

Earliest recordings of family Christmas found

21st December, 2012



The National Museum of London has uncovered what it says is the first ever recording of a family Christmas, dating back 110 years. It is of the 1902 family get-together of the Wall family from North

London. It is part of 24 recordings made by the family between 1899 and 1917. The recordings are from various family gatherings, including comments made during World War I on sons who were sent to fight. The Wall family used a phonograph machine to put the audio of their special occasions on wax cylinders. Historians at the museum say it is amazing the cylinders have survived as they are very fragile and usually disintegrate over time. They also say the sound quality of the century-old recordings is amazing.

The phonograph machine was discovered in the year 2000 by David Brown, 71, in his house near Cambridge. Mr Brown is the great-grandson of Mr Cromwell Wall, who made the recordings. Brown saw no use for the machine and donated it to his local museum, which passed it on to the Museum of London in 2008. It discovered the significance of the wax cylinders and has spent the past four years painstakingly restoring them. The museum said: "We tried to reduce any noise by cleaning the cylinder first with a fine brush that can get in between the groove and once we had the best playback from the cylinder we then digitally cleaned them up". Mr Brown said: "It's incredible how clear the recordings are."

Sources: BBC / huntspost.co.uk

Writing

Christmas in the 21st Century has lost its true meaning. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

museum / London / family Christmas / get-togethers / recordings / audio / fragile / discovered / great-grandson / donated / significance / restoring / digitally / incredible

True / False

- Archaeologists found a recording of a Xmas from 1,000 years ago. T / F
- The recordings that have been discovered are of family get-togethers. T / F
- Historians are very surprised the recordings survived until today. T / F
- A museum said the sound quality of the recordings was amazing. T / F
- The man who found the recordings didn't know what they were. T / F
- The man gave the machine with the recordings to an antiques shop. T / F
- Experts decided a special brush would damage the recordings. T / F
- The man who found the recordings is disappointed with the sound. T / F

Synonym Match

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. uncovered | a. unearthed |
| 2. get-together | b. reunion |
| 3. various | c. a number of |
| 4. fragile | d. delicate |
| 5. disintegrate | e. fall apart |
| 6. donated | f. contributed |
| 7. significance | g. importance |
| 8. painstakingly | h. meticulously |
| 9. fine | i. thin |
| 10. incredible | j. unbelievable |

Discussion – Student A

- What can you remember of your first Christmas?
- What do you think is different between Christmas today and Christmas 1902?
- What do you think is on the 1902 recording?
- How far back can you go with your family history?
- What is the meaning of Christmas today?
- What do you think your relatives from 100 years ago were like?
- Would you like to hear the recording?
- How do you think the first family Christmas was spent?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. dating | a. family gatherings |
| 2. The recordings are from various | b. grandson |
| 3. Historians | c. over time |
| 4. very fragile and usually disintegrate | d. to his local museum |
| 5. the sound quality of the century- | e. back 110 years |
| 6. great- | f. the recordings are |
| 7. donated it | g. brush |
| 8. painstakingly | h. old recordings |
| 9. a fine | i. at the museum |
| 10. It's incredible how clear | j. restoring them |

Discussion – Student B

- Why is 'Christmas' sometimes spelt as 'Xmas'?
- Do you think it's OK for kids to believe in Santa Claus?
- What sounds of Christmas from centuries ago would you like to hear?
- Is there anything you dislike about Christmas?
- Have your feelings towards Xmas changed since you were a child?
- Is Christmas stressful?
- How do you feel when Christmas is over?
- What questions would you like to ask Santa Claus?

Spelling

- family get-together
- various family gatherings
- special occasions
- wax cylinders
- very fragile
- disintegrate over time
- phonograph machine
- local museum
- discovered the significance
- painstakingly restoring them
- we then digitally cleaned them up
- It's incredible

Answers – Synonym Match

1. g	2. e	3. c	4. j	5. b
6. a	7. i	8. d	9. h	10. f

Christmas Presents

What would you buy these people, and why? Talk about your answers with your partner(s).

Who?	What?	Why?
Barack Obama		
Your English teacher		
Yourself		
Malala Yousafzai		
Mark Zuckerberg		
Lady Gaga		
Ban Ki-moon		
The world		

Xmas Stuff

What's best? Rank these and share your rankings with your partner. Put the best at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| • midnight mass | • sending / receiving cards |
| • Christmas tree | • exchanging presents |
| • turkey | • Christmas songs |
| • shopping | • lights |

Answers – True False

a	F	b	T	c	T	d	T	e	T	f	F	g	F	h	F
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.