

Boxing Day History



Boxing Day is a holiday traditionally celebrated the day after Christmas. Servants and tradesmen would receive gifts, known as a "Christmas box," from their bosses or employers in the United Kingdom and other former British colonies. Today, Boxing Day is the bank holiday that generally takes place on December 26.

In South Africa, in 1994, Boxing Day was renamed Day of Goodwill. Due to the Roman Catholic Church's liturgical calendar, December 26 is known as St. Stephen's Day to Catholics and to several European countries, including Italy, Finland, and France. It is also known as the Day of the Wren, or Wren's Day, in Ireland. In some European countries, December 26 is celebrated as the Second Christmas Day.

Various competing theories for the origins of the term "Boxing Day" circulate in popular culture, none of which are definitive. However, the Oxford English Dictionary gives the earliest attestations of the term as being from England in the 1830s, defining it as 'the first week-day after Christmas day, observed as a holiday, on which postmen, errand-boys, and servants of various kinds expect to receive a Christmas-box.'



In Britain, it was a custom for tradespeople to collect "Christmas boxes" of money or presents on the first weekday after Christmas as thanks for good service throughout the year. This custom is linked to an older English tradition; since they would have to wait on their masters on Christmas Day, the servants of the wealthy were allowed the next day to visit their families. The employers would give each servant a box to take home, containing gifts, bonuses, and sometimes leftover food.

The European tradition, which has long included giving money and other gifts to those who were needy and in service positions, has been dated to the Middle Ages, but the exact origin is unknown. It is believed to be in reference to the Alms Box placed in places of worship to collect donations to the poor. Also, it may have come from a custom in the late Roman/early Christian era, wherein metal boxes placed outside churches were used to collect special offerings tied to the Feast of Saint Stephen, which in the Western Church falls on the same day as Boxing Day.



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