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EDWARDIAN CHRISTMAS IN THE ARCHIVES

As part of the [Archive Awareness Campaign](#), an ongoing celebration of archives and their treasures, Norfolk Record Office is marking the festive season by revealing the story of Christmas festivities over a century ago, through the memoirs of Hon Lady Smith, daughter of Savile Brinton, first Baron Somerleyton.

Although giving an account of her childhood in Suffolk, the memoir is held by the Norfolk Record Office within a deposit of material from a Norfolk landowner.

The sound recordings are reminisces of her childhood particularly Christmas festivities at Somerleyton Hall. In one excerpt, she gives a colourful account of Christmas shopping:

“The cousins must have arrived for Christmas before the other guests, and there was an expedition to Lowestoft in the break. The break was an open vehicle with two horses, with seats along each side, facing inwards, for late Christmas shopping. I used to budget pretty carefully ... the cousins generally received a beautiful little copy of the classics bound in pretty coloured suede at a shilling each, the inside meant little to me, but the price was right, it might be.. extracts from the book of proverbs or some poetry or other. Then there were always block calendars or some small article of stationery from Floods. Possibly a cup and saucer for some special person, such as Nanny, from the six and hapenny bazaar.

In another she talks of the presents, eating, celebrations, and other merriments:

‘On Christmas eve the Salvation Army Band used to come from Lowestoft and play the old carols whilst I was in bed, how I loved it.

“On Christmas morning all my father’s employees came for their Christmas boxes....The outside people walked from the back passage, through the hall, and out of the front door. While mum handed them their presents and dad and we children stood behind her calling ‘Merry Christmas, Harry’, ‘Merry Christmas, Jimmy’ and so on. Then came the house servants who turned round the butler and went back kitchenwards’. Once the employee has received their presents the

family would go off to church, before coming home in 'pleasant anticipation of roast turkey and plum pudding'.

Victoria Horth, NRO Archive Education and Outreach Officer says:

“This is a lovely account capturing what Christmas was like for this family in the past. It was really interesting to listen to the family traditions and compare these to our own experiences of Christmas today.”

This provides a glimpse into the lives of the upper class almost 100 years ago. For many readers – it will be comforting to know that Christmas is fraught with some of the same worries and the gaiety experience by people regardless of their social standing. The festivities of the period have little changed over the century to today.

– Ends –

For further details, spokespeople or images on Archive Awareness Campaign, please contact **Angela Owusu** on **0208 392 5237** or email Angela.Owusu@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

For more information about the records, contact Norfolk Record Office, The Archive Centre, Martineau Lane Norwich NR1 2DQ

- Archive Awareness is spearheaded by the Archives & Records Association (ARA) (www.archives.org.uk) and funded by The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (www.mla.gov.uk).
- Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com is an ongoing celebration of all kinds of fascinating archive treasures. It celebrates and promotes local and national archives. Throughout the year archives across the country open their doors to showcase history, hold open days and present workshops to help the public discover a piece of their own history.
- To find an Archive Awareness Campaign event near you or to discover more about the UK's archives visit www.archiveawareness.com