

The Tradition of Christmas Pudding Charms

I first came across pudding charms whilst browsing through an English antiques market. I bought two tiny silver Victorian charms, one a wedding ring and the other a bachelor's button.

My research into the tradition of Christmas pudding charms or favours as they are also known began. Some people will remember pudding dolls, once common in the 1850s to the early 1900s, particularly in Germany where they were made from the scraps of larger porcelain dolls. These little dolls were hand moulded and lovingly painted for putting in Christmas puddings or crackers.



Silver charms were also very popular in the past, the traditional shapes being a boot, bell, wishbone, thimble, ring, button and horseshoe. The significance of these is not so certain now but had meaning for the unlucky or lucky finder. The boot was for travel, the ring for an impending marriage, the wishbone for the granting of a wish, the thimble was seen as bad luck predicting spinsterhood, whilst the bachelor's button was lucky for a man. Silver sixpences and threepenny bits were also put in the pudding, the finders having good fortune.

Silver coins continued to be placed in puddings long after the little charms became lost, but after World War II, coins were made of copper and brass alloys which reacted during the cooking process, so the tradition of placing little surprises to be found became rare.

My Victorian charms gave me the idea of putting back some of the spirit and nostalgia into family Christmas's by reviving this lovely tradition with some modern additions of my own.

Christmas Puddings

The first plum pudding was really a porridge that contained boiled portions of beef or veal with wine, sherry and lemon juice. Dried fruit, sugar and spices were added with breadcrumbs to thicken and bind it together. The pudding was then steam cooked in a cloth giving it the shape of a ball. The meat ingredients were omitted in the early 19th century, thus it became a sweet course.

The last Sunday before Advent was known as "stir up Sunday" and was regarded as the last opportunity to make the pudding. Every member of the family stirred the mixture and made their wish. The silver coins, trinkets or charms were then placed in the pudding, and the lucky people who found them in their portion on Christmas Day would have their wishes come true.



Christmas Pudding Recipe

2 oz flour	4 oz sultanas
4 oz breadcrumbs	4 oz raisins
4 oz suet	1 grated apple
pinch of salt	grated rind of 1 orange
1/2 tsp nutmeg	grated rind of 1 lemon
1/4 tsp cinnamon	juice of 1/2 lemon
2 oz chopped almonds	2 large eggs
4 oz currants	2 tsps brandy

Mix all dry ingredients, one at a time, stir well, add all the fruit then beaten eggs mixed with lemon juice. Mix. Cover and stand overnight. Next morning add the brandy stirring thoroughly. Put into a greased bowl, cover with greaseproof paper and tie with string. Steam for 4 - 5 hours. Before eating on Christmas Day steam for 2 further hours.