



Press Release

For immediate release:

How our Victorian ancestors misbehaved at Christmas parties: games designed to embarrass their colleagues and friends, drinking competitions and other improper behaviour....

Long before the days of karaoke and games consoles and endless re-runs of television programmes, our ancestors had to make their own entertainment at social gatherings. In the Victorian era of 1853, we imagine a time of refined, sensible socialising, but Christmas celebrations did encourage more outlandish behaviour from our ancestors.

TheGenealogist has uncovered a list of popular Christmas party games during the Victorian era from its online newspaper collection, dating from the 1850s.

According to the newspapers of the time, many of the party games of the 1850s had French origins. The French games were given English names but proved just as popular in London and Birmingham as they had in Paris and Marseille. There was no doubt they certainly caught the imagination of many parties and gatherings of the Victorian era.

The party games, although seemingly quite mild and innocent at first, did rely on victims being singled out for attention and one can imagine quite a bit of embarrassment caused. One game, known as the '**Learned Pig**', required one person to play the role of the 'pig that knows everything' and one person to be the 'master'. The master would ask for example: "Which of these young ladies is most fond of flirting?", the learned pig would grunt and sniff and pick out a young lady much to her embarrassment. This proceeding is generally accompanied by roars of laughter at the expense of the lady who receives this unenviable distinction.

Other party games included the popular game '**It was I**' when an unfortunate victim has to answer with this phrase to every question posed by the rest of the party. "I saw a monkey playing tricks on an organ"- (*The chosen victim answers- It was I*) or "I saw a man sneaking down an area to make cupboard love to the cook" – (*again the answer- It was I*)

Another popular game was "Tuning the Organ", with ladies standing on chairs playing the part of the organ pipes that must be arranged in an order to ensure the organ is correctly tuned. The victim in this game must be the person who tunes the organ by lifting and carrying the ladies to different chairs until the organ is 'tuned', an often exhausting exercise!

Other games that were fashionable then included 'Get out of that', 'Jack's Alive' and the drinking game 'The Health of Cardinal Puff'. Depending on the characters involved and the amount of alcohol consumed, many of the games had the potential to upset Victorian

sensibilities but could often ensure just as lively a party as this year's office party or family gathering!

The newspapers of the 1800s offer us an invaluable insight into what life was like and we have a comprehensive collection. Although the party games may seem quite dated, it shows they enjoyed a good laugh and a joke, often at someone else's expense!

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More details on Victorian party games and The Illustrated London News collection on TheGenealogist are available. For more information on TheGenealogist, including a more extensive case study, please contact David Osborne at david.o@sandn.net or 01722 717003.

