

# Mumming

Mumming is also an ancient pagan custom that was an excuse for people to have a party at Christmas! It means 'making diversion in disguise'. The tradition was that men and women would swap clothes, put on masks and go visiting their neighbours, singing, dancing or putting on a play with a silly plot. The leader or narrator of the mummers was dressed as Father Christmas.

The custom of Mumming might go back to Roman times, when people used to dress up for parties at New Year. It is thought that, in the U.K., it was first done on St. Thomas's day or the shortest day of the year.

Different types of entertainments were done in different parts of the U.K. In parts of Durham, Yorkshire and Devon a special sword dance was performed. There were also different names for mumming around the U.K. too. In Scotland it was known as 'Gusards' in Somerset, 'Mumping' in Warwickshire or 'Thomasing' and 'Corning' in Kent.

In Medieval times it had turned into an excuse for people to go begging round the houses and committing crimes. It became so bad that Henry VIII, made a law saying that anyone that was mumming wearing a mask would be put in prison for 3 months!

One poem that people said when mumming was:

Christmas is coming, the beef is getting fat,  
Please drop a penny in the old mans hat.

Over the years, this was changed into a very similar poem that is said by some carol singers today:

Christmas is coming, the **goose** is getting fat,  
Please **put** a penny in the old mans hat.

The early settlers from the U.K. took the custom of Mumming to Canada. It is known as Murmuring in Canada, but is banned in most places because people used it as an excuse for begging.

Mumming is still done in parts of the UK, USA and Canada.