

# Past and presents

Ever said “Christmas isn’t what it used to be”? These three women have decided to do something about it, and bring back the festive spirit of their favourite decade – together with some of its stranger delicacies Words by Maria McCarthy

## 1940s

Amanda Pickard, 33, lives in Milton Keynes, where she manages a local museum. Her husband Harry, 44, is an IT manager, and they have two children, Molly, five, and Felix, two. “For Christmas dinner, our starter will be pea-pod soup. It looks disgusting and I think my mother, sister and nephew are wondering what they have let themselves in for, joining us for our authentic 1940s Christmas. But, like so many awful-looking wartime recipes, it actually tastes delicious, so I’m sure they’ll love it.

The main course will be ‘mock turkey’ – sausage meat shaped to resemble the body of a turkey, with parsnips cut like turkey legs – and a limited selection of winter vegetables, followed by a small Christmas pudding served with custard (cream wasn’t available during the war), and one bottle of wine shared between the adults.

Our decision to have such a modest spread isn’t to do with the credit crunch: my husband Harry and I have a passion for this period of history. We actually met at a Civil War re-enactment event, but now we’re members of a 1940s re-enactment group, and we’re always going to events and dances. And although we live in a modern house in a modern city, inside we’ve decorated it in keeping with the period. We’ve got original 1930s and 40s furniture, and when we draw the curtains and put a Bing Crosby record on the gramophone, it’s 1940 again. We regularly dress in vintage gear and I also give lectures to schools and at museums on what life was like on the Home Front during the war.

We want everything to be as authentic as possible for our Christmas lunch, and we’ve used tips from 1940s magazines for the festive decorations. We’ve made party hats and paper-chains with newspaper,



and our daughter Molly loved joining in. Our tree is created from twigs dusted with Epsom salts to make them glittery, and hung with pinecones, tissue, old sweet wrappers and hand-knitted woollen ornaments. Our crackers are made from old loo rolls, with treats inside, and you have

to shout “bang” as you pull them.

For most people these days, Christmas is about over-consumption – tables groaning with food, much of which gets wasted, and too many unnecessary presents. We feel that by getting back to basics and focusing on spending time together as a family, we’ve discovered a whole

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new approach to the festive season.

After dinner we’ll sit by our fire and listen to a recording of the speech from 1941, and the King’s College Choir carol service from the same year. We’ll spend the afternoon playing traditional party games like Ludo and tiddlywinks. Maybe it doesn’t sound exciting, but when we did it last year, everyone stayed longer than usual – it was as if we didn’t want such a lovely day to come to an end.

There was one unfortunate incident last year though. In the evening my mum broke ranks over what Harry referred to as ‘contraband’ – she’d smuggled in some very inauthentic after-dinner mints!

When it comes to presents, we compromise a bit, and we get our children some of the modern toys they want, along with clothes and simpler toys like craft kits, which our daughter loves. Of course, we know that as the children get older they may well want to see modern toys and have the latest gadgets to cross that bridge when we can’t. It’s encouraging though that it