

CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE ARCHIVE...



Trinity has always done Christmas. As the Feast of the Nativity, December 25 featured in the earliest college statutes both as additional duties in the Chapel, and as a time when the usually stringent rules could be relaxed for a while.

The celebrations may be a little different this year – but, then again, the festive activities that every generation considers ‘normal’ have been evolving steadily ever since the Foundation.

This is also an archive exhibition with a difference. Traditionally, items are laid out in the Old Bursary, with a vigilant member of staff standing by the door instructing visitors to put down their drinks. But this year you’re at home with your slippers on. We invite you to make a cup of tea or pour a glass of port and settle down by the fire.

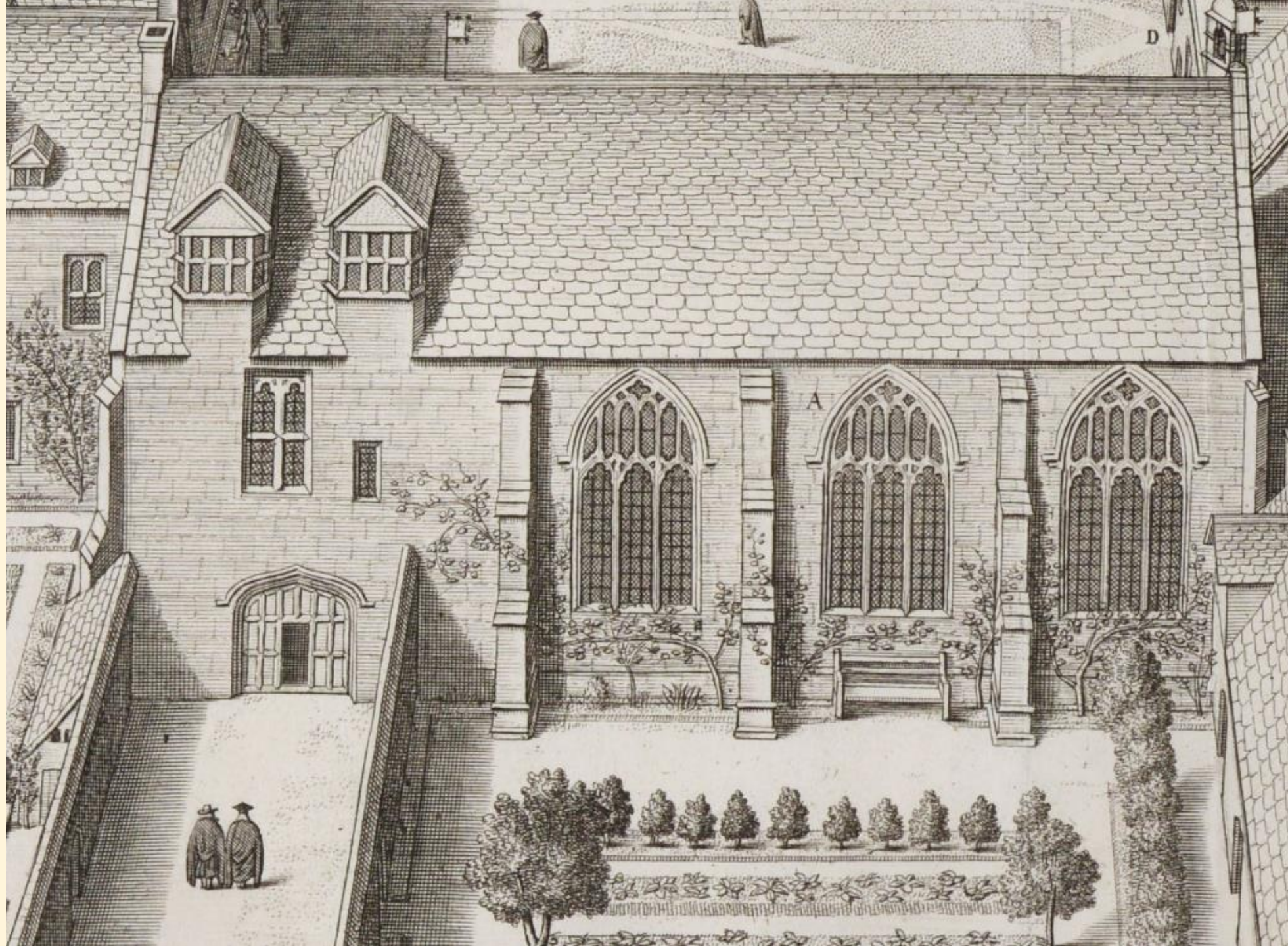
Merry Christmas, one and All!

In the Beginning...

Throughout the College's history the Chapel has been central to Christmas.

From 1555 until 1691, Trinity's members worshipped in the medieval Chapel that had been built for the monks of Durham College in 1410.

This engraving is from David Loggan's *Oxonia Illustrata* (1675).





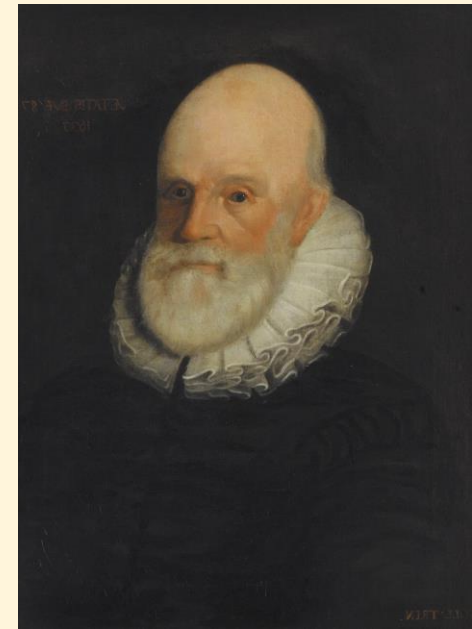
A Feast for the Eyes

One of the most exquisitely illuminated of Trinity's manuscript books, the fifteenth-century 'Abingdon Missal', is unlikely ever to have been used in the Chapel. It is likely to have belonged to the mathematician Thomas Allen (scholar 1561 and fellow 1564) who left Trinity for a life of independent scholarship at Gloucester Hall in Oxford. Allen converted to Catholicism on his deathbed in 1632. He bequeathed his books to Trinity and was buried in the old Chapel.

Now designated MS 75, the missal shows signs of damage from damp, and bears a note to say it was 'found amidst a heap of rubbish removed from the Chapel' in 1807.

The lusciously intertwined flowers, leaves and ferns, the rich border of gold bars, and the charmingly naturalistic stable scene that introduce the Christmas Mass are indeed a feast for the eyes.

According to his portrait's inscription, Thomas Allen was painted in 1633 at the age of 87. He is the second most Santa-like of all the white men with beards in the college collection. This image is shown reversed.





ter natus
datus est n
cum sup h
no cabitur
in consili
phabitur

Unto Us a Boy is Born...

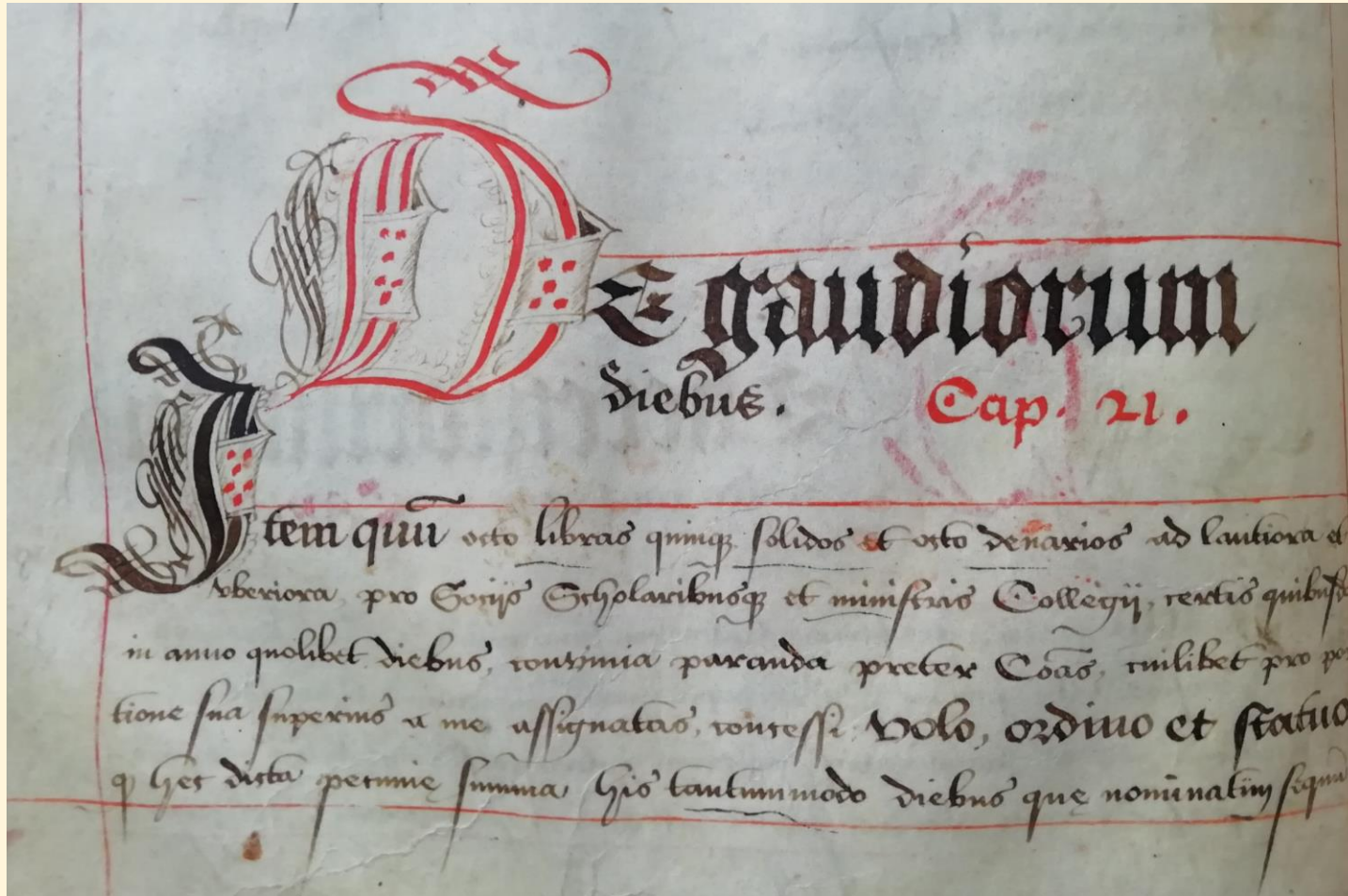


An illuminated capital P introduces the Introit to the Christmas Mass, which is written in a large gothic book hand. The Latin text has a few abbreviations, which have been extended below. The two red notations – PS (*Psalmus*) and Di (*Dicetur* – indicate an antiphon (a short sentence to be sung) and the rubric *dicetur per octavum* ('it is said for the octave', i.e. for 8 days).

Puer natus est nobis [et] filius
datus est nobis cuius impe-
rium sup[er] humerum eius. [Et]
vocabitur nomen ei[us] mag-
ni consilii ang[el]i[us]. P Multi-
plicabitur eius imperium:
et pacis non erit finis. Gloria patri. Gl[or]ia in excels[is].

Unto us a boy is born and a son
is given to us, and the government
[shall be] upon his shoulders. And
His name shall be called
Angel of the great counsel.
His government shall increase
and of peace there shall be no end. Glory to the
Father. Glory in the Highest.

‘Concerning Feast Days...’



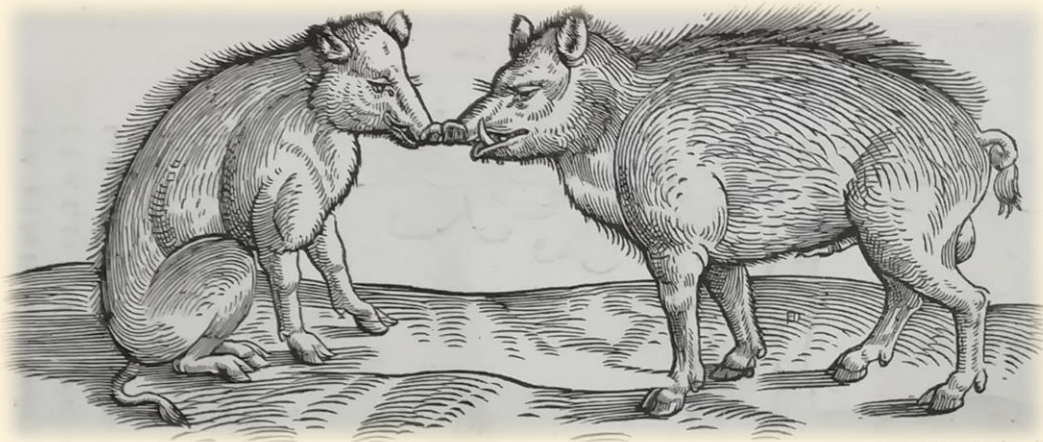
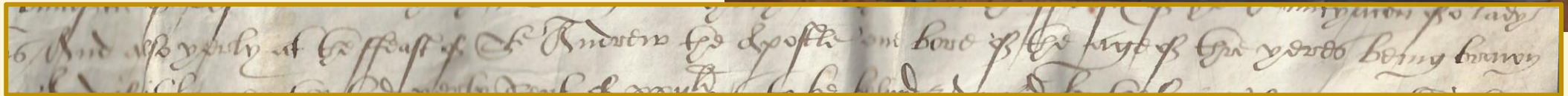
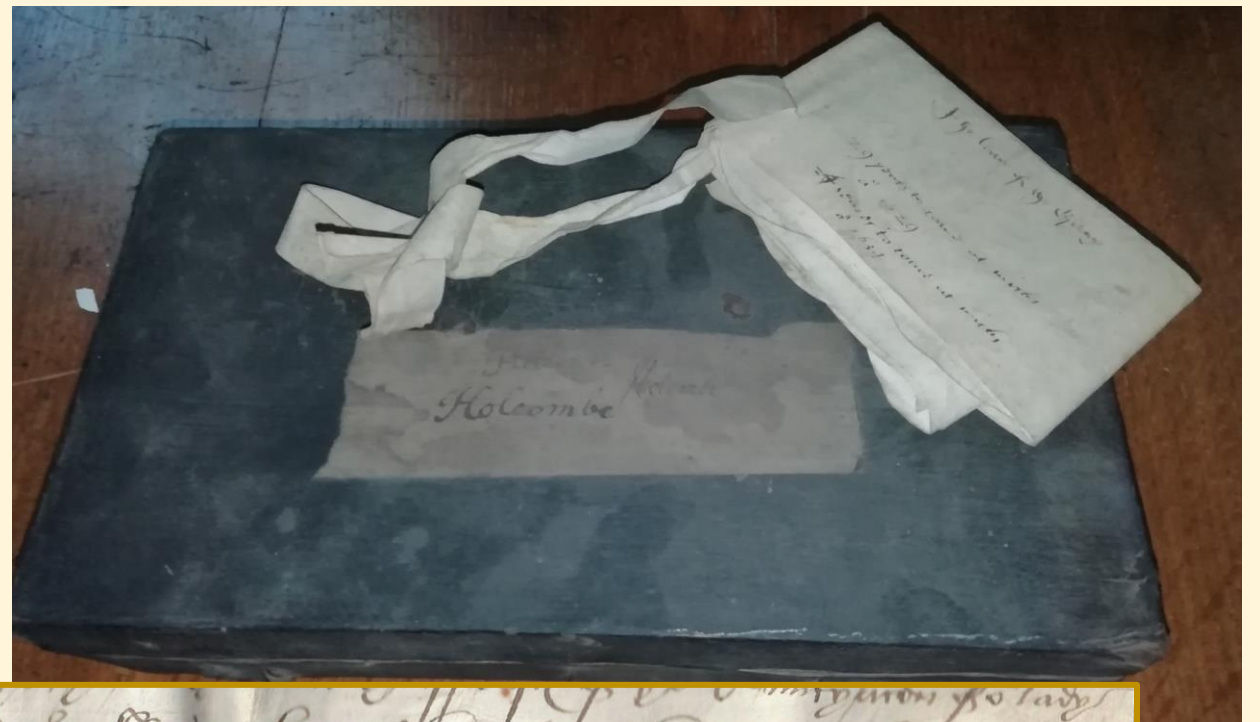
The Founder devoted an entire chapter of his Statutes to another important element of college feast days: the food. The three most important festivals in the calendar were Trinity Sunday (and Monday), Christmas (and the 12 days) and Easter (and 3 days following), and each was to be the occasion for slap up dinners and extra treats.

Item quum octo libras quinque solidos et octo denarius, ad lautiora et uberiora, pro Sociis Scholaribusque et ministris Collegij, certis quibusdam in anno quilibet diebus convivia paranda, prater communas cuilibet pro portione sua superius a me assignatas, concessi...

Also, I have granted £8, 5 shillings and 8 pence for entertainments and abundant provisions for the Fellows, Scholars and officers of the college, which banquets are to be provided on those particular days of each year in addition to the commons assigned by me to each person as his portion...

The Christmas Bore

A stained sixteenth-century deed box contains the Founder's original lease of Holcombe Grange in South Oxfordshire. Dated 1554, the document records that the tenant John Spier was to provide both a monetary rent to the soon-to-be-founded Trinity College, 'And also yearly at the ffeast of St Andrew the Apostle [30 November] one bore of the age of thre[e] years being brawn...'



A hog (castrated male pig) and a boar (uncastrated male pig) from John Hill's *An History of Animals* (1752) in the Old Library.

Despite the requirement of 'being brawn', archival evidence – payments to butchers – suggests the boar regularly arrived on foot. Roast pork and sausages must have provided a delicious alternative to the daily staples of bread, cheese and weak beer, with mutton the most commonly consumed meat. Brawn was another treat, which would also be given to former fellows and benefactors as gifts. As late as 1770, the dramatist George Colman the Elder wrote to his friend Thomas Warton (fellow 1752–90) to thank him for 'your Trinity brawn [which] has made me happier than any present I ever received in my life...'

Not Santa...

... But Edward Augustus Freeman, Regius Professor of Modern History, in his academic robes. Freeman was elected a scholar of Trinity in 1841 and held a fellowship of the College from 1845–7.

Although the Foundation Statutes were still in force, by the mid-19th Century, the fellows could and did spend long spells away from Oxford. Going home for Christmas had also been made considerably easier thanks to Britain's burgeoning railway network.



Christmas Dinner

Sunday, Dec 25 th		Dec 26 th	
Fish	1 6	Fried fillets sole	1 6
Mutton cutlets.	1 6	Salmi pheasant & olive	1 3
Roast pheasant	4 -	Roast beef.	7 .
Seakale & potatoes	1 2.	Sprouts & potatoes	1 .
Plum pudding.	2 6	Fried plum pudding	9 .
Scotch woodcock.	1 -	Macaroni	6 .
	<hr/> 11 8		<hr/> 12 .
Returued	2 8.	Returued	0 .
	<hr/> 9 .		<hr/> 7 .
Commons	3 9	Commons	3 9
M ^r Vice president. 3 at 1/4	5 3	M ^r Vice president 3 at 1/4	3 3
" Paper.		" Paper.	
" Canaan.		" Canaan.	

Following the University reforms of the 1860s and 1880s, college fellows were allowed to marry. Many did so and moved out to Oxford's rapidly expanding suburbs. But the bachelors remained to keep Christmas together in Chapel and Hall.

A rare surviving 'High Table Book' reveals the diners and menu of 25 December 1886. The Vice-President was the senior fellow and college librarian Martin Green. His three guests may have been undergraduates unable to travel home for the vacation. The buttery books reveal Frederick Armitage (1883) from Australia; James Flanagan (1884) from Dublin; and Frank Borwick (1886) whose home was in Walthamstow. That, we cannot explain.

The four courses – fish, entrees, dessert, and savoury – included the hearty delights of mutton cutlets and roast pheasant followed by plum pudding. As is traditional, the left-overs (salmi [stewed] pheasant and fried plum pudding) duly reappeared the next day.

Boxing Day's savoury of pasta may seem surprisingly modern. We note however that Mrs Beeton's *Book of Household Management* (1861), offers not one but two recipes for macaroni cheese.

A President remembers...

Sitting alone in his house at Boar's Hill on Christmas Day 1940, Herbert Blakiston (scholar 1881, fellow 1886, President 1907–38) picked up his pen and reminisced sadly about the Good Old Days in a letter to his old friend Herbert Maynard-Smith (1887).

For very many years Raper & Ellis & I used to dine in C.R. [Common Room] on Xmas day; but College is shut up now.

'Kirk' was the Bishop of Oxford Kenneth Kirk, who had been Chaplain of Trinity College 1922–33. It is not entirely clear whether Blakiston had missed the University Sermon for the second time in a row, or for the second time since 1881.

What I compromised for luncheon to. For very many years Raper & Ellis & I used to dine in C.R. [Common Room] on Xmas day; but College is shut up now. I took the celebration at Kirk's Chapel this morning, but I have had for the second time to miss the University Sermon - perhaps I should not have appreciated the Canadian Dean! I have never told me how your big with

'Happy Day'

DECEMBER

Rosemary - and saw many old friends. Christmas dinner, at mid-day, in the new dining-room, went very well - it is a comfort to be able to carve a 20-lb turkey on the table (ours is 4'6" wide) with no fear of splashing walls or carpet. We drank burgundy, & port afterwards. Then to the drawing-room for presents & the Queen's speech. We saw one a standard lamp & some vegetable dishes, already delivered to 72 Regent's Park Rd.; Roger another standard lamp, & a couple of prints - one framed - of a da Vinci drawing & a woodcut. H. a portable Murphy radio, which pleased him very greatly; and Pip a waterproof jacket from Lillywhites. My present to J. - a mirror for his dressing table, with two electric lights fitted to it - has not yet arrived. J. gave me some buttons for white waistcoat & a hatbox slip-in spectacle case. After dinner, most of us went for a short walk about 4.0, into the meadows, along Menton way; & home up the High and through New College lane. About 8.0 the forewills & Mrs. Martin arrived to spend the evening with us, according to tradition. We had cold supper and champagne about 7.0, after a sherry party

DECEMBER

in EDC's drawing-room, and then played games. The Furrers came in about 9.0, bringing their nice M.P. lamp for Caroline - her first evening party, & I think she enjoyed it, & hope Pippa may be good fortune. We played chess a Nebuchadnezzar, & many other games. Happy day.

Sunday 26 Dec. J. & I at 8.0, with



The election of a family man in 1954 brought much needed cheer to the President's Lodgings. After a first term living with their children in a small flat, Arthur ('Thomas') and Joyce Norrington were thrilled to move into their proper residence just in time for Christmas.

In a long diary entry, the President described his pleasure in carving 'a 20 lb turkey on the table (ours is 4' 6" wide) with no fear of splashing walls or carpet' before repairing to the drawing room 'for presents & the Queen.' The kids got all the latest gear - 'H. a portable Murphy radio... and Pip a waterproof jacket from Lillywhites.'

A short walk, friends for 'cold supper and champagne' and party games with the chaplain Austin Farrer and his wife and daughter - 'her first party' - completed the day. 'Nebuchadnezzar' was an advanced form of charades traditionally enjoyed at Christmas.

A Happy day indeed.

Christmas Creep

The reluctance of Charles Dickens' most famous antihero Ebenezer Scrooge to give his downtrodden clerk Bob Cratchit even one day off for Christmas – followed by his sudden conversion to out-and-out party animal – is a classic example of the phenomenon of Christmas Creep.

The Victorian age saw the introduction of many seasonal activities – carol services, Christmas trees, Christmas parties – which today we consider traditional. There was a great deal of money to be made from the production of Christmas decorations, gifts and goods of all kind, and the sooner the season started the better.

But none of these things reached Trinity's senior or junior common rooms until well into the 20th Century. Term ended at the beginning of December, for goodness sake, and to have eaten a Christmas dinner or put up decorations as early as the first Sunday in Advent would have seemed quite simply bizarre.

Scrooge informs Cratchit of his pay rise. The luxury edition of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843) with illustrations by Arthur Rackham, was produced for the Christmas market in 1915. From the Danson Library.



Christmas Merchandise

The earliest known Trinity Christmas card is this of 1921, which was given to the Archive by Mark Shelton (1981). Inside, it is signed by Clive Rose, who had matriculated that year.

No publication details can be seen on the back of the card, which has been previously pasted into an album. But the artist is T Martine Ronaldson, whose charming engraving of the Chapel first appeared in her *Drawings of Trinity College, Oxford* (Holywell Press, 1904).



Christmas Downstairs

The Servants' Party on the 21st went off very well. They had decorated the Hall very nicely. There were numerous

visitors, as I gather each servant can bring a guest or two.

With all good wishes to you for 1951,

Yours ever
J.R.H. Weaver

Trinity is much kinder than Scrooge to its staff.

This year will be the first in more than 70 that the College has not held a 'Last Working Day' Christmas party with dinner in Hall and dancing to follow.

On 28 December 1950, J.R.H. 'Reggie' Weaver (President 1938–54) sent this characteristically vague report on the proceedings to the Bursar Philip Landon. It would seem that the bursary clerk, Mr Honey, was already back at work on the office typewriter.

Trinity WaGs

This evocative but undated photograph of a 'Servants' Party' is from the collection of Bill Sloper (scout and Head Scout 1943–95).

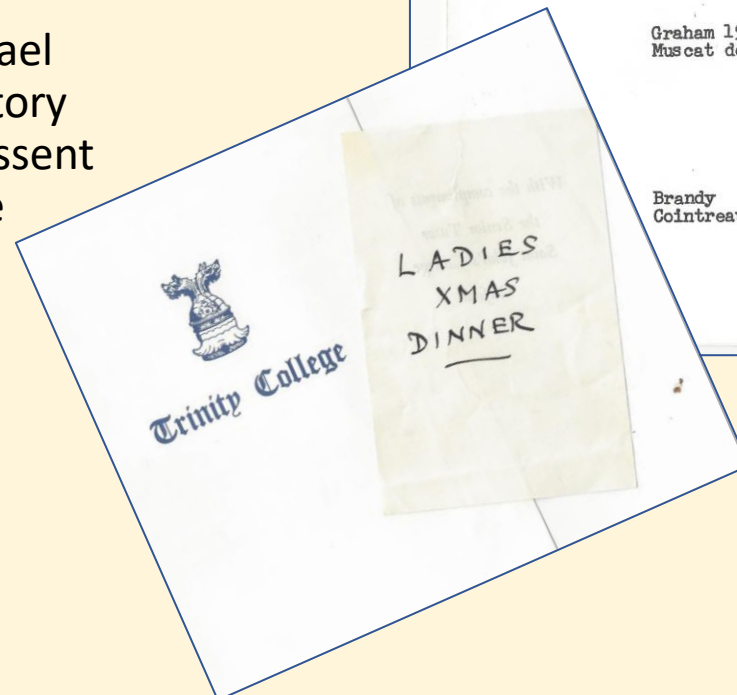
Bill's wife Rosemary came to work in the Bursary in 1968. The couple got together at that year's Christmas Party and were married the following December.



Ladies and Gentlemen

The custom of Ladies Night – when, once a year, the fellows could bring their wives into dinner – was inaugurated by President Norrington in October 1961. The event was a success, and from the following year Ladies Night was held in mid-December.

Does a note in the hand of Michael Maclagan (fellow in Modern History 1939–81) suggest some slight dissent in the ranks of the SCR when the name of the event changed in 1975?



CHRISTMAS DINNER	
21st December 1976	
Sherry	Le Jambon Glacé Monté Carlo
	--
	Le Consommé Célestine
	--
Macon-Villages-Prisse 1973	Le Filet de Sole Diéppoise
	--
Gigondas 1972 SCR	Le Col-vert Roti Bigarrade Les Legumes Frais
	--
	Crêpes à la Bonne Femme
	--
Graham 1960 Muscat de Beaumes de Venise SCR	Le Plateau de Fruits d'Hiver
	--
	Les Petits Fours
	--
Brandy Cointreau	Café
	--
	--
	--

RECITAL OF CAROLS AND ORGAN MUSIC

Trinity College Chapel

Thursday, December 2nd, at 3.00 p.m.

1. Chorale and Chorale Prelude:
"Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, allzugleich" J. S. Bach
2. Break forth, o beauteous heavenly light J. S. Bach
Past Three o'clock London Waits
Recitative and Aria:
"For behold, darkness shall cover the earth" G. F. Handel
3. Chorale and Chorale Prelude:
"Vom Himmel Loch, da komm' ich her" J. S. Bach
In dulci júbilo Ancient carol arranged by
R. L. Pearsall
4. Coventry Carol (Oxford Book of Carols, 22) traditional
Blake's Cradle Song (196) R. Vaughan Williams
Sussex Carol (24) traditional
Lute Book Lullaby (30) traditional
A babe is born (116) traditional
5. Air: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd",
from Messiah G. F. Handel
6. Rocking (87) traditional
Wither's Rocking Hymn (185) R. Vaughan Williams
The Birds (103) traditional
The Kings (193) P. Cornelius
A Gallery Carol (25) traditional
7. Chorale and Chorale Prelude:
"Jesu, meine Freude" J. S. Bach

Carol Singing

Gordon Smith (1952) was one of the prime movers behind both the Trinity Music Society and the Trinity Singers. We are very grateful to him for his gift of the programme for an ambitious concert of traditional carols and Christmas in the last week of Michaelmas Term 1954.

We only wish we knew the names of all the performers and soloists!

'Felt Marvellous afterwards...'

By the 1960s, a Carol Service was a regular fixture for the last Sunday of Michalemas Term – even if it was the First Sunday in Advent.

At the end of his first term, David Fairer (1966) wrote eloquently in his diary of the simple pleasure of a 'good loud sing'.

At 6.15 went to chapel for the carol service. The Chapel was in darkness save for tall the lit candles along the pews. The atmosphere was perfect. The lessons and carols service lasted for an hour – all the popular ones – O little town, God rest ye merry, the First Nowell, Hark the Herald, O Come All ye Faithful etc. Had a good loud sing, and felt marvellous afterwards.

Christmas Crackers

This atmospheric scene from the album of Richard Newhouse and Ed O'Reilly (both 1989) is the Archive's only photograph of a student Christmas Dinner.

The picture was taken early in the action. Note that the bread is still on the plates.



'The Most Spectacular Thing...'

Sunday 48th Week (336-29)

First Sunday in Advent

December 2

Ahem, yet another ten-days-late job, I'm afraid, worked in the library all day (presumably). The most spectacular thing was the college Christmas dinner at 7.00, which was even more uproarious than last year, with bread rolls flying around and people being sconced all over the place. Mr. MacLagan, presiding at High Table, looked bemused. Then attended a quick & boring DRO's meeting at the union before returning to my room to do a bit more work.

Tim Holman (1977) nicely captured the essence of the 1979 college Christmas dinner in this succinct 'ten-days-late' diary entry.

The long obsolete custom of 'sconcing' was the customary penalty for inappropriate behaviour in Hall. It is connected to the long-held beliefs that all Trinity men are gentlemen, and that gentlemen never get drunk. They could therefore be suitably reprimanded by means of the compulsory purchase of a two-pint tankard of ale to be shared around the table. Or, if they downed it in one, they could be sconced again.

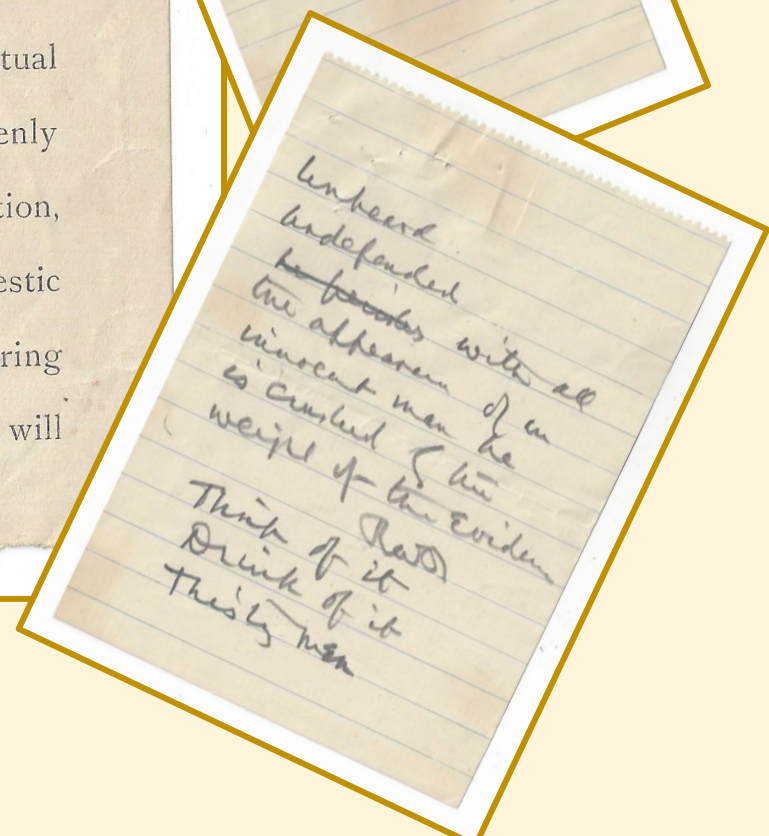
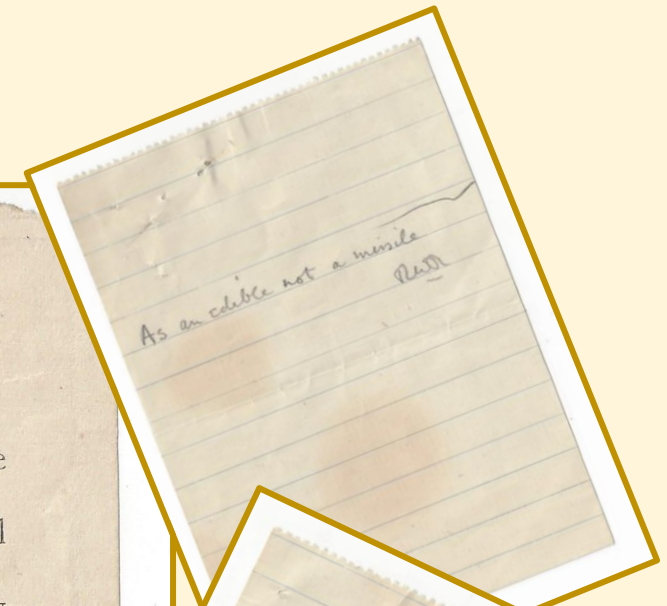
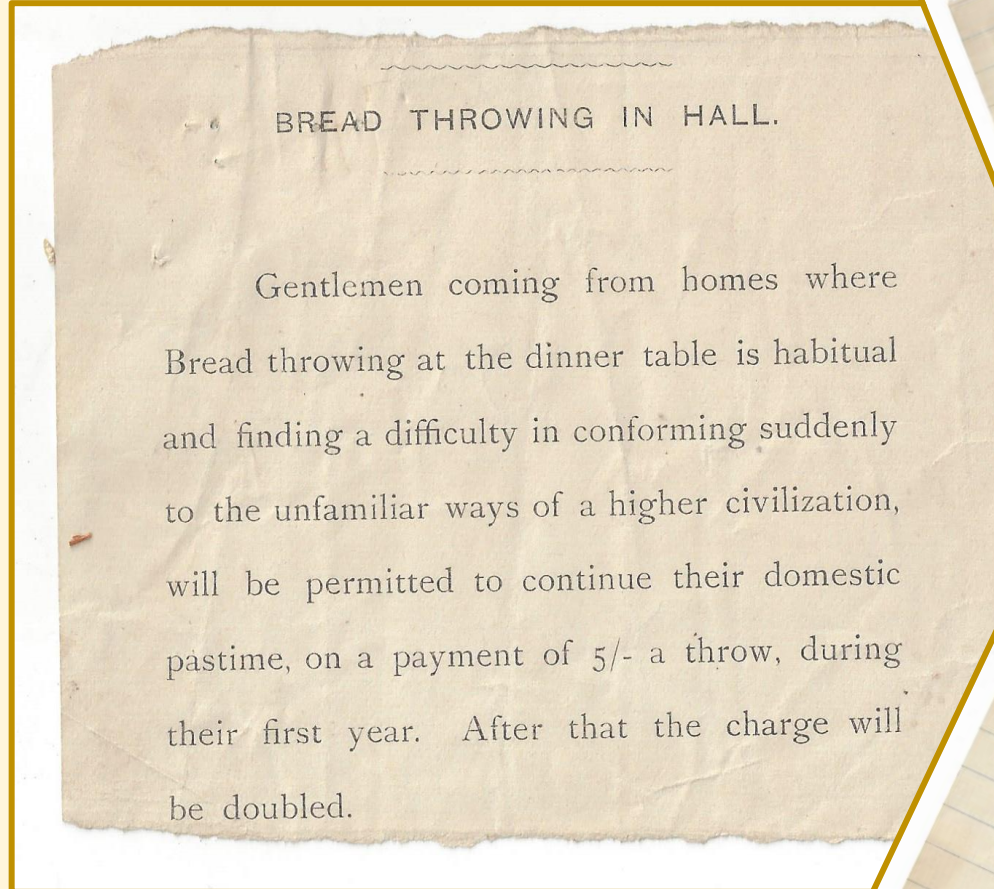
A note on the subject of bread throwing

Perhaps it is the shape of bread rolls that suggests uses other than eating.

The pastime of Bread Throwing in Hall has a long and inglorious history at Trinity, dating back at least to the early years of the 20th Century, when the Domestic Bursar Robert W. Raper (fellow 1871–1971) issued this famously ironic prohibition.

One culprit (most likely at a boat club dinner) was Geoffrey Christie-Miller (1900, Honorary Fellow 1953–1969). The Bursar's two witty notes – which would have been written at High Table and delivered by a scout – suggest the fine was levied in the form of a sconce:

As an edible, not a missile RWR
and –
Unheard/Undefended/with all the
appearance of an innocent man he is
crushed by the weight of the
evidence. RWR
Think of it, Drink of it, Thirsty Men'



The Christmas Party

Ever the harbingers of new ideas, the MCR may have thrown the very first Christmas party in college.

It was Michaelmas Term 1973, and the MCR Committee were meeting in their newly acquired HQ of Kettell Hall. 'A party', they agreed unanimously, 'was absolutely necessary'.

The President was Jack Mastroianni (1972), and his suggestion of 'a disco and dancing' in the Danson Room was taken up with enthusiasm by MCR Secretary Phil Davies (1972) who volunteered to organise 'food, the punch and a Christmas tree'. His assertion that 'his beautiful wife, Beverly, would be happy to prepare her renowned sausage rolls' was met by a round of applause.

② The big issue of the meeting was left on the agenda - The MCR Christmas Party. The entire Committee held the same view that after such a rigorous term academically, a party was absolutely necessary. Mr. Mastroianni said he would talk to Albert about the use of Kettell Hall and the Danson Room for the party. Kettell Hall would be used for refreshments and quiet social intercourse, whereas the Danson Room would house a disco and dancing. Mr. Davies offered ~~the~~ his services for planning for food, the punch, and a Christmas Tree. He said his beautiful wife, Beverly, would be happy to prepare her renowned sausage rolls. There was a round of applause from Mr. Mastroianni at this idea.

③



TELEPHONE (01865) 279900

Historians ~ Time to make history!!

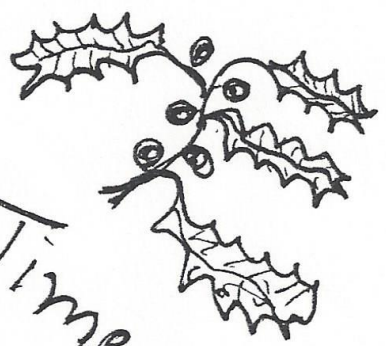
TRINITY COLLEGE

OXFORD

OX1 3BH



Christmas Party Time
Old Bursary ~ Thursday 4 December
6 p.m.



Bryan and Peter

invite you to be there!!

Prizes to be won! Raffle, hot mince pies, brandy butter, wine!

Party Time

Tutors holding Christmas gatherings for their students is hardly remarkable these days.

But we love the design of this invitation to the Historians Party of Christmas 1997. The artist was Peter Carey (1966, Fellow in History 1980-2008), and it is preserved in the collection of Jan Martin (Librarian 1985-2005).

Christmas Memories...

Everyone in the Trinity community has their own special Christmas memories.

For those living and working in the College today, the absence of a dear friend and colleague Paul Lawrence is one of the most difficult changes of this year's Christmas.

Paul was Head Gardener for 25 years, and his infectious enthusiasm was never more visible than when the Christmas trees arrived in College.

Paul Lawrence 1966–2020

Rest in Peace



We hope you have enjoyed this Exhibition...

It is always a pleasure to showcase items from the College Archive at alumni events, and we will be delighted to receive feedback, whether about this topic, or with suggestions for future exhibitions.

The official archives preserved by the college administration are a rich source of information about Trinity's past, but there is much that can only be known from the personal records and memorabilia kept by college members themselves. For that reason, we appeal regularly for donations to the Archive, either outright or as loans to be copied. We are interested in material of all kinds, including but not limited to letters, diaries, photographs and films, sports records, essays, term cards, menus, press cuttings...

We would be particularly interested to hear of members' own experiences of Christmas at Trinity. Were you there at any of the events that we have illustrated? Can you pre-date our records of the first Christmas party or carol concert? What can you remember of the Christmas dinners that you attended? (We are extremely discreet.)

Please do get in touch, via the link provided by the alumni office.

And finally, our thanks to Ana Fabian in the Development Office for facilitating this exhibition, and to Alison Felstead, Julia Paolitto, and Professor Richard Gameson (1982) for their help and advice.

Clare Hopkins, Archivist
James McDougall, Fellow Archivist