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## VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS PAINTINGS

Much of what we associate with Christmas today, with the exception of After Eights and Christmas jumpers, stems almost entirely from the Victorian era (1837-1901). Prince Albert introduced all of his German family's Christmas traditions to the Royal household following his marriage to Queen Victoria in 1840. Christmas trees, cards, turkeys with all the trimmings and Christmas stockings were all enthusiastically taken up by Queen Victoria and as the key influencer of her day, her loyal subjects followed and fully embraced all the young Queen's new and exciting festive family traditions.

Charles Dickens wrote about Christmas and Victorian painters in Europe and America alike brought these Christmas scenes and people to life. Santa Claus was brought to life by the American illustrator Thomas Nast who also invented the Christmas Card, another stroke of Victorian genius that brought a little bit of festive splendour through letterboxes around the world during the festive season.

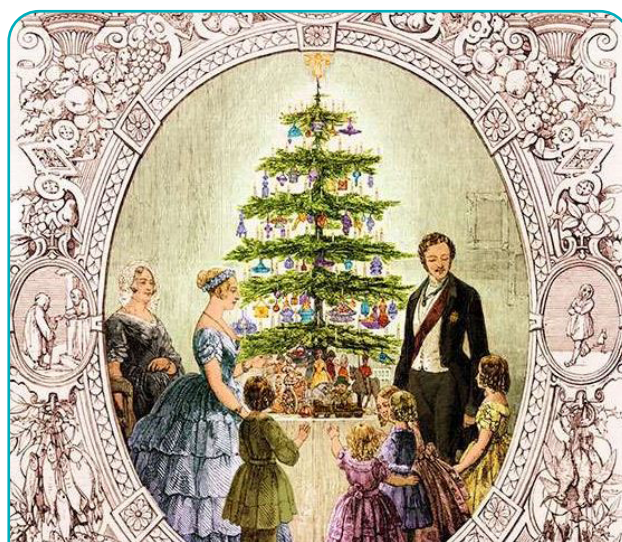
Here are some common themes and elements found in Victorian Christmas paintings:

**1. Family Gatherings:** Victorian Christmas paintings frequently feature scenes of families coming together to celebrate the holiday. These gatherings often take place in beautifully decorated homes, with family members enjoying each other's company.



Uncle Williams Christmas Presents by  
Sir John Gilbert (1817-1897)

**2. Decorations:** The Victorians were known for their elaborate Christmas decorations. Paintings from this era often showcase festively decorated Christmas trees adorned with candles, ornaments, and tinsel. Mistletoe and holly were also commonly used to decorate homes.



Decorating the Christmas tree  
Science History Images

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**3. Gifts and Presents:** Gift-giving was an important aspect of Victorian Christmas celebrations. Paintings might depict scenes of children eagerly unwrapping their presents, or the presentation of gifts to family members.



Christmas Presents by Hugo Oehmichen (1843-1932) - Victoria and Albert Museum, London

**4. Caroling:** Christmas carolers, often dressed in traditional Victorian clothing, are a common subject in these paintings. Carolers would go from house to house, singing festive songs to spread cheer.



Carol Singers by Gunning King (1859-1940) - Brighton & Hove Museums

**5. Snowy Scenes:** Many Victorian Christmas paintings depict snowy landscapes and scenes, introducing the idea of a "white Christmas."



Victorian Christmas by Thomas Kinkadee

**6. Feasting:** A Victorian Christmas feast was an important tradition, and you can find paintings that feature festive tables laden with roast meats, puddings, and other holiday treats.



Christmas Comes But Once a Year by Charles Green (1840-1898)

**7. The Yule Log:** The Yule log was a symbol of warmth and light during the Christmas season. Some paintings show families gathered around a fireplace with a burning Yule log.





Yule Log by Robert Alexander Hillingford (1828-1940)

**8. Christmas Cards:** Victorian Christmas cards, which gained popularity during this era, often featured sentimental and picturesque scenes. Paintings might show people exchanging or displaying these cards.



Victorian Christmas card (1843) by John Callcott Horsley (1817-1903) – Victoria and Albert Museum, London

**9. Acts of Charity:** The Victorians placed a strong emphasis on acts of charity and goodwill during the Christmas season. Some paintings depict scenes of people helping the less fortunate, emphasizing the importance of giving during the holiday.



B & W illustration from The Book of Christmas (1837) by Thomas Kibble Hervey

**10. Father Christmas:** The modern image of Santa Claus, known as Father Christmas in the UK, started to take shape during the Victorian era. Paintings might feature the jolly figure of Father Christmas, sometimes dressed in green or other colours, distributing gifts to children.



Santa Claus drawn by Thomas Nast (1840-1902)

Prominent artists of the Victorian era, such as John Callcott Horsley (British, 1817-1903) Thomas Nast, (American 1840-1902) and Sir John Gilbert (British 1817-1897), created Christmas-themed works that have become iconic representations of the holiday. These paintings continue to be cherished for their ability to capture the nostalgia and spirit of Victorian Christmas celebrations.



Under the Mistletoe by John Callcott Horsley – Bonhams, London, 29 September 2010, Lot 113, £31,200