

# Pause For A Holiday Tea

A Christmas tea with light-as-air scones is the perfect way to relax during December

By Kendra Nordin

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

After college, when I wasn't quite sure what to do next, I went to live with a British friend and her family in a London suburb. Tamsin had moved into a flat on the third floor of the house, and I slept down below in the narrow room where she had grown up. We used the flat as a kind of hideaway after supper and on weekends. Each night, we ate the evening meal with her mom and dad, tucked around the circular table in the downstairs kitchen. The table glowed with decorative oil lamps, and the four of us would sit there long after the dishes had been cleared, discussing our days and playing games. Even the cat, Mouse, had a perch on an old piano stool strategically positioned in front of the radiator. It was a cozy time.

Cozy is important, because what I most remember from my fall in England (besides working as a checkout girl at the local grocery store) was how dark it was. England may have a mild climate, but it is also close to the Arctic Circle, which means that the sun drifts to the horizon by 4 p.m. come late October.

Enter the traditional English teatime.

Between 4 and 5, everyone would begin to arrive home as the streetlights came on. First me, with a half gallon of milk picked up on my employee's discount (the family called me "the milk maid"), then Tamsin, from her day of teaching school, and finally John, her father, returning from the university where he taught.

We'd light the fire in the sitting room, sink into the overstuffed couches, and have tea and cake in front of the television - all this before supper. I

felt as though I was in heaven. As the Christmas holiday neared, and strings of lights and boughs of evergreens were hoisted above the shopping plazas, stopping for tea and cake or a scone in between finding the perfect gift was part of the flow of our weekends.

On the topic of scones: Do not think you've had the traditional British variety if the scone was dense and larger than the palm of your hand. The scones I relished in England were small, round, and light. And while saying the words "Devonshire" or "clotted cream" can make one feel very British, the fact is that thick cream on a scone was the exception rather than the norm during my time there.

"When I was growing up, you would have to get Devonshire cream by post," remembers Tamsin. "But now you can get it in the supermarket because it is shipped up from the West Country." The quaint and pastoral West Country includes Devon, located in the far southwest of England.

Before Devonshire cream expanded its market beyond specialty shops, many Brits living in central England as recently as 15 years ago were accustomed to spreading only a bit of butter and jam on a scone.

My favorite was a warm scone, topped with jam and then crowned with unsweetened whipped cream. At first bite, the whipped cream floated on your tongue followed by the sweetness of the jam. Finally, the whole experience was grounded by the comfort of the humble scone. Then it was washed down with a mug of spicy Christmas Tea with milk. (A good American counterpart is Bigelow's Constant Comment, which has hints of clove, cinnamon, and orange.)

Cream on scones is delightful, however, and it is usually an option when enjoying "high teas" offered by restaurants and fancy hotels. High teas can include small sand-

wiches, scones, and cakes displayed on a stand and pots and pots of tea. But high teas are more ceremonial events and can serve as a meal. "Afternoon teas" are the daily teatime in nearly every English home - and a perfect pause during the holiday rush.

Scones are as simple and quick as biscuits to make, but the key is in the technique to ensure a light texture instead of something you'd rather smother in gravy. In other words, heavy hands make a heavy scone. Use just your fingertips to rub the butter into the flour and to spread out the dough. Move quickly and make sure the oven is very hot for the best results (see recipe).

The frothy cream for the top is also just as quick: Use a 1/2 pint of whipping cream and mix on high speed. Open a jar of your favorite fruit preserves, and you will feel as British as the queen.

It's been years since those cozy English evenings in the Advent season.

But I still think of them.

Now living in Boston, I again find the late fall dark and cold. I have no fireplace in my city condo, but that doesn't stop me each year from inviting a few friends to a candlelit Christmas tea. As the scones get passed around, it isn't long before holiday planning pressures ease away. The comfort of Christmas, after all, can also be found in simple things, such as a warm mug, a sweet treat, and maybe my cat, Cricket, perched on your knee.

### English scones

The key to making perfect scones is to use self-rising flour. Sifting the flour will add air and ensure that the scones are light. Work quickly and lightly and handle the dough as little as possible.

- 2 cups self-rising flour
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 5 T butter, room temperature
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup milk, approximately
- 1 cup whipping cream

Jam, to taste  
Preheat oven to 450 degrees F. and grease a baking sheet.

Sift the flour into a mixing bowl. Add sugar and salt. Cut the butter into the bowl with a knife or pastry cutter. Using your fingertips, rub the butter into the flour until the mixture resembles fine bread crumbs. (You can also use a hand mixer to do this.) Make a well in the center of the mixture and drop in the egg. Adding a portion of the milk at a time, stir the egg and milk into the dough using a rounded-edge knife. How much milk you use depends on the size of the egg. The dough should incorporate all the flour, but it shouldn't be wet and sticky.

Turn the dough onto a floured surface. Using your fingertips, gently smooth out any cracks in the dough. Lightly press out the dough or roll lightly with a rolling pin until about 3/4 inch thick. Cut with a 2-inch round cutter dipped in flour. Place rounds on the greased baking sheet and brush the remaining milk on top with a pastry brush. Bake 10 to 12 minutes or until golden brown.

After removing the scones from the oven, put them onto a cooling rack covered with a tea towel. Place another tea towel on top of the scones to trap the steam and to keep the scones from drying out as they cool. Serve warm with jam and whipped cream (simply whip whipping cream on high with a mixer until soft peaks form). Makes 8 scones.

### Fruit scones

Add 1/4 cup dried fruit, such as currents, raisins, or cranberries to the dry mixture.

### Savory scones

Omit sugar. Add 1 teaspoon dry mustard and 3 to 4 ounces of grated cheese to the dry mixture.

Leftover scones can be frozen for several weeks. To reheat, wrap a frozen scone in a paper towel and microwave for 30 seconds. Enjoy!

## Pa. Loses 26,000 Jobs In Nov., Most Since 1996

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) - Pennsylvania lost 26,000 nonfarm jobs in November, the biggest monthly drop in more than a decade, the state Department of Labor and Industry said Thursday.

The state's jobless rate rose three-tenths of a percentage point last month to 6.1 percent. That is the highest unemployment rate since 1994, but it still falls below the national rate for the seventh straight month.

The national jobless rate is 6.7 percent.

The state now has 5.76 million nonfarm jobs, the fewest since August 2006.

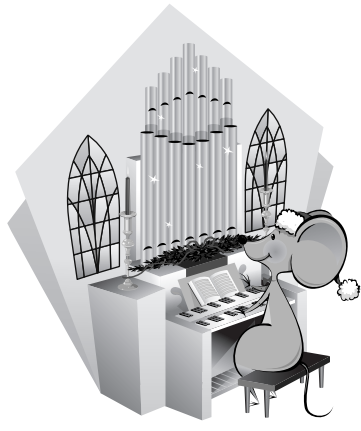
Officials said they are worried that the state's jobless benefits fund may not be able to keep up with the rising number of unemployment claims. The unemployment insurance benefits fund has declined by \$400 million to \$1.2 billion since December 2007.

The state might have to borrow money from the federal government or another state fund by next spring as a stopgap measure, Labor Department spokesman Troy Thompson said. Gov. Ed Rendell has formed

an advisory committee to examine ways to bolster the fund in the long term. Possible solutions include reducing benefits or increasing taxes on businesses or employees. Any tax increase would need state lawmakers' approval.

Rendell said Thursday that states will need the federal government's help to revive their economies and continue providing assistance to the unemployed. He noted that the government has amassed a surplus in federal unemployment taxes collected from employers across the country.

"I urge President Bush and Congress to immediately return those funds to the states to help us provide adequate services and benefits to an increased number of unemployed workers," Rendell said.



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## In Memory

SOWERS



In loving memory of Clarence Reed "Pancake" and Hazel Sowers, December 23, 1979, and December 26, 1999.

Sadly missed by family

WILT

In loving memory of Joshua Timothy Wilt Jr., at Christmas, August 21, 1993 - August 3, 2008: He wished no one a last farewell Nor even said goodbye He was gone before we knew it And only God knows why, They say that time heals all sorrow And helps us to forget But time so far has only proven, How much we have missed him yet God gave us strength to face it And courage to bear the blow But what it meant to love and lose him, No one will ever know.

Missing you so very much, Love, Mom

WARD

In loving memory of my best friend, Nancy Taylor Ward, whose birthday would have been December 28. She passed away on March 14, 2008:

Nancy,

I miss you so much and you are in my thoughts every day. I also know you are in good hands and also at peace.

With loving memories, A. Kay McGarvey



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