victoria's Favourite song on a winter's evening
Love's Old Sweet Song (Just a song at twilight)

Once in the dear, dead days beyond recall,
When on the world the mists began to fall,
Out of the dreams that rose in happy throng,
Low to our hearts love sang an old sweet song,
And in the dusk where fell the firelight gleam,
Softly it wove itself into our dream.

Chorus:

*Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low;
And the flickering shadows softly come and go.
Tho' the heart be weary, sad the day and long,*

*Still to us at twilight comes love's old song,
Comes love's old sweet song.*

Even today we hear love's song of yore,
Deep in our hearts it swells forever-more.
Footsteps may falter, weary grow the way;
Still we can hear it at the close of day.
So 'til the end, when life's dim shadows fall,
Love will be found the sweetest song of all.

New Year's Eve Party

We played in Newport Square in one the pubs. Many people were in fancy dress. The pub had free nibbles. It was packed. Nearing midnight we played the conga. Almost all the pub joined in. They went out of the pub door into the cold and vanished. It seemed they went across the square to a big party in one of halls. We kept playing with no one there. A few minutes before midnight they returned still doing the conga and in time to the music. They had all been given one quick drink. We then played Auld Lang Syne. What a night!

Happy Christmas and a Wonderful New Year