

What the Dickens

Holiday festivities with a British flair



A traditional British Christmas with warm Wassail.

ENTERTAINING for the holidays takes on historical and international tones with David Sandeman, sixth generation of the House of Sandeman, a producer and distributor of port wines and sherries.

Nestled on a 550-acre estate in Sussex is the classic British farmhouse where Sandeman and his wife, Sue, invite family and friends to enjoy wassail and other delicious and British accompaniments during the holidays.

"Waes hael, the original words from which wassail was derived, was coined by a Saxon," Sandeman said. "In 450 A.D., the Saxon princess Rowena saluted British King Vortigern with 'waes hael' — a toast to health. Britishers take their toasts seriously, and we have derived numerous customs from the original."

By the 17th century, the British began to refer to wassail as a loving cup or bowl brimming with a warm and delicious combination of ales and spices. As new countries were colonized and trade formalized, new wines and exotic spices were added.

In the spirit of giving, well-to-do people offered wassail to people who came to their door wassailing — singing for a cupful.

Here are some distinctive and easy recipes for wassailing with friends and family:

WASSAIL

12 apples, cored
two parts tawny port
two parts ale
one part brandy
one tbsp. grated nutmeg
one tbsp. allspice
one tbsp. ginger
1/2 tsp. cardamom
one tbsp. clove
thin strips of lemon peel
one stick cinnamon
12 egg whites

Bake apples in 375 F oven for 30 minutes. Mix remaining ingredients, except egg whites, in saucepan and simmer.

Beat egg whites until frothy. Pour gently into punch bowl. Add saucepan mixture to punch bowl and top with baked apples. Serve warm.

SANDEMAN'S FRUIT CAKE

1 1/2 cups raisins
one cup candied fruit
1/4 lb. blanched walnuts

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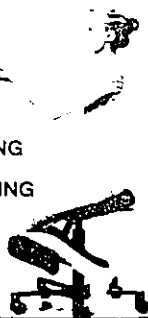
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