



## READING Easter Traditions in Britain

Fill the gaps in the text with the sentences below. One sentence is given extra.

For Christians, Easter is about celebrating the central miracle of Jesus' death and resurrection. It's been the most important date in the religious calendar since the very earliest days of Christianity. In medieval England, churches held rituals and religious ceremonies, organised various processions, vigils and plays over the Easter weekend. The Puritans banned Easter celebrations in 1647 and although it was restored after 1660, it never quite regained its former glory in the English Church.

☐ That's partly because Easter follows Lent – a period of religious observance and abstinence from worldly pleasures to remember Jesus' fasting in the desert.

Today, many people might give up chocolate, but before the Reformation Lent was rather more involved for English Christians. ☐ So when Easter came around, there were many good reasons to celebrate.

Easter was the time when fires were extinguished, flowers displayed and houses cleaned. Celebrations went on for many days after the Easter weekend.

All kinds of sports and games took place from Easter Monday and into the following week, including archery contests, hunting, handball games, horse racing and dancing.

The Leicester Hare Hunt took place on Easter Monday until about 1767. The Epping Forest Stag Hunt was a favourite of early 19th-century East

Enders, who would travel up to the woods to track down an elderly stag released from a cart, although the event became so popular that it was banned in 1847. In some parts of the country, people headed to open spaces to take part in Good Friday skipping. ☐ It largely died out during the Second World War.

Some Easter sporting traditions still survive, like the 'Uppies and Downies' mass football game in Workington, Cumberland, which has been played over the Easter weekend since at least 1779. There are few rules as the players try to carry a leather ball between the village and the harbour, about a mile and half apart. It's a violent affair, but was far more so in the past – players drowned in 1882 and 1932, and there have been several serious injuries.

The Leicestershire village of Hallaton holds an annual 'scramble' for pieces of pie followed by a 'Bottle Kicking', which is another mass football game, this time played between two villages on Easter Monday. The 'bottles' – small wooden kegs – are blessed in church in the morning, before being wrestled over for much of the rest of the day. The Victorians invented greetings cards and sent them as often as they could throughout the year.

Many of us keep up the tradition of sending cards at Easter, it's still big business. ☐

The designs of Victorian and Edwardian Easter cards could be fantastical and downright odd – but even the strangest of them get across a spring-like sense of new life, sunshine and hope for brighter days to come.

- A. Cambridge and Brighton were particular hotspots, but it can also be seen taking place in Preston.
- B. But Easter has always been marked with great secular celebrations too.
- C. Many people believed that bread or buns baked on Good Friday would never go mouldy,
- D. In 2014 Brits spent £18 million on them, and 2018 sales were up 11% on the previous year.
- E. They were supposed to avoid eating meat, eggs or dairy, and they couldn't play any sports.

based on [www.english-heritage.org.uk/easter/how-the-english-celebrated-easter/](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/easter/how-the-english-celebrated-easter/)