

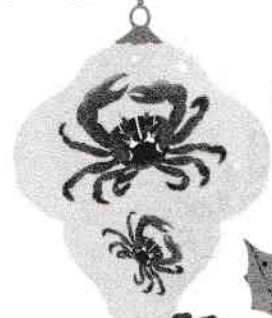
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THE  
SECRET  
HISTORY  
OF  
CHRISTMAS

TAKE A FESTIVE JOURNEY  
THROUGH TIME



ILLUSTRATED  
BY LENA ADDINK



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# INTRODUCTION

CHRISTMAS IS COMING



Christmas is a magical time of year. Twinkly lights, sparkly decorations and bauble-laden trees pop up all over. Catchy Christmas songs blare

out wherever you go and you can't seem to get away from Christmas movies on

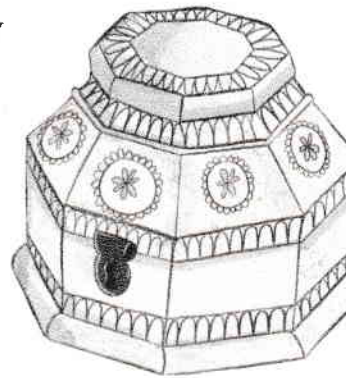
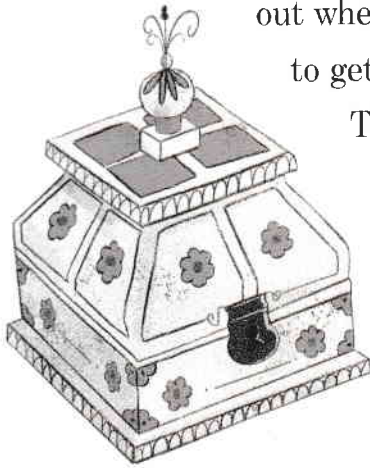
TV, with important messages about kindness, hope and, er, not letting your parents leave you home alone.

Throughout December there are holiday parties and lots of

exciting preparations for the big day itself. Christmas Day, 25 December, seems to have its own rules, from the food that gets eaten (and how much of it) to the things that you always do. Most people

give gifts. (And receive them, too – woo-hoo!)

You might know the biblical story of Christmas Day already. Baby Jesus



was born in a humble stable and visited by angels, kings and shepherds. It was there that he was given gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh by the three wise men.

Many Christians go to church at midnight on Christmas Eve for a service, known as a mass, to celebrate the start of this special birthday. In fact, the word 'Christmas' is a shortened version of 'Christ's Mass'.

However, every year, billions of people from all over the world – from many different cultures and faiths – celebrate, share important traditions and create special moments at Christmas, too.

But did you know that Christmas is a time when other truly AMAZING things have happened over the centuries? From the coronation of kings and the amazing Christmas Day truce to wonderful space missions and incredible inventions, there is a whole secret history of Christmas just waiting to be shared.

So, get ready to go on a festive journey through history and around the world to uncover some of the most extraordinary things that have happened on and around 25 December. There are incredible stories, fantastic people and amazing moments to discover, as well as lots of impressive facts about the Christmas traditions you already know and love.

# CHAPTER

# 1



On 25 December 1066, King William I was crowned King of England (but not Scotland, Wales or Ireland). Now, you might be thinking that Christmas Day was a strange day to choose for a coronation (for a start, wouldn't everyone be busy doing Christmassy things?) but it was actually a very clever move by William. As a Frenchman who had 'won' the English throne in battle, he wanted to

send a message to the people in the country that his reign would be a time of peace and hope, not war. So, what better day to do that on than Christmas Day?

## THREE (WOULD-BE) KINGS

To appreciate just how brilliant William's idea was, we need to understand a little bit of the history and how a Frenchman came to be king of England in the first place. Nowadays, countries with a king or queen usually know exactly who the next one will be. There will be a very clear line of succession – this means the person who will inherit the role – and it's usually the current monarch's son or daughter. However, back in eleventh-century England, things weren't so clear. When King Edward, known as Edward the Confessor, died on 5 January 1066, he didn't have any surviving children to inherit the throne. His closest relative was his fourteen-year-old great nephew, Edgar the Atheling, who didn't really want to be king – not to mention the fact that he was only a teenager!

So, who would be king? (At that time, the idea of having a queen reigning alone would have blown people's minds!) Three people thought that it should be them: King Edward's brother-in-law, Harold Godwinson, an Anglo-Saxon; William of Normandy, a French duke; and Harald Hardrada, a Viking and the King of Norway. They all had strong reasons for claiming the throne of England. Harold thought it should be him because his sister had been queen, plus he had tonnes of money and was from the largest area in England at that time, Wessex. William was a more distant relative, but he claimed that Edward had promised him the throne in 1051. Finally, Harald was a distant relative of King Cnut, a Viking who had ruled England between 1016 and 1035, and he thought that England should have a Viking ruler again. At that time, many people in England were descended from Vikings.

The final decision was made pretty quickly by a group of powerful English nobleman (people from important families who helped the king run the country). They chose Harold Godwinson, and he was crowned on 6 January 1066, just one day after