

Food Glorious Food

When I was a child we always spent Christmas with my grandparents in North Devon and Christmas Eve was busy!

First of all, there were the chickens. Roast chicken was at the centre of our Christmas lunch as it was a luxury then. We only had chicken at Christmas time. There would be two large chickens, possibly from a local farm. One was eaten hot with vegetables etc. on Christmas Day. The other one was eaten cold with pickles on Boxing Day. My Mum and my Gran would be in the kitchen on Christmas Eve chopping onions and parsley from the garden, and making breadcrumbs from stale bread for the stuffing. These combined with sausage meat and seasoning made a tasty alternative to what had originally been inside the chickens!

Then there was the Christmas Pudding. The pudding had been made and steamed for a few hours some weeks previously. In those days the suet had to be bought in one piece from the butcher and chopped with a little flour until it was fine enough to mix with the fruit, flour, eggs, spices and sugar. On Christmas Eve the pudding was wrapped in a large square of white cotton, and tied at the top to make a handle for removing it safely from the steamer when it was hot. Most important of all were the three penny bits, wrapped in greaseproof paper, which would be slipped surreptitiously into each helping by our Gran, as she served the festive dessert. A dish of clotted Devonshire cream was also standing by.

All that was fine for our feast, but what about Father Christmas ? On the landing upstairs stood a large chest of drawers and, as we children went to bed on Christmas Eve, we hung up our stockings and

Mum put on the top of the chest, something for the special visitor. There would be a glass of sherry and a plate of biscuits plus some carrots for the reindeer. In the morning the glass was empty, just a few crumbs lay on the plate and the carrots had gone. We were convinced!

I have often thought how lucky we were to have more than enough delicious food to eat at Christmas, and presents too of course. Most importantly of all, we were surrounded by a loving family.

Jan Rees December 2025