

Memories of a Carlton Childhood

For this edition, Richard Liddington has been looking back to Christmas in Carlton in the fifties and sixties.....

I lived in Carlton during my childhood when things were very different from today. Christmas was not a community time but a family time. I do not even remember a Carol Service at the church, or any Carol Singers. It was a family holiday and as most people did not have transport any socialising was done very locally. These are my personal memories.

The build up to Christmas began when it was time to make mincemeat and Christmas cake. We, the children, would mince the ingredients as instructed, arguing all the time about whose turn it was to turn the machine. My mother would then do the rest after everyone had stirred the pudding for good luck. Nothing then happened for several weeks. However, as we children got older, and questioned the viability of Father Christmas, we would scour the cupboards and drawers to see what had been hidden.

With the help of my grandparents we used to rear and sell a few cockerels and geese for Christmas, and we would have to kill and pluck and dress about thirty birds and arrange for them to be collected. The scullery was covered with feathers for days afterwards.

My mother, assisted by my sister, would cook dozens of mince pies and jam tarts on a coal fired Rayburn in the kitchen, and my father would give them away quicker than she could make them to visitors who called. The children would decorate the tree and my father was given the task of putting up the streamers. The house was Victorian with large rooms and high ceilings and the streamers were not long enough to reach across the room so they had to be joined to the light in the middle. His temper would become more and more frayed and that was before he started on the holly, mistletoe and wall decorations.

On Christmas morning we would open our presents in our bedrooms and would normally get what we expected, including an apple, an orange and a bar of chocolate. Joint presents were put downstairs by Father Christmas.

We always had boiled ham for breakfast, then both parents would cook a traditional dinner, again on the Rayburn. We had home-reared goose and home grown vegetables with stuffing and sausagemeat. Afterwards we would have Christmas pudding, the children searching for the sixpence in their dish. After lunch we would open a few more presents. As children we normally made paper presents for the grown ups at school and no presents were exchanged by the adults. Then it was time to play games or watch television. There was never an argument as to what we should watch as there was only one television channel. Christmas was always marked by nuts, tangerines,

dates figs and my father smoking a cigar. We would then have a large tea with Christmas cake and play games until bedtime.

Boxing Day was full of the remains of yesterdays food and the following day it was back to work as Christmas was over. My grandad was very superstitious and would always have the decorations taken down on Twelfth Night. If a piece of holly was missed then it had to stay until the next Christmas.

New Years Eve meant a trip to 'the Gate' for my grandparents with granddad always returning home first with a piece of coal to bring us good luck for the following year.

Richard Liddington.