

ST. STEPHEN'S DAY



St. Stephen's Day or Wren Day is celebrated in Ireland on December twenty-sixth. On this day children used to dress up in old clothes and paint their faces. They would go from house to house carrying holly bush and singing the wren boys song (The hunting of the wren on St. Stephen's day was an old custom.) The children would be given some food or a few pence, similar to our caroling. Groups of older people (adults) would go from pub to pub singing and playing musical instruments.

Another St. Stephen's day tradition was the hunt. This hunt would often be for the wren (who supposedly betrayed St. Stephen) or it could be a foxhunt. Families would bundle up and go out to the hunt and then enjoy a picnic. This picnic would include Christmas Day leftovers. The centerpiece of the food would be St. Stephen" Day stew made up of turkey, ham or bacon, vegetables, and other leftovers served hot. Cakes and pies would be served for dessert. After the hunt many people would go to the local pub for hot punch and entertainment.

Today, St. Stephen's Day is often celebrated at home. The tradition is carried on in some Irish-American households with a St. Stephen's Day party. An excellent musical addition to the party is the 'Chieftains Bells of Dublin'. This is a Christmas/St. Stephen's Day album. We should all try to celebrate St. Stephen's Day in true Irish tradition.