



Prince Albert, who was born in Germany, brought his childhood love of Christmas traditions to his growing family.

This drawing—which was published on the cover of the *Illustrated London News* on 23 December 1848—depicts Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, their five (at the time) children and [Queen Victoria's mother](#) (Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, who was also known as the Duchess of Kent).

The 1848 Christmas tree was located at Windsor Castle (since Victoria's much-loved [Osborne House](#), on the [Isle of Wight](#), was not-yet finished).

These traditions, which Victoria and Albert were developing for their own family, also changed how people celebrated Christmas elsewhere.

By 1850, Charles Dickens wrote a story about "[A Christmas Tree](#)." In the first line of his story, he called the tree:

*that pretty German toy.*

The BBC tells us how this all came about, in [Emma Midgley's article](#) (published on December 15, 2010). The following are excerpts from this interesting story of Christmas trees and cards:

*This Christmas, most families in the UK will buy a Christmas tree and send cards to friends.*

*However, these Christmas traditions only date back to the 1840s, and are actually German in origin.*

*In the 1840s and 1850s Queen Victoria and Prince Albert popularized a new way of celebrating Christmas.*

*An engraving of the Royal Family celebrating Christmas at Windsor was published in 1848 and their German traditions were adopted worldwide.*

*Kathryn Jones, is assistant curator of decorative arts at the Royal Collection, which is currently hosting a Christmas exhibition at Windsor Castle.*

*She said that Prince Albert was instrumental in bringing German traditions to Britain, such as the Christmas tree.*

*"It has become the accepted way we celebrate Christmas now," she said.*

Because Queen Victoria's mother was also German, the idea of a Christmas tree was not exactly new to Victoria and the Royal Family:

*"Queen Victoria's mother was German as well, so the Royal Family did have trees before Prince Albert popularized the Christmas tree.*

*"Queen Charlotte, George III's wife used to bring yew trees in at Christmas.*

*"But for most people in Britain the idea of having a tree inside was completely new.*

*"People would bring in a branch of a tree or holly or mistletoe, but there wasn't that traditional Christmas scene that we know now."*

*A drawing of the Royal Family celebrating around a decorated Christmas tree in Windsor was published in 1848 by the Illustrated London News.*

*Prince Albert also sent decorated Christmas trees to schools in Windsor and to local army barracks.*

*Soon every home in Britain had a tree bedecked with candles, sweets, fruit, homemade decorations and small gifts.*

*"Queen Victoria and Prince Albert brought the tree into Windsor Castle on Christmas Eve and they would decorate it themselves," said Ms Jones.*

*"They would light the candles and put gingerbread on the tree and the children would be brought in."*

A "White Christmas," even in Britain, was part of the family's experience during the years when Prince Albert was still alive:

*"There were very cold winters in the 1840s and 1850s, there was a lake at Frogmore House which used to freeze, and Albert and the children used to skate there.*

*"Albert was a really good skater, and Queen Victoria tried to learn, but she never really got very good," said Ms Jones.*

*"They had a sleigh they used to ride around in, one year they even rode it to Slough."*

*Turkey, for Christmas, wasn't always high on Victoria and Albert's list:*

*"They always had roast beef. They did serve turkey, but not necessarily every year," said Ms Jones.*

*"In the 40s and 50s they had a lot of different courses on the table.*

*"We've seen the menus and there were huge lists of meals.*

*"They would have different courses, maybe up to 20 different dishes. Quite often they would have a boar's head in the middle of the table.*

*"They sometimes had exotic birds such as snipe or capercaillie.*

*"They had swan on one menu."*

Since Britain encompassed an Empire at the time of Victoria's reign, the use of Christmas trees and the sharing of Christmas cards spread around the world.

America was impacted, too. The same illustration—minus the royal trappings (like the Queen's tiara)—was published (in December of 1850) in *Godey's Lady's Book*.

Who made that happen? [Sarah Hale](#)—the same person who convinced President Lincoln to make [Thanksgiving Day](#) an annual holiday.

By 1870, Christmas had also become [a yearly federal holiday](#) in the U.S.

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